



How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis

Michael J. Klarman

The Journal of American History, Vol. 81, No. 1. (Jun., 1994), pp. 81-118.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723%28199406%2981%3A1%3C81%3AHBCRRT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>

The Journal of American History is currently published by Organization of American Historians.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/oah.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis

Michael J. Klarman

Constitutional lawyers and historians generally deem *Brown v. Board of Education* to be the most important United States Supreme Court decision of the twentieth century, and possibly of all time. Surprisingly little attention, however, has been devoted to analyzing precisely how *Brown* was important. Yet Supreme Court decisions can be significant in many different ways. First, as a direct cause, *Brown* could have desegregated the public schools. Alternatively, or additionally, *Brown* might have had indirect effects—thrusting the desegregation issue onto the national agenda, searing the conscience of previously indifferent northern whites, providing legitimacy to desegregation demands by blacks, or inspiring (especially southern) blacks to challenge the racial status quo.¹

This article has two objectives. First, I wish to raise questions about the usual accounts of how *Brown* mattered. It is widely acknowledged that *Brown's* direct impact on school desegregation was limited. Yet *Brown's* indirect contribution to racial change continues to be more generally assumed than demonstrated. I wish to suggest that scholars may have exaggerated the extent to which the Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling provided critical inspiration to the civil rights movement.

has it not been official change is hard to measure?

Michael J. Klarman is professor of law and Class of 1966 Research Professor, University of Virginia.

I have benefited in different ways during the gestation of this project from the input of Barry Adler, Ed Ayers, Alan Brinkley, Dan Carter, Lance Conn, Barry Cushman, Matt Dillard, John Hart Ely, Jon Entin, David Garrow, Paul Gaston, Sam Issacharoff, John Jeffries, Walter Kamiat, Pam Karlan, Herbert Klarman, Hal Krent, Chuck McCurdy, Neil McMillen, Dan Ortiz, Gerald Rosenberg, Jim Ryan, Reuel Schiller, Bruce Schulman, Bill Stuntz, David Thelen, J. Mills Thornton III, Mark Tushnet, and Ted White, as well as participants in faculty workshops at Case Western University School of Law and at the University of Virginia Department of History and two anonymous readers for the *Journal of American History*. Superb research assistance was provided by Wijdan Jreisat, Reuel Schiller, Leslie Shauntz, and Joel Straka. I would also like to thank Susan Armeny for her excellent copyediting and Kent Olson for reference assistance above and beyond the call of duty. Finally, it would not have been possible for me to have read as widely as I have for this project without the cheerful and efficient dictation transcription of Kathy Burton, Evelyn Gray, Christine Moll, Susan Simches, and (especially) Phyllis Ware.

¹ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). For statements of *Brown's* overarching importance, see J. Harvie Wilkinson, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954–1978* (New York, 1979), 6; Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review*, 41 (Nov. 1988), 62; Lino Graglia, "Remarks at Roundtable Discussion of the Judiciary Act of 1789," *Nova Law Review*, 14 (Fall 1989), 271; Robert L. Gill, "The Impact, Implications, and Prospects of *Brown v. Board of Education*: Twenty-Five Years After," *Negro Educational Review*, 30 (April–July 1979), 64; Howard A. Glickstein, "The Impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* and Its Progeny," *Howard Law Journal*, 23 (no. 1, 1980), 55; and Nathaniel R. Jones, "The Desegregation of Urban Schools Thirty Years after *Brown*," *University of Colorado Law Review*, 55 (Summer 1984), 553.

2

The second, and more fundamental, objective of this article is to provide an alternative account of *Brown's* indirect contribution to racial change, one that focuses on the backlash against *Brown*. In this view, *Brown* was indirectly responsible for the transformative civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s by setting in motion the following pattern of events.² *Brown* crystallized southern resistance to racial change, which—from at least the time of Harry S. Truman's civil rights proposals in 1948—had been scattered and episodic. The unification of southern racial intransigence, which became known as massive resistance, propelled politics in virtually every southern state several notches to the right on racial issues; *Brown* temporarily destroyed southern racial moderation. In this extremist political environment, men who were unswervingly committed to preservation of the racial status quo were catapulted into public office. These massive resistance politicians were both personally and politically predisposed to use whatever measures were necessary to maintain Jim Crow, including the brutal suppression of civil rights demonstrations. There followed nationally televised scenes of southern law enforcement officers using police dogs, high-pressure fire hoses, tear gas, and truncheons against peaceful, prayerful black demonstrators (often children), which converted millions of previously indifferent northern whites into enthusiastic proponents of civil rights legislation.

It is crucial to emphasize the limited claim to originality that I am making in proposing the backlash thesis. Many historians and political scientists—for example, Earl Black, Numan V. Bartley, Hugh D. Graham, and Neil R. McMillen—have copiously documented the racial fanaticism that *Brown* induced in southern politics. Other scholars—for example, David J. Garrow, Harvard Sitkoff, and Doug McAdam—have convincingly demonstrated the connection between suppression of civil rights demonstrations at Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, and the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Thus, I claim no originality in establishing the particular links in the proffered chain of causation. To my knowledge, however, nobody has assembled these links into a causal chain that con-

² Any evaluation of the extent to which the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s altered the racial landscape of this nation is controversial. Plainly the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had a dramatic effect on southern school segregation; the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had similarly revolutionary implications for black voter registration, especially in the Deep South. For example, the percentage of eligible blacks registered to vote in Mississippi increased from 6.7% in 1964 to 32.9% in 1966 and to 59.4% in 1968, while the corresponding figures for Alabama were 23.0%, 51.2%, and 56.7%. These figures are uncontroverted; what is controversial is evaluating how much difference school desegregation and voter registration have made to the lives of blacks. Heightened black voter registration has failed to produce black elected officials in proportion to the black percentage of the population (though the numbers continue to increase annually), and even black elected officials have failed significantly to mitigate the enormous economic and social problems facing the nation's black community. The statistics on black voting are from David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, 1978), 19, table 1-3, 189, table 6-1. Statistics on black elected officials are in Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941* (Philadelphia, 1991), 260, table 5, 261. On the limited capacity of black voting to remedy the ills of the black community, see Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 190–91, 210–11; Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 261–64; Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York, 1992); Robert J. Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York, 1985), 206–8; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954–1980* (New York, 1981), 230–34; and Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Ga.* (Athens, Ga., 1983), 203–4.



White students protest the *Brown* decision, which destroyed racial liberalism among southern whites and fomented massive resistance.
Courtesy Birmingham News.

nects *Brown*, in an indirect and indeed almost perverse manner, with the landmark civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. Finally, whether the *Brown* decision was a profound or a minor inspiration for the civil rights movement, the backlash thesis has explanatory power, since the critical federal legislative intervention occurred only after the civil rights movement intersected, at places like Birmingham and Selma, with the southern racial backlash.³

Any evaluation of *Brown*'s contribution to racial change must consider the decision's direct impact: How much school desegregation did *Brown* produce? Clearly *Brown* had a significant and fairly immediate effect on school segregation in the

³ See, among others in this rich body of scholarship, Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950's* (Baton Rouge, 1969); Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 1975); Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana, 1971); Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); and Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago, 1982).

border states and in isolated portions of the peripheral South. For example, in Kentucky the percentage of blacks attending public schools with whites increased from 0 percent at the time of the first *Brown* decision in 1954 to 28.4 percent in 1957–1958 and 54.4 percent in 1963–1964; the analogous figures from Oklahoma were 0 percent in 1954, 18.2 percent in 1957–1958, and 28.0 percent in 1963–1964. Moreover, in the peripheral South, roughly seventy-five school districts in Texas and ten in Arkansas had desegregated by 1957, though these districts were in areas with very small black populations, and they thus yielded little desegregation in absolute numbers or statewide percentages (in 1957–1958, 0.09 percent of black students attended school with whites in Arkansas and 1.4 percent in Texas).⁴

Throughout the rest of the South, *Brown* had almost no immediate direct impact on desegregation. In upper South states such as Tennessee and North Carolina, the percentage of blacks attending desegregated schools was, respectively, 0.12 percent and 0.01 percent in 1959–1960, and 2.7 percent and 0.54 percent in 1963–1964. Even more revealing, in the Deep South states of South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi, not a single black child attended an integrated public grade school in 1962–1963. Across the South as a whole, roughly 0.16 percent of school-age blacks were attending school with whites in 1959–1960 and 1.2 percent in 1963–1964. Thus, while it is true that lower court rulings in Arkansas and Virginia in 1959 broke the back of massive resistance in those states, only trivial amounts of desegregation ensued, as defiance of *Brown* was replaced, not with compliance, but with evasion.⁵

Only after the 1964 Civil Rights Act threatened to cut off federal educational funding for segregated school districts and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1966 adopted stringent enforcement guidelines, did the percentage of southern black children attending public school with whites rise to 6.1 percent in 1965–1966, 32.0 percent in 1968–1969, and 91.3 percent in 1972–1973. After the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 vastly increased federal spending on public education, southern states found it increasingly difficult to resist school desegregation, which became a condition for receipt of federal funds. In the three

⁴ The percentage figures are from Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (Chicago, 1991), appendix 1. The figures on Texas and Arkansas school districts are provided, with some variation in the precise numbers, in Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 138; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 373n73; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 93–94, 103; Richard E. Yates, "Arkansas: Independent and Unpredictable," in *The Changing Politics of the South*, ed. William C. Havard (Baton Rouge, 1972), 271. On the immediate, preliminary steps toward compliance with *Brown* in border states, as well as in the District of Columbia, see Benjamin Muse, *Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration since the Supreme Court's 1954 Decision* (New York, 1964), 23, 30–37; Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 50–51; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 7–9; Robert Fredrick Burk, *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights* (Knoxville, 1984), 55–56; William Henry Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980), 16; August Meier, "The Successful Sit-ins in a Border City: A Study in Social Causation," *Journal of Intergroup Relations*, 2 (Summer 1961), 231; and George C. Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations in Louisville," in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn (Baton Rouge, 1982), 192–93.

⁵ Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 50, table 2.1, appendix 1; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 9–10; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 323–32; James W. Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia: The Byrd Organization and the Politics of Massive Resistance* (Knoxville, 1976), 88–89, 123–24, 128–29, 132–33; J. Harvie Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945–1966* (Charlottesville, 1968), 145–46; Lee Powell, "Massive Resistance in Arkansas: A Tale of Race Relations in an Undemocratic Political System in the 1950s," 1992 (in Michael J. Klarman's possession), 93.

Deep South states most resistant to school desegregation—Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina—federal funds constituted 16.8 percent, 20.2 percent, and 17.5 percent of the public school budgets as of 1967–1968. Though the federal courts aggressively reentered the school desegregation fray in the mid-1960s (as did the Supreme Court in 1968), it seems clear that legislative and executive, more than judicial, action prompted the sea change in school desegregation in the middle and late 1960s.⁶

That *Brown* had little direct impact on school desegregation is apparent, yet the decision may still have been tremendously important because of its indirect effects. Not only did many participants in the civil rights demonstrations of the 1950s and 1960s emphasize *Brown's* inspirational effect, but most scholars believe that *Brown* was very significant in this regard. Notwithstanding the powerful recent historiographic trend toward locating the origins of the modern civil rights movement well before *Brown*—usually in World War II, but occasionally even earlier—historians, legal scholars, political scientists, sociologists, and informed journalists continue to assume that *Brown* inspired the civil rights movement.⁷ This pervasive assumption of *Brown's* indirect causal significance has been evidenced both implicitly, by the use of 1954 as the starting or ending point for many period studies, and explicitly, by claims regarding *Brown's* importance. Scholars have told us that the commencement of the Second Reconstruction is traceable to *Brown*, that *Brown* “profoundly affected national thinking and served as the principal ideological engine” of the civil rights movement, that *Brown* “raised black awareness” and “strengthened resolve among southern blacks to take control of their destiny,” and that without *Brown* there would have been no 1964 Civil Rights Act. Even those recent historians who

⁶ All statistics are from Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 50, table 2.1, 52–54, 97–100, table 3.2. These desegregation figures fail to distinguish between actual and token integration—that is, they fail to identify how many white children were in the “integrated” schools—but they are useful in making the time series comparison.

⁷ On the historiographic trend toward locating the origins of the civil rights movement in the 1930s or 1940s, see Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, x; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 32–39; Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley, 1991), 184–201; Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (Lawrence, 1993), chs. 8–11; Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History*, 75 (Dec. 1988), 786; Robert J. Norrell, “Labor at the Ballot Box: Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement,” *Journal of Southern History*, 57 (May 1991), 201; Morton Sosna, “More Important than the Civil War? The Impact of World War II on the South,” *Perspectives on the American South*, 4 (1987), 145; Elizabeth Jacoway, “Taken By Surprise,” in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and Colburn, 19–20; Peter J. Kellogg, “Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s,” *Historian*, 42 (Nov. 1979), 28–29; Patricia Sullivan, “Southern Reformers, the New Deal, and the Movement Foundation,” in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, ed. Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan (Charlottesville, 1991); and J. Mills Thornton III, “Municipal Politics and the Course of the Movement,” *ibid.*, 45–48. On the still pervasive tendency of scholars to attribute great indirect causal significance to *Brown*, see also Mark Tushnet, “The Significance of *Brown v. Board of Education*,” *Virginia Law Review*, 80 (Feb. 1994), 173; Mark Tushnet, “What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*,” *Columbia Law Review*, 91 (Dec. 1991), 1867; David J. Garrow, “Hopelessly Hollow History: Revisionist Devaluing of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*,” *Virginia Law Review*, 80 (Feb. 1994), 151; Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 143; Bradley C. Canon, “The Supreme Court as a Cheerleader in Politico-Moral Disputes,” *Journal of Politics*, 54 (Aug. 1992), 648–49; Glenn T. Eskew, “The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights and the Birmingham Struggle for Civil Rights, 1956–1963,” in *Birmingham, Alabama, 1956–1963: The Black Struggle for Civil Rights*, ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn, 1989), 11; and Kenneth Clark, “Racial Justice in Education: Continuing Struggle in a New Era,” *Howard Law Journal*, 23 (no. 1, 1980), 95.

When did the
rights movement
start?

have persuasively traced the origins of the modern civil rights movement to an earlier period have generally been loath to downplay the significance of *Brown*.⁸

Brown might have indirectly contributed to the success of the civil rights movement in a variety of ways. First, perhaps *Brown* forced the civil rights issue onto the national agenda. *Brown* plainly increased the salience of the civil rights issue in the South, though there the short-term effect was to retard, not to advance, the cause. *Brown* commanded significantly less attention in the North. One opinion survey conducted in the summer of 1955 revealed that only 17 percent of northern whites, as compared with 60 percent of southern whites, had discussed the Supreme Court decision during the preceding week. Whereas 33 percent of southerners in that survey deemed segregation a more important issue than crime, atomic bombs, and high taxes, only 6 percent of northerners felt that way. Moreover, analyses of print media coverage of civil rights events suggest that court decisions, including *Brown*, attracted relatively little attention as compared with demonstrations producing confrontation and violence, such as the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956, which had little connection to the *Brown* decision. The *New York Times* gave more coverage to civil rights issues in 1952 than in 1954 or 1955 (the years of the first and second *Brown* decisions). The percentage of respondents identifying civil rights as the nation's most urgent problem surged after the Montgomery bus boycott, not after *Brown*, and even that increase was dwarfed by the explosion in public attention to civil rights after the Birmingham demonstrations in the spring of 1963.⁹

⁸ Jack Greenberg, "The Supreme Court, Civil Rights, and Civil Dissonance," *Yale Law Journal*, 77 (July 1968), 1522; David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, 1990), 91–92; C. Herman Pritchett, "Equal Protection and the Urban Majority," *American Political Science Review*, 58 (Dec. 1964), 869. For the choice of 1954 as a relevant date, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1945–1963* (New York, 1988); Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality (1954–1980)*; John Dittmer, "The Politics of the Mississippi Movement, 1954–1964," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson, 1986); Broussard, *Black San Francisco (1900–1954)*, esp. ch. 13; and Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (New York, 1987). For the explicit statement that *Brown* launched the Second Reconstruction, see Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 4; Paul Gaston, "The South and the Quest for Equality," *New South*, 27 (Spring 1972), 9; and William C. Hovard, "The South: A Shifting Perspective," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Hovard, 10. For historians who trace the origins of the civil rights movement to an earlier period but still emphasize the significance of *Brown*, see Lee E. Bains, Jr., "Birmingham, 1963: Confrontation over Civil Rights," in *Birmingham, Alabama*, ed. Garrow, 159; Dittmer, "Politics of the Mississippi Movement," 67; Robert J. Norrell, "One Thing We Did Right: Reflections on the Movement," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, ed. Robinson and Sullivan, 70; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 11–13, 37–38; J. Mills Thornton III, "Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–1956," *Alabama Review*, 33 (July 1980), 172–74; and Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984), 81.

⁹ Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 111, 113, 116, 129–30, fig. 4.2; Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Desegregation and Its Chances for Success: Northern and Southern Views," *Social Forces*, 35 (May 1957), 340, 341, table 3. For explicit statements that *Brown* increased the salience of the civil rights issue, see Canon, "Supreme Court as a Cheerleader," 648; and Aryeh Neier, *Only Judgment: The Limits of Litigation in Social Change* (Middletown, Conn., 1982), 241–42. While many participants in the Montgomery bus boycott subsequently claimed that *Brown* had provided an important source of inspiration for their actions, the historical record casts significant doubt on any causal connection between *Brown* and the boycott. First, black leaders in Montgomery had been challenging seating practices on city buses since well before *Brown*. Second, the Montgomery boycott was patterned after one that occurred in Baton Rouge in 1953 (the year before *Brown*). Third, the initial objective of the protesters was not an end to segregated seating but rather a less degrading form of segregation. Fourth, the lawsuit in *Gayle v. Browder* was not filed until the bus boycott had been underway for two months and had not been seriously contemplated during the first month of the boycott. *Gayle v. Browder*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956). See Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 134–38; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 93–95; Thornton, "Challenge and Response," 174–76, 211n49, 229; Branch, *Parting the*

Goldfield in
Changing Perceptions

Relatedly, perhaps *Brown* indirectly contributed to the success of the civil rights movement because it pricked the conscience of northern whites by placing the moral authority of the Court and the Constitution behind the black demand for desegregation. Yet there is little evidence that *Brown* made white northerners significantly more sympathetic to the civil rights cause. One opinion poll conducted in July 1959 recorded only a five percentage point increase (to 59 percent) in public support for the *Brown* decision over the preceding five years. One useful reflection of constituent sentiment is a congressman's willingness to sponsor legislation; the number of congressional sponsors for civil rights legislation rose steadily through the late 1940s and peaked in 1951–1952, before declining throughout the remainder of the 1950s (*Brown* notwithstanding) and reaching a new low in 1959–1960. Another indication that there was no critical awakening of civil rights consciousness among northern whites in the years after *Brown* comparable to the awakening after Birmingham and Selma was the willingness of the president and the Senate to see the Eisenhower administration's 1956–1957 civil rights bill emasculated in the upper house. Similarly, Emma Lou Thornbrough's study of civil rights in Indiana reveals that the state legislature talked more about civil rights issues during the 1950s than in the 1940s, but it did not enact meaningful legislation until after the civil rights revolution of the early 1960s.¹⁰

Perhaps the most popular assumption regarding *Brown*'s indirect causal significance is that the decision inspired black protest by legitimizing the civil rights cause or by improving the prospects for its success. Recent historical scholarship has assured us that *Brown* “stimulated black hope,” served as a “catalyst” for blacks, “awoke a new activism within the black community,” “provided both a rallying cry and a focus for black men and women working for social change,” and “gave a great boost to black expectations, even a sense that equality was now inevitable.” Many participants in the civil rights movement have also given this account of *Brown*'s significance. Thus, for example, Martin Luther King, Jr., declared in 1958 that *Brown* had “brought hope to millions of disinherited Negroes who had formerly dared only to dream of freedom.” Fred Shuttlesworth, leader of the indigenous civil rights movement in Birmingham, subsequently dated his role in the movement to *Brown*. The decision, he recalled, “stirred up in me what I knew all the time.”¹¹

Waters, 144, 151; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, 1986), 54, 63, 71; and Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 7–25, 52–53.

¹⁰ Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 202; Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 124; Emma Lou Thornbrough, “Breaking Racial Barriers to Public Accommodations in Indiana, 1935 to 1963,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 83 (Dec. 1987), 327–30, 336–39. For the view that *Brown* pricked the conscience of white America, see Pritchett, “Equal Protection and the Urban Majority,” 869. On the Senate's emasculation of the 1956–1957 civil rights bill, see Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 223–24; Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908–1960* (New York, 1991), 522–26; John Frederick Martin, *Civil Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism: The Democratic Party, 1945–1976* (Boulder, 1979), 162–63; and C. Vann Woodward, “The Great Civil Rights Debate,” *Commentary*, 24 (Oct. 1957), 286–89.

¹¹ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 37–38; Bains, “Birmingham, 1963,” 159; Eskew, “Alabama Christian Movement,” 11; Dittmer, “Politics of the Mississippi Movement,” 67; Norrell, “One Thing We Did Right,” 70. The King and Shuttlesworth quotations are from Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York, 1958), 191; and Lewis W. Jones, “Fred L. Shuttlesworth: Indigenous Leader,” in *Birmingham, Alabama*, ed. Garrow, 132. For other attributions of inspirational significance to *Brown* by movement participants,

Since measuring the legitimizing effect of a Supreme Court decision is virtually impossible, it is difficult either to defend or to reject this interpretation of *Brown's* causal significance. Martin Luther King, Jr., and A. Philip Randolph led prayer pilgrimages to Washington, D.C., on the anniversary of *Brown* in the late 1950s, thus testifying that blacks regarded *Brown* as an important symbol. Moreover, *Brown* clearly inspired much litigation challenging state-sponsored segregation. For example, local branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed roughly sixty desegregation petitions with school boards in the Deep South during the summer of 1955. After *Brown*, blacks in Greensboro, North Carolina, sought to desegregate the city golf course, and blacks in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, brought court suits challenging segregation in city parks and on city buses.¹²

Yet the pervasive assumption that *Brown* played a vitally significant inspirational function is troubling for several reasons. First, it is not clear that in 1954 a Supreme Court decision was needed to legitimize civil rights demands in the eyes of blacks. The democratic ideology of World War II and the greater opportunities for political and economic advance that the war afforded had already fostered a civil rights consciousness in most American blacks. Thus one black veteran returning to Alabama after the war observed as he registered to vote: "After having been overseas fighting for democracy, I thought that when we got back here we should enjoy a little of it." Blacks meeting in Durham, North Carolina, in 1942 issued the Southern Black Declaration of Independence (also known as the Durham Manifesto), endorsing the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) and calling for an end to segregation and to inequalities in housing, medicine, and education. During the war Norfolk, Virginia, blacks protested segregation in busing and streetcars, served on war-related boards and councils, joined voter leagues, paid the poll tax in record numbers, and successfully lobbied for the appointment of two blacks to the city police force (the first to serve in seventy years). In the North, the ideology of the war, combined with the growing political power of urban blacks, led to the enactment in the late 1940s and early 1950s of a flood of state and local antidiscrimination legislation, most of it promoting fair employment practices and open public accommodations, but some actually forbidding racial segregation in public schools.¹³

see Garrow, "Hopelessly Hollow History," 154-57; James Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation, 1960-62: Toward a Theory of the Rationalization of Protest," in *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. David J. Garrow (Brooklyn, 1989), 62-63, fig. 1; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 48; and Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 69-70, 83-84.

¹² Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation," 70-71; Jack L. Walker, *Sit-ins in Atlanta* ([New York], 1964), 11-12; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 82-83; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 30-31, 62-63; Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore, 1988), 61; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 83-86; Eskew, "Alabama Christian Movement," 21, 38; Jones, "Fred L. Shuttlesworth," 136; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 113.

¹³ Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 60-61; Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*, 184, 188-97. For additional examples of the heightened civil rights consciousness that grew out of World War II, see Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York, 1976), 28-29, 100, 106; Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York, 1983), 69, 74; Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," 72; Dittmer, "Politics of the Mississippi Movement," 68; Thornbrough, "Breaking Racial Barriers," 310-11; Sosna, "More Important than the Civil War?," 155; and Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 57. On the greater political and economic opportunities afforded to blacks by the war, see Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, *passim*;

The existence of a vibrant civil rights movement during and after the war confirms that *Brown* was not necessary as an impetus to challenge the racial status quo. Over the past decade or so, historians have demonstrated just how potent the black challenge to Jim Crow was from 1940 to 1954 in a wide array of southern locales, including Greensboro and Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Louisville, Kentucky, Norfolk, Virginia, Little Rock, Arkansas, and Tuskegee, Montgomery, and Birmingham, Alabama. Southern black voter registration "jumped by leaps and bounds in the 1940s"; the number of blacks registered to vote in the eleven states of the former Confederacy increased from 151,000 in 1940 to 900,000 in 1950. NAACP membership grew nearly ninefold during the war, increasing from 50,000 in 1940 to 450,000 in 1946. By the late 1940s, black candidates were standing for public office in many cities in the upper South and occasionally winning. Moreover, black challenges to various aspects of Jim Crow were beginning to bear fruit in the early 1950s—there was desegregation of the Montgomery police force, of elevators in downtown office buildings in Birmingham, of federal juries in Little Rock, of some department stores and downtown public facilities in Greensboro, of public libraries, parks, and swimming pools in Louisville.¹⁴

Conversely, if *Brown* gave a vital inspirational spark to the civil rights movement, why did the volume of civil rights protest activity decrease during the 1950s, except in the period immediately following the Montgomery bus boycott? The average number of civil rights demonstrations per year reported by the *New York Times* was higher in 1946–1948 than in 1957–1959. The 1957 prayer pilgrimage commemorating *Brown*, which seems to confirm the decision's symbolic importance, was noteworthy mainly for its "disappointing" turnout. Nor were the voter registration cam-

Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History*, 55 (June 1968), 96–99; Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 90; Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938–1980* (New York, 1991), 76–77; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 32–33; Sitkoff, *Black Struggle for Equality*, 14–15; and Norral D. Glenn, "Some Changes in the Relative Status of American Nonwhites, 1940 to 1960," *Phylon*, 24 (Summer 1963), 109. On the northern antidiscrimination measures, see Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 4; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 18; Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, 54–55; Thornbrough, "Breaking Racial Barriers," 311; Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 92; Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 38–39; and Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness," 22.

¹⁴ The local studies are Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (on Tuskegee, Ala.); Lewis, *In Their Own Interests* (Norfolk, Va.); Thornton, "Municipal Politics" (Birmingham and Montgomery, Ala.); Tony Allan Freyer, *The Little Rock Crisis: A Constitutional Interpretation* (Westport, 1984) (Little Rock, Ark.); Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost" (Winston-Salem, N.C.); Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights* (Greensboro, N.C.); Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations" (Louisville, Ky.). The figures for black voter registration, as well as the quotation, are from Alexander Heard, *A Two-Party South?* (Chapel Hill, 1952), 181. For further discussion of mass voter registration by blacks, see Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Millwood, N.Y., 1979), 238; Sullivan, "Southern Reformers," 90–92, 103n29; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 60, 72–75, 86; and Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 35. For the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) membership figures, see Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925–1950* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 135; and Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, 48–49. On black candidacies for public office, see Heard, *Two-Party South?*, 218; Henry Lee Moon, *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* (Garden City, 1948), 164, 188; Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 793; and Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 32, 35–36. For the instances of desegregation in the text, see *ibid.*, 38–39; Freyer, *Little Rock Crisis*, 20; Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 43–46; and Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations," 192. For other instances of civil rights activity in the pre-*Brown* years, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The First Freedom Ride," *Phylon*, 30 (Fall 1969), 213; Thornbrough, "Breaking Racial Barriers," 314–15; and Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation," 66–67.

paigns conducted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the late 1950s notable successes. Indeed, a leading historian of that organization has called 1957–1959 its “fallow years.” He observed that “in the late 1950s the [black college] campuses seemed quiet,” and most southern blacks were “reluctan[t] . . . to embrace direct action.” One plausible explanation for the relative quiescence in civil rights activity during the 1950s is the rise of the Cold War and its domestic counterpart, McCarthyism. With the country widely perceived to be under both internal and external attack, any social, political, or cultural movement challenging the status quo was susceptible to being labeled Communist-inspired. By reining in the aggressive civil rights campaign of the late 1940s, black leaders consciously or subconsciously avoided the tincture of complicity in communism. The virtual demise of domestic anticommunism as a serious concern by 1960 rendered possible the reemergence of a social movement critical of the racial status quo. In this view, then, the civil rights revolution of the 1960s had relatively little to do with *Brown* and much to do with the elimination of McCarthyism as a temporary impediment to a civil rights movement that had been spawned by World War II.¹⁵

Finally, much civil rights protest activity in the 1960s aimed at objectives that court decisions alone could not realize; thus it is not obvious that *Brown*, by enhancing the prospects of judicial intervention in furtherance of racial equality, inspired these demonstrations. The Supreme Court could not (or would not) rule, as the sit-in demonstrators urged, that the Constitution bars racial segregation in privately owned places of public accommodation; congressional action was necessary to outlaw that practice. Nor could a court give the Birmingham demonstrators most of what they were seeking—desegregation of facilities in downtown stores, equal employment opportunities in those stores, reopening on a desegregated basis of the city's closed recreational facilities, and establishment of a biracial committee to pursue further desegregation. Likewise, the Selma demonstrators were plainly appealing to Congress, not the courts, since only new voting rights legislation could effectively enfranchise blacks in the rural Deep South. In short, to the extent that the civil rights movement sought to change the law, rather than to enforce existing law, its appeal necessarily was to legislatures rather than to courts. Having *Brown* on the books did not significantly improve the prospects for success in the political arena, as evidenced by the toothless civil rights legislation enacted by Congress in 1957 and 1960 and by the Kennedy administration's abysmal pre-Birmingham civil rights record.¹⁶

¹⁵ Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 133–34, table 4.2; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, Ga., 1987), ch. 2, (esp. 40, 53–54); Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 93, 103–4, 118, 120–21. For McCarthyism as an explanation for the diminution in civil rights activity in the 1950s, see Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990), 29–36, 164–65, 175–78, 193–94; McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 20–21, 146; Korstad and Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost,” 800–804, 811; Nottrell, “One Thing We Did Right,” 69; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 185–88, 213; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 195–98, 269; Nottrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 105, 108, 142; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 17; Sullivan, “Southern Reformers,” 98–99; and Laue, “Direct Action and Desegregation,” 81.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the justices' internal deliberations in the sit-in cases, see Michael J. Klarman, “An Interpretive History of Modern Equal Protection,” *Michigan Law Review*, 90 (Nov. 1991), 272–76.

Nor are testimonials by participants in the civil rights movement particularly convincing evidence of the inspirational impact of *Brown*. Similar statements were made, perhaps even in roughly equal numbers, about the motivational force of the lynching of Emmett Till in the Mississippi Delta in 1955 (and the subsequent acquittal of his killers), the Montgomery bus boycott, and the rapid decolonization of Africa. Maybe what these testimonials show is that participants in social movements, when asked to articulate their inspiration, identify concrete, highly salient events such as court decisions, boycotts, or lynchings. It seems unrealistic to expect them to attribute causal significance to deep-seated but intangible forces such as urbanization and industrialization, demographic shifts, political realignments, economic advances, and rising literacy rates. Yet the most persuasive accounts of the origins of the sit-in demonstrations of 1960, for example, emphasize, not *Brown* or Emmett Till, but the existence of a thriving, well-educated black middle class living in urban centers where Jim Crow norms already had significantly eroded.¹⁷

In sum, I believe that political, economic, social, demographic, and ideological forces, many of which coalesced during World War II, laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement, and that *Brown* played a relatively small role. The Great Migration, the increasing urbanization of the black population, the decline of southern agriculture, the increasing potency of the northern black vote, the burgeoning black middle class, increasing black literacy rates, the ideology of World War II, the Cold War imperative for racial change, the social and economic integration of the nation—these were the forces that helped create the civil rights movement.¹⁸ Yet *Brown* may have contributed to the transformative racial change of the mid-1960s in another way that scholars have not yet sufficiently appreciated. While the civil rights movement did not require *Brown* as a catalyst, the massive resistance movement did. And only the intersection of these two movements enabled passage of the landmark civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. In the remainder of this article, I hope to demonstrate that *Brown* contributed importantly to racial change. But that contribution lay primarily in the decision's effect on southern racial politics. By propelling southern politics toward racial fanaticism, *Brown* set the stage for the violent suppression of civil rights demonstrations in the early 1960s, which in turn aroused previously indifferent northern whites to demand federal legislative intervention to inter Jim Crow.

thesis
prop

thesis
argument

¹⁷ For participants' attribution of causal significance to Till's murder, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the decolonization of Africa, see Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 89–100; Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 144–45; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 16, 82–83; Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation," 62–63, fig. 1; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 16; Harold Robert Isaacs, *The New World of Negro Americans* (New York, [1963]), 50–53, 290–93; Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Burning Truth in the South," *Progressive*, 24 (May 1960), 9; and Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, 125. For accounts of the sit-ins that emphasize the growth of a black middle class for whom Jim Crow restrictions appeared increasingly incongruous, see Walker, *Sit-ins in Atlanta*, 1–3, 5, 14; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 49, 84–85; Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation," 73–78; Ruth Searles and J. Allen Williams, Jr., "Negro College Students' Participation in Sit-ins," *Social Forces*, 40 (March 1962), 215–20; Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 197; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 22–23; Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, 127; and King, "Burning Truth in the South," 9.

¹⁸ For detailed accounts of the political, economic, social, demographic, and ideological forces impelling the nation toward racial change, see Michael J. Klarman, "Brown, Racial Change, and the Civil Rights Movement," *Virginia Law Review*, 80 (Feb. 1994), 7–75; Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, ch. 4; and McAdam, *Political Process*.

The first step in establishing this backlash thesis is to show that southern resistance to racial change was of different orders of magnitude before and after *Brown*. The stress placed upon southern racial norms, first by World War II and then by President Truman's 1948 civil rights proposals, unquestionably stiffened the resistance to racial change. But that backlash pales in significance, both in depth and breadth, when compared with what transpired after *Brown*.

Racial changes inspired by World War II fomented an incipient backlash, as white southerners sought to counteract black wartime militancy and to preempt anticipated postwar demands for the dismantling of Jim Crow. The most horrific manifestation of this racial backlash was heightened racial violence, including a rise in the number of lynchings, in the postwar South. In 1948, when President Truman unveiled his landmark civil rights proposals and the Democratic convention adopted a civil rights plank even more liberal than the one Truman desired, the most notorious manifestation of the pre-*Brown* backlash materialized: the Dixiecrat revolt. After the Mississippi and part of the Alabama delegations bolted the Democratic convention, the Dixiecrats fielded their own presidential ticket, consisting of Governors Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and Fielding Wright of Mississippi, which carried four southern states in the fall election. The other famous indicia of a pre-*Brown* southern racial backlash were the Democratic senatorial primary defeats in the spring of 1950 of Frank Porter Graham in North Carolina and Claude Pepper in Florida. By contemporaneous southern standards, both defeated incumbents were extremely liberal on the race issue. Racial demagoguery also characterized other, less widely noted pre-*Brown* southern electoral contests. For example, Eugene Talmadge in his 1946 Democratic primary campaign for the Georgia governorship highlighted racial issues, especially black suffrage; two years later in another Georgia gubernatorial primary, his son Herman appealed to states' rights and white supremacy in opposition to "Yankee meddling and a federal civil rights program."¹⁹

These events confirm the existence of growing white southern resistance to racial change prior to *Brown*. Yet we must not lose sight of the relatively limited scope of that resistance, especially when compared with the tidal wave of racial hysteria that swept the South after the *Brown* decision. There was a Dixiecrat revolt from the Democratic party in 1948, but it failed. The Dixiecrats carried only the four

¹⁹ Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 37, 42, 52, 67-70; Heard, *Two-Party South?*, 20, 25-27, 147-48, 183, 192; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 56-57, 77-78; Wynn, *Afro-American and the Second World War*, 109, 116; Eskew, "Alabama Christian Movement," 14; Sullivan, "Southern Reformers," 86, 93-94, 96-97; Martin, *Civil Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism*, 69-70, 81-88; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York, 1977), 106-7; McAdam, *Political Process*, 89, table 5.5; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 25, 51-52, 85; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 121-22, 132; John R. Skates, Jr., "World War II as a Watershed in Mississippi History," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 37 (May 1975), 141; William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus, 1970), 101-2, 107-15, 125, 132-33; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 40; Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns III, *Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 91, 93-96, 139-42, 147-48, 226; Robert Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South: Stars of the New Confederacy* (New York, 1968), 49, 138; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 35-41; Joseph L. Bernd, "Georgia: Static and Dynamic," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 314-15; Joseph L. Bernd, "White Supremacy and the Disfranchisement of Blacks in Georgia, 1946," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 66 (Winter 1982), 494-95, 498.

states where the percentage of blacks in the whole population was largest—Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Louisiana. The Dixiecrat appeal was essentially confined to the Deep South black belt; in metropolitan areas and throughout the peripheral South, the New Deal/Fair Deal coalition held up reasonably well for President Truman.²⁰

Moreover, the Dixiecrats won only those states where they controlled the Democratic party machinery, enabling them to run slates of electors pledged to Thurmond and Wright under the Democratic party label. In other words, where they won, the Dixiecrats benefited from the intense, traditional Democratic party loyalty of Deep South voters. In the four states where Thurmond ran as the regular Democrat, he won 55.3 percent of the vote; in six of the other seven southern states where he appeared on an independent ticket, his vote trailed not just that of Truman but that of the Republican nominee, Thomas E. Dewey. States such as Arkansas and Virginia, which a decade later led the massive resistance crusade against *Brown*, gave only 16.5 percent and 10.3 percent of their vote, respectively, to Thurmond. Moreover, in 1950 the Dixiecrat party was rocked by electoral defeats across the South, the most ignominious of which was Thurmond's failure to upend Sen. Olin Johnston of South Carolina. A leading contemporary political scientist concluded, "The failure of the Dixiecrats in 1948 and 1950 demonstrated that the great mass of southerners would no longer be bamboozled by racist appeals."²¹

With a few exceptions such as Graham and Pepper (and even they were at most partial exceptions, as we shall see), economically liberal and racially moderate southern politicians continued to thrive in the late 1940s and early 1950s—figures such as Big Jim Folsom, John Sparkman, and Lister Hill in Alabama; Lyndon B. Johnson in Texas; Earl Long in Louisiana; W. Kerr Scott in North Carolina; Sid McMath, J. William Fulbright, and (the early) Orval Faubus in Arkansas; and Albert Gore, Estes Kefauver, and Frank Clement in Tennessee. As the historians Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham have noted, "Generally during the post-war decade the politics of economic class made considerable headway against the inertia of the politics of race and caste."²²

Coalitions uniting the relatively few enfranchised blacks with economically dispossessed whites often produced electoral victories for populist candidates who eschewed racial conflict and supported higher government spending on education, roads, public health, and old-age pensions. In Louisiana, at roughly the time when Thurmond defeated Truman in the presidential contest, at the state level Earl Long,

²⁰ Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 85–86; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 33; Heard, *Two-Party South?*, 27–28, 246; Emile B. Ader, "Why the Dixiecrats Failed," *Journal of Politics*, 15 (Aug. 1953), 358, 366–69; Richard S. Kirkendall, "Election of 1948," in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1968*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Fred L. Israel (4 vols., New York, 1971), IV, 3140–41.

²¹ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 35–37; Heard, *Two-Party South?*, 22–23, 25–26, esp. 148, 164, 246, 278; Perry H. Howard, "Louisiana: Resistance and Change," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Harvard, 548; V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), 671; Berman, *Politics of Civil Rights*, 133; Ader, "Why the Dixiecrats Failed," 366–69.

²² Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 25; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 41–45; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 48–49; Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 288–89, 368–70.

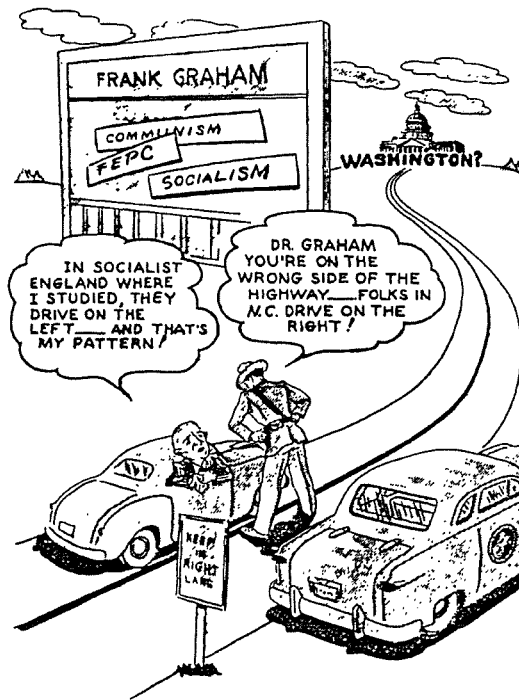
the younger brother of Huey Long, the Kingfish, was perpetuating the family tradition. He allied poor whites and blacks (a higher percentage of blacks were permitted to vote in Louisiana than in any other Deep South state) by highlighting economic issues and downplaying race. In Arkansas in 1948 and 1950, Sid McMath, emphasizing populist economic policies and ignoring race, defeated more overtly segregationist candidates who highlighted racial issues such as the pending congressional legislation that would establish a fair employment practices commission. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, North Carolina's governor was W. Kerr Scott, who assembled a successful coalition of farmers, organized labor, and blacks behind a program of increased spending on road construction, education, and rural electrification. Just weeks after the *Brown* decision, Scott won a Democratic senatorial primary against opponents who portrayed him as soft on the issue of segregation. In Virginia, Theodore Dalton, the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 1953, won roughly 45 percent of the vote on a platform of higher teachers' salaries, repeal of the poll tax, and increased spending on state mental institutions; neither party discussed racial segregation in the campaign.²³

The most outstanding example of such racial moderation, Big Jim Folsom, won resounding victories in Alabama's Democratic gubernatorial primaries in 1946 and 1954 on populist platforms of higher state spending on schools, roads, and old-age pensions, as well as abolition of the poll tax and reapportionment of the state legislature. Folsom's posture toward blacks was one of genuine fraternity, invoking their right to a fair share of Alabama's wealth, speaking of "fellowship and brotherly love," and disparaging racial divisions on the grounds that "all men are just alike." Folsom urged liberalization of voter qualification requirements, appointed voting registrars who administered existing requirements in a color-blind fashion, worked to equalize the salaries of white and black teachers, and supported creation of more state parks for blacks. He defeated with ease candidates who took a much harder line on segregation, while Folsom continued to stress the congruity of interests between poor whites and poor blacks.²⁴

Even the notorious 1950 Democratic senatorial primary defeats of Graham in North Carolina and Pepper in Florida are flimsy evidence of a sweeping pre-*Brown* racial backlash. A close look at the elections reveals an ambiguous message regarding the southern racial climate in 1950. First, the elections were not simple referenda on the candidates' liberal racial views. In his senatorial primary win over Pepper in

²³ Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 37–39, 72; Howard, "Louisiana," 546–47; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 33, 35–37, 50; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 77–78; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 72–73; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 66; Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 6; Preston W. Edsall and J. Oliver Williams, "North Carolina: Bipartisan Paradox," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 370–71, 373; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, 102–3, 105; Ralph Eisenberg, "Virginia: The Emergence of Two-Party Politics," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 48–49.

²⁴ Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 38; Marshall Frady, *Wallace* (New York, 1968), 102, 111; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 64, 72–74, 86, 88–89; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 125; George E. Sims, *The Little Man's Big Friend: James E. Folsom in Alabama Politics, 1946–1958* (University, Ala., 1985), 26, 30, 58, 154, 163–66, 168, 171; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 275; Donald S. Strong, "Alabama: Transition and Alienation," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 446, 448–49; Sullivan, "Southern Reformers," 96.



KNOW THE TRUTH COMMITTEE

During the 1950 Democratic senatorial primary in Florida, the Willis Smith campaign portrayed Frank Porter Graham as a dangerous political leftist.
Courtesy Julian M. Pleasants and Gus Burns, University of Florida.

Florida, George Smathers devoted greater attention to Pepper's support for New Deal/Fair Deal redistributive policies, his close ties to labor unions, and his moderate stance toward the Soviet Union than to the race issue. Similarly, in the first primary in North Carolina's 1950 Democratic senatorial contest (and to a reduced extent in the runoff primary), Willis Smith focused his attack less on Graham's relatively liberal racial record than on his past affiliations with allegedly subversive organizations ("Frank the Front") and his present association with Truman's allegedly socialist Fair Deal policies, some of which — particularly national health insurance and repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act — were distinctly unpopular in North Carolina. In short, the tactics of Smathers in Florida and Smith in North Carolina closely resembled those used by Republicans throughout the nation in 1950: attacks on Truman's domestic policies as socialist and McCarthyite challenges to the administration's alleged softness on communism, foreign and domestic. It is thus unwarranted to treat the defeats of Graham and Pepper entirely, or perhaps even principally, as manifestations of a southern racial backlash, rather than as

confirmation of President Truman's unpopularity in 1950 and of the potency of McCarthyism as an electoral weapon.²⁵

Second, to the extent that race played a critical role in Graham's defeat—and in the runoff primary it plainly did—Graham was more exposed on this issue than any other southern politician of the period. Widely identified as the foremost southern liberal of his time, Graham had been a member of Truman's civil rights committee (a group the president appointed in 1946 to study racial conflict and to recommend legislation) in 1946–1947, the first president of the interracial and integrationist Southern Conference on Human Welfare, and one of only three southern senators (the others were Pepper and Kefauver) to oppose the southern filibuster against FEPC. Graham was, moreover, one of the few southern politicians of the period who dared to endorse the eventual abolition of racial segregation (though even he opposed federal compulsion to secure that end). Thus, rather than highlighting Graham's defeat as evidence of a racial backlash, one might instead find it remarkable that someone of Graham's high-profile racial liberalism could come within a whisker of winning an outright majority in the first primary—leading Smith by 48.9 percent to 40.5 percent—and in the race-baiting second primary still poll over 48 percent of the vote. It is very difficult to imagine Graham polling equally well in the frenzied racial politics of the post-*Brown* period.²⁶

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the factor transforming Smith's Truman-bashing, McCarthyite first primary campaign into a predominantly race-baiting runoff campaign appears to have been intervening decisions by the United States Supreme Court. Smith, soundly defeated in the first primary, was on the verge of withdrawing from the race when the Supreme Court on June 5, 1950, handed down decisions, in the graduate school and railroad segregation cases, that insisted on either strict equality of facilities within a segregated system or integration. These rulings not only persuaded Smith to demand the runoff election to which he was entitled but also enabled him to make race the dominant issue of the campaign. Smith moved quickly to take electoral advantage of the Court decisions, blanketing the state with letters stressing their importance. Against the backdrop of the segregation rulings, FEPC and the alleged racial bloc vote for Graham in the first primary assumed a new dimension in voters' minds. In the first primary, Smith had been unable to convince eastern North Carolina black belt whites—a core constituency in Governor Scott's populist economic coalition—to desert Graham over the race issue, but in the runoff primary Graham was badly defeated in the eastern counties. Many contemporary observers and campaign participants pointed to the Supreme Court decisions as the decisive factor in the runoff primary. Thus, the Court's 1950

²⁵ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 24, 42–43, 76, 89, 91, 96, 98–99, 122, 129–32, 147–48, 171, 218–19, 263; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 147–51; Manning J. Dauer, "Florida: The Different State," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 133; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 52; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 77–78; Edsall and Williams, "North Carolina," 373–74; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon*, vol. I: *The Education of a Politician, 1913–1962* (New York, 1987), 213–23; Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, 129–30.

²⁶ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 12, 25–27, 41–42, 56–57, 85, 151, 189, 216, 219, 221, 226, 228, 244, 255, 263; Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (New York, 1951), 101–6; Edsall and Williams, "North Carolina," 373, 375; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 37; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 52.

graduate school and railroad segregation decisions may have catalyzed white racial opinion in the same manner that *Brown* did later and on a larger scale.²⁷

Like Smith's 1950 victory over Graham in North Carolina, most other race-baiting southern election campaigns of the time emphasized Supreme Court interventions in southern racial practices. Herman Talmadge's demagogic 1950 Georgia gubernatorial primary campaign invoked the same Supreme Court decisions that played a vital role in Graham's defeat. Earlier, in 1944, the Court's invalidation of the white primary in *Smith v. Allwright* had generated its own racial backlash across the Deep South. When 135,000 blacks registered to vote in the Georgia Democratic gubernatorial primary in 1946, Eugene Talmadge converted the threat of mass black voter participation into the centerpiece of his campaign. Similarly, in Mississippi's 1951 Democratic gubernatorial primary, the emergence of an unusually large number of black voters (by Mississippi standards), in a delayed response to *Smith*, produced a white backlash. In sum, the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948, the 1950 Democratic senatorial primary defeats of Graham and Pepper, and other race-baiting political campaigns of the postwar era do not demonstrate the existence of a southern racial backlash before *Brown* comparable in power to what followed *Brown*.²⁸

Argument

Throughout the South the pattern of response to *Brown* was consistent: Race became the decisive focus of southern politics, and massive resistance its dominant theme. Adam Fairclough has observed that *Brown* "unleashed a wave of racism that reached hysterical proportions"; David Garrow has stated that *Brown* produced a "quantum change literally overnight" in the southern racial climate. Virtually no southern politician could survive in this political environment without toeing the massive resistance line, and in most states politicians competed to occupy the most extreme position on the racial spectrum. Racial moderation was submerged, as *Brown* collapsed southern racial opinion into two polar positions, integrationist and segregationist. Roy Harris, president of the Citizens' Councils of America, warned that "if you're a white man, then it's time to stand up with us, or black your face and get on the other side." One resident of Tuskegee observed that there was no conceivable middle ground; one either agreed with the racial policies of Sam Engelhardt, a massive resistance leader from black belt Macon County, Alabama, or else one was portrayed as "a nigger-loving communist." Since no integrationist politician could survive anywhere in the South in the middle or late 1950s, moderates necessarily gravitated toward the right, as evidenced, for example, by the decision early in 1956 of such men as Fulbright, Hill, and Sparkman to join the vast majority of southern representatives and senators in signing the Southern Manifesto, which con-

²⁷ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 190–95, 197–201, 208, 216, 219, 226–27, 234–36, 248, 250, 254–55, 259–63, 268–69; Lubell, *Future of American Politics*, 104, 120; Edsall and Williams, "North Carolina," 375.

²⁸ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 29–32, 40–41; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 12–13, 35–36; Hine, *Black Victory*, 223–25; Nortrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 55; Heard, *Two-Party South?*, 192; Bernd, "White Supremacy and the Disfranchisement of Blacks in Georgia," 492, 494–95, 498; Sullivan, "Southern Reformers," 93–94; Charles N. Fortenberry and F. Glenn Abney, "Mississippi: Unreconstructed and Untredeemed," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Harnad, 505.

demned *Brown* as a "clear abuse of judicial power" and called for resistance "by any lawful means."²⁹

Even in North Carolina, widely regarded as the prototype of southern moderation, political opinion shifted dramatically to the right in the mid-1950s. In 1956, two congressmen who had declined to sign the Southern Manifesto were defeated for reelection in Democratic primaries, and Gov. Luther Hodges, seeking to fend off segregationist opposition in his reelection bid, disavowed his earlier moderation and began attacking the NAACP, broaching the possibility of school closures (which he earlier had condemned), and endorsing a legislative denunciation of the *Brown* decision. Similarly in Florida, where high urbanization and relatively low black population density seemed to predict a racially moderate climate, segregation became a dominant campaign theme in the post-*Brown* era. The formerly moderate LeRoy Collins was forced far to the right in the 1956 gubernatorial primary to protect his flank against a rabid segregationist. In the two succeeding Florida gubernatorial contests, the strongest segregationist candidate won by attacking his opponents for being too moderate on the race issue.³⁰

Three points regarding the post-*Brown* southern political backlash deserve special emphasis. First, *Brown* elevated race over class for the relatively less affluent whites who were the backbone of the populist coalitions that had been ascendant in several southern states. Second, *Brown* inspired rural black belt whites to exert their disproportionate power in state politics to exact racial conformity from whites less preoccupied with race. Third, many whites who were less transfixed by race nonetheless felt obliged to rally around the white supremacist banner when the issue was federal compulsion versus states' rights, as it was after *Brown*, and even more compellingly, after Little Rock. I shall consider these three points in turn.

Brown elevated race over class in southern politics, just as southern conservatives had done a half century earlier when confronted with the Populist threat of interracial economic alliances. Those lower-class whites who had provided much of the backing for the populist/New Deal economic policies of the late 1940s and early 1950s were also the people most likely to feel threatened by integration. Thus, coalitions that had formerly joined together the few southern black voters with lower-class whites in opposition to the economic elite began to disintegrate. As race began to preponderate over class, these coalitions often gave way to alliances between blacks and upper-class whites, whose commitment to segregation was tempered by a concern for economic growth, as well as by the knowledge that segregated housing

²⁹ Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 21; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 9; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 17, 68, 116–17, esp. 192, 247; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 102, 112; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 51, 53; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 235, 361; Bernd, "Georgia," 327; Eisenberg, "Virginia," 39–40; Fortenberry and Abney, "Mississippi," 506, 517–18; Norrell, "One Thing We Did Right," 81–82; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 31, 52; Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York, 1990), 276; Strong, "Alabama," 446; Frady, *Wallace*, 207; Earle Johnston, *I Rolled with Ross: A Political Portrait* (Baton Rouge, 1980), 73; 102 *Congressional Record*, 84 Cong., 2 sess., March 12, 1956, pp. 4515–16.

³⁰ Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 66–73, 366n13; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 97n48, 142–43, 342; Powell, "Massive Resistance in Arkansas," 29; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 63–66; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 90–96; Helen L. Jacobstein, *The Segregation Factor in the Florida Democratic Gubernatorial Primary of 1956* (Gainesville, 1972), 27–40.

Consistent NC & Mississippi

patterns would render school desegregation largely irrelevant to their lives. Thus, for example, in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1958, lower-class whites voted by a nine-to-one margin in favor of school closures over desegregation, while upper-class whites divided evenly on the issue. Indeed, both the Little Rock and New Orleans school crises were exacerbated by the design of the proposed desegregation plans, which called for only lower-class whites to attend school with blacks. As Bartley and Graham have noted, "In state after state the populist-New Deal alignments of the early post war years broke apart, as rural and low-income whites shifted from support of economic reform to defense of social conservatism."³¹

In Arkansas, the economically populist and racially moderate policies of governors McMath and (the early) Faubus were replaced by massive resistance policies in 1957–1958, as Faubus shifted his base of political support from hill country whites and urban blacks to delta planters and lower-class urban whites. In Louisiana, the Long coalition of blacks and poor whites collapsed under the pressure of racial politics. There, in the Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1959–1960, race replaced class as the dominant issue for the first time in a generation, with the Long faction candidates failing even to make the runoff primary. In Mississippi, a traditional geographic cleavage between Delta conservatives and hill country populists was overshadowed after *Brown* by a statewide preoccupation with the race issue, which enabled conservative forces to gain the upper hand. Similar voting patterns developed in Georgia, as poor rural whites were pitted against coalitions of metropolitan blacks and more affluent whites.³²

In Alabama as well, the postwar rural populism that had sustained Big Jim Folsom fell victim to the race issue. Folsom's racial liberalism put him badly out of touch with the times; he refused to condemn the *Brown* decision, vetoed several pieces of massive resistance legislation, ridiculed the state legislature's nullification resolution as "just a bunch of hogwash," lambasted the Citizens' Councils as "haters and baiters," and invited the Harlem congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., to the governor's mansion for a drink. In 1956 Alabama voters overwhelmingly repudiated Folsom's racial progressivism, defeating him by a three-to-one margin in his race for Democratic national committeeman—a contest that turned into a virtual referendum on racial issues and "unmistakeabl[y] indicat[ed] . . . the damage that the civil rights movement had done to his popularity." In 1958, all candidates for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination repudiated Folsom's moderation and competed to adopt the most extreme segregationist position. John Patterson, who as attorney general had shut down NAACP operations in the state, proved the most adept at exploiting the race issue and rode it to an easy victory. In 1962, the rural

Alabama
Folsom → Wallace

³¹ Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 53, 80, 186–87; William C. Havard, "From Past to Future: An Overview of Southern Politics," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 706; Carl Abbott, "The Norfolk Business Community," in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and Colburn, 108; Morton Inger, "The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960," *ibid.*, 88–89; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 292–93; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 280; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 253–54, 337.

³² Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 287; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 59–60, 68; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 76; Howard, "Louisiana," 555–59; Fortenberry and Abney, "Mississippi," 474–75, 485, 502–4, 506.



Big Jim Folsom, whose populist brand of racially moderate politics was shattered by the *Brown* decision, campaigns in Warrior, Alabama, in the Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1954.
Courtesy Birmingham News.

lower-class whites who had supported Jim Folsom's populism in the late 1940s and early 1950s tended to support George Wallace, who knew no equal when it came to exploiting the racial hysteria of the post-*Brown* era.³³

In Virginia politics, too, *Brown* abruptly halted "the moderating process at work." In the 1949 Democratic gubernatorial primary, the machine led by Sen. Harry Byrd had faced its first serious challenge in recent memory from within the party. In 1954, young legislators favoring expanded public services had revolted against its leadership. Most significantly, though, in 1953 a Republican gubernatorial candidate, Theodore Dalton, had won roughly 45 percent of the vote in the general election, running on a platform of increased state services and repeal of the poll tax. After *Brown* raised the specter of integration, though, antimachine leaders found it extremely difficult to arouse a popular following for progressive, nonracial causes; the Byrd machine adeptly reinvigorated race as Virginia's dominant political issue. In

³³ Sims, *Little Man's Big Friend*, 169–70, 173–77, esp. 183–86; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 280n39, 282–83, 286; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 52; Frady, *Wallace*, 103, 108; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 316; Strong, "Alabama," 449–50, 452; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 67–68; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 98.

this political environment, the same Republican candidate who had come so close to winning in 1953 suffered a shattering defeat in the 1957 gubernatorial election at the hands of the Byrd machine candidate, Lindsay Almond, who ran on a strong massive resistance platform.³⁴

Brown not only elevated race over class as the dominant issue in southern politics but also energized black belt whites to exert their disproportionate political power to compel white unity on racial matters. While the vast majority of southern whites in the 1950s favored racial segregation, the depth of their commitment varied enormously, depending primarily on their demographic situation. Even in southern states with relatively large black populations, portions of each state were populated almost entirely by whites. While residents of such areas generally supported white supremacy, they were principally concerned with other issues that affected their lives more directly. Thus, for example, in western Texas and the hills of northwest Arkansas, areas with minuscule black populations, compliance with *Brown* was often swift and painless.³⁵

One of the momentous facts of southern political history is that black belt whites have always enjoyed disproportionate political influence, owing both to the malapportionment of state legislatures in favor of rural counties and to the practice of apportioning representatives according to total (rather than voting) population, which in effect enabled black belt whites to cast votes for their disfranchised black neighbors. A startling blow like the *Brown* decision awakened black belt whites to the imminent threat posed to their white supremacist world view, and they moved quickly to reassert their traditional dominance over southern politics. In Virginia, the Southside black belt defeated a state legislative proposal espousing local pupil allocation (the Gray Commission proposal) that would have permitted liberal northern Virginia school boards to comply with *Brown*. Similarly, the state legislature revoked Arlington County's right to elect school board members after the board published an outline of its desegregation plan for the 1956-1957 school year. In Georgia in 1961, Atlanta businessmen were seeking peaceful school desegregation in compliance with a federal court order, while Gov. Ernest Vandiver, elected via the county-unit system, which grossly exaggerated rural voting power, was still promising to preserve segregation forever. Florida at midcentury had one of the most malapportioned legislatures in the country. A rapidly expanding urban majority in south Florida, whose racial views were tempered both by relocated northerners and by urban norms, was rendered "all but voiceless" in a rural-biased legislature dominated by northern Florida counties committed to preserving traditional

³⁴ Eisenberg, "Virginia," 39-40, 46, esp. 50-51; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, 89, 92-97, 106-12, 137-38; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 270-71; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 45.

³⁵ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 13-14, 138; Ely, *Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 5, 34-36; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 6-9, 45-46, 93, 94n4, 103, 309-10; Fortenberry and Abney, "Mississippi," 517-18; Yates, "Arkansas," 235-36, 271; Thomas F. Pettigrew and Ernest Q. Campbell, "Faubus and Segregation: An Analysis of Arkansas Voting," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24 (Fall 1960), 441, 443; O. Douglas Weeks, "Texas: Land of Conservative Expansiveness," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 201n2; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 125, 373n73.

racial mores. As a result, a series of legislative sessions in the late 1950s focused on maintaining segregated schools.³⁶

Just as within a single state the black belt could pull more moderate racial opinion along with it, so within the South as a whole, extremist states could pressure their more moderate neighbors. Governor Faubus of Arkansas found himself backed into a corner over desegregation of Little Rock schools in 1957. Alabama and Texas had successfully flouted desegregation orders in 1956, and other states' politicians—most notably, Georgia's "roving ambassadors of segregation," Marvin Griffin and Roy Harris—came to Little Rock in the summer of 1957 to fan the segregationist fury. Governor Griffin of Georgia declared at Little Rock his shock that any southern governor with troops at his disposal would allow school integration. After Griffin's speech, Faubus later reported, Arkansans would come up to him in the street to ask why their schools were about to be integrated when Georgia's were not.³⁷

Yet it was not simply Citizens' Council intimidation or black belt political domination that silenced the voices of moderation after *Brown*. Rather, many racial moderates rallied around the banner of resistance to outside intervention, a cause that resonated deeply in a southern political consciousness for which the Civil War and Reconstruction remained seminal events. Just as southern racial progressives in the 1920s and 1930s had supported state, but not federal, antilynching legislation, so many southern liberals in the postwar years favored local initiatives to ameliorate Jim Crow practices, while warning that federal intervention would cause more harm than good.³⁸

That resistance to outside interference remained a powerful southern rallying cry is demonstrated by the virulent response to President Dwight D. Eisenhower's dispatch of federal troops to Little Rock in the fall of 1957. Many Arkansas businessmen and other racial moderates, who had resented Governor Faubus's efforts to instigate racial discord in Little Rock, felt obliged to rally around him once Eisenhower had sent in the 101st Airborne Division. The confrontation with the federal government

*Faubus made
popular by
the deep
intervention*

³⁶ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 18–19, 42, 94, 109–15, 144, 278–79, 333–34; Frady, *Wallace*, 101; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 517, 666; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, esp. 99–100; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 121; Bernd, "Georgia," 296–97; Eisenberg, "Virginia," 52, 56–57; Lee S. Greene and Jack E. Holmes, "Tennessee: A Politics of Peaceful Change," in *Changing Politics of the South*, ed. Havard, 169–70; Ely, *Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 37–39; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, 114, 127, 132–33, 151–52; Mark Howard, "An Historical Study of the Desegregation of the Alexandria, Virginia, City Public Schools, 1954–73" (Ed.D. diss., George Washington University, 1976), 154; Abbott, "Norfolk Business Community," 114; Alton Hornsby, Jr., "A City That Was Too Busy to Hate," in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Jacoway and Colburn, 125; Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 194; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 91; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 37.

³⁷ McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 40, esp. 65, 271–74; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 258; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 87–89, 98, 207–8; Jacoway, "Taken by Surprise," 21–22; Stephen L. Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker: Ralph Smeltzer's Civil Rights Mediation* (Philadelphia, 1987), 170–71.

³⁸ Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 22, 71; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 668; Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 31, 158–59, 199–200; Ader, "Why the Dixiecrats Failed," 356, 367; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 358–59; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 107; Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia, 1980), 126–27; George C. Rable, "The South and the Politics of Anti-Lynching Legislation," *Journal of Southern History*, 51 (May 1985), 203–4, 208; Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 41, 85, 151–52.

left Faubus so popular in Arkansas that he won four additional consecutive terms as governor, for a grand total of six, in a state with a half-century-long tradition of limiting its chief executives to two successive terms. Perhaps even more striking is the impact of Little Rock elsewhere in the South. Faubus quickly became a regional hero, receiving standing ovations at speaking engagements through the Deep South, and (amazingly) appearing, along with Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, and Truman, on a national Gallup Poll list of Americans' ten most admired world statesmen. Across the South, the gubernatorial success rate of militant segregationists peaked after the confrontation in Little Rock, as Faubus's landslide 1958 victory in Arkansas rendered unmistakable the electoral advantages of overtly defying federal authority.³⁹

In sum, *Brown* produced a southern political climate in which racial extremism flourished. It is small wonder that southern politicians drew the lesson that uncompromising obstruction of racial change would probably win the plaudits of voters. Each of the high-profile civil rights conflagrations of the post-*Brown* decade featured southern politicians who had been elected to office on the strength of the post-*Brown* backlash and who fully appreciated the political gains to be had from fostering violent clashes with federal authorities and brutally suppressing civil rights demonstrations. The relevant figures are Orval Faubus, Ross Barnett, T. Eugene ("Bull") Connor, Jim Clark, and George Wallace.

That massive resistance should peak in the Little Rock crisis of 1957–1958 is ironic. Arkansas, in 1954, was one of the most racially moderate southern states. In the postwar years, Arkansas was under the political control of racial moderates, who sought to encourage industrial development by avoiding racial strife. In 1948, Arkansas became the first southern state to desegregate its state university without federal court compulsion. Blacks voted in large numbers in Arkansas (not just in Little Rock, but also in the eastern plantation belt), and they sat on previously all-white state commissions. Educational funding disparities for black and white schools were under attack. Little Rock was one of the South's most racially progressive cities. Blacks served on the city police force and frequently on federal court juries as well; the city's public transport system had been integrated in the mid-1950s; department stores had desegregated their lunch counters.⁴⁰

Brown then intervened, with the usual consequences. Eastern black belt planters reasserted their traditional political dominance, propelling state politics far to the right on racial issues and squelching racially moderate urban sentiment. Orval Faubus had first been elected governor in 1954 on a populist economic program of

³⁹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, vol. II: *The President* (New York, 1984), 420–23; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 270, 277–78, 287; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 106–8; Jacoway, "Taken by Surprise," 23–25; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 55; Yates, "Arkansas," 254, 274; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 103, 118–22, 128–29; Ely, *Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 59–61, 65; Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd*, 138; Eisenberg, "Virginia," 53.

⁴⁰ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 251, 260; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 107–8; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 94, 274; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 77–78, 82–83; Yates, "Arkansas," 271; Powell, "Massive Resistance in Arkansas," 5–6, 12, 97–98; Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 176; Jacoway, "Taken by Surprise," 19–20; Freyer, *Little Rock Crisis*, 20–24.

higher spending on public education and old-age pensions. Neither candidate in that election had highlighted the segregation issue, and as a candidate, Faubus had promised blacks state jobs and access to the governor's office. During his first year in office, Faubus paid virtually no attention to the segregation issue and, indeed, became the first Arkansas governor to appoint blacks to the state Democratic Central Committee. During this time, several Arkansas school districts began to desegregate in compliance with *Brown*. During his 1956 reelection campaign, Faubus's principal opposition came from Jim Johnson, one of the state's leading segregationists and the chief organizer of the Arkansas Citizens' Council. Johnson's allusions to Faubus's softness on the race issue and an opinion poll indicating a rightward shift in public attitudes on it induced Faubus to reconsider. Faubus, who was not a "segregationist by philosophy," became one "by political necessity."⁴¹

Faubus rapidly converted himself from a candidate of the white hill country who also won large majorities in black urban districts into a candidate of the eastern black belt and urban lower-class white neighborhoods. Rather than permitting implementation of the token desegregation plan of the Little Rock school board, Faubus manufactured a racial crisis that was in no sense inevitable. The governor called out the National Guard to prevent the admission of black students to Little Rock High School; the pretext was preservation of order, but it was the posting of guardsmen outside the school that fomented the mob atmosphere. When Eisenhower finally responded by dispatching federal troops, even local white moderates rallied behind the governor. He not only won a landslide victory in his gubernatorial contest the following year but also became virtually unbeatable in Arkansas politics for the better part of a decade. While Faubus tolerated, rather than instigated, violence against blacks asserting their constitutional rights, the lesson for other southern politicians was clear: The more extreme a politician's resistance to the civil rights movement, the greater the rewards he might expect at the polls. As the *Arkansas Gazette* noted following Faubus's sweeping victory in the 1958 gubernatorial primary, moderation "is clearly untenable for any man in public life anywhere in the region."⁴²

The race riot attendant upon the admission of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in the fall of 1962 was another of the great racial conflagrations of the civil rights era. It is interesting to note that Mississippi, the most racially reactionary southern state at midcentury, had under the stewardship of Gov. James Coleman (1955–1959) avoided some of the fanaticism of other Deep South states. While any serious Mississippi politician of the era was necessarily a committed segregationist, Coleman had vetoed some of the more extreme massive resistance

⁴¹ Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 54–55; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 100; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 107–8; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 77–78, 84–85, esp. 102; Yates, "Arkansas," 235, 264–65; Powell, "Massive Resistance in Arkansas," 8–9; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 142, 260–62.

⁴² Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 57, fig. 3.1; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 103; Pettigrew and Campbell, "Faubus and Segregation," 437–39, 445; Yates, "Arkansas," 258–59, 272–73, 281; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 75–76, 82, 89, 101, 108–9; Powell, "Massive Resistance in Arkansas," 42–44; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, esp. 268–69, 273.

measures presented to him by the legislature, resisted pressure to outlaw the NAACP (as neighboring Alabama had done), and disparaged the doctrine of nullification as "legal poppycock." With massive resistance cresting in the aftermath of the confrontation at Little Rock, the 1959 Mississippi Democratic gubernatorial primary featured four strong segregationists; Ross Barnett was the most extreme. In the runoff campaign, the dominant issue was the candidates' relative devotion to segregation, and Barnett sought to tie his opponent, Lt. Gov. Carroll Gartin, to the relatively moderate racial policies of the Coleman administration, while portraying himself as a "one hundred percent" segregationist. At campaign speeches Barnett spoke openly and proudly of his Citizens' Council membership. He promised that there would be no integrated schools in Mississippi so long as he was governor and attributed the downfall of Egyptian culture to mongrelization of the races. Barnett won in a landslide.⁴³

In this racial climate, Barnett stood to gain politically by obstructing implementation of the order from the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit that desegregated Ole Miss and mandated the admission of Meredith. Not only the governor but local public officials as well found it politically advantageous to declare their willingness to go to jail rather than comply with the desegregation order. When Governor Barnett announced on Mississippi television that he would interpose the state's rights against the federal court order and would suffer imprisonment rather than permit integration of Ole Miss, virtually the entire white polity and the state political hierarchy lined up solidly behind him. Barnett twice blocked the entrance of Meredith into Ole Miss before, faced with the threat of imprisonment for contempt of court, he arranged a charade with the Kennedy administration by which he would surrender to explicit threats of superior federal force. But when events spun out of Barnett's control, two were killed and hundreds more wounded in a full-scale race riot.⁴⁴

Ole Miss had roughly the same political consequences for Ross Barnett as Little Rock had for Orval Faubus. Barnett became, in the words of one journalist, "the dominant political figure in Mississippi as long as he lives." The political benefits of condoning violent resistance to desegregation were evident in the 1963 Mississippi gubernatorial election. With Barnett ineligible to succeed himself, the leading segregationist candidate was his lieutenant governor, Paul Johnson, who highlighted his physical obstruction of Meredith's admission to Ole Miss the preceding year and portrayed his opponent, former governor Coleman, as racially moderate and pro-black. The major issue in the campaign was which candidate could better defend segregation. Coleman argued for circumvention, rather than blatant defiance, of federal authority, while Johnson embraced the view that "we must fight fire with

⁴³ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 136, 211; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 60, 63; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 322, 326–28; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 176–78; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 74; Johnston, *I Rolled with Ross*, 78, 82–83; Fortenberry and Abney, "Mississippi," esp. 506–7.

⁴⁴ Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York, 1977), 183–87, 192–96; Johnston, *I Rolled with Ross*, 91–92, 95, 97–98, 102–3; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 647–53, 659–70; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 185–86.

fire." Mississippi voters sided decisively with the racial extremist. The lesson of Ole Miss was that it was virtually impossible for a Mississippi politician in the post-*Brown* period to espouse a racial position too extreme for his white constituents.⁴⁵

Bull Connor had first been elected to the Birmingham City Commission in 1937, pledged to crush the Communist/integrationist threat posed by the unionization efforts of the Committee for Industrial Organization. By the early 1950s, though, Connor had "become a genuine embarrassment to Birmingham's wealthy economic and social leaders." The local chamber of commerce in 1950 formed a committee to encourage industrial relocations to Birmingham, but its task was hampered by the racial violence that plagued the city and by the reputation for racial extremism of its political leaders, most notably Bull Connor. In the spring and summer of 1951, racially moderate businessmen organized an interracial committee of community leaders to foster improvement in the living conditions of the city's black citizens. Over the next several years, the first hospital for blacks was established, elevators in downtown office buildings were desegregated, and a much publicized (though ultimately unsuccessful) campaign to desegregate the city's police force was launched. Then, in 1951-1952, the business progressives orchestrated the public humiliation of Connor for an illicit sexual encounter. He decided not to seek reelection to the city commission in 1953, and a racial moderate replaced him. By Birmingham standards, substantial progress had been made.⁴⁶

Outside events, most notably the *Brown* decision (but also the Montgomery bus boycott), then precipitated a dramatic shift in Birmingham politics. For example, in early 1954 the city commission, eager to exploit the financial opportunities that would accompany a spring training visit by the Brooklyn Dodgers—Jackie Robinson's team—voted to repeal the local ban on interracial sporting contests. Within two weeks of the *Brown* decision, however, a city referendum reinstituted that ban by a three-to-one margin. Other signs of racial progress from the early 1950s were also quickly reversed after *Brown*. Birmingham's interracial committee disbanded in April 1956 after an energetic campaign against it, as the formerly preponderant, racially moderate businessmen now disappeared from the political scene. All formal biracial consultation in Birmingham ended, not to resume again for nearly six years. The city commission refused to negotiate an end to segregation on city buses, even after the Supreme Court ruled such segregation unconstitutional in the case arising from the Montgomery bus boycott.⁴⁷

In the tide of racial venom that swept over the city during massive resistance, Connor was able to resurrect his political career; he regained his seat on the city commission in 1957 with a race-baiting campaign. During the late 1950s, Bir-

⁴⁵ For the statement on Ross Barnett by the journalist Hodding Carter, see Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 185-86; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 75; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 63, 208-11; Johnston, *I Rolled with Ross*, 102; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 348; Fortenberry and Abney, "Mississippi," esp. 508-9.

⁴⁶ Thornton, "Municipal Politics," esp. 47-48; Eskew, "Alabama Christian Movement," 23; Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 25.

⁴⁷ Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 275-77; Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 48-49; Eskew, "Alabama Christian Movement," 23-28; *Gayle v. Browder*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956).

mingham race relations rapidly deteriorated, as a powerful Ku Klux Klan (KKK) element turned increasingly to bombings and brutality, while the police, under Connor's control, declined to clamp down on their outrages. Standing for reelection in 1961, Connor sought to consolidate his position among racial extremists by offering the KKK a fifteen- to twenty-minute "open season" on the Freedom Riders, free from police intervention, when they rolled into Birmingham in May 1961. Connor won reelection in a landslide, and later that month, a Citizens' Council activist was elected mayor. For the first time since the late 1930s, all three Birmingham city commissioners were racial intransigents, elected on strict segregationist platforms. In Birmingham the political climate fostered by the post-*Brown* racial backlash rewarded racial extremism almost without limit—a situation that proved to have momentous implications for racial change when the SCLC commenced demonstrations there in the spring of 1963. One of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s principal lieutenants, Wyatt Walker, speculated that Connor used violent tactics on that occasion to bolster his reputation with segregationist voters in preparation for a statewide political race. Connor calculated, according to Walker, "that he would be the state's most popular politician if he treated the black violently, bloodily, and sternly."⁴⁸

Selma, located in the heart of the Alabama black belt, was home to the state's first local Citizens' Council, founded in November 1954. By its first anniversary the council had enrolled as members roughly one-fourth of the adult white males in Dallas County. The council maintained close ties with the Selma city government and the Dallas County Democratic party. Such linkages between public and private authority both reflected and reinforced the "unusually aggressive and unanimous commitment of the white community of Dallas County to an extremist racial position." Open dissent from white supremacist orthodoxy simply was not tolerated in Selma.⁴⁹

In 1958 Dallas County voters returned Jim Clark to the sheriff's office in a race against a senior Selma police officer, Wilson Baker. Clark highlighted his cooperation with the local Citizens' Council and promised that no racial integration would come to Dallas County under his watch. Racial issues were not an express point of difference between the two candidates, but the contest did turn on the polarization of the electorate between city and county, with Wilson Baker representing both increased professionalization of law enforcement and the Selma business elite's preoccupation with preserving social order to lure industrial relocations. As time passed, Clark, more than any other individual in Selma, came to represent the views of die-hard segregationists.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 48–49; Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 167–68, 187–88; Eskew, "Alabama Christian Movement," 35–36; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 420–21; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, esp. 251; William A. Nunneley, *Bull Connor* (Tuscaloosa, 1991), 55–60, 74–75, 98–99, 107, 110–11, 184.

⁴⁹ Thornton, "Municipal Politics," esp. 55; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 43, 210; Sims, *Little Man's Big Friend*, 174; Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 35.

⁵⁰ It would be inaccurate to say that Jim Clark outmaneuvered Wilson Baker on the race issue; Baker appeared before a Klan rally, though he later insisted that he did not endorse the organization's positions. See Charles Fager, *Selma, 1965* (New York, 1974), 17; and Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 18, 36. I am grateful to Professor J. Mills Thornton III for clarifying the racial aspects of the 1958 election contest between Baker and Clark for me in a telephone conversation.

In the post-*Brown* racial hysteria, Clark had every incentive to behave in Dallas County as Connor had in Birmingham. Indeed, in 1963 Clark had, at Governor Wallace's request, traveled to Birmingham to assist Connor in suppressing the SCLC's spring demonstrations. That the extremist Clark, rather than the more professional and racially restrained Baker, occupied the Dallas County sheriff's office in 1965 had great import for the history of the civil rights movement. Whereas Baker responded to voting rights demonstrations with courteous arrests, Clark demonstrated his characteristic lack of restraint, using violent tactics that sickened national television audiences and prompted immediate congressional and presidential intervention in the form of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Clark apparently calculated that his brutal suppression of voting rights demonstrations would translate into a viable gubernatorial candidacy in 1966. Clark withdrew from the governor's race only when George Wallace announced the candidacy of his wife, Lurleen; it was widely appreciated that nobody could outflank Wallace as a symbol of resistance to racial change.⁵¹

George Wallace, much like Orval Faubus, was not by nature a fire-eating white supremacist. Indeed, Wallace had been a little "soft" on the segregation issue in his early political career, and he had not been in the half of the Alabama delegation that walked out of the Democratic national convention in 1948 after it adopted the liberal civil rights plank. Wallace had strongly supported Governor Folsom's populist economic platform and had acquired a reputation in the state legislature as a leading liberal. Yet by the mid-1950s, Wallace perceived the political imperative of breaking with Folsom on the race issue. By 1956, when federal officials investigating charges of race discrimination in jury selection sought access to grand jury selection records in Cobb County, Georgia, Wallace (then judge of the Barbour County Circuit Court) threatened to arrest any Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agent entering his county with similar objectives. Yet Wallace's incipient moves to the right on the race issue were insufficient to win him the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1958. His opponent in the runoff primary that year, Attorney General John Patterson, had achieved statewide prominence by banning the NAACP from Alabama and now received the endorsement of the Ku Klux Klan, whom Wallace gently repudiated. Patterson played the racial theme so heavily in the campaign that Wallace unwittingly became the candidate of moderation, and ironically, won heavy black support in the cities. Patterson easily won the contest, leaving Wallace to ruminate that "they out-niggered me that time, but they will never do it again."⁵²

Soon after losing this gubernatorial contest, Wallace was reminded of the political advantages of defying the federal government. The conflict came when Wallace's old law school classmate, Judge Frank Johnson of the federal district court, ordered him, in his capacity as Barbour County circuit judge, to release county registrar

⁵¹ Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 199; Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 36, 112-13, 123-24, 129-30, 139-42, 162-64, 217; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 42-45, 60-61, 73-76; Frady, *Wallace*, 179-202; Fager, *Selma*, 1965, 208-9.

⁵² Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 67; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 52-55; Frady, *Wallace*, 97-98, 106-8, 116, 121-22, 124-26, 141; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 267; Strong, "Alabama," 448-51.

voting records to the United States Civil Rights Commission, which was investigating alleged denials of black voting rights in Alabama. Wallace seized custody of the records and announced that he would arrest any federal agent seeking to obtain them. Facing a possible contempt citation for defying a federal court order, Wallace chose privately to surrender, returning the records to the grand juries in his circuit, while publicly continuing his bluster—a political tactic he was to repeat several years later while standing in the schoolhouse door at Tuscaloosa.⁵³

During his 1962 campaign for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, Wallace made political hay of this episode, bragging of his defiance of Johnson's orders and calling the federal judge "a low-down, carpet baggin', scalawaggin', race-mixin' liar." Wallace also made his dramatic pledge to block any attempt at school desegregation in Alabama, "even to the point of standing in the schoolhouse door." His opponent in the runoff primary was a moderate segregationist who promised to resist the federal government in a responsible manner. But times in Alabama were such "that to be moderate was to be demolished." Wallace swept to victory with the largest number of votes of any gubernatorial candidate in Alabama history. Then, in his inaugural address, Wallace spoke his famous words of defiance: "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say, Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!"⁵⁴

Once ensconced in the governor's mansion, Wallace affirmatively sought out confrontation with the federal government. Wallace tried to entrap the Kennedy administration into using federal troops in Alabama, as it had at Ole Miss, fully appreciating the political gains that would accrue from his playing to the southern tradition of foreseeable defeat before overwhelming odds. In the now-famous charade, Wallace first physically blocked the entrance to the university and then, as planned in advance, stepped aside before a show of superior federal force. From the moment of his stand in the schoolhouse door, Wallace became "the apotheosis of the will of the people" and entered a new political dimension, at both the state and national levels.⁵⁵

Yet, for Wallace, the prospects for political advantage were not limited to nonviolent resistance to federal authority. During the Birmingham demonstrations of April and May 1963, Wallace, who had covertly supported Bull Connor in the recent mayoral race, increased the firepower at Connor's disposal by dispatching Col. Al Lingo with several hundred Alabama state troopers. Lingo supplemented Connor's brutality with some of his own in quelling the Birmingham demonstrations. Wallace also asked another racial hothead, Sheriff Jim Clark of Dallas County, to assist

⁵³ Frady, *Wallace*, 127–29; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 114–17; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 278–79.

⁵⁴ Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, esp. 252–53; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 279–80; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, esp. 137–38; Frady, *Wallace*, 129, esp. 132–33, 135, 142; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, esp. 55; Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 195.

⁵⁵ Frady, *Wallace*, 141, esp. 148–150, 170–71; Strong, "Alabama," 452; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 144, 146–48; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 821–22; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 253, 257–9; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 282.

Connor; Clark readily acquiesced. After Connor had ruthlessly suppressed the Birmingham demonstrations, Wallace saw fit to praise his handling of the situation. And, while we may never know Wallace's precise role in the violence at Selma on Bloody Sunday, his chief law enforcement lieutenant, Lingo, insists that it was Wallace himself who gave the order to initiate the horse-mounted troopers' attack on the demonstrators at Edmund Pettus Bridge. Even after Bloody Sunday and President Johnson's ensuing "We Shall Overcome" speech to the nation, Wallace saw political advantages to continued resistance. He criticized Judge Johnson's injunction against state interference with the rescheduled voting rights march and warned the president that if he wanted the demonstrators protected he had better perform the task himself. Wallace's posturing against the federal government and his unyielding resistance to local civil rights initiatives converted him into a political hero in Alabama. Although Wallace failed to secure a state constitutional amendment that would have enabled him to succeed himself in office in 1966, his popularity was evidenced by the success of the ruse of having his wife elected governor in his stead—the election being seen as a referendum on his first term in office—and by the "unanimous political extinction" of those state senators who had blocked his efforts to amend the constitution.⁵⁶

In sum, the post-*Brown* racial backlash created a political environment in which southern elected officials stood to benefit at the polls by boldly defying federal authority and brutally suppressing civil rights demonstrations. Had *Brown* not elicited for prominent display the full venom of southern Jim Crow, it is unlikely that the dramatic transformation of northern public opinion that followed Birmingham and Selma would have taken place in the mid-1960s. thesis

The final link in my proffered chain of causation connects the violent civil rights confrontations of the early 1960s with the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. To establish this linkage convincingly, it is necessary to show a dramatic shift in the Kennedy administration's civil rights policy after Birmingham. Neither John F. Kennedy nor Richard M. Nixon had been an unambiguous civil rights enthusiast in 1960. Of the five principal contenders for the Democratic nomination, Kennedy had been the least attractive (Texan Lyndon Johnson notwithstanding) to many civil rights leaders. Nixon, meanwhile, spent the general election campaign running away from the liberal civil rights plank that the Nelson Rockefeller camp had forced on him at the Chicago convention. When Kennedy won the election in a squeaker, no reasonably astute observer could help but note that his victory had depended on a shaky coalition of northeastern and southern states; it was difficult to see how Kennedy could be reelected in 1964 without strong southern support. Nixon had scored well in the South—winning three of the same southern states that Eisenhower

⁵⁶ Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 192, 199; Frady, *Wallace*, 147–50, 203; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 55–56; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 266; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 114. I am indebted to Dan Carter, author of a forthcoming biography of George Wallace, and to J. Mills Thornton III for confirming the uncertainty of the historical record regarding Wallace's role at Selma. Stephen Longenecker, while noting that the historical record provides no definitive answer as to who initiated the violence of Bloody Sunday, emphasizes that Wallace had declared that the march would be broken up by "whatever measures are necessary." Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 176.

had twice won (Virginia, Tennessee, and Florida) and narrowly losing the fourth (Texas), probably owing to Johnson's residency—thus proving that presidential Republicanism was not simply a product of Eisenhower's southern appeal but rather was there to stay. John Tower's Republican senatorial victory in Texas in 1961 (the first in that state since Reconstruction) and Republican near misses in Senate races in Alabama and South Carolina in 1962 would have further confirmed the increasing undependability of the South for Kennedy and the Democrats.⁵⁷

Thus, the perceived imperative of recarrying the South in 1964 was bound to influence civil rights policy early in the Kennedy presidency; the transformative legislation of 1964–1965 was anything but inevitable from the vantage point of the early 1960s. During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy had promised to eliminate race discrimination in federally assisted housing with the “stroke of a pen,” through an executive order. Yet for more than two years, he declined to execute that pledge, and when he finally did so, the order was limited in scope and prospective in application. Kennedy placated conservative southern Democrats in the Senate with atrocious judicial appointments, including William Harold Cox, Sen. James O. Eastland's close friend and former college roommate, who referred to blacks from the bench as “niggers” and “chimpanzees.” Rather than supporting the Freedom Riders in their efforts to exercise federally guaranteed rights recently articulated by the Supreme Court, the Kennedy administration privately negotiated a deal with Mississippi public officials, according to which the latter were permitted (illegally) to jail the civil rights demonstrators in exchange for preventing the sort of mob violence that had befallen them in Alabama. The administration also declined to intervene on behalf of civil rights demonstrators in Albany, Georgia, who were exercising federally protected rights, including access to nonsegregated facilities in interstate travel, and it apparently broke its promise to protect civil rights workers in Mississippi if they channeled their energies into voter registration. In the first two years of his presidency, Kennedy publicly declared that he would not seek civil rights legislation because Congress would not pass it (which was true); yet plainly his priorities lay with foreign policy matters involving the Cold War, as well as with other domestic issues such as tax cuts and Medicare. As of early 1963, then, with the Birmingham demonstrations just months away, there was little basis for predicting that the nation was about to undergo transformative racial change.⁵⁸

What happened in the ensuing two years to ignite transformative racial change through civil rights legislation? The answer, in brief, is that the Kennedy and

⁵⁷ Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 32–42; Theodore Harold White, *The Making of the President*, 1960 (New York, 1961), 203–4, 272, 315, 352, 354, 359–60; Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 47–49; Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics*, 90, 95–99; Barone, *Our Country*, 350; Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 72–73; Theodore Harold White, *The Making of the President*, 1964 (New York, 1965), 117; Strong, “Alabama,” 438–39.

⁵⁸ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 383, 405–6, 469–70, 480, 586–87, 640–43, 682–83, 685–87, 693–95; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 43, 61–64, 84–85, 105–6, 110, 129–31, 205–9; Bains, “Birmingham, 1963,” 237–38; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 23–24; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 195; Neil R. McMillen, “Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s,” *Journal of Southern History*, 43 (Aug. 1977), 351, 357–60; Dittmer, “Politics of the Mississippi Movement,” 76–77; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 179–80, 182–83, 187–88, 190, 192, 199, 201, 216; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 124–25.

Johnson administrations were spurred into action when the nation witnessed, through the immediacy of television coverage, the cruel excesses of Jim Crow, in the form of southern law enforcement officials brutally suppressing generally nonviolent civil rights demonstrations. The result was a wave of indignation that such behavior could be tolerated in the mid-twentieth-century United States.⁵⁹

By the early 1960s, King and his colleagues had basically given up on convincing southern whites of the wrongness of racial segregation and had redirected their energies toward converting northern whites to the civil rights cause by exposing the true evils of the Jim Crow system. Yet events quickly demonstrated that even blatantly illegal southern responses to civil rights demonstrations were not sufficient to arouse national outrage or to evoke a presidential response. Opinion polls from the early 1960s show that the public began to rank civil rights as the most important issue facing the nation only when demonstrations produced violence and social disorder, not when they led simply to mass arrests of peaceful participants. Likewise, as noted above, the Kennedy administration acquiesced in the illegal treatment of civil rights demonstrators in Mississippi and Georgia. Only when confronted with widespread violence and the collapse of social order, as during Alabama's violent reception of the Freedom Riders in the spring of 1961 or the race riot accompanying Meredith's admission to Ole Miss in the fall of 1962, was the Kennedy administration prompted to intervene.⁶⁰

To be successful, then, King's strategy required the unwitting assistance of southern police chiefs in creating, or at least tolerating, sizable racial conflagrations. When southern law enforcement officials acted as Laurie Pritchett had in Albany—illegally but peacefully arresting civil rights demonstrators—neither the country nor the administration paid much heed. Moreover, because the public evidently tends to condemn even nonviolent direct action tactics—only 22 percent of those polled expressed approval of the Freedom Rides and only 31 percent of Freedom Summer—the civil rights demonstrations could succeed only if the public's negative attitude toward the civil rights "provokers" was outweighed by its condemnation of their violent repressors. Appreciating this fact, King and his lieutenants devised the strategy of "creative tension": Peaceful civil rights demonstrators would provoke and then passively endure violent assaults from southern law enforcement officers and mobs, with the hope of harvesting a public opinion windfall from a horrified viewing audience. The success of this strategy required not only that the demonstrators remain generally nonviolent and that their objectives be widely perceived as legitimate but also that such political figures as Bull Connor in Birmingham and

⁵⁹ Barone, *Our Country*, 354; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 220–22; Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 156–57; McAdam, *Political Process*, 174–76; Norrell, "One Thing We Did Right," 72; Gary Orfield, *The Reconstruction of Southern Education: The Schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (New York, 1969), 33; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 125; Stephen B. Oates, "The Week the World Watched Selma," *American Heritage*, 33 (June/July 1982), 48, 50–51, 57.

⁶⁰ Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 2–3, 220–21, 225; McAdam, *Political Process*, 160, fig. 7.2, 170–71, 176; Rosenberg, *Hollow Hope*, 114–15, 130, fig. 4.2; Orfield, *Reconstruction of Southern Education*, 36; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 98–103, 109–10; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 124–26; Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 238; Laue, "Direct Action and Desegregation," 127–28; McMillen, "Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi," 359.

Jim Clark in Selma “cooperate” by so brutalizing peaceful demonstrators as to mobilize national opinion behind a legislative assault on Jim Crow. As one SCLC leader put it, the movement “had calculated for the stupidity of a Bull Connor.”⁶¹

Indeed King and his colleagues chose Birmingham as the site of the successors to the failed Albany demonstrations on the explicit assumption that Connor was constitutionally incapable of duplicating Pritchett’s restraint in dealing with civil rights demonstrators. King was widely criticized for refusing to defer demonstrations until first attempting negotiations with the new mayor, Albert Boutwell, who had recently defeated Connor in the mayoralty race—Connor refused to relinquish his position as commissioner of public safety, abolished by the recent change in Birmingham’s governmental structure, while the mayoralty election results were being challenged in court. But King’s strategy required that the demonstrations take place before Connor was evicted from office. As Wyatt Walker observed retrospectively: “We knew that when we came to Birmingham that if Bull Connor was still in control, he would do something to benefit our movement. We didn’t want to march after Bull was gone.” The strategy proved brilliantly successful. After relatively lackluster initial marches that Connor met with uncharacteristic restraint, the dam soon burst, as Connor’s men deployed vicious police dogs and high-pressure water hoses against the demonstrators, many of whom were children. Television and front-page national newspaper coverage immediately followed, with photographs of police dogs attacking demonstrators and editorials condemning the violence as “a national disgrace.” President Kennedy reported that the famous photograph of a police dog lunging at a nonresisting demonstrator made him “sick.”⁶²

Several United States congressmen denounced the use of police dogs and fire hoses against peaceful demonstrators, while others introduced bills to end federal complicity in the operation of racially segregated schools. Public opinion surveys conducted in the wake of Birmingham and its spin-offs in scores of southern cities revealed substantial majorities in favor of federal laws guaranteeing black voting rights, equal employment opportunities, and desegregated schools and public accommodations. Opinion polls taken two months before and two months after Birmingham showed a 1,200 percent increase in the number of Americans deeming civil rights to be the nation’s most urgent issue. The conclusion seems inescapable that the Birmingham demonstrations were primarily responsible for the Kennedy administration’s reversal on civil rights legislation. After two years in office, the administration had introduced its civil rights package in February 1963, but it bore

⁶¹ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 631; Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 19; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 187–88, 209, 216–17, esp. 251; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 2, 155, 159–60, 221, 225; McAdam, *Political Process*, 174, 176; Eskew, “Alabama Christian Movement,” 73–74; Laue, “Direct Action and Desegregation,” 107; Sitkoff, *Black Struggle for Equality*, 29, 98; Bains, “Birmingham, 1963,” 220, 239; Oates, “Week the World Watched Selma,” 50–51; Thornton, “Challenge and Response,” 233; Frady, *Wallace*, 147; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 280–81.

⁶² Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, esp. 227–28, 231–64; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, esp. 138–41, 166–68, 221; McAdam, *Political Process*, 177–78; Bains, “Birmingham, 1963,” 175–83, 189–90, 217, 219, 222; Eskew, “Alabama Christian Movement,” 73–74, 77–78, 80–83; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 710, 725–26, 758–65; Richard Lentz, “The Prophet and the Citadel: News Magazine Coverage of the 1963 Birmingham Civil Rights Crisis,” *Communication*, 10 (Dec. 1987), 5, 7–10, 12, 16; Thornton, “Municipal Politics,” 52; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 232–38; White, *Making of the President*, 1964, 205–6.



A black civil rights demonstrator is attacked by a police dog during the Birmingham, Alabama, confrontation of April and May 1963. President John F. Kennedy said this photograph made him "sick."

Courtesy Birmingham News.

scant resemblance to the landmark legislation that eventually was enacted in the summer of 1964. Only after Birmingham, with the conscience of white America aroused, did Kennedy propose civil rights legislation of a transformative nature, after declaring on national television that civil rights was a "moral issue as old as the scriptures and as clear as the American Constitution."⁶³

⁶³ Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 135n7, 141-42, 144; Orfield, *Reconstruction of Southern Education*, 33-34, 36; Bains, "Birmingham, 1963," 195, 222-23, 238-39; Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 134-35; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 141; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 124-25, 127, 148-52, 156; White, *Making of the President*, 1964, 201, 207; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 808-9; Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 246-47; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 267-69; Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South*, 280-81; Lentz, "Prophet and the Citadel," 18-19.

The Birmingham success of 1963 was duplicated two years later at Selma. The groundwork for Selma had been laid in 1964 during Freedom Summer in Mississippi, as a national audience witnessed the horrifying brutality, including several murders, inflicted upon civil rights workers—many of whom were, for strategic reasons, affluent whites attending the nation's most prestigious universities—as they endeavored to assist Mississippi blacks in exercising the most elemental rights of citizenship. At Selma the following year, King and the SCLC further refined the tactics that had succeeded so handsomely at Birmingham. Once again, the situs for the demonstrations was chosen to ensure the presence of a law enforcement officer of Bull Connor-like proclivities. As J. Mills Thornton III has put it, the SCLC decision to come to Selma was influenced by “the presence of the bellicose Sheriff Clark, whose hot temper could be counted on to provide vivid proof of the violent sentiments that formed white supremacy's core.” In contrast with Birmingham, though, the Selma demonstrators' objective was more precisely defined—voting rights—and additional efforts were made to ensure that the demonstrators remained entirely nonviolent, as they had not at Birmingham.⁶⁴

The result was another resounding success. Sheriff Clark, after initially displaying uncharacteristic restraint (to the professed “disappointment” of the SCLC staff), ultimately obliged with several displays of stunning brutality against nonresisting demonstrators, culminating on Bloody Sunday (March 7, 1965), when the county posse and state troopers went on a rampage against the marchers as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge heading toward Montgomery. ABC television interrupted its evening broadcast of (ironically) *Judgment at Nuremberg* for a long film report of the gruesome scenes from Selma of peaceful demonstrators being assailed by stampeding horses, flailing clubs, and tear gas. Popular revulsion was heartfelt and nearly universal. Public opinion polls showed that, except in the South, large pluralities or majorities from throughout the nation sided with civil rights groups over the state of Alabama with regard to their conflict at Selma.⁶⁵

Across the country, public demonstrations were held in support of the Selma marchers in the week after Bloody Sunday, and constituents began to press their congressmen for remedial action. Within days of the event, scores of congressmen had risen to condemn the violence and to call for voting rights legislation. Then, on March 15, President Johnson went before a joint session of Congress to deliver his speech in support of voting rights legislation—the first special presidential message on a piece of domestic legislation in nineteen years—while seventy million Americans watched on television. Prior to Selma, the general sentiment in the Johnson camp had been to allow the 1964 Civil Rights Act time to work before in-

⁶⁴ McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 39, 81, 96–101, 103, 116, 118, 150–52; Amelia Platts Boynton, *Bridge across Jordan: The Story of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Selma, Alabama* (New York, 1979), 146–47; Fager, *Selma*, 1965, 18; Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 2–3, 32–34, 42, 135, 146–49, 221, 223, 230; Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 23–24, 127; McAdam, *Political Process*, 177–78; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 187; Thornton, “Municipal Politics,” esp. 60; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 161; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 779–80, 794–96; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 250–52; Bains, “Birmingham, 1963,” 228–29.

⁶⁵ Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, esp. 42–45, 60–61, 73–80, 159, table 4-1; Longenecker, *Selma's Peacemaker*, 139–42, 162–64, 174–77; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 187; Oates, “Week the World Watched Selma,” 56.

roducing additional civil rights legislation. Thus, for the second time in less than two years, northern revulsion at southern brutalization of peaceful demonstrators had prompted a national administration to introduce civil rights legislation that had not theretofore been on its immediate agenda.⁶⁶

In sum, it is possible to agree with President Eisenhower's privately stated judgment that *Brown* set back the cause of racial progress in the South (at least in the short term) and with Justice Hugo L. Black's prediction that *Brown* would destroy racial liberalism in the South (also in the short term), while continuing to believe that *Brown* was indirectly responsible for the transformative racial change effected by the civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. *Brown* temporarily destroyed racial moderation in the South, and it halted the incipient amelioration of Jim Crow practices that had been occurring in much of the South in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But in doing so, *Brown* produced a southern political environment that encouraged public officials to use violent tactics to put down civil rights demonstrations, to the horror of northern television audiences, who in turn mobilized in support of national legislation to eradicate Jim Crow.⁶⁷

One possible rejoinder to the *Brown* backlash thesis is that it overstates the extent to which the Supreme Court's ruling, rather than the civil rights movement itself, was responsible for creating massive resistance and the ensuing violent suppression of civil rights demonstrations. Although the civil rights movement might well have generated violent southern white resistance regardless of *Brown*, I believe that the Supreme Court's intervention both significantly exacerbated the level of such violence and rendered officially sanctioned suppression politically profitable.

The dramatic rightward lurch in southern politics occurred before the major civil rights initiatives of the early 1960s, and thus it is most plausibly attributable to *Brown*. It is true that the Montgomery bus boycott played a crucial role in the mid-1950s transformation of Alabama's racial politics. Yet it is difficult to believe that, for example, the reinvigoration of the Byrd political machine in Virginia between 1953 and 1957 was attributable to anything other than the perceived threat that *Brown* posed to school segregation. Moreover, a significant shift in southern political opinion took place in the interval between *Brown* (May 1954) and the emergence of the Montgomery bus boycott onto the national stage (late February 1956). In Virginia, the voter referendum that approved amending the state constitution to permit public tuition grants to students attending private schools and the state legislature's endorsement of interposition took place, respectively, in January and February of 1956. Similarly, in Mississippi by the end of 1955, the statewide organization of Citizens' Councils was claiming a membership of 60,000, black belt counties had begun to purge black registrants from the voter lists, and voters had ap-

⁶⁶ Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 36, 81-82, 88, 91-99, 102-3, 106-7, 176-77; Boynton, *Bridge across Jordan*, 172; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 186-87. For a slightly different account of the impact of Selma on the administration and Congress, see Garrow, *Protest at Selma*, 36, 40, 92-93, 133-34.

⁶⁷ Burk, *Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights*, 192; Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 72; Mark Stern, "Presidential Strategies and Civil Rights: Eisenhower, the Early Years, 1952-54," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 19 (Fall 1989), 787; Tushnet, "What Really Happened," 1928.

proved by a five-to-one margin a voter-qualification amendment to the state constitution aimed at reducing black suffrage (a proposal that they had rejected in 1952). In Louisiana and Alabama, Citizens' Council membership was mushrooming well before the Montgomery bus boycott began, apparently in response to the filing of desegregation petitions with local school boards by NAACP branches in the summer of 1955. Moreover, the *Brown* decision was surely responsible for an event that occurred just two weeks after the Court's ruling: the reversal by referendum of the decision made by the Birmingham city council earlier that year to repeal the local ban on interracial sporting events.⁶⁸

Nor can this rejoinder—that civil rights initiatives rather than *Brown* were primarily responsible for the racial backlash—explain why significant civil rights advances took place in the South in the pre-*Brown* years without inciting a violent response. This was true not only in border state and upper South cities such as Baltimore, Louisville, Norfolk, and Greensboro, but also in middle and Deep South cities such as Little Rock, Montgomery, Birmingham, and Tuskegee. In Louisville, for example, blacks were winning regular election to the city council by the 1940s; teacher pay was equalized in 1941; and the University of Louisville and public libraries, parks, and swimming pools had been desegregated by the early 1950s. By that latter date, racial desegregation in Little Rock had come to the city police force, federal court juries, and many department store lunch counters. In Montgomery, the city police force was desegregated in early 1954; the preceding winter the city's professional baseball team had hired its first black players. And in Birmingham, the most segregated and racially violent city in the South, in the early 1950s the first hospital for blacks was established (which provided a place for thirty black doctors to practice), elevators in downtown office buildings were desegregated, and the city was actively considering the desegregation of its police force and bus transportation. None of these developments incited a white backlash even remotely resembling that of the middle and late 1950s. In Alabama, moreover, black voter registration had increased tenfold between the end of World War II and 1953. Yet in 1954 the state's voters reelected governor, by a resounding margin, Big Jim Folsom, the man who had appointed the fair-minded voting registrars who had made possible much of that increase.⁶⁹

Why didn't these incipient, yet pervasive, civil rights initiatives of the postwar years produce the political polarization that developed in the middle and late 1950s (and which I have attributed to *Brown*)? There are three principal reasons. First, *Brown* represented federal government interference in southern race relations—something that white southerners reared on Civil War and Reconstruction resent-

⁶⁸ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 109–11; Ely, *Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 39–40; McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 26–31, 62, 219, 320; Whitfield, *Death in the Delta*, 62; Thornton, "Challenge and Response," 194n33; Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 45–46; Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 275–77.

⁶⁹ Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations," 192; Meier, "Successful Sit-ins in a Border City," 230–31; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 32–39; Lewis, *In Their Own Interests*, 193–97; Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 793; Freyer, *Little Rock Crisis*, 20; Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 60–62, 73–76, 86; Thornton, "Challenge and Response," 175, 180n17; Thornton, "Municipal Politics," 45, 48.

ments could not tolerate dispassionately. We have seen, for example, that many racial moderates in Little Rock saw no choice but to rally around the obstructionist tactics of Governor Faubus after President Eisenhower dispatched federal troops to enforce a federal court desegregation order. Second, *Brown* was an unambiguous, highly salient pronouncement that southern race relations were destined to change. It could not easily be ignored or discounted as gradual, diffuse, and less salient changes could be. For example, one public opinion survey conducted in two small towns in Georgia and North Carolina during the summer of 1955 found that 60 percent of interviewees reported having discussed the *Brown* decision during the preceding week. Third, and perhaps most important, *Brown* decreed that racial change take place first in an area of life—grade school education—where white southerners were certain to be most resistant. By the early 1950s, as we have seen, underlying pressures were leading many southern cities gradually to eliminate or at least to relax Jim Crow in such areas as public transportation, police department employment, and voter registration. Yet public school segregation—the focus of the *Brown* decision—was an issue on which southern segregationists felt most intensely committed. For these three reasons, then, *Brown* elicited greater violence and intransigence than the indigenous civil rights advances of the postwar decade. Yet in temporarily retarding the cause of racial change in the South, *Brown* set in motion a sequence of events that soon culminated in the emergence of a national commitment to eradicating southern Jim Crow.⁷⁰

Two

why?

⁷⁰ Pettigrew, "Desegregation and Its Chances for Success," 341, table 3. On the visceral southern white resistance to federal intervention in racial matters, see Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 668; Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 200; and Ader, "Why the Dixiecrats Failed," 356, 367. On the declining southern white opposition to black voting, see Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944–1969* (New York, 1976), 148–49, 179–80, 345; and Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 102. On the notion of a hierarchy of southern white commitments to facets of Jim Crow, see Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 60–61.