SECOND GENERATION

BLACK YOUTH AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN CHAPEL HILL, N.C., 1937-1963

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PREFACE

Teach us, Forever Dead, there is no Dream but Deed, there is no Deed but Memory.[1]

W. E. B. Du Bois

It is the province of the historian to find out, not what was, but what is. Where a battle has been fought, you will find nothing but the bones of men and beasts; where a battle is being fought, there are hearts beating.[2]

Henry David Thoreau

This work is an effort to retrieve part of the freedom legacy created by African Americans in their striving for dignity, opportunity, equal rights, and justice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The focus of my story is on the way local black activists fashioned the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s out of their own lives, the resistance they encountered, and the ways they interacted with others to pursue their goals. The leadership of black youths is at the heart of this story.

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The viewpoint I bring to this work developed from certain important social experiences. I grew up in a white, upper-middle-class family, attended private schools, and lived in an exclusive suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Until I got out in the world, I believed that all people lived like this.

Although my mother was a Republican, she was a kind of cultural rebel among her peers. For example, she drove one of the first VW "bugs" in Cleveland and was a staunch supporter of Homeopathy rather than mainstream medicine. Both my mother and father also spent a great deal of time volunteering for different community institutions, including the Library for the Blind and their church.

During high school and college in the 1960s I became increasingly concerned about racism and poverty, and I became active in tutoring, Headstart, and, eventually, protest. After receiving a bachelor's degree in history from Harvard in 1969, I went to work there in the university kitchens as part of the radical student movement's effort to build a "worker-student alliance." Following that, I spent fifteen years as a hospital

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[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, with a Preface by Herbert Aptheker (n.p.: International Publishers, 1968), 423.

[2] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 155; quoted in Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*, with a Foreword by Lerone Bennett, Jr. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 7.

worker and community activist in the South, mainly in Chapel Hill. In 1990 I returned to school to pursue a graduate degree in United States history.

During the ten years that I worked as a lab technician at North Carolina Memorial Hospital (NCMH) in Chapel Hill, I became familiar with the difficult conditions encountered by many state workers on their jobs. White workers had no easy time of it, but black workers generally endured lower pay, less respect from management, and fewer opportunities to advance. Soon, I began to work with other employees to address a broad variety of worker grievances.

In 1980, dietary workers at the hospital protested their working conditions and pay. That same year, housekeeping workers at the University of North Carolina (UNC) organized around their own grievances. This protest led to the formation of a workers organization, the Housekeepers Movement. As a result of my involvement in these struggles, I began to know many black workers at the university and the hospital, including many who lived in Chapel Hill. At the same time, I became active in numerous organizing efforts in the local black community involving high school students, public housing tenants, welfare rights advocates, and black e«electoral candidates.

In the course of organizing, I heard innumerable stories about the struggles of African Americans in Chapel Hill and at UNC. People told stories as a way of sharing their pain and joy and the lessons of their lives. I began to appreciate these stories as part of a rich history and tradition. It also appeared that this legacy was endangered. The stories were part of an oral tradition that was virtually unknown outside of the black community and in danger of being lost with the passage of time.

When I decided to attend graduate school in the late 1980s, one of my goals was to help pull together, preserve, and make accessible the freedom legacy hinted at by the stories I had heard. I felt that this history, full of defeat, dead ends, and personal tragedy, also abounded in triumph, lessons, and human growth. I believed that every aspect of such a history was worth preserving as a resource in the ongoing struggle to enlarge democracy in America.

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The research that forms the foundation of this thesis draws on both written sources and interviews. As a way of starting, I surveyed the secondary sources about black lives in Chapel Hill. It turned out that while much has been written about the town and the university, little has been written about the African Americans who lived, and still live, here. Published works generally ignored or distorted black contributions to local history, particularly the black freedom struggle. References in these sources to African Americans were few and often patronizing.[3]

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[3] Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1907-1912); Kemp P. Battle, *Memories of an Old-time Tarheel* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1945; Ruth Blackwelder, *The Age of Orange: Political and Intellectual Leadership in North Carolina, 1752-1861* (Charlotte, N.C.: William Loftin, 1961); Hope Summerell Chamberlain, *Old Days in Chapel Hill*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1926); R.D.W. Connor, compiler and annotator, *A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1953); Archibald Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1949); Robert B. House, *The Light That Shines: Chapel Hill, 1912-1916* (Chapel Hill: UNC

Nevertheless, I found several important sources on African Americans in Chapel Hill. Although they are not easily accessible to the general public, a number of scholarly works done by UNC graduate students during the 1930s and 1940s shed light on the history of the black community and conditions of life and work.[4] In 1964, Gary Blanchard, an editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* (DTH), the student newspaper at UNC, wrote a case study of the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement for his senior honors thesis in Political Science.[5] While this work focused on the municipal decision making process, it also offered the insights of a newspaper reporter and participant into the movement dynamics of the day. In 1965, UNC law professor Dan Pollitt published an article that focused on the legal issues surrounding the Chapel Hill story.[6] *The Free Men*, published by writer John Ehle in 1965, is the only book about the Chapel Hill movement.[7]

In 1974 the Duke Oral History Project (DOHP) conducted over one hundred interviews with participants in the 1960-64 Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement. Under the direction of professors Lawrence Goodwyn and William Chafe, of the Duke History

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Press, 1964); Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager, editors, *Orange County 1752-1952* (Chapel Hill: Orange Printshop, 1963); Cornelia Spencer Love, *When Chapel Hill Was a Village* (Chapel Hill: Chapel Hill Historical Society, 1976); Willñiam S. Powell, *The First State University: A Pictorial History of The University of North Carolina*, 3rd. ed. (Chapel Hill and London: UNC Press, 1992); William Meade Prince, *The Southern Part of Heaven* (New York: Rinehard and Company, 1950); Phillips Russell, *The Woman Who Rang the Bell: The Story of Cornelia Phillips Spencer,* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1949);William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: UNC Press, 1992); Steven Stolpen, *Chapel Hill: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk: Donning Company/Publishers, 1978); James Vickers, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay Publishers, 1985); Henry McGilbert Wagstaff, *Impressions of Men and Movements at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1950); Louis R. Wilson, *The University of North Carolina, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1957); Louis R. Wilson, ed., *Selected Papers of Cornelia Phillips Spencer* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1953).

[4]Among the most useful were Agnes Brown, "The Negro Churches of Chapel Hill" (M.A. thesis, UNC, 1939); Mittie Frank Mason, "The Negro Community Center of Chapel Hill, North Carolina: A Study of the Processes of Community Organization" (M.A. thesis, UNC, 1943); Charles Maddry Freeman, "Growth and Plan for a Community: A Study of negro Life in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina" (M.A. thesis, UNC, 1944).

[5] Gary F. Blanchard, "The Politics of Desegregation: A Case Study of Desegregation and Municipal Decision-Making in Chapel Hill, North Carolina" (Senior honors thesis, UNC, 1964).

[6] Daniel Pollitt, "Legal Problems in Southern Desegregation: the Chapel Hill Story," *North Carolina Law Review* 43, No. 4 (June 1965), 689-767.

[7] John Ehle, *The Free Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

Department, graduate students and junior faculty from around the country came to a summer institute to learn how to study social movements through the use of oral history.

Although Goodwyn and Chafe hoped that a book would result from the work of the institute, this did not happen. Marcellus Barksdale used the interviews as the basis for the Chapel Hill section of his Duke dissertation on the "indigenous" Civil Rights Movement in Weldon, Chapel Hill, and Monroe, completed in 1977.[8] Two years later, another Duke student, Elizabeth Buchanan, drew on the DOHP interviews and Barksdale's dissertation to place the Chapel Hill movement into the larger historical context of race relations at the University of North Carolina from 1930-1969.[9] Then, for ten years, scholars seemingly forgot the Chapel Hill story. Millicent Meroney only touched it on in her 1986 thesis on the UNC foodworkers' strike of 1969.[10] However, in 1989 Duke student Michael Evans wrote a 221 page senior honors thesis that took a detailed look at both the origins and the internal development of the Chapel Hill movement.[11]

Part of the reason why the Duke professors chose Chapel Hill as their focus, apart from the overall significance of the Chapel Hill movement, was the one-sidedness Ehle's book. Ehle did not look deeply into the origins of the movement prior to 1963, nor did he investigate the inner dynamics of the movement building process in Chapel Hill. For these reasons his book failed to emphasize or document the origins of the movement within the black community and the essential leadership role of black youths.

Barksdale attempted to correct this bias and thereby address the problem he saw in the civil rights historiography of the period, namely that "there are no adequate studies of the fundamental underpinning of the civil rights movement: the movement at the local level among the indigenous people."[12] Nevertheless, because he spread his attention over three communities, Barksdale's argument was broad, not deep. He did not come to grips with *how* the movement developed from black lives, although he asserted that it did. Although Buchanan explored an important focus and context, she did not add anything to Barksdale's treatment of the 1960-64 period. Evans, however, did provide a more

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[8] Marcellus Barksdale, "The Indigenous Civil Rights Movement and Cultural Change in North Carolina: Weldon, Chapel Hill and Monroe: 1946-65" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1977).

[9] Elizabeth Jakes Buchanan, "The Testing of the Liberal Vision: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Race Issue 1930-1969" (Senior honors thesis, Duke University, 1979).

[10] Meroney, "The Coming of Consciousness: The UNC Foodworkers' Strike, 1969" (M.A. thesis, UNC, 1986).

[11] Michael R. Evans, "Between the Idea and the Reality: Liberalism and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1950-64" (Senior honors thesis, Duke University, 1989).

[12] Barksdale, 400.

detailed treatment of the development of the movement. Nevertheless, his focus, like Ehle's, was on white participants in the movement. His aim was to expose liberalism: "What follows is primarily a critical analysis of white beliefs and assumptions about the racial order and interracial relations as played out during the struggle for black freedom. It is not a definitive history of the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill; nor is it an analysis of black history in the town."[13]

Although each of these studies contributed to an understanding of the local history, none of them focused on the actual lives of black people as they related to the development of the black freedom struggle during the 1960s. For this reason some crucial issues were not explored, including the generational dynamics of the movement, the relationship of generation to issues of gender, class, and race, what motivated and sustained movement activists, what distinguished black movement leaders from their peers, the relationship of white movement leaders to local black leaders, and generally, the relationship between individual lives and the movement as a social force.

Likewise, the stories that constitute such an important part of the oral tradition of black Chapel Hill were given little prominence. These are important, in my view, because the narrative of events only explains the result while people's stories reveal the complex and beautiful drama of human striving. Activism is, after all, the product of a long process of human growth and social change.

Professional historians have recognized for some time that most writing about the Civil Rights Movement does not focus on how people made the movement in their communities. In addition to Barksdale, Duke professor William Chafe expressed this concern in 1980 at the time of the publication of his community study of the black freedom movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, *Civilities and Civil Rights*. Chafe noted:

> Most of these studies have been written from a national perspective, distant from the day-to-day life of the local people most affected by the movement. . . . While all these studies contribute to our understanding, very few have examined the story of social change from the point of view of people in local communities, where the struggle for civil rights was a continuing reality, year in and year out.[14]

While Chafe's work was hailed as a model, few historians took up the challenge. Ten years later, Steven Lawson was still calling for a redirection of attention to the local level in his critical review of civil rights historiography.[15]

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[13] Evans, ii.

[14] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 2.

[15] Steven F. Lawson, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 456-71.

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My approach has been to try to uncover the origins, interconnectedness, and meaning of "what happened" by asking the actual participants in the Chapel Hill movement, particularly the black youth. I have used newspaper accounts, court and police records, and secondary sources to help reconstruct events and provide historical context, but this has not been my main focus. More than anything, I have tried to draw on personal interviews to explore how the movement grew from individual lives. This has resulted in an emphasis on life histories and generational dynamics. I have tried to draw out, however, the very definite relationship of individual lives to group dynamics and of generational issues to questions of class, race, and gender. Finally, I have tried to place the events that unfolded in Chapel Hill, viewed from inside the lives of youthful black activists, into a broader analytical and narrative framework.

The Duke interviews have been an invaluable resource. However, I found that most of them provided relatively little biographical information. In addition, a number of key participants in the Chapel Hill movement were not interviewed in 1974. For this study, therefore, I did thirty-one additional interviews. Several of those interviewed were activists from the 1930s and 1940s and older black workers. Most of the new interviews, however, were with movement participants who were youths at the time of the protests. I also made extensive use of the federal manuscript census through 1920 to gain background information about the history of black population, slavery, employment, and housing patterns in Chapel Hill.

The story I have written is in no way complete or comprehensive. Because my focus is on "origins," this paper does not examine the climax of the movement in Chapel Hill, which unfolded between September, 1963, and May, 1964. For the most part, I do not give much space to the points of view or the life histories of activists outside the core of local black youths who led the movement through August, 1963. But even in terms of this group, considerations of space and the availability of sources have inevitably meant that most of the young activists, including some key leaders, are not well represented on these pages. My intent, however, is not to slight certain groups or individuals, but to focus attention on how the movement grew out of the lives of some of the local black activists. My goal is not to present *the* finished product, but to offer a work in progress. Hopefully, this beginning will serve as an usher at the door for those who will continue the work of retrieving the freedom legacy in Chapel Hill.

At this point, it may be useful to make one point of clarification concerning my use of certain terms, including "class," "working-class," and "middle-class," as there seems to be much confusion and disagreement about their meaning. Categories like "privilege," "status," and "standard of living" do not fully describe the experience of "class" and often confuse the issue. Class has to do with the relationship of a person to the “means of production"--a term used by Karl Marx--and to others who share similar experiences.

For example, slaves had different experiences than masters because one was owned as part of the means of production, while the other owned the means of production--meaning the land, the farm equipment, the slaves, the cotton seed. All slaves shared the experiences of slavery, whether they wore fine clothes and drove the master's coach or whether they wore rags and worked in the cotton fields. This created the basis

for slave solidarity and resistance or revolt, tendencies that were inevitable, but which occurred only as a matter of individual human choice.

Also, slaves had different experiences, and therefore different outlooks, than free blacks who worked for wages. *Regardless* of the fact that some free blacks had a lower standard of living than some slaves, and *regardless* of the fact that all African Americans in the South shared many experiences, the difference between being free and being owned was important.

Today, people use the term "middle class" to designate a certain status, standard of living, or privilege. But a person can be "middle class" and be either a small business owner or a middle income wage earner. And the difference in social experience between a life of being your own boss and a life of answering to an employer is immense. That is one of the differences of class.

"Working-class" people, in this paper, are people who work for wages and neither own nor control the means of production. Theoretically, they may be "poor" or "middle-class," but in reality, nearly all working-class black people in Chapel Hill were poor, even teachers who ranked near the top of black society in terms of status. But teachers, and most others who might be referred to as "the people who had" or as "middle class," had to deal with the fact that their white employers could fire them. They were not self-employed. They did not own a business or a farm. And this made a great deal of difference in their lives, their outlooks, and their actions during the Civil Rights Movement.

My final note to readers concerns the uses of this paper. My purpose is not only to preserve the dreams and deeds that constitute the freedom legacy in Chapel Hill, but also to stimulate discussion and action in this community concerning race relations and black empowerment today. Too often, scholars mine local communities for their stories without engaging those communities in an ongoing process. This has created unequal relationships that many of those who have been the objects of academic research no longer trust. Even when a researcher makes every effort to be considerate, the question of accountability *to the community* remains--"What will the community get out of it?" Vivian Foushee raised this question directly with the Duke interviewers in 1974:

> Now the only thing that bothers me about this, what we are doing, is that we don't ever get any feedback, you know. And every time we've done something like this, and the reason I always try to put people off, is because there's nothing in my head that shows me how the community can benefit. See, you people have real expertise that's pulling stuff together. You can be a real benefit to the community, but we never get any feedback. And I, I think that's not fair. And I say this every time I get involved in this and the person says "Oh yes, you'll get a copy of it," and I never hear from them. [16]

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[16] Vivian Foushee, Interview by Leon Fink and Tina Harrison, 4 June 1974, interview 41-42, transcript, Duke University, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

Doing the research and writing the paper is only the first step, in my view. My hope is to engage many people in the community and at the university in projects to add to these beginnings and to use this research in ways that advance the cause of freedom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although many people have helped me along the way, I would like to thank in particular those individuals who allowed me to interview them. ¯I am indebted as well to Fred Battle, Gloria Williams, and Hilliard Caldwell who have supported this effort from the beginning. I also want to thank professors Peter Filene, Jim Leloudis, Lawrence Goodwyn, and Peter Walker who have advised me, given my work close readings, showed much patience, and provided their support for this project. Thanks also to Professors Genna Rae McNeil and Kenneth Janken, and to George Waldrop, for their generous criticism and advice. Finally, I am blessed to have had the support of my whole family, including my wife, Bev Grant, my stepdaughters Naimah and Leticia, and my daughters, Joyce and Sandy.

In particular, Sandi and Joyce put up with a good deal through this long process. They offered me warm and creative encouragement, although they did try to persuade me, at times, to write children's stories instead of history.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of James Brittian and Marie Roberson who devoted their entire lives to the black freedom struggle and to helping America become, in the words of Langston Hughes, "the land that never has been yet." They were my teachers and my friends. They showed us what it means to "take the dare."

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CHAPTER ONE

CIVIL RIGHTS, CHAPEL HILL, AND THE QUESTION OF ORIGINS

The making of the United States--like the making of the modern world--is beginning again:

> *O, let America be America again--*
> *The land that never has been yet--*
> *And yet must be--*

And the central question of our history is the question of our future: what kind of a nation do we want?[1]

Vincent Harding

What has become known as "the Civil Rights Movement" was a quickening and a transformation of the black freedom struggle in the United States. Not in three hundred and fifty years of slavery and limited freedom had black people succeeded in organizing such a widespread social insurgency. It changed them and it changed America.

For African Americans the struggle brought new rights and opportunities. More importantly, it was a massive experiment in self-determination. "Sambo," the submissive Negro, died a thousand deaths as black Americans asserted a new identity based on dignity, equal rights, and justice. Attitudes of deference and dependency withered as African Americans struggled to find their own authentic voices and organized themselves into a powerful social force.

The Civil Rights Movement also challenged the entire nation to acknowledge and eliminate ongoing patterns of unfreedom in the "land of the free." By placing this contradiction at the center of public debate in new and powerful ways, African Americans broke through the barrier of fear generated by post-war McCarthyism. The Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s in the South set in motion a much broader black freedom struggle throughout the nation. This movement, in turn, stimulated a flowering of democratic protest among all those groups for whom America was "the land that never has been yet."

All of this is to say that the Civil Rights Movement was a process of profound historical significance. Nevertheless, its history and its legacy do not reside in generalizations, useful as these conceptual tools may be, but in the actions of human beings. For the movement grew out of the lives of black people and their allies in communities all across the South. And it is only by studying the process of change at these more intimate levels that we can gradually gain an appreciation of how people

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[1] Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981; First Vintage Books Edition, 1983), xxvi.

actually made history, how they changed their communities, and how they changed themselves.

Throughout the South, local movements engaged the citizens in contests over deeply held values and traditions. In most communities these struggles never resulted in actions that broke into the historical record. But in every instance, the choices people made for and against change had important consequences for those involved and for their communities. At the same time, each was a part of something bigger that changed the nation and the world. Yet we know virtually nothing about the great majority of these local efforts.[2]

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The community that is the focus of this investigation was a small, picturesque town in 1960. Nevertheless, Chapel Hill had a big reputation, for it was known far and wide as the home of the University of North Carolina, one of the most influential institutions of the South. Of the town's 12,573 residents, roughly nine thousand were white university students. Of the permanent Chapel Hill population, 1,290 were African Americans while roughly 2300 were white.[3]

The black community in Chapel Hill comprised about four hundred families, counting a hundred or so families in Carrboro, the adjoining mill town. Many African Americans, however, lived outside these towns in unincorporated areas. All of these families sent their children to the same schools, worked for the same employers, shopped at the same stores, and attended the same churches. Thus, while there were half a dozen black neighborhoods in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, there was one black community.

By most demographic measures, the black community in Chapel Hill was comparable to black communities in small towns throughout the state. Like these other towns, Chapel Hill did not have a strong black middle class and most of the black residents were poor. In larger cities, most African Americans were poor as well, but there was also a significant black middle class.[4]

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[2] In North Carolina, for instance, the Mayors' Co-operating Committee, established by Governor Terry Sanford in July 1963, documented fifty-five local movements in *North Carolina and the Negro*. Perhaps half a dozen have been studied and documented. Even the landmark community studies, such as William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights* (Greensboro), or Robert Norwell's *Reaping the Whirlwind* (Tuskegee), do not penetrate community dynamics in ways that really grapple with the choices local people made. Norrell's book is basically a political history of race relations in Tuskegee that virtually ignores the local black community outside of Tuskegee Institute. Chafe's study of Greensboro is far better as social history. Nevertheless, for the period of the early 1960s, it focuses on black college students and does not deal in any detail with how the movement unfolded in the lives of black high school students and permanent black residents.

[3] 1960 Census: North Carolina, U.S. Department of Commerce, Vol. 1, Part 35, Table 21. Also, see Blanchard thesis, 3.

[4] ibid., Tables 72-78, 88.

The university, North Carolina Memorial Hospital, and white families--on average the wealthiest and most educated in the state--were the main employers of black labor.[5] Black family incomes in Chapel Hill were even with those of North Carolina's large cities, and they were significantly higher than black incomes in most small towns and rural areas. Nevertheless, the median income for African American families was less than half of that for white families. This was primarily because two-thirds of black men and 85 percent of black women labored at unskilled, low-paying jobs. Although a significant number of black men held somewhat better paying jobs as craftsmen, African Americans held only nine out of 170 sales positions and four out of 598 clerical positions. Of the 315 "managers, officials, and proprietors" in Chapel Hill, none were black. And out of the 1721 "professional, technical, and kindred workers" in the town, only forty-four were black.[6]

Like employment, housing for African Americans followed patterns of strict segregation, and opportunities were accordingly limited. Public accommodations and education, as well, were segregated, although by this time some token desegregation had occurred. Thus, in terms of race, Chapel Hill was like most small towns in the South in many ways. This was the conclusion, in fact, reached by Rev. Robert Seymour, a Southern Baptist minister who arrived in Chapel Hill in 1959. His observations confirmed the impersonal statistical evidence. He noted that the town's liberal reputation in terms of race was "more fiction than fact:"

> Culturally, the town was very southern. The university community accepted segregation in stride and without challenge until change was forced upon it by the federal government. Negroes lived in one section of Chapel Hill and served the campus as cooks and janitors with low wages. Restaurants were open to whites only. The local movie theater did not even provide a balcony for blacks. Negroes and whites were worlds apart here, just like everywhere else in Dixie. . . . Local black public schools were so inadequate that graduates legitimately could be denied admittance to the university because they were simply unqualified. Prejudice dictated community mores as if they were climatically controlled. This was the South, the Old South, and this was the way Southerners lived.[7]

Since black youths are the focus of this study, it is useful to note a few pertinent facts about them. Although the 1960 census reported only sixty-eight students at Chapel Hill's all black Lincoln High School, youths from Carrboro and the surrounding

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[5] ibid., Tables 32, 33.

[6] ibid., Table 78, 227.

[7] Robert Seymour, *"Whites Only:" A Pastor's Retrospective on Signs of the New South,* with a Foreword by Samuel Proctor (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1991), 74-75.

countryside swelled total enrollment to around two hundred. There were thirty-five black students at the university in the fall of 1960, of whom six were undergraduates.[8]

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What set Chapel Hill apart during the early 1960s, other than the university, was its Civil Rights Movement. While some of North Carolina's larger cities generated more powerful movements that preceded Chapel Hill's, no other small town produced a comparable struggle.[9]

The first high tide of the movement began on February 28, 1960 when a group of black high school students staged a "sitdown protest" at the Colonial Drug Store.[10] The next day, seventy-five to one hundred black youths picketed in front of Colonial Drug and several other segregated businesses on West Franklin Street in the black community. On Tuesday, March 1, the youths established a protest organization with the assistance of adult activists in the black community, several black college students, and a group of white liberals from the Community Church. The new group, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Committee for Racial Equality, conducted a highly organized campaign of picketing, boycotts, and negotiations for over two months.

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[8] 1960 Census: North Carolina, U.S. Department of Commerce, Vol. 1, Part 35, Table 77, 222. Gary F. Blanchard, "The Politics of Desegregation: A Case Study of Desegregation and Municipal Decision-Making in Chapel Hill, North Carolina" (Senior honors thesis, UNC, 1964), appendix on black enrollment at the university.

[9] Based on reports from fifty-five municipalities cited in North Carolina and the Negro it appears that open protest in Chapel Hill persisted longer than in any other small town, including sitdown protests in 1960, regular picketing of movie theaters in 1961-62, and numerous street marches, sitdown protests, and other forms of civil disobedience from spring, 1963 through spring, 1964. Also, the numbers of people involved in protest over periods of months at a time appear to be larger than in any other small town, although some towns experienced brief periods where their numbers matched or exceeded Chapel Hill's. Finally, there seems to be no other small town in which massive civil disobedience occurred, such as the blocking of streets that was carried out in Chapel Hill in February 1964. Nevertheless, these claims are not based on extensive research. While the evidence cited seems to be fairly accurate for Chapel Hill, it may not be accurate for other areas.

[10] The terms "sitdown," "sitdown movement," "sitdown protest," and "sitdown strike" were commonly used to describe the student protests in local newspaper articles in the spring of 1960. Some of these same terms appeared in the New York Times and other newspapers during this period. For a scholarly interpretation of the origins of the term "sitdown" in the labor movement of the 1930s, and in an even older tradition of direct action as well, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The Origins of Nonviolent Direct Action in Afro-American Protest: A Note on Historical Discontinuities," Chapter 14 in *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience*. Blacks in the New World Series (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), especially the footnote on page 308.

Protest activities were confined to the black business district on West Franklin Street where the main target, Colonial Drug, stubbornly refused to desegregate. Two other businesses in the area, the Bus Station Grill and the Dairy Bar, removed their lunch counter stools and announced equal standup service for all. A fourth, the Village Pharmacy, integrated its booths. In addition, five restaurants in the white business district agreed to serve black UNC students following consultations with the Mayor's Human Relations Committee and the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen. Most restaurants and lunch counters, however, remained completely segregated.

Protest activities were already winding down when Dr. Martin Luther King visited Chapel Hill in May to speak at the university. Enthusiasm for the protest movement had faded in the face of limited results, disagreements over how to proceed, and intimidation. Following King's visit, all protest activities were called off, although the Committee for Racial Equality called upon citizens to continue boycotting segregated businesses.

This first thrust of the movement was followed by an ebb that lasted nearly three years. Segregation in Chapel Hill had proven a stubborn opponent, and civil rights efforts were forced to a lower level of activity until the spring of 1963.

The most significant campaign during this period targeted Chapel Hill's two movie theaters. Picketing by the Committee for Open Movies, an interracial organization led by white liberals, continued intermittently from January 1961 until March 1962. The protests maintained a moderate and hopeful tone throughout, and they were ultimately successful.

Then, for over a year following the desegregation of the movies in 1962, there was no organized protest activity in Chapel Hill. Not until April 1963 did signs of a movement renewal disturb the village calm.

The second high tide of the Civil Rights Movement in Chapel Hill began in the spring of 1963 and persisted until the spring of 1964. This upsurge came in two waves.

The first wave developed when Harold Foster, the leader of the black youths during the effort in 1960, joined forces with white radical college students affiliated with the Student Peace Union. In May, these youths formed a new protest organization with widespread support from the black community and white liberals. The new protest organization, named the Committee for Open Business (COB), challenged segregation broadly, with its main focus on public accommodations. It employed increasingly aggressive tactics as it became clear that negotiations and voluntary approaches would not bring about complete desegregation in Chapel Hill. From picketing the COB moved to street demonstrations, and from street demonstrations to civil disobedience.

In July, following the first large-scale arrests of demonstrators and strong criticism of civil disobedience from the governor and local media, a split developed in the COB. Many white liberals and some of the more moderate black leadership opposed the militant tactics favored by most of the black youths and COB Chairman, Harold Foster. In early August 1963, the organization fell apart due to these disagreements. This split was followed by a second ebb period of limited activity. This ebb lasted only four months. It was followed by the second and final wave of the new high tide.

Although a new organization dubbed CURED (Citizens United for Racial Equality and Dignity) was formed to try to find an organizational home broad enough to accommodate all views, this effort failed. In the fall of 1963, local black youths and their

white university allies formed a chapter of CORE (the Congress on Racial Equality) with the assistance of veteran activist Floyd McKissick of Durham. This organization was established with the express intent of leading a campaign of non-violent direct action to complete the desegregation of Chapel Hill. Also that fall the Chapel Hill movement gained the full time assistance of Quinton Baker, leader of the NAACP Commandos and one of the most experienced youth activists in Durham. Baker had been helping out in Chapel Hill intermittently, but now he devoted all his energies to the local effort. In this way, activists in Chapel Hill gained a tremendous wealth of movement knowledge as well as increased contact with movement activists throughout the state. Members of the CORE chapter in Chapel Hill rapidly developed links to movements in nearby cities and towns. They traveled to these areas to support the local activists, and activists from around the state traveled to Chapel Hill.

The second wave began in December 1963. In conjunction with the trials of demonstrators arrested in July, Chapel Hill CORE launched a campaign of massive civil disobedience. Following two weeks of nightly sitdown protests and hundreds of arrests, a new local organization was formed to lead the movement. The Chapel Hill Freedom Committee included the entire CORE chapter as well as a number of veteran activists from other civil rights organizations. This organization renewed protests against segregated businesses after Christmas. A series of violent attacks against the demonstrators and the failure of the Board of Aldermen to enact a public accommodations ordinance brought the situation to a head in mid-January.

At this time, national CORE vowed to make Chapel Hill the focus of its work in the South if complete desegregation did not occur by February 1. Governor Sanford offered his full support to town officials to resist "civil disorder." Massive demonstrations in early February targeted not only segregated businesses but also the entire town. On one basketball game Saturday, traffic was brought to a standstill in Chapel Hill as hundreds of demonstrators blocked streets with their bodies. Later in February, students at Lincoln High School went out on strike. Nevertheless, in March, following the conviction of hundreds of demonstrators and the sentencing of nearly all the movement leaders to active jail terms, the movement died without achieving its goal of making Chapel Hill the first open city in the South.[11]

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In trying to get at the question of the origins of the movement in Chapel Hill, how it unfolded, and what it meant for the people involved, we are immediately confronted with two different and seemingly contradictory traditions of historical interpretation. One tradition sees the movement developing primarily out of the initiative of white activists with the black community of Chapel Hill as a supporting cast. The other tradition sees the movement developing from the initiative of local black activists.

The first historical tradition reflects the views of many white observers of the movement. Those quoted below were engaged in journalism, business, and politics, but their viewpoint was not limited to these professions. Nor were those who shared these

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[11] Sources used to compile this narrative of the Chapel Hill movement include the theses by Evans and Blanchard, Barksdale's dissertation, Heel's *The Free Men*, and articles from the *Chapel Hill Weekly*.

views of one mind politically. Some were liberal and sympathetic to the movement, while others were extreme conservatives committed to segregation.

John Carswell, for instance, the proprietor of the Colonial Drug Store, did not believe that the movement in Chapel Hill was an authentic expression of the feelings of local black residents. Apparently, the FBI convinced him that the protests were the work of communist agitators from Berkeley, California. These outsiders, Carswell believed, "picked a lot of gullible teenagers in high school. . ." to start things going, and then moved on. Carswell's drug store was the main focus of black youths over the entire course of the Chapel Hill movement. And yet, he seemed to maintain in a 1974 interview that the youths had no reason to target his business. "[I] resented the fact that they would turn against me. . . ," he said, "the one that had been good to them."[12]

Nor were segregationists like Carswell the only white people who believed that outsiders must have been responsible for the protests, or at least for their excesses, because black people in Chapel Hill had less reason to rebel than African Americans elsewhere. Chapel Hill was considered by many to be the most liberal town in the South, and it had a long-standing reputation for enlightened race relations. In particular, the University of North Carolina had become known as both the most prestigious university in the region and the most progressive, largely as the result of the leadership of Dr. Frank Porter Graham from 1930 to 1949. Moreover, Chapel Hill appeared to be largely free of the kind of racial conflict that frequently occurred between African Americans and white workers in other communities. Indeed, the white laboring class did not live in Chapel Hill, but rather across the tracks in Carrboro. When protests did erupt in Chapel Hill, and particularly during the massive civil disobedience campaigns of 1963-64, many white observers asked "Why here?"

The *Chapel Hill Weekly*, which had initially been sympathetic to the movement, promoted this theme in August 1963 after the movement returned to the tactic of sitdown protests and street demonstrations. Stating that "Chapel Hill's record of progress is unmatched by any southern town," the paper asked "Why Chapel Hill?" At the same time the paper characterized those who led the Chapel Hill movement as individuals with "a lust for power, for revenge, or a neurotic need for martyrdom." The paper stated that those who supported this "depraved leadership" were "pawns," and called for new leadership to step forward.[13] Jim Schumacher, the editor of the Weekly, contended in 1974 "It was a white movement. I don't think there is any doubt about that. . . :"

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[12] John Carswell, Interview by Wendy Watriss and Lois Gilman, August 1974, Interview 103, tape recording and transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[13] "New Leadership Must Step Forth" (editorial), *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 21 July 1963, 1.

> There was no black leadership. . . . In nearly every march they had, there wouldn't be nearly as many blacks as whites. . . . There wouldn't have been a movement without the white leadership.[14]

Collier Cobb, Jr., a prominent businessman and part owner of the Weekly, attributed the movement to "these outsiders coming in here and causing so much trouble." He added "they were concentrating on Chapel Hill when Chapel Hill wasn't supposed to be concentrated on."[15]

Roland Giduz, whose negative vote on the Board of Aldermen doomed the attempt to gain a local public accommodations law, and whose newspaper reports interpreted the movement to the public, believed the "whole movement--the heart and soul of it--was overwhelmingly white." In his view it was "sparked by university students" who "picked up some participation in the black community."[16]

Governor Terry Sanford, a moderate Democrat, asserted, "Chapel Hill, from the time I had been a boy, had been the leader in the South, let alone the state, of advocating openness and fairness and an end to discrimination. So of all places in the most progressive [Southern] state, that was the most progressive community." The governor's program was voluntary compliance without federal intervention, and he believed that demonstrations in Chapel Hill, which had been the leader in voluntary compliance, sent a message to other communities that even if you tried to do the right thing "they" would not be satisfied. He felt Chapel Hill was "a rather unlikely place of confrontation."[17] And he felt the movement there was "ill-advised" because it challenged the town government and "ill-timed" because it would adversely affect the democratic primary for governor. And he blamed all this on the "immature" leaders of the movement and the influence of national CORE officials.

What all of these observers had in common was that they did not believe--or would not acknowledge--that the movement in Chapel Hill was motivated and guided by the needs and longings of the black community and the perseverance of local black

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[14] Jim Schumaker, Interview by Fred Baldwin and Wendy Watriss, 6 June 1974, interview 33-34, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[15] Collier Cobb, Interview by Leon Fink, 12 June 1974, interview 46, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[16] Roland Giduz, Interview by Wendy Watriss, 26 August 1974, Interview 91-92, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina, quoted in Evans thesis, 177.

[17] Terry Sanford, Interview and transcript, "OH, II," Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas. All other Sanford quotes are from DOHP: Terry Sanford, Interview by Wendy Watriss and Lois Gilman, 29 August 1974, Interview 103, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

activists. This view, however, was not shared by black movement activists, their white university allies, or the black community itself.

Harold Foster, a black teenager from Chapel Hill, was the elected leader of both the 1960 protest organization and the COB in 1963. In his view, the Civil Rights Movement came out of "a local spontaneity." It was initiated in 1960 by black youths from the Pottersfield neighborhood.

> It had started out in Greensboro and had spread to other areas where there were students. We did it strictly as a local thing, "If this is what's happenin', Jack, we better be down with what's happenin'." Like I said, people from Pottersfield were known to be the leaders, the vanguard, and that's where we carried that right on through, even to the sit-ins. Where we had been the leaders in football, track, the sports, and academics, so were we in the Civil Rights Movement.[18]

James Brittian, another black youth from Chapel Hill, was the elected representative of the Lincoln High School students on the leadership body of the Chapel Hill Freedom Committee in 1963-64. In his view, local black youths were the backbone of the movement. Brittian noted that the original core of the COB was "ten whites and forty young black males," with increasing numbers of young black women becoming involved as the demonstrations progressed.[19]

According to Braxton Foushee, a young black hospital worker who had grown up in Chapel Hill, "the group" from Pottersfield exercised its leadership in the movement through an informal process. They would gather views from the various people involved in the movement and then retreat to their traditional meeting place on the Rock Wall at the corner of McDade and Cotton in the heart of Pottersfield:

> At that time [1963], we had an office. We used the old Mason Hall on the corner of Sunset Drive and Rosemary Street, which is now bein' used by Howard Lee. . . . We saw each other every day. I mean, day in and day out. . . . We had a chance to sit and talk with people, to get different ideas, and then come right back to the Rock Wall and sit up there and say "Hey, look man, what do you think we ought to be doin'?" And so we would finally decide what we would do, and once we had agreed to the strategy we would take, then Harold [Foster], most likely, would be relatin' it to the mass of people. And he did nothin' to betray our ideas.[20]

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[18] Harold Foster, Interview by Ken Hamilton, 26 August 1974, interview 84-86, tape recording, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[19] James R. Brittian, Interview by author, 27 November 1990, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[20] Braxton Foushee, Interview by William Bishop and Romus Broadway, 5 June 1974, interview 17, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

John Dunne and Pat Cusick, two white university students, and Quinton Baker became the most prominent public figures in the movement in the fall of 1963. These were the "free men" who are the focus of John Ehle's book. Yet Foushee, who participated in the movement and later became an alderman in Carrboro, contended that Dunne, Cusick, and Baker "came on the scene late in the demonstrations."[21]

Although Cusick and Dunne had helped initiate the renewed protests of 1963, they knew few African Americans or white liberals at that time. It was not until the fall of 1963, when Foster resigned from the movement leadership, that they came into greater prominence. Foster, however, continued to live in Chapel Hill while going to work and school in Durham. And as Cusick, Dunne, and Baker assumed more leadership of the Chapel Hill movement, Foster continued to consult with his Pottersfield friends and to exert his influence:

> After I resigned, my role in the movement in Chapel Hill was behind the scenes. Everything that was going on I was reported to on--the whole move by Cusick and them [to establish a CORE chapter]. And it boiled down to whether they should support them or not. And I always told them, "Yes. Support, support." I couldn't be there, but "support." [22]

For their part, Cusick and other white activists who were now part of the leadership acknowledged that it was a black, community based movement. John Dunne contended that "in all of those marches, in all of those sit-ins and so on, between 60 and 98 percent, depending on the event and the phase of the movement, were local Chapel Hill residents who were black and had been there all their lives." And he added, "I wasn't that movement. I was a symbol, I played a role."[23]

This outlook was also evident in Pat Cusick's description of the CORE chapter that formed in the late fall of 1963. The group was "basically under twenty-one, basically black, non-university," he said. "It was the core of the movement from the summer which was basically Lincoln High School." And when the Chapel Hill Freedom Committee was formed in December, "it was basically the high school students once again." Only the name had been changed so that a few activists on the staff of national civil rights organizations other than CORE could justify staying in Chapel Hill to help out.[24]

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[21] Braxton Foushee interview, 1974.

[22] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[23] John Dunne, Interview by Al Broussard, Wendy Watriss and others, 8 June 1974, interview 68-70, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[24] Pat Cusick, Interview by group, 10 June 1974, Interview 61-65, transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

Cusick believed that despite the opposition of many white liberals and some moderate blacks, Harold Foster's power in the movement was "genuine" because "power was thrown from the bottom up." And Cusick believed that his power in the movement, and John Dunne's, and Quinton Baker's all came from the same source:

> One of the problems I had with [John Ehle's] book. . . , it's the totally wrong perspective. It was the high school in Chapel Hill that was the movement. And Harold was their spokesman. And there were. . . others of us that were in the Committee. . . . But we weren't leading them. We were their spokesmen.[25]

Finally, the historical tradition that saw the movement coming from local black initiative also came from black adults in Chapel Hill who were not part of CORE or the Freedom Committee. The editorial opinion of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* that blamed the continuing demonstrations on outsiders who were "professional civil rights leaders" enraged Mrs. W. P. Tolliver. In a letter to the Weekly printed on February 16, 1964 she wrote:

> Your editorial of Sunday, February 9, should be answered by one of the Negro citizens of this town--a Negro adult citizen.
>
> We Chapel Hill Negro citizens are not "pawns" in the hands of the professional civil rights movement. The Negroes in Chapel Hill, as every place in the South, have been done injustice for many years--yes even in this "liberal" town and we have taken enough and can't take much more.
>
> We want 100% desegregation in all of our town and we don't need Reverend Shuttlesworth to tell us that--we know that very well ourselves. . . .
>
> Yes, Chapel Hill Aldermen and Chapel Hill businessmen: Your advice to "wait a little longer"; your shunning of facing the real problems! We are tired of your subtle and not-so-subtle discrimination in employment, in housing and in all areas of the life of this town! Yes, "your" Negroes are fed up. . . .
>
> We are happy to have the Chapel Hill Freedom Movement to take the lead in this town--or better still start the lead, but let's be realistic about the whole thing: there will be a Freedom Movement in Chapel Hill led by adult Chapel Hill Negro citizens long after Quinton Baker and John Dunne are gone--simply because this is OUR fight, this is OUR hurt, and this is OUR town.
>
> Now tell me when will your editors and Aldermen and merchants stop and look in on what is really happening?[26]

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Some readers may have made up their minds at this point as to which of these traditions they believe. Of those who believe the Chapel Hill movement was led by outsiders and whites, I do not ask that you discard what you know, only that you open

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[25] ibid.

[26] Mrs. W. P. Tolliver, Letter to the editor, *Chapel Hill Weekly,* 16 February 1964, 2(B).

yourself to seeing the role of these activists in a new light. What the evidence reveals is that outside leaders empowered local black youths and represented the interests of the black community. For these reasons they were embraced by the local community. In every case, these outside leaders were only able to carry out their leadership roles because of the ongoing endorsement of local black youths.

Of those who believe that the local movement developed from the striving of the black community and the leadership of local black activists, I ask openness as well. For the Chapel Hill movement, more than most other local struggles, did rely on the skill and energy of leaders from outside the community, both black and white, and it is important to ask why this occurred and how it affected the movement.

My view is that the Chapel Hill movement grew out of the needs of the black community and that local black activists recruited and, if necessary, trained leaders from the outside to assist them. How this happened is the focus of my thesis. Before proceeding, however, a word of explanation may be helpful for readers anxious to get to the story of the Chapel Hill movement in the 1960s.

To understand the role of black youths in the origins of the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement, it is necessary to appreciate both the legacy they built on and the history they made themselves. To do this means that consideration of the movement itself must be put off for awhile, until the long years of preparation that gave birth to the movement have been examined, if only briefly.

The second chapter reviews the black experience in Chapel Hill from 1793 to 1937. There is very little known so far about individual black residents during this period, so I have included several anecdotes and a biographical sketch of Elizabeth Cotton to give a feel for black life in Chapel Hill during the early twentieth century.[27] The third chapter outlines the historical dynamics of the 1937-1960 period that gave birth to the civil rights generation. In this chapter I have tried to open some windows on how the movement actually grew out of the lives of specific individuals in Chapel Hill.

Let us move on, then, to a brief consideration of the long history of slavery in Chapel Hill, the struggle for black rights and opportunities during Reconstruction, the gradual narrowing of black freedom leading up to legalized segregation, and the gradual widening of black opportunities leading up to the revolt against Jim Crow. In particular, let us focus, to the extent possible given the sources, on the choices made by black people in Chapel Hill, that is, on their freedom. For African Americans fashioned their own lives out of what was possible. They learned to appreciate their necessity, and turned

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[27] Elizabeth Cotton, the world-renowned author of the song "Freight Train," grew up in Chapel Hill at the turn of the century. On her guitar named "Stella" she played turn-of-the-century parlor music, blues, church songs, and ragtime from an early age. Her mother was a domestic worker and her father worked as a laborer in an iron mine. Until 1941, Elizabeth and her daughter lived in the neighborhood now known as Northside, then called Pottersfield. Then she moved to New York, but it was not until the 1960s that her unique guitar style and heart-felt lyrics won her national acclaim. On the question of the poverty of scholarship on black lives in North Carolina see Raymond Gavins, "A `Sin of Omission:' Black Historiography in North Carolina," in *Black Americans in North Carolina and the South,* ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Flora J. Haley, 3-56 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

their lives toward freedom. And they forged a culture of struggle that depended as much on memory and song and stealth as on confrontation. What could not be achieved by day might be achieved by night. And what was beyond the reach of a single life span could be claimed by a second generation.

CHAPTER 2

FROM GENOCIDE TO JIM CROW: THE COLOR LINE IN CHAPEL HILL, 1793-1937

In November 1934, Langston Hughes visited Chapel Hill on a poetry reading tour of the South. At the time, he was perhaps the best-known poet of the Harlem Renaissance. In his work he took a militant stand against all forms of oppression, including Jim Crow. The tour, therefore, was not without risk.[1]

Hughes recorded his experience in a short piece entitled, "Color at Chapel Hill."[2] Although playwright, Paul Green, and sociologist, Guy B. Johnson, had invited Hughes to speak at the University of North Carolina, the white state university refused to lodge the black poet on campus. A white student named Anthony Buttita contacted Hughes and invited him to stay in the apartment he shared with Milton Abernathy. The two young men published a literary magazine called *Contempo*, and they requested that Hughes send them a selection of his work for publication. Hughes selected "Christ in Alabama" which ended:

> Most Holy Bastard
> Of the bleeding mouth:
> Nigger Christ
> On the cross of the South!

"By the time I reached the town of Chapel Hill," Hughes wrote, "the daily papers had reproduced my `inflammatory' lines, and the white citizenry were claiming mortal insult. When they learned that I was to stop overnight with two white students, Buttita and Abernathy had been promptly ejected from their lodgings, and had nowhere to stay themselves."

Considerable pressure had been put on the university to cancel Hughes' lecture, but President Frank Graham held firm. Nevertheless, a leading town politician attempted to have the special police protection requested by the university denied, stating that Hughes should be run out of town before he had a chance to speak. The lecture went on to a packed house, and afterwards Buttita and Abernathy defied southern custom by taking Hughes to dinner at the Carolina Cafeteria. Hughes and his white friends were

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[1] Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression,* First Evergreen Edition (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985), 42. Hughes was active in the communist movement in Harlem and his participation was an important factor in the involvement of other black artists and intellectuals.

[2] Langston Hughes, "Color at Chapel Hill," in *The Langston Hughes Reader*, (New York. George Braziller, date), 405. Also, see James Vickers, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay Publishers, 1985), 136-138 for information on the Hughes visit and activities of communists, including Abernathy.

served without incident, much to the surprise of the black family Hughes stayed with that night. According to Hughes, the man of the house exclaimed in astonishment, "`It's the first time such a thing ever happened in Chapel Hill."

This incident reveals certain aspects of race relations in Chapel Hill. Legalized segregation and violent racial intolerance--Jim Crow, as it was called--was still predominant in the 1930s, despite the willingness of some courageous few to challenge it openly. In Chapel Hill, as throughout the South, no black person, regardless of station in life or point of view, could escape "the color line" that defined his or her place in the eyes of white society. Pauli Murray, a descendant of Orange County slaves and slave masters, recalled what this was like for children coming of age in the Jim Crow South:

> The signs. . . literally screamed at me from every side--on streetcars, over drinking fountains, on doorways: FOR WHITE ONLY, FOR COLORED ONLY, WHITE LADIES, COLORED WOMEN, WHITE, COLORED. . . .
>
> Our seedy run-down school told us that if we had any place at all in the scheme of things it was a separate place, marked off, proscribed and unwanted by the white people. We were bottled up and labeled and set aside--sent to the Jim Crow car, the back of the bus, the side door of the theater, the side window of a restaurant. We came to know that whatever we had was always inferior. We came to understand that no matter how neat and clean, how law abiding, submissive and polite, how studious in school, how churchgoing and moral, how scrupulous in paying our bills and taxes we were, it made no essential difference in our place. . . . The tide of color beat upon me ceaselessly, relentlessly.[3]

Yet the town was also a place where a person might challenge Jim Crow in certain ways without getting lynched, and this set it apart from much of the South. In that sense, the town had gone a few hesitant steps beyond many other communities. In fact, Chapel Hill's white personality was split. It was home to liberals like Frank Graham and radicals like Buttita and Abernathy on the one hand, and to traditional segregationists on the other. For African Americans, this meant that "you could get away with things," particularly in terms of taking advantage of opportunities resulting from the presence of the university.

It was such a world into which the black youths who led the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s were born. And before we can consider what led them to challenge segregation, we must try to understand how this world was made.

On the one hand, the color line embodied the laws and customs that enforced racial subordination. On the other, it reflected the efforts of dominated peoples to expand the limits of their freedom. The color line was woven into the material and cultural fabric of Southern life, but it was not a thing. It was a relationship, a process of struggle that had been developing for over three hundred years.

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[3] Pauli, Murray, *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library edition, 1987), 268-70.

The forcible taking of land from Native Americans and of labor from Africans, and the subjugation of those peoples through a system of racial domination, was the material foundation upon which North Carolina's gentry established the university and the town in 1793. The legacy established by these practices began with genocide and slavery, and it was perpetuated during Reconstruction and the period of segregation known as Jim Crow. It shaped the university and the town to its logic, and it stamped its imprint on the habits and outlook of the people. And it was this legacy, embedded in the foundations of Old East, the rock walls surrounding the campus, and the patterns of segregation and racial discrimination in Chapel Hill, that African Americans struggled against during the Civil Rights Movement.

Slavery in North Carolina flowed from the motives and the methods of those who promoted settlement.[4] The colony was established in the 1660s by the English king, Charles II, as a commercial venture. He granted the territory of the Carolinas to a group of profit-seeking English noblemen, the eight "Lords Proprietors." These English lords promoted both development and slavery in the colony by establishing the "headright system," which gave land to new colonists in proportion to the number of slaves they brought with them. In 1669, Carolina's Fundamental Constitutions, drafted in England as the legal framework for colonial government, asserted, "every freeman of Carolina, shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever."[5]

The rush of speculators and settlers to control the resources of North Carolina brought war with the Indians. Colonists pushing westward from the Atlantic coast and southward from Virginia enslaved many of the native inhabitants and took their land. In the early 1700s Governor John Archdale wrote:

> God sends war and sickness like an Assyrian angel' to destroy the Indians and make room for the English.'[6]

In a more objective vein, historian Hugh T. Lefler concluded that theft was the standard pattern of white acquisition of native lands. "The whites simply took over the lands which they desired," he noted, "even though, in many instances, they did go through the formality of purchase or treaty."[7]

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[4] The story of black lives in Chapel Hill has not yet been told. What follows is based primarily on secondary sources by white authors. A more complete telling must await extensive research in primary sources such as private papers, diaries, and oral histories.

[5] Jeffrey J. Crow, *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1983), 2.

[6] Quoted in Hugh T. Lefler, *History of North Carolina,* vol.1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co.), 10-11.

[7] ibid., 14.

Most Indians who survived fled to the distant margins of colonial society, while a few managed to melt silently into the new order. In either case, by the time the colonial General Assembly created Orange County in 1752, the Eno, the Sissipahaw, and the Occaneechi had gone. This fact, quipped James Vickers in his history of Chapel Hill, permitted "the Europeans to establish homes, farms, and villages unthreatened by human menaces not of their own creation."[8] Nevertheless, the colonists had sown the wind. In time, they would reap the whirlwind.

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In 1793 the North Carolina legislature founded the university to train the sons of the gentry. The town of Chapel Hill was established to support the university. And from those first days until the end of the Civil War, the university was dependent on slave labor, wealth based on slavery, and revenues from the sale of western lands taken from native peoples.[9]

From the beginning, most African Americans in Chapel Hill were slaves. They cleared the forests and built the university buildings, the faculty homes, the churches, and places of business. Slave gardeners planted and pruned the ornamental shrubbery that beautified the campus grounds. Slave laborers and masons built the old stone walls. Slaves cared for white children in private homes. Slaves waited on the sons of the southern gentry on the university campus.[10]

The African American presence in Chapel Hill, both slave and free, was nearly equal to the white throughout the period of slavery. In addition to the relative wealth of Chapel Hill residents, this resulted from the need for labor generated by the university and the economic and social opportunities that Chapel Hill offered free blacks.

By 1860, when the town population had grown to 1193, it was 47 percent African American and 39 per cent slave, including 464 slaves and ninety-eight "free persons of color." Nearly half of the white family heads of Chapel Hill owned slaves. These masters were mostly merchants, wealthy widows, and professionals, including professors and administrators at the university. In 1850, for instance, David L. Swain, the president of the university, owned nineteen slaves, and by 1860 his holdings had increased to

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[8] Vickers, 8.

[9] R.D.W. Connor, compiler and annotator, *A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina,* 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1953), 253-306. Note, for example, a letter from William Barry Grove to James Hogg, April 3, 1794: "The Committee on the Western Lands have reported Very favorably, but I will not flatter you on the adoption of the Report by the Legislature, for I know the thing will be powerfully opposed, principally on the ground that the State had never extinguished the Indian claims and of course had no right to sell those Lands. We will do what we can."

[10] Information about slavery in Chapel Hill is scattered throughout the texts listed in the bibliography that deal specifically with the university, the town, and Orange County. In particular see Fletcher M. Green, "Slavery in Orange County," in *Orange County 1752-1952, ed.* Hugh Lefler and Paul Wager (Chapel Hill: The Orange Print Shop, 1953), 95-106.

thirty-two. In 1850, Elisha Mitchell, professor of geology, owned twenty slaves, Manuel Fetter, professor of Greek, seven, and William Horn Battle, professor of law, sixteen. Very few of the skilled craftsmen, who made up the other half of the white population, owned slaves. And the only slave owned by an African American in Chapel Hill in 1860 was a forty-seven- year-old black man owned by Adeline Bowles, a thirty-two- year-old free black woman.[11]

Slavery generated a fundamental contradiction between slaves and masters. Based on the conflict between the need of the masters to protect their property rights and the need of the slaves to assert their freedom, two cultures developed.

The mainstream culture was one of white domination over African Americans, both free and slave. Its counterpart among slaves and free blacks was a culture of resistance.

Both domination and resistance took many forms, and it must not be imagined that power over blacks necessarily meant abuse, or that resistance necessarily meant protest. Generally speaking, for those African Americans who stayed in their place, there was "the carrot," while for those who stepped out of line there was "the stick." Inevitably, given the resources and overwhelming force available to whites, most black people accommodated to white power. What must be appreciated, however, is that for most African Americans, accommodation was a form of resistance, and it did not necessarily imply giving up the freedom struggle.

Southern law and custom gave almost unlimited power to white masters over their property and to white people generally in their relations with African Americans. This served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it helped to ensure the property rights and personal safety of masters. On the other, it made it easier for elites to exercise their power over the entire population by giving lower status whites a sense of privilege that was missing in their lives, thereby promoting white class solidarity.

While the first purpose of white power is nearly self-evident, the second purpose is not widely appreciated. Nevertheless, it was understood by leading defenders of slavery. In the early 1940s, Gunnar Myrdal tried to explain this function of white privilege by citing Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, who gave it as one reason why slavery had to be preserved:

> By relegating--in theory--all menial and domestic labor to the slaves, all the whites became gentlemen. "One of the reconciling features of the existence [of Negro slavery]," argued Jefferson Davis just before the outbreak of the great conflict, "is the fact that it raises white men to the same general level, that it dignifies and exalts every white man by the presence of a lower race."[12]

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[11] U.S. Census MS., Orange County, 1850, Schedules 1 and 2;
U.S. Census MS., Orange County, 1860, Schedules 1 and 2.

[12] Gunnar, Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 442. For a deeper discussion of this issue see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York and London: Norton, 1975) For a perspective on this question that also pays attention to gender relationships see Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter:*

The culture that slavery generated by giving white people such power was both brutal and patronizing. Whites expected hard work, deference, and submissiveness from slaves, and felt free to humiliate or punish those who did not act in the ways demanded of them. At the same time, they could be kind and gentle with their slaves, as long as they were doing the giving on their own terms. Always, the question of how to best manage their human property was a basic factor in the way white masters behaved, while the question of how to best manage the choices available to them--their freedom--governed the decisions of African Americans.

The right to buy and sell black human beings was one of the fundamental powers bestowed by the dominant culture on white people, and it was one of the greatest causes of resistance on the part of slaves. Slave sales broke up families and separated friends and loved ones. Sale to a slave trader or to bondage in the Deep South could be a harsh fate indeed.

Slaves were sold frequently in Chapel Hill. An advertisement in the Literary Gazette on January 15, 1858, proclaimed:

> SALE OF SLAVES. By virtue of a Deed heretofore made by Walter A. Thompson to secure Andrew Mickle and others, the undersigned will, at Chapel Hill, upon Saturday the 30th inet., expose to sale to the highest bidder NINE VALUABLE SLAVES.[13]

Battle recounts the story of a slave who ran away when he was sold to a slave trader to pay his master's debts. Not only would the sale separate the slave from his family, but it would also condemn him to the more harsh conditions of servitude in the Deep South:

> One of [Samuel Morgan's] slaves, Tom, having been bought by a trader who designed to carry him to the Southwest for sale, ran away and for several years had two hiding places, one a cave on Morgan's Creek and the other in a very thick copse of wood near his old master's residence, under the lee of overhanging rocks.

Eventually, however, the white men of Chapel Hill mobilized their resources to recapture Tom. Throughout the South, slave owners had devised an array of measures to discourage slaves from pursuing freedom. In Chapel Hill, as elsewhere, there were slave codes, night patrols, and hunting parties to track down runaways. In a description that

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The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York, William Morrow and Company, 1984), 33-39.

[13] Vickers, 57

suggested both familiar ritual on the part of whites and Tom's determination, Battle explained how Tom was re-enslaved:

> Then a posse was summoned for his capture. Marching through the forest at regular intervals--a process known as "beating the woods"--the men aroused him from his lair, and, on his refusal to stop when commanded, he was shot in the legs, captured and then sent south for sale.[14]

Southern law proved to be an almost impenetrable trap for African Americans striving for freedom. Battle tells another story of a free Negro, a father whose daughter was a slave. In a stratagem used by many free blacks to rescue loved ones from servitude, the man bought his own daughter. Nevertheless, technically she was still a slave. Nor could he legally free her because of laws against manumission. When the daughter had a child, her son was born a slave as well, since North Carolina law determined the status of a child by the status of the mother. Then, when the woman's father died without any free relatives and without a will, his personal property, including his daughter and grandson, became the property of the university. This was because state law granted the university all the property of such persons who died "intestate," that is, without heirs or a will. As Battle noted, "[the trustees] seemed to experience no difficulty" deciding what to do in this instance. They ordered the child and his mother to be sold, convinced "that they were in the lowest stage of poverty and degradation and that it would redound to their happiness to have a master."[15]

This final comment illustrates another aspect of the web woven by white supremacy to suppress black freedom. Black strivings were suppressed by limiting the opportunities available to free blacks. If the lives of free blacks were much above the level of slaves, it would be an encouragement for those in bondage to seek freedom. And so, even "free" blacks, of which there were a considerable number in Chapel Hill during the 1850s, were limited and denied by the brand of race.[16]

Finally, this story is also an example of the indifference to black self-determination promoted by the culture of white supremacy long after the end of slavery. Battle, who wrote in the early twentieth century, was both a product and leading practitioner of that culture. He does not acknowledge that the mother and child had viewpoints worth considering. Adopting the fundamental stance of white paternalism, he considered only what the white trustees felt was at issue, and told the story from that point of view. In essence, then, the black people involved were invisible to him as agents of history.

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[14] Kemp P. Battle, *History of the University of North Carolina*, vol. 1 (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton, 1907-1912), 31.

[15] ibid., 320.

[16] For a detailed discussion of free blacks in North Carolina see John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

Another example that demonstrates the culture of domination among university trustees and students, the limitations on free blacks, and the particular vulnerability of black women to white power comes from the autobiography of Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes*. This account is also an example of writing that acknowledges black self-determination by exploring the feelings and choices of African Americans.

In this story, Dr. Smith is a planter, prominent politician, and university trustee for whom Smith Level Road in Chapel Hill is named. Sidney is his son, recently graduated from the university. Harriet is a slave on the Smith plantation, Pauli Murray's great-grandmother. Reuben is Harriet's husband, a free black. Julius is a child, their son. The incident took place in Hillsborough, not far from Chapel Hill:

> . . . one evening Sidney walked up to Harriet's cabin as she was saying good night to Reuben.
>
> "Say boy, what're you doing on this place after nine o'clock? You're not one of our slaves," he said.
>
> "You know me, Marse Sidney," said the astounded Reuben. "I'm Reuben Day, Harriet's husband."
>
> "Husband!" Sidney exclaimed. . . Somebody's been fooling you, boy. Don't you know slave marriages aren't recognized in this state?"
>
> . . . "But Marse Sid, I'm free born and--"
>
> "Then it's too bad you married a slave woman. You'll have to get yourself another wife."
>
> Reuben was stunned. Harriet clung to him wordlessly. Fury and frustration boiled in him but he was helpless. Behind the evil little man who leered at him in the darkness was the oppressive weight of southern law and custom.
>
> Harriet knew that Sidney had not run her husband off just out of meanness:[She] nailed up the door as usual and put barricades against it. Later that night, after everyone had gone to bed, the other slaves heard Marse Sid break open Harriet's door. Ear-splitting shrieks tore the night, although he stuffed rags in the door and window cracks to muffle Harriet's cries. They heard little Julius screaming and Harriet's violent struggle before Sidney had his way with her. Nobody interfered, of course.[17]

Harriet eventually had four children by white men--one by Sidney and three by his brother. Despite the grim circumstances of their conception, Harriet nurtured all her children. This "accommodation" to white power was a practical matter and a form of

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[17] Murray, 42-42.

long-term strategic resistance. For Harriet not only raised her children; she taught them well.

Like hundreds of thousands of children fathered by white men, but raised by black women (and frequently by black men, as well), Harriet's children stood as a rebuke to the culture of slavery and white supremacy. Eventually, one of Harriet's descendants, Pauli Murray told her story. She also became one of the first African Americans to apply to the graduate school at the University of North Carolina. Although she was refused admission because of her race, she went on to become a leading fighter for the rights of African Americans and women, thereby demonstrating the power and wisdom of her great-grandmother Harriet's love.[18]

The example from *Proud Shoes* demonstrates how dangerous white power could be for both slaves and free blacks. The pervasive brutality of the culture is also reflected in the activities that made students laugh. Battle noted that there were "some negroes, who in different ways contributed to the amusement and comfort of the students:"

> . . . There was Ben Boothe, who, on account of his simian features was, after the publication of Darwin's books, called "the Missing Link." His forte was butting planks asunder by his head, and allowing planks to be split upon the summit of his skull. . . . He was no beggar, worked for his living as long as he was able. . . . When he became nearly helpless from old age he was well cared for by the King's Daughters, a white organization. . . .[19]

Such a story raises many questions. At the least, it sheds light on the atmosphere of ridicule and abuse that white power encouraged among the future leaders of the state and the desperate survival strategies forced on African Americans. It also reflects the legitimacy bestowed upon white behavior by a man who had served for many years as president of the university after the end of slavery. And could it not also reveal a certain contemptuous resistance to white power on the part of Ben Boothe? "Here," we can imagine him saying, "take this board, master, and hit me in the head as hard as you can." And we can imagine him thinking, "That's right, white boy, give me your best shot. Do me the way you been wantin' to. Your people been beatin' on mine all this time anyway. So hit me. I may not be able to hit back, but I can take whatever you dish out, and make a quarter doing it."

Even in the mid-1980s, a white author could recount such anecdotes without editorial comment. James Vickers, for instance, wrote in 1985 about how university students made sport with the body of a dead slave:

> . . . a slave. . . named Asgill was hanged for killing another slave. Students made a holiday of escorting the body back to Chapel Hill, and some medical students sent the head in a bag late one evening

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[18] ibid., 281-282.

[19] Battle, *History*, vol. 1, 600-607.

> to John B. Tenney's teenaged son, Abdel Kader, who worked as the night clerk in a drugstore. Their slave messenger told the boy it was a watermelon.[20]

Slaves rebelled against this kind of treatment, and against bondage itself, in a thousand ways. They stole from the "big house," ran away, aborted unwanted pregnancies, learned to read, bought their children, and, most importantly, struggled to survive in order that they, or their children, or their children's children might gain freedom when the opportunity arose.

Open rebellion, however, was probably rare. Although there are no records of slave insurrections in Orange County, there were times when whites feared imminent rebellion. In a community just north of Chapel Hill, a large proportion of the white adult males turned out to counter one such threat:

> . . . according to Charles Pettigrew, who was a student at the Hillsborough Academy, the citizens anticipated an insurrection at Christmas in 1830. They grouped themselves for patrol duty in twelve companies with about ten persons in each.[21]

Whether through open resistance or long-suffering accommodation, African Americans established a freedom legacy that was passed on from generation to generation. Nevertheless, slavery confined this legacy primarily to cultural forms that could be hidden from white eyes, while public behavior generally conformed to deferential patterns.

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The era of freedom finally allowed a flowering of black life, and for the first time African Americans in the South openly challenged old limits all along the color line. They did this by defying the established norms of personal conduct, organizing themselves for political action, pressing for reparations, establishing their own educational and religious institutions, and freeing themselves, to the extent possible, from economic and personal dependency.

Naturally, black assertiveness was a tremendous challenge to the power and profits of the Southern gentry. And for Southern whites generally, who had come to depend on black subordination to flavor their lives with privilege and bolster their self-esteem, black freedom was a difficult adjustment. Many tried to make the best of the new day, but others, often organized and encouraged by the Southern gentry, joined efforts to maintain white power and privilege.

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[20] Vickers, 57; Kemp P. Battle, *Memories of an Old-time Tarheel* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1945), 246.

[21] Ruth Blackwelder, *The Age of Orange: Political and Intellectual Leadership in North Carolina, 1752-1861* (Charlotte, N.C.: William Loftin, 1961), 35. For a "flare-up" of concern in Chapel Hill see Battle, *Memories,* 151.

African American slaves in Chapel Hill gained their freedom on Monday morning, April 17, 1865, when Union cavalry units under General Smith B. Atkins rode into the town. And while local white residents contemplated their defeat and worried about their buried silver, black Chapel Hillians rejoiced. At the same time, they began testing the limits of their newfound freedom. They challenged everything that had been taboo. They went where they weren't supposed to go. To this extent, therefore, they were unruly and disobedient, disobedient to those who told them to be obedient, but obedient to their own consciences. On Wednesday morning, whites awoke to find that "most of the Negroes had left to follow the Yankees north, to go to urban centers, or just to get away from their masters."[22]

In July, the "freedmen" in Chapel Hill demonstrated their solidarity with the Union victory, as well as a certain level of regional organization, by staging a large Fourth of July celebration in Hillsborough. In August, when General Atkins married Eleanor Swain, the rebellious daughter of the president of the university, many of the invited white guests boycotted the wedding. Some even "spat upon their invitations." African Americans, on the other hand, boldly asserted their approval by sending "`a large and handsomely decorated cake'" from "`the colored people of Chapel Hill.'"[23]

The post war period of Reconstruction was a time when African Americans and their white allies struggled to enlarge democracy. It was also the first great experiment in interracial cooperation in the South. In Chapel Hill, as elsewhere, African American tried to live as free citizens.

The first two black churches were established in Chapel Hill immediately following the end of the Civil War. One was Methodist and one was Baptist. The Quakers donated a small building to the black community, and the two denominations held services on alternate Sundays until they were able to build their own facilities. Eventually a black man, Jerry Hargraves, donated land to the Methodists while old Rev. George Purefoy, a white Baptist preacher, gave land to the Baptists.

Probably the black churches were built by black workers who volunteered their labor and by a mobilization of resources that involved the entire black community. In 1939, when Agnes Brown collected interviews for her study of black churches in Chapel Hill, she noted stories "about the school children `toting shingles from one end of the town to the other' to aid in the building of the Methodist church."[24]

Black education was established in much the same way. In 1869, Wilson Swain Caldwell quit his job as University janitor and took charge of a "free school for colored

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[22] Vickers, 71.

[23] Vickers, 76. Throughout the South such incidents of everyday life had become highly politicized as the struggle over what freedom meant unfolded. For a good summary of this struggle see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988; Perennial Library, 1989), 77-123.

[24] Agnes Brown, "The Negro Churches of Chapel Hill" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1939), 2.

children." The school was located in a one-room log cabin on the corner of Cameron Avenue and Mallett Street.[25]

Wilson Caldwell also figured prominently in the black political activities during Reconstruction. When Holden became the Republican governor in 1868, he appointed Caldwell Justice of the Peace in Chapel Hill, a position flagrantly out of step with southern tradition. As late as about 1888 Caldwell was elected to the Chapel Hill Board of Commissioners as a Republican, defeating the Democrat who was a professor at the University.[26] Up to 1875, Republican candidates did particularly well in Chapel Hill Township because of the relatively high concentration of black voters (40.6 per cent) and the large number of Republican appointees on the faculty and in Federal positions like postmaster.[27]

Land and labor issues were also key issues for the freedmen. Paul Cameron of Orange County, a university trustee who had been the largest slaveholder in North Carolina, noted that his former slaves defied his authority and seemed to feel that his plantations should belong to them.[28] Kemp Plummer Battle complained that his father's former slaves were trying to organize a labor boycott against him. The new president of the university felt "so indignant at the behavior of our old darkies" that he retaliated by refusing to extend credit to one of his father's former slaves.[29]

The heart of the matter for African Americans was what today would be called the question of self-determination and reparations. Then, it was a question for blacks of control over their own labor and access to land. Not surprisingly, these questions were the occasion for prolonged struggle throughout the Western Hemisphere after the abolition of slavery. In the U.S., blacks came into the period of freedom believing not only that they had a right to land in repayment for their stolen labor, but also that the federal government was committed to land distribution.[30]

As African Americans asserted their right to property, citizenship, and social equality the conflict with white supremacy escalated. Even the white political allies of the freedmen in the Republican Party had a very limited commitment to black freedom. W.W. Holden, for instance, the Orange County politician who became the Republican

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[25] Charles Maddry Freeman, "Growth and Plan for a Community: A Study of negro Life in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1944), 58.

[26] Kemp P. Battle, "Sketch of the Life and Character of Wilson Caldwell" (Chapel Hill: University Press, 1895), 315-17.

[27] Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 138.

[28] ibid., 110. Also, see Foner, 136 for a discussion of the land question.

[29] Battle, *Memories,* 246.

[30] Foner, 104.

governor of North Carolina during Reconstruction, told the freedmen: "It is not expected that you can comprehend and appreciate. . . the wise provisions and limitation of the Constitution and the laws; or that you can now have that knowledge of public affairs which is necessary to qualify you to discharge all the duties of citizens. . . . But you are free. . . ."[31] Samuel Fields Phillips of Chapel Hill, a former Whig who became a prominent Republican after the war, believed that ". . . it was a Christian duty to give Negroes as much of an opportunity for success as a sound regard for the permanent welfare of whites would allow."[32]

Democrats, on the other hand, were even more determined to limit African Americans citizenship. Former governor William A. Graham, also of Orange County, declared "as to political liberty or power over the law, as comprehended in the right of suffrage, the safety and welfare of the community require, that this shall be jealously reserved to the white race. . . ." And President Swain wrote to Graham, "`with reference to emancipation, we are at the beginning of the war.'"[33]

The quality of this conflict in Chapel Hill is illustrated by the following report of an attempted political meeting of African Americans to prepare for a statewide convention of freedmen in Raleigh. A group of African Americans were meeting secretly in the second story of a building in the village. Who they were and the extent of their organization is not known. But their purpose was probably to elect delegates to the Raleigh convention:

> At approximately ten o'clock, students from the University of North Carolina rushed across the campus yelling and pelting the meeting house with stones. They tore down the outside stairs, trapping about twenty Negroes on the second floor. Replacing the steps with ladders, students rushed into the building with sticks. They were repulsed, but their bloody faces infuriated those gathered below, and cries of "fire to it" arose from the angry crowd. The mob was soon quieted, but not before twenty frightened Negroes had jumped from the second floor windows and fled.[34]

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[31] William Woods Holden, *Memoirs of W.W. Holden* (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1911), pp.49-50; quoted in Bobby Frank Jones, "An Opportunity Lost: North Carolina Race Relations During Presidential Reconstruction" (Masters thesis, University of North Carolina, 1961), 43, footnote 4.

[32] Samuel Field Phillips to William Alexander Graham, December 28, 1865, in William Alexander Graham Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; quoted in Jones, 54, footnote 43.

[33] William Alexander Graham to Joseph Holderby and J. W. Burton, February 6, 1866, in Graham Papers; quoted in Jones, 59, footnote 56. Swain letter to Graham cited in Foner, 123.

[34] Jones, 47.

Violence against African Americans was practiced by students and townspeople in less organized ways as well. And it was also directed against whites that assisted black efforts to improve their lives and assert their rights:

> After the Civil War "the negro question was `full of dynamite.' The personal and moral influence of the white people did not obtain then in the way in which it did when the negro was in slavery. The satisfactory social and industrial relations of slavery times had become strained and often broken." It was not unknown for University students to whip Negroes for impudence.5 A Northern woman who came to teach Negroes and who lived with them was a social outcaste. . . .[35]

Nevertheless, what must always be kept in mind is that the local battle over the color line in Chapel Hill was part of a larger drama. The key players were the Southern gentry and the Federal government.

Given a nearly free hand by the lenient reconstruction policies of President Johnson, North Carolina and the other Southern states had enacted "black codes" following the Civil War to define and regulate the freedmen's activities. At the heart of these codes was the fundamental concern of the planter class to control black labor. The black codes attempted to replace the now dissolved power of the planter over his slaves with the coercive power of the state. At the same time, Southern white leaders made every attempt to preserve the traditional prerogatives of white social domination.[36]

The North, however, was not content to see the former planters reestablish slavery in all but name. Thus, Congress overturned the legal discriminations of the black codes and military commanders were given wide discretion to limit repressive measures against African Americans. The moves made by the Southern gentry to reassert their power were limited by countermoves made by the Federal government.

For example, when it became clear that whipping was being used by whites to reassert the old labor discipline of slavery, Daniel Edgar Sickles, Military Commandant of North Carolina, suspended corporal punishment in the state on December 17, 1866. Deeply concerned, leading representatives of the Southern planter class, including university president David Lowry Swain, ". . . visited President Johnson in Washington in an effort to get General Sickles' order rescinded."[37]

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[35] Stuart Willis, "A Glimpse at the Other Half," *The University Magazine*, XL (April, 1914), 276, in Freeman, 134.

[36] Foner, 198.

[37] Jones, 70.

The clear determination of the Southern gentry to maintain the badges of slavery, including the old labor discipline and the economic dependency of African Americans, and to create a new order as close to slavery as possible resulted in the overthrow of the lenient "presidential reconstruction" by Congress in 1867 and the imposition of harsher measures against the white South. The reconstruction plans of the Radical Republicans, who controlled Congress, "included plans of an active role in politics for the Negro, which was anathema to white North Carolinians."[38]

During Radical Reconstruction, the Confederate gentry were barred from public office. Therefore, the governmental aspect of the campaign to reestablish the power of the old guard was carried on in the media and by extra-legal means.

The primary instrument of white supremacist extra-legal force was the Ku Klux Klan. In Chapel Hill, the Klan attempted to intimidate both assertive African Americans and whites sympathetic to black rights.

The university president, Soloman Pool, appointed along with the new trustees and faculty by the Republican administration in Raleigh, believed that the Klan's activities were designed to intimidate his faculty. Indeed, the efforts of the Republicans to transform the university into a "people's university" (without black students, however) met with extreme antagonism from North Carolina's elite. The university was their most revered institution and a bulwark of their political power, and they launched a "virtual boycott," refusing to enroll their sons, as part of their larger campaign to strangle the Republican effort and eventually regain control.[39] The legislature did not appropriate funds that would have enabled poorer white students to attend the university, and Pool, his back to the wall, reportedly told J.W. Carr, a prominent Chapel Hill merchant, that "if no whites will come here, I will have negro students."[40] Thus, it is not unreasonable, though hard evidence is lacking, that the primary goal of the Klan in Chapel Hill was to close down the university.

Klan activity was undoubtedly directed against acts of black assertiveness and interracial politics. The view that the Klan also hoped to cripple "the people's university" is given weight by the subsequent role of the Klan's principal leader in the restoration of the old guard to power at the university.

William L. Saunders grew up in Chapel Hill and graduated from the university in 1854. During the Civil War Saunders quickly rose to the rank of colonel. Following the war he returned to Chapel Hill where he lived from 1867 to 1870, the period of most intense Klan activity. From his home in Chapel Hill, Saunders apparently directed the activities of the KKK in North Carolina.[41]

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[38] ibid.

[39] William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: UNC Press, 1992), 81.

[40] William S. Powell, *The First State University: A Pictorial History of The University of North Carolina,* 3rd. ed. (Chapel Hill and London: UNC Press, 1992), 91.

[41] Vickers, 80.

Cornelia Phillips Spencer, also of Chapel Hill, led the public relations aspect of the campaign against the Republican administration of the university. While Col. Saunders and the KKK attacked those who sided with the Reconstruction program in the streets, she attacked them with her pen. She had raged against university president Soloman Pool, calling for "`the overthrow of the foul gang that were polluting the University halls'", and she had demanded, "`the university be returned to its own.'"(my emphasis)[42]

In the end the resurgent Democrats defeated Holden and the Republicans. They regained control of the legislature in the elections of 1870 and promptly impeached Governor Holden. With the Democratic electoral victory the form of the struggle shifted. Colonel Saunders moved to Raleigh to devote his energies to the consolidation of Democratic political control. Deprived of both finances and political support, the university was forced to close in February 1871.

In 1874 the Democrat controlled General Assembly elected a new Board of Trustees for the university. The new Executive Committee of that board was ". . . made up entirely of devoted university men. They were President, William A. Graham; Secretary, Kemp Plummer Battle; and members W.L. Saunders, John Manning, W.T. Faircloth, John A. Gilmer, and Paul C. Cameron."[43] When the General Assembly voted to use public funds to support the university in March, 1875, the reopening of the university was assured. Thus, when students returned in September, 1875, the university was led by white supremacists all, including the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, the former largest slave owner in the state, and the former governor who believed that the right to vote must be "jealously reserved to the white race."

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Little appears in secondary sources about the lives of African Americans in Chapel Hill during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was a period when the university was rebuilding its enrollment, economic vitality was gradually returning to the town, and interracial politics and black rights were under increasing pressure from white supremacy. It was also a period when the second and third great experiments in racial cooperation were being fought out in the larger arena of the South and the nation. Although there is little evidence concerning either the labor revolt or the farmers' revolt in published works about the town and the university, these social movements undoubtedly had some impact locally. At the least, their defeat set the stage for the triumph of Jim Crow in Chapel Hill and throughout the South at the end of the nineteenth century.

Following the reopening of the university under Democratic control in the fall of 1875, economic activity in the town slowly returned to life, and the social and political turmoil of Reconstruction diminished. The antebellum leaders of the university, now back in power, set about restoring the buildings and grounds, even as they restored white supremacy and rebuilt mechanisms of domination that matched the conditions of the new day.

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[42] Cornelia Phillips Spencer, quoted in Powell, 95.

[43] Vickers, 86.

Nevertheless, during both Reconstruction and the duration of the nineteenth century, African Americans in Chapel Hill were able to strengthen their families, churches, and schools. Although most black workers labored at menial jobs, black men were able to maintain a significant presence as skilled workers and small businessmen, and black women increasingly gained a measure of independence and personal security by taking up laundering in their homes and forsaking domestic service in white households. Over this period African Americans increasingly lived on their own property rather than attached to white households. Many owned their own homes.[44] Thus, it becomes clear that one of the gains of African American striving during this period was a black community that was more cohesive, more institutionally developed, with more resources and more independence. This was accomplished primarily through self-sacrifice and community mobilization. White individuals such as Rev. Purefoy and white groups such as the Quakers assisted the effort, however.

Nevertheless, the larger dynamics of history that unfolded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century pushed African Americans in Chapel Hill and elsewhere in the South into an increasingly isolated and vulnerable position. It is to this more general historical context that we now turn.

The end of the century roughly coincided with the beginning of a new era marked by the triumph of monopolies, or "trusts," in the economic life of the United States. Internationally, the growth of industry and the dominance of monopolies in the advanced capitalist countries resulted in a scramble to control the resources of the less developed countries. This was the "age of imperialism," and although the United States was a latecomer, it struggled aggressively for its place at the table.[45]

Two groups in the late nineteenth century, the workers and the farmers challenged the domination of the trusts and their vision for America. Both groups organized democratic mass movements that tried to build unity across traditional barriers of region, race, gender, and economic condition to challenge the growing national power of monopolies. Both movements were defeated with dire consequences for democracy in America, and for race relations in particular.

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[44] Ninth Census, 1870, Orange County, N.C. Schedule 1 (Inhabitants), National Archives, D.C., microfilm copy;
Tenth Census, 1880, Orange County, N.C. Schedule 1 (Inhabitants), National Archives, D.C., microfilm copy;
Twelfth Census, 1900, Orange County, N.C. Schedule 1 (Inhabitants), National Archives, D.C., microfilm copy;
Thirteenth Census, 1910, Orange County, N.C. Schedule 1 (Inhabitants), National Archives, D.C., microfilm copy;
Fourteenth Census, 1920, Orange County, N.C. Schedule 1 (Inhabitants), National Archives, D.C., microfilm copy.

[45] For a popular discussion of these themes see, for example, Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1980), 247-314.

One consequence of the advance of capitalism was the growth of a large urban population of industrial workers who waged persistent struggles against their employers over wages, working conditions, and the growing power of monopolies. Not until the rapid growth of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, however, did these industrial workers find a union that would include them--black and white, male and female--along with the skilled workers who had dominated the labor movement up to that time. By 1886, when their membership reached 729,000, the Knights had become "the first massive organization of workers in this country's history."[46] Nevertheless, their membership had fallen to 100,000 by 1890, their power broken by the trusts. Not until the 1930s would there be another upsurge of industrial unionism of such magnitude, nor would their be a comparable openness to the inclusion of black workers in the ranks of labor until the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO).

Another consequence of the growth of large-scale industry and the increasing power of bankers (financial capital) was the impoverishment of large numbers of farmers. The ability of the growing power of the monopolies to bend the "laws of commerce" to their advantage at the expense of the farmers eventually led to the Populist Revolt.[47] During the 1890s over four million farmers joined this movement to challenge the emerging industrial order. They tried to bridge both the old North-South rivalry and the color line. Both the power of their movement, which demonstrated the potential threat of black-white unity to vested interests, and its defeat contributed to the establishment of legalized segregation in the South. This defeat also contributed to a national constriction of democratic aspirations, a lessening of the sense Americans had of the possibility of becoming more in control of their own lives:

> Populism was the last mass-based political movement that challenged the ethical basis of the emerging corporate order, and its defeat was measured by the decisiveness with which the nation turned to the Republicans, the political expression of that corporate order.[48]

In particular, the defeat of these movements crippled the militant interracial organizations that had sprung up to defend the interests of workers and farmers against the trusts. Instead of entering the twentieth century as a model of interracial cooperation, the United States sank into a period of racial scapegoating and democratic decline. In the South this took the form of a hardening of the color line known as Jim Crow, legalized segregation.

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[46] Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: Norton, 1987), 44.

[47] Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 12.

[48] William L. Barney, *Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, MA and Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), 417.

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Black disfranchisement was accomplished legally in North Carolina in 1900, but not until extra-legal violence had helped crush the Populist challenge:

> Under the tactical leadership of Furnifold M. Simmons, a New Bern lawyer and former congressman, the Democrats organized White Government Unions, set up a speakers' bureau to send white supremacy spokesmen such as Charles B. Aycock across the state, and employed paramilitary units called the Red Shirts and Rough Riders to terrorize Populists, Republicans, and blacks in particular. .[49]

In November 1898, white supremacist Democrats overthrew the interracial coalition of Republicans and Populists of Wilmington, North Carolina, in a riot that cost dozens of blacks their lives. African Americans had been dismayed when the federal government allowed the Southern gentry to reassert its power by pulling troops out of the South in 1877. Their concern had deepened when the Supreme Court had blessed segregation with its 1896 decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson. When the president refused to intervene to stop the butchering of African Americans in Wilmington, it sent an unmistakable signal to black people throughout the nation: Jim Crow had arrived.

The campaign that destroyed black-white cooperation to challenge elite economic power in 1898 was almost a duplicate of the campaign that crippled the black-white coalition during Reconstruction. Like William L. Saunders, Furnifold M. Simmons, leader of the Redshirts, was elected to high public office when the Democrats regained control.

Just as racial hostility increased in Chapel Hill preceding the defeat of the Republicans in the 1870s, it surged again preceding the victory of Jim Crow in 1898. The kind of racial openness that had allowed Wilson Caldwell to defeat a white democrat in the mid-1880s apparently gave way to racial polarization in the late-1890s. One indication of this is that the Chapel Hill News, which had "published impartially occurrences among both Negro and white persons in Chapel Hill," began printing statements like the following:

> How are you going to vote? White man or Negro? WHICH?
> Shame on the man who deserts his color in this crisis.
> Let White Men give preference to White Labor and extend
> the same preference in other patronage in the future.
> Some few white men are swinging between White Supremacy
> and Negroism solely to retain and gain colored trade. They are spotted.[50]

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[49] Jeffrey J. Crow, "Cracking the Solid South: Populism and the Fusionist Interlude," in Lindley S. Butler and Alan D. Watson eds., *The North Carolina Experience: An Interpretive and Documentary History* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 340.

[50] Painter, 165.

It is not clear what kind of racial climate existed in Chapel Hill following the Democratic victory. Still, there are some indications that the first two decades of the twentieth century were a period of nostalgia among some residents for the Confederate past. In 1906, for instance, Professor Collier Cobb commented that William L. Saunders was the greatest North Carolinian ever to have lived.[51] And in 1909 the North Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy decided to erect a Confederate war memorial on the UNC campus. The statue, known affectionately as "Silent Sam," was unveiled in the jubilee year of the Emancipation Proclamation, 1913. One of the first classroom buildings constructed in the 1920s was named Saunders Hall in honor of the former head of the KKK, while a dormitory constructed during the same period was named Aycock in honor of the foremost spokesperson for the disfranchisement of African Americans in 1898.

While it is hard to infer the racial climate in Chapel Hill from such fragmentary evidence, there is no doubt that there was tremendous tension throughout the state at this time over race related issues. During the same year in which Silent Sam was unveiled, Clarence H. Poe, editor of the Progressive Farmer in Raleigh, began a crusade to establish rural segregation throughout the South:

> He modeled his plans on the policies then being enacted in South Africa. In 1915 the North Carolina Senate narrowly defeated an amendment to the state constitution that would have ordained separate agricultural districts for blacks and whites.[52]

In Chapel Hill, there is also evidence of an atmosphere of paternalism. In 1916, for instance, university alumni displayed a kind of affectionate condescension toward one of the university janitors:

> Horny-handed Henry Smith, janitor at the University for 21 years and ringer of the college bell 16 years, died January 30th. His familiar figure and shuffling gait have been missed an the campus since the opening. . . . The class of 1909 at its reunion during commencement of 1914 conferred upon Henry the degree of L.L.D.D. (Learned, Loyal Ding Donger).[53]

Despite the patronizing ridicule implied by the mock degree conferred on Henry Smith, this gesture may have indicated more about white fears of black educational achievement than about the true character or accomplishments of the university janitor.

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[51] *Chapel Hill News*, IV (November 4, 1898), pp. 1, 4; quoted in Freeman, 135.

[52] Vickers, 81.

[53] Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, eds., *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1922), 122.

In fact, education for blacks was an issue of growing importance in Chapel Hill and the South at this time.

While black activists like W. E. B. Du Bois were advocating higher standards for black education as a step toward racial equality, white educational reformers in the South associated with "the southern education movement" wanted to educate black workers for continued subordination.[54] At the university, for instance, Professor Stuart Willis argued that a night school program he organized out of the Campus YMCA would not arouse discontent with the servile life:

> [The Negro's] awakened self-mastery, racial integrity and racial respect will create in him, not the scorn of a servant's life, but will raise in him an ambition to be a more reliable servant, a more efficient janitor, a more responsible cook, a more consistent brick layer.[55]

Recalling this period, Cornelia Spencer Love, a member of one of Chapel Hill's oldest and most prestigious white families, wrote about what endeared the town to her and others:

> [It was] "`partly the beauty of the place, partly the University atmosphere, where you could find friends in any field of endeavor, but above all it was the freedom in which we all lived."[56]

To illustrator William Meade Prince, who grew up in Chapel Hill during this period, Chapel Hill was "the Southern Part of Heaven."[57]

Regardless of the intent of these authors, such views embodied the cultural stance characteristic of white paternalism, that is, that African Americans were unimportant and invisible as agents of history, while white people knew best. These authors wrote as if they spoke for all, and the way in which their words became part of the often-quoted lore about Chapel Hill demonstrated the ongoing power of patterns of white supremacy in the mainstream culture.

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[54] "`Horny-Handed Henry Passes,'" *Alumni Review,* V (October, 1916), p. 13; quoted in Freeman, 138.

[55] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Note, for example, p. 80: ". . . philanthropic and southern white crusaders for universal public education wished to substitute education for older and cruder methods of socialization and control."

[56] Stuart Willis, "A Glimpse at the Other Half." *The University Magazine* XL (April, 1914): 276-81; quoted in Freeman, 137.

[57] Cornelia Spencer Love, *When Chapel Hill Was a Village* (Chapel Hill: The Chapel Hill Historical Society, 1976), viii.

White residents, however, could not speak for African Americans because they had not experienced the same things in life and because they were generally ignorant of black lives. Black residents were not free, and for them, Chapel Hill was closer to "the southern part of Hell" than to any part of Heaven.[58]

Although most whites probably did not care to see the realities of black life in Chapel Hill, they were in part responsible, for the freedom of their lives depended on the unfreedom of African Americans. Cornelia Spencer Love, for instance, felt free to pay her black hairdresser with an old coat. When the woman did not return to do her hair, she felt cheated. And writing about this incident years later, she felt free to take her revenge. Speaking of the Caldwell family, she wrote:

> The progenitor of this family was Minnie Caldwell, a very handsome mulatto who in 1917 was the town beauty parlor, going from home to home to wash (not set) ladies' hair. Minnie used to come to my room to wash my hair but this ceased when I let her have an old winter coat which she was to pay for in shampooing. She never came any more, but by that time I could take "Kern's," (Colonel) Pendergraft's bus to Durham, for a complete hair-do.[59]

But why didn't Minnie Caldwell return to do Cornelia Spencer's hair? Ed Caldwell Jr. knew when he addressed the Chapel Hill Historical Society many years later:

> Cornelia Spencer [Love] wrote an account about Minnie Caldwell. . . . She gave [Minnie Caldwell] an old coat for fixing her hair. And she said something about [Minnie Caldwell] was dishonest because she never came back to do her hair again.
>
> But one of the things that I said when I spoke [at the Historical Society], "Minnie Caldwell is my grandmother. Let me tell you why Minnie Caldwell never came back. Minnie Caldwell had eleven kids."
>
> Man, you know, she was having a tough time trying to feed those eleven kids. She needed money. She didn't need no damn old coat that you handed down out of your closet. She could not translate that into taking care of kids.[60]

Moreover, Minnie Caldwell had just lost her husband. Ed Caldwell Jr. recalled that his grandfather died as the result of a joke.[61]

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[58] William Meade Prince, *The Southern Part of Heaven* (New York: Rinehard and Company, 1950)

[59] As I became involved in grassroots organizing, I heard this term used among African Americans. In a similar vein, "the plantation" was a term used in reference to the university.

[60] Love, 40.

[61] Edwin Caldwell, Jr., Interview by author, March 27, 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

> My grandfather, who was Bruce Caldwell, my father's father, had a drinking problem. He had a problem with alcohol. And he worked in one of the chemical labs.

Ed remembered how his father and uncles cried when they told him how they had gone out to get his grandfather, who was going blind, stumbling up the hill to his home. A professor had switched the lab alcohol, which was drinkable ethyl, with methyl alcohol, which was poisonous. And Bruce Caldwell died because of that:

> But the thing that got me was that the professor had a dinner party, and there was a black servant. And [the professor] was down there bragging that he had poisoned this guy that worked in his lab. He switched the alcohol and he made a big thing out of it. I was furious. It hurt me.

Like the beating of Ben Boothe on the head for fun, or sending a dead slave's head in a bag as a joke, this vicious act was motivated by the persistent legacy of a culture of domination rooted in slavery. Bruce Caldwell's death, meanwhile, had particularly serious implications for the entire family:

> . . . They hurt and changed the whole direction of our family, if you really wanna know. Caused my grandmother to sell off land. She had a tough time. . . . And that's why Doc Caldwell came down to take care of the family. My father was in school at Central. He had to come out of school, out of college and help take care of the family.

While these developments were unfolding, Chapel Hill was undergoing changes that reflected the narrow limits of black alternatives prior to World War I. These changes resulted in segregated black neighborhoods, the narrowing of black employment opportunities, and the decline of black political activity, as well as individual human tragedies.

After 1900, Chapel Hill grew rapidly as the university increased its enrollment, but the proportion of African Americans in the town dropped steadily. The reasons for this drop are unclear.

It may be that a hostile racial atmosphere drove some African Americans out of Chapel Hill after 1898. Not only did the black population drop during the first decade of Jim Crow, but the number of skilled and self-employed black workers dropped from forty to sixteen, while the percentage of African Americans employed in "menial" jobs jumped from 85 per cent to 93 per cent during the same period.[62] In addition, Chapel Hill became increasingly segregated during the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the manuscript census for 1890 is unavailable, the census for 1880 shows that black and white families were interspersed throughout Chapel Hill's neighborhoods, demonstrating

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[62] manuscript census, 1900, 1910.

that the antebellum pattern was still largely intact. By 1900 segregated housing patterns were clearly developing, and by 1920 only a handful of black families lived in white areas of town. White neighborhoods surrounded the university, while the main black neighborhood comprised a small area on the northwest periphery.[63]

Other changes contributed to the relatively slow growth of the black population in Chapel Hill as well. Up until 1894, students and faculty alike had been dependent on black laborers to haul water from the town wells each day. The need for this kind of labor was eliminated by the installation of a campus water system. At the turn of the century, students were still dependent on black workers to chop and haul wood for fires during the winter and to launder their clothes. But steam heat and the construction of a university laundry in the 1920s reduced the demand for these kinds of labor as well.[64] At the same time, the proportion of white families employing servants gradually declined. And while the expansion of the university did increase job opportunities for African Americans, improvements in transportation probably meant that the university no longer had to depend on a large resident group of black laborers.

All in all, it appears that these changes, in conjunction with the ongoing barriers and prohibitions against black workers entering skilled trades and white collar jobs, meant that the growth of the university and Chapel Hill offered far more opportunities to whites than to blacks. And the opportunities that were available to African Americans were mostly restricted to the lowest paying, menial "Negro jobs."[65]

Still, even when the attempt is made to retrieve evidence about black lives during this period, the results are sparse and generally limited to evidence presented by white interpreters. How did black Chapel Hill residents view their lives during these years? What did it mean to be a black parent raising children during these times? And what was it like for black youths coming of age in Chapel Hill during the height of Jim Crow? While we have numerous accounts of life in Chapel Hill during this period written by white residents, there are no written accounts that have come to light as yet by black residents.

In order to try to bridge this gap, it may be useful to turn at this point to an account of black life in the early part of the century by one of Chapel Hill's most famous daughters, Elizabeth Cotton. Although she is known to many for her music, particularly the song Freight Train, her life was in many respects typical of young black women of

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[63] In 1943 this neighborhood was called Pottersfield and occasionally, New Town. Today it is called Northside.

[64] The physical development of the campus during this period is examined in Archibald Henderson, *The Campus of the First State University* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949).

[65] Myrdal, 222.

her generation in Chapel Hill. The following account is based on interviews done in 1966, 1977, and 1979.[66]

Elizabeth Nevill was born in January 1893, and grew up in Chapel Hill. Her father, George Nevill, worked in an iron mine and died when she was young. Elizabeth remembered that her father was a hard working man.

> My father was a man never wanted a easy job. Looked like he liked very hard work. Didn't, he felt like he wasn't a man or something. . . .

Elizabeth's father worked hard, then, not just to provide for his family, but also so that he could feel himself to be a man. But the hard work killed Elizabeth's father when she was a young child. She remembered that her father was "a long time a-dyin'. . . He died in Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. That's a good hill down there. . . ."

After that, Elizabeth lived with her mother. Life was considerably more difficult.

> I was small and after he passed we would wash for the doctor to pay his doctor bills. There wasn't much money in circulation then, and not much for the colored people anyway. . . and we washed for that man and they'd have the biggest old nasty wash. We'd just hate to see that wash come in. . . .

Like an increasing number of black women in the early years of the century, Elizabeth Cotton's mother took in laundry from white families. She also was a cook in one of the boarding houses which earned her $5.00 a month. And she was a midwife.

As Chapel Hill's white population soared with the expansion of the university, taking in laundry and institutional cooking became alternatives that were preferred by black women to domestic service. It offered the relative freedom of self-employment and the escape from the sexual harassment that was a common problem for female servants.[67] Midwifery was also a respected and independent trade for a limited number of black women before the hospital era.

Elizabeth often worked with her mother. Despite her memories of Chapel Hill as a "good hill," it was good only in a relative sense. She recalled both the decent treatment and the constant necessity of being aware of the limits of segregation:

> Where I come up in Chapel Hill I never got all that roughness from white people. 'Course they didn't take me in their lap, they didn't put me in their bed. I wasn't expectin' that, but they would speak nice to me and act like they was all right. And my mother always tell us, "Children, know how far to go with

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[66] Elizabeth Cotton, Interviews by Alice Gerrard and Mike Seeger, 13 December 1977 and 10 January 1979 and by Mike Seeger, 18 January 1966, tape recording and transcript; quoted in album notes, Elizabeth Cotton Vol. 3, Folkways FA 3537.

[67] Mittie Frank Mason, "The Negro Community Center of Chapel Hill, North Carolina: A Study of the Processes of Community Organization (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1943), 14; Ed Caldwell, Jr. interview.

> anything. . . don't go too far with it. Know there's a stoppin' place somewhere and stop before you get to the worst part of it." So we children would always stop and think, "Now they're white and I'm black, is it alright to do so and so. . . ?"

Some blacks bent to white power more than others. Elizabeth Cotton remembered that her mother "was very pleasant. Very nice, obedient." This bothered Elizabeth.

> Mama was always kind of humble—just a little bit, you could see it—kind of pulled back act, you know what I mean? She wouldn't go too far too quick. I used to didn't want to see her do too much of that. But she seemed to get along alright. . . See, she had to do that maybe a little more than I did. I don't know why, 'cause she was not a slave. But after she had to get out and work for herself and work around white people, maybe she picked it up then.

The reasons for the difference in attitude between Elizabeth Cotton and her mother probably related to the generational and economic themes she herself noted. Black women trying to provide for a family without the help of a husband were particularly vulnerable, both economically and physically. There was more pressure on them to toe the line, make compromises, and adopt a deferential air around white people. Elizabeth Cotton, unlike her mother, had a husband helping to provide for her by the age of 15, and she reveled in her ability to devote some of her time to being her own homemaker rather than a white person's servant or even her mother's dependent child.

> My own boss. That's what made me feel so proud when I got married—I was my own boss. Nobody to say, "Go in the kitchen and wash the dishes, make up your bed, straighten up that floor, pick up!" Did it if I wanted to and if I didn't I didn't do it. I was a pretty good little housekeeper when I was first married. I was so proud to have it. . . I was so proud of that place, honey. . . I married at the age of fifteen, birthed my baby when I was sixteen. And I didn't never have no more. . . .

And even though Jim Crow was still in full force when Elizabeth Cotton was growing up, there were opportunities developing on the horizon that gave her generation certain alternatives. Elizabeth's husband, for instance, joined the Great Migration to the North. In New York he found steady employment at much higher wages than he could have earned in Chapel Hill. And eventually, in 1941, Elizabeth and her daughter joined him there.

And, of course, personality had much to do with how far an individual bent to white domination. For whatever reasons, Elizabeth was feisty and she did not identify with her mother's humility. It was an attitude that caused her to strike out on her own. In later years it might have led her to be a leader in the freedom movement. In her life it led her to music.

> I was raised up to make a noise, joyful noise, go to church, people come to your house, pray, sing, you ring bells, beat on tubs, anything joyful, lord—toot horns.

> My father used to load the guns and let us shoot straight up. You bring in New Year's Eve with joy, singing and praying. And letting the old go, see.

Elizabeth's father was not a man to hold onto the old sorrow. Like other black men and women who endured hardship and pain, he knew that you had to let it go in order to survive. But he was sometimes almost ferocious in his determination to prevail, and he was hard both on himself and his family.

> My daddy's somethin'. He had a toothache and he couldn't pull it out, and he took a nail, anything that was kind of rough, and put it against the tooth. . . "God damn you! Guess you won't hurt me no more"—and somethin' came out. . . . We was all scared of him. I was, anyway. Just as scared of my daddy as I could be. He'd just fuss all the time, sittin' around grumblin', you know, talkin'. Like he's the boss. . . .

And we must pause to ask, what kind of a society forced this man to knock his own tooth out to get relief and to be a man? What kind of humiliation had he endured that he subjected his family to his own rage? And what kind of grace gave him the hopefulness and caring to load the guns and let his children shoot straight up on New Year's Eve?

Elizabeth learned from her father but did not follow in his footsteps. It was from her mother, Louisa, that she learned to sing.

> I can imagine I see her sometime. . . doing something, you know, and just singing. All them songs. . . "Hallelujah T'is Done"—that's old, old. Mama'd give out her songs and sing 'em. She'd sing the chorus, then she'd stop and give out the verse, and she'd sing the verse, then she'd sing the chorus. . . .

As a young teenager she began playing the guitar and singing songs. She only went as far as fourth grade in school, but by age twelve she was doing domestic work for seventy-five cents a month, and it wasn't long before she had the $3.75 she needed to buy her first guitar.

Elizabeth's brothers and sisters played music. They swapped songs with others and learned from watching, since there was no written music. But Elizabeth was a difficult student because she was left handed and strung her guitar upside down. When she would say to her brothers "Show me," they would say "I ain't showin' you nothin'. Turn it over, change the strings." So Elizabeth had to teach herself.

The attitude of the church elders turned out to be another obstacle to Elizabeth's music, far more serious than being left handed. She played her guitar in the homes and yards of neighbors, but Elizabeth could not keep on playing and stay in the church.

> And after I was baptized, joined the church. And then the deacons told me, "You cannot live for God and live for the devil. If you're going to play them old worldly songs, them old ragtime things, you can't serve God that way. You've either got to do one or the other.

But despite the obstacles life set before her, Elizabeth Cotton found a way to prevail. She did give up music for a while. But years later she took it up again. Although she had few material resources and slim opportunities, she drew on great spiritual resources.

> I say them words, they come to you just like song you make of the gospel. They come from inside of your heart, and you know why? Because you've been mistreated. . . . You know, if you get hurt you know how you feel heavy? And them words just bursts out of you, you got to make a song or talk about it or do something. They got to do something instead of maybe fussin' or quarrelin'. . . .

Elizabeth Cotton expressed her sorrow and longing in words that let go of the old and ushered in the new. Eventually, all of the sorrow feelings of black people for which white America had made so little room found focus and positive expression in the freedom movement of the 1960s. And, as if returning gratefully to its source, this movement opened up a space for Elizabeth Cotton's music, and she attained national prominence with songs like Freight Train in the mid-1960s.

Within black families and the larger culture of the black community there were always some strands of culture, some role models, some resources that a person could grab onto to fashion a life of self-assertion and independence. There would always be someone, somewhere teaching you to let the old go and usher in the New Year by making a joyful noise.

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During the period when Jim Crow was tightening its grip on the South, many African Americans in North Carolina followed Booker T. Washington's lead and retreated from outspoken criticisms of segregation. By around 1915, however, this attitude had shifted and a more confrontational tone had entered race relations.

One manifestation of this discontent was a tremendous unrest among African Americans. When acute labor shortages associated with the beginning of World War I developed in northern industrial centers, southern Blacks were ready to move away from the land of lynching and low wages.

> All this focused the uneasiness of Black America. And flowing with and out of this uneasiness came a feeling, nebulous at first but always waxing clearer, that there was another way and another and better place. The feeling moved, became a mood, an imperative, a command. Without preamble, without plan, without leadership, the people obeyed that command, going from the plantations to Southern cities, going from there to the big cities of the North.[68]

This migration generated some of the changes in both the South and the North that gave southern Blacks the opportunity to revolt in 1960. It created large population

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[68] Lerone Jr. Bennett, *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1962; 5th. ed. Penguin Books, 1985), 344.

concentrations of black workers in southern cities, and upon this base black institutions developed along with substantial black middle classes in cities like Durham. Also, large black voting constituencies developed in key industrial states. The migration created a potentially explosive social force throughout urban America, and it positioned African Americans to be included in the powerful industrial union movement that erupted in the 1930s. This, and the growth of the Communist Party, provided the organizational base for the labor based civil rights movement that developed prior to the Second World War.[69]

World War I heightened racial contradictions in the South. Billed as a war "to make the world safe for democracy" by the President who had segregated government employees, World War I caused discord among African Americans about whether to support the war. W. E. B. Du Bois ultimately counseled blacks to "close ranks" behind the war effort and fight the war at home another day. A stormy racial climate followed World War I.

In 1917 the first NAACP branches in North Carolina were formed in Raleigh, Greensboro, and Durham despite verbal and physical threats from whites. In Raleigh, in 1919, "3,000 blacks passed strongly worded resolutions warning whites that blacks would not be content to sacrifice their lives in a war for democracy and return to bigotry at home. The resolutions condemned lynching, demanded the boycott of Jim Crow facilities, and urged parents and teachers to instill race pride in black children.[70]

Nevertheless, white political leaders held firm to Jim Crow. Now, however, a more defensive, threatening tone was intermixed with louder expressions of concern for the welfare of African Americans. In 1920 Governor Bickett declared:

> In North Carolina we have definitely decided that the happiness of both races requires that white government shall be supreme and unchallenged in our borders. . . . [W]hen we deny to the negro any participation in the making of laws, we saddle upon ourselves a peculiar obligation to protect the negro in his life and property. . . .

For this white supremacist there was a clear sense of danger in the air, dangerous ideas, the openness of southern blacks to dangerous ideas, dangerous people. He wanted to control and limit black education in particular. He denounced southern Blacks who went north to receive their education and then returned home to teach. "Bickett said that `the ideals of the North' made such teachers `unfit. . . to be useful citizens in the South.'"[71]

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[69] Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History*, 75 (December, 1988).

[70] Crow, Escott, and Hatley, 133.

[71] ibid.

In 1925 another North Carolina governor echoed the same shrill theme. "There is no longer a race problem in the South," Governor Angus W. McLean told black farmers at the "Negro State Fair" in Raleigh. "It exists only in the minds of those, white and colored, who are seeking selfish advancement; who are trying to intimidate others, and have no better weapon than the cowardly appeal to racial prejudice and racial antipathy."[72] He added that Blacks were receiving too much instruction "along academic and theoretical lines."

In Chapel Hill, the 1920s brought a major boom in university construction and population growth. Black opportunities increased as a result.

During the 1920s black land and business owners apparently accumulated significant holdings in Chapel Hill, probably based on rising incomes and business opportunities associated with the general post-war prosperity and university building boom. A more positive racial environment may have been operative as well. While the causes are not completely clear, the total value of all lots owned by African Americans rose from $71,021 in 1918 to a peak of $286,466 in 1931, while the number of lots owned increased from 142 to 325 during the same period. There was also a steady increase in the value of individual lots until 1929, when the Stock Market crashed.[73]

During the twenties a significant black business district emerged along West Franklin Street. A number of individuals in the black community accumulated considerable real estate, including Van Nunn, O'Kelly, and Rev. Hackney.

The Great Depression disrupted black family life and generated a dramatic decline in living conditions within the African American community. From October 1, 1932, to March 31, 1933 48 per cent of the black population in Chapel Hill Township received public relief, compared to 11 per cent of the white population. In the town of Chapel Hill itself 236 African Americans and 36 white persons received aid from the King's Daughters, a white relief organization. By 1937 those receiving relief in Chapel Hill Township comprised "the largest proportion of families on relief and the largest proportion of Negro families of any township in the county."[74]

The 1930s saw a rapid decline in both the amount of black owned real estate and its value. The black property owners "who had built up their holdings. . . lost them or died, and others have not risen to take their places."[75] Moreover, the value of the average individual lot owned by an African American climbed from $500 in 1918 to a high of $1128 in 1929 and then fell steadily to a low of $501 in 1940.

To some extent, the decline in property ownership among African Americans must have been the normal product of development pressures on an economically and politically marginal community. On the other hand, it is possible that a large part of black economic losses during the 1930s came as the catastrophic result of the Great

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[72] ibid, 134.

[73] Freeman, 23-26.

[74] ibid., 33-35.

[75] ibid., 23.

Depression. In either case, what is evident is that black losses did not come about simply as the result of blind economic forces. It seems clear, in fact, that racism was part of the reason African Americans lost their land. This was the period, for instance, when Minnie Caldwell was forced to sell off some of her family's significant land holdings. The economic pressure of the Depression certainly played a part. But it was racism that had taken her husband years before, and it was the ongoing legacy of slavery than confined her and other black workers to low-paying "Negro" jobs.

The most outstanding evidence of the way racism played a part in the erosion of black economic gains concerns a controversy over the paving of streets in Chapel Hill.[76] Just as colonial settlers took land from Native Americans "legally," some properties owned by African Americans on West Franklin Street apparently passed into white hands through a process of legal extortion.

In 1937 the *Chapel Hill Weekly* ran a series of articles decrying the "Outrage of West Franklin Street." Apparently some years before, black property owners along that street, which was also the main thoroughfare of the town, had signed a petition agreeing to pay for the paving of the street. It later came out that not only was the process by which the signatures were gathered suspect, but the well-to-do white property owners on East Franklin Street who had refused to sign such a petition had their street paved by the town and the State at no cost to them. As a result of the high costs and the inability of most blacks to pay, African Americans stood to be swindled out of a great deal of valuable real estate. Through their own protests and the support of Lewis Graves, the newspaper editor, black property owners found some relief. A good deal of land was still lost, however.

The deterioration in black living standards that occurred during the Depression is also reflected in the decline in the percentage of home ownership in the black community. This was one cause for a decline in the condition of housing during the same period.

Between 1925 and 1940, the number of black homeowners increased from 91 to 122, while the number of black renters increased from 65 to 178. The percent of owner occupied housing declined from 58 per cent to 39 per cent. Living conditions declined as a result. Partly this was due to the fact that rental housing tended to be inferior to owner occupied housing. Even without the negative impact on all housing conditions of the Great Depression, which anecdotal evidence suggests was severe, the shift to rental housing would have been a step down.[77]

As the Depression deepened, housing and health conditions approached crisis levels. In 1937 the editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* cited the case of a black family servant who lived in a house with thirty-five men and women, paying "a dollar a week for the privilege of sleeping on a cot in a room with two or three other persons" (out of a weekly wage of perhaps $10):

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[76] ibid., 7-14.

[77] Freeman, 35-45; also see W. H. Levitt and Minna Abernathy, "Housing Survey of Chapel Hill Negroes, 1940," unpublished report in the North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina.

> Now this may not be typical, but it is not so very different from the other houses in which the Negroes live in Carrboro and Chapel Hill. This is not to say that there are not many decent Negro homes. There are. But in the recent years have come into being here slums which, in dirt and general indecency, resemble some of the worst slums in the large cities. . . .[78]

As the Depression dragged on, then, there seemed no end in sight to the suffering of African Americans in Chapel Hill. Nevertheless, the forces that would eventually undermine Jim Crow and cause it to fall were already at work. One of these was the growth of black assertiveness in the South.

There is evidence that the black community in Chapel Hill took part in the growing assertiveness of African Americans in North Carolina during the 1920s and 1930s. While it does not appear that the NAACP had a presence in Chapel Hill during this period, there were signs of increasing black organization and protest.

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In 1927 eight men formed the Negro Civic Club. Three were janitors at the university--Adolphus Clark, Eugene White, and Charles Craig; one a barber--Walter Hackney; the chauffeur of the university President--Hubert Robinson; two ministers--Rev. J.S. Miller and Rev. J.S. Holt; and a waiter at the university--Charles Maddox.

The origins of the Negro Civic Club are somewhat obscure. Mason's 1943 Social Work thesis on the "Negro Community Center" states that it was "an organization of leading Negroes" set up to promote the social and moral welfare of the citizens. The group held regular meetings to discuss the "problems and needs of their area." They would then present their views directly to "the official white group" in a "respectful, intelligent way."[79] Freeman's 1944 Sociology thesis is more specific: "The Negro Civic Club was organized as a result of the `realization on the part of a group of interested citizens about the conduct of both the younger people and less thoughtful groups and the general condition in the Negro section, and lack of educational facilities and those things that have to do with the civic life of the people.'"[80]

Both in Charles Craig's statement quoted by Freeman and in later public actions, Civic Club members emphasized their concern with social control of disorderly elements of the black community itself, in one case referring to "the low moral practice of some of our people." Based on some of the proposals made by the Civic Club to the aldermen, this probably was a real concern of Civic Club members. On the other hand, it must have been clear to these men that white leaders of Chapel Hill would look after the interests of white Chapel Hill if they felt problems in the black community threatened either unacceptable levels of disorder or increased political assertiveness. These men were

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[78] Mason, 45.

[79] ibid., 33, 34.

[80] Freeman, 103.

undoubtedly aware that the white officials of Chapel Hill had voted resources to the black community in the past due to such considerations.

For instance, in 1924 the Board of Aldermen voted to appropriate $450 a year toward the salary of the black public health nurse. For two years they had refused to extend any financial support and the nurse's salary had been paid through the contributions of the black community and private charities. In 1924, however, they passed the appropriation. The town records reveal the apparent thinking of the local white politicians:

> Alderman Connor. . . stated that, in so much as the work being done by the nurse in the colored homes was a protection to the white community and in so much as the negroes of the Town listed for taxes last year, property valued at more than $200,000 and paid into the Town Treasury over $1500 in taxes, and that in making this appropriation the expenditure for the direct benefit of the negroes would not exceed the amount they pay in taxes, he would make the following motion that the Town make the appropriation requested.[81]

In fact, many of the proposals of the Civic Club, while prefaced with concerns about low morals and disorder, focused on the fundamental needs of the entire black community. Civic Club efforts were focused on obtaining improved municipal services, education, jobs, and recreation.

One of their earliest recorded activities was an entry into the political arena on behalf of public education for blacks. In 1930 a special election was proposed to vote on an enlargement of the Chapel Hill school district. The Civic Club sponsored voting rallies.[82]

Improvements in education had been an issue that had motivated black organizing since at least 1913.[83] It may not have been a coincidence that on the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation whites in Chapel Hill unveiled Silent Sam, while African Americans organized a mass meeting to protest the inadequacies of public education for their children.

The meeting was held in Rock Hill Baptist Church (later renamed First Baptist Church) in Chapel Hill. Rev. L. H. Hackney, principal of the black public school, had become convinced that "opportunities within the county educational system were so circumscribed that a private school should be set up." Apparently many African Americans in Chapel Hill agreed. When the Hackney Training School was established on South Merritt Mill Road it drew nearly 200 students.[84]

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[81] Minute Book No. 4, February 1, 1926; March 1, 1926; quoted in Freeman, 49.

[82] Freeman, 103.

[83] For the history of black educational efforts in Chapel Hill see Freeman, 58-81.

[84] ibid., 63.

In 1917 Orange County purchased the Hackney School and renamed it the Orange County Training School. In 1922 this school burned. For a year and a half the elementary grades were housed in two black institutions, the Oddfellows Hall and the Guthrie Theater, while a two story house on Rosemary Lane was rented for the high school. This school enrolled about 300 students and was the only school for African Americans in Orange County with 11 grades.

Although the Orange County Training School served mainly the children of black Chapel Hill workers, the white employers of these workers, the white taxpayers of Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina did not support it financially. In fact, the boundaries of the Chapel Hill Special School District had been drawn in such a way as to exclude the entire black community. For these reasons African Americans in Chapel Hill had to rely on the goodwill of individual white citizens, the county government, and the northern philanthropic foundations involved in school reform to supplement their own efforts to build a new school for their children. A local black man, John Henry Strowd, provided the land for the new school. The county provided $15,000 toward a new building while the Rosenwald Fund contributed $2550. The Slater Fund and the Jeanes Fund, as well as the Rosenwald Fund provided money for teacher salaries until 1930. Funds to equip the school, and probably for much else, had to be raised by the local black community.

The pride in black institutions and increased willingness to protest Jim Crow that developed during the 1920s were evident at Orange County Training School as well. In 1926, black female teachers at the school wrote an indignant letter to the white women of the Community Club complaining that one of their members had been "discourteous to one of the teachers." The white woman had called the teacher by her first name rather than "Miss." The gifts that the Community Club members had given to the black teachers were returned at the same time. Freeman reports, "the Southern women of the club were both perplexed and indignant. But after than the regular titles were used."[85]

Evidence that the Orange County Training School was not simply a school on the Tuskegee "industrial" model is contained in the argument made by the "committee on the colored school" asking it to support the school for an eight month term rather than the usual six. The key point was that "many graduates of the school were expected to teach."[86] This was not true, apparently, for graduates of the other county schools. In any case, the county did fund Orange County Training School for the eight-month term from 1924-1929, at which time the county commissioners refused to continue their extra support and asked the town of Chapel Hill to take over funding. Since the town had carefully excluded the African American neighborhoods from its special school district, a special election had to be held to include the black areas before the town could begin funding. This election was held in 1930. African Americans voted to tax themselves up to twenty cents per $100 to become part of the Chapel Hill school district. Thus, through a division between rural and urban whites, African Americans finally gained access to public support for education in Chapel Hill.

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[85] ibid., 140.

[86] ibid., 66.

Although Orange County Training School was probably the best school for African Americans in the county, it "had no adequate playground." The school "did not have good paths approaching it, and had no street lights, being outside the town."[87] The school building was in poor condition. As a result, in 1934 African Americans petitioned the school board for improvements to the school or for an entirely new school. Some improvements were gained including a new playground in 1935 and fire protection in 1936. Also in 1936 the school board let a contract to build a six room High-school addition onto the old school at a cost of approximately $23,500. At the same time the school board authorized $106,000 to build a new white high school.

Employment was one of the issues that stimulated much discontent, and some organization and protest in Chapel Hill. It is hard to get evidence in this area, however, because most discontent did not reach the level of successful collective organization or open protest.

Historically, southern workers had expressed great discontent around job related issues. But efforts on the part of workers to organize had been met by employers and their allies in government with swift repression. Therefore, while employment issues were a high priority, collective action to remedy grievances was also particularly dangerous. Moreover, labor organizing among black workers was doubly difficult. The defeat of efforts like the Knights of Labor in the nineteenth century meant that there were few places in the country where black and white workers had succeeded in building traditions and institutions of labor solidarity.

In Chapel Hill, no evidence of a significant history of organized worker protest has come to light for the period prior to the 1930s. In 1929, however, the Janitors Association appeared, organized by Melvin Rich, General Jones, and Elliott "Uncle George" Washington. This was not a union, however. In fact, it was a club sanctioned by the university administration. In return for their efforts to improve the work habits of janitors, the Janitors Association was given the power to recommend new hires. They also were given permission to bring grievances to the attention of administrators and to advocate for improved conditions.[88]

These few indications of self-organization and protest, however, should not be taken as the sum total of such activities. If logic and history are any guide, these public expressions of discontent represented only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, a grassroots ferment was building throughout the South and the nation, and it did not leave Chapel Hill untouched.

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[87] ibid., 68.

[88] ibid., 26, 101-102.

CHAPTER 3

"LET A NEW EARTH RISE": CHAPEL HILL AND THE DYNAMICS OF BLACK INSURGENCY IN THE U.S., 1937-1960

One writes in order to deflect death and strangle the specters that haunt us; but what one writes can be historically useful only when in some way it coincides with the need of the collectivity to achieve its identity.[1]

Eduardo Galeano
We Say No

. . . dreams, imagination, vision, and hope are actually powerful mechanisms in the creation of new realities. Especially when the dreams go beyond speeches and songs to become embodied, to take on flesh, in real, hard places.[2]

Vincent Harding
Hope and History

"It was an age of Depression," sighed Margaret Walker, recalling the summer of 1937. She had been just twenty-one years old then, an aspiring African American poet working for the WPA Writers Project in Chicago. Black people were "mired in despair and despondency." They had "no jobs, no money, relief for food."[3]

The young poet had no difficulty naming the "specters" that haunted her people. Yet, despite her sense that most African Americans were stuck in despondency, she sensed hopeful stirrings among the black industrial workers with whom she and her radical young friends associated. The massive organizing drive led by the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) in auto and steel was challenging segregation in the labor movement. "Black people were being included as never before."

In July, on her twenty-second birthday, Margaret Walker began writing "For My People," the poem that launched her career with its publication in 1942.[4] In nine poignant verses she offered up a reflection of the black lives she had known as a gift of compassion, understanding, and solidarity:

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[1] Eduardo Galeano, *We Say No: Chronicles 1963-1981*, trans. Mark Fried and others (New York and London: Norton, 1992), 133.

[2] Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement,* with a Foreword by Lerone Bennett, Jr. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 178.

[3] Dr. Margaret Walker Alexander, Interview by author, 19 March 1992, by telephone to Jackson, Mississippi, notes in the possession of the author.

[4] For the historical context and significance of this poem see, for example, Harding, *Hope and History*, 131, 143, 207.

For my people everywhere singing their slave songs
repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and
their blues and jubilees, praying their prayers
nightly to an unknown god, bending their knees
humbly to an unseen power;

For my people lending their strength to the years, to
the gone years and the now years and the maybe
years, washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing
mending hoeing plowing digging planting pruning
patching dragging along never gaining never
reaping never knowing and never understanding;

For my playmates in the clay and dust and sand of
Alabama backyards playing baptizing and
preaching and doctor and jail and soldier
and school and mama and cooking and playhouse
and concert and store and hair and Miss
Choomby and company;

For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to
learn to know the reasons why and the answers to
and the people who and the places where and the
days when, in memory of the bitter hours when we
discovered we were black and poor and small and
different and nobody cared and nobody wondered
and nobody understood;

For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things
to be man and woman, to laugh and dance and sing
and play and drink their wine and religion and
success, to marry their playmates and bear
children and then die of consumption and anemia
and lynching;

For my people thronging 47th Street in Chicago and Lenox
Avenue in New York and Rampart Street in New
Orleans, lost disinherited dispossessed and
happy people, filling the cabarets and taverns
and other people's pockets needing bread and
shoes and milk and land and money and something-
something all our own;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time
being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when
burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied and

shackled and tangled among ourselves by the
unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently
and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in
the dark of churches and schools and clubs and
societies, associations and councils amid
committees and conventions, distressed and
disturbed and deceived and devoured by money-
hungry glory-craving leeches, preyed on by
facile force of state and fad and novelty, by
false prophet and holy believer;

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a
better way from confusion, from hypocrisy and
misunderstanding, trying to fashion a world that
will hold all the people, all the faces, all the
adams and eves and their countless generations;

Then she stopped in frustration. She knew the poem was unfinished, and she did not know how to end it. Her people called out to her. What did she have to offer beyond a reflection of their lives? What way out of the confusion? What way to cut through the huge and complex knot that bound both her and her people to the will of "the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh"?

Finally she asked her friend, writer [Nelson Algren?], for help. He said, "what do you want for your people? Answer that and you've got a poem." And so, she listened, and she reached out. In answer to their call, and in confirmation of their faith, she challenged her people to bring forth a new day:

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a
bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a
second generation full of courage issue forth;
let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let
a beauty full of healing and a strength of final
clenching be the pulsing in our spirits and our
blood. Let the martial songs be written, let
the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now
rise and take control.

Margaret Walker sensed the movement that was struggling to be born and added her voice to welcome the new day. Her words corresponded to the deepest aspirations of her people to forge a new identity in America. And because of this intimate bond with the deep and steady currents of history, her poetry challenged, guided, and sustained thousands during the long years that it took time to ripen. And when a spark in Greensboro, North Carolina, set in motion the dream of the poet in 1960, her words were raised up and celebrated as an anthem of the new day.

Yet what is most important is not a poem or individual: it is the knowledge that the longing and the faith of women and men like Margaret Walker, in their millions, changed the world. For despite every obstacle, their dreams slowly took on flesh, eventually generating a social force that shook America to its core. And it is this knowledge that is the true freedom legacy.

Margaret Walker's poetic outburst was only one example of the flowering of a militant and farsighted creativity among black writers and other cultural workers during the 1930s. In 1935 Langston Hughes wrote "Let America Be America Again," and in 1937 Richard Wright published his autobiography, *Black Boy*, in which he said:

> The white South said that it knew "niggers," and I was what the white South called a "nigger." Well, the white South had never known me--never known what I thought, what I felt. The white South said that I had a "place" in life. Well, I had never felt my "place"; or, rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the "place" to which the white South had assigned me. It had never occurred to me that I was in any way an inferior being. And no word that I had ever heard fall from the lips of southern white men had ever made me really doubt the worth of my own humanity.[5]

The bebop revolution in jazz that took place during World War II was another indication of the way that cultural workers were both reflecting and nurturing the simmering rebelliousness that was growing among black people, especially youth. Langston Hughes revealed this process when he had one of his characters explain, "`that is where Bop comes from. . . out of them dark days we have seen. . . beat right out of some bloody black head! That's what Bop is. These young kids who play it best, they know.'"[6]

These black writers and musicians were heralds of the longing and the growing militancy they perceived among their people. They were inspired by the revolt of northern industrial workers and by the upsurge among black workers and farmers in the South. And they used the strength of their creativity not only to reflect reality but also to change it.

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Only a few weeks after Margaret Walker completed "For My People," on the night of Saturday, August 21, tension along the color line crackled like high voltage electricity in the streets of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Late summer was a hot, dry season in the Depression year of 1937 in Chapel Hill. Professors at the University of North Carolina often chose August to escape with their families on vacation. But for the black

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[5] Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937; quoted in Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1980), 438.

[6] For an examination of this trend of cultural rebellion see, for example, Harding, *Hope and History*, 141, 126-153, 177-189; Frank Kofsky, *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 56.

janitors, domestics, and laborers, as for the unemployed white mill hands in the adjoining town of Carrboro, there was no escape from the routines of daily life, the stress of hard times, or the summer heat.

Nevertheless, it would have been hard to tell that racial tension was building to the boiling point from the description of "This Village of Chapel Hill" written by Louis Graves, editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, in the spring of 1937. In a feature aimed at the 2000 delegates to the convention of the American Chemical Society, Graves noted that despite Chapel Hill's transformation into a "modern town" since the turn of the century, it "retained the atmosphere of woods and the open air. The busiest spot on its busiest block is hardly a stone's throw from the campus lawn, from groves of oaks and poplars, from hedgerows and flower gardens."[7]

In his only reference to racial issues, Graves described his image of "old Chapel Hill":

> Amid modern comforts. . . there is many an old-timer whose memory dwells with affection not only upon the leisure and tranquility, but also upon some of the material aspects of life in that bygone era. A stove or fireplace in every room had to be kept supplied with fuel, and water for a bath had to be brought in buckets--but there were *faithful Negro servants a-plenty* to tote the wood and water. (my emphasis)

Less than five months later, "hardly a stone's throw from the campus lawn," residents of Chapel Hill's "Negro Quarter" were exchanging gunfire with whites from Carrboro. Only a few weeks after Margaret Walker wrote "For My People," as if aroused by the same martial spirit, black workers expressed their own longing in a less literary, but no less compelling, manner.[8]

At a filling station near the boundary between Chapel Hill and Carrboro, an argument broke out between two men, one white and one black. It is not known who was involved or the nature of the dispute. In any case, such incidents were commonplace. White workers from Carrboro and blacks were constantly fighting, stoning each other, yelling insults as they passed through each other's territory. Nevertheless, on this night a routine brawl escalated into a raging black revolt that threatened to plunge Chapel Hill and Carrboro into race war.

Angry voices and the sudden crash of shattered glass brought attention to the dispute. And as a crowd of black onlookers gathered around, they saw another black man lying on the ground with his head split open and a white man standing with a broken bottle in his hand. The general scenario was familiar. From the days of Ben Boothe and great grandmother Harriet, to the days when the Klan rode into Chapel Hill, to the summer of 1937, white men had felt it was their right to brutalize African Americans.

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[7] Louis Graves, "This Village of Chapel Hill," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 9 April 1937, 2.

[8] The narrative of this event and all quotes are taken from Louis Graves, "Better Police Protection Is Essential Step toward Remedy of a Bad Situation," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 27 August 1937, 1.

And most of the time they had gotten away with it because the power of Southern law and custom protected them. But a new mood of rebelliousness was spreading in black communities throughout the nation, and it had not passed by Chapel Hill.

The crowd swelled. Voices called out of the darkness. The white man with the bottle found himself surrounded. He looked around desperately as the black crowd moved in.

At that point, according to Louis Graves, the police arrived and escorted the man to protective custody in the Carrboro jail. For a while, that seemed to be the end of it, but it was not. Who took the initiative to rally the crowd and march to the jail is not known. But soon "a crowd of 40 or 50 negroes" gathered at the jail, "clamoring to get at the prisoner."

Such a turn of events would not have been surprising if the man in jail were black and the victim white. Every African American in Chapel Hill had grown up hearing stories about lynchings. But for a black crowd to storm the Carrboro jail represented a level of black rebellion against white authority that was unprecedented.

Police again came on the scene and dispersed the crowd. In the meantime, the prisoner was taken to Hillsborough. But the revolt was still not over. Word of the incident had by now spread throughout the black community. Along the main street leading into Carrboro, a large crowd of black residents gathered. According to Graves, people in the crowd stoned automobiles that night and fired guns. Then, the ominous wail of the Carrboro fire siren blared in the darkness, sounding a "riot call." Out of Carrboro a truck barricaded with crossties appeared, and as the truck approached, white men began firing into the crowd from behind the crossties.

According to Graves, ". . . never before has there been any such clash between the races as occurred at this week-end. . . . It serves to throw light on a situation that is unquestionably dangerous." And so it was. For this demonstration of black assertiveness reflected more than racial hostility toward white workers in Carrboro. As events would show, it was an indication that blacks in Chapel Hill were fed up and increasingly willing to stand up for their rights.

Hard evidence is lacking about the aftermath of this event, in part because it mysteriously disappeared from the pages of the *Weekly* after the first front page reports. Julius Scales, who was living in Chapel Hill at the time, reported in his autobiography, *Cause at Heart*, that his family's servants were afraid to come to work for three days and reported reprisal attacks against the black community by angry Carrboro whites.[9] Nevertheless, Edwin Caldwell, Jr., who heard stories about the revolt as a child, believes that black people generally took pride in their actions that night.

What is certain is that as a result of this incident, members of the white establishment in Chapel Hill initiated an unprecedented coalition with "the better class of Negroes." They raised money to fund the purchase of land and the cost of constructing a Negro Community Center. This was an idea that had been discussed in the black community for some time, but there were no resources for such an undertaking. But

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[9] Junius Scales and Richard Nickson, *Cause at Heart: A Former Communist Remembers* (Athens, GA: U. of Ga. Press, 1987), 49.

wealthy whites now seemed to see the project in a new light, as a worthwhile investment to get young black men off the streets and pacify the black community.[10]

The idea for a black community center appealed to African Americans in Chapel Hill. It was needed, and they were willing to work and contribute to see that the project reached fruition. But no community center would put bread on the table or remove the color line. In this context it was not surprising that black workers in Chapel Hill were attracted to the southern organizing drive of the CIO.

The CIO organized black workers as well as white, women as well as men, and the unskilled as well as the skilled. It also employed militant organizers, including communists, who had become famous for employing the tactic of the sitdown strike. It was this weapon that had won union recognition for workers in the auto and steel industries.

CIO locals were the foundation for a labor-based civil rights movement that developed rapidly in the South during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In North Carolina this movement was particularly strong among the tobacco workers of Winston-Salem and their communist-led union.[11] Chapel Hill felt this movement as well, and here, as everywhere, collective action and solidarity sparked dreams of a new day.

In remarks that reveal much about the motivations of white businessmen who pursued alliances with "the better class of Negro," Louis Graves wrote several editorials denouncing John L. Lewis and the CIO's southern organizing drive at about the same time he was exposing the "outrage on Franklin Street" and calling for a "Negro Community Center." Nevertheless, in 1941, a CIO local was organized in Chapel Hill.[12]

Although there were some in the university administration, like comptroller William D. Carmichael, who opposed the union, Frank Graham was generally supportive.[13] Graham's support, however, had a contradictory effect that must be noted.

The liberal reputation of the university developed after 1930, when Frank Porter Graham became president. During the 1920s, the university attained a national reputation and regional leadership among institutions of higher learning in the South.[14] Graham

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[10] This history is examined extensively in Mittie Frank Mason, "The Negro Community Center of Chapel Hill, North Carolina: A Study of the Processes of Community Organization" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1943).

[11] Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History*, 75 (December, 1988).

[12] Louis Graves, "When the C.I.O. Comes South," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 2 April 1937, and "Gangsterism Wins Victories on the Labor Front," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 25 June 1937.

[13] Sidney Rittenberg, Interview by author, 30 November 1994, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author; For information on the CIO in Chapel Hill see Freeman, 27-30.

[14] William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill: A History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 202.

became president at the beginning of the Depression when discontent was beginning to mount among both white and black workers in the state. Politically, Graham represented the cutting edge of New Deal liberalism in the South, in a state that was generally unfriendly to both black rights and labor. His liberalism, however, had limits that were both pragmatic and philosophical. Although he opposed segregation, he thought it unwise to try to end it by confrontational methods or federal intervention. And while he forced the resignation of the dean of the Medical School, who placed a limit on the admission of Jews, he would not endorse the admission of a black applicant, Pauli Murray, to the graduate school in 1938.[15] Indeed, if he had, it would have been a violation of North Carolina law and Graham would probably have been out of a job.

Nevertheless, Graham's influence at the university created some new opportunities for African Americans who lived in Chapel Hill. The university library began making books available to blacks on a regular basis after 1932.[16] Also, after 1930 African Americans began to take more advantage of concerts and lectures at the university. The first interracial meal on university property was held at the opening banquet of Graham Memorial in the early 1930s, and interracial meals were held at the Campus Y until the early 1940s.[17]

Probably more important to African Americans than any of these measures was Frank Graham's tolerance and, to some extent, protection of students and faculty who became involved with the Communist Party and union organizing of campus workers. According to the research of Charles Maddry Freeman, who wrote an extensive assessment of the history and prospects of the black community under the direction of Howard Odum in 1944, "the State, County, and Municipal Workers of America, since they cannot usually demand a closed shop, rely upon strong industrial unions to keep government administrators from destroying their locals. Since Chapel Hill has no strong union, it is the attitude of the [university] administration itself which protects the local."[18] Many of the student organizers of the union were members of the Communist Party.[19]

The union had over two hundred members including janitors, and employees of the cafeteria, infirmary, and laundry. In negotiations with Graham in 1943 the union raised wages of janitors from 29 cents to 37 1/2 cents an hour and of maids from $10 to

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[15] Warren Ashby, *Frank Porter Graham: A Southern Liberal* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1980), 227, 230.

[16] Charles Maddry Freeman, "Growth and Plan for a Community: A Study of Negro Life in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1944), 133.

[17] ibid., 142

[18] ibid., 143

[19] Rittenberg interview; Julius Scales, Interview by author, 1 April 1992, New York, tape recording in the possession of the author.

$14 a week. Other goals of the union were to eliminate wage differentials on the basis of race and sex and to strengthen the political action of black workers in Chapel Hill.

Despite the wage victory and the high hopes of union activists, the CIO in Chapel Hill never became a powerful force. While Local 22 in Winston-Salem had a decisive impact on local politics as well as in the tobacco factories, ˆLocal 403 of the State County and Municipal Workers of America (SCMWA) in Chapel Hill was not able to make comparable breakthroughs. The full story of the workers' efforts remains to be researched and told. Nevertheless, several reasons for the union's weakness and ultimate demise are suggested by partial evidence.

The union got by, for the most part, on a succession of volunteer, white student organizers who were dedicated but inexperienced, unfamiliar with the community, and not committed to Chapel Hill for the long term. In at least one instance, a paid organizer for the union was also the director of political education for the Communist Party in North Carolina, and his attention to the workers' interests in Chapel Hill, though sincere, was intermittent and unfocused. It may be that because of reliance on these organizers, black workers failed to develop leadership and broad involvement within their own group. If this was true, the workers may have undermined their long-term prospects.

The other factor was Frank Graham. His support and protection of the union was undoubtedly helpful in certain ways. But to the extent that the union relied on him rather than on its own organization and militancy, the union failed to develop itself into an institution with staying power that could stand on its own two feet.

Finally, the war also disrupted union organizing. After a number of the male organizers left Chapel Hill for military service, several female students took over the organizing.[20] After the war, large layoffs at the University Laundry and throughout the university helped to reduce the local strength of the union while the redbaiting that weakened the entire CIO probably diminished the union's national strength. In the end, the union effort faltered, and by 1949 the only material remnants of the CIO in Chapel Hill were the memberships maintained by a few black workers.[21]

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In Chapel Hill then, as throughout the South, it was the angry discontent of black workers that stirred the pot to boiling in 1937 and 1941. In 1943, UNC sociologist Howard Odum, reflecting on the growth of the militant mood among African Americans, wrote: "It was as if some universal message had come through to the great mass of Negroes urging them to dream new dreams and to protest against the old order."[22] A

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[20] The activities of these female organizers and the history of the union from the point of view of local black union activists is a blank spot in the Chapel Hill story for which the research remains to be done.

[21] Robert Ketchum Bain, "A Study of ‘The Social Factors of the Work Situation'" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1949), 24.

[22] Howard W. Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 171; quoted in Raymond Gavins, *The Perils and Prospects of Southern Black Leadership: Gordon Blaine Hancock, 1884-1970* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1977), 107.

black author reported in the same year a "Southern Negro awakening" based on a "deep distrust of white good will and `Uncle Tom' leadership."[23]

This upsurge had a generational aspect as well, at least in Chapel Hill. In 1939, Agnes Brown, a sociology graduate student working under Guy Johnson, noted, "the younger generation of Negroes [in Chapel Hill] is increasingly feeling that there is no inherent difference between the two people. They are putting from their minds any idea of inferiority. . . . This attitude will probably be responsible for bringing about a change in the status of the Negro race in years to come."[24]

The militant mood of African Americans developed out of conditions that pre-dated World War II, but there is no doubt that wartime conditions heightened tensions along the color line. Discrimination in government training programs for wartime jobs, employment discrimination, and discrimination in the armed forces aroused black anger to the boiling point. The country was supposedly at war with fascist Germany to save democracy, but there was no democracy at home, only lip service. The president of North American Aviation, for instance, stated:

> While we are in complete sympathy for the Negro, it is against company policy to employ them as aircraft workers or mechanics. . . regardless of their training. . . . There will be some jobs as janitors for Negroes.[25]

As World War II unfolded, the rising militancy of black workers prodded black middle-class leaders and white community leaders to become more active on racial issues. Despite their significant dependence on white support, "the black middle class, who traditionally brokered small concessions from the white elite, could not remain reticent in the face of such working class ferment and the rapidly changing conditions brought on by the war."[26]

In 1942 moderate black leaders from across the South issued the "Durham Manifesto," setting forth their opposition to the principle of segregation and calling for gradual changes in the post-war southern social order. Southern white liberals responded with guarded support. Eventually the two groups formed the interracial Southern Regional Council. Moderate as these middle-class black leaders were compared to black

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[23] J. Saunders Redding, "A Negro Speaks for His People," *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXXI (March 1943), 58-63; quoted in Gavins, 106.

[24] Agnes Brown, "The Negro Churches of Chapel Hill" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1939), vii.

[25] quoted in Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 1619-1973, first paperback edition (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 238.

[26] Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley, eds., *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992), 150.

labor leaders like Randolph or the tobacco workers, they upheld the long-term goal of ending segregation. Their white liberal southern allies, however, refused to adopt this position until 1951 when black protest, world opinion, and the dynamics of capitalist development were beginning to force the U.S. government to turn cautiously against Jim Crow.

Thus there were two distinct, yet interrelated, trends of black protest. Driving the process strategically was the activity of black workers. In Chapel Hill they demonstrated their anger against the color line by rebelling in the streets and their demand for better job opportunities by joining the CIO. Allied with them were increasing numbers of radicalized white college students and faculty, including those in and around the Communist Party and others who challenged segregation from a radical religious point of view.[27]

There was also a distinct trend of protest involving "leading Negroes" in uneasy coalition with liberal whites. This trend was less confrontational and often employed legal and political tactics that did not lend themselves to participation by large numbers of people. Indeed, frequently these middle-class leaders found themselves in conflict with the more militant workers. At the same time, black middle-class leaders tended to embrace the demands and tactics of the workers during periods of pronounced grassroots activity.

Rising black militancy provoked a white backlash evidenced by a series of bloody race riots in Detroit and elsewhere in 1942 and 1943. "`Negro leaders then retreated, eschewing mass movements and direct action in favor of aid from white liberals for their congressional and court battles,'" according to Harvard Sitkoff.[28]

After the world war, cold war anti-communism became a potent weapon against democratic movements at home and abroad. During this period the Communist Party was crushed and all progressive activities were subjected to intense red-baiting and McCarthyite repression.

Federal and local government launched a two-pronged attack against labor organizing, on the one hand passing right-to-work laws and other restrictive legislation, and on the other encouraging a bitter purge of communist-led unions from the CIO in 1949. "The purges of alleged Communists from labor unions. . . was a low point of the American trade union movement. They had particularly adverse effect on black workers because the unions usually expelled those black and white leaders who had done most to

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[27] The story of the "Snuffbuckets," a white student group that met in the basement of the Presbyterian Church of which Charley Jones was the minister is the basis for my claim concerning religious radicals. In the mid-1940s, for instance, this group sponsored interracial meals. Charles Maddry Freeman, author of "Growth and Plan for a Community," was a member of the group and shared this information with the author during a telephone conversation in 1993.

[28] Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *Journal of American History*, LVIII (December 1971), 661-681; quoted in Gavins, 104.

recruit blacks in the first place."[29] The CIO had maintained an energetic support of black workers since its formation, but under the pressure of the "red scare" it joined the always more conservative American Federation of Labor in a pattern of "business unionism" that was but a passive shadow of the militant pre-war days.

Just as the defeat of the workers' and farmers' movements at the end of the nineteenth century had paved the way for a period of extreme racism and democratic decline, so the defeat of the democratic upsurge among African Americans and organized labor in the 1940s led to a period of reaction. In 1950 Frank Graham, the liberal president of the University of North Carolina, went down to defeat in his bid for the U.S. Senate in a campaign marked by vicious red-baiting and race-baiting. The fifties had arrived.

Nevertheless, strategic changes at the national and international level were opening up new possibilities for black freedom. For one thing there had been a vast migration of black people to the industrial centers of the North, away from Jim Crow and toward jobs and opportunity. These blacks were gaining both economic power and political power that could not be ignored.[30] They brought the race issue home to the whole country, while before it had been mainly a southern issue.

In addition, the emergence of the liberation movements in the former colonies of the West following World War II, coupled with the competition of a surging socialism, politicized the issue of race in a way that created new opportunities for the black freedom struggle.

For many leaders in both business and government whose broad vision matched their far-flung interests, it was becoming increasingly important to at least modify legal segregation in the South. Reflecting the concerns of these powerful figures, as well as the demands of African Americans, President Harry Truman appointed a Committee on Civil Rights in 1946. The committee recommended "that the civil rights section of the Department of Justice be expanded, that there be a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, that Congress pass laws against lynching and to stop voting discrimination, and suggested new laws to end racial discrimination in jobs." Howard Zinn noted in his *Peoples History of the United States* that the Truman Committee openly admitted that in addition to a "moral reason" there was an "economic reason" for strengthening black rights. And most importantly, the committee proclaimed, there was an "international reason":

> Our position in the post-war world is so vital to the future that our smallest actions have far-reaching effects. . . We cannot escape the fact that our civil rights record has been an issue in world politics. The world's press and radio are full of it. . . Those with competing philosophies have stressed--and are shamelessly distorting--our shortcomings. . . They have tried to prove our democracy an empty

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[29] William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 124.

[30] Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 113.

> fraud, and our nation a consistent oppressor of underprivileged people. This may seem ludicrous to Americans, but it is sufficiently important to worry our friends. The United States is not so strong, the final triumph of the democratic ideal is not so inevitable that we can ignore what the world thinks of us or our record.[31]

This was the weak spot in the coalition of forces that had blocked all challenges to "separate but equal." And it was through this weak spot that Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP charged to victory at the bench of the Supreme Court in 1954.

With the labor-radical based civil rights movement in a shambles, reform was carried forward under the guidance of relatively "safe" leaders. President Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948 and the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in public schools in 1954. As a result, by the mid 1950s, large numbers of black people began to feel a new day coming.

But within the minds of a generation of leaders whose experience had taught them habits of patient survival, working through the white power structure, and the kind of deference necessary to gain white concessions under segregation, there was neither the vision nor the temperament to lead a militant, massive and democratic movement of the kind envisioned by Margaret Walker. The requirements of working through the white power structure favored the leadership of established, "middle class" leaders skilled in diplomacy and compromise whose effectiveness depended on the goodwill of powerful whites and not on powerful working-class organization. This leadership core was not prepared to take the risks and to make the leap necessary to catalyze a mass movement.

Thus, when the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that segregation must end in public schools there was no powerful, militant, institutionally based civil rights movement to push toward the full implementation of equal rights. Into this vacuum stepped the black people of Montgomery, Alabama.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, sparked by Rosa Parks and led by black women as well as by established black male leaders, indicated that "time had ripened." It inspired African Americans with a vision of the effectiveness of grassroots struggle; it began teaching the tactic of non-violence; and it propelled Martin Luther King, Jr. to national prominence as the symbol of renewed black grassroots militancy.

Still, the boycott did not spark a national uprising. Even Martin Luther King, a young leader himself and one who had tasted the feel of the movement to come due to his leadership of the boycott, was discouraged by 1959. As Taylor Branch observed in his biography of King, "nothing--not his near martyrdom, or his White House audience, or his thousand speeches--had rekindled the movement spirit of the boycott."[32]

It fell then primarily to the youth, to their restless urge to grow, to their need to challenge limits of all kinds, to their lack of entanglement with the white power structure and the traditional black leadership to become the shock troops of the new freedom struggle.

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[31] Zinn, 440.

[32] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988; First Touchstone Edition, 1989), 259.

CHAPTER 4

BLACK LIVES IN CHAPEL HILL AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ACTIVIST CORE, 1937-1960

It would be extremely misleading to leave the impression that black struggle and resistance took place primarily in the public arena, carried out by male activists through organizations they led. Moreover, no analysis of the larger political and cultural dynamics of a period can explain the actual unfolding of human events or the human condition. While these levels of interpretation are indispensable, to neglect deeper investigations into social and personal history is to view historical events from afar, that is, from a position of aloofness and complacency.

To be black in Chapel Hill was a constant struggle for survival, dignity, and human growth. In particular, families carried on this struggle in many subtle ways. As much as any organization or institution, the family was a training ground for dealing with the tension between accommodation and resistance that was part of everyday life. Work, school, and church were also particularly significant locations of training for life. And finally, there were the streets–the block where black men hung out, the stone walls and hot dog joints where the school kids gathered, and Granny Flack's front porch. It was in all of these social spaces that the older generation tried to live and provide a foundation for their children, and where the younger generation came of age.

Focusing on the actual lives of black people in Chapel Hill also helps explain why the freedom movement of the 1960s was not initiated or led by black adults. For without the support of unions or civil rights organizations, black working people in Chapel Hill had to defend their rights with only the aid of friends and family. For the most part, it was all they could do to keep their heads above water, and often, the only way to do that was to rely heavily on white goodwill. Although they were not slaves, there was a constant pressure to conform to standards of conduct that met the approval of employers and white authority generally. Even those who did not develop habits of deference like those Elizabeth Cotton disliked in her mother could do little more than stand up for themselves.

Black youths, however, did not have either their parents' overwhelming responsibilities or their caution. And while youths of Elizabeth Cotton's generation could only conceive of escaping Jim Crow by leaving the South, black youths coming of age in the 1950s sensed that perhaps the South could be changed. Growing criticism and opposition to segregation, as well as the defensive reaction of the white South, were widely known facts, and they indicated the weakening of Jim Crow. And while the youths may not have understood exactly how the shifting geo-political forces of history, including their own people's struggle, were creating new opportunities for black people in the 1950s, they felt it. They felt the opportunity. And they acted on their dreams. Yet exactly *how* these youths developed the idea that segregation could be challenged, that the time for patience and silent suffering was over, that they

should lead, and that direct confrontation should be their strategy is not well understood. It is to these questions that we now turn.

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Jim Crow was more than anything else a method of social control. Just as slave masters had designed a set of rules, punishments, and rewards to preserve the system of slavery, established authority in the South designed methods of social control to preserve black subjugation despite emancipation.

Although violence against African Americans and their allies was employed to establish and maintain Jim Crow, law and custom became increasingly important mechanisms of control.[1] In particular, every effort was made to induce African Americans to become resigned to their place in society. As W. E. B. Du Bois wrote in 1909:

> There are ever those about [the Negro] whispering: "You are nobody; why strive to be somebody? The odds are overwhelming against you–wealth, tradition, learning and guns. Be reasonable. Accept the dole of charity and the cant of missionaries and sink contentedly to your place as humble servants and helpers of the white world."[2]

At the same time, Jim Crow placed restrictions on African Americans to limit their options. Just as slave masters made it illegal for slaves to learn to read in order to limit their freedom, segregationists tried to limit the kind of education available to African Americans in the South to a standard in keeping with their "place." And in the school of life, segregationists always tried to teach African Americans that their "place" was inferior and it was hopeless to rebel.

From the point of view of established authority, therefore, organizations like the CIO that tried to build black-white solidarity in defense of workers' rights could not be tolerated. And while such organizations inevitably developed out of the needs of dominated peoples, it was exceptionally difficult for them to survive and maintain their democratic principles.

In the 1950s, in Chapel Hill, there is no evidence that any militant

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[1] For an insightful discussion of the dynamics of social control and their relationship to mass democratic protest see the Introduction to Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,1978). See, for example on page xi: "A far more permanent and thus far more desirable solution to the task of achieving domestic tranquility is cultural–the creation of mass modes of thought that literally make the need for major additional social changes difficult for the mass of the population to imagine.… Though for millions of Americans the fact is beyond imagining, such cultural dynamics describe politics in contemporary America."

[2] W.E.B. Du Bois, *John Brown*, American Crisis Biographies, ed. E. P. Oberholtzer (Philadelphia: n.p., 1909), 390; quoted in Herbert Apthecker, *Nat Turner's Slave Rebellion* (New York: Humanities Press, 1966), 107.

grassroots organizations existed, or even that traditions of organized resistance survived from earlier periods.[3] How, then, did black youths learn to rebel? And can it be said that the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was linked in any way to earlier efforts to enlarge black freedom?

Just as black individuals had to accommodate to survive in the Jim Crow South, black institutions had to accommodate. African American youths did not necessarily learn to think for themselves during the 1950s from black schools and teachers, black churches and ministers, or black families. Certainly, some black youths learned to question *white authority*, and all were at least taught to survive it, in these black institutions. But black youths were not often encouraged to question *black authority* in these settings. And since these institutions had to accommodate to white power to survive, and black leaders had to depend on the goodwill of powerful white people to gain concessions for the black community, and black parents did not want their children getting in trouble with the law or lynched, there was a tendency for the training that black youths got in these institutions to be about how to survive and succeed in a white-dominated society. And yet the black youths who initiated the lunch counter protests in 1960 defied such training. How did this happen?

It turned out that the young people who initiated the protests in 1960, at least in Chapel Hill, were not those young people who passively accepted the leadership of black institutions, let alone the authority of white institutions. They were not the ones who did everything by the book. Some thought of themselves as rebels, renegades, or radicals. A good many were deep thinkers and risktakers with relatively broad experience. These youths became the local activist core of the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement.

Part of what these youths drew on to develop their rebellious outlook was the tradition of resistance and solidarity embedded in African American culture. Even though accommodation was the norm within the black community, much of it was no more than a realistic adjustment of behavior to overwhelming white power. As such, it was not at odds with traditions of resistance. And as the youths matured, they found certain individuals who encouraged them to rebel. One such person was Granny Flack.

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Although the schoolbooks provided to black students offered only a very limited and biased account of black history, there was no way that Jim Crow

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[3] This statement is not based on exhaustive research. It is possible that some of the families of the black youth civil rights activists had links to the Chapel Hill CIO, although none of the activists interviewed mentioned any such influence. It is also possible that some of the youths may have met, or heard a speech by, Floyd McKissick before 1960, or they may have known about theNAACP Youth Councils that existed in other cities. Linkages to previous, or then current, traditions of organizational resistance do not seem to have been prominent factors in the social experience of those interviewed. However, some activists were not interviewed, and not all of those interviewed were asked the question.

could completely rob black children of their freedom legacy. Braxton Foushee was a case in point. Eventually, he became very active in the Civil Rights Movement, but first, Braxton had to learn a great deal about how to struggle for freedom. In his case, much of this learning took place outside of school.

"Probably the most fondest memory I had was Church Street," Braxton recalled. "There was an old lady–Grandma Flack. That's where I learned all my history–slavery."

Braxton was small, perhaps five or six, when Mrs. Tempe Flack began teaching him. He and many other children would spend their days with the old woman on Church Street while their mothers were at work:

> We used to sit on her porch late in the afternoon.… She'd always talk to us about slavery. Say, "Son, this is what it used to be like when I was growing up.…" [Her father] was sold and she never saw him again.…

Granny Flack explained to the children how the slaves had resisted, the methods they used, and how they carried on the struggle for generations:

> [She told us how the slaves used] religious songs, and how they sang them. And if someone was stealing something out of the big house, how they would let the people know that The Man was coming back at that time.… They were warned by songs. It was a tradition in the slave quarters that you had these messages that were tied up in hymns … that they just passed down from generation to generation.…

These stories, and Granny Flack herself, made a deep impression on Braxton. He felt that it was from her that he learned his people's true history. And what made the greatest impact was her endorsement of resistance to white power, her confidence that a new day was coming, and the example of her own perseverance:

> I reckon that what impressed me the most was her survival, how she lived through all of that. And, her main word, her theme, was that you gotta fight for what you want. And she told us our day would be comin'. And, "There are gonna be times, son, when you're gonna have to stand up to the master." And, in a sense, when the sixties rolled around, that's exactly what we did. I mean, that was a vivid portrayal of standin' up against the master, being the white man.

Just a few years before the lunch counter protests began in Chapel Hill, Granny Flack's health finally began to fail. By this time the children who used to sit on her front porch while their mothers worked had become young men and women. And even as they moved to break with traditions of deference and accommodation to segregation, they also carried on the traditions of community solidarity and respect that had enabled black people to survive Jim Crow. Now they took care of Granny Flack.

Braxton recalled that taking care of Granny Flack was something like a community project:

> Everybody in the neighborhood took care of her, you know, when she got really old and couldn't do for herself. We'd build fires. Somebody had to go by and build her fire. Somebody had to cook for her. Somebody had to cut her wood. And all that continued until she died.[4]

Mrs. Tempe Flack died in 1958, but more than thirty years after her death, strong memories of her persisted among those for whom she cared. It seemed she represented something of great importance to the community, and to children in particular. She was the *memory of people*–history.

The history she passed on to the young was more than oral tradition. She embodied the essence of that history herself. It was flesh and blood, her house, her spinning wheel, her "old well." Even more, it was working until she could not, caring for the next generation, sharing her pain, her hope, what she knew because she had seen it with her own eyes.

Such history has seldom been recorded. To those who write the *memory of nations*–that is, the national myths created in service to national elites–such history is either irrelevant or subversive. But it is not possible to understand those young people who led the Chapel Hill freedom movement in 1960 without understanding why they cherished the memory of Grandma Flack, or why they built her fires, cooked her meals, and cut her wood when she got too old to do for herself.

Gloria Mason Williams, another Civil Rights activist, called Grandma Flack "a lady of wisdom… steadfast and strong…":

> If you were confused, Granny Flack would set you straight. She was everybody's grandmother.… Sometimes you wouldn't feel right if it was a bad day and you went by and didn't see her.… If you saw her it made all the difference in the world.… She was truthful, genuine, you knew she was concerned. She never told you anything that was wrong… all things about life… how to be responsible, and make it, and grow up.… She was a historical person, a legend in the community.[5]

In the long reach of her life, Granny Flack embodied the black struggle for freedom and the kind of caring community that was the goal of the struggle. In this sense, she was a formidable threat to segregation.

The story of Granny Flack, therefore, stands for more than what she

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[4] All preceding quotes about Granny Flack are from Braxton Foushee, Interview by author, 15 March 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[5] Gloria Mason Williams, Interview by author, 12 April 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

meant to Braxton Foushee and Gloria Williams. It also stands as a symbol and an example of how traditions of resistance and solidarity were passed on to black youths in Chapel Hill.

At the same time, these youths were constantly exposed to traditions of submission as well. Parents told them stories about lynchings. Parents bent under the daily humiliations of Jim Crow and took it out on their families and themselves. Teachers accommodated. Preachers accommodated. And so, the young people had to decide which aspect of their culture to embrace.

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Often, the way they came to their own conclusions had a great deal to do with places they congregated with their friends to talk, social spaces that were free from white domination and black adult control. It was in such gathering spots that the youths forged their own traditions, building upon what their elders had established, but taking it a step further. One such place in Chapel Hill was known as "the Rock Wall," or simply "the Rock."

The Rock Wall had a significant history. During David Lowery Swain's tenure as president of the university, he put professor Elisha Mitchell, who was from Connecticut, in charge of building rock walls around the campus. The walls were needed to keep pigs and other animals from roaming at will. Rocks were plentiful, and there was an abundance of slave labor to carry out the work. It was in this way that the tradition of rock masonry began among African Americans in Chapel Hill.[6]

Building the rock walls required a tremendous amount of labor and took several years. The work also demanded a high level of skill. Therefore, it was not surprising that as rock walls became a fashion in later years, only Chapel Hill's well-to-do families could afford to have such walls built. On the other hand, a good many slaves became skillful masons, and after slavery they were able to continue their trade, building additional rock walls for the university and for private families. Even after Jim Crow forced many black workers out of skilled trades, the black rock masons of Chapel Hill were able to hold their ground.[7] And so, the tradition of building with rock among African Americans embodied both the oppression and the resistance of black workers.

During the 1930s, houses in the black community were often built with unpainted siding, no insulation, and no underpinning. The community itself was a maze of dirt roads and dead ends. Mrs. Fannie Bradshaw worked for a white man who had a house built for her on the corner of Cotton Street and McDade in Pottersfield. For years, she and her daughters worked for the white man to pay for that house. In the early 1940s, when Atlas Cotton was building a house

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[6] James Vickers, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History* (Chapel Hill: Barclay Publishers, 1985), 56.

[7] Walker Perry, for example, with whom the author worked on a racial discrimination grievance, was the first black supervisor of a skilled trades group, the brick masons, at the university.

near Mrs. Bradshaw, he had to blast away a lot of rock. And he gave some of the rock to Mrs. Bradshaw and her husband so that they could build a rock wall in front of their house. Just as the walls around the university had been built to control stray animals, Mrs. Bradshaw hoped to keep people from walking through her yard. Mrs. Bradshaw's husband and a boarder built the wall in front of the house along McDade Street. Mrs. Bradshaw herself used some of the rock to build steps up to her front door, and eventually she was able to buy enough additional rock to underpin the house.[8]

The wall served its purpose of keeping people out of the yard, but it had an unexpected result as well. As soon as it was built, people began sitting on it. Older folks coming up the hill would stop and sit for awhile. Neighbors would come by to chat and sit on the wall. As time passed, however, the Rock Wall became a favorite gathering place for young people. There were several teenagers in the house, including Carol Purefoy and Alton Purefoy. They were all popular, and their friends would come by, boys and girls, and sit on the wall under the shade of a big tree during the day and under the street light at night. It happened that Harold Foster lived around the corner, William Cureton up the street, the Geer boys and the Foushee brothers nearby. These boys became friends, and as the 1940s passed into the 1950s, they spent more and more time hanging out at the Rock Wall. Mostly, the young men talked about their dates, sports, movies, and other social things. But as the decade of the fifties waned and a new day began to break, they sat on the Rock wall *late* into the night, and increasingly their conversation turned to more serious issues like religion, their futures, and freedom.

When the Civil Rights Movement hit, these same young people met at the Rock Wall to talk through the events of the day and decide what to do next. In this way, they took what their parents' generation had built and turned it to their own purposes. And yet they also continued the long tradition of struggle and self-determination that was embodied in the wall itself.

Both Granny Flack's front porch and the Rock Wall were staging areas for the black youth revolt of the 1960s in Chapel Hill. The Rock Wall actually figures prominently in the story of the movement. It was a place that was both physically and socially free. It was a space controlled by the young black men of Pottersfield. And as will be seen, such spaces were critical to the development of the movement.[9]

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[8] 8Willie Mae Patterson, Interview by author, 8 January 1995, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[9] The concept of "free spaces" has been developed by Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986). For a discussion of how African Americans created subtle "paths of resistance" through the "landscape of domination" that constituted the necessity of their lives see, for instance, Robin D. G. Kelley, "`We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no.1 (June 1993). For a useful, though backward looking, discussion of the question of

No less important than spaces where the youths could forge their own traditions were the influence of people like Granny Flack who passed on the wisdom and traditions of the past to the youth. And while Granny Flack herself does not figure prominently in the story of the Chapel Hill movement that follows, there were numerous people who nurtured the rebelliousness of youth in their own way, some with words, some by example.

For the rest of this chapter, then, let us turn to an examination of the lives of some of the people who played a key role in the Chapel Hill movement. In particular, I have focused on the process by which a friendship group of teenage males became the leading group within the activist core of the Chapel Hill movement. My account focuses on certain individuals, including members of the Mason family, William Cureton, James Brittian, Harold Foster, Marie Roberson, and Stella Farrar. In part, these persons have been chosen because of the significant roles they played, but there are others who were equally important in the movement.[10] What follows, therefore, is not meant to be definitive or comprehensive. Rather, my aim is to open windows on the process of how the freedom movement grew out of black lives in Chapel Hill.

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The growing of the movement took place silently in the lives of individuals, like seeds unfolding under the earth. In Chapel Hill, it was not a conscious process. The young people involved did not *intend* to build a movement at first, and their associations did not revolve around political organizations or activities. Nor was it a visible process to observers outside the community. Nevertheless, this process of preparation and gathering can be documented as it unfolded in response to concrete historical conditions. The youths observed, felt, and understood these changes to varying degrees. Because of the particular experiences of their growing years, however, they all felt called to act. Increasingly they saw themselves–as individuals, friendship groups, and families–standing out from their peers in ways associated with leadership and rebellion. And when news of the Greensboro lunch counter protests reached Chapel Hill, they knew that the challenge was theirs.

To a great extent, the movement in Chapel Hill grew from families and from friendship groups. Certain families stand out for the number of activists they produced. Among these are the Foushee family and the Mason family. What

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resistance by oppressed peoples in the South, both black and white, see David Thelen, *Paths of Resistance: Tradition and Dignity in Industrializing Missouri* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[10] Some of the leading activists who are not written about here in any detail include James Foushee, Charles Foushee, Hilliard Caldwell, Peter Leake, Quinton Baker, Rosemary Ezra, and John Dunne. Except for Pat Cusick, I have not written much about either white activists or older adult activists since my focus is on black youth. Also, as is true for all historians, I have had to use the sources that were available to me, and I have been limited by considerations of space.

follows is a questioning of how activism developed in the Mason family and in the lives of James Brittian, Harold Foster, William Cureton, Stella Farrar, and Marie Roberson.

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Matthew Mason was born to a sharecropping family in nearby Durham County in 1911. He began "ploughing with a mule" at eight, and had to stop school after third grade when his father got sick. At thirteen he went to work at the Ligget and Meyer tobacco factory in Durham, where he worked for three years. By the time Matthew was sixteen his father was dead and he was the main support of the family. In 1927 they moved to Chapel Hill where he got a job at Harry's Grill, eventually becoming a waiter. Two years later he married Fannie Lou Strowd, a young woman from Chatham County. In 1934 students at the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house asked him to work for them. Since they were offering $12.00 a week and he was only making $7.00 a week at Harry's, he took the job. He worked there from 1934 until he retired in 1972. He also worked a second job at the Hollywood Cab Company.[11]

Sally Baldwin Strowd, Mrs. Mason's mother, lived with the Masons in Chapel Hill after the marriage. She had attended Shaw University in Raleigh at a time when it was unusual for a black woman to go to college. She was a former school teacher, having taught in the Baldwin School House, a one-room school in Chatham County.

Although her sister went to college, Fannie Lou Strowd married Matthew Mason at a young age and stayed at home to raise her six children. She worked taking in laundry from the fraternity boys as well. She bore and raised two girls and four boys between 1931 and 1944, and she died in 1963.

Gloria, the oldest girl, was born in 1934. She recalled that she did not feel poor growing up in Chapel Hill, partly because most people she knew owned their own homes.

> I guess we were a poor family, but I never knew it. I never knew I was poor until I was grown and realized what poverty was.… We were never hungry, and we had clothing, and I grew up feeling that I was rich. And my father and mother were both very religious, and we grew up in the church.… And we were taught to care for each other as sisters and brothers.… The family meant a lot. And my father's mother lived next door to us, so I had two grandmothers. And I had a host of aunts and uncles. And they had the right to discipline us just as much so as my own parents did. So I was enriched with a wonderful family.[12]

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[11] Matthew Mason, Interview by author, 6 February 1993, Chapel Hill, tape recording in thenpossession of the author.

[12] Matthew Mason, Interview by author, 6 February 1993, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

She remembered that there were a lot of benefits to her family because of her father's job at the fraternity. The fraternity boys would drop by "whenever they wanted," sometimes bringing their dates to visit, or coming to play the piano, and sometimes bringing gifts. In particular Gloria remembered a gift she received as a child: "The first pet I ever had, I remember one of my father's boys gave me a black cocker spaniel in a basket with a red ribbon on it and I thought that was the prettiest thing I'd most ever seen in my life."

In fact, in addition to the relatively good wages Mr. Mason brought home from the fraternity, he also brought home extra food for the rest of the community, particularly during the Depression. Moreover, the fraternity made him an honorary brother and contributed substantial funds to help his children go to college. This was one of the main reasons Matthew Mason stayed at his job:

> I stayed so long because they was always good to me and I ain't never wanted for nothing. If I'd ask for anything I would get it. That's why. They was good to me, nice to me (laughs). That's why I stayed there.… Like I told you, when people, at that time a lot of 'em, the children and different families, you know, need some food or something to eat, I'd ask the fraternity–"Let me take my friends some food," or something else. They'd give it to me. Let me take it to 'em. I would be a fool to run away from there, wouldn't I (laughs)?

To some observers it might seem that Mr. Mason's job required a great deal of bowing and scraping and was inherently humiliating. Indeed, Mr. Mason was no outspoken critic of segregation or community activist. Like nearly all African Americans in Chapel Hill he spent most of his time working. His job title of "houseboy" was demeaning, and he was, after all, a black man servant to a bunch of rich white boys. Nevertheless, while there was undoubtedly a good deal of patronizing in the good will of some Phi Delt brothers, it appears that there was much genuine respect as well. For apparently Matthew Mason bent to segregation only as a practical matter, while at the same time he exercised a genius for drawing the young white men across the color line into true human relationships. In this way "Dr. Reet," as he was affectionately called by the fraternity brothers, transformed his "menial" position into a base from which to challenge Jim Crow with human kindness.

A close inspection of the influences of Matthew Mason on his children reveals similar patterns of resistance to Jim Crow within a framework of accommodation. One has to ask, to begin with, why this "houseboy," who was never active in political or civic affairs in Chapel Hill (except for faithful attendance at PTA meetings), had three children who were leaders in the freedom struggle of the 1960s. Thomas, at fifteen, was one of the instigators of the first lunch counter protest at the Colonial Drugstore. Mary, then a student at North Carolina College in Durham living in Chapel Hill, was one of the first elected leaders of the movement in 1960. And Gloria, then twenty-six, worked behind the scenes as an organizer and facilitator. When asked why he had three children in such prominent roles Mr. Mason replied simply, "My other three

children weren't here."

Undoubtedly, Mr. Mason believed his children were leaders. And when asked if Mary was the kind of person who would stand up for her rights he replied, "Oh yeah, she would stand up for her rights. All of them would, far as that's concerned.…" However, when prodded about an incident mentioned by Gloria concerning a racist white neighbor, Mr. Mason told a story that revealed much about his own influence on his children.

After getting married "down in the bottom," the Masons bought a house on West Rosemary Street on the edge of the black community. A white man named Cheshire lived across the street:

> Oh, that's the man I told you had the store across the street. That man didn't have no children.… He didn't have no children, you know. And [the hedges in my yard] was growed up pretty high, you know. And he told me he wanted to let 'em grow up higher so he couldn't see the children playing over there in the yard, you know–He's a kind of funny old white man–so he couldn't see the children growin' over there in the yard. And I cut the hedges *all* the way down, real low, so he could see 'em *good*, yeah.

Gloria credits her father as a strong influence and she gives her mother a great deal of credit as well.

> My mother stayed at home, but she took in home laundry. And she raised us. And she exposed us to more than one religion. She also kept up with the things that were happening, like the fashions, and the trends, and the changes in times. She was an excellent mother.

It was Mrs. Mason who read a great deal and kept her children abreast of what was going on in the town and throughout the country. They had an "old timey radio" and they would listen to the news. Gloria's mother introduced the children to black history and shared old family documents with them. She made them aware that things were not right and things were not supposed to be that way, and that times had to change. As the events of the 1950s unfolded, Gloria's mother interpreted the Supreme Court decision of 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 to her children and she encouraged them to be prepared to do their part. Gloria recalled:

> And that's what I was tellin' you that my mother kept up with. She would sit down there and try to give us what she thought the implications of those decisions were and all of that, and that we would have a role to play, that somebody had to take some leadership responsibilities.

Gloria believed that it was the support she got from her family that enabled her to be a rebel.

> I thought the world was mine and I thought that it was there for me to venture out and that the best should come. I was always looking for the best. And I read with intensity. It was nothing for me to read a hundred books in a year.… I've always been a real outspoken person… one of the renegade children.… My dad used to tell me he didn't think I was gonna live till I got fifteen.… So I began to believe it. And when I woke up and I was fifteen I said, "Gee whiz, I'm still living." Whatever was on my mind, regardless if it was my principal, or my teacher, or anybody in the store, I could not live with myself until I spoke my point of view. And so, even though that there was segregation I didn't respect it that much because I sort of said what I wanted to the people and did what I wanted to do.… And everything that was radical I caused.… I would think up ideas for the rest of the children to do.…

Although Gloria could not recall any really hurtful experiences resulting from segregation, she was certainly aware of the way black people were treated as inferiors. And the rebelliousness of her youth that was frequently directed against traditional black authority figures like her father, teachers, or preacher, was also directed against segregation. In the case of Mr. Cheshire, action took a collective form.

Gloria's brother Matthew, chauffeured Mr. Cheshire, who lived across the street and owned a laundry. And Matthew told Gloria, "Yes, I'll chauffeur him. I'll chauffeur him in West Hell and leave him." And sometimes Matthew would get the children together and they would go across the street to bother Mr. Cheshire. Since he did not want to see the children at play, sometimes with white friends, they decided they did not want him for a neighbor. So they would go over and sing songs, and the other neighbor children would join in. They sang "Bah Bah Blacksheep," "The Black National Anthem," "The Star Spangled Banner," and other songs.[13]

Mary, who was also involved in these raids, remembered that Mr. Cheshire's laundromat was segregated, and some of the older boys including Matthew would paint over the man's "white" and "colored" signs at night. Cheshire would repaint the signs, and the young men would again paint them over. Finally, in 1953, these tactics forced the integration of the laundromat. Mary recalled that at first the whites didn't use it, but after awhile they came back.[14]

Mary, born in 1939, came of age in the early 1950s and considered Gloria her "second mother." She became a tomboy while Gloria was more "the young lady." While she remembered that the black public schools taught them to become "strong citizens and responsible persons," segregation was not openly

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[13] ibid.

[14] Mary Mason Boyd, Interview by author, 18 April 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

discussed. It was outside the school system that she became aware, reading at the university library and experiencing discrimination directly trying to get summer jobs.

> It was during my teenage time that I realized how much racism did exist and just how ugly it really was. And I think it was the first time that it really touched me is when I attempted during my summer breaks to go out and get summer employment. And we knew quite a few of the white children there in Chapel Hill because we lived there on Rosemary Street, which was the last house in the black community on that street and the beginning of the white section. So there were children next to us and across the street that we had associated with quite a bit.

Unlike many black children who knew few whites, Mary was in a good position from an early age to learn about the way segregation affected job opportunities. And as she experienced discrimination first hand, she felt deeply hurt.

> And my first experience was to go to the Roses 5 & 10 and apply for a summer job. And I was told "No," and simply because they did not hire blacks. And that to me was very disappointing and it hurt deep inside. And then I realized what racism really was for the very first time. I was sixteen at that time.

Following this experience, a kind of group dynamic developed each summer when Mary and other teenage friends who had also experienced discrimination would "test the system." It was at this time that Mary decided that she would always try to fight "in my own way, some how" to break those barriers.

> As a group of us teenagers, each summer, after having realized that you couldn't always get jobs anywhere–and basically the only things that you could do was baby-sit, for the girls, I don't really remember what any of the young boys did except when they became maybe eighteen, nineteen maybe wait tables–because we did realize this, we would test the system sometimes and go to places like the bus station and some of the restaurants in town and just test to see how far we could go. And go in on the white side, sit in the bus station on the white side, or go to the restaurants and drink out of the water fountain that said "white." But we were always, you know, deterred from that and told that we were not allowed, and sometimes we were threatened. Sometimes racial slurs were made.
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> I think during that time is when things became instilled in me that there would be something greater to come, and it was gonna be a struggle, and, you know, we would have to really work for it.

From 1955 on, Mary and her friends would test the system. Usually,

Mary's younger brother Thomas would be involved. According to Mary, Thomas was a step ahead of most children in terms of racial awareness and assertiveness: "[He always had a] lot of depth, insight, and perception.… He would always be a little bit more aggressive and would recognize a lot for a young child, even as much, or moreso, than I did so far as racism was concerned.… We were sort of radicals, you might say, in that day."

Also Thomas's best friend, James Brittian, would come along sometimes, and Esphur Foster, perhaps with her younger brother Harold, "who was a lot like Thomas," and Delores Jones, Ida Battle, and Delores Harris.

The testing of segregation by young people such as these was a learning process, a process of their rite of passage into the adult world, and closely connected to the formation of their identities. Like all black children growing up under segregation, they became more deeply aware of "how ugly" racism really was as they began to experience it more directly in their own lives. Unlike other generations, they developed this appreciation at a time when segregation was being challenged and they could begin to feel the coming movement gathering itself.

Both the depth of racism and the possibility of challenging it became most clear to those young people who were able and willing to challenge authority. These were not the young people whose main concern was being acceptable and successful in a white world. They were not the aspiring Booker T. Washingtons of Chapel Hill. They were far more akin in spirit to W. E. B. Du Bois and Margaret Walker.[15]

When black youths "tested the system," they learned about racism in ways other young people did not. And just as importantly, they learned the way the system worked, its strengths and weaknesses. They also learned about themselves, for in many ways they were testing themselves, developing their resolve, their understanding, their skill. And they were finding each other, the ones who could be counted on, who felt the same way. They were, in fact, building a movement, although they may not ever have been fully conscious of that process.

For those who became engaged in this process of "doing something about it," that became the standard by which they measured all people, institutions, and beliefs. In particular, the moral leadership of the black community came under their scrutiny.

Like a number of the rebellious young people, Mary Mason developed many concerns about her religious faith and the church. She wondered how God could be who the church said he was and allow such hatred and discrimination toward black people. She knew, even as a child, that a person of

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[15] For a discussion of what kind of people initiate mass democratic movements see Goodwyn, xix: "Democratic movements are initiated by people who have individually managed to attain a high level of personal political self-respect. They are not resigned; they are not intimidated. To put it another way, they are not culturally organized to conform to established hierarchical forms."

any white ethnic group could come to America and eventually be accepted and respected, but that this was not true for an African American. So she questioned whether or not God was a racist.

Unlike many of the other young people her age, who she felt had similar questions but were afraid to say anything, Mary Mason asked her minister about this. She was in ninth grade.

Rev. J.R. Manley was the new minister at First Baptist Church, and Mary Mason liked him and had a high opinion of him:

> So far as the religious side of my life went there were a lot of questions and there were never any answers. And I thought, well finally, at last there's someone that would have some of these answers.
>
> And I remember on one occasion I was at church, and church was over, and I thought I'd wait, and I had this one question that I wanted to ask a minister or someone who I thought would know a little bit more about God, the meaning of God, where He came from, and what have you. And I asked him this question, and he was appalled. He asked me, "Why–how dare you ask such a question? You don't ever question God, you just believe him." He said, "I'm really disappointed in you and I think I'll just have to talk with your parents." And so, he called my parents, matter of fact he came by, and my mother being the person that she was… told him that she was disappointed in him 'cause he was a leader in the community and a religious person.… And if I had that question to ask, then he should have some answers to give me. Even if it was to the point that he did not know, then he should have been man enough to say, "Well, I don't know," but not reprimand me for asking a question that I felt that I needed to ask.

Mary believed she learned to be her own person, think for herself, and make her own decisions from her mother. And increasingly, a number of young black men and women were developing similar temperaments. And as they learned to live such lives, they were, in fact, developing both the inner strength and the bonds of solidarity that would enable them to carry forward the democratic struggle for self-determination.

Thomas Mason, Mary's younger brother remembered that he became part of a group of male friends with rebellious attitudes. "Despite age differences, those who stood out hung together." [16] They were intellectuals in the "sense of challenging the given norm." They were "critical thinkers," tended to be good students, and read a lot. In this way, they broadened their horizons.

The black schools, of course, were under the direct control of the white school board and superintendent, even though all the administrators and teachers were black. When Thomas scored in the ninety-eighth percentile on a

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[16] Thomas Mason, Interview by author, 17 April 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

standardized test, the superintendent, Mr. Howard Thompson, called Thomas into the office and in front of the black principal of Lincoln High School, Mr. C. A. McDougal, told him, "No nigger could score this high."[17]

So it was the exception, rather than the rule, when black youths would learn critical thinking or be encouraged to question authority by black teachers. The black educational system was in fact a hierarchy dominated by white power that at best taught aspiring black youths to succeed in a white world. While many of the teachers and administrators worked tirelessly to instill self-esteem and skills in black youths, they also taught deference to authority and acceptance of "the norm," at least for the time being. In all fairness, of course, if they had bucked the system openly they would have clearly risked losing their jobs.

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James Brittian was born November 26, 1944, a middle child out of six. Like most black children in those days, he was born at home. His family lived at that time in a big white house on West Rosemary not far from the Masons. A black midwife, Miss Minnie Thompson, delivered him and a good many others of his generation. He was raised mostly by his older sister and his aunts because his mother worked almost all of the time.[18]

When James was a child he would drive with his father out to Chatham County. There was a baseball field over near the Fearrington area, and on weekends there were games. "It was a regular affair," James recalled:

> My father and I, we would go there usually on weekends… and then everybody would eat their barbecue and drink their white liquor and have fun. And then they'd fight each other, and it would be brother against brother, families against families, those types of things.

During the week, James's father worked at the Texaco service station across from the bus station on Franklin Street. He did mostly mechanical work:

> Wasn't probably paid the wages that was doing. And on weekends he drank a lot. There was a lot of arguing and those type of things. And then it gets to a point where I guess he felt that he could not be a man and take care of his family, because if you don't feel good about yourself and your situation, then you don't feel like you're taking care of your family fully. And that type of thing went on.

Like Elizabeth Cotton's father, Thomas Brittian had a difficult time dealing with the rage he felt at his daily humiliations and lack of opportunity. Sadly, he

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[17] ibid.

[18] James R. Brittian, Interview by author, 27 November 1990, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

turned his anger against himself, and that also hurt his family. Nor was his story exceptional. As James' account of weekend drinking and brawling attested, certain kinds of destructive behavior were commonplace in the black community.[19]

Around 1954, when James was ten and the Supreme Court overturned "separate but equal," Thomas Brittian left his family. He stayed in Chapel Hill, but he did not stay in touch. James remembered: "Our communication afterwards usually probably during that time, once separation occurred then there was very little communication."

At the time, James thought as a child. Undoubtedly he was hurt, and he coped the best he could. To grow up in a household disrupted by drunkenness and fighting, and to be abandoned by a parent–these things create deep and everlasting wounds. Still, what a person does with such wounds is at least partially a matter of individual character and choice. James Brittian leaned into his pain and turned his life into an ongoing crusade against the system that drove his father down.

In later years, James thought as an adult. He had spent much time pondering why so many black men got drunk on weekends, fought "brother against brother," and abandoned their families. He noted, for instance, that black parents did not talk about their jobs:

> It was very rare, I would think, if during that period… a black father or mother would discuss their work, because I don't think they feel good about doing it.… Even during that time they must have felt that they could do things better than that, but the opportunity wasn't there, and they knew the opportunity wasn't there, so there was no fuss about it. So when you are denied and you're limited, and you know that you have the skills to do something else, you don't feel good about it, so you don't want to discuss it.… I never heard anybody discussing about their work in any household that I ever went into, regardless of whatever it was. And even those people that worked at the university–I mean, it was bad then and it's bad now.

Whether black parents did not talk about their work because they felt bad about themselves, or because they were trying to shield their children from the harsh reality of segregation, they were not successful in hiding the truth of things completely. James learned what it meant to work for white employers because he and his friends loved to go to the movies:

> Say, if you wanted some money for the weekend or something like that, then your friends, you'd go where your father and you'd go where their father worked. You'd go everywhere all of your friends' parents worked so

[19] The destructive behavior in the black community was, in many respects, the mirror image of destructive behavior in the white community, i.e. the culture of domination.

> that you could get money that Friday to go to the movies. [The movie started at] seven o'clock and they may not get home in time. So you heard all of these things.

I had a good friend of mine whose father worked at the First Baptist Church on Columbia Street. The minister there didn't call him by his name. I mean, it was anything that they could think of at that time. I mean, they didn't care whether or not they called them by their names, or whatever their name was. It was whatever they could think of. "Go tell John"–his name may have been Joe. "Go tell Mike"–anything they could think of, you know, to say to these people, to black people. So therefore, you have what you call an overflow, an aftereffect that was brought back into the home. Therefore, the black families were disrupted. And the same thing still today it happens.

James also noticed that "there were very few… male head of households." And even when both parents were present in the household, he observed that men very seldom spoke for the family:

> If there was a male, black male head of household, and he and his wife lived together–for example, if they had a daughter–you never talked to the father about taking the daughter out. You always talked to the mother. So the females were looked upon as the head of household. They were the matriarches of the black household. And very rare you will talk to a father. I hardly saw that in any situation with any of my friends or anything. It was the mother that did the talking for the house, because the mother was always recognized, … Now! I know *now* why it happened.… If the insurance man came to your house, which was white, then he talked to the female. And that was to, not to ever allow the black male to know that he had any type of authority, and that's the reason for that.

Segregation did not impact men and women in all of the same ways. In particular, those who had power in the South, white men, saw black men as physical threats and sexual competitors as well as sources of labor. They saw black women, on the other hand, as laborers and potential sexual partners or victims. Not infrequently, particularly among the more well-to-do, white men felt a closeness to black women, having been raised by them. Consequently, segregation maintained its power by concentrating its most lethal physical and psychological repression on men. While parents worried about their daughters being raped by white men, they worried about their sons being killed. And while black women were generally accorded the traditional female role of nurturer by white society, black men were generally denied the traditional male role of provider and protector.

For these reasons, part of the black male response to the rising tide of black struggle in the 1960s was motivated by a deeply felt desire to reclaim the dignity of manhood. This dynamic does not seem to have been present, or at least it was not as strong, for women. Nevertheless, when 1960 came, women rallied to the cause in numbers at least as great as men.

James' mother, Mary Brittian, was a domestic worker. She worked for several different families when James was young, but her longest employment was with Bob Cox, chairman of the Jaycees and a former Carolina football player who teamed with the famous Charlie "Choo Choo" Justice.

Every weekday she would leave home about 6:30 A.M. and travel to a part of Chapel Hill known as Greenwood. This was also home to Sandy McClamroch, prominent businessman and mayor, and James Taylor, dean of the Medical School. James remembered:

> All of them lived in Greenwood at that particular time. That was the social elite white people lived in the Greenwood area. There was no Lakeshore Drive and all these other developments that, you know, you see now.

It would be six-thirty or seven in the evening when Mrs. Brittian would get home. Then on most weekends from September through March or April, she would baby-sit for students or for her regular employers while they attended sporting or social events. She also took in laundry. In this way the energy of her days was drained so that well-to-do whites could enjoy life, so they could be "free."

This helps to explain why James Brittian became an activist in the freedom struggle: his parents, and the household peace he deserved as a child, were taken away from him by the system of white domination. Like other black children, he observed the disrespect that fathers received from white employers. He felt the rage and despair his father felt when he experienced the shouting, the drinking, the fighting. He knew that his mother was not there to take care of him because she had to be in the homes of the rich white people taking care of their kids, cooking their meals, doing their laundry. He understood these things, even if he had no words to express them until he was older. And he coped. But the fact that James pondered these issues and devoted his entire life to struggling against such injustice demonstrates that he was deeply moved, even as a child, by the social experiences of his youth.

By the time James was eleven or twelve he was able to put words to much of what he saw that was unjust. James was Thomas Mason's running buddy and best friend, "lifelong, from toddlers up." His knowledge of the world was enlarged by his contact with that family. He participated when Thomas accompanied his older sister, Mary, on their small skirmishes with segregation in the mid-1950s. And even though they were younger, he and Thomas began to hang with Harold Foster. They were kindred spirits, and together they sought out reading material about black history and culture and discused how to challenge segregation.

James recalled that the Supreme Court decision of 1954 was discussed in school, but it was clear to him that black adults were still very cautious about talking openly about such things. A few years later, however, a new sense of possibility seemed to take hold of the youth and the black community as a whole. James remembered:

> Well, I think that teachers more or less talked about the 1954 Supreme Court decision not openly. Ok. They didn't teach it. The only thing they would say is "You need to be prepared to walk in the door when the opportunity comes because that's going to happen one day, and if you're not prepared then there won't be an opportunity for you."
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> Then there was talk about civil rights.… When I can remember it was probably the late fifties. Even though the Supreme Court had made the decision, I think it was around fifty-eight, fifty-nine when everybody begin, well most of the black kids, the black community began to–I think they were relieved, and they really began to believe that something was going to happen because of the boycotts, and the demonstrations, and the marches and things that had begin to take place.

What such comments indicate is that it was not the decision of the Supreme Court per se that really brought black youths and adults to the point of believing that things might change. It was also black struggle–Montgomery, Little Rock, Greensboro.

Although such feelings were not common among black youths in Chapel Hill during the late 1950s, James Brittian and Thomas Mason began actively talking about how to strike some blow at segregation when they were twelve or thirteen. They discussed this issue, including the possible use of the sitdown tactic, with each other and with the older Mason children and a few other friends. Thomas Mason recalled:

> James and I had discussed something like [the Greensboro sitdown protests] before. I mean, we wanted, someday we *would* do it. Before the Greensboro thing ever took place, I believe, we talked about this, *what* we were gonna–We knew then that we had to take some action, but we didn't really know what we were going to do. We had considered [the lunch counter tactic], but we didn't know exactly what we were going to do. We knew we were going to challenge it some way.

Although James and Thomas felt motivated to make some kind of move against segregation by the time they were twelve or thirteen, most of the other youths did not. The two friends knew their own minds and they sought out other like-minded associates:

> Well, for the most part, James and I had our own, you know, role down… so we were expandin' out. And… there were just a few people who… were aware, you know, who were not confined as a result of lack of exposure to different things. And one of the people that, he was a little older, that we could talk to was Harold Foster, that was Esphur's brother. William Cureton at times, you know. He was not *always* there.… There were other people who we'd talk with but finally decided that, "Hey, we can't talk with these people because their own objection is that `This is morally wrong. This is, you know, you just don't do things like this.…'"

> There was a relative, David Mason, who occasionally participated in these kinds of things… but not very often. Weren't, just weren't very many.… I used to talk to my sisters about it.… James and I and my sisters and brothers, you know, occasionally talked about things like that. And they were very favorable, but we had our own little thing too, you know.[20]

Thomas and James, then, learned to protest because the conditions of black life in Chapel Hill called out for redress, because they were encouraged by older siblings and friends, and because they were aware that a rebellious trend was growing throughout black America in response to new historical conditions. Most importantly, they decided to rebel and in that way transformed themselves, turning their lives toward freedom.

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Harold Foster was born in 1942. He grew up with his mother and two older sisters on Cotton Street in the heart of Pottersfield. According to lore passed on to him from his mother, the area had been "a graveyard site for paupers, but they eventually moved the freed slaves over there and they began to set up residences."[21] It was an historic neighborhood in other ways as well. Although Elizabeth Cotton moved up north before Harold was born, she had grown up on Cotton Street singing "them old worldly songs." Her mother, Louisa Nevill, had owned the lot on the corner of Cotton Street and McDade Street. During Harold Foster's time Mrs. Fanny Bradshaw's house stood on this corner. It was under the street light in front of her house, sitting on her rock wall late at night, that Foster and his friends came to know each other's minds and solved "the problems of the world." Across the street from the Foster home, Granny Flack sat on her porch caring for the new generation.

Historically, Pottersfield was economically and socially better off than the other black sections of Chapel Hill. In 1920 there was a greater percentage of home ownership in Pottersfield and a higher proportion of "mulattoes."[22] During the1930s researchers noted a higher standard of living in Pottersfield and a relatively high level of church attendance. Since these patterns probably held true in the 1950s, it could very well be that Pottersfield children might have had the opportunity to observe differences in social standing moreso than children in other areas. Harold Foster, at least, recalled that he and his mother were acutely aware of such differences.

It seems that from an early age, Harold Foster was aware of his family's status and achievements in relation to others in the community. He put a tremendous amount of energy into observing social relationships and expanding

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[20] ibid.

[21] Foster interview, 1993. All subsequent quotes in this chapter from Harold Foster are from the author's 1993 interview unless otherwise noted.

[22] 1920 manuscript census

his "knowledge base," as he called it. This was not mere curiosity. Rather, it stemmed from the concern he learned from his mother about the family's standing in the community and how this could effect their survival. Harold noted, for instance, that Granny Flack's sister had married a Robinson. As Harold was growing up he heard people talk about how Mr. Robinson had sent his daughters to "finishing school" in Sedalia.

> But I had contrasted that with the fact that even though they had gone and done all this, none of them had made no particular mark in the area and they all eventually left, and left the home place in a shambles and all. In contrast to my *mother* who didn't finish high school, but had to go out and start workin', and she became very respected in the community and, like, sort of a leader in that she worked hard, saved her money, and gained the confidence of people who helped her eventually build a home.

Another neighbor up the street was Mr. Ephriam Mitchell who was married to "this high yellow woman" and "they had a influence in town." Harold believed that Mr. Mitchell "had a big influence in the First Baptist Church which was up on Franklin Street at that time."

> They were somebody that you didn't try to get too friendly with. They were to be seen at a distance. Mr. Mitchell had this air about him–there were times you didn't go up in this big field and play because he didn't want us up there, or something like that. You always had to handle yourself very gingerly around them.

Foster later came to believe that part of the reason his mother warned him against acting up around Mr. Mitchell was because they could not afford to "make waves" in the neighborhood. They were living in a house that did not belong to them. It had been abandoned, and the people moved far away. Mrs. Foster had moved in and fixed it up. But Harold speculated that his mother felt it was important not to aggravate any of the older people in the neighborhood who knew the history of the property. Likewise, it was a matter of "not wantin' to be seen in a bad light by influential people in the community, especially someone who had close ties to the Baptist church, which was a very powerful influence."

In contrast to the Mitchells, Foster liked and respected his next-door neighbor, Mr. Ed Stewart. "He owned a horse, a cow, he plowed the fields–he would turn the fields up for people to plant." Harold remembered him as "a big, tall, very muscular man. He earned his livin' by the sweat of his brow with his muscles." Rebecca Stewart, Ed's wife, was a bootlegger and many people, including the two black policemen of Chapel Hill, congregated at the Stewart house to partake of her "white lightenin'."

Mr. Stewart owned the lot on the corner of Cotton and Brooks Street. He often contracted with the university to haul dirt in his wagon or dig a ditch. He also dug graves. Harold liked Mr. Stewart because he was very friendly. He would let the kids watch him work, let them ride on his horse, sit in his wagon.

"He never seemed to feel that we were in his way, or botherin' him." And Harold admired Mr. Stewart as well, perhaps because of the way he commanded respect in the community because he was self-sufficient. "He didn't have to work for a white man," Harold recalled.

From his childhood neighborhood experience, then, Harold Foster began to feel a distance from the people who had standing and influence and a closeness to the laboring people who did not display a sense of superiority. He began to make the connection in his mind between material advantages and social attitudes. In other words, he began to form concepts of class and status and a sense of where his family fit into the social structure and with whom he felt solidarity. The people who had not "made a mark" in the community were the ones sent to finishing school, not the ones like his mother who had few advantages and had to work for everything. The man who was unfriendly, who was bothered by the children, and who might harm the family if aggravated was a person of influence in the church, a person who had married "up" in the skin color hierarchy, a leading citizen. The man whom Harold Foster liked and admired had a friendly and sharing attitude, dug graves and "turned the fields up for people to plant," and was not dependent on the white man.

In these early years, much of what Harold Foster learned about the social structure of the black community, as well as basic life values, came from his mother. Even though he rebelled against his mother's authority from an early age, and saw his leadership of the black struggle in the sixties as a challenge to "all the things she feared," there is no doubt that she was the most important early influence on his character.

Haddie Boothe grew up in Chapel Hill in the 1920s and 1930s. Her parents both died when she was very young and she was raised by a white family. What her experience was growing up as a black child in a white family is not known. She did not talk about it with her children.[23] She did not finish high school and married Charley Foster as a teenager. They had three children by the time she was twenty one. When Harold was growing up, his mother worked as a domestic and his father worked as a cook at a Chapel Hill restaurant.

Mrs. Foster set an example for her children of how hard work and perseverance could enable a person of few means to prevail. By being active in civic affairs, a member of the Elks, director of the First Baptist youth chorus, and especially by being president of the PTA, Mrs. Foster taught her son about leadership and the value of being involved in community efforts. By getting Harold to follow along with the text of her PTA speeches as she practiced her presentations, she helped him to learn to read and to speak in public. She also emphasized the importance of getting a good education. While Harold was growing up she worked toward her high school degree studying at home out of textbooks titled "High-school Subjects Self-Taught." And she spoke to Harold about the importance of learning:

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[23] Esphur Foster, et. al., Interview by author and Jennifer Alford, 14 April 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording inn the possession of the author.

> [She placed] a very high value, a supreme value [on education], and especially for me. It was always "Study, study, study. Learn. Get it in your head. Because if you get it in your head, nobody can take it from you." So there was a big emphasis on learnin' and havin' things in your brain rather than acquirin' material possessions. Because she always warned me that people could take things from you. They would tax 'em from under you, and if they couldn't handle you, they would eventually kill you. Because, of course, this probably had been her experiences in life of things she had seen happen to black men. So education had a high priority for her right up to the day she died. She always said, "Just stay in school if you don't do nothin' else."… This was repeated because most blacks have always put a great emphasis on education, that, you know, "We can educate ourselves out of this problem."

And Harold did excel in school. He got A's for everything except conduct in 4th grade. Whatever the teachers gave out, he mastered. He was the teacher's pet. He helped others. He was "showcased" by the teachers and given a separate seat. And he always volunteered to help the teacher. He was being groomed for leadership.

But at the same time his mother was teaching him to develop his critical judgment with regard to blacks. She had always taught Harold not to think he was better than others, and she was very critical of those in the community who exhibited self-importance:

> She also saw the shortcomings of blacks, especially in situations, like, with teachers and certain other people who were supposed to be leadin' blacks in the community. They came in for critical evaluation too.… If I'd said somethin' about 'em that was like, sounded like I was givin' them some praise, there was always somethin' forthcomin' to show that they weren't (chuckle) as up there on a pedestal as I thought. 'Cause I was goin' by sense impressions, and of course, when you go by sense impressions you can always be taken as a sucker 'cause you'll go for, you know. So certain people had to be downsized in order for me not to want to imitate, because really, deep down within, they weren't that much.… And so when I confronted these people [in the sixties] I had already had a mindset on them.… [Before the sixties], if I had any kind of dealin's with them, I still had a prejudiced view on 'em because I had gotten it from my mother. This included teachers, and preachers, and regular townsfolk too.

Harold Foster realized that the knowledge his mother had about these leading members of the community did not come from "sense impressions." She was president of the PTA, so she dealt with the teachers a lot. She was secretary for various civic organizations, so she knew the civic leaders:

> She would not pass this judgment on 'em until she had gotten close to 'em and actually saw them close up. It was sort of like you could see that these people are well-to-do and this, that, and the other, but when you find out how they got their money you want to spit on them, you know. (chuckle) So it was like that. Like, after she got close up to find out how these people really were, then they came in for very critical evaluation.

While Mrs. Foster taught Harold to be skeptical toward influential black people, she warned him against white people generally. If you "got too high and too powerful," if you "outmaneuvered the white man in a way that offended him, he would call you a uppity nigger and kill you or somethin'. And all this was smartin' off the occurrences of things like the death of [Mack Charles] Parker, they talked about him, and Emmett Till, which drove home the fact that whites thought they always had open season on blacks."[24]

> White people were to be outwardly respected, and to be stayed away from as much as possible, but if you did have to encounter 'em say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir," and be honest and go on about your business. Because "White people could do some things that could really hurt you," as witnessed by so and so, and so and so, and this incident, and this incident.…

The lessons that Haddie Foster taught her son gave him a knowledge of the social structure of the black community that was a step ahead of others his age. This kind of knowledge was part of what eventually made Foster a leader:

> She would constantly point out to me the different sections of town: "These people stay here, and they think this way about us, and this way about these people here.… And I would tell the other people that, and they wouldn't believe it. And then we'd go check it out and it would be proved. So when it came down to giving an analysis of different parts of the community and who they were, they looked to me for that…[people like] Bill Cureton, and eventually the white community. They saw that I had the most experience in all the communities of the black community.[25]

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[24] A young black man named Mack Charles Parker was accused of raping a white woman in Poplarville, Mississippi in 1959. He was taken by a white mob, beaten, murdered, and thrown in the Pearl River. This lynching was publicized around the nation, and despite evidence presented by the FBI to a grand jury, "the jury refused to act on the matter or even to acknowledge that a lynching had occurred." See, Fred Powledge, *Free at Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It* (n.p.: Little, Brown and Company, 1991; reprint, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Harper Perennial ed., 1992.), 191.

[25] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

So Foster gained his ability to analyze social dynamics and his awareness of the need for self-protection initially from his mother. He also gained this knowledge through his own experience as he grew older.

> I had a paper route that carried me through all the [communities] when I was eleven or twelve. I had been a child prodigy in journalism, so I had written things for the school paper in fourth or fifth grade, you know, school, class reporter. And I went on from that to have a paper route. Well, at that time my mother started tellin' me about thinkin' I was better than people. You know, "Don't do that.… Go ahead and get along with everybody, but defend yourself, protect yourself, cause you're out there by yourself. You don't have a father, you don't have no brothers." And that's the way I came up.… I had to make it on my own, gain no sympathy from nobody else.[26]

Looking back on this growing period, Harold Foster described the black community of the 1950s as a place of ignorance as well as poverty. He felt that there was a great deal of sifting of rumor, hearsay, and other bits of information that a child had to do growing up, "and if you have no way of siftin' it you grow up believin' that what you heard is true."

In his early years Foster relied a good deal on his mother to help him sift things. But as he grew older he developed his own ways of deepening his knowledge. He read a lot, and he extended his reach into all the black communities of Chapel Hill. This developing self-reliance was accelerated by his early break with his mother.

> Something happened, and my mother came home and said "How did this happen?" I said, "I didn't know. I didn't do it?" [I was] maybe six or seven, seven or eight. She said, "You did do it, and I'm gonna whip you for it." And I cried, and against all my protestations she still whipped me. What I felt then was I felt betrayed–because I had put all my trust in her, and I believed everything she said, and she couldn't do no wrong. She was never wrong. She was always right. But in this instance when she was wrong, and I knew that she was wrong because I hadn't done this, I cried, and in spite of that she still whipped me. And so I made up my mind then that–I just lost faith. I lost trust. I felt that I was left to my own. So anything that she said not to do, I was gonna challenge it. And I remember becoming very rebellious at that time.…

All young children feel that their lives depend on their parents, and in this case Harold had only one parent he could count on. Harold's father was gone from home most of the time, even though he and Haddie Foster did not get

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[26] ibid.

formally divorced until 1956 or 1957. Harold thought his father was incarcerated part of that time, but he wasn't sure. In any case, he had few memories of Charley Foster.

> I didn't remember too much about my father except as a drunk. And he came to symbolize alcoholism to me. I remember seein' him get drunk, and fall down the street, and crawl the rest of the way home. I remember him bein' drunk and fightin' my mother, and me bitin' him on the leg. I must have been three or four.… I remember him comin' home one day severely burned because he had gone to work drunk and grease had splashed all on him.… He was a cook.… And that's just about it. He never said anythin' that left an indelible mark on my mind. Never spent time with me playin' games or anything else. Except I remember one time, I was very small when he came, [he] had been away to camp. He would always send these camp pictures home that he had taken, because he was a cook for the boy scout camp. So they would always include him in the pictures. So I remember him with the white outfit on, and everything. When he came home one time I remember him bouncin' me up on him and I had tied a string around the end of his, of his nipples on his titties, (chuckle) or whatever you call 'em and I pulled on it (laughter). But other than that, that was the only moment that I ever shared with him that had any humor to it.

So young Harold really had put all his trust in his mother and had tried to live up to her expectations. Like the teachers and preachers, Mrs. Foster was like a god to Harold as he was growing up. And he depended on her completely. But the sense of betrayal he felt following his whipping resulted in a momentous reordering.

> It made me lose the supreme faith and trust that I had in her to be right. So I started questioning things she said, and started lookin' for things to prove that she was wrong, even academic wise.… I just never got over that, I never got over that. I don't know if it was the hand of fate, or what. But I grew up to challenge whatever was said, and whatever was put down as edict, because I had been betrayed in this one instance.… The challenge to segregation was an extension of the challenge to a lot of other theories that she had.…

Harold relied less and less on his mother and other adults, and more on himself. He began running with a group of male friends who shared many of his feelings. They gathered on the Rock Wall near Foster's house, during the summers especially, and talked late into the night.

> We went up there to The Rock, and that's where we had our arguments, and fusses, and fights and got to know each other. It was right there at the corner of McDade and Cotton. It was a stone rock wall like the same work they did for the university. This lady, Miss Fannie, Miss Fannie

> Bradshaw, yeah, she was a lady that, you know, she sort of looked out, she had a daughter had a lot of children so she kind of looked out for all the children in the neighborhood. She took in laundry from the university students. Like, she specialized in doin' shirts and they would wash and iron shirts all day long. She had these grandchildren that we played with and there was a rock wall there, and we all would go up there. [It was] right in front of her house.

Harold's sisters did not go up to the Rock Wall. They weren't allowed, according to Esphur. "I didn't know they weren't allowed to go," Harold recalled. "I know they just didn't, because it was somethin' that the guys did."

The young men played sports together, sometimes competing with white youths or sneaking into UNC football games. They talked about segregation and sized up black institutions like the church and the schools, finding the leadership of the preachers and teachers on this central issue lacking. And they began to gain a sense of themselves as being the young leaders from an historic part of town.

Harold consciously set out to compete with adults on a knowledge basis and to challenge whatever they "put down as edict." He and his friends sought out sources of black history and culture beyond what was offered in school. Reading, in particular, broadened Foster's knowledge of the outside world. Harold began to read at three years old, and he did a lot of it. Eventually he found black history.

> I learned a lot about black history. But, you know, when I read about black history it was like, I felt like I was in on something that was a secret. And that everybody didn't know about this. I guess that's because I felt some kind of shame. Felt like, what I was feelin' when I read it wasn't to be revealed. But when I acted out I felt that everybody should know why I was actin' out, that they should know what the history of our people had been.

This knowledge was different from the black history Foster had learned in school. That version had not penetrated deeply the cause of things, and had taken the viewpoint that black people should be proud of men like Booker T. Washington who came "up out of slavery." But Foster's vision for himself did not start from coming up out of slavery. As a child he was excited by the possibility of learning, developing his talents, and doing. While most other young black men were following in the footsteps of their fathers, for whom work had of necessity taken precedence over education, Harold followed in the footsteps of his mother and sisters.

In Foster's mind this interest in intellectual matters was associated with the female influences in his life. He felt that he was excluded from a lot of things that his mother and sisters would talk about. And he felt that more was expected of them:

> Opportunities for them would be greater.… So the problem was what do you say, or how do you raise a male in a matriarchal society where there are mostly females.… I was constantly surrounded by female influence and there was no male influence. It's just lucky that the things that I chose to be interested in were intellectual things, like the newspaper, like writing. Other people who had that bent had no avenue to pursue it like I did. People just didn't, you didn't walk around talkin' about being a poet."

Foster believed that this was so because the nature of Jim Crow society forced more young men to be sacrificed "at the education altar" than young women:

> It was ok for the boy to drop out of school, but the girls had to finish. You find that more boys were sacrificed at the education altar than girls. That's why we had more girls finishin' high school than boys, because boys would drop out and try to get some kind of work or help the family income, or something. So, that's what I'm sayin' that more was expected of them in terms of bein' prepared for opportunities. If there were ones, they were to go to the black woman. Which is, I guess, part of the matriarchal system, as I look at it now. The woman represented more stability, she was to be the stablin' factor in the family, because, I guess she was not as endangered, or at risk as much as the male. Bein' that the black male was the target of denigration in society.

Perhaps for these reasons Mrs. Foster encouraged her son to concentrate on getting an education rather than accumulating material possessions. In any case, although his mother and sisters could not provide him with the same kind of counseling or support that a father might have provided, they did support his intellectual interests. These interests came to embody what Harold Foster wanted to be at an early age:

> Somewhere along the line I'd read the boys' biography of Benjamin Franklin. And that moved me. I was moved by Benjamin Franklin and I may have made a critical mistake of reading his biography before I read Booker T. Washington's. [Washington's] biography paled up against Benjamin Franklin in terms of what I would have like to have been like.

Foster did not see Benjamin Franklin as a white man, but rather as somebody he admired and wanted to be like. He was more of an inspiration than a role model. Booker T. Washington, being the foremost proponent of "industrial education," had not encouraged young black men to develop their minds or pursue higher education. Nor did Foster like the man's attitude:

> I liked the way [Franklin] was able to be talented in many directions. He was an achiever. He was inventive. He was a thinker. He was always doin'. Those things turned me on. I was moved by those things.

> Whereas with Booker T. Washington, I saw him as a black who had been in slavery and overcame the odds to get educated. But some of his methods seemed soft to me.
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> When you're comin' up that age, and you read, and want to see how men defended themselves, up against other men. And I remember Booker T. Washington got knocked down and his response to it was tell the person he didn't have time to fight him back because he could spend his time in a more useful way bein' constructive. And he also made the statement about not lettin' a person bring you so low as to make you hate him. And that kind of theme was to repeat itself when I saw the Jackie Robinson story, about how Jackie Robinson was to have to eat crow and be totally non-violent in light of all this violence that people wanted to perpetrate on him, just because he wanted to play baseball. And then to hear it again when I read Martin Luther King's book. This thing of nonviolence is deballin' a man. But then I've grown to understand that it takes more fortitude and guts to be non-violent in the face of violence than it does to strike back.

But as a teenager Harold Foster did not appreciate the courage of nonviolence. He was determined to learn to defend himself against a hostile world and against hurt feelings.

> That's why I went on to play football and stuff, because I wanted to learn to be tough. I wanted to stop bein' sensitive and havin my feelin's hurt because people said things. I wanted to be able to take those things and let 'em roll off me like water, you know, off a duck's back. I wanted to be tough. I wanted to see just how tough I could get.

In this way, young Foster extended himself, widened his horizons, pushed himself to take on new challenges, and developed both the means and the attitude for increased assertiveness. And when the challenge of the Greensboro sitdown protests occurred, Harold Foster was prepared by his broad knowledge and associations, his standing among his peers, his temperament, and his experience challenging authority to lead.

In Chapel Hill's black community no issue of race, class, gender, generation, attitude, or point of view stood outside the dynamic of the color line. Black children in the 1940s and 1950s learned from their parents and other adults at first, but increasingly they learned from their own direct experience. In particular, young black men were taught that they were the main target of white hostility. And it was constantly repeated to them that their prospects, even their very survival, required learning how not to offend white people. Most of them learned, as well, that their role in life was to labor with their hands, although a lucky few could "make it in a white world."

Increasingly, however, the teachings and warnings of black adults struck the younger generation as out of touch with reality. They could sense a new day breaking, and they were not content to accept the narrow and limited path

prescribed for them.

As Harold Foster grew older, he came to understand the way that black adult attitudes toward the youth resulted from complacency and subservience to white domination. Initially, his rebellion was personal, but increasingly it became political. And just as segregation targeted the black male as a way of controlling the entire black population, Foster and his young male friends came to see their rebellion as a struggle for manhood as well as for black freedom.

At the same time, a rebellion against segregation had to be a rebellion against black authority as well. Those whom the children had seen almost as gods–their parents, their teachers, their preachers–had to be challenged, knocked down a notch or two, and seen as merely human.

Harold Foster was prepared by his whole life to lead such a struggle. His mother had made sure he did not idolize the traditional leaders of the black community even when they picked him out for special praise and grooming. She had taught him to resist the temptation to feel he was better than others simply because he could do better than others. And, appropriately enough, he had freed himself of deference to his mother. She had taught him about society, but he chose a different path of dealing with society. She had taught Harold that white people were vicious and not to antagonize them. But she had been wrong when she beat him and he believed she was wrong about how to deal with the problem of white domination.

Harold summed up his mother's attitude as "tryin' to stay on the good side of white people," and the question of the black freedom struggle as "how much of a troublemaker can some little nigger boys be before goin' to jail?"[27] He and his friends rebelled against adult authority not because they were influenced by "radical white college students" or because "young people always rebel." It was because adult authority had proved to be arbitrary and confining, and it was out of step with the aspirations of their generation.

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Conscious efforts to build a movement in Chapel Hill were preceded by long years of development that took place primarily on the level of personal experience rather than political action. Awareness developed only gradually. In part this was the result of increased experience that came with age. Awareness also depended, however, on whether the status quo was being questioned or challenged by people of any age. And while movements developed in all of North Carolina's larger cities, the same was not true for small towns. It is important to ask, therefore, what made Chapel Hill different. Essentially, what this came down to was the question of leadership.

We have examined the biographies of several of the key individuals who initiated the movement in Chapel Hill. It is now necessary to examine the process by which these individuals came together and began to engage in protest.

What gave birth to this core was a particular group dynamic arising from

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[27] ibid.

the broader growth dynamics of a generation of black youths in Chapel Hill. What follows is an attempt to sketch the broader generational dynamics in Chapel Hill, followed by a discussion of how a friendship group of black, male teenagers evolved into a social force. It is an investigation of how rebellious ideas formed and came to action among a generation of black youths.

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Many young black children were aware of the rules of segregation long before they developed a strong sense of the injustice of those rules. Shirley Davis, for instance, who later became an activist, initially gave respect to the "white only" signs "… because I was just taught you obey your elders."[28] William Cureton, one of those in the first assault on Colonial Drug, did not question the Jim Crow order when he was in fourth grade because his teachers seemed to accept it. When the teachers would venture out with their students into the larger white society, Cureton and the other children learned about the racial dynamics of Jim Crow, but they also learned to accept them:

> We'd have these ah, the concerts. And we would go downtown from Northside [Elementary School], *all* the way down Church Street, holdin' hands, side by side, two together. And the teacher would always tell us, "I don't want anybody actin' up. I don't want anybody to do this. I'm gonna get you when"–and on, and on. And we were made *aware* that white people were observin' us. And this would happen sometime in May.… So, we would go all the way down to the university, to Memorial Hall. You know how long a walk that is? But somehow, it never bothered us. It never bothered us that, "We should have some buses. The white kids don't have to walk this far." I don't think that was on anybody's mind. Then when we got there, we sat in the balcony, automatic, "In the balcony." You know, that's for "you folks." And we noticed that.[29]

Cureton felt that elementary age kids noticed, but accepted. And he felt that it was not just young kids at that time, but also most adults in Chapel Hill, who accepted the given order. He could not recall any critics of segregation who spoke out during his childhood years:

> I'm bringin' all this in to show you that we had our own little thing, so to speak, where kids were concerned and goin' to school. We just never saw maybe the racism in it, how racist it was. I think during that period of time everybody, sort of, so far as I know, everybody sort of felt that that's the way it was. But somewhere, somewhere in another city

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[28] Shirley Pendergraph Davis, Interview by author, 2 March 1994, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[29] William Cureton, Interview by author, 19 April 1991, by telephone to New York City, tape recording in the possession of the author.

> somewhere, you probably had the people like Thurgood Marshall… and Adam Clayton Powell saying, "Hey, this is *wrong*." Of course they were older, and of course they could see that it was wrong. But then, sometimes, if a person has deception at an early age, no matter how old they are, then, ah… and I'm also talking about the people who went into town, you know, older people, who were probably Thurgood's and those age also. I'm just thinking, everybody around there just said, you know, this is the way it is. I don't know anybody who was doing anything, any kind of radical move.

As black teenagers in Chapel Hill got older, and ventured out on their own, they became aware of segregation in new ways. Charles Foushee, a leading activist during the 1963-64 period, was puzzled when he realized in the mid-1950s at age eleven or twelve that he could not sit down in Colonial Drug:

> … all this time we had been going to John's. My brother went. My oldest sister went before my brother. Everybody, you know. All blacks just, you'd get your medicine from him. You'd get everything from him. I mean, he was like a doctor. You know, you just go in and you'd tell him what's wrong, colds and everything.… But all of a sudden, I was puzzled about it. "Can we sit down?" and he said "no." I couldn't believe, you know.[30]

Hilliard Caldwell, who graduated from Lincoln in 1956 and was one of the young adults who helped provide leadership to the movement in 1960, recalled that teenagers knew segregation was wrong in the early 1950s, but accepted it.

> We talked about it among ourselves as young teenagers, the inequity, the unjust system, but we never–we didn't have the means, or the monies, or the know-how to [challenge segregation]. We always said among ourselves it was wrong. We always thought it was wrong to have two high schools. We always thought it was wrong that we had to get a hotdog on, that there was two bus stations, that there were still signs up–"black" and "white," "colored" here, "colored" there.… We had to ride in the back of the bus to go to Durham to Sears Roebucks. And, you know, being in a southern town we just assumed that was the way it was supposed to be. Whether it was right or not, we accepted it. We accepted it because it, the way to do was to accept it. We knew it was wrong. It hurt. It really hurt being black, and having to follow these, you know go into the colored side or drink water from the colored fountain.[31]

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[30] Charles Foushee, Interview by Tina Harrison and Ken Hamilton, 5 June 1974, interview 11-12, transcript,Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[31] Hilliard Caldwell, Interview by author, 26 March 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in

According to Harold Foster, teenagers had joked about segregation over the years, as in comments like, "You may be lighter skinned than me, but neither one of us can get served at the Carolina Inn.… That happened long before the sit-ins in Greensboro. So that thought was there, that there was not public accommodations." Yet many youths, perhaps most, accepted the status quo. But among the larger group of black youth some made a practice of challenging segregation. Although the practice does not seem to have been widespread, it happened throughout the 1950s, and not just among Harold Foster and his group of male friends from Pottersfield. Older youths and young women acted in rebellious ways during the 1950s as well. Such people, who were young adults in 1960, were prepared by their earlier experience to jump into the movement as soon as it started. In the same way, the fact that Foster and his neighborhood friends did challenge segregation from an early age prepared them to initiate the sitdown protests in 1960.

Foster recalled that throughout the 1950s he and his friends would disrespect the rules of segregation when they could get away with it:

> And like I said before, these signs of "colored" and "white," we had always sabotaged that anyway. When we didn't think anybody was lookin', we would drink out of the white, with the sign that says "white," or we'd go on the white side of the bus station, slip into the bathroom, and things like that. Wherever we saw it, and got a chance to sabotage it, we did. And when we got caught the people would say, "Well, I'm going to tell your mother about it. And then [there would be] a threat of puttin' the policeman on us, because the policemen would uphold the laws of segregation. And of course your mother would tell you why you had to obey segregated laws. So there was always this threat of turnin' us over to authorities. But we never had it organized, or we never did it when it got notoriety.[32]

The efforts of Foster and his friends were not necessarily always conscious challenges to segregation. In part, they simply sensed that they could get away with things because of the influence of the university on race relations, and they took advantage.

One of Foster's best friends, William Cureton, recalled that as early as eighth grade their interests were somewhat more far ranging than the average. When Ralph Bunche, the first black recipient of a Nobel Prize, came to speak at the university, five of the young teens accompanied by Clarence Merritt's older cousin, who had a car, attended. "We went, and we sat down. I don't remember any particular stares, or anything like that," Cureton recalled. And while this

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the possession of the author.

[32] Harold Foster interview, 1974

activity was not conceived as an assault on segregation, they were the only blacks from Chapel Hill there.[33]

> The university was segregated, but Chapel Hill has always been sort of a strange place where segregation is concerned. First of all, there's a closer knit with the community, in the black community and the university, than you would say with Durham, with the black community in Durham and Duke. I think maybe it might have to do with the size of the town. Because there were other things for people to do in Durham like the tobacco companies, there were other jobs. And also you had a very stable upper middle class, a good middle class, with the Mutual, the people who owned North Carolina Mutual, you had the people that were teaching at Central, you had the people that were professional doctors, lawyers, small percentage though they may be. There was also a black hospital. So you had that group, where in Chapel Hill you didn't have that. There were no professionals in Chapel Hill.

Cureton noted that black teenagers could go to the "Tin Can," the old university gym, on Saturdays and play basketball. Sometimes there would be interracial games. Of course, no one would go during the week. Also, Cureton's father and a friend were tennis players, and they had been using the university courts "since I was a kid." They would go early before others arrived. And blacks would occasionally go to the university library. These things were tolerated, though they were not the norm, when blacks acted as individuals or small groups, chose appropriate times, and did not make a scene.

> Nobody had said "ok," but nobody said "no."… I'm trying to give you the texture of racism in Chapel Hill which wasn't that blatant.

The university had another type of influence as well. Cureton noted that young black males in Chapel Hill emulated athletes at the university.

> Chapel Hill had an attitude. They thought they were as good as the people in Durham and Raleigh, much larger communities. They really did. We were actually on par, so to speak, with Pittsboro and Hillsborough, places like that.

But Cureton and his friends felt they should not even associate with teenagers from the small towns, and this attitude had a great deal to do with the influence of the university.

> The university had a great deal of influence. When you see the '57

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[33] Cureton interview, 1991. All subsequent quotes from William Cureton in this chapter are from this interview unless otherwise noted.

> basketball team winning–The uniforms that Lincoln had, they had to be just so. You know, you were copying the university in a sense. The basketball team had those long socks just like the '57 championship team. And you would see these guys on the street, you know, like Lenny Rosenbloom, Joe Quigg, Pete Brennan. These were northern white boys who you could talk to a little bit more readily.… The people in Hillsborough and Pittsboro weren't exposed to that, you follow what I'm saying?

The university gave Chapel Hill greater status than other small towns, and it also gave black youths like William Cureton exposure to a broader range of people than could be found elsewhere. There were "northern white boys who you could talk to," and there were Africans and other international students. In Cureton's opinion, these influences gave black youths in Chapel Hill a definite attitude that was more assertive and more open-minded than what could be found in other small towns:

> I remember that UNC had the ram's head in the middle of their basketball court.… Jimmy Little… painted a tiger in the middle of Lincoln's gym. Nobody else had that, but we had to have that because that was the university.
>
> I mean, imagine somebody as small as Chapel Hill taking on these types of attitudes. That's what it was about Chapel Hill, it was all about attitude.… It made you, you weren't docile. You weren't as docile as people in Pittsboro or Hillsborough. So, you were exposed, and when you are exposed you tend to be a little more open about your thinking.

Still, Harold Foster believed that the 1954 Supreme Court decision had little impact on his thinking or that of his friends. Making a stab at maintaining separate but equal facilities, Chapel Hill had spent $238,493 in 1950-52 to build a brand new high school for blacks. In the late 1950s, Foster believed, the young people were looking forward to going to the new Lincoln rather than Chapel Hill High. Nor was Foster particularly aware of national civil rights developments, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In fact, the youths took segregation as "a given," even though they would disrespect it and disobey it when they could.

For instance, when they would slip into a UNC football game, Foster noted, it never occurred to them to sit with the white kids. The effect of Greensboro on Foster and his friends, however, was to make them realize that "segregation was a policy."

The unconscious acceptance of the segregationist framework and rules was evident in the way the young people thought about black history as well. Harold Foster remembered learning about black history at Lincoln, and how even the effort to instill racial pride was twisted into an apology for white power by the hold that segregation held over the *minds* of black educators.

> I remember the Black History Months. We were always reading

> about black people, but what we read about–these people were presented as heroes and role models.… Well, you know, we thought it was a real pride thing that somebody came up out of slavery and became a good reader and orator and put out a paper, say, like Frederick Douglas. And we didn't put any kind of–It wasn't viewed as, "It never should have been that way in the beginnin'."

Foster felt that his teachers did not probe the underlying reasons for historical events, as if things happened in a vacuum:

> So we never questioned why we were championin' this person, except to say, "Oh, he made it in a white world," and being glad with that. We never went behind that and said that, "He never should have had to go through this anyway." We never looked at it as him bein' colonized and tryin' to take on the values of the oppressor, and things like that. So I grew up respectin' these people because other people respected them, in terms of sayin', "Well, you can do it too and in spite of the odds, you can make it in a white person's world.…" So, when I read at that time, I read with the intent of finding people who had met the challenge of becoming "good Negroes," or people who had made it in this society despite the odds, but made it on white people's terms.

But as they gained greater experience in the world, Harold Foster and his friends began losing respect for the "good Negroes" of Chapel Hill who seemed intent on catering to white power and controlling black youths. As a result, they began reaching for a new identity that broke with that of the "good Negro." And part of this reaching was for a knowledge and culture of past black rebellion.

In fact, to supplement their public school education, and their thirst for a more assertive black culture, Mason, Brittian, and Foster extended their reach beyond the norm considerably. They sought out a radical white college student at UNC named Chris Munger who supplied them with books on a variety of topics, especially works by black authors.[34] They also developed a love for jazz, and the three of them bought a subscription to *Downbeat* magazine together.[35] Foster, in turn, helped Cureton develop a knowledge of jazz that eventually led him into a career in music. Foster, in particular, went out of his way to cultivate a wide diversity of associates, including a number of whites who had various resources to offer:

> My associations were not the ordinary associations at that time. I would say that my reach to different communities was greater than other people that I associated with.

[3434] Thomas Mason interview.

[35] ibid.

Over the years, a friendship group of black high school youths formed that was based partly on neighborhood and age, but also on temperament and outlook. The group was all male and it also had a particular class character. The youths who initiated the protest movement in Chapel Hill were not part of the black establishment. Their parents were not teachers, businessmen, or preachers, but poor laboring people. And subjectively, the young men did not identify with the establishment. Which is not to say that their families had no standing in the community or that some of the youths did not have their sights fixed on college. Charles Foushee, for instance, believed that the Foushee name was well known in the community, and that consequently he and his brothers and sisters had opportunities and experiences that other blacks might not have had. Nevertheless, college was not among these. "I did not think about even going to college," Charles remembered. Harold Foster's mother also had standing in the community as a PTA leader and an activist in church and civic affairs. However, she was a single parent raising three children in a small house that didn't belong to her and she worked at the university for minimal wages. She did not see either herself or Harold as part of the black middle class. This class awareness was revealed in advice she gave to her son in 1963. She advised him to pull back before he got killed, and she predicted that the gains of the movement would not fall to all blacks equally: "When you all break the door down, it will be Mr. McDougal's daughter who goes in because she'll have the money."[36] James Brittian's mother was a domestic and his father was a gas station attendant. William Cureton's father was a plasterer and his mother was a domestic. Some of the youths hoped to go to college, including Foster, Brittian, and Mason, but most of the others did not.

William Chafe argues persuasively that the most significant thing that the freshmen at North Carolina A & T did to get to the point where they decided to commit themselves to the lunch counter protest was develop a sense of solidarity–"They found each other."[37] In Chapel Hill, however, this process had taken place over a period of many years. More so than the A & T students, or black college students generally, the young people in Chapel Hill had already gone through a sorting out process.

By 1960, then, the character of the group had become relatively set. The members of the group knew who they were and had definite opinions about what set them apart.

Thomas Mason felt that there was only a very few students who were really "aware" during the late 1950s. Along with Foster and Brittian, he

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[36] Haddie B. Foster, Interview by Tina Harrison, 26 August 1974, interview 98-99, tape recording, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

[37] William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 115.

mentioned Cureton and his cousin, David Mason. "Despite age differences, those who stood out hung together," he recalled. Mason and James Brittian, both fifteen in 1960, were among the youngest in the group. The rest were seventeen or eighteen, with a few, like Braxton Foushee, in their early twenties. Harold Foster noted that the group was set apart, as well, by their level of intimacy and their historical sense of mission attached to the Pottersfield neighborhood. The group that Foster ran with was probably about a dozen, from families named Cureton, Geer, Foushee, Strowd, Purefoy, Merritt, and Alston. And while it included "allies" from other parts of town, "… there was a core there that had to be dealt with–me, Geer, and Cureton:"

> There was a kind of… There was just a feelin' there that had grown up among us because of our association. And so if Geer would say something I would have an instant understandin' of what he meant because I knew where he was comin' from.… Same thing with Bill Cureton. Same thing with many of 'em. We knew each other's minds. We'd all been through school together.… We were from what was called the Pottersfield and we had seen this as a section of town that had some kind of historical significance in the town–historical significance as far as makin' a contribution to the activities that we were workin' on. The baddest people, we were doing the toughest things in town, came from Pottersfield.

Not only were Foster and his friends close, they were also leaders. When they heard about Greensboro, this characteristic motivated and prepared them to act. Cureton saw himself and the others as both more intelligent and less willing than other students at Lincoln to go by the rules of the establishment:

> You had certain individuals in there that did things by the rule; in other words, they came out valedictorian, and salutatorian and all that, but they were by no means the smartest, smartest individual. They did everything by the rule. They studies, everything that was required.… They weren't in our group.… Our group members basically, not all of them, but the most of them were the more intelligent. If all of them had applied themselves, the people that got the awards and everything, never would have gotten them.[38]

Thomas Mason agreed that members of the group were intellectuals "… in the sense of challenging the given norm. Critical thinkers. Good students. Read a lot. Questioned." By way of illustration, Mason noted that he had been suspended from Lincoln for two weeks because he defended use of the term

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[38] William Cureton, Interview by Kenneth Hamilton, 25 August 1974, tape recording and transcript, Oral History Program, Manuscript Department, Duke University Library, Durham, North Carolina.

"black" instead of "Negro." Later, he got in trouble for showing interest in the Cuban Revolution. He reasoned that, given the United States government's historically poor treatment of blacks, "If the government was so opposed to the Cuban Revolution, there might be something to it." The schools taught Marx "as the devil," according to Mason, and generally tried to "teach the norm." When he and James were invited to attend a conference at UNC with students from the Soviet Union and Canada, the white Superintendent tried to prevent them from going.

Most fundamentally, they were rebellious. It had started at an early age around issues of parental control, and in the cases of Foster and others, at least, this personal rebelliousness had carried over into opposition to segregation and accommodationist views among black leaders and parents. These youths had been attracted to each other because of their similar attitudes and backgrounds, as well as because they lived in the same neighborhood and attended the same school. By the time the sixties arrived, they were ready, and they were not alone.

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Several black women, including Mary Mason, her sister Gloria, and Vivian Foushee were part of the young adult activist core that joined Harold Foster and his friends following the initial sitdown protest at Colonial Drug. Along with young adult males, including Hilliard Caldwell and Braxton Foushee, these women took over an important share of the organizing in 1960. But it appears that no female Lincoln students took a leading role during the first high tide of the Chapel Hill movement, though large numbers participated.

The fact that young black women did not step forward first in 1960, and did not lead, does not necessarily mean that young men were any more aware or concerned about segregation than young women. As we have seen, in the Mason family, the older sisters challenged segregation in various ways long before 1960. And certainly, a comment by Lincoln student Lonita Terrel in the *Chapel Hill Weekly* of February 15, 1960 reflected a clear view in favor of sitdown protests: "If there isn't integration soon I think we should take steps similar to those taken by the students at A & T and in Durham."[39]

It takes more than the thought, however, to bring the thought to action. Just as the four A & T students in Greensboro were able to act because they found each other, developed trust, and challenged each other, the young men from Pottersfield were able to act because they "knew each other's minds." Indeed, it may be that gender roles encouraged the formation of male groups more than female groups. In any case, traditional gender roles allowed the young men to feel the responsibility to lead, the confidence to initiate aggressive and possibly dangerous action, and the need to protect women rather than involve women.

Nevertheless, Lincoln women participated in the movement following the

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[39] J.A.C. Dunn, "The Negro Speaks On Integration, Part III," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 15 February 1960, 1.

first sitdown protest at Colonial Drug. And young women generally took an increasingly assertive role as the movement unfolded in 1963-64. One particular group of friends played a leading role. These young women had been friends before the movement, and like the young men from Pottersfield, they were not from the more influential black families. For this reason, in part, they were prepared to throw themselves into battle. "One of the most spirited" of these young women, according to Harold Foster, was Stella Farrar. Stella was four years younger than Harold. They were, in some ways perhaps, kindred spirits, and they had a close personal relationship that broke off before the movement.

There were also young black women in the community who were not in high school who became movement activists. Marie Roberson was one of these women, and like James Brittian, her involvement in the Chapel Hill movement transformed her into a lifelong Chapel Hill community activist.

Although these women did not play a prominent role in the movement building process of 1960, their stories are part of the origins of the movement as well. In particular, their stories help illuminate why there was such a strong female presence in the movement throughout its history.

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When Hurricane Hazel came through Chapel Hill in 1957, Stella Farrar had to take a taxi home from Northside Elementary School because she lived "out in the country." Estes Drive, in those days, was a dead-end dirt road coming off Airport Road. Stella's grandfather, James Blacknell, had owned a good deal of land in the area. He was a farmer, raising sweet potatoes, watermelons, and cotton.[40]

Mr. Blacknell divided his land among four children, including Stella's mother. Toy and Della Farrar lived on Estes Drive with their nine children and many relatives for neighbors. Stella's father was a cement finisher who worked for the university. Her mother was a domestic.

> My mom was a domestic worker and my father was a cement finisher.... She worked for Charley "Choo Choo" Justice's mom. And they used to live right up here.… And I remember, they had a dog (chuckle).… His name was Danny, and that dog, he hated black people. He would not run after anybody but black people, [but] I was too quick for him.

Stella felt that her mother had "a good relationship" with her employer. Even though Mrs. Justice apparently had a racist dog, she nevertheless thought to send gifts of food and used clothing home to Stella and her brothers and sister:

> She would always be givin' my mom clothes, you know, and food, and stuff. Course, you know, she probably wasn't makin' that much. But she

[40] Stella Farrar, Interview by author, 7 March 1994, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

> would just give her little extras, like hand me down clothes and extra food that she had in the house. My mom would bring that home for us.

Mrs. Farrar didn't talk to Stella about her work or about white people. "You see, back then," Stella recalled, "white people, that was their food." Nevertheless, like James Brittian, Stella Farrar could not help but notice the drudgery of her mother's life and the toll it took on the family. Just as Cornelia Spencer Love's old coat did not help Ed Caldwell Jr.'s mother that much, old clothes and leftovers did not shorten the hours Mrs. Farrar had to work to make ends meet.

Some time in elementary school Stella developed a different dream for herself. She did not want to be a domestic worker or take in laundry:

> I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to do that. Because, I mean, you know, I would see my mom ironing somebody else's clothes, and we had to iron our own clothes, washing somebody else's clothes, and we had to wash our own clothes, because sometime she be too tired to do it… especially little stuff that she had to put starch in and have it real stiff collars… ironing handkerchiefs, little dainty items.… After she finished doing theirs then there wasn't any time for her to do ours, so we had to do it ourselves.

After school, many of the children would congregate at Nick's Grill before going on to the Community Center later in the day. Stella's dream was born there.

> I wanted to be a model, a fashion model.… It was this lady up there who was on this neon light advertising Miller beer, and she was so pretty, and people used to always tell me I looked just like her.

Like many other young black people in the 1950s, Stella Farrar hoped for a future that was not so confined as the world of her parents. But there were many pitfalls for young black women coming of age in Chapel Hill, nor would a black child have the same resources as a white child to help her up:

> I wanted to be a model, a fashion model. But then after I had a child I kinda, just forgot all about that.… I hated it, because I didn't want any children, I didn't want any children at that time. I just–… and then my mom and my dad were angry with me because I got pregnant. And then I had to go through that. It was awful, I hated it.

Stella had her child in ninth grade. She had to stay out of school until Dierdra was born, but her mother stopped working to help her with the baby, and she was able to go back to school and graduate in 1964. Nor was this unusual.

> Listen, there was no birth control. We didn't know anything about

> birth control. And your parents didn't talk to you about, you know, about what could happen to you if you had sex, because that was something that was not discussed. So, you know, you go out and you experience it, and then this happens to you. So what do you do? You have to have the child because you don't know anything about abortions and stuff. Little white girls that went to Chapel Hill High School, they knew about things like that, see, because [their parents] could send them away, have their abortion and come back. Next week they back in school.

Just as Mary Mason had felt racism deeply for the first time when she got turned down for a summer job, Stella Farrar felt the unfairness resulting from segregation as she ventured out in the world. She thought about the difference in the choices available to her and to white girls, and she increasingly noticed other signs of her inferiority in the eyes of whites.

> See, I knew that it was something wrong because why do we have water fountains, one say "colored," one say "white;" bathroom, "colored," "white;" theater downtown, we can't go there. We got a black theater in Carrboro– Midway Theater, fifteen cents to go to the movies.

Although Stella did not spend much time in other black neighborhoods because she lived out in the country, her family did attend First Baptist Church. At that time it was located on West Franklin Street where Yates Motor Company now stands, across from Colonial Drug.

Stella's mother would always give the kids enough money to get lifesavers or something. And if they had more money, they could go to the Dairy Bar and get ice cream.

> Sometimes we'd have enough to get ice cream, but… we couldn't ever sit down in there to eat it. Couldn't sit down in Big John's either, 'cause he had a little eatery in there, little lunch counter. So we couldn't sit down in there and eat. We would always have to buy our stuff and leave… [and] I resented it. Yes. Yes. Because I'm sayin, "I'm spending my money here. Why am I not allowed to sit down and enjoy what I purchase here?"

Stella believed that when lunch counter protests broke out in Greensboro in 1960, the young people in Chapel Hill took the lead because "it was time for a change." She also felt that most of the older black people, like her parents, were complacent. Some would say, "`I ain't goin' no jail.'" Speaking of her parents' attitude toward segregation, Stella recalled:

> They had gotten so used to it, you know, until it just didn't really matter to them. As long as they were happy with getting a salary and having a job, it just didn't matter.

But Stella and many of her friends did not share such views. They picketed and sat down at Big John's many times for their rights. And they endured his punishment to keep their dreams alive:

> We had a walkout at school. And they said that we're gonna go downtown and we're gonna sit-in. We went to Big John's, it was Colonial Drug Store but it was always called Big John's. And I remember that when we got in there, he and his wife both were there, and I remember they pulled out these cattle prods. And told us if we didn't get out they were gonna do this to us, and they stuck it to our skin and shocked us, and stuff. 'Bout thirty five of us on the inside, and we went straight to the lunch counter, and then… we locked ourselves, arms and stuff, together. And we just sat there until the police came.… [The cattle prod] hurt. It stung. But we didn't move. We didn't move. We sat there and we endured that pain, because it was determination, and, "My god, why should we be treated like this? We're human beings too."

Stella felt that men took the lead back in 1960, not because the male leadership was better than the female leadership, but because "back then the men were more outgoing than the young ladies were":

> You know how sometimes females will kind of shy away from doing something? … But I was never afraid to go on a sit-in, never.

As the movement unfolded, Stella saw her friend Colleen Burnette burned by ammonia thrown in her face at Brady's Restaurant, and she saw other demonstrators get urinated on by Mrs. Watts at the Watts Grill. Nevertheless, she and a small group of female friends kept on volunteering for even the most dangerous protests.

Stella and her friends–Charliese Cotton, Shirley Pendergraph, Phyllis Timberlake, and Emma Davis–had developed "a close little bond" before the civil rights movement. It appears that, like the group of young men around Foster, Geer, and Cureton, Stella and her friends were not limited by restraints of respectability or fear.

> We were always the ones that weren't afraid to be arrested. Like, some people would, they would pull back and say, "Well, I'll go to this place, but I'm not gonna go to this place." But, like I said, we were always there. "We gon sit-in at this place? Ok. Let's go." That's the only difference. But, like some, you had one little group that was kind of reserved. They would only go at certain times and when you were goin' to certain places. But any time that we could go, we would go.

This activist core of young women differed from the activist core of young men in many ways. Their group was not rebellious against authority, generally. Nor did Stella consider them especially intellectual or more aware than others.

"We weren't no smart-alecks, but we weren't dummies either–somewhere around the C, D area. We weren't the little smart kids in high-school." But like the male group, the young women provided spark and backbone for the movement. And as they became veterans they took on the role of orienting and training new recruits. And it was because of their character that they were able to play this role:

> I guess we were the "wild bunch"–not rebellious as far as, you know, against white people, or anything like that. No. No. We believed in the church and we always attended church. We always attended church, 'cause that was the backbone of your growing up. You had to go to church. But, I guess, that little group, it just kinda stood out from the rest of 'em, because we were always ready, you know.

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Marie Roberson was born on Whitaker Street in Carrboro on New Year's Eve, 1940. She grew up during her early years in Tin Top, a small black community between Chapel Hill and Carrboro by the railroad tracks, over behind the car wash. Marie's mother was Mary Jane Roberson from Chapel Hill, and her father was Thomas Farrington. There were nine children and Marie was the fourth. Her father was not around much. He was in the army and did not live with the family.[41]

Marie's mother lived with her mother for several years and then moved away, leaving Marie with her grandmother. After a few years Marie was sent to Detroit to live with her mother's brother, and this is where she started school.

After two years she went to live with her mother in Washington, D.C. The family returned to North Carolina in 1952, after Marie's grandmother died, and moved into her house on Lloyd Street in Carrboro. It was here that Marie's racial awakening took place.

The black communities in Carrboro and Chapel Hill were a far cry from the urban environments of Detroit and Washington, D.C. Marie recalled that she enjoyed growing up here in the 1950s.

> [The black community] was basically like dirt streets, log cabins, railroad houses.… But it was fun, you know. It had its good part and bad part, but I enjoyed it.

One of the biggest differences Marie noticed was white people. There had been none in D.C. She was not even thinking about race relations until she encountered segregation in Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

> When we moved back here to Chapel Hill my mind was not on, like, I

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[41] Marie Roberson, Interview by author, 5 February 1994, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

> really paid little attention to race relationships. And I guess because where we lived in D.C. there were blacks, and, there weren't any whites, but there were Puerto Ricans, stuff like this. We all seemed to get along together, and when we moved back here it really never dawned to me 'till we went to stores and you had a black waitin' room and a white waitin' room. And if you wanted somethin' out of a cafe you had to go round to the back, if it was a white cafe. And it really dawned on me, "Why was this here?" Because it wasn't what we faced in D.C. We didn't have prejudice problems.

When Marie was asked if there were any particular racial incidents from that period that were important for her she responded:

> I think all of 'em were important. When you go somewhere, especially when you travel, and black people had to sit in the back of the bus, that sort of bothered me. Because I felt like… why not just sit anywhere you want to sit. Then there was signs, like if you use the bus station, and there was a jukebox joint there, but they had a black side and a white side at the Chapel Hill bus station. And I remember picketin' that bus station. And I remember [the manager of the Bus Station Grill] old man Leo–still runnin' a cafe here–he said before he integrated he would shut it down. And he did.

Nevertheless, there was one particular incident that made a great impression on Marie. In 1956 Marie came down with rheumatic fever, but because of a debt owed the new hospital in Chapel Hill she could not see a doctor.

> I remember goin' to the hospital and my first encounter was a white waiting room and a black waiting room. I remember them… signs. I remember, I had rheumatic fever. And I remember, my mamma not able to pay fifty cents, or a dollar, to get me to the clinic. And I remember they had a "stop" thing on it. It was old man Brown. His father owned, E. A. Brown owned a furniture company right next to the police station.

Mr. Brown, whose father owned the furniture store, was an administrator at North Carolina Memorial Hospital. It was his practice, according to Marie, to put a "stop" on people who owed money on their bills. This resulted in many black people being unable to use the hospital.

> I remember my mother taking us to another doctor in Carrboro when we got sick, because he would do it on credit. It was Dr. Hooker. Dr. Hooker, I never will forget it. He was real fat. And he would look at us. I don't know how well he wanted to touch us, but he would look at us and give us medicine or give us a prescription for medicine when we couldn't get to

the hospital.[42]

So in the first few years after Marie Roberson returned to her home in Chapel Hill, she became painfully aware of the "signs" of her inferiority in the eyes of white people. Like other African Americans who grew up in the 1950s, Marie could remember her childhood in Chapel Hill as being both fun and full of sorrow. And she knew very well the feelings expressed by Pauli Murray in *Proud Shoes* when she spoke of what it felt like to be a black child growing up in Durham–"The tide of color beat upon me ceaselessly, relentlessly." To Marie, years later, such feelings brought back thoughts of a condition for which she knew only one word:

> And so, it's rough. I guess everybody, all blacks felt the same way. I don't have good memories [voice breaks] of it. When I think about my childhood in Chapel Hill I really think about sad, it really brings me back to the days of the eighteen hundreds when blacks were slaves. Because that's really all they were, you know, really slaves. You could only do so much as they let you do, and they didn't let you do that much. You could only say what they wanted you to say and get by with it. You say anything else you probably in a lot of trouble. So, you know, to me it was just, it was slavery.

When Marie came back from Washington, D.C, the fear that all blacks knew deep down as a result of segregation began to penetrate her innocence. These were the "bitter hours" when Marie discovered she was "black and poor and small," when a knowledge dawned on her about the viciousness of which white people were capable. It stole her carefree days, the days of feeling completely safe that are the birthright of every child.

It was from the older people that Marie heard the stories that terrified her:

> When we moved back here, the first time I ever heard of Ku Klux Klan was when I came back here at age twelve.… My stepgrandfather would talk about the Klan, and I'd ask him who they were and what they meant, and he told me what they were, but I never really seen a hood. And that was frightening because I remember us going to an all black movie, on

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[42] After the Civil Rights Movement, Marie, Birdine Edwards, Mildred Riggsbee, Suphronia Cheeks,and several other women joined with Mildred Ringwalt of the Inter-Faith Council, Dee Gamble, white Chapel Hill minister Rev. Robert Seymour, and black Durham activist Howard Fuller to organize a local chapter of the Welfare Rights Organization. They chose health care and housing as their first targets for corrective action. And among their many other accomplishments, they succeeded in forcing the hospital to stop the practice of putting "stops" on people. It is also interesting to note that E. A. Brown was the landlord from whom John Carswell rented space for his drugstore.

> Saturday night seeing a late movie, and running all the way home, … afraid we might run into the Klans, or whatever.

The stories Marie heard were not about some mythical past or events that had occurred in Mississippi or other far off places. They were about people with names in Chapel Hill.

> [The older people told stories about] how there were lynchin's, how they lynched black people. One story of it was that a man used to work at the movie, name was Rob Snipes, used to work at the Hollywood Theater, and how they castrated him. And I guess that was before I got back here to North Carolina.
>
> And these were stories that to me as a kid would frighten you. You always believed what your elders told you. We knew that they were more wiser than we were, and a lot of things they'd tell you, "You can't go this way," you know. "Don't step on that. That's Mr. so-and-so's property."

Just as fear stole Marie's peace of mind, poverty stole her time for friends and play and hurried her to adulthood. When she was thirteen, Marie went to work at the Pines Restaurant after school.

> I remember being about thirteen years old workin' at The Pines Restaurant from four to twelve at night peelin' potatoes so that we could have extra money comin' to our household.… We were makin' about a dollar, or maybe seventy five cents an hour at The Pines Restaurant.… A lot of people worked down there. They were underage people. Some of them were school age. Most of them were school age children. I was thirteen, ah, I guess [the others] were fifteen, sixteen years old, some more probably eleven, twelve. He had maybe one or two [grownups] in there cookin'. And I remember goin' in there peelin' a hundred pounds of potatoes. He'd bring a whole hundred pound bag of white potatoes, and peel those, help wash pots at closin' time and that was it.

Mr. Merritt would pick up the kids at four after school and drop them off uptown on Franklin Street after midnight. "He'd put you out up there and you'd walk on," Marie recalled.

Marie's first child, Gwen, was born in 1955 when Marie was fourteen. Like most other black women she knew, both her age and older, she raised her child without a father in the household, with the assistance of neighbors and relatives. Getting pregnant put an end to her school days forever. When her mother moved to New York the same year, Marie stayed with the next door neighbor. At sixteen she was out on her own.

Despite the fear and hardship that were part of Marie's coming of age in Chapel Hill, she was not a person who was willing to set aside all her dreams. And as Marie's understanding of racial prejudice grew, so did her determination to fight it.

Marie sensed the fear older people revealed in their stories and their warnings, but she developed an attitude of resistance rather than submission. Like Elizabeth Cotton, Marie was bothered, in particular, by the deference older black people showed whites.

> It really bothered me, I guess it always bothered me to hear old people call young white people "sir." That's something that just irritated me, and I never–I know why now, but to me, long time ago, it would irritate me.

Marie also knew from close personal experience that these traditions, embodying the racial etiquette of the South, were not mere words. They represented the larger patterns of power and submission that characterized the labor relations, political participation, and social dynamics of the period. They both reflected the status quo and enforced the status quo, for to fail to participate in these cultural forms was to make oneself a target, whether one was black or white:

> My stepgrandfather, I remember him real good. He worked for a man called Bill Hardy, used to own the store that Cliff Meat Market's in. To me, he would work from sunup to sundown, and he would bring home something like ten dollars a week, some rotten fish on Saturday, and some old dried up fruit. And this was his pay.
>
> And it burnt me up that he sit up there and chopped that, worked at that wood yard. Because he was not able to read and write he didn't make nothin'. [Mr. Hardy] felt like he didn't need to pay him but that little ten dollars a week.
>
> I guess he was scared, 'cause I used to ask him, "Why don't you make him give you your money?" And he would just smile, "That's just the way it is."
>
> And I remember him having a heart attack and getting sick. And he stayed with us then. Stayed with me, because I had an apartment then. And I'd take him to the hospital. And I remember them sendin' him to Duke, and they were sayin' his heart's real bad. And I remember putting diapers on him, you know, 'till he got well. And he went back out to Hardy's wood yard. And, bless God, the man's still workin', choppin' wood at his wood yard, cuttin' his grass and all this kind of stuff. And he had to be somewhere along about eighty years old.
>
> And I remember [Mr. Hardy] buildin' a little tar shack out of some wood, corrugated.… Because by that time he had started gettin' his, long time ago they called it "old age assistance." And he would never see his check. He worked at Hardy's wood yard and got his old age assistance, and he would never see a dime of that money. [Hardy] didn't give it to him.
>
> … And after he built that little tarry shack, one room shack for him to live in, we used to go out there. [Mr. Hardy] didn't like us to come out there to see him, but we would wait 'till night come, and we'd go the back

> way in Carrboro, and go see him. And wasn't any electricity in the shack. There was a wood stove and a bed… and that was all he had in it. And he died in there. One morning I started out there, and I think that's New Year's Day, forgot what year it was, and I started out to see about him. 'Cause I had thought about him all that night before, and I was going, and I met this guy and he said, "You know, old man Henry died, don't you." I said, "No, I didn't." And he died. And as of today Bill Hardy, wherever his shoes [?] is, I hope his soul's restin'. We still owe for his funeral.… He worked that man for nothing. That was slavery.

All of these experiences gave Marie plenty of reason to fight segregation, although she had no thought that Jim Crow could be overturned until the demonstrations started. Even then, she only became involved gradually:

> With my first daughter, I remember Rev. Manley coming to me and asking me did I want her to go to a white school, which was Carrboro School. At that time there was segregated schools in Chapel Hill. Being afraid for her, I said "no," because I was afraid of what might happen to her. So, later on I got to thinkin' that, it shouldn't be a choice of, it should be a choice of whether my daughter wanted to go to that school. And she should have the freedom to be able to go to the school she wanted to. And I seen a need then to struggle, not just the people there, but it was my struggle also. So I began to picket and even went to jail for things that I thought should be our choice.… And this was the beginning of the struggle.

CHAPTER 5

TAKING THE DARE--FEBRUARY, 1960: CHAPEL HILL AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE BLACY YOUTH REVOLT

Events in history occur when the time has ripened for them, but they need a spark.[1]

Daisy Bates
The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir

The lunch counter protests in Greensboro, North Carolina, that began on February 1, 1960, marked a turning point in the history of the United States and in the lives of African Americans. But the conditions that led to the black revolt had developed over many years. By 1960, the events that have become known as the Civil Rights Movement needed only the proper spark to set them in motion. And if it had not been for the act of the four A & T freshmen, the traditional forms of civil rights struggles would have continued to command the attention of the nation only until some other spark caused the dry tinder of black youth to explode.

Nevertheless, during the first few days of the protests, it was not clear to all observers that a new stage of the black freedom struggle had been reached. This uncertainty was indicated by a *New York Times* article reporting on the "sitdown" protests. The article gave almost equal space to another NAACP lawsuit challenging school segregation. This lawsuit was brought by the family of Stanley Vickers against the Chapel Hill public schools.[2]

The month of February, 1960 was one of those moments in history when the long process of ripening results in the fruit falling from the tree. In this case, "the event" was so massive and disquieting that it commanded the attention of the entire nation. Legalized segregation had maintained its grip on the South for over sixty years, but the massive social insurgency that the Greensboro protests sparked would bring it to an end in less than five years.

The Vickers lawsuit, like other ongoing reform efforts based on the "politics of moderation" in Chapel Hill, would continue.[3] But it was a new day. In the hallways of

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[1] Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: David McKay, 1962), 221.

[2] "Negroes in South in Store Sitdown," *The New York Times*, 3 February 60, 22.

[3] This term is borrowed from the work of William Chafe. For a discussion of the "politics of moderation" in North Carolina see Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 56-97. On the class nature of this approach, i.e. the inability of a strategy that relied on the black and white (liberal) middle-class to involve large numbers of people in the struggle against segregation, see Louis E. Lomax, *The Negro Revolt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Signet Books, 1962), 89, 124.

Lincoln High School, after school at Nick's Grill, and late at night on the Rock Wall, black teenagers were talking, reflecting on the protest movement that was spreading across the state, and reaching decisions, both personal and collective, about how to act. For these youths, Greensboro was a line in the sand, a challenge, a dare.

For a few of these teenagers, whose minds had long been occupied with the question of how to strike at segregation, Greensboro was a model of both what to do and what such tactics could accomplish. Greensboro enabled these Chapel Hill youths to realize that segregation was a policy, not a given, and that sitdown protests were a way that policy could be changed.[4]

Although the sitdown movement spread rapidly among North Carolina's major cities, it took nearly a month for the movement in Chapel Hill to gather itself and act. Like the article in the *Times*, this lag reflected the fact that activism in Chapel Hill's black community was a step behind the larger urban centers. Nevertheless, it was a step ahead of most other small towns.

Let us now try to reconstruct what actually happened in Chapel Hill. We will begin by examining the initial dramatic act of the movement, and then we will trace the process of development sparked by Greensboro that led to that act.

My approach is both comparative and intimate. By looking at events in Chapel Hill in relationship to other communities, it is possible to gain a better understanding of "why Chapel Hill?" At the same time, the comparative approach helps answer questions about what the local movement shared with other community struggles and what made it extraordinary. And by looking at the Chapel Hill movement closely, it is possible to gain an appreciation of the fact that the movement was fundamentally about human growth. It was a moment when millions of individuals chose to take risks and make commitments for freedom, both their own and that of the community.

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From a distance calm appeared to reign in the small college town of Chapel Hill on the night of February 28, 1960. It was Sunday, and many of the stores on East Franklin Street, in the white business district, were closed. Still, the streets were far from empty.

Among the students and townspeople out that night, a group of young black men were walking back toward town from the Morehead Planetarium. William Cureton and Earl Geer were seniors at Chapel Hill's black Lincoln High School. Thomas Mason and James Brittian were ninth graders at Lincoln and best friends. Along with one or two others who were with them that night, these teenagers were long-time friends from the Pottersfield area, the heart of the black community in Chapel Hill. They were running buddies who gathered at The Rock Wall to socialize. But what set them apart from many of their peers was a rebellious attitude toward authority, particularly the authority of white supremacy. Now, as the young men walked next to the old stone walls built by slaves, under the cold bronze stare of Silent Sam, the statue honoring the University of North Carolina's Confederate war dead, they talked over their plan to assault one bastion of segregation.

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[4] Harold Foster interview, 1993

As the teenagers passed by the many small shops and restaurants that lined Franklin Street, they encountered Harold Foster, another Lincoln senior and neighborhood friend. The youths stopped and talked briefly among themselves, then continued on their way through the evening cold. Their numbers had increased by one.

This night the young men were on their way to the Colonial Drugstore at the other end of town in the black community. John Carswell--Big John, as he was called--stayed open late at night to cater to the needs of his black customers. Nevertheless, black patrons who bought snacks or sandwiches could not sit down to enjoy their food. Like nearly all of the other white-owóned lunch counters and restaurants in Chapel Hill, the Colonial Drugstore was strictly segregated. Now, however, Carswell's Jim Crow policies were about to be challenged.

Years later, James Brittian recalled how the young men came to their decision:

> We would sit around and talk, basically. It was Harold Foster, Thomas Mason, Jimmy Merritt, William Cureton. . . probably seven or eight of us. . . . See, we couldn't sit in the booths, so every time we would play like we were going to sit down in the booths or something like this. "Well, ya'll got to get out." So we'd leave and it became a topic of discussion from time to time that. . . here we are going down there and spending our money, and what we need to do is to go down there and sit down.
>
> So one Sunday we went and sat down. He came over, he and his sons, and said, "Ya'll gotta get up. You gotta get up."
>
> Ok, after that, that Sunday night--this was on Sunday morning--that Sunday evening it was four or five of us went back. We woulêd always walk past down Franklin Street, go to the Planetarium, and back down Franklin Street again, and we decided that particular time to sit down.

Although there had been plenty of discussion among Lincoln students about the sitdown movement that had started in Greensboro on February 1, the first assault on Big John's did not result from any formal planning. Harold Foster recalled this protest as "very impromptu, spontaneous":

> I wasn't in the first wave. The first wave was led by Cureton, Earl Geer, and a few others. Those names stick out very prominent to me because they were very close allies, in more ways than one.
>
> The first wave was led by them. This was a Sunday night. . . . I remember I had gotten uptown rather late, comparatively late to when I usually get up there, and by the time I had gotten there they told me about what had happened, and they wanted to make another assault on the place. And they asked me if I was in concurrence with the act. And I most certainly was. . . .[5]

As the young men neared Carswell's drugstore, they finalized their plan. Thomas Mason recalled what happened next:

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[5] Harold Foster interview, 1974

> We decided to go in, get ourselves a soda from the fountain and a comic book and sit down. If he should ask us to leave, we're not going to leave. That was the plan. . . and that's what we did.
>
> He came over and said "I'm going to have to ask you to leave. These seats are reserved for whites. No coloreds are allowed."
>
> Nobody didn't say nothin'.
>
> He left and some lady came back. "Why don't you niggers get out of here. Starting up all this mess. Only reason you're doing this is because some niggers in Greensboro doin' this stuff."
>
> Didn't say anything.
>
> So he came back again. "C'mon now. I know your parents and everything. Don't make me have to call your parents. You know you can't do this. You know coloreds can't sit down there. How you think it makes me look?"
>
> He finally got angry. "Alright then, if y'all don'ït get up--"
>
> A couple of white people sittin' in there ran out the door. We saw some white people lookin' in the window. It got a little hairy after awhile. Some of them were shouting obscenities, threatening, you know.
>
> So finally the police came. "Alright you boys, c'mon down here. Alright, you had your fun, now let's go."
>
> Nobody responded.
>
> "If you don't come we'll have to take you out, take you downtown and lock you up."
>
> They went back and talked to Carswell. "You gonna swear out a warrant for 'em? That's probably what you're gonna have to do to get 'em outta here unless we just drag 'em out."
>
> So finally we talked, said, "We have the right to sit here--" We had some little thing together. I spoke first, then Harold spoke. Went right down the line. I don't think they got to everybody. So they served a warrant on us for trespassing.

James Brittian recalled the arrests clearly because he and Thomas Mason had to go to Juvenile Court:

> The police came, arrested us, took us down to the police station, called our parents, told our parents to come get us, and that was it. Now as far as Harold and some of the other ones who was older at that time, I don't think anything really happened to them. But Thomas Mason and I had to go to Juvenile Court.

Neither the arrests nor the appearance of the two young men in Juvenile Court were reported by *Chapel Hill Weekly* when stories appeared about the first sitdown protest. However James remembered his appearance before the Clerk of Court in vivid detail:

> [The Clerk of Court] told us, he said, . . . "Don't you know this man don't want you in his place?" He said, "Why did y'all go to his place?"
>
> You know, we sitting there in fear and everything, scared to death.

> "If that man don't want you there, don't go there." And he said, "I'm gonna tell you now, if you go back there again I'm gonna send you to Reform School."
>
> And I'm sittin' there thinkin', "Going to Reform School. Gonna go back there again."

Although *Chapel Hill Weekly* was essentially right when it reported that the Lincoln students acted "apparently without adult participation and without any organization," it would be wrong to conclude that the young men had not thought carefully about what they did.[6] Their course of action, though tactically finalized on the streets as they walked toward Carswell's drugstore, was the result both of careful reflection upon their lifelong experiences in Chapel Hill and weeks of intense discussion prompted by the sitdown movement unfolding in North Carolina at that time.

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The A & T students who sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro four weeks earlier had also developed their plans outside of any formal organizational structure. Three of them--Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, and Franklin McCain--had been friends at Dudley High School in Greensboro, and in college a fourth young man, Joseph McNeil, from Wilmington, joined tÛheir rap sessions. As they talked they began to challenge each other. Despite a great deal of traditional civil rights activity in Greensboro, they had a sense that the problem was not really being addressed:

> "We constantly heard about all the evils that are occurring and how blacks are mistreated and nobody was doing anything about it. . . ."[7]

Their act defied both the long-standing cultural rules that reinforced white domination in the South and the traditional patterns of black protest. Immediately, as word of their act spread through black Greensboro, college students from A & T and Bennett, a private college for black women, as well as students from nearby high schools, responded with massive support. Black youths in nearby communities, as if they had been poised, waiting for a signal, launched sitdown protests of their own.

And as it became clear that the youths were holding firm, support flowed to them from around the country. Within weeks, the revolt of black youth, the catalyst for a decade of protest, had established itself in the South.

In part, the sudden flowering of this movement can be explained by the power of decisive acts of courageous self-assertion and solidarity. This power transformed the doubt and hesitation felt by others into determination. When such acts correspond to the most deeply felt needs of millions of people for self-expression, when those who take the first step are joined by others, and when those who take these bold actions stand firm against the ensuing reaction, then there is a good chance that a powerful social force will be called into being. The act of Rosa Parks, when she refused to move to the back of the

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[6] Dwayne Walls, "Young Chapel Hill Negroes Protest At Lunch Counters," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 3 March 1960, 1.

[7] David Richmond, Interview by Clayborne Carson, 1972; quoted in Chafe, 113.

bus in 1955, was such a spark. The act of the four A & T students in Greensboro who sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960 was another.

The Greensboro protests spread partly because they struck a responsive chord in an entire generation. The defining generational characteristic of the youths who launched the sitdown movement was that they had come of age, made their rite of passage into the emotional, physical, and social world of young adulthood, at the precise moment in the mid-1950s when the Supreme Court decision of 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 demonstrated that a new day was within reach. Indeed, many African Americans were aware that oppressed people throughout the entire world were rising in revolt.[8] As the black youths pondered their possibilities and forged their identities, a large number of them sensed these possibilities and shaped their lives accordingly. As Thomas Mason said, it was ". . . a period of self-identification and learning that you don't have to depend on that little dangling string out there."

For many of the black youths who grew up in segregated southern communities during the 1950s, the sitdown protests of 1960 were an experience of profound self-affirmation and growth. These young men and women discovered both their own power and the transformative power of solidarity and collective action.

Franklin McCain, one of the four young men who participated in the historic protest at Woolworth's, recalled, "`I probably felt better that day than I've ever felt in my life. I felt as though I had gained my manhood. . . .'" Joseph McNeil, another participant, remembered, "`I just felt that I had powers within me, a superhuman strength that would come forward.'"[9]

And as thousands of young black men and women felt the transformative power of the movement surge through them and across the land, they began to realize their true potential--what Jim Crow had tried to hide from them by making them sit at the back of the bus, or giving them the ragged hand-me-down books that white children had used before them in school. Those days, when they had discovered they ". . . were black and poor and small and different, . . ." were past.

Another important reason that the sitdown protests were able to spark a movement was the steady gathering of new movement resources. This had taken place during the 1950s in response to changed historical conditions. Although the politics, personalities, and institutions of moderation held center stage during this period, new forces were gathering in the wings--leaders, like Martin Luther King, Jr.; leadership cores, like the NAACP Youth Councils; local experiments with mass protests, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott; the growth of "movement centers", like the Montgomery Improvement

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[8] Louis E. Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*, xiv, 87-88. For ways this sense of global revolt was spread by black newspapers and black servicemen who had served abroad during World War II see Harding, *Hope and History*, 172. Harding claims this awareness strengthened the resolve of African Americans to fight racism in the U.S. and that "many of these returning veterans became some of the most important grassroots leaders in the southern freedom movement."

[9] Franklin McCain, Interviewed by Howell Raines and Joseph McNeil, Interviewed by William Chafe; quoted in Chafe, 116.

Association; the development of "movement halfway houses", like the Highlander Folk School; insurgent trends in the black church; and new protest organizations, like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[10]

Thus, at the very moment that the youths came of age and prepared to step out into the world, both the larger historical conditions and the internal development of the movement had sharpened the contradiction of black identity in America to a point of excruciating tension. It is not surprising, therefore, in hindsight, that black youths throughout the South refused to "be reasonable" any longer in 1960.

When students sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, it was by no means the first such protest in North Carolina or in the South. It was the culmination of a growing trend. But in addition to factors of timing, factors of geography helped the Greensboro protests spread rapidly. North Carolina's urban population was concentrated not in one or two big cities, but among a relatively large number of medium-sized cities located in the central part of the state. In addition, there were an exceptional number of black colleges located in these cities. Moreover, associated with these colleges were particular black churches that catered to the college students, including a number led by activist ministers. And finally, there were activist organizations, like the NAACP Youth Councils, that drew from these black colleges and churches. As a result, there were established networks of activists and easy communications between cities, black colleges, and black churches in North Carolina. When the Greensboro protests hit, these communication networks were critical to the spread of the movement.[11]

As wave upon wave of young people caught the spirit of the times and sat down at segregated lunch counters throughout the South, it was as if Margaret Walker's call of 1937 had been answered. In a very real sense the black youths were indeed "a second generation full of courage." And they had been called forth by the yearning for freedom and the faith in a new day that is at the core of African American culture. By their choices, including even rebellion against their parents, the youths had prepared themselves for the 1960s. The aspirations of their generation embodied the broad democratic essence, if not the form, of the working-class militancy of the late 1930s and their acts inspired "a people loving freedom" to growth.

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[10] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, a Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1984), 1-194.

[11] ibid., 195-213. For other discussions about how the movement spread from Greensboro see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988; First Touchstone Edition, 1989), 272-311; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960's* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 9-18; Miles Wolff, *Lunch at the 5 & 10*, with an Introduction by August Meier, revised and expanded ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990), 57-71.

From Greensboro, the lunch counter sitdown protests spread to Winston-Salem and Durham on February 8, Charlotte and Fayetteville on February 9, Raleigh on February 10, and Elizabeth City, High Point, and Hampton, Virginia on February 11. By the end of the month over thirty communities in seven Southern states had experienced lunch counter protests. By mid-April the movement had recruited perhaps fifty thousand participants throughout the South, primarily black college and high school students.

In North Carolina, the lunch counter movement spread according to a definite pattern indicative of the range of conditions that either favored or discouraged such protests. All of the reported protests took place in urban areas. The first six cities to experience sitdowns had the largest black populations in the state. In every case, students from local black colleges initiated the protests, often with assistance from black adults experienced in civil rights activities.

The seventh sitdown took place in Elizabeth City and was initiated by black students at Elizabeth City Teachers College. This protest marked the spread of the movement to a limited number of small towns.

The eighth sitdown was staged by black high school students with the assistance of several ministers in High Point. This protest marked the beginning of initiatives by high school students.

During the second two weeks of February four additional protest movements developed, all in small towns, only one of which had a black college. Sitdowns began in Chapel Hill on Sunday night, February 28 without the participation of black college students or adults.

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The upsurge in the black freedom struggle that began in Greensboro, was led by black youths and assisted by adult movement activists. In many areas, much of the leadership of the movement came from black college students. In Chapel Hill, however, there was only token integration at the University of North Carolina. Here the movement was initiated by black students from Lincoln High School.

We have seen how this generation of black youth was literally brought into being by a hopeful longing for life. They grew up in the environment of this longing. Granny Flack, a former slave, told them, "your day will come," as she cared for them while their mothers were at work.[12] And even as their elders fought for life in their own way, according to what was possible in their time, they laid a foundation that would allow the children to go beyond them. In this way the succession of generations acted as a mechanism to achieve what was beyond the reach of a single life span.

Movement forces had been gathering during the 1950s in Chapel Hill as well, although civil rights activities remained dominated by the politics of moderation. These movement forces, however, were not black led, nor were they committed to the kind of grassroots activism espoused by groups like SCLC or the NAACP Youth Councils. There was no active NAACP in Chapel Hill. And while there was a fledgling NAACP student chapter at the university, it was relatively isolated from the local black community, in part because there were no black students at the university from Chapel

[12] Braxton Foushee interview, 1991.

Hill. Nor was there an activist black church in Chapel Hill, although there were five in Durham.[13] Still, there were signs of a quickening.

The late 1950s was a time when many black people in Chapel Hill began to feel a growing sense of possibility. On an organizational level this change was reflected by the fact that a significant number of black adults became active in public life during this period. Some joined the Fellowship for School Integration organized in 1954 by Charles Jones, the white minister of the Community Church. Despite the legalistic approach of this group, it was a definite step ahead for civil rights activism in Chapel Hill. Also, the Community Church itself, founded in 1953, was an organizational home for many liberal activists. Many of these people worked on the successful election campaign of Rev. J.R. Manley to the Chapel Hill Board of Education in 1956. At the same time, younger, more activist blacks, like Hilliard Caldwell and Vivian Foushee, were trying to bring new energy to the Negro Civic Club.[14]

As a result of this activism, a variety of organizing efforts were evident in the months preceding the Greensboro protests. Hilliard Caldwell was forcing an investigation by the Mayor's Human Relations Committee into the rejection of his application for a job on the Fire Department. Adolphus Clarke was heading up a group (including Haddie Foster, Harold's mother, as secretary) to secure funding for a swimming pool for the black community. Others were pressing for joint "Negro-white" use of the county's home demonstration kitchen.[15]

Despite the fact that these activities stayed within the bounds of traditional forms of civil rights activism, the essence of what was happening reflected a grÖowing sense of possibility and conviction in both the black and white communities that change would come if people would work for it. And every effort in this direction added to the momentum of change.

In all of these activities the assistance of white allies was crucial to black efforts. The black community in Chapel Hill had always survived on the goodwill of more affluent whites. As we have seen, this dependence was both personal and political. And it had a hidden cost. Many black families were helped through hard times, and some additional resources were channeled to the black community, but such help did not come without conditions. Whether the whites doing the giving were conservative, liberal, or radical, dependence on them meant that the pace and direction of the black struggle was largely determined by white personalities and priorities.

In 1974, remarks by Vivian Foushee revealed that some African Americans had concluded that reliance on liberals hêad undermined black empowerment:

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[13] Morris, 198. It appears that local black youths had very limited contact with black activists in Durham or elsewhere prior to 1960. Nevertheless, more research on this question is needed.

[14] James Vickers, *Chapel Hill: An Illustrated History*, 170-73; Vivian Foushee interview.

[15] *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 25 November 1959, 1.

> You know, things have always been pretty good so that you haven't been able to get your dander up enough really to pull off something that was really fantastically good for the community. Two or three people might benefit, or a lot of people might benefit, but in terms of developing some sense of your own ability to deal with systems and things--we just hadn't come to that in Chapel Hill, because we've always had the liberal white people to take care of us. I always say that because I feel like we've been kind of raped by their liberalism. (my emphasis)

What this meant in terms of the development of the Civil Rights Movement in Chapel Hill was that despite the quickening of the 1950s, activism in Chapel Hill was held in check by the inclinations of white liberals as well as traditional black leaders. In Durham and other large North Carolina cities, black leaders like Floyd McKissick were working closely with local black youths, pushing for and expeÿrimenting with the sitdown tactic. Nothing like this was happening in Chapel Hill.

Thus, when news of the Greensboro protests reached Chapel Hill, there was no concentration of black college students to take up the challenge, no NAACP Youth Council or other activist organization, no experienced black adult activists sympathetic to the sitdown tactic.

Chapel Hill was by far the smallest community in North Carolina hit by lunch counter protests during the month of February. In addition, as noted earlier, the black population of Chapel Hill and Carrboro was very small, both in actual numbers and relative to the white population. Nor were the kinds of resources provided by the black middle class in most other areas as significant in Chapel Hill. African Americans labored overwhelmingly in the university oriented service economy, and only a handful made their living in the professions or small business. Most of them were economically dependent on one large employer, the university, while the rest laböored for white owned businesses and white families. They were therefore under the thumb of white employers politically as well as economically. And while the black population of Chapel Hill was better off economically than its rural neighbors, and stood level with large urban areas in terms of median income, it was nevertheless very poor. There was very little of the black economic strength, independence, or education that existed among black middle classes in larger cities.[16]

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[16] 1960 census: In 1960, 54 per cent of employed black men and 79 per cent of employed black women were either private household workers, service workers , or laborers. For white workers the percentages were 10 per cent for men and 6 per cent for women. While 46 per cent of employed white men and 47 per cent of employed white women were in the "professional, technical, and kindred workers" category, only 6 per cent of black men (18 out of 312) and 8 per cent of black women (26 out of 346) were similarly employed. While only comprising 12 per cent of the male work force, black men held 35 per cent of the service jobs and 66 per cent of the laboring jobs. Black women, comprising 20 per cent of the female work force, held 96 per cent of the jobs in private households and 62 per cent of other service jobs. For these reasons 49 per cent of black families had yearly incomes under $3000 compared to 17 per cent of white families (of whom a significant number were probably students). Only 3 per cent of black families,

From a distance, then, it would appear that Chapel Hill had few resources in 1960 to initiate or sustain a lunch counter protest movement. Nevertheless, of all the small towns in North Carolina, Chapel Hill was one of the few to generate a serious protest movement in 1960. And in 1963-64 the black freedom struggle in Chapel Hill was one of the largest, most prolonged, and most significant in the state.

Despite the conditions that made protest more difficult, there were other factors that favored open confrontation. Unlike other small towns, where protest would be immediately subject to severe repression from local racists and police, Chapel Hill had always been a town where "you could get away with things." White workers, from whom violence could be expected, mostly lived across the tracks in Carrboro. And the police in Chapel Hill were not as brutal as in many other small towns.

There were also significant resources for protest in the black community. Because of the relatively steady black employment provided by the local economy, there were a good many stable black churches which could provide the institutional base from which to mobilize the black community. Also, while there was no black college to draw from, and only a handful of black students at the university, there was Lincoln High School. There was also the proximity of Durham, Raleigh, and Greensboro. Black people in Chapel Hill had ties to the black communities in these neighboring cities and, therefore, accessμ to certain resources and networks of communication. Finally, there was the cohesiveness of the black community. Despite its small size and lack of wealth, there was a large measure of togetherness and sharing.[17] And while there were large numbers of female headed households, there was also a good measure of home ownership, and families appear to have been fairly stable.

Also, in Chapel Hill, some of the weakness of the black community might be compensated for by resources from the white community. There were resources that white liberals and college students might provide. Although the black teenagers did not consider these resources before their first sitdown protest, it soon became evident to them that white liberals were a potential source of material assistance, movement know-how, and protection from certain kinds of repression.

In the end, however, the conditions favoring or holding back protest were simply that--conditions. The determining factor in Chapel Hill, as elsewhere, was the human factor. Were there people ready to act? Were there people ready to lead?

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nine families, had yearly incomes over $10,000 while the figure for white families was 27 per cent, or 536 families (probably a third to a half of the non-student families).

[17] This sense of togetherness was expressed by many of the black Chapel Hill residents interviewed. See especially the group interview with Esphur Foster; Barbara Burnette Powell; Lillian Perry Atwater; Alberta Jones Nealy; Ethel Jean Riggsbee Jackson; Delores James Farrington; Barbara Pendergraft Winston, Interview by author and Jennifer Alford, 14 April 1991, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

At Lincoln High School black students debated their views on the sitdown movement sweeping the state. Students brought news of Greensboro to class, recalled Harold Foster, who was soon to become the spokesman for black youth in Chapel Hill:

> We discussed current events, and the argument as to the pros and cons of it spilled out beyond the class to the cafeteria, outside the school building, and into the streets--whether these students had the right to go in there and sit down where they "weren't wanted," as was being said at that time.[18]

Foster recalled that most of the young people felt anger when they heard about the Greensboro protests. They did not necessarily agree with the sitdown tactic, but Foster realized that their anger toward the treatment of those who did sit down demonstr÷ated a potential to take action of some kind themselves:

> Most of the young people in high school felt anger that "Why the hell can't you be served in this store." And a lot of people would say, you know, like "I wouldn't go in there. If they don't want my money, I wouldn't try to give it to 'em." So even though they were sayin' that they wouldn't, but they were angry about that, the fact that somebody wouldn't take their money for service.

As noted earlier, Shirley Davis, who was one of those students who had not thought about challenging segregation previously, became active in the Chapel Hill protests once they started. She remembered how Greensboro changed her thinking:

> I was the type, if I saw a sign that said `black only,' I just went by those rules. . . . I just gave that as a respect because I was just taught you obey your elders. And I really didn't have no problem, at that time, until I realized it was wrong to put me in a category where I was to go one place and you could go another.

She heard about the Greensboro protests from James Brittian who brought the news to school.

> I found out through James Brittian. He told me about it. He brought it back to the class members, some of the class members. I was really shocked, and angry 'cause the way some of them had been treated. And that even gave me more will power to go and sit in.

Of course, it was not just high school students who talked about the implications of Greensboro. This was the topic that was on the minds of people of all ages throughout the black community.

White people, too, were concerned about Greensboro, and in particular the white power structure of Chapel Hill was anxious to find out what black people thought and, in particular, to learn about any sitdown rumblings. It was probably in order to size up what

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[18] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

was developing in the black community that *Chapel Hill Weekly* launched an in- depth investigation into the attitude of black Chapel Hillians toward integration. This series of articles is one of the few contemporary sources reflecting the thinking of the black community during the month of February, 1960.

The Chapel Hill Weekly never reported either the initial Greensboro protest or the rapid spread of the protest movement throughout the state. It did print a variety of articles and letters, however, that related to the sitdown protests. In particular, the *Weekly* did a three-part series titled "The Negro in Chapel Hill Speaks on Integration."[19] The first article focused on the views of adults, the second on older leaders, and the third on youths. Following this investigation, which clearly showed that some black youths were prepared to act, the Weekly offered editorial advice to the young people, calling on them to negotiate with business owners rather than stage protests.[20]

On the one hand, the approach of the Weekly followed age-old patterns. In failing to report the Greensboro protests, t˘he paper perpetuated traditions of the antebellum white South which had tried to keep inflammatory news about slave unrest and abolitionism from becoming known among blacks. And just as whites had tried to dominate and control black reform efforts since freedom, the editor of the weekly tried to advise black people in Chapel Hill what to do.

On the other hand, the fact that the Weekly solicited the views of African Americans at all, let alone the fact that they were front page features, was unprecedented. It is striking evidence that the actions of the youths in Greensboro had already opened up wide social spaces that had been closed to African Americans for generations.

Significantly, the first article in the series opened by acknowledging that white people had a profound lack of knowledge about what black people thought concerning integration. This closed space in the minds of white people was one of the social spaces that Greensboro began to wedge open. The newspaper noted:

> In all likelihood, few white people have ever actually heard a Negro express an opinion on integration. Most known Negro opinions are either rare or only implied.[21]

The newspaper articles reflected widespread black opposition to segregation among both adults and youth, an attitude of extreme caution among some older leaders, and the fact that behind the scenes the youth were preparing to strike.

Among the older blacks quoted were several prominent leaders. Hubert Robinson, the lone black member of the Board of Aldermen, felt he could not express his

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[19] J.A.C. Dunn, "Part One Of A Special Series: The Negroes In Chapel Hill Speak On Integration," *CHW,* 8 February 1960, 1; _____, "Part II: The Negro Speaks On Integration," *CHW,* 11 February 1960, 1; _____, "Part III: The Negro Speaks On Integration, *CHW,* 15 February 1960, 1.

[20] "A Word On The Sitdowns," editorial, *CHW,* 22 February 1960.

[21] J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 8 February 1960, 1.

personal views without jeopardizing his ability to play a constructive role for both black and white on the Board. His views on integration clearly reflected the rationale of the politics of moderation in which the dynamics of change centered on the relationship of "leading Negroes" to powerful whites. Referring to integration, Robinson stated:

> "That's one question I try and stay away from," he said, sitting in the Faculty Lounge of Morehead Planetarium, which he had been vacuuming. "In my opinion it might do me some harm to say what I think. I've done pretty good so far. I've got some things done for both white and colored, but if I said what I think there might be some opposition to anything else I might want to do. I'd like to say what I think, believe me." [22]

In a letter to the editor following the publication of these remarks, Robinson noted that he had expressly told the Weekly reporter not to quote him. He declared that he never would have said anything if he thought it was for publication.[23]

Adolphus Clark, member of the Mayor's Human Relations Committee, was more outspoken. Nevertheless, he did not address the sitdown movement directly, although his remarks clearly indicated he preferred a more gradual approach:

> Well, my opinion is there's too much fear. . . I think the School Board is afraid. They had a good case last year and they could have made the decision right there and got it done with and moved on, but they didn't and I think they're trying too much to hold things as they are. . . I'm not a radical person. I believe in engineering things carefully, but you've got to keep moving, you can't stop. This is a moving age, and if you stop you'll get run over. . . I don't think we ought to have just a storm of integration, but I do think we should all get together and be a happy nation.[24]

In fact, because the School Board did not approve their request to transfer their son to a white school, the parents of Stanley Vickers filed a suit in federal court on February 2, 1960, to desegregate the Chapel Hill schools. The suit was filed by Conrad Pearson, counsel for the NAACP in North Carolina, and Thurgood Marshall of New York, chief counsel for the NAACP. While *The New York Times* gave the sitdown movement prominence over this lawsuit, the Weekly showed its bias by making the Vickers case front-page news, without mention of sitdowns, three days after the Greensboro protests.

Charles Maddox, President of the Negro Civic Club, said of his views on integration:

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[22] Hubert Robinson, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 11 February 1960, 1.

[23] Hubert Robinson, letter to the editor, *CHW,* 18 February 1960, 2(B).

[24] Adolphus Clark, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 11 February 1960, 1.

> I don't think we're ready for it. . . I don't think we can push it too fast. . . I'm for it gradually, when we're ready for it.[25]

John Johnson, Secretary, Steward and Trustee of the St. Paul A.M.E. Zion Church, and formerly, for thirty-two years, the only Negro fireman in North Carolina said:

> I don't think we're ready for it yet. . . The reason why is--well, you take me. I don't mean to be patting myself on the shoulder, but I've worked in every hotel from here to the coast and I've never had a bad word said to me. I know my place. The old people of my race get respect, but they know their place. But I don't think these young people have learned to respect themselves, so they won't respect other people when they go to a white school. They'll abuse their privileges. I think there're too many colored people coming down from the North and pushing too hard. Whenever you try and force a man into something, it never comes out good. I think it'll be two, three, maybe five years before we're ready.[26]

The workers and small shopkeepers interviewed for the *Weekly's* "man in the street" article demonstrated a range of views, from gradualism to support for immediate integration. None, however, showed the level of avoidance exhibited by Hubert Robinson except David Caldwell, one of the few black police officers in Chapel Hill:

> That's one thing I never say anything about or even think about," he said, referring to the question of integration. "I just try to stay away from it altogether. You know, working down there with all the other men, it might cause hard feeling, and in my position I just can't afford to have anything to do with talking about segregation.[27]

Interestingly, the only people who felt they could not afford to speak their minds were those who were public servants. While some might view the unwillingness of Robinson and Caldwell to speak out as personal cowardice, it seems more useful to view their attitude as an accurate reflection of the extreme hostility of civic power in Chapel Hill to black assertiveness on the question of integration.

At the other extreme to such views were those of Robert Nicks, proprietor of M & N Grill. Interestingly, this was one of the main hangout spots for black teenagers. Speaking on integration, Nicks said:

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[25] Charles Maddox, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 11 February 1960, 5.

[26] John Johnson, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 11 February 1960, 5.

[27] David Caldwell, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 8 February 1960, 6.

> I think we should have had it a long time ago. I don't see why we can't all do anything we want to and go where we want to and let each other live in peace. If they'd just let white and colored go to school together and forget about it there wouldn't be any trouble. What's keeping it back is a lot of politicians, and I think the colored ought to band together and work together as a group.[28]

The views of black adults, for the most part, clashed markedly with statements by younger blacks. Hilliard Caldwell, a young member of the Negro Civic Club who was respected by Foster and his friends stated:

> I think integration is here to stay. . . I'm right behind those students in Greensboro.[29]

A group of high school students interviewed two weeks prior to the first Chapel Hill protests spoke even more forcefully.

Lonita Terrell, 17:

> . . . Integration is not going fast enough, and I think it's a waste of money to keep us segregated. I think segregation in stores and theatres and such is nonsense because we're all human. I think it's the parents of Caucasian youth who are forcing ideas of segregation. If there isn't integration soon I think we should take steps similar to those taken by the students at A & T and in Durham. After you've asked for something for such a long time and you don't get it, sometimes you have to use force.[30]

William Cureton, 17:

> . . . We are one of the most `educated' towns in the South and we should set an example to the South, but we're not. . . I think the Caucasians don't want us to integrate because they can't stand to see the underdog rise and surpass them. But there are a great many things we have contributed to the human race they don't know about.[31]

Harold Foster, 18:

> . . . the white person has seen the Negro as a slave, not progressing: he's taught to consider the Negro a slave from the time he's born. So the white doesn't know the

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[28] Robert Nicks, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 8 February 1960, 6.

[29] Hilliard Caldwell, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 8 February 1960, 6.

[30] Lonita Terrell, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 15 February 1960, 1.

[31] William Cureton, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 15 February 1960, 1.

> Negro culture or Negro history. I think Negro history should be integrated into white history. . . I think integration should be, as it actually is, the law of the land. There should be integration if we are to live according to the law of the land and to substantiate what President Lincoln said in the Gettysburg Address.[32]

When asked if he thought there would be incidents in Chapel Hill similar to those recently in Greensboro, Raleigh, and Durham, Harold Foster replied: "There shall be. Should trespassing warrants be served, I think the Negro is willing to pay the price." William Cureton added, "I would like for them [white people] to know that we know they fear our every move, . . ." and Lonita Terreêll chimed in, ". . . and that we are not going to take anything away from them that belongs to them; only what belongs to us."[33]

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Just as Greensboro had acted as a catalyst, precipitating a movement among those prepared to act, so the sitdown protest at Colonial Drug on February 28 precipitated the movement in Chapel Hill. But despite the fervor of Foster and his friends, getting to Big John's was not easy.

Once the youths had decided to act, they had to deal with a variety of questions. They had to decide on a target, learn about the non-violent tactic, and recruit others, all the while maneuvering to thwart the naysayers and persons in authority, both black and white, who would like them to do nothing. These issues were not defined in organizational meetings, decided by formal votes, or written down on paper as part of a master plan. Rather, they evolved according to the customary informal patterns that the young people had developed over many years.

"Our target was already picked out," recalled Braxton Foushee in 1991:

> Most of the kids in that neighborhood went to First Baptist, which was right where Yates Motor lot sits now. That's where First Baptist was, which was directly across from Colonial Drug Store. So the typical Sunday morning, sunshine, you got a hundred kids at Sunday school. The break between Sunday school and church we ran across the street and bought sodas, ice cream. . . . but you couldn't sit down, and we resented that. So when I say the target was already picked out, Colonial Drug Store was the target as far as we were concerned.

The roots of the antagonism Harold Foster and his friends felt for Carswell went deeper than simply the fact that they could not sit down. Embedded in this rule was an attitude of disdain and disrespect emanating from white society that generated a corresponding disrespect and rage among many African Americans. The highly sexualized nature of white supremacist culture focused on the protection of white womanhood, despite an underlying economic rationale. And this was particularly aggravating for Foster and some of his male friends. Therefore, the conflict with Carswell had played itself out on a personal level years before it took a political form.

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[32] Harold Foster, quoted in J.A.C. Dunn, *CHW,* 15 February 1960, 1.

[33] ibid., 3.

> Before Manley moved to the new church we had the church across from Carswell's drug store, and at that time Carswell's drugstore, Colonial Drug Store, had been a target. . . . John had become a source of, he had become a target for discussion on many occasions, havin', I think, prosecuted people for being caught shopliftin' in there. . . . When you're kids you want to rip off somebody, and we had that attitude toward John. So John adopted the attitude that most little nigger children steal, and he carried that attitude through arrogance. And people from next door, the Hospital Savings, were always goin' in there, sittin' down, eatin'. You know, cute little secretaries and stuff, couldn't ¯have these niggers in there.[34]

Thomas Mason recalled that the process of targeting Big John's also involved political considerations of appropriateness and leverage:

> Where we started was Colonial Drugstore. We chose that place for due consideration, you know, by lookin' at each--And the reason that we chose [Big John's] was because the majority of his clientele was black, and in a black neighborhood. . . . I'd say 85 per cent of his business came from black folks. Had a decent relationship with them. You know, even after Sunday School, after school every day, we'd buy, read comic books and buy fountain drinks. . . . That was the reason we chose Big John's. We thought it was very appropriate.

Although the choice of a target was not controversial for the youth, whether they liked Big John or not, they did feel that their knowledge of how to move ahead tactically was insufficient. This was one of the main reasons that protests did not start in Chapel Hill immediately according to Braxton Foushee:

> The reason it didn't start, say two or three weeks later, was because we didn't know anything about demonstrations and we had CORE to come in and they put on some workshops for us. We had the NAACP to come in and they put on workshops. CORE and NAACP were working together, and they came to Second Baptist for two consecutive Saturdays, and they put on workshops on what we were to expect, how we were supposed to react, and what most likely would be the reaction of the white community and the police department.[35]

[3434] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[35] Braxton Foushee interview, 1991. Although no other activists mentioned the assistance of these civil rights organizations (nor were they asked), Foushee's remarks are at least partially consistent with a report on the Chapel Hill activities of Gordon Carey, the regional organizer for CORE, cited in Fred Powledge, *Free at Last?* (n.p.: Little, Brown and Company, 1991; reprint, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Harper Perennial ed., 1992), 214: Carey "was invited to go to Chapel Hill to teach nonviolence to the black high school students, who had been engaging in fist-fighting with the white hecklers who came to their demonstrations," claimed Powledge. Carey was quoted as saying: "I was supposed to turn them around. I was supposed to train them. I'm sure they were a little

Another reason protests did not start in Chapel Hill right away, according to Thomas Mason, is that the young people committed to action could not recruit others to make a move:

> There were daily discussions in school and after school. . . . That was the basis of most of the conversation. And you'd have the pros and the cons. And I think that the only thing that delayed us, was that James and I couldn't convince enough people. And then in the afternoons, stop by the local soda shop, and we were talkin'. And said, "Well, we're goin' anyway. Don't want to go, don't try to talk us out of it." And a couple of people asked, "Why do you want to do these things? What's it going to prove? I mean, you can't talk the people out of patronizing. . . . I don't think you should do that." Ended up we had not enough people to follow us. The amazing thing about it was they were all older than we were.

The challenge of recruitment was critical for the possibilities of the Chapel Hill movement. In 1960 the youth had to overcome the first hurdle of recruiting other young people, most of whom were hesitant. Eventually, they had to gain the support of the more cautious and moderate adults. And in these tasks the young people of Chapel Hill had a harder job than most others. To begin with, they were high school students rather than college students, and therefore they were considered a less mature and more easily dismissed group by adults and even by other youths. Some black college activists tended to look down on the high school students as less disciplined and less reliable, and discouraged their participation in demonstrations.[36] Brittian and Mason, in particular, were very young high school students, ninth graders. And finally, the young people committed to action were not endorsed by the black establishment in Chapel Hill. For all these reasons, gaining new recruits to a sitdown plan proved difficult.

Thus, both among the students at Lincoln and among the black workers who made up the larger community, there was a great deal of fear and hesitation. It was only the act of the sitdown itself that catalyzed a movement into being.

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skeptical of me." Claims of demonstrations in Chapel Hill prior to February 28, 1960, hecklers, and fist-fighting are not consistent with other oral and written evidence.

[36] In a forum sponsored by The Fellowship for School Desegregation on February 25, 1960, the president of the student body at North Carolina College in Durham, Robert Kornegay, stated: "We try and discourage high school students from taking part in sitdowns. They are immature. If they go on a sitdown they may not even know why they're there. But if you have a hand-picked group with a good leader it might be all right. We stress non-violence, but to some people this means violence." (Robert Kornegay, quoted in "Students Relate Experiences: Fellowship Discusses Sitdown Strikes," *CHW,* 29 February 1960, 2)

CHAPTER 6

THE FIRST HIGH TIDE: FEBRUARY 29 TO AUGUST 30, 1960

The "impromptu" sitdown protest at Colonial Drug Store Sunday night, February 28, resulted in arrests and media coverage. More importantly, it had a profound impact on the Lincoln students and the broader community. By breaking decisively with the habits of deference demanded of African Americans in the Jim Crow South, the black youths grew as individuals and began to transform themselves into a social force. And they sent a clear signal that there was a group in Chapel Hill ready to take a stand with the growing southern protest movement. These courageous acts had an immediate twofold effect, calling forth both support and opposition. In the long run, the youths set in motion a generation of struggle in Chapel Hill.

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The perseverance of the black youths resulted in a psychological breakthrough. Much of the fear and hesitation among their peers melted away, and the ranks of the protesters grew rapidly. A movement now blossomed before their eyes where before there had been none. Secondly, all African Americans began to feel greater self-respect. Finally, the sitdown protest prodded white liberals to take a more activist stance in regard to black freedom. Thirty years later, James Brittian remembered the power of their act:

> I was 15 years old, yeah; I was 15 years old because I went to Juvenile Court for it. We had a sit-in at Big John's drug store, and so parents, and I think even us, we began to feel a certain sense of pride that probably wasn't there before. And then, when those type of things start happening, then you had some whites in the community--at that time they were called liberals--that saw what is happening and said, "Yeah, we need to change too."[1]

For all its "spontaneity," this first sitdown protest did not follow the Greensboro actions of February 1 with any ease or certainty. Compared to the relatively swift and decisive way that the movement developed in North Carolina's larger communities, the Chapel Hill movement labored to be born. There was, in fact, no adult leadership in Chapel Hill that made a move to organize sitdown protests in February 1960. In this respect, therefore, Chapel Hill was like most other small towns in North Carolina.

What Chapel Hill had, that many other small communities did not have, apparently, was a leadership core ready to take the dare. Without movement experience, formal organization, or the assurance of widespread support, these young black men set the struggle in motion. The initial assault on the Colonial Drug Store, therefore, must be appreciated as an extraordinary act of leadership.

The youths persevered because they had always felt they were in a league with the cities like Durham rather than the small towns; they believed that their Pottersfield

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[1] James Brittian interview.

neighborhood had a tradition of leadership to maintain; they were a close-knit group of friends who "knew each other's minds"; they received encouragement from older sisters and brothers and young adults; and there were a few among them with exceptional vision, deep commitment, and long histories of rebellion. This group now moved to enlarge the work it had begun.

After the Sunday night protest at Big John's, Foster and some of the others went to Hilliard Caldwell's house to talk things over. There had been no plan up to this point, just the act. Although memories of what was discussed that night are vague, the young people apparently were in agreement about continuing the protests. They made picket signs for the next day.[2]

On Monday, February 29, Foster brought his ideas about how to proceed to school written down on a legal pad, and the decision to continue the protests was finalized at lunch among a small group.[3] As this was happening, an interracial group of students from North Carolina College and Duke in Durham, from Shaw and St. Augustine's in Raleigh, and from UNC in Chapel Hill staged a sitdown protest at the Howard Johnson Restaurant between Chapel Hill and Durham. The group from UNC included a black student, Joe Powell. The segregated restaurant was owned by state Senator B. Everett Jordan and Governor Luther Hodges.[4]

Indicating the rapid development of grassroots coordination, the *CHW* reported that the college students planned to join the Lincoln High School students in Chapel Hill to continue protests Monday afternoon. These plans were thwarted by a large snowstorm. Nevertheless, another black college student at UNC, David Dansby, did join the pickets in Chapel Hill on Monday.[5]

After school that Monday, Foster and his friends went to the Long Meadow Dairy, across the street from Colonial Drug, where they sat down. The manager called them into the office for a conference, and the group left shortly thereafter. Gathering more students, they moved on to the Bus Station Grill and took seats. The manager, Leo Eliadis, refused to serve them, and when they would not leave, he closed his business.

By Monday evening, half of Lincoln High School had congregated on the snowy winter streets in front of Colonial Drug. They carried placards. Carswell had roped off his booths to forestall a sitdown protest, so the students picketed outside. The next day, another attempt to stage a sitdown protest at the Bus Station Grill proved futile when the manager again closed the business. The youths were served without incident, however, at the nearby Village Pharmacy.[6]

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[2] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[3] William Cureton interview, 1974

[4] Ron Shumate and Davis B. Young, "Howard Johnson Restaurant Hit By Demonstration," *The Daily Tar Heel (DTH),* 3 March 1960, 1.

[5] "Organization Set Up: Picketing Resumes At Two Businesses," *CHW,* 10 March 1960, 1.

[6] *CHW,* 3 March 1960, 1; "Sitdown Strikes Hit UNC," *DTH,* 3 March 1960, 1.

This massive show of support by black youths clearly disturbed the Chapel Hill authorities. Earlier in February, the *Weekly* had advised black youths to employ negotiations without confrontation to achieve their goals. Now the paper reported intense efforts by the police chief to persuade both black and white adult leaders to intervene to end the demonstrations.[7]

Although it is not clear whom Chief Blake contacted, or what kinds of discussions took place, it is apparent that the students could not be dissuaded from their protests. And while the newspaper reported that the students did "agree to adhere to adult counsel," the students did not, in fact, simply put themselves under the control of adults.[8] On Tuesday, the Lincoln students continued their picketing.

It remained to be seen whether the high school students would be able to hold onto their leadership, and the course that implied, once a broader grouping of people joined the movement. On Tuesday, the protesters remained without formal organization. Nevertheless, an expanded informal leadership group had constituted itself during the first days of the movement.

The young men at Lincoln were not the only ones who felt called to action by Greensboro. Immediately following the first sitdown protests in Chapel Hill, Mary Mason, Thomas's twenty-one-year-old sister, who was a junior at NCC, and Hilliard Caldwell, a twenty-three-year-old hospital employee, began meeting with Harold Foster, Thomas Mason, and James Foushee, a neighborhood friend and Lincoln classmate of Harold Foster's, to organize the movement in Chapel Hill. Other young black adults who became part of the activist core almost immediately included Braxton Foushee, James's twenty-year-old brother who worked with Hilliard at the hospital, Gloria Mason Williams, Mary's twenty-six-year-old sister, and Vivian Foushee, a close friend of Gloria's who was a social worker.[9]

From the beginning, recalled Mary Mason, the black teenagers and young adults who constituted the informal leadership decided they needed to secure the support and guidance of some established black leaders. Since many of them were members of First Baptist Church, and Rev. Manley was a leading minister in Chapel Hill at the time, they decided to ask his advice and his help.

> We wanted basically to have him steer us, and be the leader, and kinda make suggestions, and put us on track of how we could go about doing this. And he was totally against it. He said "no," he didn't want any part of that. So we thought, "Well, if you don't want to participate, could we use the church as our meeting place?" Because that church has a basement. It had a nice meeting area there. And so he said "no." And so I became a little bit outspoken and suggested that we go before the board of the church and get permission to use it, because,

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[7] *CHW,* 3 March 1960, 4.

[8] ibid.

[9] Mary Mason interview.

> we were, basically, members of the church. And so, they were all in total agreement with Rev. Manley, and they said "no."[10]

Rev. W. R. Foushee, the minister at St. Joseph's C.M.E. Church, said "no" as well.[11] The young people found themselves, therefore, without either the support of the leading black ministers or access to the traditional meeting places of the black community. "At that point we became really disappointed," Mary Mason remembered:

> I think that most black people, they were just basically afraid, because too much was happening too fast. And here we were, a group of young kids, didn't really know what we were doing, in their eyes. And just creatin' a lot of trouble, and gonna make it difficult for everyone, and especially for the adult black men of Chapel Hill. Because after all, they did depend upon the white man for their survival.

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At this point, it may be useful to pause briefly before telling the story of how the movement became organized, and grapple with this reluctance of the black ministers in Chapel Hill. To begin with, it should be noted that such reluctance was not confined to Chapel Hill. When the sitdown movement broke out, the national office of the NAACP and many black religious and educational leaders refused to back the new movement.[12] It contradicted their instincts about how to work for change, threatened their carefully nurtured relationships with powerful whites, and jeopardized the institutions they had built. The most fundamental consideration, however, was the fact that nearly all African Americans "did depend on the white man for their survival." Open revolt was a tremendous risk.

The lack of initial enthusiasm among the Chapel Hill ministers should be seen not simply as a reflection of their individual character and outlook, but also as a reflection of their congregations. Even the board members of these churches were made up primarily of working class men, including low-level employees at the university, teachers employed by the white school board, and cooks in white-owned restaurants.[13]

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[10] For Rev. Manley's own description of his role in the movement, his views of the strengths and weaknesses of the movement, and his work for integration and on behalf of the black community, both before and after the sitdown movement, see Rev. J. R. Manley, Interview by Tina Harrison, Ken Hamilton, & Wendy Purifoy, interview 19-20, DOHP, 12 June 1974 and Interview by Ken Hamilton and Tina Harrison, interview 78, DOHP, August 1974.

[11] Mary Mason interview.

[12] Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 198.

[13] Hubert Robinson, for instance, was a member of Rev. Manley's board. His status in the black community was high as a result of his leadership in the church, the fact that he was the only black member of the town Board of Aldermen, and his former job as chauffeur to university president Frank Graham. Nevertheless, in 1960, Robinson was a janitor at

"Your black minister at that time really had a lot to lose," recalled Hilliard Caldwell, "if he actively came out and supported something like that, particularly when he had a congregation or a board of trustees of older people."

> I think [the members of the congregation] were [afraid] because we were young. Kids. Didn't know what we were doing. . . . And there were certain elements at the university, your low-income employees. They are not to participate because their immediate supervisor was old segregationist from out in Carrboro and out in the county. So your maids and janitors [and] those people who had semi-technical jobs back in those days dare not get involved.[14]

The youths, on the other hand, had very little to lose of a material nature. They were focused on what they could gain in the future rather than what they had that they could lose.

> Most of the young kids, we were working, but the jobs wasn't that important. The goal was important to us. And we knew that we were going to be getting married sooner or later, and we knew that if we made a stand now, it would be a hell of a lot easier for our kids. We didn't want to experience the same thing that our parents had experienced and see our kids come up under that brutal system that took away their pride, took away their self-respe*CT,* and made them not feel free to go anywhere in the community, because you couldn't go to Carrboro after dark. I mean, it was a feared place.[15]

Nevertheless, whether a black church was "a movement church," or not, was fundamentally a question of leadership--the leadership of the minister, the board, the members of the congregation. And for whatever reason, there were no black movement churches in Chapel Hill in 1960.

It is also important to note that once the movement got off the ground and proved itself, the local ministers gave the use of their buildings and their support. Their support grew as the movement grew among the people. They did not march or get arrested. They were not outspoken. But the movement, nevertheless, was mobilized substantially out of their churches.

Nevertheless, many of the youths continued to distrust Rev. Manley. When he eventually asked to participate in the leadership meetings as an advisor, Mary

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the university, and he could be fired from his job at any time. He was vulnerable to retaliation by white employers, like other black workers, because of his class and race, despite his status, privilege, or standard of living.

[14] Hilliard Caldwell, Interview by Wendy Purifoy and William Bishop, 4 June 1974, interview 39-40, tape recording and transcript, DOHP.

[15] Braxton Foushee interview, 1991.

remembered, "all of the young people were opposed." Rev. Jones, however, prevailed on them to include Rev. Manley and he did participate.

In the early days of the movement, however, the reluctance of the ministers and their lack of experience with protest created a leadership vacuum in the black community. This factor goes a long way in explaining how a white minister and his congregation came to play a leading role in the first high tide of the movement in Chapel Hill.

During the first day of the movement, the young people kept trying to gain support in the community, but, according to Mary Mason, felt like they were "really not getting anywhere." Later that day, however, Rev. Charles Jones, the white minister of the non-denominational Community Church, offered his support and his facility. The young people did not know Rev. Jones personally up to that time, except by his reputation as something of a radical who had been involved in civil rights issues. After meeting with him, they accepted his support, but they decided that the movement should not use his church. Mary Mason recalled that "since it was really a fight for the black cause, that it should basically be located in the black community." For their initial meetings, then, they turned to the Negro Community Center and the Elk's Lodge, both in the black community.

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As in the case of Rev. Manley and the black ministers, it may be useful at this point to pause and grapple with the role of Rev. Jones and the Community Church in the Chapel Hill movement. In Charley Jones, the protesters had found a person who had been a civil rights activist for years, and he proved to be an invaluable mentor and source of support to the group of young blacks during the first phase of the movement. Although Mary Mason believed Rev. Jones was the "spearhead, the forerunner, the organizer and everything of that movement," it would probably be more precise to say that he provided a critical measure of support and guidance to the black youths at the moment when their inexperience demanded it. He was able to do this because he took a firm stand with the youth, he was experienced in protest, commanded significant resources, and he did not force his ideas on people.

The attitude of Harold Foster and his friends toward Charley Jones remained generally positive years after the end of the Civil Rights Movement in Chapel Hill. The young black men eventually excluded white liberals from leadership in the movement and took it to a level of confrontation that Rev. Jones did not endorse. And yet, they did not feel that this older white man had tried to dominate them, even during the days of their inexperience in 1960. When asked specifically if he thought Charley Jones had ever tried to be a "white master over black people," Braxton Foushee replied:

> I don't thinks so, but my ideas may differ from some other peoples', but I didn't think so. He was a guy that we could look to at that point, because we were not as prepared or well read at that time on people, and tactics, and what avenues to take. And so, to me, it was a helpful thing to have Charley sitting right there. And he didn't try to dominate a person, or a person's mind. I think he gave the person the chance to think things out for themselves and leave the tactics we would want to

> employ up to us, and he would agree with them. I'm not saying he agreed with all our tactics, but he didn't disagree with them either.[16]

During the second high tide of the movement, in 1963-64, Rev. Jones did not play a leading role. During the first high tide of the movement in 1960 he played a key role. In particular, he worked closely with Harold Foster developing the direction of the movement. Harold Foster noted the personal bond he felt with Rev. Jones:

> Rev. Jones was very instrumental in the first wave of the movement. As I told you before about Jones approaching me, Jones just had a natural *affinity* for what we wanted to do. And Jones was one of the, I think he was one of the *only* men in town that I had a great deal of respect for. I mean, it was like *chemistry* when he and I were together. In fact, we didn't need to talk about what needed to be done. We *knew* that. The point was "how?" And all Charley had to do was kind of look at me, and we knew that something was afoot. It was that kind of closeness.[17]

Rev Jones' role was not simply to help with the leadership of the movement. He also helped bring the congregation of the Community Church into the movement, including many liberal faculty members at the university like Joe Straley and Dan Pollitt.

Marion Davis was a Holocaust survivor who came to Chapel Hill after World War II. She worked in the Danziger Old World Restaurant where she made friends with the black workers and tried to organize a union.[18] It was at the restaurant that she met Rev. Jones. Later, when the Community Church was organized in 1953, he asked her to be his secretary. She was an activist in her own right and she also saw part of her role being to free up Rev. Jones so that he could be active in the movement. Thomas Mason felt both Marion Davis and Rev. Jones, as well as the Community Church as a whole, were of great importance to the movement:

> [Marion Davis played] a very supportive role, an inspirational role. Active in everything, everything she could be in, she would support.
>
> [Charley Jones] was kind of a key figure, center figure. He pulled a lot of people into the movement that I don't think would otherwise have been there. The Community Church had a, he allowed the Community Church to become a focal point for everything, pulled it together. First truly integrated church in Chapel Hill. Strong image of, "We've got to look at this, and we've got to change it."

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[16] Braxton Foushee interview, 1974.

[17] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[18] Marion Davis, Interview by author, 18 February 1994, by telephone, tape recording in the possession of the author. "Old World Restaurant" is the same as "Old World Giftshop?; "Papa" Danziger, a refugee from Nazism, ordered Marion not to make friends with his black workers or to organize a union, reflecting the power of Jim Crow in Chapel Hill at the time as well as his interests as an employer.

The first organizational meeting of the movement was held Tuesday evening, March 1, at the Negro Community Center. The institution that white businessmen had hoped would become a tool of black pacification was now claimed for the freedom struggle. But even as the meeting began, there was still no certainty about the outcome. The politics of moderation and the politics of confrontation in their various shades, and the social groupings they represented, collided, interacted, and only after a bit of high drama reached an uneasy common ground.

Harold Foster explained in 1974 how his role in the first organizational meeting unfolded:

> They had, the people, the group, had said, like, "You're going to represent us. And come time for the meetin', you go up there." And I did what they told me to do, because I felt a part of them, and we had been together for so long.

But when the meeting started Rev. Manley was up front doing the talking:

> We knew who Manley was. We had summed up Manley long before that as to what our attitude about him was. The attitude toward Manley was that Manley, he was a minister, and the ministry was a game that they ran on the people. . . . It had been discussed in light of pro and cons of religion and its relevancy. Because we had long since, we had long prevailed against gettin' baptized·. When we went to church it was just to see what was said and to discuss it, its idiocy moreso than anything else. I say that because most people felt that it was, most of us thought then that it. . . had no contemporary, contemporaneous significance. So the church became a place where you went to see what people wore, you went to see who came. . . . That's what church had become durin' our generation, and the main carrier of this was Manley.

On a personal level, Foster had discussed his differences with Rev. Manley and his concerns about the "hypocrisy" of the church before the sitdown protests. Rev. Manley had consistently reached out to him, and they had talked on the steps of Foster's home many times. Harold's mother had directed the youth choir at First Baptist, in which Harold had participated, although he refused to be baptized. And Harold's sister, Esphur, had worked as Rev. Manley's secretary. They had a long history. Now, however, the differences between these two men became part of a public drama in which the political implications of formerly personal issues became manifest. Foster and Manley represented different generational and socioeconomic constituencies, and different approaches to the challenges of their day.

Foster represented the youth, Manley the adults; Foster the poor working people, Manley the "people who had"; Foster the tradition of protest and Du Bois, Manley the tradition of accommodation and Booker T. Washington. Nevertheless, among African Americans, the poor working people and the "people who had" were not that far apart in Chapel Hill; the tradition of protest and the tradition of accommodation had never been mutually exclusive, either in practice or in theory; and the youths and the adults shared much togetherness as well as difference. And so they struggled to reach common ground, despite their differences, while being true to themselves.

When the meeting started, Rev. Manley had seized the initiative, recalled Foster. But the black youths around Foster demanded that he take control:

> Manley was up there talkin' about race relations in the abstract and go-slow gradualism. And they called me to the side and they said, "Look, we've got to stop that."
>
> And I said, "Well, you know, he's got a lot of influence."
>
> And they said, "Stop it."
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> So I said to Charley Jones, I said, "Well, look, the people don't want to hear that."
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> So he said, "What are we going to do?"
>
> I said, "What do you think?"
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> He said, "Wait a minute."
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> And so, when Manley finished, [Charley Jones] raised his hand and said, "Why don't we hear from those who have actually participated?" This was my in. When this was said, the rafters went off, "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!"
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> So I went up front, and Manley wanted to hold up a minute. I said, "Well, you know--" Once that I'd showed up at the front, it became, like, a thing between us.
>
> Well Manley, of course didn't want to, I would imagine he didn't want the people seein' the two of us bickerin', so he sat down. Because I wasn't about to sit down, and he knew that. . . .
>
> We proceeded to have the meetin'. And when I called for names of people who wanted to be chairman, they just blanked that out, and they said, "No, go ahead."

This would not be the last time that Foster repelled challenges to his leadership and the path of confrontation. The incident illustrates that he was skillful and self-confident enough to challenge established authority and to recognize and accept white allies like Rev. Jones. But it is also a good illustration of how Foster's constituency, "the people," as he called them, recruited him to leadership, demanded that he represent their interests, and backed him against those who they felt did not speak for them.[19]

In these early days then, the youths began to come together in a new way and learn what it meant to assert themselves as a social force. They had sized up the established leaders of the black community over many years, and while they expected and wanted their support, they also knew there would be conflict with these authority

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[19] This thesis, like the work of most historians, suffers from an overemphasis on outspoken leaders. Their roles draw attention because of the conventional prejudice that leaders make history, because they often leave behind a public record of their activities, and because they often speak powerfully and analytically when they write or give interviews. There are also only a few of them, which simplifies research. I have tried to balance this tendency by emphasizing the active role of the black youths who were not visible leaders in determining the direction of the movement. Still, there is much work to be done in this regard.

figures. What was new was the support they received from Rev. Charles Jones and other white liberals. They did not know these people at all, and only time would tell what would come of the new relationship. Although they were inexperienced and unsure of themselves, they wanted the thrust of their initial revolt carried through to the end, and in Foster they apparently felt they had found a leader who would not back down from the challenge.

Those who attended the first meeting were blacks from Chapel Hill, a few white liberals, at least one black UNC student, and an organizer from CORE who came with Rev. Charles Jones. This group established an ongoing local organization to coordinate the protests.

Those present elected an executive committee including Harold Foster as chairman, and Leola Bynum, Hilliard Caldwell, William Cure ton, David Danby, Marion Davis, Rev. Lonnie Horton, Vivian Foushee, Rev. Charles Jones, Mary Mason and Richard Winston. The group designated Rev. Manley and Rev. W.R. Foushee as advisors. There was agreement to continue the thrust of the high school students' initiative by negotiations, further picketing, and a call to boycott segregated businesses. Lincoln students instituted a boycott against the Longmeadow Dairy, owners of the Dairy Bar, with whom Lincoln High School had its milk contract. The tactics of massive picketing, picketing at night, and sitdown protests were given up in favor of less confrontational and more orderly action.[20]

Some have viewed this change of tactics as nothing more than a capitulation on the part of the high school students to the authority of liberal white adults and conservative black leaders who wanted to avoid conflict and disorder. Michael R. Evans argued this point of view in his senior honors thesis, “Between The Myth And The Reality: Liberalism and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina 1950-1964:”

> In seeking wider acceptance and hopefully broader support, the students relinquished much of the control over their movement to the traditional leadership in racial matters--the black establishment and white liberals. It was paradoxically precisely the failure of this group to effect progress that had alienated younger blacks from the system and precipitated their direct action. "We knew we'd have another day," remembered Foster.[21]

While there is some truth in Evans' analysis, it is also misleading. There is no evidence that the black youths of Chapel Hill were alienated from white liberals before February 1960. While the youths were angry at segregation, with those blacks in the older generation who seemed content to "suffer in silence," and with the black establishment, they did not know white liberals. They had not been involved in either liberal efforts to achieve school integration or the handful of other ventures in which

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[20] *CHW,* 10 March 1960, 1.

[21] Michael R. Evans, "Between the Idea and the Reality: Liberalism and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1950-1964," 62.

white liberals cooperated with black adults. In fact, the only experience the black youths had with white liberals was with Rev. Charles Jones following the first sitdown protest.

It is true that Rev. Jones argued with Foster from the very beginning for a change in tactics. Marion Davis recalled that this dynamic unfolded the very first day of mass picketing in Chapel Hill:

> People were calling [the church] and saying, "They're marching outside"--wherever they were then, I guess Carswell's drugstore. Someone, I don't really know who, called and said, "Shouldn't something be done here? Don't you want to--?" And we immediately went there.
>
> And then I remember Charley was telling the kids, "Let's negotiate with them." And he always had the idea that you don't negotiate under threat of something. So we had to convince the young ones that they better get off the picket line for a while and let's negotiate. And it was very controversial. He said you don't negotiate about opening a place up, or doing anything, when you're out there threatening them with a picket line. And he felt that while we are negotiating there should be no action outside. Now the kids were, you know, really hyped up, and it was great, and they wanted--it was very hard for them to understand. And I'm sure, also, for a white man to tell them that. But they did, they did. They stopped, and the negotiations were done then . . . . With the drugstore, I don't remember the details, but the guy was sitting there with a gun, you know. I'm sure you heard that. And it was really, really hard to negotiate. And it was finally decided there was no way to negotiate, so we picketed. But Charley had a way of talking to young folks, and they trusted him.

What apparently happened is that Charley Jones persuaded Harold Foster and the other youths to follow his lead. They had no experience with organized protest and they were basically open to support and guidance, as long as it furthered the movement.

At the same time there were factors that argued for giving negotiations a chance. The storeowners made use of the sitdown tactic difficult. Carswell roped off his booths to all customers, while the manager of the Bus Station Grill closed his business each time the students attempted a sitdown protest. The Dairy Bar entered into negotiations with the students immediately (by the end of March they had removed their booths and announced equal stand-up service for all). The fourth target, the Village Pharmacy, integrated.

The students believed that their main target, Colonial Drug, could be forced to give in because of Carswell's dependency on black trade. Braxton Foushee recalled their thinking:

> Well, I think John was a little surprised and angry all at the same time, because we cut his business slap off. I mean we whacked, just like that. That's what we set out to do. We didn't set out to close him down, but we set out to say, "John, if you don't let us sit down, you gone feel this, and you gone feel it immediately and right away." And that's what we did. We stopped going, saved our little money. We picketed and we stopped people going--"Don't go in there. Go down the

> street to so-and-so, or go somewhere else, but don't go here." . . . I think that move showed him a lot and it showed older people.[22]

The boycott tactic would take time. To sustain a long effort it would be necessary to turn to community mobilization and regular picketing. Nor was the danger of attacks by white racists a matter to take lightly, especially given Carswell's belligerent attitude and the proximity of Carswell's store to Carrboro. Finally, the prospect of arrest and jail, when boycott and negotiations might work, was probably a significant deterrent to youths whose parents were still ambivalent toward the movement.

Rather than see the shift in tactics as a capitulation, it seems more useful to evaluate it as part of a learning process. The students deferred to the judgment of those with more experience based on their own evaluation of the situation.

Nor did they give up their voice, although they did join forces with others outside their group. When Rev. Jones offered the Community Church as a meeting place, they turned him down because they believed "that it should basically be located in the black community." The students knew that they had to have broader community support. Despite this, they challenged the established leadership of the black community. If Foster had not marched up to the front of the first organizational meeting at the bidding of his constituency, that would have been capitulation. Nor was the executive committee that the new group elected representative of the more conservative black leadership. Black high school students (Foster, Cureton) and young adult activists (Mason, Caldwell, Foushee, and Dansby) formed a majority, while the most prominent black ministers were relegated to advisory status. Foster and his friends saw Rev. Jones and his secretary, Marion Davis, the white members of the committee, as allies against “go slow gradualism”.

Of course, over the next four years, the holdout segregationists in Chapel Hill demonstrated an unexpected tenacity for which liberalism was partly to blame and to which liberalism had no adequate response. But the high school students gained this understanding only by going through the process of the movement. Foster's comment, that "we knew we'd have another day," reflected frustration with liberal tactics *after* four months of effort. In March of 1960 the black youths were willing to give tactics of picketing, boycott, and negotiations a try.

It was a grassroots effort. Gloria Williams, her sister, and several friends, along with Marion Davis of the Community Church, formed the organizational nerve center. Harold Foster and Rev. Jones, along with Hilliard Caldwell, handled the political leadership. The leadership of the movement was now more evenly divided between males and females, although the apparent tendency was for males to do strategizing and negotiating while females led the day-to- day operations.

Gloria recalls that her role focused on the day-to-day operations of the movement, both in 1960 and later in 1963-64.

> I worked on it from an organizational level, like settin' up street captains, and telephone committees so that we could turn out one hundred to a thousand people

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[22] Braxton Foushee interview, 1991.

> at one time. Just doin' all the background work. I worked closely with Marion Davis and with another little young lady. . . . I also was a backup for the picket lines, and we had to schedule the pickets, when they would go on, when they would come off. It was just a big responsibility. And then we had the older adults who brought sandwiches and coffee, and we had another committee that would go down and get people out of jail. We were just highly organized.[23]

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It is worthwhile to pause for a moment to take note of the fact that the activism of several of these young adults had been nurtured and was supported by their participation in a friendship group, rather than through any institutional affiliation. For Gloria Williams, activism was encouraged by her family experiences in the 1950s, and by a friendship group after she left home.

By the mid-1950s Gloria was married to Thomas Williams, and they formed a friendship and support club with several other couples. Just as the young men in high school met on the Rock Wall to talk, Gloria and her friends met in each other's homes:

> We sorta had a little unit, or a little club. . . . Vivian Foushee and I, Braxton and his wife, Billy Hargraves--there was about, I guess, ten of us. It was just that we got together and played cards. We went from house to house and we served something that everybody enjoyed. And that's where we would have our fireside chats, and talk about the existing situation and what to do.
>
> And Vivian was a great, we supported each other strongly. And so she gave me strength and I gave her strength to do some of the things that we did. And she was, like, sort of outspoken like me, and we complemented each other. And we did a lot of the testing in the civil rights movement, you know, to go to see if the restaurants really would serve us. And we planned that, "Yes, we'll be the ones to dare to see if they'd take our children." And these are the types of things that we did. . . .
>
> We had things in common that we had children the same age, and we were like a support for each other. And we traveled together, and we went to the mountains, to the beach, or wherever. . . . We were planning things for our families and our children and enjoying each other. But part of that was the world around us too, so we did a lot of planning, . . . what we would be involved with, how we would support it, how we would look for jobs, and all this stuff, and how we would try to integrate.[24]

So when the young men sat down in Colonial Drug Store on February 28, 1960, Gloria, Vivian, and others were prepared to act. Although time had not ripened sufficiently in the mid-1950s for the protest movement to erupt then, the rebellious types of that day had also found each other and had formed a social space, like the Rock Wall, that gave them the strength of solidarity.

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[23] Gloria Mason Williams interview.

[24] ibid.

The high school students welcomed the young adult activists. Thomas Mason recalled that it seemed to him that people like his sisters, Hilliard Caldwell, and Vivian Foushee had been waiting in the wings:

> It's like, these people have always been there, they were just waiting for the right catalyst. And they were there, you know. And they came in and took over. And that's who needed to have been there at the time. They took the leadership role in bringin' the rest of the community. . . .
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> *

"Bringing the rest of the community," the task of recruitment, involved a whole series of tasks and decisions. They had to choose a spokesperson, find a meeting space, structure the organization, develop literature, and acquire the necessary funds.

Although Harold Foster retained his leadership of the high school students, Mary Mason, was chosen to represent the larger movement. Mary had graduated from Lincoln in 1957 and was attending North Carolina College while living in Chapel Hill. Braxton Foushee remembered Mary as a "strong, soft, demanding person." He felt that the students chose Mary based on their view of what the movement needed at that time:

> We didn't want somebody at that minute to be real forceful, I mean right out forceful. . . . We didn't want somebody to just bust--Harold was probably a little too strong for that initial phase. . . . He knew it.
>
> See, that was one of the good things about the group. Because most of us were basically from Pottersfield. We knew each other. Criticism was taken in the sense that it was for the good of the group and not as direct criticism, personal criticism towards somebody. And so that's how I think we held a lot of cohesiveness together, because we understood each other very well.
>
> Mary was just the obvious person for us to pick at that time, but later on-- . . . We wanted to present our list of demands and things that we wanted to accomplish, and Mary could do that in the initial stage--and then later on we would come with Harold when we had to be a little more forceful. And that's the way I saw it developing.[25]

Marion Davis committed herself to the movement, and the office of the Community Church became the operational headquarters for the picketing operation. She and Gloria Williams typed up literature and maintained the schedule of picketers. Because there was much concern on the part of Charley Jones and others about the safety of the pickets, Marion Davis's car was used to ferry the youths to and from the picket line. It became the car of the movement. Also, Rev. Jones donated much of the initial funds the students needed to purchase supplies of poster board, paper, and food. Then, as the black community saw that the young people were serious and disciplined, broad support started flowing to the movement.[26]

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[25] Braxton Foushee interview, 1991.

[26] Marion Davis interview.

During this phase of the movement, the black youths of Chapel Hill were fairly isolated from movement activists in other areas. When Harold Foster and William Cureton attended the founding convention of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, for instance, it seemed to have little impact on the local movement. Although that meeting took place in nearby Raleigh during April 1960, it did not result in other activists becoming involved in Chapel Hill, and there was little evidence in the activities of the local movement of any coordination with protest groups in other cities.

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The initial thrust of the Chapel Hill movement generated an inevitable and opposite reaction. The forces in opposition gathered their resources to resist the revolt against Jim Crow.

In every community where sitdown protests erupted, the radical new direction initiated by black youths was met by efforts to contain that force, to subdue its grassroots thrust, to blunt its confrontational cutting edge. This counter-force operated at a multitude of levels and emanated from numerous sources. Nor was it simply a matter of repression by those who supported the status quo. For the habits and attitudes that supported the hierarchy of domination were everywhere, and the freedom struggle involved confronting both the enemy without and the enemy within. Those who wanted a change, for instance, but who also were uncomfortable with or hostile to the development of mass forms of democratic struggle attempted to contain and redirect the movement. And even the most enthusiastic supporters of freedom always had to overcome the counter-force within themselves before they could take the next step.

The reaction of many whites in Chapel Hill was anything but friendly to the efforts of the movement. "They were very hostile," recalled Marion Davis:

> My car got--They got to know my old Plymouth, and there were nasty things going on a lot. Awfully lot of nasty things. Thrown--I mean, at the picket line there were nasty things said to us. I think it was Joe Straley, and also [Dan] Pollitt, they came with cameras, and we were trying to photograph these people who were taunting us. Boy, this was really something. I mean, they got so furious.
>
> They were certainly the business folks on main street in Chapel Hill. We were certainly not much liked by anybody there that I can think of. I don't know about the university too much. But I think what we used to call "the old Chapel Hill crowd," the old families, you know, their order seemed to be disturbed. It was understandable. So they felt very threatened.

"The business folks on main street," the merchants of Chapel Hill, had been thinking about the issue of integration long before the student sitdown protests of February 1960. For the most part, they had shown no inclination to desegregate, nor had the business community taken any initiative to deal with an issue that was obviously gathering momentum year by year.

Integration of the public schools, of course, had been an issue since 1954. But as early as November of 1958 the Human Relations Committee of the Campus "Y" had launched a campaign to open restaurants and theaters in Chapel Hill to the twenty-six black students at the university. The committee investigation found that all but three

restaurants (the Rathskeller, Danziger's, and Harry's) and both theaters were segregated. Forty university student volunteers interviewed a representative sample of UNC students and found that two thirds of the student body supported desegregation. During a meeting with the "Y" committee in September 1959, merchants indicated that they needed even more assurance of student support. Finally, in February 1960, the student legislature voted by a 2-1 majority to endorse desegregation. And later that month, just as the leaders of this effort thought they were going to achieve a resolution, the merchants involved in the process suddenly pulled out:

> A meeting of the businessmen was scheduled for three P.M. last Friday [February 26, 1960]. . . . Four out of ten appeared at the meeting. . . . During the meeting, as we were in the process of getting suggestions as to what step might next be taken, a fifth person entered, signaled the other four and all five speedily left us sitting there a bit dazed.[27]

Exactly what was going on behind the scenes is not known. The students speculated that the merchants were afraid due to the growing tension in Chapel Hill. They stated, however, that the merchants should have known after nearly a year and a half of negotiations that the "sitdown rumblings" in Chapel Hill were not connected to the efforts of the Campus "Y." The actions of the merchants suggest a significant level of communication and coordination concerning the desegregation issue.

It seems likely, in fact, that as the new confrontational attitude toward segregation gathered momentum, those who feared such a trend organized their own forces, and resistance hardened. So while the high school students at Lincoln prepared to confront segregation at a few small businesses in the black end of town, powerful individuals representing larger political and economic interests were maneuvering behind the scenes to meet the challenge.

While little is known so far about the organizational development of forces opposed to the thrust of the sitdown movement, it does appear that John Carswell did not act solely as an individual. At the same time as resentment was building among black teenagers over Big John's discriminatory seating policies, E.A. Brown was inside Colonial Drug collecting his rent, for he owned the building out of which Big John operated. Brown also owned a second- hand furniture store that catered to a largely black clientele. This store was located on Rosemary Street between the police station and the law office of town solicitor Roy Cole. Brown told Carswell that in the future he would no longer be coming to the store. He wanted John to deliver the rent to him instead.[28]

Thomas Williams, Gloria Williams' husband, worked for Big John in the store cleaning up, serving customers at the soda fountain, and filling prescriptions. He claimed that pressure from Brown was part of the reason that Carswell would not let blacks sit down in his store.

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[27] Pappy Churchill and Paul Wehr, "Letter of Clarification," *DTH,* 3 March 1960, 2.

[28] From a conversation with Thomas Williams following the author's interview with him on 4 March 1994.

> That's one reason why he wouldn't let people sit down in there. [Mr. Brown] told him it would violate his lease and he could put him out. I heard him talkin'. I heard this. Not him and Brown, but he was tellin' some guy why he wouldn't give in.[29]

How much pressure was brought to bear on John Carswell and other merchants by segregationist forces, and how much support he received for holding out, is not known. It is clear, however, that a broad array of opposition efforts developed ranging from violence by grassroots racists to threats by the highest officers of state government.

By mid-February, Governor Luther Hodges was moving to contain the growing participation of white college students in the sitdown movement. At that time, Governor Hodges publicly endorsed a speech by Chancellor Gordon Blackwell of the Women's College in Greensboro that warned white college students not to join the protests.[30]

Repression against the movement in Chapel Hill was also evident in the harassment endured by David Dansby, a black student at the university who joined the Lincoln students in early March. After his participation was publicized in the newspapers, Dansby received threatening phone calls:

> The person said, "Hello, David. I hear that you are the leader. And I said, "First place, who is this?" And they said, "the boys." And I said, "What boys?" They say, "The boys that are gonna get you if you don't stop being the leader."[31]

After this, Dansby had cherry bombs thrown at his window and placed at his door. Finally, an article about the massacre of black protesters in South Africa by white troops (the Sharpesville Massacre) was placed on the bulletin board in his hall.

Even the supposed white friends of integration frequently displayed attitudes calculated to make the protest movement conform to middle-class standards of civility and the larger interests of the business community. For example, as the black grassroots mobilization gained momentum, politicians and civic leaders tried to make sure the protests did not spread to the white business district. The Mayor's Human Relations Committee, led by D.D. Carroll, a Quaker and former dean of the UNC School of Commerce, tried to orchestrate a compromise with the downtown merchants. At the same time, Carroll warned local blacks that unless they behaved according to white standards, they would not be worthy of respect and their cause would be lost:

> If the Negro expects to succeed in his cause he has got to conduct himself above reproach and he must be sure that he is worthy of respect.[32]

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[29] Thomas Williams, Interview by author, 4 March 1994, Chapel Hill, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[30] Chafe, 122-124.

[31] David Dansby, Interview by Marcellus Barksdale, 6 June 1974, transcript, DOHP.

While such appeals may not have influenced working- class black youths, there were other forms of discouragement that were unmistakable, and they made a definite impression on the youths, especially as the movement dragged on without significant victories. Intimidation from white employers, curtailment of material help from the white community to black families, and the appearance of the KKK sent a powerful message. James Brittian, for instance, recalled how these factors caused things to unravel for him and his friends:

> Where the swimming pool is now at [the Negro Community Center] there was a path. [Members of the Klan] were sitting alongside the path one night, we were coming through there on our way home, 'cause the majority of us lived in Northside [Pottersfield].

The Klan members jumped out with their sheets on. The kids ran home. Their parents called the police:

> The response came back. I remember my mother and other people saying, "Well, Chief Stone said, `Those are my men.'" And I'm saying to myself, you know, "The police?" And later on I found out that they were police officers, and we found out that those were the people who were the Ku Klux Klan, just like in the old South, probably just like the pictures you see in "Mississippi Burning." It was strange.
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> So then fear overtook, I guess, a sense of dedication and courage. So that's what really brought an end to the movement at that time. And pressures from the whites, the white businessmen, and the university. And they said, "Well, we don't want your kids out there. They don't have no business doing that. We treat them good. We treat them nice." The fraternities giving us Christmas toys and little tricycles and wagons, and girls baby dolls, they would give out the little food baskets to black people during that time. So those type of things begin to cease. All the nice things that would usually happen, see, they started ceasing.

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All across the South, the movement died a thousand deaths that spring, despite significant victories in many communities. In Chapel Hill, the first high tide of struggle was met by a powerful, if often subtle, reaction. As African Americans revealed their discontent and showed their willingness to struggle, the forces invested in white supremacy began to reveal their true nature and show their power. And the movement in Chapel Hill had no answer to this power in 1960--not the black youths, the young black adults, the older generation, or the white liberals. No one knew what to do. It was time to regroup.

Nevertheless, before examining why the movement faltered and how this first phase ended, it must be acknowledged that the insurgency initiated by black teenagers

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[32] Dean Carroll, "Tension Apparently Eases in Lunch Counter Protests," *CHW,* 24 March 1960, 1.

and young adults in Chapel Hill was powerful. It happened, in the words of Vincent Harding, because dreams took on flesh, "in real, hard places." And because this happened in many places at the same time, the impact went far beyond what an isolated local revolt could have accomplished.

In early February the *Carolina Times*, a black newspaper in Durham, proclaimed that the A & T students' sitdown protest had "caused a patch of goose pimples to appear on the backs of all the Uncle Toms in Greensboro and elsewhere in the state." The paper went on to note that the youths had "focused the attention of members of their race and all fair-minded people on the vicious practices [of segregation]."[33] At North Carolina College, center of the black academic establishment in Durham, 103 professors revealed both their support for the youths and their anguish in a statement which said, "`We are compelled to acknowledge that these demands, no matter how embarrassing to us elders, are reasonable and just. . . .'" In the same issue, a statement by Joycelyn McKissick, a youth leader in Durham and the daughter of Floyd McKissick, demonstrated the pressure that was compelling these elders to confront their fears. She said:

> The older people of all the worlds of today are so "set in their ways" that they are either afraid to make a move for human dignity or they refuse to acknowledge the truth of the whole matter. Youth have utterly taken over. In Germany the youth started the fight for Freedom, equality, justice for all; in Cuba, the youth were the first to begin; in Africa the youth are beginning to gain their rights or are dying for them. Now, in America the youth are again taking over the Great Fight for human dignity.[34]

Clearly, if black parents did not want to lose their children, they needed to join in the struggle. In fact, as early as February 20, the *Carolina Times* editorialized that the sitdown protests could not be dismissed as mere youthful rebelliousness. The *Times* noted that broad support was flowing to the North Carolina students.[35]

The actions of the Lincoln High School students in Chapel Hill had similar effects locally. All attitudes of accommodation among blacks were challenged, whether it was the "go slow gradualism" of some black leaders or the attitudes of complacency among black parents and youth. The attitudes of whites were challenged as well. People like John Carswell had to question why the people he thought he'd been good to were picketing and boycotting his establishment. White politicians, from the Governor on down, as well as local white civic leaders in Chapel Hill, were receiving an impatient wake up call from the grassroots.

In a statement quoted by the *Carolina Times*, Rev. Charles Jones made his view of the historical significance of the sitdown movement clear. Although he did not use the words, what he said reflected the fact that African Americans in the South were

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[33] *The Carolina Times (CT),* editorial, 6 February 1960, 2.

[34] *CT,* 16 April 1960, 1, 7.

[35] *CT,* edit., 20 February 1960, 2.

beginning to exercise their right to self-determination after long years of deference to white authority:

> We'll have to recognize that we are now dealing with the leaders of the South. For a long time white people have selected from among the Negro people those with whom they would deal and called them leaders. That day is gone. New leaders of the South are here. . . . We cannot by-pass these new leaders. These young people have longer to live than their elders. They are more impatient. The older people have had their spirit numbed a bit by the constant adjustment to this humiliation, and that's sad. The older people, some of them, have gotten places of security and that satisfies them, and that's sad.[36]

And yet, despite all this talk of an end to accommodation and new leaders, the power of segregation in the South had hardly been broken. Patterns of power and privilege remained largely intact, bolstered both by the use of force and by the persuasion of minds. In Chapel Hill, this was reflected by the lack of clear-cut desegregation victories and by the containment of the movement.

After its initial surge, the movement had contracted, despite the broadening of its potential base of support. It had confined its targets to segregated lunch counters in the black business district, failing to challenge discrimination in the white part of town. And the channeling of efforts into orderly, limited, and ultimately ineffective tactics had sapped the spirit of the youths. In short, no way had been found to unleash the initiative and energy of the many people who seemed ready to work for a change.

The problem lay partly in the small size and economic dependency of the black population in Chapel Hill. These conditions had contributed in the past to the inability of black activists to sustain civil rights and labor organizations and traditions° of grassroots insurgency. Larger and better organized black communities had been able to go farther than Chapel Hill during the spring of 1960, and many would develop strong movements before Chapel Hill during the years to come.

In Chapel Hill, however, the movement also had to deal with the town's mystique, the idea that it was a particularly enlightened community, "the Southern Part of Heaven," and that for this reason it was not appropriate for those who wanted change to employ tactics of confrontation. Instead, reasonableness and civility should be employed. It was based on such thinking that Orville Campbell, publisher of the *Weekly*, advised black youths in Chapel Hill not to "peremptorily demand service" at lunch counters, but rather to "ask if they will be served if they sit down." If they were refused service, Campbell suggested that the youths should "leave without a public disturbance, and THEN, if they so choose, advertise the fact that they were refused service."[37]

White liberals in Chapel Hill, many of them connected with the university, were particularly susceptible to such arguments. Although they provided much needed support to the black youths in February, their ignorance of black life and their deference to norms

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[36] *CT,* edit., 2 April 1960, 2.

[37] *CHW,* 22 February 1960, 4.

of order, civility, and reasonableness undermined the development of a strong movement. As Durham activist Quinton Baker noted when he came to Chapel Hill to assist the resurgent movement of 1963, there was a lot of wishful thinking among whites in Chapel Hill:

> There were a lot of people in Chapel Hill who believed that peaceful negotiation was the way, and that Chapel Hill was not a community in which to have domonstrations--because it would ruin the image of paradise, that their fifteen hundred blacks were happy on the other side of town and that they knew that they had a lot of liberal whites that were just doing all kinds of wonderful things for them. . . . You couldn't pretend that in Durham.[38]

The black youths had ignored Orville Campbell's advice when they launched the first assault on Colonial Drug on February 28. As a result, the barrier of fear was broken, and large numbers of their friends and classmates rallied to the movement. From that point on, however, the tactics employed by the movement enlarged the role of a few adult negotiators while restricting the roles available to black youths. And when these tactics did not result in victories, the movement retreated instead of developing new tactics that could mobilize increasing numbers of people to put pressure on the status quo.

Throughout the South, black youths who had initiated sitdown protests faced the same problems as the young people in Chapel Hill. The movement was new everywhere and it would not finally embrace the approach of total community involvement in massive civil disobedience for several years. But in Chapel Hill the basic thrust of the new approach was overwhelmed almost from the very beginning.

The decline of the movement in Chapel Hill reflected the powerful hold of old habits on white liberals and black adults. These were the cautious instincts that had become ingrained over many years as they attempted to weaken segregation without resort to confrontation and the power of an aroused people. No less, however, it represented the failure of the emerging activist core of black youths and young adults to assert their leadership and propose a definite alternative that could unleash the slumbering power of the black community.

In Chapel Hill the grassroots thrust of the movement was preserved by Harold Foster's interruption of Rev. Manley's effort to redirect the movement into a more traditional path. Foster made this move at the insistence of his constituency and with the support of Rev. Charles Jones. Ironically, though, while white liberal support helped to maintain the momentum initiated by the black teenagers, it also stifled their initiative. The white adults took over, with the best of intentions. Because of their outlook they redirected the movement. They emphasized negotiations conducted by them over either negotiations or confrontations conducted by the youths. In this way, therefore, they both inhibited the developing leadership of the youth and they cancelled the only tactical approach that had demonstrated grassroots appeal in the black community.

At the same time, the black youths were novices in organized struggle. In 1960 they had no direct links to the accumulated knowledge of the movement. And they were

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[38] Quinton Baker interview, 1974.

just beginning to learn to function within an organizational framework that included a broad range of people. As yet, they were not sure of their own voice, and so they deferred to those white liberals, like Charley Jones, who were older, educated, committed, experienced, commanded resources, and had a clear sense of direction.

For their part, Rev. Jones, Marion Davis, and other white liberals did not realize that they had dominated the high school students in 1960. Charley Jones, at least, understood this by 1974. At that time he noted:

> At the beginning of the demonstrations four or five of us whites were on the executive committee. . . . But we actually dominated the group. They were high school kids, but we didn't think of ourselves as dominating the group.[39]

Reflecting on how white liberals came to dominate the protest movement of 1960, Marion Davis noted in 1994 that she, Rev. Jones, and others found the black youths very difficult and that their approach made her culturally uncomfortable:

> [Harold Foster] was very difficult for us to work with. You know, they were just gung ho--"Now we're gonna have a picket line and we're gonna have mass meetings." Today I would do this all differently, but at the time I didn't know. And, you know, all of us thought, "Well, it should be a little bit *more* organized," you know, and, "You can't do mass meetings unless you know what you want to do in mass meetings." And I personally felt, "Why am I gonna have all this religion?" I mean, even though I worked for Charley Jones, I've never been a religious person and basically I had a Jewish background, so to be in Christian churches and sing hymns continuously--so there were all these issues and Harold Foster was very difficult. *Now I would think he was very powerful*. (my emphasis)

Clearly, in 1960 Marion Davis, dedicated and sympathetic as she was, had no grasp of the issue of black self-determination. She did not understand it as a right or a necessity.

Although Marion Davis did not understand these things in 1960, she learned this over the years of her involvement with the black freedom movement:

> You know, I've learned a lot. But in those years, we have to admit that [the organization of the picket lines] was run by white folks. . . . We were good people, but I would never do that again.

Marion Davis believed that well-meaning white folks dominated the protest movement to the detriment of the struggle. When asked how she would do things today, she responded:

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[39] Rev. Charles Jones, Interviews by Romus Broadway, William Bishop and others, 6 June 1974 and [?] August 1974,interviews 47-48 and 60, transcripts, DOHP.

> Oh, I've done it now, up here and wherever I am, is to empower the people that are the *oppressed* to go ahead and do it, and I will be an ally. But I'm not running anything anymore. I think that was something I've learned now. I mean, we had best intentions, and I think we did well. I'm not trying to say it wasn't. But we've learned, I mean, I've learned a lot about my work. I do a lot of work. I run workshops on racism and homophobia all over the place and in the schools. And I've learned now that. . . *maybe that's why we didn't go all the way with this*. (my emphasis)

The outlook of university liberals in Chapel Hill, and liberals everywhere, had been shaped by life experiences far removed from the Pottersfield youths. They were not black. Most were not working class, and few were poor. Many were not native Southerners. ©≠Because of the relative comfort of their lives they had much to lose. And because of their middle-class status, which was based on privileges of race, class, and gender, white liberals were full of illusions. They overemphasized the capacity of reason and persuasion to transform relations of power in Chapel Hill. Unfortunately, these methods, which were useful in the experience of professors, were ineffective in the struggle against entrenched authority. And most liberals did not appreciate, and sometimes feared, the power of the people. Most importantly, the prospects of confronting power, as power revealed itself, were frightening. And yet, as black youths knew from experience, this was the challenge of their times. Like black freedom fighters before them, they were learning that progress demanded commitment and unflinching struggle. Frederick Douglass summed up this lesson after many years of striving on behalf of black freedom and democracy in America, and his words still describe what black youths in Chapel Hill were learning for themselves:

> Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its mighty waters.
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> This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.[40]

Many black youths were temperamentally prepared for such a contest, despite their inexperience as movement activists. But most white liberals were not. Joe Straley,

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[40] Frederick Douglass, speaking in Canandaigua, New York, 3 August 1857; quoted in Fred Powledge, *Free at Last: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It*, v.

one of the most steadfast white allies of the movement among university liberals, noted that the commitment of many of his peers fell short of that demonstrated by blacks:

> A lot of liberals were all for integration. . . if you could have [it] just by wishing for it. . . . They finked out early.[41]

The experiences of white liberals with African Americans grew out of various scenarios where well-meaning whites with skills and resources helped poor blacks, rather than scenarios where they lived and worked together as equals or participated in the black-led freedom struggle as allies. If they had worked closely with blacks politically, it was generally with ministers and other civic leaders who seldom challenged white supremacy directly. Fundamentally, they did not understand why change could not be won except by the mobilization of the black masses, nor did they understand why African Americans had to lead the freedom movement. They were not prepared, in particular, to follow the course of action that black working class youths had initiated.

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In the end, the protest movement of 1960 came up short. It failed to desegregate most of the white-owned businesses on West Franklin Street, finding them less vulnerable than expected. Several lunch counters and restaurants on East Franklin Street desegregated quietly, officially limiting their service to black university students. Since black residents from Chapel Hill did not frequent the white business district in significant numbers, this compromise did not have a large practical effect.

While the protest movement of 1960 in Chapel Hill did exert significant pressure on segregation, there were few clear-cut victories. By May, the massive surge in youthful assertiveness and the protest movement it sparked had dwindled. Some may have taken heart at the words of Martin Luther King who came to speak at the university that month. He «called the increasingly ineffective boycott of segregated businesses "a magnificent act of non-cooperation with the forces of evil."[42] Yet many probably understood that these words of encouragement did not reflect the difficulty of the situation. The movement had not prevailed. Many of the black youths were discouraged, some frightened, and the movement was in disarray with no clear direction. In particular, the young men who had led the first assault on Big John's in February were discontented. They still felt limited and denied, even by the movement they had helped to create.

One evening as the Pottersfield youths were walking on West Franklin Street, someone in the group called out, "let's go sit down in Big John's." So they did. Harold Foster recalled that it was just that spontaneous, no tactical ploy to try to redirect the movement, no plan at all--just the bursting forth of a deep and abiding yearning to be free that at that time, in that place, expressed itself as a question and an act:

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[41] Joseph Straley, Interview by Lois Gilman, 17 August 1974, interview 79-80, transcript, DOHP.

[42] *CHW,* 9 May 1960, 1.

> The arrests in July occurred as another spontaneous act that grew out of the whole question of "how far can you go before goin' to jail?" Look, we were in *rebellion* against *authority* at the time. You have to understand that this group was a group known as *troublemakers*. We were troublemakers. We *questioned* authority and *challenged* it head on. [We obtained this question] from our growin' years. . . . We didn't stay in the yard when we were supposed to. We went over by the railroad track when we weren't supposed to. Goin' places we weren't supposed to go, had been told not to go. So we were *disobedient* to that extent, disobedient to those who told us to be obedient, but obedient to our own consciences as it were.
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> So the question became "How far can you, how much of a trouble maker can some little nigger boys be before they go to jail." The challenge was ours. I think we're still askin' that question in various forms.[43]

Following the arrests resulting from this protest, Foster and eight other youths were scheduled for trial August 2 in the Chapel Hill Recorder's Court on charges of trespass. Two other youths who were under sixteen years old were released to the custody of their parents. The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Committee for Racial Equality issued a statement disavowing sponsorship of the protests. The committee also declined to take responsibility for defending the youths, and as a result Foster and his friends retained Floyd McKissick as their lawyer. McKissick had not been involved in the Chapel Hill movement up to that time.

The youths' trial date was continued until August 30 at McKissick's request. Those arrested on Tuesday, July 26 included Clarence Merritt Jr., 17; Douglas Perry, 17; James Merritt, 16; Harold Foster, 18; Dave Mason Jr., 17; William Cureton, 18; Albert Williams, 16; Earl Geer, 16; John Farrington, 17; Thomas Mason, 15; and James Brittian, 15.

As the teenagers awaited trial, several small dramas unfolded which on first glance had little relation to the case at hand. First, the Vickers lawsuit made news as it wended its way through the judicial process under the watchful eye of NAACP lawyer Conrad Pearson, eventually to end up in the Supreme Court. Second, Police Chief Blake proposed a picketing ordinance that would impose legal limits on picketing similar to those voluntarily adopted by the protest Committee. While the new ordinance would limit picketing to ten persons per block, marching single file, fifteen feet apart, it would also guarantee protection for the pickets against interference and abusive language. Finally, the campaign by A. D. Clark and others to raise funds for a swimming pool in the black community came to fruition. Miss Cornelia Spencer Love, a retired librarian at the university where Mr. Clark had been janitor, donated forty thousand dollars. Miss Love was the granddaughter of Cornelia Phillips Spencer, the woman who led the campaign to oust the Republicans from control of the university after the Civil War. She was also the sister of Greensboro industrialist J. Spencer Love, the head of Burlington Industries, the

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[43] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

largest textile company in the world. Her gift made it possible to complete the pool project when grassroots efforts were faltering.[44]

While each of these developments heralded a kind of progress for Chapel Hill, and some tangible benefits to the black community, each, in their own way, reflected the power that the black youths had failed to confront squarely. Neither the legal campaign for Stanley Vickers nor the gift by Cornelia Spencer Love helped African Americans learn to stand up against white domination by involving them directly in the process of struggle. The Vickers suit depended on the work of a few lawyers and prominent citizens, black and white. Miss Love's swimming pool contribution made it unnecessary for black people to learn to rely on their own efforts. Ë Finally, the Police Chief's ordinance echoed the same themes of limiting mass participation in struggle and deference to white authority. Shortly, the power of the Chapel Hill Recorders Court would attempt to teach rebellious black youths the same lesson.

In court, Floyd McKissick argued that "the greatest inconvenience God ever put on man was to be born a Negro. . . . It's just as clear as God made green trees and little green apples that the reason we are in court today is that these are black fellows." He continued, "We have here a chance to join in with the progress now being made in the state, and take the chance to let these boys truly sing, `My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.' The prosecutor, Solicitor Roy Cole, noting that, "Your honor, I can't answer all the things he said," replied by reciting the evidence of trespass. The judge, William S. Stewart, fined each young man ten dollars and costs, and gave them each a suspended thirty day jail sentence. He added, "I would like to point out that these defendants will have more opportunities than their fathers ever had before them, and that by concentrating on a supposed injustice done to them they will not be taking the advantage of these opportunities that they could."[45]

At that point, no one knew whether there would be a movement revival in Chapel Hill. It was clear, however, that the militancy and enthusiasm of the youth had been suppressed, and the high tide of struggle had receded due to the unrelenting tug of tradition and the power of white supremacy.

The black youth core that had come together in Chapel Hill was not yet ready to sustain the local movement. Following the trials of August, the youths resumed more normal lives. Harold Foster went off to school at North Carolina College, although, like Mary Mason, he continued to live at home. Those who were not in college went back to high school or to work.

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[44] *CHW,* 28 July 1960, 1; 1 August 1960, 1; 4 August 1960, 1; 11 August 1960, 1; 18 August 1960, 1; 1 September 1960, 1.

[45] *CHW,* 1 September 1960, 2.

CHAPTER 7

"JUST A MATTER OF TIME": THE MOVEMENT'S EBB, SEPTEMBER 1960 TO APRIL 1963

The upsurge in the black freedom struggle that swept the South in the spring of 1960 was a response to the most long-standing and fundamental yearnings of black people to be free in America. And it grew out of historically unique opportunities for black freedom that emerged after World War II. These conditions constituted a dare that history laid down before the black people of the South.

The challenge to segregation and accommodation gained momentum in 1960 because thousands of formerly intimidated and passive people broke through a barrier of fear and conformity to assert their humanity. In this process, black youths were the cutting edge, and their initiative opened the way for broad participation. From these beginnings, the black people of the South and their allies forged a movement, a mass democratic insurgency.

In the beginning, the new freedom struggle developed out of the life experiences of people who, for the most part, were not seasoned political activists. This may have been particularly true in areas like Chapel Hill where grassroots organizing traditions and institutions had been largely destroyed during the 1940s and 1950s. In most areas, however, it seems that while inexperienced college and high school students took much of the initiative, "old movement warriors" assisted them.[1] In many areas, these older activists were associated with protest-oriented institutions that had slowly been developing during the 1950s such as the NAACP Youth Councils, CORE, and SCLC. The youths worked with these groups, but frequently insisted on maintaining their independence.[2] The movement also recruited and mobilized from the basic institutions of black life, including the churches, schools, neighborhoods, and families. But the movement itself was new, inexperienced, and immature. Moreover, it was about breaking with established leadership and institutions as much as it was about attacking segregation, and it had to find its way without a map, creating new forms, new strategies, and new tactics as it developed. In particular, the youths were wary of the old gradualism. As a result, there were times when youthful activists cut themselves off from the valuable experience and resources established leaders could have provided.

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[1] Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 195.

[2] In Chapel Hill, Rev. Charles Jones played the part of "old movement warrior." Both the fact that Rev. Jones was white, and the fact that he did not help to initiate the first protests, set Chapel Hill apart from most other communities. As noted earlier, it seems that veteran CORE organizer, Gordon Carey, oriented the youths in non-violent tactics during February, but there is no evidence that Carey helped plan the first sitdown protests in Chapel Hill. Also, at its first organizational meeting, the Chapel Hill movement voted not to affiliate with CORE in order to maintain its independence. Later in the Chapel Hill movement, local youths gained experienced assistance from Floyd McKissick and especially Quinton Baker.

It took time for this movement to unfold and mature. And, like all social movements, it followed patterns of ebb and flow, stages of growth and decline, moments of birth, death, and rebirth. Nevertheless, beneath the bewildering surface appearance of "what happened," definite patterns of development could be discerned. It is to an overview of these patterns that we now turn. This brief general discussion is meant to provide an analytical framework for the narrative of local and regional events that follow.

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In the beginning, most movement activists lacked long- term strategies and vision. The activist core was a relatively small and generally inexperienced group. And the broader social base from which the movement recruited had only begun to throw off attitudes of deference and feel that it could become a powerful force in history. Given these realities, the first upsurge of 1960 could not be sustained for long. Following the initial stages of core formation and mass recruitment in 1960, therefore, the movement subsided.

During this ebb, the movement gained wisdom and power. Those who were prepared to take the dare had found each other and they had gained a wealth of experience through their efforts to change the world. Now they had time to reflect on this hard-won experience, and they used the opportunity to develop long-term strategies and vision, sharpen their tactics, and strengthen their organization. A momentum had been established, and even in places like Chapel Hill, where the movement had turned down a dead-end in 1960, youths like Harold Foster were saying, "It was just a matter of time."

The first phase of the movement in 1960 recruited and trained a new social force and began to transform the outlook of millions of African Americans. Following the mass upsurge of 1960, many black people were able to think in new ways about their ability to change the world. Not since the grassroots movements of the late 1930s and early 1940s had hundreds of thousands of black people felt such hopefulness.

At the core of this new social force were hundreds of black youth leaders who first became politically active in the sitdown movement of 1960. At the same time, a growing number of white youths inspired by the black freedom struggle made decisions to ally themselves with it. While some of these young people were experienced activists, many were simply youths with a strong sense of justice and a willingness to explore a deeper commitment. A few of these young white activists gradually earned enough trust and experience to become respected allies within the black youth movement.

Throughout the South, the only significant sitdown protests during the summer took place in Greenville, South Carolina, and Jacksonville, Florida, areas that were not even represented at the SNCC founding meeting. Activists in the various local movements did what they could to understand what was happening and determine a course of action that made sense under the new conditions of declining mass participation. In many areas, including Chapel Hill, local protest organizations became dormant or fell apart. Movements in Winston-Salem and Charlotte, for instance, dwindled after merchants agreed to substantial desegregation in the spring of 1960. In Durham, on the other hand, demonstrations resulted in mass arrests in May 1960, and following the conviction of all protesters in July, the movement there lost momentum, although an activist core maintained a lower level of activity.

As the mass movement of 1960 subsided, the focus of black struggle shifted to these cores of committed activists. In dozens of North Carolina communities these

activists carried on despite the lack of broad participation, summed up their experiences, and thought about how to take things the next step. In some communities, such as Durham, these cores maintained a strong organizational identity and carried on a process of movement building based on collective decisions regarding strategy and tactics.[3] In other communities, including Chapel Hill, the activist core did not maintain any formal organization. In such circumstances, discussions about the future of the movement and participation in ongoing protest activities were carried out by one's and two's and three's.

At the regional and national levels activists rallied to the civil rights organizations. It was the initiative of these organizations, invigorated by the influx of fresh forces and new resources from the waning mass movement, that propelled the larger movement process forward during this period. CORE's Freedom Rides campaign of 1961 and Freedom Highways campaign of 1962, SNCC's Deep South voter registration and direct action campaigns, particularly the Albany Movement, and SCLC's involvement in Albany in 1962 and Birmingham in 1963 prepared the way for the next wave of community rebellions.[4] When this new phase of mass struggle came in the spring of 1963, the local cores of veteran community activists, assisted by the civil rights organizations, recruited and directed an uprising that was far more powerful than what had taken place in 1960.

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The ebb period in Chapel Hill lasted longer than in Durham or Greensboro. Despite significant ongoing protest activity during 1961-62, the mass character of the movement dwindled after March 1960. Following the July 1960, arrests at the Colonial Drug Store, there were no further civil rights arrests in Chapel Hill for three years. Participation by black youths, and the black community generally, in efforts to desegregate the movie theaters and the schools was limited. White liberals led these efforts.

The local protest organization lapsed at the beginning of the summer of 1960. Six months later it came back together again as the Citizens Committee for Open Movies (COM).

Local black teachers who wanted to take their students to see *Porgy and Bess*, which had an all black cast, sparked this renewal of activity in January 1961. The Carolina Theater, which had no separate balcony for African Americans, refused. Eventually, this led to renewed picketing and organization, but black youths participated in small numbers and secondary roles for the most part. Protests continued for a year until final victory in March 1962. Widespread support of these efforts by UNC students and liberal adults, who boycotted the theaters, probably generated enough pressure to

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[3] Quinton Baker interview, 1974. Baker noted that the community and campus NAACP Youth Councils and Floyd McKissick's law office were the activist core of the Durham movement.

[4] The main sources I have consulted on CORE, SNCC, and SCLC include the works by Morris, Carson, and Branch as well as August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study of the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

force desegregation, although the national civil rights momentum exerted pressure behind®≠ the scenes. The protests maintained a moderate and hopeful tone throughout, aiming their appeal at the conscience of white people.[5]

The only independent initiative by local black youths during this period was an attempt to run Hilliard Caldwell for the Board of Aldermen. Foster suggested the plan, and the youths agreed that a younger point of view was needed on the Board. This effort fell short, according to Harold Foster, because "the people wouldn't turn out Hubert Robinson."[6]

Also, during this period, Foster, Mary Mason, and others participated in occasional meetings at the Campus Y to discuss civil rights issues. As Foster recalled, there might be twenty-five to thirty people there, but most of those present "had responsible positions."[7] They did not represent the grassroots.

Then, for over a year following the desegregation of the movies in 1962, there was no organized protest activity in Chapel Hill. Not until April 1963 did signs of a movement renewal disturb the village calm.

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It is important to note that the movement in Chapel Hill did not ebb because it had achieved great success, or because little remained to be done. During this interim, the basic structures of segregation in Chapel Hill, both public and private, remained intact. Despite the rhetoric of public officials, a hard core of racism permeated the institutional structures of the town and the university.

This reality was evident to all African Americans and to many observers outside the black community. Thus, the cries of "why Chapel Hill?" that erupted in 1963, following the renewal of the freedom movement, rang hollow to some liberals. John Ehle, for one, did not find the new protests surprising:

> The integration of both the university and the schools had come about only by reason of court action. In the town itself Negro income was pitifully low. Almost half the Negroes lived in white-owned houses, which did not meet the minimum requirement of the town's housing code, which everybody admitted, was a lax code, even so. The schools from which Negroes graduated seemed to be poor; only one graduate had been able to satisfy the academic entrance requirements of the university. Negro visitors to the town had to be severely oriented to what a Negro could do, where he could go and where he couldn't, where he could eat and where he couldn't, and whether he could sit down when he ate or was required to

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[5] For a more complete treatment of the period from June, 1960 to April, 1963 see Gary F. Blanchard, "The Politics of Desegregation: A Case Study of Desegregation and Municipal Decision-Making in Chapel Hill, North Carolina," 17-19; Michael R. Evans, "Between the Idea and the Reality: Liberalism and the Struggle for Racial Justice in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1950-1964," 67-72.

[6] Foster interview, 1974.

[7] ibid.

> stand up. And what could the Negroes aspire to? What jobs? What business? What chance for success? What sense of dignity and opportunity? [8]

In fact, between 1960 and 1963, black enrollment at the university fell as a percentage of the entire student body. In 1963, the schools of Business Administration, Education, Journalism, and Pharmacy had never had more than one black student in a given term, while the schools of Dentistry and Nursing had not admitted a single black student as of spring, 1963.[9] In the area of public accommodations, at least one-third of the restaurants in Chapel Hill remained segregated as well as all three white owned motels. Memorial Hospital maintained two predominantly black floors and its Gravely Sanatorium "generally enforced segregation by custom."[10]

The grudging attitude toward change and the deeply racist attitude of public officials during this period surfaced whenever black initiatives for freedom did occur. One indication of the prevailing attitude came to light when the campus chapter of the NAACP sent a negotiating team to the director of North Carolina Memorial Hospital, a division of the university system, to urge further desegregation there. The NAACP asked for the "removal of signs denoting segregation in rest rooms and. . . the ending of segregation in wards and private rooms." In a book detailing the response of municipalities to desegregation efforts, the North Carolina Mayors' Co-operating Committee recorded the hospital director's response:

> During these discussions, the director indicated that he was receptive to the idea of removing the "Colored" and "White" signs from the rest rooms, but he indicated that the signs would have to be removed over a period of time, and that they would have to be removed during the night so that their removal would be inconspicuous. The director refused to hear any arguments in favor of desegregating bed facilities at the hospital.[11]

Another example of the segregationist attitudes among public officials was exposed by the efforts of a black graduate student to enroll his son in the town's private "Little League" baseball club in 1962. As a result of the ensuing controversy, the league commissioners discontinued the program rather than desegregate. One of these commissioners was Town Solicitor, Roy Cole. Cole's part in this incident was described by Gary Blanchard:

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[8] John Ehle, *The Free Men*, 39-40.

[9] Blanchard thesis, appendix.

[10] "*DTH* Survey Shows Unequal Service at 25% of 116 Places," *Daily Tar Heel*, 12 January 1964, 1; quoted in Evans thesis, 136.

[11] Capus M. Waynick, John C. Brooks, and Elsie W. Pitts, eds. *North Carolina and the Negro* (Raleigh, NC: Mayors' Cooperating Committee, 1964), 30.

> Roy Cole, the Town Solicitor (prosecutor) and a Commissioner of the League, refused to comment on the matter. But Tom Scism, a UNC graduate student and one of the Minor League coaches, said he had been asked to resign by Cole because he supported the Negro boy's efforts to play ball.[12]

The incident brought brief nationwide publicity to Chapel Hill, and the town quickly moved to shore up its image by reorganizing the league with assistance from the town Recreation Commission. Nevertheless, solicitor Cole received no public censure from town officials. In this way the institutional racism of the town bureaucracy--the way that the culture, structure, and personnel of governmental institutions perpetuated racism--was maintained by the failure of elected leaders to take a firm stand on behalf of black freedom.

Thus, as African Americans observed the process of desegregation in Chapel Hill, it was evident that change was moving at a snail's pace. Nevertheless, it was difficult for a renewal of the protest movement to take place for the very reasons that it had dwindled in Chapel Hill and many other communities in the first place.

To understand how the renewal of local protest came about in the spring of 1963, therefore, it is necessary to turn our attention to the movement building process that took place as a result of the activities of the national civil rights protest organizations. For it was the development of a movement dynamic that went beyond what individual communities could generate that created the conditions that allowed a resurgence of protest in Chapel Hill and other local areas.

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The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was the only organization that had been established specifically to support the development of a regional youth movement. Delegates from many local areas formed SNCC, but its interaction with most of the original protest movements of 1960 was not significant. Although it was formed as a "coordinating committee," it never served this function. In part, this was due to a lack of resources during its initial formative period. But it was also because the leaders of SNCC believed strongly in local autonomy and wanted to avoid the kind of hierarchy they saw in the established civil rights organizations. Another possible reason why SNCC's role as a coordinating organization never developed was the swift decline of the local mass movements.

As the scattered local movements declined, SNCC, CORE, and SCLC gained recruits. These organizations provided an organizational home for activists, a process for gathering and evaluating the lessons of the movement, and a mechanism for concentrating resources. Since they were not bound to particular communities, they had the flexibility to focus their attention where they believed it would do the most good. And it was their efforts during the period of ebb in the mass movement that enabled activists to discover the methods by which entire communities could be mobilized to challenge segregation. This was the next step.

From its founding, SNCC became a magnet for committed young activists who wanted to be on the cutting edge of the freedom struggle. Initially, many of these activists were southern black youths who had become involved during the 1960 sitdown

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[12] Blanchard, 19.

protests. Increasingly, however, volunteers were drawn to the southern struggle and to SNCC from a broad variety of areas and backgrounds. But no matter where they came from, those who joined SNCC stood apart in terms of the quality and depth of their commitment to directly challenge segregation under even the most difficult conditions.

Rather than focus on coordinating local student protest movements, SNCC turned toward becoming an organization in its own right. In particular, SNCC activists saw themselves as the organization that was carrying on the tradition of the black youth upsurge of 1960 and developing that thrust to meet the new challenges of the day. They did not see themselves as a youth wing of King's SCLC, despite that organization's role in helping with SNCC's formation. In fact, SNCC activists were skeptical of King's leadership style and the established civil rights organizations generally. In his authoritative study of SNCC, Clayborne Carson noted:

> Open defiance of segregationist authorities formed the basis of SNCC's distinctive reputation for militancy. The civil rights movement included many non-SNCC activists, but there was no other group of individuals who were as uniformly willing to "put their bodies on the line." Student protesters had in fact associated themselves with SNCC because they believed that it was unlike other civil rights organizations, whose more cautious leaders and entrenched bureaucracy discouraged local initiative.[13]

While many local movements in Chapel Hill and elsewhere settled into patterns of limited and non-confrontational activity, SNCC broadened the scope of its protests and turned to direct confrontation. While local movements in decline ceded center stage back to more moderate leaders, SNCC on the rise turned to grassroots organizing in the Deep South, adopted working-class norms, and embraced a stare-death-in-the-face militancy.

The freedom legacy that the SNCC youths began to establish was a model that built on local leadership and community empowerment. SNCC workers tried to become allies of communities in struggle, and they stayed where they organized for extended periods. Their approach was a grassroots appeal to the youth, the workers, and the farmers to develop their own organized strength.

During its initial stages, the sitdown protest movement was limited by middle-class norms of respectability. Black youths were careful to wear clothes that conformed to these standards, reflecting the traditional concerns of black civic leaders to counter negative racial stereotypes in the white community. But as the struggle progressed, dress became more casual. SNCC went through the same transition, but more quickly. When ÷young activists gained experience in the struggle, they broke with traditional forms of deference to middle-class values. Those who joined the SNCC staff in 1962 and 1963, whatever their class background, adopted a new look on the outside that matched their new level of understanding and commitment:

> Association with SNCC meant not only a willingness to be arrested but also a desire to identify with oppressed people, to abandon or postpone middle-class

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[13] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960's* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), 69.

> career plans, and to take the risk of assuming new tasks. These goals were symbolized in the SNCC workers' typical dress of blue jeans and work shirts or farmer's overalls.[14]

This trend toward the grassroots mobilization of black communities, and especially youths, as well as the abandonment of the safe and conventional norms of behavior and struggle that characterized the black middle class, was evident throughout the South as the movement developed. Indeed, this transition was a requirement for the movement to develop. Simply stated, it was "the logic of history." Neither the black middle class, nor liberal white allies, had the temperament or the power to carry the struggle through to the end, and their strategies and tactics excluded most African Americans from participation.

CORE launched a campaign to integrate interstate travel in the spring of 1961. The "freedom rides," conducted by black and white volunteers, met with severe repression at the hands of white mobs and local law enforcement. As the violence escalated, CORE called off the campaign, fearing that some volunteers would be killed. Student activists, however, particularly a group from Nashville that had been instrumental in the formation of SNCC, decided to continue the freedom rides. As they gained control of the freedom ride campaign, these youths sparked a renewal of the student movement. After more violence in Alabama, hundreds of arrests in Mississippi, and an outpouring of support from northern white students and prominent liberals like William Sloan Coffin, victory was won in September.[15]

While the Freedom Rides involved only a few hundred students, compared to the thousands involved in lunch counter protests the previous spring, those hundreds were transformed by their experiences. Drawn together by the challenge of the southern student movement, many became leading activists.

Just as an activist core had formed in Chapel Hill and other local areas, so this process now continued on a regional level, and increasingly under the banner of SNCC and CORE. Out of all the local struggles and the scattered lives of individuals, the grassroots leadership organizations were recruiting a critical mass of experienced and enthusiastic activists who could help take the struggle to the next level.

In addition to their participation in the Freedom Rides, SNCC activists launched their first voter registration drive in McComb, Mississippi, under the leadership of Bob Moses. Although the SNCC workers were successful in recruiting local blacks to attempt to register, their efforts were met by arrests and murder. Under attack, this initial effort collapsed. Yet, like the Freedom Rides, this campaign provided SNCC with the kind of knowledge and testing that could only be gained by direct organizing experience. Like the veterans of local struggles, SNCC activists gained a wealth of knowledge from their efforts. In particular, they began to develop organizing techniques that relied on local

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[14] ibid., 72.

[15] Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, especially 135-45. Morris, 231-36.

leaders and bold confrontations "which would enable them to mobilize entire black communities in the South for protracted struggle."[16]

During 1961 the most significant civil rights struggle took place in Albany, Georgia. SNCC organizers started by reaching out to the grassroots, particularly high school and college students, and upon that basis built a broad coalition of black reform organizations to challenge all aspects of segregation in Albany. Their organization was called the Albany Movement. As the movement built in late 1961, Martin Luther King and SCLC became involved. This gave the struggle a high media profile and broad support, but it also resulted in serious conflicts between SNCC and SCLC. Nevertheless, the movement was sustained for an entire year, and although there was no clear-cut victory in Albany, the civil rights organizations had learned much about the challenge of mobilizing entire communities to confront segregation.[17]

Albany was perceived as a defeat by many movement observers, and particularly by King and SCLC. Summing up Albany, Wyatt T. Walker, King's chief lieutenant in Albany, said, ". . . this was the first time we'd ever been in a revolution. We made a tactical error of assaulting too many things." Julian Bond, believed Albany was a loss for King and SCLC: "I think it was a loss for King, and it was a loss created by their lack of leadership development. They sent all the leadership to jail, and they didn't have a real plan."[18] SNCC activists like James Forman felt that much of the problem in Albany was King's leadership, which still seemed to be more about positioning himself and SCLC than about empowering the masses. In his analysis of the Civil Rights Movement twenty years later, Aldon Morris agreed:

> At a critical moment in the Albany movement, King had capitulated to the white power structure. It is almost certain that he could have united the community and possibly the various protest organizations behind him if he had defied the federal injunction. When he instead obeyed the injunction, however, the internal strife within the movement increased, while the morale and determination of the masses decreased.[19]

Nevertheless, King claimed Albany as a victory. One of King's white SCLC associates, Henry Schwarzschild, who, like Marion Davis, was a Jewish Holocaust survivor, argued that this was a mistake:

> Who was it who said what we ought to do about the Vietnam War was declare victory and leave? Martin tried to do that about Albany, and it was

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[16] Carson, 55.

[17] Carson, 56-65. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 524-61. Morris, 239-50. Forman, 247-62.

[18] Walker and Bond quoted in Powledge without reference sources, 416.

[19] Morris, 248.

> transparently false, and everybody sort of knew it was false. Martin was a little bit too much of a taboo subject for people to say it out loud.
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> But I at the time said, "It's a very bad mistake to declare Albany a victory. . . . It is not chiseled in stone that you're going to win every campaign. Here you invested a great deal and you lost. That's a good thing to say, not a bad thing to say. Your defeats will help you as much as victories.[20]

But the historically significant problem was not whether King misrepresented Albany as a victory, but the fact that so many in the mainstream Civil Rights Movement saw Albany as a defeat. Because of their grassroots orientation, however, many SNCC activists could see a more basic truth. Martha Prescott Norman, for instance, who was a SNCC field secretary in the sixties, declared:

> Here it was that a Black Belt community showed the level at which it was going to struggle for civil rights. When Albany, Georgia, citizens marched to the courthouse by the hundreds in 1961, they said, "We're going for broke. We're not worried about oppression, we're not worried about our jobs, and we really aren't worried about our lives."
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> They were the first to do such. They were the model. They created the mold on which the rest of the civil rights movement was based. Their numbers and their seriousness served notice that the South could no longer maintain its system of racial oppression--because that's all they had to uphold it, the threat of arrest, of beatings, of economic reprisals. When Albany, Georgia, citizens went to the courthouse, they announced that these threats weren't going to work anymore. And I can't see that as anything but a victory.[21]

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The movement throughout the South was moving toward a second phase of massive confrontation, this time involving entire communities, and Chapel Hill was no exception. The historical possibilities that had called black people to rise up against Jim Crow had not been exhausted. When one local movement would fall, another would rise. Out of nowhere, seemingly, a James Meredith would step forward to ignite a national crisis. And all the while, civil rights organizations probed, experimented, and focused resources, eventually making a breakthrough here, developing a model of struggle there.

All of this reflected an urge, a yearning--"Let another world be born." It was no one's project and everyone's project. It was the cultural super trend of "the sixties" in the making. It was a tide that raised all ships.

In this context, a gathering of individuals took place in Chapel Hill. This was no called meeting, but a gradual coming together of those people in the community who reflected the main components of the larger gathering of social forces that was taking place in the South and throughout the nation.

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[20] Powledge, 417.

[21] ibid., 418.

CHAPTER 8

THE SECOND HIGH TIDE—THE FIRST WAVE: APRIL TO AUGUST, 1963

It was not surprising that the second high tide of protest in Chapel Hill did not develop out of the liberal-dominated coalition that led the effort to integrate the movies. Instead, an alliance between local black youths and radical white college students at the University of North Carolina initiated the new wave of protests that began in April 1963.[1] Once again, Harold Foster played a decisive role. Among the white students, a thirty-year-old undergraduate from Alabama named Pat Cusick took the lead.

Soon after the new protests began, Foster, Cusick, and their associates recruited support from white liberals and black adults in Chapel Hill, and from black movement activists in Durham and elsewhere. The movement grew rapidly by reversing the steps that had led to its decline in 1960. From picketing it moved to street demonstrations and then to sitdown protests.

The push toward massive civil disobedience, however, had contradictory effects. As the enthusiasm and participation of the black community surged, resistance stiffened among all sectors of the Chapel Hill establishment. The movement came under attack from Governor Terry Sanford as well. And in this context, white community support faltered. Many white liberals abandoned the movement as it moved toward confrontation with the business and political leadership of the town and state.

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The local trend toward massive civil disobedience did not develop in isolation from the regional dynamics of protest. The movement in Chapel Hill was guided and sustained by the larger movement and also contributed to it. In the spring of 1963, a renewal of black protest swept through the South. Somehow, many people, in many places, from many organizations came to the same decisions at roughly the same time. In part, this happened because of the process involving national civil rights organizations described in the previous chapter. In part it was due to local developments that often followed similar patterns. And in part it was due to something harder to define that many people simply called "the spirit of the times." What all this added up to was the fact that something called "the movement" had matured, and in the spring of 1963 it revealed the power and wisdom of its growth.

The most dramatic struggle unfolded in Alabama, where Martin Luther King, Jr. and SCLC activists led the people of Birmingham against the dogs and fire hoses of Bull Connor's police and the dynamite of the Ku Klux Klan. Simultaneously, protest erupted across North Carolina and other southern states.

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[1] "Radical" is a term without any precise meaning in everyday usage. I use it to highlight the fact that the white students who allied themselves with local black youths had gone beyond most white liberals in their readiness to act on beliefs that fundamental and sweeping social changes were needed to make the United States truly democratic.

The renewal of protest in Chapel Hill did not come easily. In the beginning, the picketing of the College Cafe by white students at the university struck many observers as both unlikely and comical. Moreover, it was completely ineffective. Yet those who snickered at these feeble beginnings had little appreciation for either the leadership abilities of the youths involved or the readiness of the Chapel Hill black community for renewed protest.

Once again, democratic insurgency in Chapel Hill grew from the lives of a few individuals who made difficult decisions to give themselves to the effort. The initiative of these leaders opened the way for many others who were ready to act, but not to act alone. And while their stories cannot all be told here, it is important to convey some sense of how individuals transformed themselves in order to change the world. For it is from such efforts that the more general dynamics of the movement process evolved.

The individual biographies of black youths in chapter four have given insight into why and how a movement developed in Chapel Hill following the Greensboro protests in 1960. The renewal of the movement in 1963, however, cannot be understood without grappling with the question of white leadership. For it was the initiative of white students at the university that provided the critical support needed by black youths to launch the new round of struggle. And while it is misleading to claim that white students started and led the new movement, they played a critical role. At this point, therefore, it is necessary to examine how one white student came to be a leader in the black freedom struggle. The story is important in its own right, but it also stands as an example of a new trend of solidarity with the black freedom struggle that was developing among white youths.

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Among the many white students who became active in the movement, Pat Cusick stands out because he came forward first, assumed leadership, worked unceasingly, and stayed until the end. None of this, however, came easily. As hard as Cusick worked at his organizing tasks, he worked just as hard at transforming himself. And this is what set him apart from the vast majority of liberals in Chapel Hill. He was willing to look at the fundamental flaws in American democracy without flinching and seek their root causes. For the cause of freedom he was willing to do things that made him uncomfortable, to sacrifice, to spend social time with black friends in the black community, to organize in the black community as well as the white, and to follow black leadership. In this, Cusick represented a new trend among white youths who allied themselves with the black freedom struggle. Whether they worked in communities or joined SNCC, these white activists crossed a line that most other sympathetic whites shied away from. And so, as the black struggle was forced by the lessons of its effort to become more radical, more uncompromising, and more disruptive, these white allies followed the same path.

In December 1962, long before the first national anti-war march, at a time when nearly all good liberals felt blessed to have John F. Kennedy in the White House, Pat Cusick decided to organize a chapter of the Student Peace Union (SPU) at UNC. The new student organization's purpose would be to expose and protest the "liberal" foreign policy of the United States government in Vietnam and elsewhere. Nevertheless, at the beginning of April 1963, the main focus of the SPU had become the struggle to desegregate Chapel Hill.

This development poses several intriguing questions. At a time when black activists were initiating massive protests all across the South, why did renewed protest in

Chapel Hill originate with a white peace group at the university? Why and how did the members of the SPU make the switch from peace to racial justice? And finally, was this unusual development an exception to the general pattern, perhaps a matter of chance, or did it grow organically out of the patterns of local history and the larger dynamics of the black freedom struggle?

To answer such questions it is necessary to examine why and how individuals made choices that affected the development of the movement.[2] Pat Cusick's story only provides partial answers. The stories of many white activists, including John Dunne, Rosemary Ezra, Joe Straley, Lou Calhoun, and others remain to be told. When that work is done, along with work on the stories of more black activists, a far richer history will emerge. Therefore, while Cusick's role was central among white allies of the black struggle, my hope is that his story will serve as an usher at the door for both general readers and historians.

Pat Cusick was a white, thirty-year-old UNC undergraduate when he took his first tentative steps toward civil rights activism. His great-grandfather had been a Confederate general and a founder of a Ku Klux Klan unit after the Civil War.

By the time of the Depression, when Pat was growing up, the family was poor. Pat described his mother as "a member of a extremely old, southern, broken down aristocracy family." His father was an Irish steelworker who moved from Illinois to take a job at Republic Steel in Gaston, Alabama, making nails. "We had no money," Pat recalled, "but we had all this family tradition which was taught to me":

> [Our family] had a crazy relationship. We knew black families that had been slaves of my great-grandfather's. There was contact at Christmas, weddings, and things like that. The kitchen furniture was hand carved by kitchen slaves. Now after I started realizing some things in my head, obviously those type of things had a hell of an impact. . . and I'm sure a lot of it was guilt.

If Pat eventually felt guilt about his family's relationship to blacks, it was probably partly because he had some mutually caring personal relationships with a number of black people as a child. Like many white children in the South, Pat had a black baby-sitter during his early years, and he loved her like a second mother. Also, like other white children in his÷ neighborhood, he grew up with black playmates:

> People I played with, . . . the kids on the block, let's say, were white and black, because it was a black street back of the white street. The houses were separate,

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[2] Historians have generally employed this intimate level of analysis to explore the black freedom movement of the sixties only in biographies of prominent individuals, particularly Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ideally, however, the attention given to, say, Dr. King in *Parting the Waters* by Taylor Branch, should also be given to large numbers of the grassroots activists who participated in the movement. Otherwise the legacy of democratic struggle is distorted and the power of the people in history is lost. On the one hand, my choice to focus on a few individuals begs the question of the role others played. But, hopefully, the possibility of what could be done along these lines with more time, space, and additional sources will be appreciated by the reader.

> of course. They were originally built as servant houses. But until we were about, I'd say twelve--then the white parents stepped in--the peer group was white and black. And it wasn't that I had no contact with [black kids] 'cause I had, everyday, and I would eat at their houses, and we played football and baseball. And then there came a point in time in which white parents started to pull this thing apart. So there was contact. And I think in terms of sports and things like that it was. . . a healthy, equal contact.

So, despite the fact that Pat Cusick had been raised up to be a segregationist, and knew that his forebears had owned slaves and fought for white supremacy, there was also a part of his life experience that could become a basis for a more inclusive sense of justice. And this was true for a good many white Southerners. Eventually, the narrow views of Pat Cusick and many others were challenged by wider experience.

At thirteen, Pat left Gaston to attend a Roman Catholic boarding school. There he debated one priest who believed segregation was wrong and another who taught "Marxist economics, but without using any of the rhetoric, 'cause he taught everybody that private property was wrong and a lot of other things."

Pat started feeling uncomfortable with his segregationist views after this exposure to what today might be called "liberation theology." It was not until he "got the hell out of the South," however, that what he "had realized intellectually, but not on a gut level," became confirmed at a deeper level by his own social practice.

During the early 1950s, Pat served in the Air Force as an air traffic controller in Berlin, Germany. There, he experienced relationships with African Americans that were relatively free of the constraints of Jim Crow.

> I was dealing with black people in a, not that crazy relationship that I mentioned before. My supervisor at the air traffic control tower in Berlin was black, and I began to have some black friends on certainly a more equal basis than I ever had. That was fifty-one, fifty-two, and fifty-three.

Later, when Pat returned to the South, these experiences stimulated an internal conflict. Like the conflict black veterans felt upon returning to a segregated America from World War II, the anxiety Pat felt based on his broader experience helped him clarify his mind on the question of racism:

> And then I went back to the South, and that had a hell of an impact on me because. . . I would ride around on buses, etc., etc. I'd think of the. . . friends that I had in the Air Force. And what would I do if they came to town?

For ten years Cusick struggled with this question. In his own words, this was a period of his life when his behavior could best be characterized as "chicken-shit":

> I don't know any other word that describes it better. Ten years--I grew up as a segregationist in Alabama. But I'd say fully ten years, from fifty-three to sixty-three, that I knew what I should do just as a human being. And I [didn't have] the

> guts to do it, even to argue. And then it came out, it came out in 19[63], thank God it came out.

When Pat came to Chapel Hill in 1960, he was deeply concerned about racial justice. "The whole question with me was, `How could I do something about it?' And also, I was afraid to do something about it, even in terms of arguing with people. And I had to get over that hump."

Cusick went to hear Martin Luther King, Jr., speak when the civil rights leader came to Chapel Hill in May 1960. He read King's books. Still, he did not join the picketing of the Colonial Drug Store. In fact, like most of white Chapel Hill, he was not involved in the "other side of town." He knew little about either the local black community or the history of black people in the United States. Pat Cusick was, in fact, like many of the white people James Baldwin described about that time in a letter to his young nephew published in *The Fire Next Time*:

> They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men. Many of them, indeed, know better, but, as you will discover, people find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger. In this case, the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identity.[3]

Nevertheless, like increasing numbers of white people throughout the country, Pat was grappling with the fears that kept him trapped. Little by little, he edged closer to confronting that which he feared. By 196ì3, Cusick had come to the conclusion that there had been "a whitewash of history." In particular, he believed that the Kennedy administration was lying about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In addition, Pat opposed militarism generally. He believed in non-violence as a way of life. And so he decided to do something to change the world. Even though he was not prepared to confront racism in the Jim Crow South, he was prepared to go against the U.S. government and white liberals in Chapel Hill.

Reflecting in 1974 on his decision to act on the peace issue, even though the race issue had been nagging him for ten years, Pat speculated that he was still afraid to do what he knew was the right thing:

> I think people block, everybody tends to block what they know they have to do, . . . even in terms of nitty gritty everyday things. It's much easier to do something else. . . . And last night for the first time I thought, "Well, I was blocking, once again, the whole thing of what was happening in~ the South, and myself as a white Southerner." And it was easier for me to start talking about peace.

Whatever Pat's motivations, organizing a chapter of the Student Peace Union in December 1962, created new possibilities for democratic struggle in Chapel Hill. When

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[3] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 23.

Cusick began recruiting for the SPU, he gave up some of his individual independence. Before, he had been free to make decisions about his life without any accountability to a larger collective. Now, he had voluntarily made himself accountable to both the new group he had initiated and to some of the larger questions being posed by history. Wherever these decisions would lead, Pat and the members of the new SPU had made a move for freedom based on human solidarity.

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Interestingly, Harold Foster was one of Pat Cusick's first recruits to the UNC chapter of the Student Peace Union. Harold met Pat in early 1963 at Harry's, one of the few restaurants on East Franklin Street that served both black and white customers. Pat had been trying to recruit enough members to start a chapter of the Student Peace Union, and one of his methods was hanging out in Harry's wearing a peace button. Although the focus of the SPU was international relations, Pat was also deeply drawn to the issue of local race relations. Harold, on the other hand, while concerned mainly with the black freedom struggle, was interested in the questions the SPU students were asking about foreign policy. Someone, perhaps Peter Leake, a close friend of Foster's who attended NCC and who socialized with some of the white students, introduced Harold to Pat.[4]

This meeting was the beginning of a close personal collaboration between Foster and Cusick that lasted throughout the next year of intense civil rights activity. In a broader sense, the meeting also marked the origins of solidarity between radicalizing white youths and young black militants that was one of the defining characteristics of both the emerging civil rights movement in Chapel Hill and the national youth movement of the 1960s.

Cusick and Foster talked politics frequently after their first meeting in early 1963. Cusick asked about local movement history and the role of different individuals. Foster drew Cusick out on American foreign policy and issues of world peace. Cusick invited Foster and Leake to join the SPU, and the black youths accepted. Other early recruits included Bill Hicks, Richard Creal, Lou Calhoun, and John Dunne--all white college students and North Carolinians (except Dunne), and Margaret Ellen Bowers, a white Chapel Hill High School student whose father had been a leader of the effort to desegregate Chapel Hill's movie theaters.

That spring the white students in the SPU stirred up a good deal of controversy on the UNC campus with their opposition to nuclear war and U.S. involvement in Vietnam and their support for the Cuban Revolution. When they handed out leaflets, angry passers-by would sometimes crumple them up and stuff them down the SPU members' shirts or pelt them with eggs. They also were very unpopular with Chapel Hill liberals, according to Cusick:

> I think most of the wrath we got, which is to be expected in Chapel Hill, was from the liberal community. Because John Kennedy was president, and how can you possibly attack foreign policy when, you know, there's a liberal president?

While the SPU had to fend off abuse from right-wingers and criticism from liberals, they also had to deal with the efforts of leftist members of the New Left Club, a

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[4] Harold Foster interview, 1974. Cusick interview.

group associated with the communist Progressive Labor Party. According to John Dunne, members of this group tried to take over the SPU but were discouraged when the organization adopted a principle of absolute Gandhian non-violence. Dunne believed that Marxists, generally, were disillusioned by the politics of the SPU.

> I know there were people who were seriously considering and studying Marxism and Leninism and Trotskyism, but I think that they really felt that we were counter-productive to their objectives. [They were the kind of people that] knew that we were very much "moderates," and were "visionless" and "reform oriented."[5]

Thus, dismissed by many liberals for being too radical, and by some radicals for being too liberal, the growing core of activists in the SPU forged ahead. They came to the point of taking action on civil rights, despite their peace focus, because of the influence of events, the presence of Harold Foster and Peter Leake in the group, and their own developing commitment to racial justice.

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Foster and the Pottersfield group that had been arrested at Colonial Drug in July 1960 recruited the key black activist in Durham, Floyd McKissick, to be their lawyer. This was the beginning of an ongoing relationship between the movement in Chapel Hill and the more developed movement in Durham. And as a student at North Carolina College in Durham, Foster developed contacts with other movement activists. Moreover, as the feature editor of the NCC newspaper, he stayed informed about civil rights developments in Durham and throughout the South.

Thus, by the time Foster met Pat Cusick, the foundation for the future collaboration between McKissick and other Durham activists and the Chapel Hill movement had already been laid. And at the same time, Foster was keeping up his relationships in Chapel Hill because he continued to live at home while attending NCC.

While there does not seem to have been a conscious plan on the part of Foster, his Pottersfield associates, or Pete Leake to turn the SPU toward civil rights activities, it is clear that Foster and Leake moved the organization in this direction. Cusick believed that Foster had this influence "by his very presence" in the group. Leake recalled that he and Foster talked with the white students about "how can you talk about peace and justice in Vietnam and not talk about it in your own community."[6]

Gradually the SPU members decided they wanted to do something about civil rights. Still, they thought of themselves as a white student peace group. Therefore, they approached the campus chapter of the NAACP, led by David Dansby, and suggested that the predominantly black group should take the lead on civil rights. But the NAACP was neither a strong organization on campus, nor a particularly activist one according to Cusick. In addition, they had their own agenda. They had been researching areas of continuing racial discrimination on the UNC campus, particularly at the university hospital, and they were not open to refocusing their efforts on desegregating public

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[5] Dunne interview.

[6] Pete Leake, telephone conversation with the author, May 1995

facilities in Chapel Hill. In addition, the NAACP members were leery of the SPU's leftist reputation.[7] As a result, the SPU members decided to renew the assault on segregated public accommodations alone.

Exactly how this process unfolded is not clear, partly because the specific conversations that took place among Foster, Leake, and the other SPU members are forgotten. But Cusick remembered that for him, every step of the way was a struggle, and his participation was prodded and pulled by people and events. And at every stage, he remembered, "Harold was a step ahead."

> When we were talking in the restaurant, I was against picketing. When I was picketing, I was against street marches. When I was doing street marches I had not yet come to the fact that I could be arrested, 'cause that, to me, was kind of making a jump. When I was arrested the first time, I certainly didn't think I would be doing anything like blocking the streets. But, you know, we were helped by events.

The Student Peace Union entered the civil rights fray in early April. Pat Cusick, at least, had been pulled and pushed over the "hump" of his fear by Harold Foster and the power of black struggle developing throughout the state and the nation. There had been large demonstrations in Durham in August and in Greensboro in November 1962.[8] Now, on March 3, 1963, after finding restaurant owners uncompromising about their segregationist policies and the campus NAACP unwilling to take the lead on public accommodations, the SPU announced in the *Daily Tar Heel* a campaign of picketing and boycotts against segregated businesses in Chapel Hill.[9] Unlike the response of the African American masses in Durham and Greensboro, however, the beginning of this movement was marked by the lack of enthusiasm it generated in Chapel Hill's black community.

On April 5, Pat Cusick, John Dunne, and others began picketing the College Cafe on Franklin Street in the white business district of Chapel Hill. Pat's sign read "Land of the Free--for Whom?" Unfortunately, these pickets helped business at the College Cafe. On the one hand, white support rallied to Max Yarborough, the owner.[10] Cusick noted, "It was the policy of certain fraternities that their pledge classes had to eat there. It was a policy in ROTC that they had to eat there." At the same time, the issue did not catch on in the black community. Pat thought it was because black people did not eat at the College Cafe. While this was true, what was far more important was the failure of the SPU to seek the involvement of the black community in the campaign.

Still, by acting, the white members of the SPU crossed an important psychological divide. By overcoming their fears and taking a stand they put themselves in position to

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[7] Dunne interview.

[8] Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 170-72.

[9] Patrick Cusick, letter to the Editor, *CHW*, 3 April 1963, 3(B).

[10] Ehle, *The Free Men*, 9-16. Cusick interview.

take the next step, and they demonstrated the strength of their convictions to themselves and others, particularly Foster. And it was this first step that opened up new possibilities.

"I remember," said Pat, "we sat down, a few of us at Harry's Cafe, and--Now, at the same time, . . . this was the time of Birmingham, and this was the time of the beginnings of the black student movement in the state. . . . So all that was happening around us. And so, I remember I talked with Harold Foster, and we said, `How can we change this thing?'"

Foster undoubtedly wanted to see things change in Chapel Hill, and he and Leake had been instrumental in the process that had brought the SPU to picketing, but that did not necessarily mean that he was prepared to lead a renewed and expanded effort to desegregate Chapel Hill. He very much wanted to get his college education and pursue his journalism interests, and he knew from first-hand experience how difficult it would be to take on liberal Chapel Hill. He, like the other black youths, had been burned in 1960. According to John Ehle, Foster told Cusick:

> Man, this town is hard to crack. It's called a liberal place, but that's a mirage, man. When you go to get water, you just get a mouthful of sand.[11]

Nevertheless, Foster and Cusick agreed to enlarge the desegregation effort. While Cusick attempted to enlist broader support among white students and adults, Foster contacted Rev. W. R. Foushee, Hilliard Caldwell, and other black adults and he rallied his Pottersfield friends. On May 3, at Rev. Foushee's church, St. Joseph's, approximately 60 people attended a meeting to organize a new, broadly representative desegregation group.[12] The name chosen was the Committee for Open Business (COB).

By the beginning of May, then, all of the forces that would renew the assault on segregation in Chapel Hill had gathered together. Local black youths had joined with white college students at UNC to initiate the effort without the participation of white liberals or moderate leaders in the black community. It became evident after only a few weeks, however, that a serious effort must be more broadly based. So members of the SPU, who had drawn the wrath of white liberals by their stand on foreign policy, reached out to white liberals, and black youths, who had clashed with moderate black leaders over tactics and leadership in 1960, reached out to black moderates. This time, however, Foster and his associates were more experienced and less isolated from support outside of the confines of both Chapel Hill liberalism and black moderation. They had allies already on the UNC campus who were not liberals, and they would soon have allies in Durham and other centers of the developing grassroots upsurge.

At this point in the story, it is important to note that the larger context of black struggle had changed since 1960. The movement had pushed ahead during the early 1960s, testing its vision and methods in a multitude of campaigns and localities. The structures of domination at every level--personal, local, state, and national--had educated the movement by their resistance to change. As a result of the failure of reasoned

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[11] Ehle, 35.

[12] "Community Help Is Sought In Desegregation Movement," *CHW*, 8 May 1963, 4(B). Ehle, 35.

argument, moral appeal, limited pressure, and the electoral process, the movement turned increasingly to civil disobedience, economic boycott, and the all-out mobilization of African Americans to attack segregation in ways that paralyzed entire communities and forced the intervention of federal power on the side of racial justice.

In this way, the movement gradually embraced an analysis of U.S. society that focused on the contradiction between the idea of democracy that was mouthed by those in authority and the reality of elite power that continued to limit and deny black freedom.[13] And just as this analysis challenged fundamental cultural assumptions about the U.S. social order, so the methods that flowed from this analysis challenged the limits that established authority tried to impose on popular democratic action.

Throughout most of the South, political leaders were forthright in their opposition to segregation. But in North Carolina, which nurtured a more progressive image, Governor Terry Sanford aligned himself with President Kennedy. On January 18, 1963, in a speech given to the North Carolina Press Association in Chapel Hill, as signs of unrest increased in North Carolina and throughout the South, Sanford established a statewide Good Neighbor Council to promote increased opportunities for African Americans based on voluntary initiatives by employers and public officials. Many African Americans, however, had little hope that substantial progress would result from this voluntary approach, any more than it had resulted from voluntary compliance with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling. In any case, the people were tired of waiting. Sanford wanted change to be guided by those who already enjoyed power and privilege, but movement activists had learned the limits of such voluntarism after they made their case in 1960.

Now, in Chapel Hill, black and white youths initiated an organization that they intended would pursue a more aggressive policy than the Committee for Racial Equality in 1960 or the Committee for Open Movies in 1961. Just how far the movement would have to go tactically in Chapel Hill was not clear at the beginning, even to the more militant black youths. Still, they had no doubt that it would have to go beyond earlier efforts. At the same time, they knew that they would have to build broad based support for more aggressive policies.

At its second meeting on May 10, the COB chose a twelve-person executive and two co-chairs, Harold Foster and Father Clarence Parker, an 80-year-old retired Episcopal minister.[14] The presence of Rev. W. R. Foushee on the committee reflected his endorsement of the new effort. Hilliard Caldwell represented something of a bridge between the more militant youths and the traditional black leadership. Foster and James Foushee, a black twenty-two-year-old restaurant worker, both had strong support among the two groups of black youths, those still in school and those who had dropped out or had recently graduated. Lester Carson reflected the participation of black UNC students

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[13] For a more theoretical discussion of this contradiction that situates the question in the context of both democratic theory and the sweep of U. S. history see Lawrence Goodwyn, "Rethinking `Populism': Paradoxes of Historiography and Democracy," Telis 88 (Summer 1991), 38.

[14] "Integration Group Mulls Future Plans: Internal Strife Is Put To Rest," *CHW*, 12 May 1963, 1.

in the new organization, and Pat Cusick and Bill Hicks reflected the role of the SPU. Anne Queen, a director of the Campus Y, was the only woman on the executive. She was a liberal closely associated with Governor Terry Sanford who had been active in earlier desegregation efforts.

The picketing of the College Cafe initiated by the SPU was now taken over by the COB. And while the SPU picketing in April had not stimulated much public response, continued picketing in May under COB auspices commanded more attention. It could not have been difficult for any concerned observer to see that the COB had a large potential base of support in the black community, on campus, and among white liberals. Moreover, while protests in Birmingham had riveted the nation during early May, massive new protests involving hundreds of arrests and thousands of marchers erupted in Greensboro on May 11 and in Durham on May 18. It was the combination of the local organizing and the power of the developing movement outside of Chapel Hill that provoked fearful activity now among a variety of Chapel Hill groups and institutions. Their opposition or passivity in the past had helped to maintain the status quo. Now, chickens came home to roost. The next decision by the COB, therefore, provoked a flurry of anguished activity.

Following lengthy debate at the second COB meeting on May 10, in which mass demonstrations were proposed but voted down, the organization asked its executive committee to recommend a course of action at the next full meeting. During the following weeks, word spread throughout the town about the possibility of a street demonstration, and this prospect stirred up a good deal of criticism. John Ehle, at that time a Chapel Hill resident and special assistant to Governor Terry Sanford, noted the mood of many white citizens: "The town looked on defensively, and some citizens shuddered. ` Why Chapel Hill?' any number of them asked."[15]

On May 19, twenty ministers asked Mayor Sandy McClamroch to establish a broad based committee to work for desegregation, and the mayor appeared receptive.[16] On May 22, the *Chapel Hill Weekly* endorsed the ministers' proposal, but indicated a strong distaste for the approach to desegregation taken by black demonstrators in other North Carolina communities. In a statement that foreshadowed the antagonism the editors would eventually take toward civil rights demonstrations, the paper stated:

> By and large, desegregation has resulted only from increasing pressure, such as that being exerted by the mass demonstrations. On experience, there is no real reason for Negroes to think that anything other than unceasing pressure will be successful.
>
> For the time being, Chapel Hill is in position to act without the pressure of demonstrations. . . .
>
> There is no way of knowing whether anything or everything that such a committee [as the one proposed by the ministers] could do would solve any of our racial problems, avert or even delay mass demonstrations. But just the appointment of such a committee would be clear evidence that we are aware of

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[15] Ehle, 39.

[16] "20 Ministers Ask Mayor To Appoint Integration Group," *CHW*, 19 May 1963, 1.

> the racial problems here, are concerned about them, and, even more important, trying to do something to solve them in a decent and sensible way, rather than leaving the resolution to a mob roiling in the street.[17]

That same day the mayor's Human Relations Committee added its support to the ministers' proposal for a new mayor's committee to end all segregation in Chapel Hill. In a statement that betrayed both unrealistic optimism and apprehension the HRC asserted:

> This committee feels that the time is ripe for the free granting of the equality long overdue for all citizens. The wholehearted acceptance of this principle is now feasible as well as urgently necessary.[18]

Despite assertions that Chapel Hill was different and could change without being forced, an open meeting of the COB executive committee voted on May 22 to recommend to the full COB that it stage a mass street demonstration on Saturday, May 25. About fifty people attended this meeting, which was marked by signs of a deep division between white liberals and the black and white youth. Not surprisingly, many of the liberals feared that a demonstration might hurt the efforts of the mayor's Human Relations Commission or the proposed mayor's committee on desegregation. The youths, however, believed that a mass demonstration was just the thing to spur meaningful activity.

At this point, the Merchants Association, which had taken no stand on desegregation in the past, seemed prodded to action. On May 23, following an emergency meeting, it called on its members and others to end all discriminatory practices, adding, however, that compliance was voluntary.

The next day, Friday, May 24, the mayor appointed a new desegregation committee. Two local businesses announced steps toward desegregation.

The preachers and politicians, the media and the businessmen--all now focused their attention on the issues raised first by the Lincoln High School students in 1960 which they had so long ignored. During the period when those involved in protest had been few, when the militant black youths had been isolated and controlled, only lip service to desegregation was forthcoming. But now, a new specter haunted those with influence who had stood by the status quo--the possibility of a democratic mass movement in the streets of Chapel Hill.

It was in this atmosphere of fear-motivated concessions and conciliatory statements that the full COB met Friday night, May 24, at St. Joseph's church in the black community. Two hundred people attended, and there was no doubt that the people were prepared to march. Although several white participants spoke against the march, the final vote was overwhelming.

The growing connection of the Chapel Hill movement with freedom movements in other areas was marked at the Friday night meeting by the presence of activists from

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[17] "Time For Concern Is Before The Fact," editorial, *CHW*, 22 May 1963, 4.

[18] "Decision Expected Tonight On Desegregation Proposal," *CHW*, 22 May 1963, 1.

Durham. These young people described their struggle and led the group in freedom songs. All of Chapel Hill awaited the next day with tense expectation.

The street demonstration of May 25, 1963, was an event of profound significance for many individuals in Chapel Hill and for the local freedom movement as a whole. Although such marches became commonplace in the ensuing months, this demonstration was probably the first of its kind in the history of Chapel Hill. Moreover, in the historical conditions under which it took place, it marked an important new stage in the movement-building process.

For the local protest organization and for many individuals, this demonstration represented a new level of willingness to go beyond the bounds of protest sanctioned by mainstream opinion and established authority. The mayor refused to address the demonstrators and the police chief tried to limit them to the sidewalks. But this day the people claimed a broad control of public spaces. The march was testimony to a growing movement of democratic assertiveness on the part of a formerly intimidated people and their allies. Reflecting and amplifying the spirit of Elizabeth Cotton and Margaret Walker, the marchers rang out "a joyful noise" against the fear that had caused so many to "suffer in silence." No dirges were sung. In this way they ushered in the new day, and their solidarity added power to the momentum initiated by the black youths in 1960 to take the struggle for freedom "to the streets."

The demonstrators gathered in an annex of St. Joseph's Methodist Church on West Rosemary Street at noon. They sang freedom songs composed of new words set to old spirituals and folk songs--"Let the martial songs be written."[19] They recited the non-violent oath en masse. They cheered Rev. W. R. Foushee when he announced that All Star Lanes had agreed to desegregate its bowling alleys. Then, in ranks five abreast, more than half of them African American, the marchers stepped out into the streets.[20] They swung down Graham Street to West Franklin Street, turned, and headed toward downtown Chapel Hill. In front of Leo's Restaurant they stopped and sang, "Give me that old freedom spirit," pointing at the restaurant. Then the group moved across the street to Colonial Drug Store, pointing and singing "Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on."

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[19] Ehle described the Chapel Hill demonstration as a "parade" and a "holiday excursion." He also said it was "a deeply serious effort which had been decked out with color and had a victorious sound to it." He then compared it to a march in Raleigh that he said conveyed a stronger sense of "protest and power and a plea for help. Almost all of the marchers in Raleigh were black youths, and they marched at night to torchlight and the "challenging beat of their own music." Ehle, 49. Yet the martial spirit of the black youths in Chapel Hill would assert itself in time.

[20] For the fact that "more than half" of the marchers were African Americans, as well as details of the march, see "350 Integrationists march On Downtown Chapel Hill: Protest Rally Is Peaceful," *CHW*, 26 May 1963, 1. Ehle, 40-50. It must be remembered in assessing the significance of these numbers that the black community in Chapel Hill and Carrboro numbered about seventeen hundred people while the white community numbered over twelve thousand.

Sixteen-year-old Charliese Cotton, Charley Pearl as she was called, was one of the black youths who marched that day. She had not been involved in civil rights protest until that morning when her mother, Mrs. Odessa Cotton, sent her up to St. Joseph's. "My mama told me to go up there and march, and I didn't know nothin' about it," she told John Ehle.[21] But Mrs. Cotton, like many of the black adults in Chapel Hill, was glad to see the movement arrive, and she knew that it was an opportunity to improve things for her children. As a young woman she had worked as a domestic in white homes because there was nothing else to do. But she had always hated having to deal with the constant sexual advances of white men in these households, and she was determined that her daughters would never have to work for white women. So Charliese marched, and eventually she became one of the most active of the young people who made up the backbone of the movement. "Pearl," her mother said, "just lived in there."[22]

The march was about evenly divided between black and white, and as it moved down West Franklin Street many who had stood on the sidewalks watching joined the throng. William Tolliver, a black adult activist in various integration efforts, recruited the hesitant: "Do you believe in segregation?" he challenged them. "Here, you look well enough to march."[23]

As the swelling crowd passed the College Cafe, another small transformational drama unfolded. Max Yarborough's black cook, one of those long-term employees Louis Graves might have referred to as a "faithful servant," told his boss he intended to quit. He felt he could no longer work in a segregated place with his minister and his friends marching outside. And it was at that point that Max decided to integrate.[24]

As the demonstrators continued on Franklin Street, through the white business district toward the Post Office, Harold Foster and his Pottersfield comrades completed a cycle of sorts. Three years before they had met downtown and walked to Big John's drug store to stage their first protest. This day they marched back. They had been few and without allies, but now they were many and had broad support. Despite the apparent domination of protest in Chapel Hill by the cautious leadership of middle-class white liberals during the intervening years, the militant spirit of the black youths had persisted, and their idea of how to struggle had grown.

The march swung around the Post Office, down Henderson Street, turned left onto Rosemary, and headed for the Town Hall. Inside, the mayor, the head of the Human Relations Commission, and the town manager waited behind closed doors. At the Town Hall the group sang and then Rev. Charley Jones spoke. He related how a woman had called him the night before and asked, "Must those people march tomorrow?" He told her "yes." And he told the crowd, "The reason we must protest is because there is no Movement."

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[21] Ehle, 45.

[22] Odessa Cotton, Interview by author, 5 February 1994, tape recording in the possession of the author.

[23] "350 Integrationists March on Downtown Chapel Hill," *CHW*, 26 May 1963, 8.

[24] Ehle, 48.

Back at St. Joseph's, at the conclusion of the march, Harold Foster announced the desegregation of two businesses and a two-day suspension of demonstrations to give the mayor's desegregation committee time to negotiate with the remaining businesses. "If nothing occurs during those two days, then it will be necessary to begin action again. You can look forward to either an announcement of the end of demonstrations or a call for more," he said. Following the singing of "We Shall Overcome," the people dispersed.

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The street demonstration of May 25 set several trends in motion that became fundamental to the development of the movement in Chapel Hill. The demonstration marked a shift in the strategic focus of protest away from individual segregationists and toward the town as a whole. Also, the COB began increasingly to focus on mobilizing support in the black community, especially among the youth. Finally, the COB began working more and more closely with movement activists from Durham and elsewhere.

Following the street demonstration, the COB decided to conduct regular street marches in Chapel Hill if negotiations were not successful within two weeks. The group also decided to call for a local legislative solution to ongoing segregation. This reflected the COB viewpoint that the responsibility for ongoing segregation belonged to the entire community and it was the job of the freedom movement to hold the community accountable. Tactically, the method whereby the community could end segregation was embodied in the concept of a public accommodations law.

COB members like Pat Cusick began thinking about a public accommodation ordinance when local businessmen complained that they could not risk desegregating unless all their competitors desegregated at the same time.[25] Rev. Jones made the first public call for such an ordinance at the May 25 demonstration, and soon both the mayor's new committee on integration (June 11) and the mayor's Human Relations Committee (June 19) recommended such an ordinance as the only alternative, given the ongoing intransigence of local segregationists. At this point, then, momentum seemed to be building that favored the demand for desegregation.

The freedom march of May 25 reflected the growing assertiveness and strength of black youths, and the black Chapel Hill community generally, in the Committee for Open Business. The caution of liberal white members of the COB Steering Committee had been overcome, in part, by the logic of events, which demonstrated repeatedly that reliance on the efforts of civic leaders and businessmen to achieve desegregation was pointless. As a result, the movement now began to turn to the tactics favored by the black youths from the beginning, tactics that relied on the enthusiasm and power of the black community itself. As a result, grassroots participation in the COB increased, while those resisting change sent up a howl.

The opposition of the business establishment in Chapel Hill revealed itself to a certain extent in the pages of the *Chapel Hill Weekly*. This paper, the main source of news in Chapel Hill, had been owned since 1954 by a group of Chapel Hill's most powerful businessmen. Prominent among these was George Watts Hill, Chairman of the Board of the Central Carolina Bank.[26] Hill was also a member of the executive

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[25] Cusick interview.

[26] "Vickers, Chapel Hill, 189, 169.

committee of the Board of Trustees of the university and a "frequent" adviser to Governor Terry Sanford.[27] In 1954, shortly after he broke the banking monopoly of the Bank of Chapel Hill, he organized a group of investors to buy the *Chapel Hill Weekly*. These included his erstwhile opponent in the banking struggle, Collier Cobb Jr., Chairman of the Board of the Bank of Chapel Hill; Orville Campbell, a former editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* propelled into business success by the conservative Comptroller of the university, W.D. Carmichael, Jr.; and the older Carmichael's son, W.D. Carmichael III. These men, then, represented the interlocking interests of the most powerful financial institutions in the town with the business and executive leadership of the university.

As early as May 26, the day after the first march, the *Weekly* asserted that the community's "men of good will" had done everything humanly possible to make demonstrations unnecessary.[28] On June 9, the day after the COB announced plans for new demonstrations, the *Weekly* put forward arguments to discredit that decision.[29] Citing a survey done by the Merchants Association at the request of the Mayor, himself a prominent merchant and owner of the local radio station, the paper reported the merchants' opinion that Chapel Hill was 92-95 per cent desegregated.[30] This claim was reinforced and broadcast by the *Weekly* the same day in an editorial arguing for an end to demonstrations:

> In the present drive in Chapel Hill to eliminate segregation now confined to about a half a dozen eating places, little more can be gained by mass demonstrations. One unreasonable demonstration, however, can put a hard break on progress that is now being made. . . .[31]

While arguing that demonstrations served no purpose because of Chapel Hill's record of desegregation, the *Weekly* nevertheless tried to advise the COB on the character of future demonstrations, should they occur. The editors stated that protest should target only the holdout segregationists, while the entire community should be spared:

> Our whole community does not deserve to be demonstrated against for any reason.

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[27] Ehle, 65.

[28] "Next Move Is Up To Those Manning The Last Outposts Of Discrimination," *CHW*, 26 May 1963, 1.

[29] "More Segregation Protest Demonstrations Planned: Committee Calls Off Moratorium," *CHW*, 9 June 1963, 1. "Mayor Cites Desegregation Gains; Committee Will Meet," *CHW*, 9 June 1963, 1.

[30] Blanchard thesis, 24.

[31] "An Appropriate Time To Take Stock," editorial, *CHW*, 9 June 1963, 4(B).

In effect, then, the *Weekly* editors argued that continued segregation in Chapel Hill was not significant, and in any case it was not a community problem or a community responsibility that warranted demonstrations. Only a few segregationists should be held accountable, not the community as a whole.

Of course, this line of reasoning ignored the fact that segregation, and before that slavery, had never been the result of decisions made by a few prejudiced individuals in Chapel Hill. The university and town administrations, as well as the media and all the individuals and institutions of the white community, had maintained the subjugation of African Americans for nearly two hundred years. No one was innocent. Everyone was responsible.

Moreover, the extent of segregation was much bigger in Chapel Hill than the *Weekly* or the Merchants Association admitted. Six months after the Merchants Association survey, the Daily Tar Heel found that 25 per cent of 116 businesses deemed "public accommodations" remained segregated.[32] And, of course, the traditional patterns of segregation were still nearly unchanged in housing, employment, and social relations.

Finally, when the *Weekly* argued that demonstrations no longer served a purpose because of the progress Chapel Hill had made, or could make, voluntarily, it ignored the overwhelming evidence of history. Progress had come mainly as a result of organization and protest, while town and university leaders had resisted change. Moreover, the most recent attempts at negotiation by the Mayor's new committee confirmed that only increased public pressure could take Chapel Hill beyond the level of voluntary desegregation already achieved. Whether that pressure would come in the form of escalating protest or whether it would come as the result of leadership by elected officials was now the issue.

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Following the May 25 street demonstration, the COB approved an eight-day moratorium to give the Mayor's new committee time to negotiate a resolution. It voted to renew demonstrations at a meeting on June 8 following news that the Mayor's committee had not made significant progress.

On June 15 the COB resumed demonstrations. Two hundred people sang and protested in front of the Colonial Drug Store.[33] This shift from the College Cafe, which was a target with little appeal for black Chapel Hillians, occurred because of the first street march. During the march it became evident to white SPU leaders, who knew little about the black community but wanted to learn, that segregated businesses in the black community were the most meaningful targets to the black youths. So the shift was made.[34] At the same time, the COB began regular mass meetings in all the black churches, called for a boycott of fifteen segregated establishments, and announced plans for three mass marches a week.

The extraordinary energy and momentum in the black community at this time were reflected by the initial plans of the COB to stage protest marches from St. Joseph's

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[32] Blanchard thesis, 24.

[33] "Demonstrations Resumed Against Segregation Policy," *CHW*, 16 June 1963, 1.

[34] Cusick interview. Dunne interview.

church to the Colonial Drug Store every day! This plan was only abandoned after Police Chief William Black informed the Committee that such tactics would violate town ordinances.[35] Nor was the powerful surging of the movement in Chapel Hill simply a local phenomenon. All across North Carolina local movements were developing tremendous grassroots momentum. And in many communities, these freedom protests were drawing out an angry, sometimes violent, response from organized racists.

On June 18, therefore, Governor Terry Sanford tried to call an end to all civil rights demonstrations, not just in Chapel Hill, but throughout the state. Like the *Weekly*, he said that demonstrations no longer served a useful purpose. He added that he felt compelled to intervene to prevent violence.

In fact, the demonstrations were becoming so effective that the government was forced to take a more clear-cut position. Either Governor Sanford had to take a stronger stand in support of the freedom movement and in opposition to the growing conservative white backlash, or he had to try to restrain the surging mass movement. He chose the latter.

Governor Sanford had worked out his plans for black "uplift" in consultation with the state's business leaders and the Ford Foundation in late 1962 and early 1963. He had ignored the pleas of Durham's black business leaders, who participated in the consultations. They argued for more reliance on new laws to enforce desegregation, but Sanford limited his program to voluntary action by state business and political leaders. People outside the business and civic leadership of the state apparently had little input into the Governor's plan.[36]

Not surprisingly, the Governor's program lay in a shambles six months after he announced it. It was completely out of step with the mood and aspirations of black North Carolinians, who increasingly were demanding "freedom now." In June, therefore, Terry Sanford called on African Americans to give up the new power they had been able to mobilize in support of their cause--the power of civil disobedience and mass demonstrations. Once again, Sanford ignored the pleas of black business leaders who generally supported demonstrations, and on June 18 he proclaimed:

> Further mass demonstrations breed disorder, endanger lives, establish animosity, and serve no good purpose. I will take whatever steps are necessary to preserve the peace. . . . It is necessary that all mass demonstrations stop and deliberations start.[37]

The Governor's call reinforced all of those at the local level who wanted an end to demonstrations. At this time, then, momentum swung back against the freedom movement in favor of the status quo.

On June 19 the *Weekly* editorialized that those who wanted to continue demonstrations in Chapel Hill were in the same category as segregationist extremists and

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[35] *CHW*, 16 June 1963, 4.

[36] Ehle, 56-61.

[37] Terry Sanford, quoted in Evans thesis, 86.

deserved "public contempt." In a clear effort to turn liberal supporters against the COB demonstrations the paper concluded:

> Those who demonstrate any less concern [than Governor Sanford] for law and order and preservation of the peace in the face of the Governor's call do not deserve public support or respect, regardless of the justness of their cause.[38]

On the same day, the Merchants Association announced its opposition to a public accommodations law.[39] Their "survey" had trivialized the extent of segregation in Chapel Hill and now their mouthpiece, the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, painted their adversaries as irresponsible extremists. They also put forward a public argument that the choice of merchants to discriminate was a patriotic and democratic right. In a thinly veiled appeal to anti-communism and white supremacy, the merchants declared their opposition to the proposed public accommodations law. "We believe peaceful persuasion is the only solution," their statement read. It continued:

> Our founding fathers believed that economic justice could best be won by free men through free enterprise. . . . We believe that each individual has the inalienable right to conduct his business as his conscience dictates and that he should not be legislated against, picketed, coerced, or threatened by any means.

The merchants conveniently forgot, however, that free men also had perpetuated slavery through free enterprise, and that the right of slave masters to conduct their businesses as their consciences dictated was terminated only through bloody civil war and national legislation. Or perhaps they remembered. In any case, their position amounted to an assertion that businessmen should be free of democratic regulation by the public. These were the views of an establishment used to having its way. And now this establishment moved to use its power to defeat the public accommodations law.[40]

Thus, the Committee for Open Business found itself under attack on the same day from the highest levels of state government, the leadership of the Chapel Hill business

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[38] "Demonstrations Must Be Halted," editorial, *CHW*, 19 June 1963, 1.

[39] "Merchants Assn. Directors Oppose Public Accommodations Ordinance," *CHW*, 19 June 1963, 1.

[40] The ways in which the Chapel Hill "establishment," and possibly powerful individuals outside of Chapel Hill, exerted pressure to defeat the public accommodations law are not readily ascertainable, although their opposition to the law is a matter of public record. Since they did wield power in Chapel Hill, simply making their position known sent a clear message that would have been difficult for anyone under their control to ignore. John Ehle reported that George Watts Hill, Chapel Hills most powerful businessman, lobbied against the measure. He also reported that an administrator at the university confirmed Alderman Wager's concerns that the university might be adversely affected if he voted for the ordinance. Ehle, 70, 75.

community, and the local media. The COB, however, continued its demonstrations until June 23, when a moratorium was called prior to the vote in the town council on the proposed public accommodations law.

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On June 25, at a regular meeting of the Board of Aldermen, with hundreds of people filling the Town Hall and overflowing out into the streets, Alderman Hubert Robinson proposed that the Board instruct the town attorney to draw up a public accommodations ordinance for enactment. Adelaide Walters seconded his motion. The town manager had advised the board that the state Attorney General had said the town had no authority to enact such legislation, but UNC law professor Dan Pollitt, a member of the Community Church, delivered a written opinion to the Board stating that it did have such authority. Many citizens spoke for and against the ordinance. Collier Cobb III, who said it was a businessman's constitutional right to discriminate, delivered one speech of note. It was not so much the power of Cobb's argument that was significant as the fact that he spoke for the business establishment and the media.

After some time, the aldermen voted to postpone consideration of the public accommodations law indefinitely. Adelaide Walters, the only woman on the board, and Hubert Robinson, the only African American on the board, cast the dissenting votes. Roland Giduz, Paul Wager, Eugene Strowd, and Joseph Page, all with close ties to the business community, voted in favor of the motion to postpone. Wager, reading from a prepared statement, made the motion to postpone and Giduz seconded the motion.[41]

Years later, Giduz, who had been considered a liberal by many people in the town prior to his vote, explained the basis of his decision:

> I had an involvement with the establishment in the community. . . . I was born within the establishment, although I was also on the fringes of it, that is the *financial structure of the community and the men's civic clubs which were resisting these things*. . . . Most of my friends were resisting a lot of these changes. . . . I just didn't choose openly to antagonize them. . . . These are people I think very highly of. I was born and reared with them. . . .
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> In the public eye, you can't do everything. You're dealing in racial matters, and you don't turn the world upside down to have your concerns with racial matters only. . . . It wasn't a popular issue at the time to pave the streets in the Negro community and things like that. [my emphasis][42]

One side of the fundamental contradiction driving the process of conflict along the color line in Chapel Hill was revealed by the confession of Roland Giduz, the assertions of Collier Cobb III, the opposition of the Merchants Association to a public accommodations law, and by the increasingly rabid opposition of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* to the black freedom struggle. Such evidence suggests that the "financial structure of the community," wanted no restraints placed on economic power by an aroused citizenry and

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[41] "Public Accommodations Ordinance Is Rejected by Board of Aldermen," *CHW*, 26 June 1963, 1.

[42] Giduz interview.

the democratic process. Aside from issues of individual prejudice, this establishment had depended historically on a low-wage, passive, black labor force. It does not seem surprising, therefore, that they would be upset by the specter of an assertive and organized black community in Chapel Hill.

The other side of the contradiction did not reveal itself so clearly in newspaper articles and public actions. This was the longing of African Americans to be free, ever present since the earliest days of slavery, and now expressing itself in a democratic social movement of unprecedented power. For it was evident that black working people were less and less under the control of cautious leaders. They were rapidly losing their fear of white power, while gaining confidence in their ability to organize and advocate for their own needs. Just as black workers embraced the CIO in Chapel Hill during the 1940s because of its militant stand for opportunity and equality, in the 1960s they increasingly embraced the freedom movement.

The catalyst of this great stirring, the black youths, represented more than a rebellious trend among their own generation. Their actions were the wedges that opened up a wide space for the active participation of African Americans in the democratic process. And in the days to come it would be these black youths and their allies who would assert their leadership.

Indeed, even as the governor, the merchants, and the media were telling these young people that they must stop their irresponsible behavior immediately or be punished, the youths were coming to decisions that would soon lead the entire movement in Chapel Hill to its first massive civil disobedience. Harold Foster and his friends were still asking the same old question they posed in July, 1960 at the time of their second arrest: "How much of a troublemaker can some little nigger boys be before they go to jail?" How far can black men and women go in Chapel Hill? How far can African Americans go in America?

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In order to understand the leadership of Harold Foster and other local black youths in the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement, it is necessary to step back for a moment from the narrative of events reflected in newspaper accounts. It is easy enough to follow this story from the formation of the COB in early May, through the first street demonstration of May 25, the moratorium of early June, and the renewed demonstrations leading up to the Board of Aldermen's vote to table the public accommodations law on June 25. This failure of democratic leadership on the part of the Aldermen threw the issue back into the streets, and renewed demonstrations ensued immediately.

What is more difficult to learn about from newspaper accounts is the dispute that was unfolding among those opposing segregation. It was this contradiction among the people that now shaped the direction of the Committee for Open Business.

When the COB was set up in early May, the Steering Committee was composed of representatives of various segments of the community. Foster, Cusick, and their constituencies gave up a certain measure of independence and initiative in order to recruit allies. It remained to be seen, then, whose vision, whose strategy and tactics, would lead the COB.

After the formation of the COB, the core of black youths from Pottersfield functioned as an independent, though informal, grouping within the larger freedom organization. The youths knew that they had an important role to play.

The group around Foster included both black high school students and many youths who were out of school. At the core of this grouping, in addition to Foster, were William Cureton, Earl Geer, and James Foushee. After Cureton left Chapel Hill to live in New York, Peter Leake, a friend who was not from Pottersfield, joined the core group.[43]

Foster assumed the role of strategist and spokesman for the black youth, as well as for much of the black community, within the COB. James Foushee, although a member of the COB Steering Committee, took a less visible, though no less important role. He was a key player in mobilizing the black community and he handled much of the practical leadership of the movement.[44] While Foster spent much of his time dealing with other members of the COB Steering Committee, Foushee, Geer, Cureton, and, later, Leake functioned as his "eyes and ears" and his "lieutenants."[45]

David Dansby, leader of the campus NAACP, believed there never would have been a picket line in Chapel Hill without Harold Foster. "He was Ezell Blair, David Richmond, Joseph McNeal, and Franklin McCain all in one in Chapel Hill. He's the one that got the ball rolling."[46] This picture, while it highlights an important truth, is one-sided. While Foster's role was critical to the local movement, he did not act as an isolated individual. Part of Foster's impressive leadership ability reflected his close ties to black youths of varying ages and to the larger black community. He spoke for a constituency and he was true to that constituency.

It is also important to understand that white leaders like Pat Cusick, John Dunne, and Rosemary Ezra held themselves accountable to this same constituency. And this is what distinguished them from most liberals.

Pat Cusick, more than other white activists in the movement, was essentially recruited and trained by Harold Foster and the local black youths. Whether he sought out Foster, or Foster sought out Cusick, is not particularly significant. What is clear, however, is that while Cusick had a deep desire to do something about racial injustice, Foster was the one who influenced Cusick and introduced him to the local black community, its history, personalities, and dynamics. Of course, Cusick made the choice to be open, to be involved, to take risks, to be committed. But it was Foster who was pulling Cusick, helping him understand, challenging him by stepping up front all the time. And as Cusick proved himself to African Americans, demonstrating that he was in Foster's corner and therefore in theirs, influence in the black community flowed to him.[47] While some other white activists in the Chapel Hill movement were respected by the local black youths, Cusick seemed to hold a special trust. James Foushee, for instance, noted that he did not like white people generally, but he believed "wholeheartedly" that

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[43] Harold Foster interview, 1974. Cureton interview, 1974.

[44] Cusick interview.

[45] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[46] Dansby interview.

[47] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

John Dunne was sincere, describing him as "young, white, and eager, and wanted to see a change." But he described Cusick as "a black man on the inside, maybe white on the outside."[48]

Cusick's development as a close ally of the black youth is tremendously important in terms of the local movement history. It also explains the experiential background that gives weight to his assessment of individuals and movement dynamics in Chapel Hill. And Cusick believed that the Lincoln High School students were the core of the movement in Chapel Hill, and that "every single one" of these students supported Harold Foster. Cusick believed that compared to most of the local youths, Foster "had more knowledge. He had an analysis." But he was not out of step with them. In fact, it was from these youths that Foster drew his power:

> It was genuine. Power was thrown from the bottom up. And you see, this is one of the. . . problems I had with [John Ehle's] book. . . . It's the totally wrong perspective. It was the high school in Chapel Hill that was the movement. And Harold was their spokesman. And there were . . . others of us. . . in the Committee. . . , but we weren't, we weren't leading them. We were their spokesmen.[49]

The way in which *"power was thrown from the bottom up"* to Harold Foster reflects a dynamic of social movements that historians have often failed to appreciate or demonstrate. And in Chapel Hill, these dynamics explain how outsiders--Pat Cusick and John Dunne, who were white university students, and Quinton Baker, a black Durham activist, were able eventually to become leaders in Chapel Hill. They gained their influence through the power that was thrown to them from the bottom up and from the continued endorsements they received in response to their leadership from local leaders like Harold Foster and James Foushee. Understanding how this actually unfolded involves penetrating the ongoing activity and inner life of the local activist core.

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"Without us it would have been a different direction," said Foster. "That core had to keep tight." They would meet and talk over the issues the movement placed before them. They discussed how to win people over and how to deal with attacks on their leadership.[50]

Within the COB, Foster, his neighborhood comrades, and close associates, including Pete Leake and Pat Cusick, argued for more militant action. The youths wanted to provoke "massive arrests." "We wanted to go in waves after waves," Foster stated, but "the militant action was constantly voted down."[51]

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[48] James Foushee interview.

[49] Cusick interview.

[50] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[51] Ehle, 83.

Finally, as a result of the Board of Aldermen's decision to table the public accommodations ordinance indefinitely, the COB voted to proceed with civil disobedience.[52] Street demonstrations resumed four days after the Aldermen's decision. On July 4, at least 400 people marched in what was probably the largest demonstration ever held in Chapel Hill. At the same time, the COB began organizing training workshops for massive non-violent civil disobedience.[53]

The *Weekly* had condemned the plans of the COB to continue demonstrations, saying this decision constituted "gross irresponsibility." Proposing the same old, same old voluntary approach, it also demanded that town government "take whatever steps are necessary to end downtown marches. The convenience and safety of the public. . . now demand it."[54] On July 12 the COB membership delegated power to the executive committee to make the decision about when and where civil disobedience would be used.

These decisions had come as the result of constant struggle by the black youths and their allies in the SPU against the cautious approach of the white liberals who dominated the COB meetings by their numbers and their talking. The youths wanted to increase pressure on the town by going to jail, but other members of the COB shrank from this approach. As Foster recalled:

> We had been losin' in open discussion. We had been losin' the vote to go to jail. . . . You see, the strategy was to wiggle away at peoples' defenses for not goin' to jail. . . . The discussion would go, "Well how can you say that this would happen if you haven't tried it?" So it became like the scientific approach.
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> We would try it. We said, "We tried it." We tried it again. And then we'd say, "Well now, you saw that didn't work. Let's try the other one."
>
> "Ok. Well, we'll vote for that one this time."[55]

After 1960, after the experience of the movement in communities throughout the South, and based on their lifelong experience of racial oppression in Chapel Hill, Harold Foster and his associates believed that negotiations without increased pressure were not going to accomplish anything. Business leaders, seeking to maintain their right to act independently of popular control, asserted rights of property over human rights and black freedom. Neither group appeared to have any illusion that this was anything but a contest of power between two constituencies who had antagonistic interests. As James Foushee said, "It was just a handful of businessmen that was pulling the opposite way."

Yet, while there was little to restrain the mechanisms of power available to business leaders, a great deal stood in the way of the ability of the black youths to mobilize their power. While business leaders could rely on their control of the media,

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[52] "Downtown Marches to Resume," *CHW*, 26 June 1963, 1.

[53] *CHW*, 7 July 1963, 1.

[54] "The Protest Marches in Downtown Chapel Hill: It's Time For A Halt," editorial, *CHW*, 10 July 1963, 4(C).

[55] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

their dominant influence in both local and state government, their ability to hold the university to their program, and their power to call upon the police and the courts to enforce their "rights," African Americans had no such resources. They had only the strength of their organization and their ability to build a movement that could unleash the power of the people acting together for freedom.

This fact, however, was not discernable to most white liberals in Chapel Hill. Or perhaps they were simply uncomfortable with conflict. Therefore, although experience all across the South had shown that tactics based on non-violent civil disobedience could successfully involve black communities in the freedom struggle, university liberals in Chapel Hill thought they knew a better way. They were betwixt and between. Against segregation, they were, for the most part, unwilling or unable to follow the leadership of blacks in the freedom struggle when that involved going beyond the limits of behavior sanctioned by established authority.

Events subsequently proved that the African American community in Chapel Hill did support the tactics advocated by black youths in June 1963. But the vacillation of white support slowed the development of community-wide black involvement in 1963 and left the black struggle relatively isolated and vulnerable to attack six months later when civil disobedience reached massive proportions.[56] As James Foushee noted, blacks were a particularly small minority in Chapel Hill, and the movement had to deal with an especially large number of white liberals:

> This is the situation--As the movement growed older, we were caught up in an all-white town with a handful of black people. And Chapel Hill is--it was then, and it still is now--it's a liberal, liberalism town. And you find yourself getting caught up with these white liberals. Ease in, they would come in gradually into the movement. One thing you've always got to think about is black people in Carrboro and Chapel Hill is a small segment of two towns because the white overpopulated.

Because the black community needed white support, Foster and his allies attempted to maintain the united front. But as confrontation escalated this became increasingly difficult to do.

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On Friday, July 19, at 2:00 P.M., massive non-violent civil disobedience occurred in Chapel Hill for the first time. The target of the first sitdown protest since 1960 was the Merchants Association headquarters, and the demonstrators were primarily black youths, including many under sixteen years of age, and white college students. Of the thirty-four people arrested, including six juveniles, there were 14 black males, 13 black females, two white females, and five white males.[57]

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[56] This is not to say that the movement activists did not make mistakes as well. James Brittian, Pat Cusick, Joe Straley, Rev. Manley, and David Dansby all acknowledge or point out mistakes, particularly during the spring of 1964.

[57] "34 Are Arrested During Sit-In Here," *CHW*, 21 July 1963, 1.

Bob Brown, a white member of the COB who observed the arrests, described the scene to John Ehle. He said the police seemed to relish their work:

> The police must have been waiting for just this chance. They stacked the limp bodies up at the curb, which was completely unnecessary. They did it because they were out for Cusick. They believed Cusick had started all this and they knew he had trained these young people, so they stacked the bodies up on the sidewalk on top of Cusick. They laid them out just like you lay out dead bodies. . . . I hadn't seen anything like it since I was in Korea.
>
> As the police cars arrived, they would pull bodies off, drag them along the street, throw them into the police cars. It was so bad that the other people there, the children and other ones who hadn't been scheduled to be arrested, sat down on the sidewalk in protest. So they were arrested.[58]

Harold Foster was not supposed to be arrested. The plan had been for him to lead a demonstration at the police station that night following the arrests, but Foster was arrested on the streets outside the Merchants Association. He described his arrest as "almost inexplicable," since he was trying to avoid arrest. But the police snatched him, saying, "we got him."[59]

John Dunne was out of town for the summer. Pat Cusick and Harold Foster were in jail. Quinton Baker, who had devised the tactics for the assault on the Merchants Association, had not yet become an acknowledged leader of the local movement. It fell then to Father Parker, Hilliard Caldwell, and other COB leaders to carry on following the arrests. Rather than following through with the original plans, however, this leadership agreed to a moratorium on further demonstrations. Gary Blanchard, an editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* at the time, described the agreement in his senior honors thesis:

> In return for halting the demonstrations, the Merchants Association agreed not to press charges against demonstrators arrested in the sit-in on its premises July 19, and the Police Department said it would recommend that charges against those arrested for blocking the sidewalk and streets be nol prossed (indefinitely suspended).[60]

In addition, a new secret committee of businessmen established by the Mayor pledged to redouble its efforts to gain voluntary desegregation. The Merchants Association made the same pledge.

Both Cusick and Foster believed this agreement was a tremendous error on the part of the remaining COB leadership. They felt that this was the point of their÷ highest leverage during the course of the movement, and that leverage was given away for nothing.

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[58] Ehle, 85.

[59] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

[60] Blanchard thesis, 46.

In fact, whether the movement could have forced desegregation at that point is questionable. Still, the bargain struck with the merchants and the police proved empty. Roy Cole, the Town Solicitor, refused to allow the charges to be dropped. The efforts of the Merchants Association and the secret committee of businessmen achieved no new pledges of desegregation. Thus, when the demonstrators finally were sentenced in December 1963, it touched off the final wave of massive protest against segregation in Chapel Hill.

Immediately, however, the protests at the Merchants Association caused a crisis in both the town and the COB. The Mayor's Human Relations Committee called a meeting at Town Hall of seventeen organizations, out of which came the two-week moratorium by the COB and the pledges concerning charges and desegregation efforts by other groups. The town gained unfavorable national media attention, and there was much concern among civic leaders over Chapel Hill's image. The COB was now in trouble not only with local politicians, businessmen, and the media, but also with Governor Terry Sanford.

Immediately following the Merchants Association arrests, pressure on the COB to abandon its course of direct action became ferocious. In an editorial that covered nearly one third of the front page, the *Weekly* unleashed a diatribe against leaders of the COB who favored direct action. The *Weekly* characterized these leaders as persons "driven by neurotic compulsion," whose "concern for equal rights and improved opportunities is, at best, only incidental." And the editors made an undisguised attempt to split the COB and return it to the leadership of moderates. They played on the familiar red scare theme that the rank and file of the movement was being duped, that they were "pawns" "trapped in the process." In particular, the editors called on moderate leaders to leave the COB so that they could exercise their "ability to act independently" once again.

Reflecting their fundamental hope that African Americans could be limited to tactics that relied on "the conscience of this community," rather than their own organized power, the *Weekly* blared forth the demand that "New Leadership Must Step Forth." And in language calculated to play on the discomfort most liberals felt with conflict, the editors used words as weapons to try to split the COB along class, race, and generational lines. They stated:

> The voices of reason that at times have spoken effectively in the Committee for Open Business have been shouted down. The predominant voice is now one of hostile militancy and open contempt.[61]

At the same time black workers at the university and in white homes found that their jobs were at risk.[62] John Dunne had already come in for criticism from the Morehead Foundation, which had not wanted him to live in the black community when he came to Chapel Hill and which threatened to take his scholarship away should he continue his civil rights activities. Pat Cusick was thrown out of his housing. And, of

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[61] *CHW*, 21 July 1963.

[62] Hilliard Caldwell interview, 1974. Brittian interview.

course, the charges against the July 19 demonstrators continued their way through the courts.

Nevertheless, when the Human Relations Committee called the seventeen town organizations back together for a report from the merchants on their efforts to gain voluntary desegregation, no representatives from the business community attended the meeting. This contemptuous attitude on the part of the merchants, along with the refusal of the Town Solicitor to drop charges against the demonstrators, heightened tensions. The full COB voted thirty-three to thirty-one to resume civil disobedience workshops, but dissension was evident.

As various new initiatives emanated from town government, the COB renewed its demonstrations, including "hit-and-run" sitdown protests, leaving when the authorities arrived. By August 8, however, tension within the COB became more open. Chairman Harold Foster criticized most of the members of the fifteen-member executive committee for not participating in demonstrations. This took place in a meeting of approximately one hundred people, who joined in the discussion. Foster described the debate:

> The height of [the conflict] came when we had the daytime demonstrations. . . . Instead of votin' for night demonstrations, they voted that we'd demonstrate in the day. Well, we had to go along with it because we were engaged in an exercise in democracy. And wherever there was a majority vote, that's what we would do. And, of course, the white university people would come in there in greater numbers and votin' that we demonstrate in the daytime.
>
> Well, when it came time to demonstrate in the daytime, no one was there but blacks.
>
> I was asked to speak on behalf of those who were [demonstrating], and I told the people quite point blankly, I said, "The people feel that you're making decisions but they're being used as the shock troops. Now, you're either with us or you're against us."[63]

Foster spoke up and made his public criticism not because of an "abrasive personality," or some general dislike of white people, as some claimed at the time. He spoke because his constituency demanded it, just as they had demanded he confront Rev. Manley back in 1960. And while memories of this process of communication back and forth between the leader and the grassroots have been mostly lost to history, at least one story has survived. In 1974, Braxton Foushee described how the split developed in the COB:

> People started lining behind people whose ideas that they thought they could follow, opposed to Harold's ideas, which was much different. . . . Nobody wanted to take the tougher line of tactics because the town was supposed to be quote, "so liberal." And so white folks were saying, "Well, we do it this way." And they got minds persuaded because they were all leaning in that one direction . . . .

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[63] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

But eventually, the youths began to assert themselves more after talking through the issues at the Rock Wall. With the wisdom of hindsight, Braxton concluded that white people opposed to the direction called for by the youth tried to split Harold Foster, their leader, from the movement:

> White peoples' thinking tried to split Harold. Because Harold's thinking, as I look at it now, was much more far advanced in lines of tactics.
>
> You've read that this town is supposed to be so liberal, and still, behind the scenes it is still a racist town. And so, when we first started, with nobody have any experience in organizing, . . . our minds were persuade by white people to use this kind of approach, and this kind of approach.
>
> And then we said, "Well, damn. Look who's going out in the front all the time with these people sitting over there making these decisions." And so, we got together, we got together at the Rock, . . . and we sat right there ÷on that corner.
>
> One night we started, started talking: "Man, man. We got to be a little, we got to make our presence a little more felt in this thing. So we going to have to start making decisions for our own selves." And so, at some point in there, we just started making decisions. And that's when people started getting into two camps.[64]

What stands revealed as we peer back through this window into the inner workings of the Chapel Hill movement, is one of those moments of human growth when black Americans found their own voice because of their experience in the freedom struggle. In the freedom afforded them by their comradeship and the Rock Wall, away from the dominating influences that had maintained their subordination, the youths reached a new level of both individual and collective self-respect. And out of this new recognition of both their need and their ability to make decisions for themselves came a new emphasis on black self-determination within the local movement.

Self-determination did not mean that the black youths no longer wanted a united front with white university liberals and black moderates. It simply meant that they asserted their leadership within the united front. It was this kind of leadership that SNCC represented in the freedom struggle--grassroots, determined, audacious, and independent of white control. White elites in the South knew this kind of leadership. They had opposed it during the grassroots upsurge of the 1930s and they would oppose it in the 1960s. They would always oppose such leadership. What remained to be seen, however, was how university liberals and the larger black community would respond to the increased assertiveness of the black youth.

Simultaneous with the attacks of the *Weekly* on the youth leadership of the COB, rumors began to circulate that the civil disobedience workshops "merely existed for sex orgies." Others within the COB charged that the workshops concentrated too much on tactics and not enough on Gandhian philosophy. Still others charged that the image of

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[64] Braxton Foushee, 1974.

the movement was deteriorating because of an incident where angry jailed youths cause minor damage to their cells.[65]

Most of this unease among black ministers and white liberals became focused on the personality of Harold Foster, although it was clear to Cusick, Foster, and others that it was essentially a response to the tremendous attack the movement had come under from the power centers of the larger society. Foster recalled how the lines were drawn and his response:

> Well, what could I say? It was an open fight. It was something I had encountered all my life. And I had certainly been prepared for the conflict and I was ready to meet it.

Three days after Foster criticized members of the COB executive committee for their failure to participate in demonstrations, that executive committee ousted him as chairman by a 5-3 vote. Members who voted against him claimed that he was part of a small group that had usurped leadership of the COB and that recent tactics had reduced public support.[66]

On August 13 the COB Steering Committee presented their recommendation to a meeting of about 200 people. It had been three weeks since the *Weekly* demanded that more reasonable leadership assert itself, and now it appeared their call was being answered.

Foster, however, had no intention of letting his constituency and the direction he represented by overwhelmed by vacillating opponents within the COB. And so, while Foster readied himself for the showdown, his allies began mobilizing support in the black community.

On the COB Steering Committee Pat Cusick and James Foushee had been Foster's allies, and now they rallied the youth to Foster's defense. Foushee, of course, was a local black youth. He was in the movement every day, doing whatever was necessary. Now he went among the youth calling them out. Cusick also had become trusted by the black youths. Like James Foushee, he was with the youths every day, marching with them and training them in civil disobedience when most other whites seemed to hang back. Now he searched them out in their homes and hangouts.

Foster had remained close to black youths in Chapel Hill, even though he attended North Carolina College in Durham. By August of 1963, he began to understand that the struggle was "going to call for a whole new orientation." He believed that this had a lot to do with the growing solidarity of the young people that resulted from their participation in the movement:

> At that time, the people in the movement had grown closer to each other; the young people had grown closer to each other. Those who hadn't demonstrated

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[65] Ehle, 90-91.

[66] "Integration Leader Ousted: New Committee Is Rejected," *CHW*, 14 August 1963, 1.

> with us were on the outside criticizing them for having love affairs, bein' "love children." I mean, they were young children, 16, 17, and 15. . . .[67]

But just as the youths had grown closer personally, as people do when they stand together for something deeply cherished, they had also grown in their commitment and understanding of their leadership in the movement. No longer was the group that was willing to take risks and confront authority confined to Foster and his running buddies from Pottersfield. Now a broader group of youth prepared to reclaim the leadership ceded to white liberals in 1960.

Foster had recruited many of these youths himself. And he was able to do this, not simply by the force of personality, but because of his active involvement with the youths in their daily lives. He recalled:

> I had been able to get people of this age because I had worked with them durin' the summer months. I had been assistant coach of the football team at the high school. I drew from that element. I had been the recreation leader at the Roberson Street community center and the coach of the Little League team. I drew from them.
>
> And these were the people that came in the back [of the COB meeting.] They stopped and put down their balls and bats and came to the meetin' that night. Cusick had done a very marvelous job of roundin' up the support. We told him where the bodies was. He just gathered up the people and told them "come on out. They're tryin' to vote Harold out of the movement." And they weren't going to hear that. 'Cause, whatever their level of dedication at the time, they were committed to the present leadership, for better or for worse.

Foster knew that he could rely on Foushee, Cusick, and others to mobilize the necessary support. His mind, therefore, was free to focus on both the larger strategy and concrete preparations for the COB meeting. He purchased a pair of overalls, the kind worn by SNCC activists in the Deep South. He wrote a speech and mapped his plans for the role he knew he had to play.

Foster planned a late entry, and prior to the vote he lobbied among his constituents, preparing them for what was to come. Then, at the appropriate moment, he walked to the front wearing his work overalls. It was a symbol not lost on the black youths. They knew what SNCC stood for. They knew Harold Foster was saying to them not to be intimidated, not to be limited by middle-class notions of respectability, and thereby to middle-class notions of struggle. They knew Foster was calling them to march right down the middle of the freedom road, even if many former allies in the COB were prepared to give up the streets at the demand of established authority and limit their struggle to the "sidewalks." And so they yelled and cheered when Harold Foster stepped forward.

Foster came forward, made his statement, and when the vote was taken his opponents in the COB had lost, and their defeat had been overwhelming. Mrs. Van Darrity, whom Foster described as "an upper class Negro," was in tears. Bob Brown was

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[67] Harold Foster interview, 1974.

furious. But the drama was not over. Following the vote that endorsed his leadership and the direction that implied, Harold Foster resigned. Questioned about this in 1974, he explained:

> That same night I resigned, you see, because that was the pinnacle of my power. I couldn't do that any more. I could never repeat that performance.
>
> It was time to quit. Where could you go but down?
>
> The question was that the movement had reached its zenith for a particular style. A new style had to be brought in. That was the new style that I was introducin' with the militant SNCC image. But it was not for me to carry it. But that is what would be called for in the future. This is why Pat was able to pick this up and carry it over when John [Dunne] and them came back, and they were able to bring in outside help of CORE and SCLC.[68]

Foster did not plan out this scenario with even his closest friends, although he acted out of carefully considered motives. On the one hand, he knew that the movement was going to have to adopt the methods of massive civil disobedience pioneered by SNCC. The picture of the SNCC worker in overalls with clenched fist raised was a poster image well known and much discussed among the black youths of Chapel Hill. And Harold Foster believed that his constituency was prepared to move in this direction. On the other hand, he knew that the new style "was not for me to carry."

At this point, we are reminded that while history cannot be understood without appreciating the interplay of "social forces," individuals make all history. Good history, although not necessarily most history, looks at both the individual and the social, the particular and the general. Committed individuals who staff social movements give themselves over to the cause voluntarily, but they remain individuals.

Harold Foster had been struggling in his personal life as well as in the movement. After enrolling at NCC in the fall of 1960, Foster threw himself into newspaper work while keeping up his civil rights activities. He wrote a jazz column for NCC's newspaper *The Campus Echo*, became the main support to the editor, and eventually became the managing editor. As a result of devoting himself to extracurricular activities, Foster's academic work suffered. He did well only during summer school, when there were fewer distractions. He also experienced financial problems. Feeling overextended and without clear direction, Foster signed up for the Army. A military career never developed, however, because he got drunk, got injured in a car wreck, and ended up staying in school. In fact, although he did not acknowledge it until years later, Foster was becoming an alcoholic. In 1993, after being clean and sober for two years, he recalled:

> I was bein' active with my generation, as such, in civil rights and helpin' to get the paper out and all, but my secret thing was that I was drinkin', too, and nobody said, "Hey, you gotta stop drinkin'. It was like, "Ok. So you drinkin'. That's to be expected, or some kind of thing.

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[68] ibid. Cusick interview. Ehle, 91-94. Evans thesis, 100-107.

The freedom movement that broke out with renewed vigor in 1963 provided Foster an opportunity to refocus his life in a very positive way, but it did not heal the inner damage that limited and denied his personal growth and freedom. In August 1963, then, Harold Foster struggled to balance his commitments to the movement with what he had to do for himself.

Foster had demonstrated by his leadership that African Americans could speak truth to power with their own voice. He had been instrumental in building a broad mass movement for freedom in Chapel Hill, while constantly representing the necessity and the possibility of black self-determination within the broader movement. At the COB meeting called to deny his leadership, he orchestrated an opportunity for the youth to assert their leadership and feel their power. Through the movement these young people had grown in experience and solidarity, and their movement had recruited and trained new leaders. Cusick had proved himself worthy and capable. Quinton Baker's commitment to the Chapel Hill struggle afforded the local movement a wealth of experience and a close connection to movement leaders around the state. And when John Dunne returned in the fall, he would add his prodigious skills, dedication, and "cleaner image" to the cause. And, of course, there were many more who would step forward as the struggle unfolded.

On the other hand, Foster had burned many bridges and scorched many sensitive egos among people whose support was still needed. He had empowered the youth by his dramatic performance at the COB meeting, but whether ministers and other older leaders in the black community, or liberals in the white community, would continue to follow his leadership was certainly doubtful. In any case, his personal leadership was no longer critical.

EPILOGUE

The story of the second wave of protest that engulfed Chapel Hill from December 1963, through February 1964, has been left untold. In part, my intention was to emphasize that this thesis is only a beginning. I hope it will encourage others, particularly local residents, to join in the work of retrieving and popularizing the freedom legacy.

At the same time, ending my story with the departure of Harold Foster from the leadership of the movement is appropriate in terms of my focus on origins. By August, 1963, the Pottersfield youths and their allies had found their voice and strengthened their leadership to the point where they were capable of taking the next step, even without Harold Foster. That step was the "new style" symbolized by the militant SNCC image that Foster introduced when he walked into the COB meeting wearing overalls. As Foster stepped into the background, therefore, others stepped forward to fill his place.

"It was the climax of a period," recalled Thomas Mason. He and his friends had learned that African Americans no longer had "to depend on that little dangling string out there." And during the next phase of the movement their bold assaults were driven by a new martial spirit. As this spirit spread, it was transforming black America and empowering oppressed people everywhere. "Its the attitude that any slave that die a natural death should not be respected at all," asserted Mason. "You have to do something about it."

Moreover, the youths fervently believed that they could usher in a new world. James Foushee believed their struggle in Chapel Hill could change the whole South: ". . . I felt, and a whole lot more felt, that if we break Chapel Hill like it should be broken, we'll break the South. . . . They say that Chapel Hill is `The Southern Part of Heaven, 'and they say if you break Chapel Hill, you can break the South."

Such attitudes led to the final phase of the Civil Rights Movement in Chapel Hill. A few words must now be said about the end of the movement because those events will help us understand why we have come to the present moment in Chapel Hill and the nation. For in a sense, the end was the beginning: it was the place from which Chapel Hill had to start to deal with the challenge of desegregation.

The harshness of the struggle that began in December, 1963, was referred to by Cusick as "walking through the valley." This was a period of nightly sitdown protests, hundreds of arrests, and a crescendo of media attacks and brutality against demonstrators by local segregationists. They were doused with ammonia, poked with cattle prods, urinated on, and hosed down in freezing weather. They were denounced by the governor and abandoned by many of their liberal white allies.

Under these conditions Stella Farrar and her friends stepped forward to take on the most dangerous assignments. James Brittian stepped forward as well, assuming the

leadership of the Lincoln High School students. And many more joined in the struggle. Together, they made their demand to power. "You had almost maximum involvement in the black community," remembered Cusick.

In the end, however, the demonstrators launched their final massive protest feeling embattled and frustrated. They had tried every way they could to get the town to hold itself accountable for segregation, but decisive action from either established leaders or the general populace was not forthcoming.

The university, which was the fundamental power center in the town, refused to take a stand in the conflict, thereby endorsing the status quo. Thomas Mason, like nearly all the leaders of the movement, believed in hindsight that one of the movement's strategic weaknesses was its failure to recognize the power of the university and to make it a target of protest. He called UNC "the real Invisible Empire," and this view was born out a few years later when black workers at the university launched their own revolt.

The local financial establishment and the media opposed the movement and attacked it. The governor opposed the movement, stuck by his program of voluntarism, and supported the local politicians who wanted to vote with the establishment against the Public Accommodations ordinance. The moral leaders of the town, the ministers, played it safe, for the most part, and offered neither wholehearted support to the movement nor any meaningful alternative. And the liberals, the only potential force sympathetic to the struggle of the black community that might have intervened in a decisive way, held back.

Given this alignment of social forces, the massive civil disobedience against the town during the first week of February, 1964, was tactically disastrous in the short term. The movement had already accumulated a tremendous bail debt, and many of the leaders had been arrested repeatedly. When hundreds of seasoned movement veterans blocked every strategic roadway out of Chapel Hill following the UNC-Wake Forest basketball game on February 8, a cry of outrage went up around the state from those who held the image of Chapel Hill and the university sacred.

Soon thereafter, the demonstrators were hauled into court. In a deal struck between the prosecution and the leaders of the movement, nearly the entire leadership was sent to prison for up to a year and hundreds of others were given suspended sentences that prevented them from participating in civil rights activities. The alternative offered by the prosecution was for all the demonstrators to go to the chain gang. In this manner, the weight of the law crushed the movement in Chapel Hill.

The local activists had not expected to have to make such a harsh choice, and they were not prepared for it. They had counted on CORE and the NAACP to keep sentences light. Although this expectation was a grievous error, it was not out of line with the experience of other communities, including Durham, where movement activists had generally not been given prison time. As James Brittian recalled, he expected only a few light sentences:

> Our thing was that "they can't try all of us. They don't have enough money." This was our strategy. I mean, you're talking about supposedly good minds, Floyd McKissick, Buddy Malone, James Forman--all these people we'd met over [in Durham] shortly before the trial.

But the good minds were wrong. They had laid down the dare to power without really having the resources to defend themselves should power act as power could. Beyond not having a developed legal strategy and financial resources, they had not prepared the most important resource of the movement, the people, to meet such a challenge. The possibility of all the demonstrators going to jail had not been discussed by the leadership with the demonstrators, with the black community, and with white allies. Therefore, there was no social force prepared to meet the challenge of the judge and the prosecution.

James Brittian and others watched in amazement and dismay as Judge Raymond Mallard looked down on them and dispensed his justice. James remembered his words:

> The first thing he said was "all of you all are communists." And he started calling peoples' names and he had 'em to come up front. And they were all white. And he admonished them and he said, "You are paid with Yankee dollars to come to enlighten what you consider a sinful South." I'll never forget those words. And I was sitting there thinking about this. He locked John Dunne up. I mean, no trial. Locked him up. Put him in chains. John, Pat, Buddy Tieger, J.V. Henry, and--Rosemary Ezra was one of 'em. I think there was one or two more. Locked 'em up.
>
> Buddy Malone began arguing, "You're violating rights. You can't do this." You know, "You haven't tried nobody," and those types of things. And Mallard had his ass locked up. . . .
>
> He brought me back and told me that since I was not a Yankee that I should not affiliate myself with them becaus°e they were people that, I didn't understand who they were. Like they're alien people, you know. "You're from North Carolina. You shouldn't associate yourself with these people. These are bad people."
>
> . . . He let me go. He put me under five years probation. Had to report to a probation officer. And if the probation officer saw me marchin' down any street or participate in any civil rights demonstration that, and he told the police that they should arrest me and put me in jail.
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> So from that point on, by Quinton, John, Pat, Lou [Calhoun], and all them gone to jail, we didn't know where they were, tryin' to find them, that ended the movement in Chapel Hill.[1]

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[1] Some details of sentencing are given in "Demonstration Leaders Given Jail Sentences: Judge Mallard Ends Special Orange Superior Court Term," *CHW*, 26 April 1964, 1. The unsigned article offers no information, however, on the courtroom drama. For John Ehle's discussion of the trials and the reaction of Chapel Hill residents see *The Free Men*, 262-289. For a revealing insider account of the relationship of the legal team to the movement, the reasons for the exceptional harshness of Judge Mallard's actions, the courtroom drama, and the deal struck between Judge Mallard, the legal team, and the movement leaders see C.C. Malone, Interview by Ken Hamilton and Tina Harrison, interview 82-83, DOHP, 23 August 1974. Malone was Floyd McKissick's associate who was the lawyer for the Chapel Hill defendants. He calls Ehle's book "pure fiction."

James was very depressed. He felt like he had lost everything:

> I felt like everything I had done was for nothing, and every sacrifice I had made was for nothin'. I felt like that nothin' would ever change. I was angry. I had lost my good friends, people that I had been wiïth, gotten to know. People that I trusted more than, ah, my family, you know--I hated the system. I hated what it stood for. I knew then that. . . anybody in authority could do anything they wanted to and get away with it. I knew then that, I finally realized that there was no justice in this country. . . . It finally dawned on me, that once you get rid of the head, the tail dies, and it was a strategy. And then, later, I saw it with the deaths of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, John Kennedy. I began to realize how this country was later, after that. . . .

In reality, the Chapel Hill movement had not been in vain. The disruption and embarrassment such movements brought to the nation, and the danger that the larger movement would grow stronger, forced the Congress to act to end legal segregation and disfranchisement. Moreover, the movement forged by youths like James Brittian unleashed a tremendous democratic upsurge. The black revolt of the late 1960s was massive and multidimensional.

In Chapel Hill, many movement activists and those inspired by the movement became active in public life as never before. According to Haddie Foster, Harold's mother, the black community was "barely existing in the fifties," but it "came alive in the sixties." People like Gloria Williams and Vivian Foushee worked to completely desegregate the schools and then to insure that their children were treated fairly. Braxton Foushee, Hilliard Caldwell and many others organized a progressive electoral trend that made Howard Lee the first black mayor of a Southern city and reformed government in both Carrboro and Chapel Hill. Marie Roberson helped launch a chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization, was instrumental in organizing a union for city bus drivers, and became a backbone in the organization of Chapel Hill's public housing residents. And in the late 1960s, many of the parents of the civil rights activists were involved in strikes against the university by black workers.

While some movement activists played key organizational roles in the post-Civil Rights struggle in Chapel Hill, others played less visible roles in bringing about change. They developed interracial relationships, became teachers and nurses, promoted black music, and raised their children to be assertive and compassionate.

Outside of Chapel Hill this democratic revolt spread throughout the country. By the 1970s almost every group that felt abused, downtrodden, alienated, or left out of the "American Dream" had organized a movement. They were no longer content with the 1950s assertion that the U.S. was the "land of opportunity." They were all asking "for whom?"

As the democratic thrust broadened, it deepened. Activists developed an intense debate over strategy and tactics. Out of this debate emerged, for some, a deeper critique

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There is nothing in any of these accounts that contradicts the basic thrust of James Brittian's story.

of the society they were trying to change. Revolution was in the air. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in 1968:

> America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially. The black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws--racism, poverty, militarism, and materialism. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.[2]

And it would not be tolerated. The full force available to those who felt threatened was brought to bear against the black struggle and other democratic social movements. The FBI and local law enforcement harassed, disrupted, and repressed black organizations, from the non-violent movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. to the armed movement of the Black Panthers. Organizations were crushed, their leaders assassinated, jailed, or discredited.

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This is a moment of great despair, anger, and cynicism for large numbers of African Americans and others who have traditionally been at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy, including many white workers. Meanwhile, many middle class, mainly white, Americans tremble at the "senseless violence" of black youths, the drugs, the crime. They seek safe haven behind ever harsher and more restrictive laws, suburban walls, tokenism, Hollywood diversions, and more police. They decry the popularity of Farrakan and the language of rap, afraid to simply listen to black America, much less to pursue the question "why?" to its logical conclusion. Unwilling or unable to see "dreams deferred" for what they are, they fail to hold themselves or America accountable. Instead, they reach out to embrace demagogues of various political stripes who offer a way out that does not involve painful self-examination, sacrifice, and transformation.

For those who are drawn by their concern for equal rights and justice to try to "do something about it," times are trying. There is no certain path, no clear road to follow. There is no quick fix, no sure answer, no new Martin Luther King. In times like these it is important to take stock, to draw wisdom and strength from the past in order to take the next step.

Unfortunately, the freedom legacy of the 1960s, and the way that Martin Luther King and many others eventually tried to challenge America "to face all its interrelated flaws," are not well known. While political leaders attack or back off from affirmative action programs clearly justified by continuing racial discrimination, few voices are being raised to demand that communities take responsibility to eliminate the effects of slavery and segregation.

This brings us to the question raised at the beginning of the first chapter--"What kind of nation do we want?" What kind of community do we want? The legacy of the Civil Rights Movement and the black youths who led it speaks to those who are asking

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[2] From "A Testament of Hope," *in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 315.

these questions, although it speaks to white and black with a different emphasis. It calls all of us to confront our history honestly and to "do something about it."

In white Chapel Hill, despite its liberal aura, there seems to be vast reluctance to confront the fact that African Americans are losing ground. During the past two years the town and the university celebrated their bicentennials. Yet there was little mention of the black slaves who cleared the land, built the buildings, cooked the food, washed the clothes, carried the water, composed love poems for the students, and did their best to survive, raise families, and live and die with dignity in the years before freedom. Nor did the "freedmen" in Chapel Hill, both male and female, young and old, who struggled for opportunity, dignity, and citizenship after the Civil War receive much attention. Likewise, the black food service workers and housekeepers, whose poverty continues to enable the university to achieve ever greater prominence, were barely acknowledged. Nor was there a celebration of the black teenagers who sat down at the Colonial Drug Store in 1960, and all those who kept on sitting down, marching, and getting arrested for four more years to break the back of segregation.

No prominent public official at the university or in the town, to my knowledge, highlighted the failures of democracy in Chapel Hill, or called for a determined campaign to right the wrongs of our community. Instead, the booklet published to commemorate the bicentennial was entitled, "Chapel Hill 200 Years: "Close to Magic." Sporting a pen-and-ink drawing of the kind of comfortable homes that Chapel Hill's elite built before the Civil War, this booklet managed to say enough about black lives in Chapel Hill to be "politically correct" while never honestly confronting the fact that white comfort and success was the direct consequence of black poverty and oppression.

In black Chapel Hill today there is a good deal of nostalgia for the days of segregation. Many of those the author interviewed believe that things are worse today in Chapel Hill for most African Americans. As Gloria Williams, who now directs the Joint Orange-Chatham Community Action Agency (JOCCA), pointed out in a recent conversation with the author, "What white people don't realize is that we have lost a generation of our youth."

While there is justifiable pride in the black community for what African Americans achieved under the heel of segregation, there also seems to be a yearning for what appears from a distance as a better time. Harold Foster believed in 1993 that this nostalgia reflected the lack of vision and leadership in the black community today. Indeed, dwelling on "what we lost" may be another way of saying, "we were making it in a white world."

The legacy of the movement, however, has nothing to do with nostalgia, not even nostalgia for the movement. It is fundamentally about the extraordinary example of human beings who were not resigned. They were not resigned to the status quo and they broke rules to live lives of democratic striving. For these reasons, they gave people hope.

Today, whatever our background or station in life may be, the example set by black youths in Chapel Hill during the 1960s calls to us. It demands that their sacrifice not be in vain, that we too must dare to envision a radically new world and struggle for it in the present--"Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth."

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