OUT OF THE SILENCE:
REMEMBERING THE DESEGREGATION OF CLINTON, TENNESSEE, HIGH SCHOOL

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In May 1957, Bobby Cain—a black student—graduated from the newly-integrated Clinton, Tennessee, High School. During that school year, conflict had exploded along the social divisions running through the town, exposing the class resentments that had long fractured the community. The violence culminated in 1958 when unknown bombers destroyed the school by dynamite. Despite the violence, Clinton High never resegregated or closed, making it the first Southern school to successfully desegregate under a court order. Though it served as a blueprint for later desegregation attempts, within a few years, Clinton’s story faded from public memory, replaced by civil rights battles occurring in larger cities across America. But the people of Clinton never forgot their groundbreaking role. In 2005 I launched an oral history project in Clinton, and I discovered that individuals in the town remember different, and often contradictory, versions of the events. The version commemorated in the town’s museum and other official venues, however, celebrates the white businessmen who acquiesced to the court order. This simplification of civil rights stories happens frequently, but glossing over the anger and the pain running through the past allows Americans to ignore the ways in which our society is constructed on inequality. It also hinders our ability to correctly diagnose the reasons that we as a society continue to struggle
with inequality and segregation. Finally, it silences women’s voices by focusing on what happened during street riots rather than asking how choices made within the school’s classrooms, churches and homes affected the outcome of events. “Out of the Silence: Commemorating the Desegregation of Clinton, Tennessee High School” reconstructs the narrative of Clinton High School’s desegregation to include the voices of the African American community, the white segregationist protestors and the teachers and students in the school as well as the white town leaders. Using that story, I follow the process of memory making in the town, asking why some memories are commemorated publicly while others are forgotten so as to understand how people use memory to vie for and consolidate power.
To my parents, who have been my friends and listeners and challengers through this process:

Oh, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person—having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away. Somebody must have done a good deal of the winnowing business this afternoon; for in the course of it I gave him as much nonsense as any reasonable man could stand

Dinah Maria Mulock Craik
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I am finding this the most intimidating section to write. There are so many people who have walked through this process with me, but I do wish to thank a few key individuals and institutions.

First, I owe a debt to the people of Clinton who have shared their memories with me. I cannot imagine opening up to a stranger in the way so many of my interviewees have. Our conversations have changed me. I hope that I have done justice to the trust you placed in me.

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INTRODUCTION

A LITMUS TEST:

While writing my dissertation, I have developed a litmus test for civil rights scholarship. Before buying a book, I flip to the index and make a quick comparison. First, I note how thoroughly the book covers desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas; second, I scan to see whether the high school in Clinton, Tennessee, even made the reference list. So few books pass this test that it cannot determine which ones I buy, but it does make me question the other works.

Clinton’s story dominated the national news at the time it occurred, and the 1956 riots in the town drew worldwide media attention. At the height of the conflict, local and regional media, the Associated Press, the BBC, the nation’s three major television networks, *Life Magazine*, the *London Daily Sketch*, the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine* all stationed journalists there. Edward R. Murrow sent his crew to the town to produce a special award-winning *See It Now* presentation named “Clinton and the Law,” and the team returned in 1962, six years after the riots ended, to do a follow up report on the status of race relations in the town.¹ Given the Clinton’s notoriety and its primary position in the timeline of desegregation, as I read the books that skip the story of the high school, I wonder what

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important stories those authors omitted from their accounts. Who else did they fail to see? What other voices did they neglect to hear?

Clinton’s story has not only disappeared from scholarly accounts. It has also faded from the regional memory of civil rights. I grew up about three hours from Clinton, and I never heard the town’s story either. No one mentioned the small Appalachian town where in 1956 twelve black students braved riots and bombs to prove that the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* could be implemented in the South, and it could happen immediately.

Most Americans are familiar with the school desegregation story I heard growing up. This version of events begins with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and then skips ahead to Little Rock in 1957. The narrative then proceeds to Prince Edward County, Virginia, where the high schools closed for three years rather than integrate. It shifts to New Orleans, where in 1960 whites rioted against the admittance of four black first graders and focuses on Norman Rockwell’s iconic image of little Ruby Bridges, dressed in white and escorted by armed National Guardsmen. It includes Governor George Wallace using his

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inauguration to pledge his commitment to “segregation today … segregation tomorrow … segregation forever.”

In this story, the key moments play out in the streets, not in the classrooms and hallways where students and teachers negotiated new interracial relationships. Furthermore, this account of the past categorizes historical figures neatly as heroes and villains, unfortunately overlooking the complicated motives that drove the participants and the culpability of the bystanders and other community members. This narrative also focuses on how far the nation has come. No one today riots because a black child enrolls in their school; instead, most children attend whatever school is in their zone. According to this measure, the battle for equality is won, and it happened in just a few short years.

For the civil rights activists who fought for the black students, integration meant more than allowing a few black children enrolled in white schools. They believed that the students who studied and played together would graduate from school accepting the social, political and economic equality of the races. By focusing on the streets rather than within the schools, the narrative keeps us from evaluating whether the students, parents and civil rights activists were right. Does an integrated educational system create greater equality?

Some of the activists’ hopes have in fact come true. Minorities and working-class individuals did enjoy new opportunities unavailable in the pre-Civil Rights era. For instance, in Clinton, access to the town’s high school meant that a higher number of the black

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students were able to finish high school and go on to college. While many of their parents worked as laborers and domestics, the generation that graduated from Clinton High became nurses, teachers, bankers and state administrators. Despite these gains, the fifty years since the Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision have revealed how deeply class-based and racial inequalities are woven into American society.

Even the schools themselves are resegregating. Many municipal and educational authorities tried to use the tokenary inclusion of minorities in all-white schools as a symbolic victory over racism. From the late 1960s into the mid-1980s, federal agencies and the nation’s court systems fought for more widespread implementation of integration, which altered the racial composition of many of America’s classrooms. Over the course of the last two decades, however, the courts have withdrawn their support and dismantled integration orders while the federal agencies have ceased enforcing civil rights policies. The result has been drastic. In 2009, forty percent of Latinos and thirty-nine percent of blacks attended schools that were less than ten percent white. The average minority student attended a school in which almost sixty percent of the students were low-income. White children, meanwhile, are the least likely to study with students of other races. “One of the common misconceptions of the issue of resegregation of schools is that many people treat it as simply a change in the skin color of the students in the school,” educational researchers Gary Orfield


and Chungmei Lee argue. “If skin color were not systematically linked to other forms of inequality, it would, of course, be of little significance. … Unfortunately, that has not and never has been the nature of our society. … Race is deeply and systematically linked to many forms of inequality in background, treatment, expectations and opportunities.”

At the same time, the idea of *Brown v. Board* remains powerful in the national imagination. The principle that separate is inherently unequal has joined a cadre of aphorisms—such as “the separation of church and state” and the right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”—that Americans invoke to explain the national culture. Though scholars debate the efficacy of *Brown* in equalizing education, the ruling itself has been used to explain everything from the campaign for gay marriage to the reorganization of the dormitory life at Yale.

The stories we tell ourselves about how America’s public schools desegregated shape how we think and talk about equality both within the nation’s educational systems and within the larger society. They affect our assessments of the black freedom struggle, helping to determine whether we believe it to be a movement that ended successfully in the 1960s or whether we see it as a strife that continues today. They influence how we understand the interplay of race, class, gender, sexuality and religion in contemporary discussions about power, access, freedom and equality. The powerful narratives we have constructed about the

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past help determine our response to contemporary social justice efforts, and they help us
assign blame for the ongoing issues America faces. “The struggles over the memory of the
civil rights movement are not a diversion from the real political work of fighting for racial
equality and equal rights in the United States; they are key sites of that struggle,” explain
civil rights scholars Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford. “The contests over the meanings of
the movement must be understood as a crucial part of the continuing fight against racism and
inequality.”

As I have studied the desegregation of Clinton High School, I have found the space to
explore some of these concerns. First, because the drama occurred so early in the struggle to
implement Brown, the individuals who participated in it had no idea what to expect. When
the 1956 school year began, the black students and their supporters could believe the school
would open without trouble while the segregationist activists could claim that the
desegregation would never happen. After Clinton, other students and townspeople were not
be so naive.

Second, because Clinton’s story has been omitted from popular accounts and
academic studies, it provides a rich field for studying memory and the process of negotiating

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10 A note about terminology: I will generally use the word desegregation rather than integration. What
happened in Clinton in 1956 is an example of a successful high school desegregation; from the 1956 school year
through today, African American students have attended classes at Clinton High School. Integration is the
dream: it is the full elimination of discrimination based on color. A truly integrated school is one in which every
student has the same opportunity to succeed, has friendships with other students from different groups and feels
safe and welcome within the school. Or as Clinton High School teacher Margaret Anderson explained in an
article for the New York Times in 1960, “Desegregation involves the admittance of Negro students into a white
school in compliance with the law. Integration involves the conversion of the two groups into a smooth-running
system, with a working relationship free of tensions.” I still believe that true equality is possible, and I believe
that integration is one of the important tools for achieving that dream. Furthermore, thanks to my father, I think
the key is being honest with ourselves about who we are and where we come from, about what we have done
and the struggle it is to overcome our past; Margaret Anderson, “The South Learns Its Hardest Lessons,” New
York Times, September 11, 1960, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
public memory in a community setting. Whereas the Little Rock Nine have told their story hundreds of time, many of the students who attended Clinton High had never recounted their version of events prior to the oral histories I conducted. I had the opportunity to watch as the community attempted to make sense of the differences among the stories and struggled to decide whose accounts would—and would not—be heard. Understanding this conversation has meant looking at the full history of race and class conflict in the town. What happened in 1956 was a product of the community’s past, and the story of desegregation continues as the high school and the community surrounding it struggle with ongoing issues of inequality.

Finally, because there was no set, simplified narrative, there are no simple heroes or villains in the story of Clinton High. At times I even found myself sympathizing with an individual whose cause I abhor, while at other moments I have found myself disliking an individual who fought for the black students. As I have listened and learned and written, I have realized that this story is no simple morality tale of good and evil. It is about human beings, individuals who are responding in fear and bravery to events they set in motion and yet never controlled. And many of them end up doing things they never expected, sometimes in support of equality and at other times doing injury to twelve black children they once considered friends.

**Desegregating Clinton High School:**

I first stumbled across Clinton High’s story while working for the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area in 2005. In anticipation of the fiftieth anniversary of the high school’s desegregation, the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization—an interracial alliance of
Clinton’s black community leaders and white politicians—contracted with the national heritage area for assistance. Named after the historic black grammar school in Clinton, the organization restored the elementary school building, nominated it to the National Register of Historic Places and then installed a museum in it commemorating Clinton High’s desegregation. I was hired to oversee an oral history initiative in the town. As I prepared for the interviews, I learned about the dramatic events that had occurred in this rural community of only a few thousand residents.\textsuperscript{11}

Clinton was not the most likely site for testing \textit{Brown versus Board}. Many of the important moments in the civil rights story occurred in locales where there was a concentrated, organized black community.\textsuperscript{12} In 1950 only three percent of Anderson County’s residents were black. The town built a two-room elementary school for the African American students, but they decided that because of the range of classes that they would need to offer the handful of black high school students, a separate black secondary school was financially impossible. The white school board arranged for African American teenagers to be bussed to a black secondary school in a neighboring county, though the families had to pay the transportation costs. Clinton’s white high school students attended a large consolidated high school.

\textsuperscript{11} The decision to house the museum in the school was one of many instances where white and black committee members had different motivations but negotiated a mutually acceptable solution. The black representatives wanted to save the historic building, which was in disrepair. White town leaders agreed to the location because Clinton High School had been destroyed in a 1958 bombing and the Green McAdoo building was going unused.

\textsuperscript{12} After the Civil War, the town’s African Americans had settled on a slope overlooking the business district. Originally known as “Freedman’s Hill,” the neighborhood’s name was soon shortened to simply “the Hill.” Some journalists and scholars erroneously refer to this as Foley’s Hill. Foley’s Hill is actually a white neighborhood about two miles outside of Clinton. A road known as Foley’s Hill Road runs along the backside of the Hill neighborhood, perhaps contributing to the confusion. Because of the small size of the black population, its relatively centralized location just outside of Clinton’s town center, its almost entirely working-class status and their common lineages, the black community in Clinton in 1956 seemed remarkably unified. When divisions did appear among African Americans, they were between Clintonians and blacks from Knoxville who were often better educated, middle class and—at least according to Clintonians—condescending. Hence, I will often refer to the African Americans in Clinton as a community.
school that was one of the best schools in the state. They had access to art, band, college preparatory and vocational courses, athletics and theater. Meanwhile the black students were sent out of the county at their own expense to attend one of the state’s lowest-ranked schools.

In 1950 a group of African American parents asked the school board to improve their children’s educational opportunities, arguing that the town had failed to provide separate but equal facilities. The board did nothing. Determined to force the issue, in the fall of 1950 five black students and their parents attempted to enroll in Clinton High School. In an attempt at a compromise, the town sent them to a higher-ranked African American school in Knoxville, still almost twenty miles away. The black community argued that the town’s solution was not enough. They wanted to attend the school in their town where they could participate in extra curricular activities, walk to and from school each day and attend classes with their neighbors. In December, the five students—having won limited support from the NAACP—sued the Anderson County School Board, claiming the out-of-county arrangements were inherently unequal.

McSwain v. County Board of Education of Anderson County, the Clinton High School case, was one of a series of desegregation suits brought by the NAACP during 1950 and 1951. Eventually, federal courts put all the cases on hold except for Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas, which went to the Supreme Court. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that segregated school systems violated African Americans’ constitutional
right to equal protection under the law. Based on that ruling, on January 4, 1956, a federal judge ordered Clinton High School to admit black students the following fall.\textsuperscript{13}

While no white townspeople publicly supported desegregation, town leaders promised to obey the law, and they assumed that the rest of the whites in the county would follow their lead. Their decision to not resist the court order made them relatively moderate in the 1950s South. They decided to obey the letter of the new directive: they would allow the twelve black students to attend classes, but they would not integrate the sports teams. They would not allow the black students to participate in extracurricular social events. They would not touch the segregated elementary or middle schools.\textsuperscript{14} Segregationist resistance to the court order began organizing almost immediately, building upon longstanding working-class white anger at both local white leaders and the federal government.

Many historians and scholars refer to the civil rights movement as the South’s “Second Reconstruction.” In Clinton, some white residents count a little differently. They call desegregation their “Fourth Reconstruction.”\textsuperscript{15} The first Reconstruction began when the Union Army seized control of the region, freed the slaves, instituted federal rule and disfranchised unrepentant Confederates. Their next Reconstruction occurred in 1936 when the Tennessee Valley Authority constructed Norris Dam—its first project—just seven miles


from the town. The project created construction jobs for many local white workers and brought electricity to the rural mountain communities, but it also meant that the federal government confiscated and flooded 34,000 acres of rich bottomland, forcing local farmers into the textile mills and coal mines.16

“The third invasion of the damn Yankees” came a few years later: the construction of Clinton Laboratories, which would become Oak Ridge National Laboratories, a part of the Manhattan Project. Again, the project meant new jobs, but it also meant that the federal government confiscated 55,000 more acres of farmland. Some farmers were evacuated before they had even had time to gather their livestock and herd them to neighboring farms. The secret city’s work on the atomic bomb drew large numbers of outsiders into the community, including scientists, government administrators and highly skilled workers. These two programs provided the town’s business and civic leaders with economic and political opportunities, but many of the town’s working-class whites—most of whom still worked in the region’s coal mines and textile mills—felt that the money and outsiders who had accompanied Norris Dam and Oak Ridge had displaced them economically and politically.17

In 1948 President Truman issued a presidential order ending military segregation on all military bases. As a military installation, Oak Ridge was under federal control. In 1955, the community’s educational system complied with this edict, desegregating its schools. The

16 Roberts, History of Clinton Senior High School, 51-52.

successful desegregation of Oak Ridge’s school caused local leaders to predict that school desegregation would proceed peacefully in Clinton as well. They would soon learn, however, that other local whites believed that the residents of Oak Ridge had accepted desegregation relatively easily and began organizing to fight the court order.

On August 27, 1956, twelve of the fifteen African American students of high school age in Clinton attended classes at the newly desegregated school. They faced only a small band of protestors. That afternoon, however, a group of white men threatened one of the black female students and her mother, and someone threw a bottle at a black woman walking by the school. By that evening, several hundred spectators assembled a few blocks from the school on the courthouse lawn as speaker after speaker urged white Clintonians to defy federal court injunctions.

The following day, the crowd by the school swelled to over one hundred, and over seven hundred attended that evening’s rally. African American students watched as people they knew turned on them. “White and black, we got along good until they integrated Clinton High School,” Alfred Williams, one of the twelve, explained to me. “And I’m going to tell you, honey,” he continued, “when they did this, I had never seen so much hatred in all the

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20 The remaining three students were unable to obtain their transcripts in time to make the enrollment deadline and so were unable to transfer to Clinton High School.

days of my life.” As the number of protestors grew, violence increased. Mobs attacked cars
driven by blacks and threatened to deface public buildings. In the African American
neighborhood, black men organized a militia to patrol their neighborhood. A group of forty-
seven armed white men volunteered to guard the courthouse, protecting the symbolic seats of
civic power in the community.22

At the height of the riots, Tennessee Governor Frank Clement sent the Tennessee
National Guard to Clinton, but unlike Arkansas’s Orval Faubus a year later, Clement sent the
troops to protect the school from the rioters rather than to bar African American students.
While public demonstrations waned as long as the soldiers remained, harassment of black
students continued inside the school, led by the Tennessee White Youth, an organization of
teenagers associated with the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council.

In November, white violence spilled back into the streets. Eventually, Paul Turner, the
white pastor at the largest Baptist church in town, intervened. He and two other white men
escorted the black students to school one December morning. In response, sixteen
segregationists—fourteen men and two women—attacked Turner, brutally beating him.
Following the attack, public opinion turned against the protestors, and even those who
believed that Turner had “asked for it” worried that the town had devolved into anarchy. The
next Sunday, Turner stood in the pulpit and announced: “The moral principal on which I
take my stand is that if the Negro children decide to return to Clinton High School, they have

22 Adamson, “Dynamite,” 101-02, 106-07; Anderson, Children of the South, 10-11, 15; Holden, Valien
and Valien, Clinton, Tennessee, 6-9; Lana Carmen Seivers, “Words of Discrimination, Voices of Determination:
Reflections on the Desegregation of Clinton High School,” Ed.D. Dissertation, University of Tennessee
Knoxville, 2002, 70-71; The Oak Ridger, August 28, 1956, 1; Alfred Williams of Clinton, TN, interview by
author, October 22, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro,
TN; Herd, “Then and Now,” 42-43; The Oak Ridger, August 31, 1956, 1, 5.
the legal and the moral right to attend without heckling or obstruction.’” He later qualified this statement, but he was nevertheless the first local white to advocate integration instead of submission to the “law of the land.”23

Despite the violence, Bobby Cain graduated from Clinton High School that May. Racial conflict continued, however, culminating in the bombing of the school in October 1958. Afterword, evangelist Billy Graham spoke at the First Baptist Church about the need for racial reconciliation, making the town the site of one of the smallest crusades he ever held. An international fundraising campaign headed by nationally-syndicated columnist Drew Pearson financed the school’s reconstruction.

**BARGAINING FOR PEACE:**

Determined to recover from the years of violence as quickly as possible, the town cobbled together a tense truce. Community members stopped discussing what had happened. Individuals of different races and classes lived parallel lives, using the same stores and schools and community institutions, often without developing friendships. This allowed them to avoid the deep social divides that Clinton High School’s desegregation had uncovered and the lingering anger that existed decades after the violence ended.

Silence also fell on the town from the outside. Despite the attention that spotlighted the town, by the 1960s, Clinton’s story had faded from American’s public memory, replaced by civil rights battles occurring in larger cities across the nation. The people of Clinton never forgot their groundbreaking role. Like so many Americans, both black and white, they are

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still haunted by their memories of their civil rights struggles. A few, including Bobby Cain, did not share their stories even with their spouses and children.

Hoping to help end that public silence, I took charge of an oral history initiative in the community in 2005. After decades of private story-telling and familial commemorations, local people spoke their memories publicly for the first time. The differences among the accounts frightened and angered the town. How could eyewitnesses remember the past so differently? The presence of the museum added to this struggle as it invested memories of 1956 with new political, economic and social value. Through its exhibits, the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization would decide whose story tourists and visitors would learn.24 When compromise among the groups seemed impossible, two rival factions even flew representatives to visit with the museum design firm they had hired, hoping to persuade the firm to adopt their interpretation of the past.

In the end the stars of the museum remain the white men who stood for law and order. The teachers’ memories—and even their names—were omitted from the museum’s narrative; there is no account of the violence that occurred in the black neighborhood nor of the steps that the black men took to protect their homes and families, and nothing suggests that the riots were an expression not only of racism but of class anger. These omissions prompted me to ask what a more inclusive account of this pioneering moment in the desegregation of the South’s—and the nation’s—public schools could reveal about the ongoing struggle against

24 As historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage argues, “Groups secure broad recognition of their identities by colonizing public spaces with their version of the past. … By insinuating their memory into public space, groups exert the cultural authority, express the collective solidarity and achieve a measure of the permanence that they often crave. To infuse objects and places with commemorative significance is to combat the transitory nature of memories and underscore the connectedness of the past and present. Historical memory thus becomes inextricably bound together with both public space and culture;” William Fitzhugh Brundage, The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 5-6.
inequality in America’s educational system and the politics behind how we have chosen to remember this part of the civil rights movement.

There is a longstanding divide between the fields of memory studies and oral history. Many memory theorists have been concerned with communal or public forms of memory, ignoring individual recollections. Meanwhile, oral historians often focus on individual voices to the neglect of communal narratives. My dissertation draws on both approaches, listening to individuals, hearing how they converse with their families and social groups and asking about the social, political and cultural implications of how a community chooses to commemorate its past. I have adopted the definition of memory offered by Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*. Memory is “the process by which people recall, lay claim to, understand and represent the past.”

Alessandro Portelli likens memory and the construction of the historical narrative to quilting, “a form of bricolage in which a new, significant whole is created out of an array of fragments, bits and pieces,” but I think of them as being akin to music. The basic building blocks of our narratives are the solos: one voice telling its story to the community around it. Such narratives capture our attention and grip our hearts. As soon as more voices join in, the music of the past becomes more complex. Some people have held onto perspectives that harmonize, differing only by gradations of nuance, but more often, the various voices are in discord and disagreement. This is often the most troubling part of memory, but it can also be the most revealing. There is power in the complexity of a community’s story, and I have decided that these moments are like Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring.” If you stand next to only

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one voice, the rest of the orchestra seems to be in chaos, but if you can step back and listen to
the whole of the group, the differing narratives become the melodies, harmonies and descants
of the piece.26

The challenge is to hold the individual voices and the communal narratives in tension, hearing both and allowing one to illuminate aspects of the other. Writing narratives that maintain this tension also allow us to identify the silences, the voices that are not participating in the story being told. Some are silent because they have nothing to say. These individuals did not participate in the story. But many others are silent because someone wrote rests into the score which directed these individuals not to participate in the retelling of the past because their voices did not match the dominant narrative. The rests can be added by a variety of forces—public disapprobation, fear of punishment, disinterest on the part of the listeners, just to name a few—but silences alter the stories. Such listening allows us to imagine new ways of attacking the inequities and power hierarchies in our society that will clearly take more than a court order to dismantle.

My work arises out of the recognition that, as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall argues, “the dominant narrative of the civil rights movement—distilled from history and memory, twisted by ideology and political contestation, and embedded in heritage tours, museums, public rituals, textbooks and various artifacts of mass culture—distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals.”27 Many scholars recently have been addressing the proliferation of civil rights memorials and commemorations. Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford’s edited collection The


Civil Rights Movement in American Memory includes essays that unpack everything from civil rights museums to the creation of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Other scholars explore how the various civil rights memorials that have popped up across the Southern countryside function to distill the civil rights narrative into an accessible, useable account of the past. For instance, in Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory, Owen Dwyer and Derek Alderman trace the spread of monuments, streets, civic buildings and public spaces dedicated to the commemoration of the black freedom struggle. By looking deeper into the creation of specific memorials, they uncover the politics behind the development of these spaces and the importance that local community members invest in the tributes.28

But despite the volume and diversity of civil rights scholarship, we still have very few fine-grained local studies that explore both how desegregation unfolded within a specific community and how that community struggled to commemorate that process. Moreover, despite Clinton’s groundbreaking role in testing the implementation of desegregation in the South, no scholarly attempt has been made to understand the town’s historical experience. Instead, most scholarship on school desegregation has centered on what happened in Little Rock and other urban centers. One group of scholars has focused on the white mobs that formed the heart of the segregationist street protests. They have asked who controlled the

mobs. Were they grassroots uprisings or the product of clever, manipulative leaders? More recently, scholars have sought to connect the rioters to the rest of their community. Karen Anderson’s 2004 essay “The Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis,” for instance, argued that massive resistance was not about education specifically but rather about access to power. She sought to understand how the relationships among white businessmen, working-class whites, middle-class women and African Americans of all classes led to the violence.

Almost all of these historians have overlooked the students and teachers within the schools, creating a curiously opaque spot at the heart of the civil rights story. Most of the scholars who do include the students and teachers have centered their narratives on the black experience of desegregation. Some have explored how the trauma of desegregation led to contemporary black nostalgia for segregated schools. Others have researched the African American teachers who often found themselves either demoted or fired during the

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29 Numan Bartley was one of the first scholars to address this debate. In *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, he proposed that wealthy black belt “neobourbonists” used the crowds’ racist fears, anti-Communism and commitment to states’ rights to build the white supremacist movement; Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969). His ideas stood unchallenged until sociologist Clark McPhail’s *The Myth of the Madding Crowd*, which proposed that segregationist crowds did not act in unanimous mindlessness. He demonstrated how individual crowd members used sociological and psychological clues to determine whether to participate; Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991). Similarly, Matthew Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis’s edited volume *The Moderates Dilemma* looked at how individual mob members participated in the uprisings. They argued for more studies of the “moderates” who did not engage in massive resistance, explaining that the ideas of tokenism and gradualism ultimately proved more effective at maintaining white supremacy than massive resistance was; Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds. *The Moderates’ Dilemma: Massive Resistance To School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998). Robert Pratt used Richmond’s experience to demonstrate how the progression from massive resistance to tokenism to “freedom of choice” and white flight allowed segregationism to win; Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954-1989* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992). William Kellar shows that white flight and private schools produced very similar results in Houston; William Kellar, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999). One of the first to take the experience of female mob participants seriously was Clive Webb’s 2005 edited *Massive Resistance*, a compilation of ten articles. Elizabeth Gillespie McRae and Karen Anderson’s essays unearthed the ways working class women participated in the protests, using ideas of women’s roles and responsibilities as mothers to carve a niche for themselves in the resistance movement; Webb, *Massive Resistance*.

desegregation process. Another group used test scores and other such quantitative sources to evaluate desegregation’s success or failure.\textsuperscript{31}

By ignoring what happened within the desegregated institutions themselves, scholars have also overlooked the stories of whites within desegregated schools. Most works recalling white female teachers’ participation in civil rights are memoirs authored or co-authored by the educators themselves. Sondra Hercher Gordy’s dissertation “Teachers of the Lost Year” is one of the few scholarly attempts to consider how both white and black teachers experienced desegregation. The white students have been similarly disregarded.\textsuperscript{32} The story of the white parents are retold by Robert Pratt’s \textit{The Color of Their Skin}, which uses oral history, minutes


\textsuperscript{32} Two exceptions to this are Beth Roy’s work with white working-class students who attended Little Rock’s Central High in 1957 and the recently released David Margolick’s \textit{Elizabeth and Hazel}, which looks at the relationship between Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Little Rock Nine, and Hazel Bryant, a teenage segregationist; Margolick, \textit{Elizabeth and Hazel} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Roy, \textit{Bitters in the Honey: Tales of Hope and Disappointment across divides of Race and Time} (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).
from the Richmond school board and local newspaper coverage to explore how “passive resistance” by white parents contributed to Richmond’s struggles over desegregation.33

This dissertation is my experiment in writing an alternative civil rights story, one that includes the full range of voices and considers the ways the battle for equality continues today. I am seeking to write a story that will “complicate any search for simple historical ‘truth’ and inspire sharply divergent interpretations.” I hope that the resulting narrative is one that W. Fitzhugh Brundage would call “messy, confusing and ambiguous.”34

I ask how students and teachers experienced desegregation, and I show that the front lines of desegregation lay in the schools as well as on the streets around them. I also trace the process of memory creation by exploring conflicting memories. I open each chapter with a moment of conflict that occurred during the 2005 construction of the Green McAdoo Cultural Center. I then look back to the desegregation story, asking why individuals remember their history so differently. Based on this reconstruction, I close each chapter by tracing these individual lives since 1956 and by exploring why some of their memories are enshrined in museum exhibits while others are publicly forgotten and suggesting how those decisions influence our ability to fight injustice in our society.


34 Brundage, The Southern Past, 343-44.
My dissertation opens with the experiences of the black students. In their recollections, the heart of the story lay within the school and in the black community, and in their view, the entire school year was marked by persecution and violence. For three years, the students returned from school just in time to see the Klan parade through their neighborhood and then went to bed wondering if that night it would be their house that was bombed. After leaving Clinton High School, the twelve struggled to make sense of what had happened to them there. Their experiences that year taught them a degree of distrust—and in particular a distrust of whites—that they would spend decades trying to overcome. Many of the twelve found that they did not have the words to express their anger and distress. They hoped that by not speaking about their memories, the pain and anger would fade away. Meanwhile, the national civil rights narrative replaced the Clinton Twelve with the Little Rock Nine, so no one outside their community remembered to ask them about it either. In this way, the twelve’s silence contributed to the historical silence that has built around events at this small mountain school.

The second chapter looks at the experiences of the white students. Though the former protestors and their families refused to participate in the museum’s construction, their pictures line its walls. The first image visitors see shows a group of boys clustered at the feet of segregationist activist John Kasper, a young, charismatic man from New Jersey who arrived in Clinton a few days before the fall semester began. The backdrop to another display shows teenage white boys facing down the National Guard, who are coming at them with bayoneted rifles. Other times they are shown participating in the protests and attacking the blacks. Though these students and their families refused to participate (and were not invited
to join) in the 2005 commemorations of desegregation, the testimonies and interviews they
gave during the desegregation conflict show that their protests were more simple racist
diatribes. Furthermore, in the federal trials that arose out of the protests, though most of the
defendants were adults, the key witnesses for both the prosecution and the defense were the
segregationist high school girls who organized the Tennessee White Youth. These young
women used the fear about racial miscegenation and black male rapists to give themselves a
political voice. They were raising important complaints about class-based inequality within
America’s educational system, complaints that remain relevant today.

Chapter 3 is about the relationship between the segregationist rioters and John
Kasper. In popular memory, the violence in Clinton is blamed on Kasper’s influence, but this
narrative masks a much more complex reality. Local segregationists began organizing their
campaign a year before Clinton High desegregated as a response to Oak Ridge’s successful
desegregation. When Kasper arrived in Clinton, he came with resources and connections the
local community lacked, but he also brought along his own agenda. As the movement in
Clinton worked to articulate its aims and purposes, the local activists and Kasper struggled—
and ultimately failed—to negotiate an alliance that accommodated all their desires. Blaming
Kasper for what happened during the riots and bombings allowed civic leaders to gloss over
the motivations that drove the local activists into the streets, to dismiss the price that some of
segregationists paid for having taken part in the uprisings and to construct the veneer of
peace that settled on the community after the 1958 high school bombing.

The fourth chapter considers the men who resisted the rioters. In the midst of the
riots, black men stood guard over their homes and families with their hunting rifles aimed at
the road, ready to protect their community from the whites who threatened them. Meanwhile, forty-seven white men were deputized by the mayor and used their own guns and a small arsenal of teargas grenades to protect Clinton’s municipal buildings from destruction. Faith and friendships with national civil rights leaders led one young white pastor to question the righteousness of the society he had long defended. Ultimately, he became one of the few participants in this story to embrace the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. This chapter, then, is about the politics of violence: who can use violence to protect his home, who is punished for doing so and—though few—who reject it and why.

The final chapter is the story of the white teachers. These women stood on the front lines of the conflict, thrust into the divides among the segregationists, the supporters of “law and order” and the black children who had entered their high school classrooms. When the political, religious and cultural leaders of the town abdicated responsibility for the events of 1956, these teachers became key to desegregation’s success. The stories of Clinton High School’s educators illustrate how the interracial teaching relationships forged in the hallways and classrooms caused some whites to take the rare leap to fighting both racism and classism, the leap that most other whites in the town chose not to make but which allied the women with a cohort of progressive whites around the South who dreamed of a radically different future.

There have been moments in the midst of my research when I have felt discouraged about whether America will ever achieve true equality. As I have learned about the ongoing strictures that prevent minority schoolchildren from succeeding or read about the rapid resegregation of our educational system, the bigotry and hate has seemed so deeply ingrained
within both individuals and the American system that I began to despair of finding a solution. At those times, I have reminded myself of my father’s story.

Much of my interest in social justice was sparked by my father. African American history hardly appeared in my social studies classes in elementary school. Dad set out to teach my sister and me about some of those missing moments, drawing largely from what he had witnessed of the civil rights struggle. For instance, in the eighth grade, my class drove the four hours to Memphis to visit Graceland, Elvis Presley’s gaudy home place. Dad took my sister and me back so we could visit the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King Jr. died. Our visit was just before the National Civil Rights Museum reclaimed and remodeled the building. We stood outside a chain link fence and looked at the dilapidated structure as Dad pointed out the balcony where King was standing when he was shot. Dad told us about the struggle for racial equality and explained the anger that had erupted after King’s death. On the way home that night, we listened to a cassette tape of some of King’s most famous speeches. Similarly, when our family went to Atlanta, we did not go to the Coca Cola museum all my friends had visited. Instead, we visited Ebenezer Baptist Church. When we went to Birmingham, my father took us to see Sixteenth Baptist Church and told us about the bombing and the teenage girls who died. And he told us stories from his own childhood of how desegregation had occurred in Nashville.

This is not how my father was raised. Before moving to Nashville, his parents and their families had been sharecroppers in northern Alabama. The little cabin where he was born (after a harrowing forty-eight hours of labor) was razed when Interstate 65 was built and
replaced by a rest stop. Though we could not see his home place, as children we visited the small shacks where his aunts and uncles and grandparents all lived, eking a living out of the leached limestone soil. Some of my relatives remained sharecroppers into the late twentieth-century. For these people, one of the only things that gave them pride was their skin color, so from early childhood when his mother scolded him for playing house with a young black girl who lived nearby, Dad was raised to be a racist.

One Saturday while I was in graduate school, the two of us were doing some work on my parents’ house, and I asked him how he had ended up so differently from his upbringing. How had he gone from that background to taking his young white daughters on civil rights tours? He paused in the middle of the project and looked up at me. “Oh, Rachel, I’m just a recovering racist,” he said a little sadly. “The only difference between me and my mother is that I choose to fight against that part of me every day.” My dissertation is one of the ways I am taking up my father’s fight.

35 He loves to tell my friends that the retired rocket that greets cars as they pass over the Alabama line sits exactly on his birthplace.

THE STUDENTS

I can only say that here is a piece about how some children lived and learned these past two years. They are children who were in a very special situation, and they were, in a sense, servants of a cause. But I think the special merit of this report is to take our minds off the public role and the function of these children, and lead us to think about them and their individualities. Perhaps, after all, that is their true civil right.37

ON BEING REMEMBERED:

May 17, 2007, was the fiftieth anniversary of Bobby Cain’s graduation from Clinton High School. At two that afternoon, he and eight of his black classmates reunited in the parking lot of the renovated Green McAdoo Elementary School in front of more than four hundred dignitaries and townspeople who had gathered to commemorate the event.

Tennessee Governor Phil Bredeson—who had donated three hundred thousand dollars to the museum—stood at the head of the parking lot and addressed the crowd. Behind him, a zigzagging ramp climbed to the top of the Hill, tracing its way up a large concrete wall. A quote from a 1957 sermon by the Reverend Paul Turner ran along the top of the wall. “… but we are positively and definitely against the disintegration of our community and our body politic that we cherish above all things,” Turner had proclaimed, “realizing that where anarchy prevails, none of us have anything of any value and none of us have any freedoms any more.” Above Governor Bredeson, a black plastic tarp hid a recently installed

monument. When the sheets fell away, they revealed twelve bronze statues, life-size sculptures of the black teenagers. Poised above the audience, they stood looking down the Hill as though they were about to begin the long walk to school (See Image 1.1).  

The idea for the statues had arisen early in the museum’s planning process when the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization’s members read news coverage of the 2005 dedication of “Testament,” statues of the Little Rock Nine installed on Arkansas’s capitol grounds. Believing that the Clinton Twelve deserved similar treatment, the organization commissioned sculptor William F. Duffy of the Large Art Company from Baltimore, Maryland, to create the memorial. He patterned the statues on news photographs taken of the teenagers. 

For the twelve, the statues were more than a simple commemoration of their bravery. “I never thought this would happen,” Bobby Cain Jr., told a reporter for The Oak Ridger. “The “Clinton Twelve” has been recognized,” Jo Ann Allen Boyce, another one of the twelve, agreed. “I’m blown away,” she said. “I’m overwhelmed. I’m humbled.” She admired the dignity and determination shown in the statues’ countenances and saw the posture as a reflection of the grace with which the twelve had met their adversaries. “We

always walked with our heads high,” she told me proudly. “We held our heads high, and we continued to walk, [and] we walked steadily.”

The process of constructing the museum and the celebrations that attended its opening helped the twelve transcend some of the anger that had haunted them since their days at Clinton High. The commemoration marked the first time many of them spoke publicly about that year. They had kept silent, even within their families, refusing to share their memories because they feared that their bitterness might infect those closest to them. They had remained silent with other Clintonians because they did not know how to discuss that year without ending the tense truce they had negotiated with whites in the town.

At first, they clung to the idea that they had made important strides for civil rights, and they comforted themselves with the thought that the rest of the nation appreciated their sacrifice, and a few of them—particularly Bobby Cain—did receive recognition from civil rights groups across the country. But as the years passed, fewer and fewer Americans included them in the litany of civil rights heroes, replacing their names with the students in Little Rock, Birmingham and elsewhere. Their silence expanded to include outside researchers and scholars. They believed that no one else cared about what had happened to

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41 In this, they had some wisdom. Memory theorist Marianne Hirsch describes the effect of what she calls “postmemory” on the children of Holocaust victims. She catalogues how those children “remember” the experience of their parents through the stories they hear. “Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment and creation,” Hirsch wrote. “That is not to say that survivor memory is itself unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that they can neither understand nor recreate;” Hirsch, “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy,” in Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 1999), 8.
them, and they grew to resent the attention given to the Little Rock Nine, who also had to brave angry mobs but who had followed behind the Clinton Twelve and learned from their experiences. “Why did the Little Rock Nine receive a presidential medal?” several of them asked me.

Puzzled by the lack of interest in their stories, they had come to believe that the historical silence must be purposeful. Fifty years after the events of 1956, several of the twelve were hesitant to speak with me. “I’m going to be honest with you, … when I read the letter [from you], I said, ‘I am not going to do this,’” Cain admitted to me toward the end of our conversation. The only reason he responded to my interview request was that he realized I was a graduate student. “I’m glad you are getting your PhD, and so I said ‘Let me call her first and see.’” During that phone call, he asked me about my work and then asked if I had spoken with any of the others. “If you had not told me [that you were a graduate student and that you had approached all of us for interviews], I probably wouldn’t have done this,” he concluded.

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The opening of the Green McAdoo Cultural Center and the events surrounding it prompted the black students to speak publicly about that year. In addition to giving voice to their stories, the commemorations officially recognized the twelve as groundbreaking participants in the struggle for educational equality.44

While the black students know they deserve more attention than they have gotten and appreciate that they are finally being recognized for their actions, many of them have mixed feelings about how they are being commemorated. “I’m not a hero,” Alfred Williams insisted. “I had no alternative but to go to school.”45 They had enrolled at Clinton High School because they hoped that the school, which was an hour closer to their homes than their all-black school had been, would allow them to more fully enjoy their high school experience. When the rioting erupted, the twelve struggled with the knowledge that while desegregation was not what they had chosen, they were the ones who had to make it work.

So often in American social memory, the black teenagers who desegregated America’s schools, sat at the Woolworth’s lunch counters or joined the Children’s Crusade are depicted as heroes who choose to walk down those painful paths because they had a degree of insight and strength that sets them apart. These stories make the teenagers’ bravery into a mythical exploit that others in their society cannot emulate, which exculpates the rest of us from having to take up their battles. But Jo Ann Crozier Allen Boyce, Bobby Cain, Anna Theressser Caswell, Ronald Hayden, Minnie Ann Dickie Jones, Alva Jay McSwain Lambert, William Latham, Regina Turner Smith, Maurice Soles, Robert Thacker, Gail Ann

44 Ibid.; interview with Jo Ann Boyce.

Upton Epps and Alfred Williams were just twelve American teenagers who loved rock-and-roll and dreamed of going to their senior prom. What made them different was that when their community called upon them, they responded. They got up and went to school. And some of them even graduated from that school. Today they debate whether the cost outweighed the value of their educations, but they also know that their determination gave their siblings, their children and the children of their enemies a better, more equal future. These students’ stories can begin to do something truly remarkable. Their voices can inspire us to continue the fight toward racial equality in America.

**BEFORE DESEGREGATION:**

The twelve black students who walked into Clinton High School on August 27, 1956, were not the five students named in *Joheather McSwain v. Anderson County School Board*, the 1950 lawsuit that had ended segregation at Clinton High School. But when they learned that federal judge Robert Taylor had ordered Clinton High to desegregate, the guardians of the twelve agreed that their children should act upon the court order brought by the older students. They understood why the other students and their parents had sued for the right to enroll at the all-white school. The twelve’s parents recognized that attending Clinton High could improve their children’s future opportunities. One of the easiest ways to prevent Clinton’s black community from rising economically had been to limit their educational possibilities. “Every time black people would get a job, they would be thrown out … because of a lack of education,” recalled Mattie Bell Henley, Gail Upton Epps’ aunt and one of the matriarchs of the African American community. “We began to realize … that our children
should have equal rights and go to school, that [if they did] they would be prepared for better jobs.”

Even before the judge ruled in the favor of Clinton’s black teens, the lawsuit had already improved their educational opportunities. When the families asked for admittance to Clinton High in 1950, white municipal leaders had tried to placate them by transferring their children from the unaccredited black school in LaFollette to Knoxville’s black high school, highly-ranked Austin High School. But the black families still believed their students were missing out on all that a secondary education could offer to them, opportunities they would receive at Clinton High.

It took almost an hour to commute to from the bus station in downtown Clinton to Austin High. In most of the black families, both parents worked, so the teenagers rode to and from school on the public bus that ran between the towns. Clinton’s black students and their parents especially worried about the times when the high schoolers could not make it to school at all. Winters in Appalachia can be unpredictable, and the two-lane highway connecting Clinton and Knoxville ran through a narrow mountain pass. During inclement weather, the mountainous road quickly became impassable. Anderson County’s educational administrators seemed unconcerned about this problem, even if the students were out for several weeks. Anna Theresser Caswell, for instance, lived about five miles outside Clinton. When the state decided to repave her road, the bus stopped coming for her, “so we just didn’t

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46 Mattie Bell Henley, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, July 12, 1978, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville, Tennessee.
go to school until the road was fixed,” she told me. “I know it was over two weeks that we
didn’t go to school. … Just stayed at home.”  

Black students from Clinton also were unable to participate in extracurricular
activities. Bobby Cain, for instance, recalled that if he had joined the basketball team, he
would have had to wait until almost midnight to catch the bus back to Clinton. Jo Ann Allen
Boyce attended only one social event at Austin: the homecoming football game during the
fall of her sophomore year. In celebration, she bought a new coat, and she fondly recalled
feeling that she was “so gorgeous … sitting up in the stands with my friends and yelling for
the team.”

That spring as their parents discussed where to enroll their children for next year, the
students themselves remember paying little attention to the court’s decision. “It was kind of
like water on a duck’s back,” Bobby Cain recalled. “We didn’t think it was going to happen.
… I was going through my routines as I had been at Austin, thinking I would be going back
in the fall, even though I read about Clinton.” He even paid a deposit so that he could attend
Austin’s senior prom the following spring. “I didn’t know anything about the school being
integrated until two or three days before we were to go … [when] we were called to a
meeting at Green McAdoo School,” Regina Turner Smith remembered. “It was a really big
shock to me. … I could see the sense in going [to Clinton High],” she continued, “I was just
looking forward to [my junior year at Austin].” Alfred Williams remembered that he did not
want to transfer to Clinton for his senior year. “I didn’t want to go to school down there with

cilton_twelve.html; Anna Theresser Caswell, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, October 22,
2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
48 Interview with Bobby Cain; interview with Jo Ann Boyce.
them any more than they wanted me to be down there,” he told me. “I preferred to have
stayed over there at that all black school, … but that was the law.” Steve Williams, his uncle
and guardian, insisted he join the others.49

At the end of the 1956 spring term, the black families began making preparations to
transfer their children to Clinton High School. Though Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. and other
school administrators permitted the African American students to enroll, they refused to go
out of their way to facilitate the process. As a result, though fifteen black teenagers were
eligible to enter at Clinton High, only twelve did so. The other three had trouble getting their
paperwork in order. One of these was Alfred Williams’ half-brother Eddie Soles. His
transcript never arrived from the high school he had attended in Anniston, Alabama. Eddie
Soles remembered that his guardian Steve Williams “meant for us to go to school in Clinton
or … not go at all.” This meant the end of Soles’ formal education. Those whose paperwork
did clear by the beginning of that academic year knew that they would either go to school
“down that hill, just two-tenths of a mile, or never go again.”50

DESEGREGATING CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL:

On August 27, 1956, the twelve black teenagers joined the 717 white students
enrolled at Clinton High School, ending white-only secondary education in Clinton forever.

On that first day, the African American pupils, the school’s white administration and at least

49 Interview with Bobby Cain; Regina Turner Smith, interview by June Adamson, analog recording,
August 7, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville, Tennessee; Alfred Williams, interview
with Rachel Martin, analog recording, October 22, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation,
Murfreesboro, TN.

50 Eddie, Maurice and Charles Soles, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, October 15, 1980,
University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; George McMillan, “The Ordeal of Bobby Cain,”
Collier’s, November 23, 1956, 68-69.
some of the white students were hopeful that events in the school would progress peacefully. Most of the black students were anxious and excited, but they were not afraid. They believed that Clinton “was one of the most tolerant little towns in the place” and so hoped that the white townspeople would be receptive to the change.⁵¹

Anna Theresser Caswell and Gail Upton Epps lived off the Hill and so went into the school alone. The remaining ten met at the top of the Hill to pray and then walked together down Broad Street and into Clinton High School. As they drew near, they saw that most of the white students were standing on the school lawn watching them approach. Although everyone seemed tense, the white students were quiet. No one yelled slurs at the ten black students or harassed them in any way. “We even talked very quietly as we walked down the Hill,” Jo Ann Boyce recounted. “And once we reached a certain point, we stopped talking.” The only thing that gave them pause was a small group of white boys gathered by the door who sneered at them as they walked in the building.⁵²

When the class bell rang, most of the white students went into the school, and everyone headed to the auditorium for the opening assembly. Again, no one said anything antagonistic to the black students, but a small contingent of white youths found ways to let the twelve know that they were not welcome. Bobby Cain remembered that one young white man at the convocation engaged him in a staring contest. Cain remembered feeling as though he had to win, that holding his ground was part of proving he “belonged and was determined

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⁵¹ Interview with Jo Ann Boyce; interview with Regina Turner Smith.
⁵² Interview with Jo Ann Boyce.
to stay.” But “it [also] seemed like [it went on for] an hour,” he remembered. “When it was over, I was so tired I didn’t know what to do.”53

After the meeting, the students dispersed to their homerooms. Because of the small number of black students in the school, they seldom had classes together so they could not rely on one another for support. As they walked into classrooms where they knew no one, the black students were wary, wondering what they should expect from their white classmates.

*Life Magazine* photographer Robert Kelly shot a series of photographs in the school that day. The images capture the black students’ tension. In one image, two of the black girls are emerging from the school. They hold their books close. They appear to be conversing, but each looks tensely past the other. A crowd of white students surrounds them, but not one of the white students looks at them. The rest of the student body seems to be flowing past them.54

Though the black students’ wariness did not ease that day, a few surprising events occurred that renewed their hope for a peaceful transition into their new school. One of the first tasks of the new school year was electing the officers for each homeroom. When Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. had assumed leadership at the school, he had launched a series of reforms designed to help the students and their families feel greater responsibility for the community’s school. He had expanded the size of the student council and given it a significant voice in the school’s operation. Each homeroom elected a president, a vice president and a secretary who served as its representatives to the student council. Jo Ann

53 Interview with Bobby Cain.

Allen Boyce was in Eleanor Davis’s homeroom. Television interviews from the time show that she was a collected and well-spoken teen who seemed to have a firm, though not haughty, sense of herself and her strengths. In addition, she was pretty and fashionably dressed. This combination of attributes impressed her white peers. One of her classmates nominated her to be her homeroom’s vice president, and she was elected unanimously.\(^55\)

In other classes, teachers eased the tension by giving students a chance to ask one another questions, and the new classmates discovered that they had shared interests and concerns. Other white students smiled at the black students when they made eye contact or even initiated conversations with them. Some of the twelve even thought they saw possible friendships forming with their white peers. Mattie Bell Henley remembered that her niece Gail Ann Upton Epps was “very happy” when she came home from school that day and told her family that there had not been any trouble. When Robert Thacker and Alfred Williams told a reporter from the *Chicago Defender* that things were going so well that the school administration might even reverse their earlier ruling and allow them to attend school dances and other events. Of course, they would promise to “dance with Negro girls only.”\(^56\)

Not all the black students felt as optimistic about the situation, however. That afternoon, Bobby Cain came home, sat down in his living room and “‘just kind of trembled for a little while.’” Meanwhile, the situation downtown worsened. That afternoon, a group of


\(^56\) Interview with Jo Ann Boyce; interview with Mattie Bell Henley; Moses Newsom, “Mixed Schools ‘Old Hat’ to One Junior in Clinton,” *Chicago Defender*, September 13, 1956, 10.
white men threatened one of the black female students and her mother. Another white 
individual threw a bottle at a black woman walking by the school. By that evening, several 
hundred spectators assembled a few blocks from the school on the courthouse lawn and 
listened as speaker after speaker urged white Clintonians to defy the federal court. The 
speakers told the crowd that men who cared about protecting their wives and daughters from 
black sexual predators, Communists and “race mongrelizers” would resist desegregation 
and harass anyone attempting to implement it. “If you had a sheriff, if you have a police 
chief with any guts he would arrest the first Negro student and the parents of that student to 
enter Clinton High School,” one of the men shouted.57 The next morning, the black teens 
who walked down the Hill faced a larger, angrier group of protestors. The crowds of militant 
segregationists continued to grow larger and more violent as the week progressed. With each 
day that passed, the journey from the Hill to the school seemed to lengthen. The twelve “tried 
to appear brave and grown-up,” teacher Margaret Anderson recalled in her memoir The 
Children of the South, “but they did not know when the people who had come to jeer at them 
would carry out their threats. After a few days, they came to look upon getting inside the 
school as a victory.”58

During our conversation, Jo Ann Allen Boyce talked to me about how quickly the 
situation had deteriorated. She mourned what had happened during that first week, believing

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that “had we been given the opportunity, I think that many of the children who went to that school, young men and women, would have gotten to know people just like them: people who loved to read; people who loved to write poetry; people who liked to sing; people who were interested in music and could play instruments. People who enjoyed math. People who enjoyed English.” She had held out a bit longer than some of her black peers believing that she would be accepted at her new school eventually. When the number of protestors grew to the point where they lined both sides of the streets, even she had to admit that the school year would not progress as she had hoped. At that point in our conversation, her eyes began to fill with tears. “I don’t know why I’m so sad today,” she continued, “but that opportunity was lost.”

Cries of “‘Go home! We don’t want you here! Get out! Go on back to Africa! Nigger! Coon! … Pickaninny!’” surrounded the black teens as they walked to and from school. “I used to wonder, … ‘Go back to Africa? Wait, I’ve never lived in Africa. Why would I go back there?’” Jo Ann Boyce recalled. In addition to yelling, the protestors also pelted the black students with rocks, rotten eggs, rotten tomatoes and sticks. “The rocks are what I remember the most,” Boyce continued. “I can remember the rocks whistling as they passed your ear. That’s how close they would get. … You didn’t dare turn your head. You just didn’t dare.”

As the number of protestors outside the school swelled, the situation inside the building worsened. White students who had leered and glared at the black students on the

59 Interview with Jo Ann Boyce.

60 Ibid; interview with Theresser Caswell; interview with Bobby Cain.
first day progressed to verbal threats and then physical attacks by the end of the week. Because of the building tension inside the institution, the twelve did not feel comfortable eating in the cafeteria. Clinton High’s students were allowed off campus for lunch, and several of the black students began using that option. On Wednesday of that first week, seniors Bobby Cain and Alfred Williams met a couple of friends for lunch at the Richy Cream, a local soda shop. As they walked back to school, they were met by a crowd of more than one hundred whites. They attempted to turn and walk away, but “some of the young men were confronting us,” Cain recalled. Both Cain and Williams carried pocket knives. They pulled their knives out in case they needed to defend themselves, though they did not show the weapons to the white crowd. “Someone hit my arm with the placard, … and they knocked the knife out of my hand,” Cain explained. “Next thing I knew, they were all on us with these placards and sticks and whatever else. … They wore my back out.”

Cain, Williams and their friends fought back as best they could, but they were badly outnumbered and could not extricate themselves. “I guess we thought we were so macho that we could go through this crowd, but they taught us a lesson. I didn’t do that again,” Cain concluded. Eventually, the police arrived and ended the attack. They took Cain into custody. They charged him with disorderly conduct and carrying a knife, but they claimed that they had picked him up for his own protection. They also arrested a white student and one of the black teens who had met Cain and Williams for lunch, charging both of them with carrying

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61 DJ Brittain Jr., “A Case study of the Problems of Racial Integration in Clinton, Tennessee High School: A Study Concerned with the Problems Faced by School Officials in the Racial Integration of a Public Secondary School in Compliance with a Federal Court Order,” Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1960, 107a; interview with Bobby Cain. His father would later tell journalist June Anderson that one of the key attackers was Mary Nell Currier, one of the fifteen who would be arrested in connection with the December attack on the Reverend Paul Turner; Robert Cain Sr., interview by June Adamson, analog recording, January 20, 1979, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.
knives. Each of the three teens was placed under two hundred fifty dollars bond. After attacking Cain, some of the whites went into a local barbershop. They grabbed Eugene Gibson, the shop’s black seventeen-year-old shoeshine boy, and dragged him into the streets. The police also took Gibson into protective custody, but they did not arrest any of the whites who had attacked him.62

The police’s response that afternoon changed Cain. By the time his older half-brother came to bail him out of jail, Cain had become harder and more determined. First, he decided that from then on, he would defend himself against anyone who attacked him. Cain and Williams began practicing self-defense. They always carried their knives, and they wedged toothpicks into the blades so that they could flip the knives open when faced with a surprise attack. “We [practiced until we] could get those knives like a cowboy could get his pistol out of the holder. Seriously,” Cain said, showing me the scars on his thumbs from all the times he had cut himself pulling the weapon out of his pocket. “Luckily, I did not have to cut anybody” or I would be in jail. After the attack and his arrest, Cain also felt a greater personal stake in desegregation’s success. “I won’t say I wasn’t afraid after that,” he told a Collier’s reporter later that fall, “but it came to me for the first time that I had a right to go to school. I realized that it was those other people who were breaking the law, not me. That night I determined to stick it out for Bobby Cain, and not for anybody else.”63

Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. was in his office being interviewed by four newspaper reporters when the attacks on Cain and Williams occurred. He looked out the window and

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62 Interview with Bobby Cain; The Oak Ridger, August 30, 1956, 1, 7.

saw the black youths being chased by the white mob. Then came the news that Cain had been arrested for carrying a knife. Frightened by how quickly things were spiraling beyond the control of local law enforcement, Brittain slipped the black students out the back door and sent them home under police protection before the mob realized they had left. Before they went, he told them to return to school the next morning. He also decided not to suspend Cain.64

When the police arrived at the school to collect the black students, the teenagers realized that something serious had happened. Anna Theresser Caswell was in study hall. She had heard the noise outside but had not known what was happening in the city’s streets. As a policeman walked her to his waiting police car, he kept telling Caswell’s teacher, “Tell her not to look down. Tell her not to look down the street.” Intrigued, Caswell looked behind her and saw the white mob. What frightened Caswell the most was knowing that she and her good friend Alva McSwain Lambert had just walked up the street where Bobby Cain and Albert Williams had been attacked. They had gone to eat an early lunch with Lambert’s mother, who worked at the county jail. “We had just come in that same door where those people were waiting,” she marveled.65

Not all of the twelve went home with the police that day. Since Gail Ann Upton Epps did not live on the Hill, her family came to get her. A friend had called her aunt, Mattie Bell Henley, and told her that “they planned to go in and mob those kids in there.” Epps’ mother

64 United States Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain et. al. v. County Board of Education of Anderson County, 1950, Case No. 1555,” August 30, 1956, United States District Court, Eastern District of Tennessee at Knoxville, Civil Liberties Cases, National Archives and Records Administration—Southeast Region, Atlanta, GA, 27-29.

65 Interview with Theresser Caswell; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 205-06; The Oak Ridger, August 30, 1956, 1, 7.
picked up Henley, and the two women went downtown to pick up Gail. “When my car drove up, they began to gather around my car, these agitators.” Henley paused. “I don’t like to talk about it too much because—. But anyway, my sister got out.” When Epps’ mother got out of the car, some of the white men started toward the vehicle. She took off running but fell over a bush. A friendly white man caught her and escorted her toward the school door. “He was as worried as I was,” Epps’ mother recalled. She claimed that the protestors “had hand grenades and all.” All the black students returned the next day.66

**CONFLICT INSIDE THE SCHOOL:**

The segregationist students began their assault on the black students by isolating them from the rest of the student body. They harassed whites who were friendly with—or even just polite to—the African Americans. Within that first week, most of the budding interracial friendships withered. “Most of us children were nice, but they were afraid,” Regina Turner Smith recalls, “afraid to be friends with us and afraid to talk to us.” Boyce agrees. “Those kids got called ‘nigger lover,’ and they didn’t want that,” she explained. “Even the kids who were tolerant were trying to move back, began to pull away.” At the end of September, Jo Ann Allen Boyce and a white student named Carole Peters were invited to Washington, DC, to appear on the “College Press Conference,” a TV program. On this program, they—along with a group of elite college students—met with United States Attorney General Herbert Brownell and asked him questions about the federal government. Peters and Boyce focused their questions on school desegregation. They also joined Brownell for dinner after the taping

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was completed. Carole’s mother was their chaperone. The two girls got along well during the trip, but within a few weeks, even Carole was less friendly toward the black students because of the pressure from her white peers.67

As the black students’ allies drifted away, the hostile students began openly attacking them. The segregationist teens developed a variety of ways to bully the black students. They targeted the black students’ belongings, sometimes putting new locks on their lockers, which made the twelve late to class. Other times, whites poured vials of ink into the black students’ lockers or smashed eggs in their books. They also harassed the African Americans in the locker rooms. For instance, Bobby Cain and Maurice Soles were in the same gym class. When they showered after exercising, white students flushed the commodes, which caused bursts of scalding water to pour out of the shower heads. “I guess it was supposed to be a joke,” Cain said, “but it wasn’t a joke to us.” The two boys learned to take turns showering so that the one could watch the toilets. Some white students threatened the black students in the hallways, where teachers had trouble policing student behavior. The white troublemakers tossed nails in the faces of the black students or brandished knives and ice picks at them as they walked to class. Other whites put thumbtacks in the black students’ seats, though Jo Ann Boyce remembered thinking that was “kind of stupid because most of the time you were looking at your seat.”68

“At first I wasn’t afraid,” Theresser Caswell remembered, shaking her head. “I guess I was young and I didn’t really know I should be afraid.” She soon learned otherwise. She

67 Interview with Regina Turner Smith; interview with Jo Ann Boyce; interview with Theresser Caswell; Clinton Courier-News, September 20, 1956, 1:1.

had been partially crippled by a debilitating condition. She had already undergone multiple surgeries on her legs and feet to correct the condition, and she would have several more during the 1956-57 school year. She spent most of the year on crutches. Because of her disability, she was a particularly easy target. “Boys, like real tall boys, you know, … they would hit you on your head,” she remembered. “I did a lot of jumping.” Gail Ann Upton Epps and Jo Ann Allen Boyce both had long hair that they wore in ponytails. White students would walk behind them, grab the ponytails and yank the girls’ hair straight down, snapping their chins toward the ceiling. Other students walked on the girls’ heels until blood flowed into their shoes.69

Other attacks were more pointed and menacing. For instance, a white boy twisted a piece of twine into a noose and, looking straight at one of the black students, stuck his finger into it, mimicking a lynching. Margaret Anderson remembered hearing white students telling the twelve, “‘If you come back to school, I’ll cut your guts out.’” Maurice Soles remembered that the worst thing that happened to him occurred one day in study hall when someone threw a snake around his neck. He assumed it was a play snake and so did not react until he felt it beginning to move. Gail Epps’ most frightening experience occurred in the second floor hallway. When the school system had added the auditorium onto the two-story building a few years earlier, they had not sealed the upstairs windows. As Epps walked down the hallway, someone grabbed her and began to push her through an open window. She looked down at the auditorium seats more than a story below and then elbowed her attacker hard in the

stomach. When he released her, she ran out of the school, but she never reported what had happened. “We just didn’t say anything bad was wrong,” she explained. “We figured it’d probably make it worse.” Even if they wanted to turn to the teachers or administrators for help, it was often difficult to report who had hurt them. Before most attacks, a group of white students would gather around the targeted black teenager and begin jostling him or her. “You couldn’t just pick out one person and say, “Him,” because there were so many of them … passing back and forth,” Alfred Williams explained. “You couldn’t say, “Well, he hit me” or “She hit me” … because they were [surrounding us].”

A few white students held out against the pressure, finding quiet ways to let the black students know that they had allies. The football team attempted to patrol the halls of the school, and their presence prevented the school from devolving into riots. Bobby Cain remembered that a couple of the football players would even ask how he was doing. Another white student always chose one of the black boys first when it came time to pick teams for gym class. “I can remember about two [white] people my whole freshman year being friendly,” Caswell told me. “I still see the both of them.”

Within the school, as on the city streets, most whites insisted that they preferred segregation but were committed to “law and order.” This stand meant that though they would not join the rioters in the streets or the troublemakers in the school, they had little investment in helping the black students remain in the school. In addition, the majority of the white

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worried about what would happen to them if they attempted to befriend the twelve. The segregationist students had already proven that they were willing to verbally harass whites who were nice to the African American teens. Would they physically assault other whites as well? As historian Michael J. Klarman suggests, “the suppression of moderate opinion had a cascading effect: as some people were intimidated into silence, the pressure on others to conform intensified.” But by looking the other way and refusing to stand with the black students, the majority of the white population in Clinton and in the high school implicitly condoned the violent tactics employed by the militant segregationists.72

Though they faced anger and isolation from their white peers and their parents, the twelve did find a few allies among the school’s teachers, most of whom were white middle-class women. Because of their positions, these women had more interactions with the black students than almost any other whites in the town, and they came to respect the students’ determination. They were key to the black students’ ability to stay in the school. The women worked to make sure that the twelve did not fall too far behind in their studies, and they also found ways to encourage the teens and integrate their voices and achievements in their classrooms.

Sue Byerly, a young, enthusiastic history teacher, had Bobby Cain in one of her classes. She asked him to memorize the Declaration of Independence and then recite it in front of the class. When he finished, she praised him in front of the other students, giving his confidence a boost. Another teacher stopped Bobby Cain in the hall and apologized to him, saying “‘We’re sorry you have to go through this.’” Margaret Anderson found herself drawn

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72 Ibid.
toward Regina Turner Smith after seeing Smith harassed during a study hall. The next day, after calling Smith at home to learn what had happened, Anderson reprimanded the students. A few of them even apologized for their behavior. “She really stood up to that whole study period and rearranged the whole thing,” Smith remembered. “She went to the trouble to do so.” Instead of assigning Maurice Soles a non-speaking role in the class play or consigning him to the sidelines, Eleanor Davis gave Soles the role of noted educator Booker T. Washington. When Celdon Lewallen—who was never one to back down from a fight—saw a group of white students gang up on one of the smaller black students, she grabbed her thermos and charged into the fray. She yelled, “‘Get the hell out of my way!’” before cracking her thermos over one of the attackers’ heads and rescuing the victim.73

Despite their teachers’ help, the twelve struggled to keep up with their studies. Many of the black students felt that they had begun high school slightly behind their white peers anyway. The teachers at Green McAdoo Elementary School had done their best given the resources at their disposal, but the school board had insured that the town’s black children had a different education than the one given to white children. Black students used out-of-date textbooks that the white schools had discarded. Green McAdoo was a two-room schoolhouse which had no gymnasium prior to 1956. Multiple grades had to study together, which divided the teachers’ attention. The library was small enough to be housed in the principal’s tiny office.74 Furthermore, because the elementary school had only two teachers, 


74 In 1956, the Anderson County School Board, which worried that the community’s black parents would sue for integrated elementary schools, upgraded several of the county’s black elementary schools. One of the improvements made to Green McAdoo was the addition of the gymnasium.
the students absorbed their teachers’ weaknesses as well as their strengths. Most of them did well in English and history, but they had more trouble with mathematics.75

Because of the turmoil at the high school, the twelve did not have the energy and concentration they needed to catch up to their peers. Most of them found it difficult to focus long enough to complete their homework at all. Margaret Anderson remembered a conversation she had with one of the twelve who was preparing to go to college. The young woman had decided not to complete one of the classes from her first year, which meant that she had a failing grade on her transcript. She worried that the mark would keep her from being accepted into school. “‘I could have passed that course, only I was so upset,’” the teen told Anderson. Anderson noted that the young woman went on to do very well in college.76

The students could not leave the tensions behind them when they left school. Their homes on the Hill were just a few blocks away from the city square where the segregationists held their nightly rallies. Unknown vehicles drove through the Hill at night on their way to and from their activities downtown, sometimes pausing in front of the students’ houses. Ku Klux Klan caravans drove through the neighborhood. One night, Gail Ann Upton Epps and her sister were in their rooms upstairs when she “heard this noise, … a scraping like they were” trying to break into the house. When her mother turned on the spotlights installed on the back of the house, they heard a car start up somewhere in the woods nearby. The next morning, one white man who seemed to know what had happened the night before pointed at her as she walked into the school building and said, “‘Don’t you know they came back here

75 Interview with Jo Ann Boyce; interview with Bobby Cain; interview with Alfred Williams.

76 Interview with Jo Ann Boyce; interview with Bobby Cain; interview with Alfred Williams; Anderson, *Children*, 66.
again this morning.’” Each of the students faced similar intimidation. Cain’s mother told a friendly white woman that some nights her family was so frightened that they would all “sleep together and hold onto each other.”

The parents of the twelve decided they could better protect their children if they moved them to a centralized location. Whenever tensions heightened, the mothers and children slept in the basement of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church. The men and older boys armed themselves with shotguns and hid around the perimeter of the Hill, monitoring who came in and out of their neighborhood. The first night that the students, along with their mothers and younger siblings, hid in Mt. Sinai’s basement, Minnie Ann Dickie Jones remembered feeling that “life had turned into a nightmare.” Her little sister cried and asked Minnie if she would die. I still have “‘to put that in the back [of my mind],’” Jones told a reporter in the spring of 2009. “‘It just bothers me to think about the hate.’”

At the height of the conflict, some members of the school board and the local police department offered to pay for the black students’ tuition and transportation to and from Austin High School in Knoxville if the black parents would just take them out of Clinton High School. The parents refused. Surprisingly, Sidney Davis, Buford Lewallen and Eugene Joyce, the lawyers who had originally argued against desegregating the school, advised the parents to stand by their decision. The white men believed that if the Twelve succeeded, Clinton could be an example of the potential of the New South. “They would come to our home to encourage us and ask us to keep the children [in Clinton High],” Mattie Bell Henley

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77 Leo Burnett, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, March 20, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 208-10.

remembered. They told them that “if the parents … stopped the children from going, then it would be hurting the others, the rest of the black people.”

The stress began to take its toll on the twelve. “It was not easy being someplace that you were not welcome,” Minnie Ann Dickie Jones remembered. Boyce remembered how difficult it was to have “all of those things combined:

having to go out of your home [at night], not knowing what was going to happen to your home when you left it, if somebody would come and throw dynamite in there; having to spend nights on a bench in the church; having had the police bring you home in the middle of the school day; not being able to go to the cafeteria without getting totally harassed, so that you couldn’t even eat. I had an apple in my hand in one of the pictures. … I carried that apple because I didn’t know when I’d get to eat again. Lunchtime was not lunchtime.

Though the protesting whites did not want any of the black students to finish the school year, Bobby Cain and Alfred Williams—the two black seniors at Clinton High that year—were the focus for much of the white anger, which may be the reason they were attacked during lunch on Wednesday of the first week while the girls came and went unmolested. The segregationists’ reasoning for this was simple: if either Cain or Williams managed to graduate, then the younger black students would be harder to intimidate. They would know that it was possible for them to earn a diploma from Clinton High. “See, that was the main thing,” Robert Cain Sr., Bobby’s father, explained. “They knew that if one Negro graduated there, then some more could graduate.”

79 Interview with Mattie Bell Henley.

80 Minnie Ann Dickie Jones, “Minnie Ann Dickie Jones,” http://www.greenmeadoo.org/clinton_twelve.html; interview with Jo Ann Boyce. This image was used for the model for Boyce’s statue.

81 Interview with Robert Cain Sr.
Reporter George McMillan profiled Cain for an article in *Collier’s Magazine* at the end of the third week of school and marveled at how overtaxed the youth seemed to be. “He reminded me of the men I had interviewed when I served as a Marine combat correspondent in World War II,” McMillan recorded. The characteristics McMillan recognized in Cain do sound similar to symptoms contemporary psychologists attribute to patients with post-traumatic stress disorder. “As we talked, drops of sweat gathered on his forehead and began to run down his cheek [and] he pressed his palms together nervously,” McMillan recounted. Furthermore, the reporter remarked, Cain seemed to be blocking some of his memories of what had happened to him. “It is impossible for men who have really ‘had it’ to talk about their experience until their memories have had an interval in which to reject the intolerable,” McMillan explained to his readers. “When I asked him, for example, what names he had been called when he ran the gauntlet of segregationists who crowded around the sidewalks of Clinton High, he looked away and answered in a voice so low I could barely hear him. ‘Coon …’ he said, his voice trailing off. He insisted he could not remember any others.”

Cain’s experiences changed him in other ways that McMillan could not see during the interview. He withdrew from his family and friends. His mother remembered that “‘he began to act different and strange with his brothers and sisters. They got on his nerves, and he asked

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82 The psychological definition of a traumatic event certain fits the Twelve’s circumstances. “A traumatic event is one in which a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening,” explains trauma scholar Susan J. Brison. “the immediately psychological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders and the more psychological, yet still involuntary, responses of depression, inability to concentrate, lack of interests in activities that used to give life meaning and a sense of a foreshortened future.” The most damaging type of trauma is that which is inflicted intentionally by other humans. That experience “not only shatters one’s fundamental assumptions about the world and one’s safety in it, but also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity;” Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” in *Acts of Memory*, 40.

me to keep them quiet.’’ He had headaches every night ‘‘because his nerves would be so jagged and edged,’’ his father remembered. When it was time for bed, he would take two aspirins, pray for his safety and that of his family and then lay sleepless. In retrospect, Cain agrees with McMillan’s comparison between him and war veterans. During our conversation in 2009, he told me that when he read about the problems faced by soldiers who had fought in Iraq or Afghanistan, he recognizes himself. ‘‘I probably needed some of that [help the Veterans’ Administration offers to returning soldiers],’’ he told me as he recounted the ways his time at Clinton High continues to affect him today.84

Even at the time, Cain realized how close he was to falling apart. He asked his parents if he could withdraw from school. ‘‘The thing that hurt me the most was that he had to go through all that suffering just to go to school when he really had nothing to do with the law being changed and neither did I,’’ his father recalled. The elder Cains worried about what this year was doing to their son, but ultimately they decided that Bobby had to stay at Clinton High. ‘‘I had to scuffle to get what little education I got,’’ his mother explained to him when she told him their decision. She told him that she understood why he wanted to quit the school and that they, too, were worried, but they could not afford to send all of their children to school in Knoxville. ‘‘What about the others in there asleep? Where are your brothers and sisters going to school if you don’t stick?’’ she asked him. His father agreed, though for more political reasons. He recognized that his son’s success was tied to the national struggle for racial equality. ‘‘I refused to tell him not to go,’’ the older Cain explained. If I had let him

84 Ibid., 338; interview with Robert Cain Sr.; interview with Bobby Cain.
quit, “I’d of been wrong” So every morning, Bobby got up, met the others and walked down the Hill.85

By the end of that first week, thousands of local residents were attending the nightly segregationist rallies, and the mob of whites threatened to overrun downtown. The small police force could not control them, so the mayor deputized an additional forty-seven white men. This makeshift home guard was charged with protecting the courthouse and the homes of the city officials. They provided no support to the African American neighborhood. By Saturday night, it was clear that even with the additional men, there were too few law enforcement officials in Clinton to control the rioters. Tennessee Governor Frank Clement stepped in. That night, he sent one hundred members of the State Highway Patrol to Clinton to keep the peace. The next day, he replaced them with the Tennessee National Guard. Unlike Texas Governor Alan Shivers who had sent the Texas Rangers to prevent black students from entering a white high school in a suburb of Fort Worth or Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus a year later who would use the National Guard to stymie desegregation in Little Rock, Clement sent the troops to Clinton to enforce the court order, a move which may well have cost this popular politician his bid for the presidency. Before that weekend, national Democratic Party leaders had discussed the possibility of this popular, progressive Southerner leading the national ticket. His decision to come to Clinton’s aid silenced any further conversation.

85 Ibid.
regarding his presidency as those who supported the segregationist fight asked why Clement did not join the other governors in defying the federal courts.  

The soldiers remained in Clinton for several weeks. When the town appeared to have settled into a tense peace, they gradually withdrew. For a time after they left, the town’s streets remained quiet, which convinced many of the law-and-order whites that open resistance to the court order had ended. For the black students who had to survive the school’s hallways, however, the situation had not improved. “You’re going to hear people tell you that everything was okie-doke and all that, but that’s not true,” Bobby Cain warned me during our conversation. “They are probably going to act as though … things were ok, but my entire senior year was bad.” He told me about one day that fall when he walked out of his classroom and into an ambush. When he finally reached his next class, he asked his teacher for permission to go see Principal D.J. Brittian Jr. Instead of visiting the principal, “I walked out of school,” Cain recalled. “Alfred saw me and asked where I was going, and I said, ‘I can’t take this any more, and I’m gone.’ [So] we both walked out.” That night, he announced that he was leaving high school. His mother asked him what he thought he would do with his life without his diploma. “I don’t know, Ma,” he replied. “I’m just through. I can’t take it any more. Maybe I’ll go in the s—.” His mother cut short his reply, “You are not going in the service. That’s out. Period. And you’re not going [back] to Knoxville [to attend Austin High School], because we don’t have money to send you. And so what are you going to do


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about it?” She then again reminded him that, as important as his own future was, his
decision also affected his younger siblings. The next day, he went back to Clinton High.87

As the pressure mounted, some of the other students’ determination also faltered.

After the first couple of weeks, William Latham left the school. Some years later, Theresser
Caswell asked him why. “‘After the first week or two, I knew I wouldn’t be able to stand it,’”
he told her. “‘I couldn’t take it.’” To give the remaining black students some support, civil
rights educator and progressive activist Myles Horton invited them to visit him at the nearby
Highlander Folk School, which was where many of the early civil rights activists received
their training in nonviolent resistance. During their weekends there, the black students
devoted part of their time to classwork, getting the quiet they needed to concentrate and the
tutoring they needed to survive their classes. The Highlander staff filled the rest of their time
with programming designed to meet the teenagers’ social and emotional needs. One
weekend, for instance, the students went hiking. Theresser Caswell, who found it difficult to
walk because of her handicap, remembered that the staff ensured that she could participate.

Another weekend, the Highlander staff invited teenagers from nearby communities to a dance
in the twelve’s honor. Highlander supporters also sent care packages to the students filled
with candy and other goodies to remind them that no matter how lonely they were at Clinton
High School, they had friends elsewhere. In addition, the students met some of the civil
rights movement’s celebrities including Septima Clark and Rosa Parks.88

87 Interview with Bobby Cain.
88 Interview with Theresser Caswell; interview with Regina Turner Smith.
BOYCOTTING CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL:

After a few riot-free months, Clinton’s law-and-order whites learned what the black students had known all fall: the segregationist protest movement was not dead. In mid-November, the conflict spilled back into Clinton’s streets. Protestors again gathered around the school to harass the black children. A bombing campaign replaced the nightly segregationist rallies. Dynamiters destroyed black homes and businesses and detonated bombs near the properties of white supporters of law and order.

The threats in the school halls grew even more violent with the formation of the Tennessee White Youth in late October 1956.89 A white student accosted Bobby Cain one day after school. The youth reached in his pocket where he presumably had stashed his knife, looked at Cain and said, “I hope you got yours because I’ve got mine.” Anonymous callers warned black parents that if they sent the children to Clinton High School, the white students “would whip … [them] real good.” On Tuesday, November 27, two white boys threw eggs at three of the black female students. Fed up with having to fight the mobs to get inside the school just to have to fight their white peers to get to class, two of the black boys walked out of their classes and told Brittain that “they were ‘tired of being molested’” and would not return.90

The next day, the black families announced that their children would boycott Clinton High School until the town provided them with the protection needed to insure their safety. This placed the school, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. and the Anderson County School Board in

89 For more information on the Tennessee White Youth, see chapter 5.

90 Interview with Bobby Cain; interview with Robert Cain Sr.; The Oak Ridger, November 29, 1956, 1; The Oak Ridger, November 28, 1956, 1-2; Clinton Courier-News, November 29, 1956, 1; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 108.
contempt of the federal court order. When he heard about their decision, Brittain, who was always more responsive to the black students’ needs than the school board, asked the police to provide increased patrols around the school and told the student body that “any further acts against the Negro students would result in the expulsion of whoever committed the acts.”

That Thursday, Bobby Cain and four others tried to go to school. A truck sporting a White Citizens' Council sticker and filled with unidentified white men blocked their route off the Hill. The students turned back. When the editor of the *Clinton Courier-News* investigated their continued absence, he reported that the men had been able to set up their road block because there were no police officers patrolling the school. When the editor asked the chief of police where the officers were, the chief explained that he had sent his officers to “‘a meeting somewhere.’”

That Thursday night, the black parents met to discuss what they would do next. They decided that despite all the opposition, they would continue to insist that their children receive the protection they needed to get the education they had won. Pending the Anderson County School Board’s response to the parents’ request, the black students did not try to reach the school on Friday, but one of them told a local paper that their absence did not mean that they intended to return to a all-black high school. “‘We want to continue in Clinton High,’” she said. “‘That’s where we belong.’”

When the black students stayed away again on Monday, December 3, First Baptist Church of Clinton’s pastor the Reverend Paul Turner, former district attorney Sidney Davis,

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91 Interview with Robert Cain Sr.; *The Oak Ridger*, November 28, 1956, 1-2; *Clinton Courier-News*, November 29, 1956, 1, 4; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 108; *The Oak Ridger*, November 29, 1956, 1.

92 *The Oak Ridger*, November 29, 1956, 1.
and Magnet Knitting Mills administrator Leo Burnett offered to escort the children into Clinton High School. The black families accepted their offer. On Tuesday, December 4, the children walked down the Hill and through the mobs under the protection of their white guides. “I didn’t want to go to Clinton High School in the first place,” Regina Turner Smith said, “but I knew I had a right to be there, and I wasn’t afraid.” After walking them through the door, the three white men left. Burnett and Davis walked back through the crowd without incident, but some of the mob members chased Turner through the town and beat him. Another group of rioters entered the school, announced that they were looking for the black children and shoved Principal D.J. Brittain Jr.’s wife, who was a home economics teacher. Brittain closed the school until the following Monday.

For white Clintonians, this day marked a turning point in the desegregation story. This was the last time the mobs would take over Clinton’s streets. The supporters of law-and-order and even some of the militant segregationists were appalled that anyone would attack a respected local white pastor. It was an election day in the town, and the law-and-order whites turned out in record numbers, soundly defeating the militant segregationists’ candidates who had run for the available municipal positions.

Though they occasionally missed a few nights, the men on the Hill had never ceased their patrols. Most of them remained hidden when the segregationists drove through. They were prepared to act if they needed to do so, but they did not openly confront the whites. That night, however, Herbert Allen, who was Jo Ann Allen Boyce’s father, decided it was take to take a public stand in defense of his family and his home. When the Klan came

through the Hill, Allen stood in front of his house, holding his rifle. The police arrested him.\textsuperscript{94}

Afraid that both her husband and daughter were now targets for the militant segregationists’ anger, Alice Hopper Allen, Jo Ann Allen’s mother, announced that they would join her brother’s family in Los Angeles as soon as Herbert was released. The family left town so quickly that they did not take the majority of their furniture, books, toys or other belongings. Publicly, Jo Ann Allen Boyce aligned herself with her mother. “‘I’ll be glad when the Yuletide holiday is over and I can get back to school—a peaceful school!’” she told a local paper. “‘Just think, I won’t have to worry about anything except getting good grades.’” Privately, however, she resented being forced to abandon her friends in the middle of the year, in the middle of their fight. Her transition to her new high school was not an easy one. “I did go to a good school” in Los Angeles, she recalled:

[but] when I first started going there, it was like being in a foreign country. It was so different from what I knew. It was much larger, and … [the student body] had blacks, whites and Asians. I had not all black teachers or all white teachers, but I had black teachers, white teachers, Asian teachers, Hispanic teachers. Wow. I didn’t quite know what to do with that.”

After having spent the last semester trying to be invisible lest she attract unwanted attention, she struggled to even make eye contact with or say hello to her fellow students, which made it hard for her to make friends. She realized that she was so used to being on guard that she no longer knew how to interact with people of her own age. It took her more than a year before she could relax.\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{94} Interview with Jo Ann Boyce.

**SPRINGTIME AT CLINTON HIGH SCHOOL:**

When the students returned after the holidays, the militant segregationists launched what Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. called “‘a war of nerves’” against the black students. They resumed their hallway attacks and continued other harassments, but they also made more threatening gestures that suggested the situation could escalate at Clinton High. One Thursday night in mid-January the segregationist teens vandalized Clinton High School, breaking five of the school’s plate glass windows and hanging two African Americans in effigy at the school. Brittain began to worry that the strain would goad the African Americans “into some action which will call for disciplinary measures or possibly trigger widespread violence.”

“The only thing I wanted to do was just go on to school and get my diploma,” Alfred Williams told me sadly. School had never come easily for Williams, and desegregation had made his struggle for an education even more challenging. “You couldn’t study down there,” he explained to me. “You got people calling you that ‘n’ word and then throwing things and hitting you. You had to keep your eyes on making sure you didn’t get hurt or nothing like that because you had to take care of yourself.” At twenty-one, he was one of the oldest students in the school, but he was also much smaller than many of the white boys who tormented him. As one of two black seniors in the school, he had born the brunt of much of the segregationists’ anger.

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96 For more on the students who hung the effigies, see Chapter 4. *The Oak Ridger*, January 10, 1957; *The Knoxville Journal*, January 11, 1957, 1; *The Knoxville Journal*, February 24, 1957, 1; *Clinton Courier-News*, January 17, 1957, 1; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 173-81.

97 Interview with Alfred Williams.
On Thursday, January 31, Alfred Williams had stayed behind at the school. He thought he was the only black student left in the building, but when he went back to his locker to get his things, he saw his younger half-brother Maurice Soles was still there. A group of white teens had surrounded Soles, and they were taunting him. “‘He had no way to get through,’” Williams remembered. “I wasn’t going to let them jump on my brother.” As he started toward the group, he heard someone say, “‘We’re going to kill him.’” Williams panicked. The knife practice with Bobby Cain had prepared him for just such a confrontation. He flipped his knife open as he pulled it from his pocket and charged into the group to free Soles. “‘I had that hot temper,’” Williams later admitted, and that already hot temper had been shortened by six months of conflict and violence. “I said, ‘Now if they [are] going to fight my brother, they’re going to have to kill me, too,’” he remembered.98

Williams grabbed fifteen-year-old Dan Ward and shoved him into a locker. Ward kept his hands in his pockets when Williams attacked, and so Williams believed that Ward was also armed with a knife. Williams brandished his weapon in Ward’s face and yelled, “‘Do you want to fight him now? You’ve been picking on him when I’m not around.’” Ward called out to his friends, “Get him!” The white students turned their attack on Williams. Unbeknownst to Williams, Regina Turner Smith and Gail Ann Upton Epps were both still at school as well. When they heard the yelling, they came to help. They did not carry knives, but it had been raining earlier that day, so they did have umbrellas which they used to hit the white students. Eventually teachers arrived to break up the fight, they released all the

students except for Williams and Soles. After briefly looking at Williams’ knife, they returned it to him and sent the two boys home. They told Williams to report to the office the next morning instead of going to his home room class.99

Ward and Jimmy Ray McGill—a white teen who had also participated in the attack—believed that they could use the fight to have Williams expelled from Clinton High. To ensure that the administration could not let him off with a warning, they reported the altercation to the police. After hearing their account of what happened, Police Chief Francis Moore took an unmarked car and drove toward the Hill. He found Williams and Soles walking home, and he searched them for weapons because Ward and McGill had claimed that Williams had pulled out an illegal switchblade rather than a pocket knife. “I searched them good. I even looked in their shoes,” he explained to the local segregationist newspaper the East Tennessee Reporter. “All I found in the way of a weapon was a little penknife with a blade about one-and-a-half inches long.” Moore then asked Williams what had happened. Perhaps to keep his brother out of trouble, Williams did not mention the attack on Soles; instead, he said that Ward had left a thumbtack in his seat earlier in the day. When he saw Ward standing in the hall, Williams confronted him about it. He told Chief Moore that in response, “Ward called him a dirty name and asked him, ‘What if I did?’” Williams admitted to Moore that he had hit Ward “and was very sorry about it.” Because of the size of Williams’ weapon, Moore announced that he would not file assault charges against Williams and Soles. School administrators would have to handle the situation.100

99 Ibid.

100 East Tennessee Reporter February 8, 1957, 1, 4.
The militant segregationist students had long suspected that Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. and other school administrators were sympathetic toward the black students. Whenever something happened at the school, the officials, “‘the most of them, just try to make it appear that it is our fault,’” one white student explained to the *East Tennessee Reporter*. When Moore refused to arrest Williams, the white students began to question whether they could continue to turn to the police for aid. The *East Tennessee Reporter* seemed to be the only official voice in the town that took their complaints as seriously as the segregationist students desired. Increasingly the militant segregationist students used the newspaper to air their grievances.101

“Knife-Wielding Negroes Cause Student Withdrawal,” the paper’s headline announced the next week. The editor had done extensive interviews with the white students involved in the altercation with Williams and related their side of the events to his readers. Dan Ward claimed that he had just been standing in the hallway when Williams passed, mumbling “‘something under his breath. … I asked him what he said, [and] he just hauled off and hit me in the face.’” Jimmy Ray McGill corroborated this version of events. He said that he heard the commotion and saw Williams holding Ward up against a locker. “‘When I got within about 20 feet of them, Alfred whirled around and jerked out a yellow-handled switch-blade knife,’” McGill continued. “‘He said, ‘I know who you are and I’m gonna cut your ——— out.’” Carl Rutherford, a fifteen-year-old freshman who delivered newspapers on the 

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101 Ibid.
Hill claimed that Williams then turned on him and promised that if Rutherford came up on the Hill again, “he would cut his guts out.”

Ward and McGill’s families also tried to overturn Moore’s decision not to arrest Williams by going before a grand jury and asking them to charge Williams with felonious assault. The grand jury refused because of the size of Williams’ pocket knife. In protest, Ward’s parents withdrew him from school. “He has lost in his grades and everything this year—just like most of them there,” Ward’s father explained. “I would rather have him home than in that mess up there.”

Though Williams was not arrested for the attack, he was punished for it. When he went to the office the next morning, the school administrators suspended him indefinitely for carrying a knife on school grounds. “I know it was more than just carrying a knife at school,” Williams said bleakly. “It was my grades and everything.” The administrators sent a letter to Williams’ guardians explaining that in their estimation Williams “age and apparent inability to keep up with his classmates [meant that] he should enroll in a vocational school or obtain employment.” Williams’ family had ten days to appeal the decision. At first, Williams remembered, he was inclined to allow his suspension to become an expulsion. “I figured that [if] I was a scapegoat, if they got rid of me, than everything else would be better,” he explained. “That’s sad, isn’t it? Sad.” After a few days, though, Williams and his guardians decided to appeal his suspension because they believed that this would force the school board to investigate the altercation. They hoped to use the hearing to expose the daily struggles faed

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102 Ibid.

103 Ibid. *East Tennessee Reporter*, March 1, 1957, 1, 6; *East Tennessee Reporter*, February 15, 1957, 1. For more on the white students and their use of the newspapers to turn public opinion, see Chapter 4.
by the black students and demand that the white perpetrators be punished as Williams had
been. When the school board met to consider his case on February 21, however, the board
announced that the point of the hearing was not to ask how the last six months of racial
conflict had contributed to the incident but “to determine the facts of the suspension and
whether or not the Williams boy was guilty of breaking school rules.”

Assistant Principal Juanita Moser, who had been the one to suspend Williams, was the
first witness. She testified that she had suspended Williams for four reasons: he had assaulted
another student and threatened him with a knife; he did not have passing grades at Clinton
High School; his grades at his previous school were poor; and he was too old to be a high
school student. Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. agreed with Moser and added that Williams had
missed a number of days of school.

By the time Williams’ witnesses took the stand, they seemed to sense what the
outcome of the hearing would be. Before he gave his statement, Williams’ uncle Steve
Williams asked the board if he could offer a prayer, perhaps hoping the men could hear in a
prayer what they could not hear in a testimony. “‘Father, I ask for your protection,’” he pled.
“‘Father, we know we have no power but to depend on you. Help this school board. Go with
them who hate us and despise us.’” After that, he turned his attention to the people who had
faced down the militant segregationists and prayed, “‘Go with my boy. Go with this school,
bless the principal and help him.’” After closing his prayer, he told the board that his nephew
deserved a chance to “receive [the] educational advantage which he did not get.”

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After this, Williams took the stand. He admitted that he had struck Dan Ward, but he insisted that Ward also had a knife and would have used it on Soles if he had not intervened. “These boys had been picking on my brother all day,” Williams explained to the board. He denied the rumor that he had threatened Ward with a switchblade and insisted that the pocket knife Police Chief Francis Moore had confiscated was the one he had pulled on Ward and McGill. After hearing Williams’ version of events, the school board members turned to Moser’s other reasons for the suspension. They questioned whether he had the ability to finish his coursework and then asked him whether he wanted to return to school. “I couldn’t learn anything there,” he replied despondently. “I’ve been going to school for twenty-one years to get a piece of paper. If I have to go back and stick my neck out for a piece of paper, they can have it.” The Board upheld his expulsion.

After Williams’ hearing, tempers in the school were even shorter. The accounts to the East Tennessee Reporter had received favorable attention from the editor and readers of the paper, so the segregationist students continued feeding the paper specific incidents that occurred at the school, creating a detailed, though biased, account of the spring semester. By reading between the lines, we can reconstruct some of what happened in the school’s hallways.

Flush with success after getting rid of Alfred Williams, segregationist students focused with increasing intensity on Bobby Cain, the only remaining senior. On Wednesday, February 13, Jimmy Bolton accused Bobby Cain of pushing him in the hall before threatening him with a “wicked looking” knife with an illegally long blade. According to

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him, Eddy Denny and Jimmy Ray McGill, two other white students, had needed to come to his aid. When the *Reporter* questioned the school authorities, the authorities admitted that they saw the three whites in heated discussion with Cain, but since they intervened before the students came to blows, they had let the teens go with a warning.\footnote{108}

The next morning, Bolton, Denny and Cain again “collided in the hall,” and again the teachers stepped in before physical violence occurred. When McGill heard about the exchange, he went to the shop building where another white student was making a knife for a project. McGill hid the knife in his sleeve and returned to the main school building. A white student who saw this exchange told a teacher that McGill had a concealed weapon. When the teacher demanded that he hand over the knife, McGill claimed that he was not going to use the weapon on Cain. “‘I carried it out to show Ronnie Stair,’” McGill protested. “‘It wasn’t even finished but I thought it was a pretty good job James was doing.’” When he heard about McGill’s knife, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. announced that “‘if there is any more trouble, I’ll hold both sides equally responsible … [and] expel both parties.’”\footnote{109}

D.J. Brittain Jr.’s threats proved ineffective. The militant segregationist students responded by announcing they would “‘drive the Negroes out’ if at all possible.” Two weeks later, the *Reporter* alleged, Bobby Cain and Robbie Moser—the son of assistant principal Juanita Moser—had been involved in an altercation, but neither boy had been disciplined. When the paper asked her about it, Assistant Principal Moser replied, “‘A mountain is being made out of a molehill. We should be able to straighten out our own affairs without people

\footnote{108}{East Tennessee Reporter, February 15, 1957, 1.}
\footnote{109}{Ibid.}
nosing in.” Brittain eventually admitted that an argument had occurred. He said that Cain had been sitting in the library near three white boys, one of whom was Robbie Moser. One of the boys said something insulting to Cain. When Juanita Moser heard about the exchange, she told her son to apologize to Cain. When Moser did so, Cain thought he was restarting the incident. A teacher intervened before they turned to fisticuffs, and the two worked out their misunderstanding with the assistance of the school administrators, Brittain concluded.110

A few weeks later, the *East Tennessee Reporter* again implicated Cain in trouble at the school. One morning in late March, he crossed paths with the school’s janitor John Harber. Harber blocked Cain’s path and told the teenager that he should not be allowed to use the restroom that the white men used. Cain shoved Harber out of his way and continued on his way to class. Harber’s son, senior Roy Lee Harber, was home sick that morning, but one of his friends found him and told him that Cain had pushed his father. Cain and the younger Harber were in the same history class, so Harber returned to school for that class to confront Cain. “‘I asked him a civil question about what he’d said to my father earlier in the day,’” Roy Lee Harber told the *Reporter*. He thought he should probably have been insulted by what Cain’s response, but he was not sure. “‘I never can understand his talk—he just babbles a lot of stuff,’” Harber sneered. At that point in the conversation, Cain reached into his pocket for his knife. A teacher stepped into the conflict and took the two students to D.J. Brittain Jr.’s office. Because no physical contact had occurred, Brittain just talked to the boys and then released them. Brittain again downplayed the incident to the *Reporter*, saying, “‘We have a lot of spontaneous combustion around here. … It’s spring.’” John Harber was hesitant

to use the paper to share what had happened, telling the *Reporter* that he believed that “‘those’ boys [who told Roy Lee about the confrontation with Cain that morning] … had egged his son into possible trouble just to start a fight.”

Three more altercations occurred at Clinton High School on Tuesday, April 9. During a class change, someone hit a white student named Doyle Cardwell from behind. The blow was hard enough that Cardwell fell down. “‘As I was falling, … I saw Bobby Cain standing there with a grin on his face,’” Cardwell told the *Reporter*. Cain denied pushing Cardwell. Cardwell insisted it must have been Cain, but Cain denied it again. At that point, Maurice Soles came to Cain’s aid. A group of white students gathered around them prepared for a fight. Before things could escalate further, a teacher grabbed Cain and Cardwell and sent both of them to the principal’s office. The white students who witnessed the altercation insisted that Cain had attacked Cardwell, but Brittain noted that all Cain’s accusers were known troublemakers in the school and so dismissed their testimony. Instead of suspending Cain and Cardwell, “‘I told them all that if they couldn’t settle their differences and get along, I’d send them up to [Juvenile Court] Judge Yarnell,’” Brittain explained to the *Reporter*. In light of Brittain’s refusal to punish the black students, the militant segregationist students took retaliation into their own hands. Later that afternoon, someone flipped a cigarette onto Bobby Cain, and ten white students ganged up on Soles.

“‘Hardly a day passes which doesn’t give me reason to wish that I was away from it all,’” a white female student told the *Reporter*. “‘Both the Colored and White boys are

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111 Interview with Bobby Cain; *East Tennessee Reporter*, March 29, 1957, 1.

always arguing. It makes it difficult to study. The language they use is something awful. I
have to stop up my ears sometimes to keep from being embarrassed. Both of them are at
fault.’’ Brittain acknowledged that ‘‘these things are happening every day,’’ but ‘‘I just
don’t think they are major enough to put in the paper.’’

Particularly dangerous for the black male students were the accusations made by
some of the white female students. One young woman, for instance, told the Reporter ‘‘that
Negro boys sometimes jostled white girls in the hallways … [and] muttered lewd words at
them.’’ Another girl insisted that one of the young black men had repeatedly asked her out on
a date. She charged him with asking her to go ‘‘to a ‘rock and roll’ dance in Knoxville where
they wouldn’t get back until ‘three o’clock in the morning.’’’ Since he would not accept her
refusals, she had resorted to trying ‘‘to ‘keep away from him.’’’

It was dangerous enough that she accused a black student of expressing sexual
interest in her. The invitation to a rock-and-roll concert was even more menacing. In 1956,
many American adults of both races worried that rock-and-roll was corrupting their children.
Though most twenty-first century Americans might laugh off the hysterical claims that rock
music would cause the downfall of American culture, adults in the 1950s accurately sensed
the revolutionary potential of the new musical style. Through its lyrics, beat, dance and
culture, rock helped ‘‘young Americans construct social identities’’ by providing ‘‘a discourse
through which they could examine and contest the meanings adults ascribed to family,
sexuality and race,’’ cultural historian Glen Altschuler explains. ‘‘Without a consistent or

113 Ibid.

coherent critique, and never fully free from an attachment to traditional 1950s values, rock ‘n’ roll nonetheless provided a fresh perspective, celebrating leisure, romance and sex, deriding deferred gratification and men in gray flannel suits stationed at their office desks and delighting in the separate world of the teenager.”

For militant segregationists, the threat of rock-and-roll was even more explicit because of its roots in African American musical traditions. They agreed with journalists Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer who a few years before had warned that rock and roll was “like a heathen religion … all tied up with tom-toms and hot jive and ritualistic orgies of erotic dancing, weed-smoking and mass mania, with African jungle background.” What worried them the most was that white teenage girls screamed and shrieked and fainted over this new type of music and the young men who performed it. Some white Southerners determined to drive this threat from the South.

They attacked artists who performed before interracial audiences, particularly in the artists were black men. For instance, jazz singer Nat King Cole played a concert in Birmingham in April 1956. The White Citizens’ Council there shut down the event and drove Cole from the city. Though Cole’s musical style may have been acceptable his race was not. It was the last concert Cole would play in the former Confederacy. Kenneth Adams, one of the men who had mobbed the stage, came to a segregationist meeting outside of Clinton and told the audience that his concern about music began when he realized rock culture

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encouraged “pure white girls [to] run around for this music.” He soon realized that the problem extended beyond rock-and-roll. That night “white girls fought for their autographs” even though many of the musicians, including Nat King Cole and most of his band, were African Americans. Even worse, black men in the audience were using this event to pursue white women:

When I got to the auditorium, ... I saw this bunch of nigger boys and men, also saw a number of white girls, fourteen- and fifteen-years-old, with their autograph books in their hands fighting for the autographs. I have never heard such vulgar and obscene language. I didn’t do anything. I stepped up a little closer to take a picture, and two niggers slapped it out of my hand. I am ashamed of this; I didn’t do anything. I went around front and bought a ticket and I went inside. The star was on the stage there, Nat ‘King’ Cole and his bunch. ... When they started in the second number with this stomping kind of music, I thought, “But for the grace of God that could have been my little girl” or your little girl. I headed for the stage door.117

When this young white woman accused one of the black male students of inviting her to a rock-and-roll concert, she was not merely conjuring the specter of miscegenation. She was reminding the Reporter’s readers of all that they feared most about youth culture.

Elsewhere in the South, accusations such as these led militant segregationists to murder young black men. Just a year-and-a-half earlier, Emmett Till had been brutally executed for looking incorrectly at a white woman. For militant segregationists, these young Clintonians were just as dangerous. They had begun to believe that American society, which had taught them so much about hatred, fear, oppression, inequality and violence, had to change. These charges of sexual misconduct could easily have been the justification the most radical segregationists needed to lynch one of the young men, yet these young men (along with most

of their compatriots in Greensboro, Little Rock, Nashville and elsewhere around the South) were attacked but not killed.

In addition to the harassment and the constant threat of physical assault, the African American students also struggled with their social isolation. In a 2005 autobiography she wrote for the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization’s website, Jo Ann Boyce recalled that “The hate we, as a group, faced daily when walking to school, while climbing the stairs to enter and … in the school’s hallways is much too much to address in this document. I will always say that it was the … most excruciatingly painful event to happen to me.” Alfred Williams agreed. “It was terrible,” he told me. “I didn’t want to go to school a lot of times, … [but] that’s all the opportunity we had. We had to go down there. We didn’t have any other choice, … but it was just tough.” Only a handful of white students acknowledged them and even fewer stood up to their attackers. Many of the others decided the safest—and perhaps given the ongoing belief in segregation, the most effective—option was to simply ignore them. One of the black female students wrote a poignant poem titled “Alone” which she left on teacher Margaret Anderson’s desk. “‘I am alone,’” she said:

The place is dark
No sign of day
No sound of lark

No kids are here to play with
No place is here to walk to
No one here to stay with
No one here to talk to

This place is dark
I am filled with dread
You see, I am alone,
I am dead.”\textsuperscript{118}

This terrible sense of isolation did not abate even during the following year. Margaret Anderson watched Gail Ann Upton Epps during her two years in Clinton High. “To my knowledge, . . . no one ever spoke to her and she never participated in a school activity outside of routine classwork,” Anderson remembered. “Some days, as she went about her work, I would . . . wonder what it would be like to . . . not have anyone except the teacher speak to me. I wondered what it would be like not to have anyone you could ask for a sheet of paper or a pencil. And what it would be like to have a new dress, and not a single person say, ‘How pretty you look.’”\textsuperscript{119} As they left school and tried to make sense of what had happened to them while at Clinton, many of the twelve discovered that the social silence had surrounded them was the most painful aspect of their memories.

At the end of the first year, Margaret Anderson asked Regina Turner Smith if she would mind discussing the past year so that Anderson could prepare to make the coming year better for the black students. At the end of their conversation, Anderson asked Smith if she would do it again. “She weighed her answer carefully,” Anderson recalled. “Finally she said, ‘I don’t know.’” Anderson pressed Smith for an answer, asking Smith “‘Do you think what you’ve have gone through is really worth it?’”

‘I don’t know,’ she said, ‘I’ve thought about it a lot.’ There was a faraway look in her eyes as of an old woman who had seen many sorrows. I suppose she remembered the way they had looked at her, and the things they had said; and the times she climbed the hill in the rain to go home for lunch because she did not dare enter the lunchroom; and the times she wanted a


\textsuperscript{119} Anderson, \textit{Children}, 63-64.
drink of water at the fountain, but never quite got it. Then she said, ‘The only thing I know is maybe it will be easier for someone else.’ There were tears in her eyes.”

Because of the stress, Alva McSwain dropped out of Clinton High School on May 3, just fourteen days before the school year ended.120

**BOBBY CAIN’S GRADUATION:**

On May 17, 1957—exactly three years after the United States Supreme Court had announced its decision in *Brown v. Board*—Bobby Cain graduated from Clinton High School. Though he knew he would likely be assaulted that night, Cain decided that he had earned the right to walk with his class. What he did not know was that his bravery had won him a few allies among his harassers. In preparation for that night, Brittain approached some of the young men who had fought against Cain during the preceding year to try to convince them to remain peaceful during the celebration. One of them replied, “‘Well, I’ll tell you, Mr. Brittain, … you know how I fought this thing. … [But] after all that boy’s [been] through, we’ll do everything we can to help things go smoothly.’” All this student asked in return was that Brittain keep the media out so that graduation did not become “‘a circus.’” By that night, Brittain said, most of the white students and their parents felt similarly. To ensure that the evening would proceed smoothly, the police patrolled the grounds, and some of the seniors on the football team volunteered to guard Cain. Underclassmen from the team watched the

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120 Ibid., 59; *Clinton Courier-News*, May 16, 1957, 1:1.
doors, keeping out known troublemakers and photographers who had come to cover the story.121

On that warm May night, Cain and eighty-eight white teens crossed the stage and received their diplomas without incident. His parents, some extended family members and his siblings watched from the audience. “When he was marching in the line, I was so proud of him,” Robert Cain Sr. remembered. “I knew he had made it that far.” The night was more bittersweet for Alfred Williams. “It didn’t feel right for Bobby and I not to graduate together,” he recalled.122

After the ceremony, the seniors went to the cafeteria to remove their caps and gowns. Some members of the press followed them and asked Cain to pose for a picture. Cain refused, and the football team members forced the photographers out of the room. While the football team was handling the media members, another group of men entered the cafeteria and approached Cain. “Why is it that when I’m confronted, it is with a group of young men?” he asked them. “Why is it that we aren’t going to fight just one at a time?” As they drew near to Cain, someone cut the lights. Though he had spent the last year defending himself, Cain did not immediately suspect anything was amiss. “I wasn’t thinking what they were doing, my stupid self,” he recalled. “They were lining me up.” Because of the dark, Cain’s attackers missed him and hit one of his classmates instead. Cain heard the other young man’s cry and knew what had happened. When the lights came back on, Cain attacked


anyone standing near him. “It did not matter whether it was a classmate or whatever. I was just swinging,” he recalled. “I didn’t care. I wanted to hit somebody.” At that point, the lights went out again. “So, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out what to do then,” he chuckled. “I just hit the floor, and they cut the light back on.” At that point, his father came in to get him. “I didn’t even prompt him what happened,” Cain recalled. “I just said, ‘Let’s go. I’m ready to go.’”\(^{123}\)

The Cains’ worries did not end when Bobby left the cafeteria. Because of the crowds, they had parked at the grammar school. As they neared their car, they saw someone hurrying away from the vehicle. After the string of bombings earlier that year, they worried that someone had rigged explosives to their car. Robert Cain Sr. told his family to move a safe distance from the car. Then he unlocked the vehicle, got inside it and started the engine. For once, their fears were unfounded. No dynamite was attached. But Bobby Cain broke. After all that had happened that year, he had been denied a peaceful graduation. When they reached their home, the teen ran into his house, went to the closet and grabbed his father’s shotgun. “I was going to shoot anybody that came over that Hill that wasn’t black,” Cain explained to me. “I felt as though I had been done an injustice. It was my last day there, and some men [had] come in and hit me upside the head.” His family eventually had to wrestle the gun out of his hands. “Naturally I’m still upset,” he told me during our conversation, “but anyway, that was it.”\(^{124}\)


\(^{124}\) Ibid., Anderson, “Dynamite,” 1.
After Clinton High:

Because he was the first African American to graduate from Clinton High, Cain had opportunities he never expected. Black organizations around the nation invited him to attend their meetings. New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell invited him to speak at Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City and took him to the Apollo Theater. Reverend Garland C. Taylor—who would eventually be awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom for founding the Progressive National Baptist Convention, a key Northern civil rights organization supporting Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—invited Cain to speak at Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn. At another convention, he appeared on a program alongside baseball player Jackie Robinson, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham who had recently led the movement to desegregate Birmingham’s city buses and singer Diana Washington. The Pittsburgh Courier, a black paper, started a scholarship fund for him. Between that money and a work study grant, Cain had the resources he needed to attend Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College. Cain did worry about how the rest of the twelve felt about him being singled out for all this attention. “I never spoke to any of them about it, but that’s why I’m very cautious about when they talk about this integration and ‘Bobby Cain was the first,’” he explained. “I hope they’re not [resentful].” Cain graduated from college in 1961, spent a couple of years in the United States Army and then entered the Army Reserves and saw combat during Desert
Storm. After his discharge from active service, he went to work for the Tennessee Department of Human Services. He retired in 2002.\textsuperscript{125}

The year after Cain’s graduation, Gail Ann Upton Epps graduated from Clinton High School, becoming the first female African American to do so. None of the rest of the twelve graduated from Clinton High. By the end of the first year, Jo Ann Allen Boyce, Minnie Ann Dickie Jones, Robert Latham and Robert Thacker had already left and Albert Williams had been expelled. After another year, Regina Turner Smith and her family moved to Florida so that she could complete her schooling in a peaceful setting. Maurice Soles and Theresser Caswell both left school before graduating, and Ronald Hayden developed a brain tumor. The surgery to remove it robbed him of his sight. He transferred to a state-sponsored school for the blind. When he was 24, he died as a result of a medical complication connected to his treatment.

After leaving Clinton High School, the twelve struggled to make sense of what had happened to them there. They sought to make peace with this violent interlude in their lives. They found that they could not understand the hate and apathy that had met them. That year, they had seen their neighbors turn on them in violence while people they trusted turned silently away from their pain. “I really did not know that people could be so mean and hateful,” Minnie Ann Dickie Jones explained. Regina Turner Smith agreed. “The thing that I think now affected me the most was not the physical danger, because you get to the point that you had just about as soon die,” she explained. “It was the realization of how much people could hate us. I never realized before that people could hate us as they do.” This taught them

a degree of distrust—and in particular a distrust of whites—that they would spend decades trying to overcome. Many of them withdrew from their families and friends, finding protection in being quiet and reserved.126

For some of the twelve, the easiest way to deal with this distrust and disillusionment was to leave Clinton entirely. Bobby Cain moved to Nashville and still lives there, though he returns to Clinton to visit his younger siblings and other family members. Jo Ann Allen Boyce and Minnie Ann Dickie Jones settled in Los Angeles and finished school there. Though they occasionally return to Clinton for family reunions, neither of them has moved back to Tennessee. In May 1957, Alva Jay McSwain Lambert and her family joined them. She enrolled in John C. Fremont High, but her grandmother fell ill before Alva graduated. Because both her parents had to work, she quit school to care for her grandmother, but she was determined to finish her education. She began taking night classes and convinced her mother to join her. “In June 1963, my mother and I graduated from John C. Fremont high school together,” she reported proudly. “That was one of the happiest days of my life.” After graduation, McSwain became a truck driver, first driving a ten-wheeler dump truck and then working as a medical driver until her retirement in 1995. She did not return to Clinton for almost fifty years.127

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126 Interview with Bobby Cain; Jones, “Minnie Ann Dickie Jones;” Anderson, Children, 64-65. “Trauma survivors cannot merely forget the past: rather, they are forced to live with a moment of time that curiously has no ending, that has attained no closure, and that can never be ‘done,’” memory theorist Proma Tagore explains. “The uniqueness of trauma … rests precisely in such latency, that is, its interruption and reworking of historical time…. Because survivors of violence are often unable to experience the traumatic event as it occurs—sometimes as a matter of survival—trauma is rarely felt in the present but rather experienced and communicated belatedly;” Tagore, The Shapes of Silence: Writing by Women of Colour and the Politics of Testimony (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 15.

127 Clinton Courier-News, May 16, 1957, 1:1; interview with Theresa Caswell; http://www.greenmccadoo.org/clinton_twelve.html; Gilbert, “10 Years after Race Rift, Clinton Blames Outsiders;” interview with Bobby Cain.
As the twelve absorbed the enormity of what had happened to them at Clinton High, they found themselves fighting against a new bitterness that was different from the anger they had felt during their school years. While in high school, they had lashed out sometimes against the students who attacked them. As the years passed, they realized that going to Clinton High School had cost them their adolescence. Their anger grew to encompass the students and teachers who had allowed the militant segregationists to turn school into their hell. Theresser Caswell, for instance, stayed at Clinton High School until shortly after the 1958 bombing. While she was there, she did not resent being barred from attending school functions. She was too concerned with day-to-day survival. Later, though, she heard her friends talking fondly about the sports functions and school dances they had attended. “[I was] cheated out of everything,” she told me. “I just got cheated out of everything a young person is supposed to do in high school.”

Many of the twelve did not have the words to express their anger and distress. They hoped that by not speaking about it, it would fade away. This hope meant that some of them did not discuss that year even with their peers or family members who had walked through it with them. “I tried to forget everything that I carried at Clinton,” Bobby Cain explained to me. “I tried putting it in my subconscious mind because, I’m going to really be honest, because I was very hostile and I had a lot of resentment. I tried ... not to even think about what I attended.”

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128 Ibid.

129 Interview with Eddie, Maurice and Charles Soles; interview with Bobby Cain.
Many of the twelve also chose silence because they worried that their bitterness would infect their children. Theresser Caswell knew her children would go to Clinton High School, and they would be there with the relatives of the people who had tormented, betrayed and ignored her. “Sometimes kids want to take up for you,” she explained. “I didn’t want them to have chips on their shoulder. I just didn’t want that, so I never told them.” The first time she ever discussed that part of her life with the younger generation of her family was when the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* did a story on her experiences. She called one of her nephews and told him to to read the story online. “I didn’t know any of this!” he replied. “I could have done my thesis on this, but you never told me!” She told him she could not talk about that year with him until she knew the racial situation was “a lot better.” She paused and then clarified, “They are not all right, but things are better.”

Bobby Cain also refused to talk about that year with his children, but his wife, who came from another Tennessee community, had watched news coverage of the events at Clinton High. She told their children what their father had done. Her children told their children about their grandfather’s role in the fight for equality. Cain only began to share his memories with them after his grandson invited him to come see his school play. The child told his grandfather he had been given an important role in the production. The child came out dressed as Cain had been in one of the photographs from *Life* magazine. He then talked about his grandfather’s important part in the civil rights movement. “I tell you, that was the

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130 Interview with Theresa Caswell.
most, that was very touching,” Cain told me. “The most gratifying thing that’s happened to me, for him to come out and do that … and for him to have learned that—.”¹³¹

Though the twelve used silence to preserve their children’s innocent hopefulness, silence also became a means of self-protection. They could not avoid interacting with whites, and their refusal to speak allowed them to bury their anger and move on with their lives and their careers. Cain remembered how he learned the importance of this survival method during the time he spent in the United States Army. “I realized my hostility was not going to get me anyway,” he explained. “So I started channeling [it] … in a different manner, into being a little more cautious in how I would approach a person. … [In that way], I was able to mask it.”¹³²

When the twelve ceased to discuss the past, many of their family and friends did not push them to talk about it. After the 1958 school bombing, Clintonians cobbled together a tense truce by refusing to discuss the pain of the preceding years. Some thought that the silence was necessary for the twelve’s own healing. Others saw it as necessary for the community’s healing. Silence allowed Clinton’s black residents to live peacefully with their white neighbors. It allowed them to shop at a grocery store owned by a segregationist leader. It allowed them to exchange pleasantries with a white municipal leader who had failed to protect them or their neighborhood.

Meanwhile, the national civil rights narrative replaced the Clinton Twelve with the Little Rock Nine, so no one outside their community remembered to ask them about it either.

¹³¹ Interview with Bobby Cain.
¹³² Ibid.
This silence became cyclical. The more other communities were celebrated, the less outsiders remembered about the rural Appalachian town. And the twelve’s refusal to speak meant that no voices reminded the American public of what had happened in Clinton, Tennessee. In this way, the twelve’s verbal silence contributed to the historical silence that has built around events at Clinton High School.

Though for many years most of the twelve had refused to speak about those events, when they did begin publicly sharing their stories, they found new ways to redeem those years. They found healing within the community and through their relationships with other people. For instance, Alfred Williams had struggled to overcome his anger after his expulsion. In 1995, he became the janitor of Clinton Elementary School. When the school administrators learned that he was one of the twelve, they encouraged the teachers to invite him to come speak to their classes about his time at Green McAdoo Elementary School and his experiences at Clinton High. The descendants of his white schoolmates sat in those classes, and he realized that this was his chance to teach these young white students a different way. He could teach them not to hate others because of racial difference, and he could tell them about the importance of speaking out when they saw someone else being abused. In addition to teaching the students about the destructiveness of hate and cowardice, he also encouraged them to learn from his mistakes, telling them that they must control their

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133 As memory theorist Susan J. Brison writes, Humans are “fundamentally relational—vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of others. … Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive and frequently somatic. … In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling and helping the survivor to remake the self,” Brison, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self,” in Acts of Memory, 40.
tempers, avoid fights and finish school. His work gave some meaning to his struggle. He found the peace and purpose he had desired.\(^\text{134}\)

As they he released his anger, he realized that his bitterness had affected his faith. high school experiences into a way that they could minister to the world. “How can you say you love the Lord, somebody you haven’t ever seen before and you can’t even love your fellow man down here?” Williams asked me. God says “if you do, you’re lying and the truth ain’t in you. First, you got to learn how to love down here before you can love Him. … That’s what love is all about.” He decided his high school experiences had given him the tools he needed to minister to the children who surrounded him every day, and he worked to forgive both the whites who had tormented him and the whites who had failed to defend him. “I turned my anger into love,” he explained.\(^\text{135}\)

**BREAKING THE SILENCE:**

Public commemoration of the twelve began in the local black churches. In 2001 Asbury Methodist, one of the two churches on the Hill, called a new minister, a young man named Alan Jones. Jones is a archetypal Renaissance man: he is a part-time Methodist minister, human resources director at Knoxville’s McGhee Tyson Airport and gifted artist. When he took the pulpit in Clinton, he went to visit Asbury’s retired pastor C.L. Willis, who had been there in 1956 and whose brother had been the minister at the Hill’s Mt. Sinai Baptist Church during the same era. The Reverend Willis told Jones that there was one piece of Clinton’s history he needed to understand if he was going to successfully minister to the

\(^{134}\) Interview with Alfred Williams; Jean-Jacques, “Love Overcomes a Young Man’s Anger.”

\(^{135}\) Ibid.
Hill’s residents or interact with white Clintonians. He needed to know that several of his church members had been part of the Clinton Twelve. Jones, who had never heard of the twelve, found their story compelling. He asked his congregation to tell him more. When they realized that their new pastor genuinely cared about their past, the twelve tried to answer his questions, which meant revisiting memories they had spent four decades trying to ignore. Some of them found they did not even know how to speak about that time. As memory theorist Susan Brison explains in her study on memory and trauma, in order to tell painful stories, survivors of assault and violence “need not only the words with which to tell … stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear … and to understand.”

Bobby Cain discovered that he had so effectively blocked that part of his past that he could not answer even the most basic questions. He turned to a scrapbook one of his younger sisters had assembled of that year of his life. As he read the clippings and poems Hettie had glued into its pages, the memories came flooding back.

Jones looked for a way to celebrate those students, wanting to give them places to tell their stories before appreciative, supportive audiences. He realized that as a pastor of a struggling church that many Sundays had fewer than fifteen congregants, he had limited resources and little influence, so he brought out his paints and created a commemorative mural for the church. In the painting, he hit all the highlights of that year [See Image X.2 at the end of the chapter]. A series of images frame the borders of the piece, including (moving clockwise from the top): the Reverend Paul Turner by the car where he was beaten; the


137 Interview with Bobby Cain; interview with Alan Jones.

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parents who brought the original lawsuit on their children’s behalf; the clock from Clinton High School frozen at the moment of the school’s bombing; Carl Cowan, the attorney who argued their case; Billy Graham speaking at First Baptist Church of Clinton; the mobs rocking a car; Bobby Cain graduating from Clinton High School; the National Guard; Principal Brittain and other members of the school faculty; and Paul Turner delivering his sermon in which he declared that “There is no color line at the cross.” At the center of the picture is a depiction of the twelve walking down the Hill accompanied by Turner, Sidney Davis and Leo Burnett. Behind them hangs Jesus on a cross with a dove descending upon him, signifying both the peace these students had desired and the sense that they had undertaken God’s mission when they walked down Broad Street. From behind the dove, rays of heavenly light shine down upon the teenagers and their escorts. Two black seraphim stand guard over the people painted below them. The entire image is done in black, white and beige other than red streaks of blood on the car where Turner was beaten.138

After he finished the artwork, he hung it in the church. The twelve were awestruck. “Have you seen the artwork Reverend Jones has done?” Theresser Caswell asked me. “[It’s] beautiful.” Cain agreed. “In my lifetime, I never thought they’d be talking about this the way they have spoken about it [in Clinton] in the recent couple of years,” he told me. “And with the statues, it’s unreal. … I’m just flabbergasted.”139 But Jones was not content to allow the story to stay within the black community. He teamed up with Marilyn Hayden, younger sister of Ronald Hayden; James Cain, younger brother of Bobby Cain and Cleo Ellis, who is a

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139 Interview with Theresa Caswell; interview with Bobby Cain.
cousin of several of the twelve. They approached the town leaders to ask for assistance in opening a museum, launching the initiative that would become the Green McAdoo Cultural Center and culminated in the installation of the bronze statues of the twelve.

The celebrations that surrounded the opening of the museum and the installation of the statues also helped the black students heal by giving them a forum in which to tell white Clintonians that they had been as hurt by the law-and-order segregationists who silently had watched their struggles as they had been by the militant segregationists’ open hostility. After hearing their accounts, a few of their white former classmates apologized to individual members of the twelve for what had happened that year. “Only a couple,” Jo Ann Allen Boyce clarified to me. “Not too many people.” Nevertheless, hearing a few of their former classmates apologize for having enabled the segregationist movement through their complacency helped the twelve begin to make peace with their neighbors and the town. At the prodding of his wife and Clinton High’s 1956 student body president Jerry Shattuck, Bobby Cain even attended his fiftieth high school reunion.140

The statues on the Hill are a beautiful, moving memorial to the twelve’s youthful determination. Ultimately, however, they are also symptomatic of the problem with contemporary commemorations of the Civil Rights Movement. In this idealistic and celebratory version of the past, the twelve are frozen in their teenage years, bravely facing the walk down the Hill. The monument, along with many other versions of civil rights history, fails to note that the fight for integration has yet to be won.

140 Ibid.; interview with Boyce.
Minority students continue to face both overt and subtle examples of racism in the classrooms and halls of America’s public schools, as a recent events in Anderson County have highlighted. The Anderson County School Board has opened a second high school, the Anderson County High School and Vocational School which serves the county’s rural children. Housing demographics in Anderson County have not changed much in the last fifty years, so most of the black high school students in the county continue to attend Clinton High School. In January 2005, Anderson County High School’s basketball team played Clinton High. Anderson County High’s team was all white, but Clinton High’s team had a student who was mixed-race (and no black players). Some Anderson County High School students threw Oreo cookies at the player, taunting him about his parentage. In August of that year, two black students enrolled in Anderson County High School. One day early in that school year, Principal Greg Deal found a large Confederate flag hanging in the gymnasium’s hallway by the school’s trophy case. Deal suspected that the two events were related. Around the same time, two Hispanic students reported that two of the white teenagers, who were also wearing Confederate flag paraphernalia, had called them “‘sand niggers’” and “‘dirty Mexicans.’”

The situation at Clinton High during this time was also tense. There, Principal Linda Davis testified, they had twelve hundred students, five percent of whom were a racial minority. Black students in the school complained that white students in art classes were drawing Confederate symbols. Others reported that the white students sang “Dixie”

whenever black students got on the school bus. In addition, one white student had “made appropriate comments concerning African Americans in class, talked about the Civil War, the Confederate flag and that he could get a gun and take care of blacks.” Administrators suspended another white male for having a hangman’s noose, Confederate flag stickers and white supremacist stickers in his locker. On March 12, 2007, Davis confiscated a note which read, “I would go back to why, before anyone was on earth, and make it like: … I would go and make it where Martin Luther King [Jr.] never talked and Rosa Parks never sat in the front of the bus and right now we would have slaves and we wouldn’t have to work and just sit around and be lazy.”

Such incidents are not unique to the Anderson County high schools nor even to high schools in the South. In 2005 and 2006, for instance, minority students at Port Huron Northern High School in Michigan were the targets of a series of racial incidents including: racial slurs, Confederate paraphernalia placed in their lockers, threats written on the bathroom walls, bomb threats and finding “KKK” carved into their textbooks. Other civic officials got involved when an assistant principal at the school found a textbook in which a student scrawled racial slurs and compiled a list of minority students who would be targeted for attack. A few days later, authorities found a second, similar hit list. When school administrators failed to take the steps needed to protect the black students, the parents filed a federal discrimination lawsuit against the district and representative officials. Similarly, in March 2006, two black students at Golden West High School in Visalia, California, filed a federal lawsuit after school officials stood by while white students called the black students

142 Ibid.
offensive names and threatened to lynch them, showing one of the students a rope they had twisted into a noose.143

While minority students are having to fight through the racism of their classmates and teachers, they are increasingly also struggling in America’s increasingly segregating classrooms. In 1999, Gary Orfield and John T. Yun of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University released a report “Resegregation in America’s Schools.” For this project, they gathered census data, statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Common Core of Data and other centralized data clearinghouses. They noted that though following the civil rights battles of the mid-twentieth century, the South had been the most integrated region in the nation, it was rapidly resegregating, which meant that its schools demographics were beginning to match schools in other areas of the nation where residential segregation and neighborhood schools had preserved de facto segregation. “We are clearly in a period when many policymakers, courts and opinion makers assume that desegregation is no longer necessary,” they opined. “Polls show that white Americans believe that educational opportunity is being provided. National political leaders have largely ignored the growth of segregation.” Decades of studies had shown that all children, and in particular minority students and poorer students, benefited from integrated schools. Nevertheless, “we are floating back toward an educational pattern that has never in the nation’s history produced equal and successful schools. There is no good evidence that it will work now,” the authors

concluded. “Reversing the trends of intensifying segregation and inequality will be difficult, but the costs of passively accepting them are likely to be immense.”

When we remember the Clinton Twelve, the Little Rock Nine, the students who claimed seats at the Woolworth lunch counters and the myriad of other young faces around the South as being bronzed statues frozen in time, when we celebrate their actions as examples of a triumphant past, we participate in the storytelling that allows America’s educators, policy makers and voting public to pretend that segregation and continued racism do not exist.

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THE TEENAGE REBELLION

LEADERS OR LED?:

The young, angry faces of the segregationist students populate the Green McAdoo Center’s exhibit space. Enlarged from Life Magazine photographs, the students’ images form the backdrop for the explanatory placards. In one picture, seven white boys cluster at John Kasper’s feet, listening intently to his speech. On another display wall, the teenagers mock the National Guard soldiers, who are advancing on the boys with bayonetted rifles. In another, they flank Bobby Cain, jeering at him as he walks to school. A policeman stands a few paces away, not interfering with the conflict occurring in front of him. Other photographs capture the adolescents’ participation in the riots, as they rock cars driven by African Americans, defy the municipal authorities and march through the city’s streets.

But only one display wall at the Green McAdoo Cultural Center recounts what happened within the school’s halls and classrooms. The display’s background is an enlarged photograph of five Clinton High School football players walking down the street. At the head of the group is Jerry Shattuck in his letterman’s jacket. In 1956, Shattuck was student council president and football team captain. At the time of the museum’s construction, he was a member of city council and on the Green McAdoo Cultural Organization’s governing committee. “Students and teachers alike agree that it was the leadership of Jerry Shattuck … that set the tone within the school student population,” the display proclaims. He
“demonstrated his conviction that the decision of the federal court must be upheld. He demonstrated the principle of good citizenship … [and] influenced many students to follow him,” an inset text box adds. Throughout the narrative, the segregationist students remain unnamed and their voices unheard. Though their faces line the museum’s walls, the placards describing how white students “remained steadfast in their commitment to obey the law of the land” deny the youths’ presence (and leadership) in the protests that year.145

When I asked members of the Green McAdoo Cultural Center steering committee why the segregationists students’ pictures had been included but not their names or voices, they explained that they were trying to protect the students. After all, the teens had joined the protest movement as minors and may have simply been following their parents’ directions. Even if they had chosen to participate in the riots and harassment, they may have changed their minds during the intervening years. What if they were now ashamed of their actions?146 Despite these misgivings, the committee had included the teens’ pictures and left their faces clearly visible. Though fifty years had elapsed, many of these individuals still lived in Clinton, and any local visitor could recognize them. Furthermore, leaving out the segregationist students’ voices meant that they were depicted simply as racists. But for many

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145 Taken from the plaque “Student Support” at the Green McAdoo Cultural Center.

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of them, the protests were a chance to lash out against the benign neglect of their teachers and municipal leaders.\textsuperscript{147}

Many of the white middle-class teens would agree with former Clinton High cheerleader Diane Pemberton who recalled her high school years fondly. For her, high school meant cheering on the football team each Friday, going to Hoskin’s Drug Store after school for milk shakes and seeing movies at the Ritz Theater every Saturday night. “It really [was] like Happy Days,” she told me. But other white youths in the school had less idyllic experiences. These students had neither the free time nor the money to participate in these activities. They were the children who were dismissed as being hillbillies, mountaineers, rednecks, crackers and white trash, and their experiences at Clinton High School had shown them that, as historian C. Vann Woodward claimed in The Origins of the New South, “The real question [of white supremacy] was which whites would be supreme.”\textsuperscript{148}

They were like Betty Lou Miller, who in 1956 was a seventeen-year-old junior who had grown up in the textile workers’ neighborhoods in South Clinton and who would marry her high school sweetheart before the year was out. They were like sixteen-year-old Jimmy Pierce, who also went by Jimmy Patmore depending on whether his parents were together. After dropping out of Clinton High School in 1956, he would spend the rest of his life in and out of jail. They were like Shirley Way, who would have to leave school in her junior year


and take a job at a laundromat. They were like Jerry Hamilton, whose dad kept his family solvent by working first shift as a day-laborer for a local farmer and then working the second-shift in the textile mill. They were like Patsy Dorris, who married her high school boyfriend at fifteen and then divorced him; remarried ten years later and then divorced that husband and remarried again a few years after that.¹⁴⁹

Many middle-class whites in Clinton believed that violence in the school represented random outbursts of hatred prompted by the interference of segregationist adults. In reality, however, the violence was the result of an ongoing campaign by some of the white teens.¹⁵⁰ Though not all white working-class students joined the segregationist protests, all the students who participated in them came from the white working-class families. Though the students’ actions arose out of racism, they were also giving voice their class resentments and their dissatisfaction. They had long felt that they were second-class citizens at Clinton High. The class differences were apparent in the clothes the students wore, the way they spoke and how they carried themselves. Jerry Hamilton remembered that “the city kids” who were from “the big shot families” walked through the halls of Clinton High and “looked past us.”¹⁵¹ Rather than risk falling behind blacks socially, economically and politically, these frustrated adolescents organized to drive the twelve out of Clinton High School. The boys picked fights with the black students, shoved them in the halls, harassed them on the streets and led the street violence. The girls waged a social and political campaign against the twelve.


¹⁵⁰ Cahn, Sexual Reckonings, 287.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
The failure to include the white students and their stories is not unique to Clinton’s Green McAdoo Cultural Center. With a few notable exceptions such as the story of the whites who joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the white teenagers affected by the civil rights movement, particularly those who joined the segregationist protests.152

The decision to omit the white students’ perspectives has had some serious implications for the directions civil rights scholarship has taken over the last fifty years. In his 1963 field report on Southern school desegregation, child psychologist Robert Coles reminded his readers that “in every school where Negro children enter, white children are there, and they have ears and eyes, memories and ideas, beliefs and feelings. Knowledge about the adjustment of white children to this new moment in their lives and history is no less important [than understanding the black experience], and in many future situations may be decidedly helpful.”153 By ignoring these students’ perspectives, scholars have implied that the white students’ experiences and perspectives were monolithic. In these accounts, white teens may not have favored desegregation, but unless they were manipulated by adults, they complied.

Hearing the white segregationists’ students complaints shows the limitations and fallacies inherent in this telling. There was no monolithic white experience nor was there a

152 There are a handful of exceptions to this statement such Beth Roy who conducted a series of oral history interviews with students from both sides of the color line who had been part of the desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School. Thankfully a handful of white students have written memoirs about how civil rights affected them, which provide scholars with powerful firsthand accounts of what occurred within the schools from the perspective of the white teenagers; Beth Roy, Bitters in the Honey: Tales of Hope and Disappointment across divides of Race and Time (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

common white response. Not all white students passively (or passive aggressively) assented to the federal ruling. Some white students believed that desegregation would not mean true educational equality because they would still suffer as a result of their class, and they fought to ensure that they did not lose what little advantage they had. In the process, they became key participants in the civil rights story. Their perspectives and complaints deserve consideration.

**POWERFUL YOUTH:**

In contemporary American culture, teenage fashion, entertainment, trends and attitudes have great cultural and economic impact, but this was not always true. Before the twentieth century, children spent little time transitioning to adulthood. The term “teenager,” which came into popular usage in the mid-1940s, marked the emergence of a distinct and definable youth demographic. The new age demographic was as much a marketing tool as it was a psychological or social categorization. Over the preceding two decades, teenage buying power had increased to the point that merchandizers could no longer ignore it. In the 1950s, about half of the nation’s teens worked odd jobs after school and on weekends, and the post-World War II economic boom meant that middle-class youths put very little of their income went back into the household economy. Suddenly adolescents had money to spend on their own clothes and entertainment, and they demanded unique fashions, musical icons, slang, movie stars and dances.154

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Changing ideas about human psychological development and the growing buying power of teenage culture meant that adolescents in the mid-twentieth century had different expectations than their parents had held at the same age. These were elucidated for adults in a 1945 *New York Times Magazine* article, “A ‘Teen-Age’ Bill of Rights.” In some ways, the article explained, teenagers wanted to remain children: they expected that to “have fun and companions,” and they when they made mistakes, they did not want to incur adult consequences for their behavior. Simultaneously, however, American youths wanted “to let childhood be forgotten.” They wanted to “have ‘a say’ about … life” and believed that they had “the right to have rules explained, not imposed.” Finally, they demanded “the right to a fair chance and opportunity.”

Though many of the high schoolers who participated in Clinton High’s desegregation would have agreed with the article’s assertions, social, racial, gendered and economic differences among the students meant that Clinton’s teens had different interpretations about what these new teenage rights meant in their individual lives. Youths such as Diane Pemberton and Jerry Shattuck found safe ways to enjoy their teenage years—dating serious love interests, going to community dances, listening to Dean Martin—before shouldering adult responsibilities. Other teens, such as the twelve who desegregated Clinton High School, focused on their “right to … opportunity” and fought against the racial inequalities that had limited their prospects. Another subset of adolescents, however, rebelled openly against traditional mores. They incited fear among politicians, educators, journalists and parents in


Clinton and across the nation who worried that they were about to be overwhelmed by an epidemic of juvenile delinquency. “Whatever the cause, and whoever they actually were, the nation saw … [them] as a threat,” explains cultural studies scholar Lucy Rollin. By rejecting “the conservatism and work ethic of the ‘man in the grey flannel suit,’” many adults thought these youths had “embrace[d] lawlessness, sexuality and rebellion.” Parents as well as civic and cultural leaders feared that these youths were similar to the Communists’ supposed fifth column. They “were a danger from within” the nation: adults were trusting them “with the future of the country,” but they were “working against all it stood for.”

The national obsession with juvenile delinquency gained credence in 1953 when U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr. addressed the National Education Association. In his speech, he announced that over one million boys and girls would be arrested by the police that year alone, which was about fifty percent more than had been arrested in 1948. By 1960, he predicted, the number would be closer to two million. In response, sociologists and educators began writing about gangs of violent youths who spread mayhem and murder through the nation’s cities. The Senate commissioned a special panel to examine the problem of juvenile delinquency.

The educational changes that had seemed cutting edge—such as consolidated, comprehensive high schools where students (or at least white students) from across the community were to gain access to greater resources and opportunities—now made many

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157 Rollin, Twentieth-Century Teen Culture, 149-52.

middle-class white parents uneasy. Instead of being markers of a democratic society where all children received an equal education, these schools became the sites where students from the best families rubbed elbows with working-class rebels. “Would the good students be able to withstand the juvenile delinquents’ temptations?” some parents asked. The popularity of rock’n’roll singers and other icons of teenage rebellion did little to reassure them.\textsuperscript{159}

These fears were not solely the obsession of urban residents. Clinton’s adults believed that they too had a juvenile delinquency problem to address. During the mid-1950s, a group of local youths dominated the community’s newspaper. The teens were drunk in public, though they were underage and living in a dry county.\textsuperscript{160} They vandalized school busses, incurring the ire of the drivers, most of whom owned the vehicles they operated.\textsuperscript{161} They left lit fireworks on store floors, rolled them down the aisle of crowded theaters and used them to terrorize their teachers. Exasperated, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. eventually threatened to take out a warrant against anyone who sold fireworks to teenagers.\textsuperscript{162} Milton McIlwain remembered that the principal hired his mother to work as a substitute teacher despite her lack of qualifications because “she was tough and wouldn’t put up with any garbage.” Brittain needed teachers who “could stand up to the kids … [and who] were hardheaded. They’d just as soon go out and cut your tires.”\textsuperscript{163}


\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Clinton Courier-News}, July 26, 1956, 1:6.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., February 28, 1957, 1:1.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., April 19, 1956, 1:1, 1:6.

\textsuperscript{163} Milton McIlwain, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Knoxville, TN. 2009, in the possession of the interviewer, Durham, NC.
Some of the teens’ pranks were more serious criminal offenses. For instance, one winter night, five Clinton High School boys stole shirts, jackets, a record player, a portable radio, beer and a slot machine from the Oak Ridge Country Club. Another group of boys threw rocks at an Andersonville house, and the homeowner shot at them to drive them away. “He might have killed or seriously injured one of them, and yet who could blame him?” the Clinton Courier-News editorialized. “He had no way of knowing the boys were not serious and really ‘didn’t mean any harm’ in tearing up his house!”

Other boys terrorized local drivers. Panicked tourists would swing by the police station late at night, reporting that they had seen terrible accidents up in the mountains and that teenagers covered in blood had run at their cars, screaming for help. When emergency services arrived on these accident scenes, however, the emergency officials found that the blood was catsup and the boys had long since scattered. Most Saturday nights, drag racers took over a particularly dangerous portion of the winding highway connecting Clinton and Oak Ridge. “We watched them drag race and play follow-the-leader …, swerving from one side of the road to the other and swapping places as they weaved across the road,” a state trooper told a local reporter. “If they happen to meet another car, they just crowd him off the road.”

Though far from any urban metropolis, Clinton’s adults also worried about gang violence. The trouble began with turf wars between Clinton’s teens and those who lived in the other nearby communities. For instance, one night, Clinton High teens traded vandalism

165 Ibid., May 24, 1956, 1:1.
166 Ibid., March 22, 1956, 1:1.
with a rival high school. Another night, a car full of Knoxville teens drove through Clinton, yelling at anyone they saw. When a Clinton boy walked in front of the car to stop it, the driver tried to run him over. The local boy smashed the car with his baseball bat. The next year, some Clinton boys battled teenagers from Norris after the Norris delegation tried to use the Clinton recreation center. The police broke up the fight before the Clinton teens felt they had reestablished their claim to the center, so they set up road blocks on the highway between Clinton and Norris, hoping to catch the Norris boys on their way home.

Eventually, the participants in these activities formed an association known as the “Black Jackets” whose members identified themselves by their clothing. The group included both middle- and working-class white boys. “In spite of the efforts of Clinton people to provide their youngsters with a fine football field, electric scoreboard, field house, recreation building, etc., some of their sons (and there are some football players included, we are told) had rather gang up … and engage in back alley brawls with neighboring hoodlums,” the local paper mourned. “While we think boys should have a good time, we do not agree that engaging in back-alley brawls, in gang fights, is either good fun or good sense,” the paper concluded. The article’s dire predictions almost came true one summer night when a Black Jacket was knifed at the local drive in. “When I was with the city of Clinton in the fire department, we went in and got rid of a lot of the old stuff that was in the vaults,” Clinton

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170 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
171 Clinton Courier-News, August 9, 1956, 1:1.
172 Ibid., August 16, 1956, 1:1
resident Jerry Hamilton recalled. He remembered that they unloaded boxes of “zip guns and guns that were made out of iron pipes [that] had been confiscated back during those days.”  

By mid-March 1956, the city leaders had decided to take whatever steps were needed to stop the mayhem. Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. and an assistant district attorney asked that anyone with credible information on the teenaged troublemakers—as opposed to “those who merely delight in rolling tasty bits of gossip around over their tongues”—contact the two men. Other community members suggested that the town abolish its juvenile court system and begin imposing adult sentences on teenage offenders. “A slight lowering of the ‘boom’” might “produce better boys and girls,” two local residents wrote to the Clinton Courier-News. Religious leaders tackled the spiritual and moral fronts, and the Reverend Paul Turner of Clinton’s First Baptist Church devoted a sermon to the topic of juvenile delinquency in which he scolded parents for trying to pass responsibility for teenage misbehavior onto the church, the schools and the city. “‘In 70 years an entirely new generation will be determining the destiny of our world,’” Turner warned his congregation. “‘Literally, everything is at stake. If homes do not turn out Christian characters ..., you see how the nation can go thoroughly pagan in a very few years. While churches and schools can help, … they can never be more than accessories.’”

Some of the handwringing may seem disproportionate to the teenagers’ actions, but heightening Cold War tensions had made American adults unusually nervous about the state

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173 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
175 Ibid., July 19, 1956, 2:2.
of America’s teenagers. The generation that came of age between the end of World War II and 1960 “was inundated, even indoctrinated, with images and messages about its unique and consequential placement in history,” American studies scholar Michael Scheibach explains. “Its members matured during complex and contradictory times, hearing messages of impending doom and the absolute necessity to protect democracy against world-threatening totalitarianism.” Many Americans believed that the future of the nation and all free societies rested with the coming generation’s ability to compete with and out-maneuver the Communists.

Because of their proximity to the Atomic Energy Commission’s work at Oak Ridge, many people in Clinton felt a particular interest in students’ abilities to participate in the nuclear arms race. They watched the scientists who worked at Oak Ridge and worried whether coming generations of students had the knowledge and dedication needed to join the Atomic Energy Commission’s pursuits. On April 28, 1956, the Saturday Evening Post published an article titled “The Race We Are Losing to Russia.” In November 1957, the United States government issued a similar study. Both these articles compared the superpowers’ educational systems, and they both concluded that the United States came up short. “Russian boys know about as much about physics by the end of their last year in high school as the physics majors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have learned by the end of their sophomore year,” announced the authors of the 1956 report. “Russians soon will be saying, “The U.S. just doesn’t have the know-how,”” the authors fretted. The 1957


report picked up on the theme, announcing that a Russian child learns as much “in his first ten years, of education than Americans do in twelve.”\textsuperscript{179}

These articles caught the attention of the editor of the \textit{Clinton Courier-News} who reprinted the findings and scolded the townspeople for having failed to provide local students with the skills and knowledge they needed to compete. In relating the findings of these two reports, the editor urged his readers to evaluate Clinton High School and consider whether “we [have] kept step …?” He asked whether the town had given “students what they need as preliminary studies to a scientific career” and he encouraged the townspeople not to be satisfied with relegating so many students to the vocational education track. “Russia is showing us that if we are to conquer space, we need to know more than how to use a hammer and saw,” he concluded.\textsuperscript{180} In response, the Anderson County Board of Education surveyed its facilities, teachers, supplies and extra-curricular offerings.\textsuperscript{181}

To encourage achievement, school and city officials contrasted the town’s troublesome teenagers with the well-behaved ones. They commended members of the Safe-Teen Club—the first one in the state—who pledged to drive “safely and courteously” instead of drag racing or driving drunk. They praised the members of the Babysitting Club, which taught high school girls about proper childcare. They publicized events at Clinton’s recreation center, where the director kept a slate of approved activities going, and they used the newspaper’s society columns to celebrate the local teens who hosted adult-approved

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Clinton Courier-News}, November 14, 1957, 1:1.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., November 21, 1957, 1:1.
events such as a Leap Year party, which, the paper noted, had been chaperoned by two sets of parents.\textsuperscript{182}

Within the school, administrators highlighted specific students whom they considered to be the model pupils by naming them as Clinton High School’s Citizen of the Month. Out of that group, the administrators then chose a male and female Outstanding Student of the Year. Only students who excelled in school and participated in a variety of extracurricular activities could earn these titles. For instance, Gail Coker was the 1955-1956 female Outstanding Student of the Year. During the preceding two semesters, she had been the secretary of the Student Council, treasurer for the senior class, editor of the school annual, president of the Future Homemakers of America, state winner of the Betty Crocker Homemaking Contest, a member of the National Honor Society and active in the Future Business Leaders of America. The other winner that year was Jerry Shattuck, who had been president of the junior class, active in the student council, a member of the first aid detachment, rising captain of the football team, a National Honor Society member, and a member of the journalism staff, the Pep Club, the Language Club and the annual staff.\textsuperscript{183}

Implicit in this approach to encouraging proper conduct was the assumption that all white teenagers had the opportunity to succeed. They just needed to behave appropriately. After all, they could all attend the same high school, use the recreation center, participate in school activities and look forward to working and living anywhere they chose. From the

\textsuperscript{182} Clinton Courier-News, April 26, 1956, 1:1; ibid., July 11, 1957, 1:1; ibid., March 15, 1956, 1:2, 2.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., November 28, 1956, 3:5; ibid., May 3, 1956, 1:4.
perspective of adult leaders, what then divided the white teens was what the adolescents decided to do with those opportunities.¹⁸⁴

But the school’s working class students—who often lived too far away to participate in extracurricular activities and who had come from smaller, rural elementary schools that had left them ill-prepared for high school—understood what many of their teachers and wealthier peers did not: when the twelve black students walked into Clinton High School, they were joining a segregated system. The school was already divided up by class. “What the world saw of desegregation … was a morality tale about power and race. They saw a grand institution whose doors needed quite literally to be breached by force in order for children of all races to attend school together,” civil rights historian Beth Roy asserts. Poorer whites also saw school desegregation as being “a story about power, but of a very different sort. Their story was about class, about an abuse of privilege by affluent people within their own community.”¹⁸⁵

The majority of the rural students’ parents had never had any secondary education, and many of the teens would not graduate, electing to leave when familial or financial circumstances suggested it was time for them to enter adulthood.¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, unlike the white city kids who had grown up going to assemblies at Clinton High and who already knew some of the teachers, the rural students had spent little time in the institution. For instance,

¹⁸⁴ Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 212.

¹⁸⁵ Roy, *Bitters in the Honey*, 3-5.

Jerry Hamilton, who was a sophomore in 1956, had never set foot in Clinton High until his first day as one of its students. He remembered the shock he felt when he entered the building. “Oh man, you talk about a culture change ——,” he paused. “Oh, Lordy.”

Those people were poor and getting poorer,” remembered a former Clinton High student who came from a middle-class family. “Some of those kids that came into the school, they looked like they had the same shirt on for a week and a half.” He remembered being fairly oblivious as to the reasons for the differences. “I just couldn’t understand why Johnny would wear the same brown pants,” he continued. “I knew they would be the same because they would have the same dirt spot on the knee or on the cuff or on the butt. He would wear that for a week!”

Class differences between the students helped determine which students pursued the academic or the vocational track at Clinton High, and class influenced which activities students joined. For instance, Jerry Hamilton remembered that even if he had lived close enough to join the basketball team, he “didn’t have a lot of the frivolous things” like basketball shoes. At his grammar school, “You played barefooted” when using the outside goals, he told me, “or in your sock feet if you played in the gymnasium.”

The working-class students, and in particular those who lived on farms, also did not have as much free time as their wealthier town peers. Their income and labor was needed by their families. The boys either worked for their parents or were hired out their labor to other nearby farmers. “As soon as I got big enough, I worked,” Hamilton remembered. He began

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187 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
188 Interview with Milton McIlwain.
189 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
on his grandfather’s farm. Within a few years, he was setting tobacco slips for his neighbors as well. Soon he was also baling hay. “We’re talking about a lot of hay,” he said, shaking his head.190

The search for income prompted some of the working-class white students to leave the area each summer in search of better paying jobs. Shirley Way went to work at a laundromat in Rockport, Illinois, where she presumably had relatives. After their junior year at Clinton High, Homer Copeland and three of his comrades went to work for the Green Giant canning factory in Seattle, Washington. His parents consented to let him travel so far away from home because the pay rate was significantly better than what the local farmers offered, but Copeland saw the job as his one chance to live away from home. He had traveled so little that he did not know even the basics of being on the road. “We got on the bus and rode for three days and three nights, and I never did take my shoes off,” he remembered ruefully. “My ankles were swollen plumb down over my shoes. I didn’t know you were supposed to pull your shoes off traveling.” That summer, the boys lived in barracks the company had built for their seasonal workers, ate at the company cafeteria and canned peas fifteen hours a day. “We just about ate up all we made,” Copeland recalled. Nevertheless, he returned the following summer. “It taught me to work,” he concluded. “Of course, I’d already been taught to work at home, but that’s the first job I ever had drew money.”191

The differences between the white students was not just a matter of perception and anecdote. In the early 1960s, University of Tennessee graduate student Janie Chadwick

190 Ibid.

191 East Tennessee Reporter, July 26, 1957, 2, 8; Homer Copeland, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording. Clinton, TN, August 17, 2009, in the possession of the interviewer, Durham, NC.
Farmer used Clinton High School student records and yearbooks from the mid- to late-1950s to explore the way class and location divided the school’s white students. She found measurable correlations between the students’ place in the school and their backgrounds. First, she established that white students who lived in town had significantly higher grade point averages than their white peers who lived in the rural areas outside of Clinton. Then she analyzed how white students’ family financial situations affected their school activities. For instance, two-thirds of the cheerleaders came from middle-class families, as did all the football queens, prom queens, Miss CHSs, Future Farmers of America queens and representatives to Boys and Girls State during that era. The working-class students, on the other hand, made up the majority of members in the Future Farmers of America and the Future Homemakers of America.

Clinton’s Future Farmers of America chapter—which was directed by L.M. McIlwain—was a particularly lively group. This was so in part because of McIlwain’s relationship with the rural students and their families. He was the one teacher they had known since childhood. Anderson County had no veterinarian. Since McIlwain had training in animal husbandry, he became the county’s unofficial animal doctor. “Dad would—out of his pocket—go to the drug store and order vaccinations and antibiotics and whatever was needed to cure somebody’s sick cow and to fix the chickens,” McIlwain’s son recalled. “Mother would

192 Though less than a third of the Clinton High’s students came from within the city, more than half of the top ten percent of the students were Clintonians.


just have a fit. That was one of their running battles because he would spend his own hard
earned cash. … But he felt like he needed to do that.”

Besides feeling comfortable with McIlwain, the boys who joined the Future Farmers
of America also appreciated the opportunities he gave to them. Though most of them had
worked on farms all of their lives, they had only done menial labor because of their youth.
McIlwain taught them adult skills such as how to dehorn cattle and shear sheep. He also
encouraged them to undertake research projects that tested the latest scientific advancements
in agriculture. Finally, he used the club to offset some of the rural students’ disadvantages.
For instance, he founded an intramural basketball team that played against other nearby
Future Farmers’ chapters, and he took his students to a summer camp for a week every year.
The reason McIlwain did all of this, his son told to me, was because he loved teaching and
felt a responsibility to help his students succeed. “That was his passion,” his son explained.

Part of L.M. McIlwain’s passion for education came from the fight he had waged to
overcome his roots. He came from a rural county in western Tennessee, and he was one of
twelve children. His father was irresponsible with money, so from a young age, McIlwain
had forged his own way in the world. After high school, he raised and sold farm animals to
pay for college. “Grandaddy would get on a drunk and go sell them and spend the money. He
had to struggle and struggle,” his son recalled. “He made a bargain with the big guy
upstairs.” He “said, ‘Lord, just let me go to school, and I’ll dedicate my life to helping young
people get an education.’” Eventually, McIlwain not only finished his degree but went on to

195 Interview with Milton McIlwain.
196 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
197 Interview with Milton McIlwain.
do graduate work as well, earning his masters and beginning work on his doctorate. He was repeatedly offered jobs at Oak Ridge. Though these appointments would have paid significantly more, he remained at Clinton High School. “He just hit teaching wholeheartedly,” his son summarized.\textsuperscript{198}

Despite McIlwain’s efforts, the white working-class students struggled at Clinton High School. They did not feel connected to the school, and they fell behind in their middle-class peers in academic classes. Fewer of them graduated, and they were less likely to go on to college or vocational school, which led to fewer employment opportunities away from the mountains. Thanks to teachers such as L.M. McIlwain, they did have a few marketable skills, but they were fitted only for the local labor economy.\textsuperscript{199} Because they were not going on for more schooling but instead stepping straight into adult encumbrances, high school represented the apex of their teenage years. It was the gap between childhood and their young adulthood, the years when they had the freedom to spend time with their friends, pursue their romantic interests and live without either the direct oversight of their parents or the responsibilities that would come with working and beginning their own families.\textsuperscript{200}

The young women from working-class white families often married young, sometimes before they had graduated. A few of these wives found husbands who supported them and their children, but most of them had to find employment because in addition to

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{199} Chadwick, “A Comparative study of Graduates of Clinton High School,” 23, 26-41

\textsuperscript{200} Cahn, \textit{Sexual Reckonings}, 215.
supplementing their husbands’ wages, they also supported their parents and younger siblings. Most of these women found work at Magnet Knitting Mills.201

After school, some of the working-class white boys went to work on their families’ farms, but many Anderson County farms were on poor, rocky mountainsides which produced little beyond what was necessary for the family’s subsistence. Others went into Anderson County coal mines, which provided a steadier income than farming but which was a dangerous way to earn a living. Furthermore, because of new mining technologies, the mines employed only half as many workers they had just a decade before. Still other young men tried migrating to northern industrial centers for work, but that was an uncertain prospect as well. The majority remained in Anderson County, doing odd jobs around town and taking seasonal positions when they could find them.202

Many among the city’s white middle class never realized how much anger and frustration was building up among other whites. “I had lived here all my life, and I didn't know there was any undercurrent about people resenting [us],” teacher Celdon Lewallen told me in 2005. “I suppose if you’ve been an underdog and you realize … [you come] from people who were struggling economically … [and you] had that stigma to overcome,” she trailed off. “So, I don’t know.”203

201 Sims, “Magnet Mills,” 140-42.

202 Katherine B. Hoskins, Anderson County (Memphis, TN: MSU Press, 1979), 3, 57; East Tennessee Reporter, June 28, 1957, 3; Clifford R. Seeber, “Schools Also Reap What They Sow” in Good Morning, Professor (Sl: self published, 1977), 42-47

203 Celdon Lewallen, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Clinton, TN, October 22, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.
THE LIT MATCH:

When Federal Judge Robert Taylor ordered the school to desegregate, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. decided to enlist the help of student leaders, most of whom belonged to the white middle class and came from the town’s leading families. “We had a group of fine young people in the school at that time,” Celdon Lewallen told me. They “did a tremendous job.”

In particular, Brittain courted the help of the football team, whose members were the school’s social leaders. Shortly before the school year began, he met with the team. He began by reminding the students that he and the other town leaders had spent the last five years fighting the lawsuit. He then told them that he did not want desegregation, but he was determined to obey the law. After some discussion, most of the team decided to help Brittain and the faculty keep order in the school. They organized to patrol the hallways during class changes, with two or three of them standing at each corner watching the student body for signs of trouble. Their efforts—which failed to prevent all of the violence against the black students but may have helped keep the riots from spreading from the streets to the school’s hallways—were led by Jerry Shattuck. “I was appalled at the fact that people would disrupt the harmony of our school and our community,” Shattuck told local journalist June Adamson in 1979. “It got to a point where we were defending the order of our own community, and I don’t just mean law and order. I mean the image of our community.” Shattuck was named November’s Citizen of the Month for his efforts.

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204 Ibid.
The football team’s actions first show the ongoing debate over the proper response to desegregation, but they also illustrate how Clinton’s middle-class white men used their class identity to perform their race. By becoming the enforcers of the court order and the protectors of the twelve black students, the teens proved that they stood above both blacks and working-class whites. They demonstrated that they had the power to give permission for the social change that was occurring, and they proved that changes in the racial order did not threaten their status. From their perspective, the whites who rioted against desegregation lacked the restraint, security and self-possession that characterized middle-class whiteness. These young men believed that the rioters were also shirking the noblesse oblige that was expected of the superior race. “The very proprieties of white people’s treatment of blacks … contained within them an underlying set of rules that demarcated class among whites,” explains Beth Roy. “One qualified for ‘superior’ status vis-a-vis black people if—and only if—one acted with gentility.” To the football players and their middle-class white allies, the rioters had given up the responsibilities of whiteness, which meant that they also risked losing its privileges.²⁰⁶

The working-class white teenagers who fought the court order saw the situation within the school differently. Though some of the national leaders of the white supremacist movement came from elite circles, it was “animated by and populated by downwardly mobile … men (and their female counterparts),” explained sociologist Michael Kimmel. That was certainly true in Clinton. The working-class white students had watched their parents struggle to make ends meet as the middle class families in Clinton grew wealthier. They had heard the stories of the families who had been evicted from the farms that were replaced by Oak Ridge

and Norris Lake. They had begun to personalize those frustrations through their experiences at Clinton High where their only social outlet was joining vocational clubs. They worried that the black students would have the social and educational entree that the white working class students had failed to receive. The first day of integrated classes seemed successful. The teachers tried to help the black students meet their peers, one black sophomore was elected by her homeroom to be a representative to student council and the white middle class students seemed open to befriending the twelve. Some of the working-class whites rose up, enraged. The one advantage they had that seemed unassailable was their race. Desegregation represented the loss of that bit of power, and the idea of losing that shocked them. Not only could they not comprehend the actions of the middle-class white students who protected the twelve, they condemned them. 207

The first morning of school that year, about fifty people protested outside Clinton High School. A good number of these were teenage boys who were refusing to return to school until resegregation occurred. The youths distributed copies of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government’s *Tyranny in Oak Ridge* to passersby and held up placards announcing “‘We don’t want Negroes in Clinton Hi’” and “‘We the students of Clinton Hi don’t want Negroes in our school.’” Though this protest was the first concrete sign that desegregation might not proceed as peacefully as hoped, local authorities did not seem concerned by the crowd that appeared. Having seen little evidence of segregationist resistance among their friends and peers, the middle-class whites believed that the individuals gathered outside the school were isolated antagonists. For that reason, Brittain

decided not to approach the students who picketed the school rather than attending classes.

“‘We’re not going to press them for the first few days at least,’” he explained to a local news reporter. “‘And if they don’t want to attend our school, that’s alright, too.’” Assistant Police Chief Joe Wilson similarly dismissed the protestors by claiming, “‘They’re just boys from the country come to see the show.’”

Over the summer, discussions of desegregation in the white working class, however, had been much more heated than the ones that had occurred among the wealthier whites. Though Jerry Hamilton never actively participated in the protests, he remembered the debates among his family members as the start of the fall semester neared. His parents decided that he would not attend school with the black students, and they sent him to enroll at nearby Lake City High School, which was not slated to desegregate. At first, transportation was a problem. Because they both worked, his parents could not drive him to school, and since he was not going to the school he was zoned to attend, he could no longer use the school bus. Eventually, he found a ride with a relative who had also decided to transfer from Clinton High. When they arrived at Lake City High, the principal met them at the door. “He told us he didn’t really want us there,” Hamilton recalled. His relative got in trouble on that first day, and the principal used it as an excuse to kick him out of school. Without transportation, Hamilton had to return to Clinton High as well. Back at Clinton, Hamilton kept out of trouble, but he remembered finding the uproar exciting.

208 Brittain, “A Case Study,” 107a; The Oak Ridger, August 27, 1956, 1-2.

209 Interview with Jerry Hamilton.
Within a few days, the segregationist protest movement had gotten organized. As the number of protestors outside the school grew, white teenagers became prominent members of the crowd. The boys appointed themselves to be the movement’s watchmen and guards much as the football players had become the school’s monitors. Whenever a civic official or reporter seemed to be harassing one of the segregationist leaders, the teens would gather. For instance, one afternoon early in the first week of school, two local attorneys approached John Kasper as he waited outside the school. They tried to reason with him, asking him to help them calm the crowd. One of the men remembered that suddenly they were surrounded by teenagers who “had sticks that were pieces of lumber that had been broken off. … Every time [we] … would score a point with Mr. Kasper in our discussion, these pimply-faced youngsters would start to strike their clubs against their legs and gesture with them, hit them in the palms of their hands.” Worrying that they were only making the situation worse, the two lawyers withdrew.\textsuperscript{210}

As the nightly meetings evolved into riots, the white boys were often at the heart of the violence, rocking cars and parading through the black community. This same group of boys also led the attacks against the black students and their families. For instance, on the Wednesday of the first week of school, a crowd of protestors chased Bobby Cain and his friends when they left campus to go to lunch. The whites trapped Cain, and the police had to extricate him from the melee, taking him into protective custody. Seventeen-year-old John Carter was arrested and charged with instigating the attack. That afternoon, white adolescents

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\footnotesize\textsuperscript{210} United States Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain et. al. v. County Board of Education of Anderson County, 1950, Case No. 1555,” August 30, 1956, United States District Court, Eastern District of Tennessee at Knoxville, Civil Liberties Cases, National Archives and Records Administration—Southeast Region, Atlanta, GA, 62-63; Daniel, Lost Revolutions, 272.
\end{flushright}
chased blacks through town and pummeled an African American woman with tomatoes and apples. The police arrested three boys in connection with these assaults, the oldest of whom was twenty-one. The other two were seventeen. A few hours later, another group of about seventy-five white teenagers went into a local white barbershop and pulled out its seventeen-year-old black shoeshine boy. He, too, had to be rescued by the police. The following day, police arrested a sixteen-year-old boy and a fifteen-year-old boy for carrying “anti-Negro signs” and for shouting that the police were chicken. In Knoxville, a group of white boys declared their solidarity with the Clinton protestors and placed a mock grave stone on their high school’s lawn beside a sign asking, “‘What nigger[’]s next?’”

Inside the school, the boys made the black girls “the principal targets of their deviltry.” They probably assumed that the African American females were less likely to fight back than the black males and thus made weaker targets, but they were also drawing on a long tradition of sexual relations in the South. For generations, black women’s bodies had not belonged either to themselves or to the black men they chose as partners. Beginning in the antebellum period and continuing through the civil rights era (and lingering even today), white men reminded the black community of their subservience by molesting and raping black women without consequences. When the white boys dumped bottles of ink into the girls’ lockers, threw eggs and stones at them as they walked into school and yelled “‘nigger

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bitches”” and ““dirty nigger whore”” at them as they passed in the hallways, they were continuing a long tradition of racialized misogyny.\textsuperscript{212}

These segregationist youths also turned against the middle-class whites. They taunted them in the hallways, calling out “nigger lover” as they walked by. Some of the boys “crashed” a meeting of the Rainbow Girls, a club affiliated with the local Masonic lodge which focused on service and sought to teach the girls to be responsible community members. The boys also harassed the teens who had sided with law-and-order when they passed them in the streets. One of the football players remembered that after they finished their first home game, he and a handful of his fellow teammates were walking through downtown Clinton on their way home. They were wearing their letterman jackets, which identified them as football players. Some of the protestors passed by. “You people are a disgrace to the County,” the protestors yelled at the team members. “Going to school and playing football while we’re out here defending you.” For the children of the white teachers, the situation was even more frightening. Milton McIlwain remembered that the nighttime phone calls his father received suddenly became hate calls instead of pleas for veterinary help. “I started sleeping with my loaded shotgun over my bed,” he recalled. The sheriff began visiting the McIlwain home multiple times a week, knowing that L.M. McIlwain had a better relationship with the working class male students than most of the other teachers did. “It was always about school or some of the kids of school who did this or that or the other,” Milton recalled. The football players continued to patrol the halls and tried to protect the black

students from the segregationist students’ physical assaults, though as Bobby Cain remembered, “They could only do so much.”

**THE TENNESSEE WHITE YOUTH:**

In mid-fall, white students at Clinton High began wearing new badges that proclaimed “Keep Our White Schools White.” There seemed to be an unlimited supply of the buttons, and they spread quickly, first among the working-class girls and then throughout the rest of the student body. “Just about everybody started wearing them,” seventeen-year-old Clinton High School junior Betty Lou Miller French told a federal court several months later when she was questioned about the buttons’ origin. “[I got mine] from different people. They were in the halls and things; go out in town, they had some. … If we wanted them, we asked for them.” It soon became clear that the buttons were more than a racist accessory. They marked the beginning of a new, more organized phase of resistance among the segregationist students.

For the first few months of the school year, teenage boys had dominated the student segregationist movement. Their female peers crafted their own way of punishing the black students and their white allies. The girls captured attention by highlighting the fact that they symbolized white adults’ worst fears: they were the young white women whose future progeny would determine the fate of the white race. For generations, white Americans had

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used the ideal of pure white Southern womanhood to justify their brutal enforcement of their society’s racial boundaries. The events of the 1950s—especially the growing popularity of rock’n’roll with its black roots and shrieking white females fans—had already made many of these whites nervous. Despite the efforts on the part of the NAACP and the Supreme Court to downplay white fears of black male sexuality by focusing solely on desegregating the nation’s classrooms, the burgeoning fight for civil rights in the classroom created a perfect storm. “White adults faced the stark reality that it was their own emboldened daughters who might well initiate the sexual ‘mixing’ or ‘integration’ in choosing boys to date or marry,” historian Susan Cahn explained.215 The young women in Clinton hardly needed to say anything to remind white adults about this threat. Their sexually mature bodies spoke for them. But while these youths lived in adult female bodies, they were also still children, minors who were the responsibility of and answerable to adults in their community and who could expect adults’ protection. They were sexualized innocents.216

The girls harnessed this paradox view and used it to their advantage. Repeatedly the segregationist girls described the “inappropriate” interactions they had witnessed occurring between black and white students or else ask hesitant whites whether they really wanted their daughters to marry black men. Thus in their statements and actions, the teenagers implied that they were still pure, but every day the school remained desegregated the threat of voluntary miscegenation increased.217

215 Cahn, Sexual Reckonings, 243-44.


217 Cahn, Sexual Reckonings, 3-5.
In addition to the buttons, the girls sewed large Confederate flags onto their sweaters and began distributing segregationist pamphlets to their classmates. Their friends and allies welcomed their new engagement, but the girls were frustrated that no one outside of their peer group was listening to them. They felt that their views and their message was being intentionally misrepresented. “It was after school one day,” Betty Lou Miller French remembered. She and her friends were hanging out together listening to the radio when they heard an interview with their principal. “Mr. Brittain said the young people at the high school didn’t want this and didn’t want that,” she remembered. He implied that the segregationist students were pawns of the rioting white adults, which angered the girls. The girls decided to start a club that would publicize their opinions, help organize resistance within the school. They decided to call it the Tennessee White Youth.

For the first time, these girls, who hitherto had had little social standing within the school, were part of an influential club on campus. They “were proud to be members,” teacher Margaret Anderson remembered. “For many of these youngsters it was the first time in their lives that they had been looked to as something important … —something we had failed to do.” The new organization also cemented the girls’ social network, establishing who their friends and allies were. They suddenly had a position in the social hierarchy, and it was one that they had created for themselves. The Tennessee White Youth also gave the girls a way to participate in the conflict without joining in the overtly violent tactics used by their

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218 Brittain, “A Case Study,” 177.


male peers. As Karen Anderson found with the white women who organized the Mothers’ League of Central High during the Little Rock controversy a year later, the girls’ organization became “instrumental in spreading rumors of impending violence … and condemning integration as a threat to public order and white well-being” while claiming “legitimacy, in part by denying the centrality of violence to their political position.” They stood for “respectable resistance.”

But the young women who organized the club wanted to do more than just vent their anger and socialize with their friends. They wanted to force white adults in the town to listen to them. The founding members soon discovered that publicizing their goals meant learning a host of new skills such as chartering an organization, formulating press releases, creating propaganda and finding ways to connect their efforts to the larger segregationist movement. The girls created the catalyst needed to intensify militant segregationism among Clinton High’s white students. “Intense, activist racism typically does not arise on its own; it is learned in racist groups,” Katherine Blee explained in her work on racist organizations. From the group’s founding and onward, the situation within the school grew increasingly worse for the black students.

The girls began by writing a press release announcing their presence. Then they asked the White Citizens’ Council in Washington, DC, to send them membership cards, and they passed around a petition among their friends, taking the names of anyone who wanted to join.

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The group quickly grew by word of mouth, so the young women set up a temporary office and called their first meeting.223

Some of the adults had recently chartered a branch of the White Citizens’ Council with the Tennessee secretary of state, so the teens also applied for a statewide charter for their organization. They received it on Wednesday, November 14. The following Monday, Betty Lou Miller French, Carolyn Hutton and Shirley Way went to the Southland Cafeteria armed with their list of names and a blank charter. Located just off the square, the Southland was a favorite eating spot for the White Citizens’ Council’s leaders, so the girls were certain they could find an adult who would drive them to the office of a notary public. As they had hoped, John Kasper and Clyde Cook were at the cafeteria. Cook drove them to pick up three more of their friends, and then the group got the document notarized by a local farm wife.224

After obtaining the notarization, the group went to the Anderson County registrar of deeds where they were met by the Reverend Alonzo Bullock, who had founded one of the county’s White Citizens’ Councils. Bullock paid the requisite filing fee. An Associated Press photographer captured the moment. In the image, Betty Lou Miller French, who was president of the Tennessee White Youth’s board of directors, and Carolyn Hutton, who was its chairman, are handing the paper over to the registrar of deeds. Both girls are wearing white turtleneck sweaters emblazoned with a Confederate flag. Carolyn has her shoulder-

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length hair pulled back in a ponytail tied up with a scarf. Sixteen-year-old Claude Summers stands between them, beaming at Carolyn. Alonzo Bullock looks on [See Image 4.1].

Over fifty teenagers came to the first meeting of the Tennessee White Youth, which occurred the Sunday after they received their charter. Though the Tennessee White Youth members focused their anger on Clinton High School, they came from around the county. They met at the Embassy Club, a social spot on the outskirts of Clinton where the local White Citizens’ Council occasionally had their meetings. Though some of the students needed their parents to drive them to the meeting, the meeting was youth led. Most of the adults waited outside until the Tennessee White Youth’s business was completed.

The girls asked Bullock to open the meeting with a prayer. Then the club’s officers passed out membership cards. “I ______________, a white citizen, believe in the separation of the races as ordained by the CREATOR,” the cards proclaimed. I “uphold racial segregation, am loyal to the United States of America, its Constitution, and believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.” These meetings took on an air of mission work for some of the girls, who described their new club as “a sort of religious organization,” teacher Margaret Anderson remembered. Some historians such as David Chappell have argued that one of the reasons white supremacy failed was that it lacked the theological and biblical support needed to hold its adherents, but for these teenage girls and their supporters, theology was central to their participation in the white supremacist movement. They built upon

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longstanding ideas of sin and race. The girls and their allies clung to the idea that God had created racial difference. “In this tradition, miscegenation—or, more commonly, amalgamation or mongrelization—was the original sin, the root of all corruption of humankind,” explained historian Jane Dailey. The teenage girls in Clinton who founded the Tennessee White Youth believed that by fighting for segregation, they were doing what was right. They were protecting their black neighbors from disobeying God’s law, they were guarding their own purity, and they were fighting a patriotic battle to save their nation from God’s judgement. They worried that, much as God had thrown the Israelites out of the Promised Land for failing to obey the laws given to Moses, America would be subject to punishment “in the form of Communist partisans of the anti-Christ” for lowering the racial barriers.228

After that meeting, the organization’s members encouraged their friends to join, and the club’s membership rolls swelled.229 As the numbers of members grew, the girls who led the club began to look for ways to get involved in the political debate that desegregation had sparked in the town. For instance, the municipal elections were scheduled for December 4, 1956, and the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council had endorsed a slate of candidates who were sympathetic to the segregationist cause. Though most members were too young to vote, members of the Tennessee White Youth canvassed for that fall’s municipal election,


229 Anderson, Children, 93-95; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 98.
passing out literature related to the election and encouraging segregationists to vote for the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council’s nominees.230

Stunned by the student uprising, the town’s middle-class white leaders tried to identify its origins. “I did not allow my students to wear their badges,” English teacher Eleanor Davis remembered. She thought that “most of them were relieved to be able to take them off” and concluded that the paraphernalia had been forced on the students by their parents.231 Another teacher agreed with her. “‘These Youth Council children think they can run wild,’” she said. “‘Their parents, after all, were running wild with them.’” Other middle-class whites thought the problem lay not with the parents but with the adult segregationist leaders. The Clinton Courier-News alleged that “‘men in town’” had bribed the rebellious teens, who otherwise would have never joined the militant segregationists. “One student admitted he had been offered $50 to ‘beat up’ one of the Negro boys,” the paper reported. “We wonder how long the people of Clinton are going to continue to sit idly by and see their officials kicked around merely because they believe in law and order and because they insist that peace be maintained.”232

Many of the white students who joined the Tennessee White Youth resented their teachers’ refusal to support their cause. They turned on the school’s faculty. “‘I have been teaching here for eight years, and I have taken more abuse in the past three months than I have in my whole career,’” one teacher told civil rights researcher Anna Holden. “I saw this

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231 Eleanor Davis, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, September 12, 1978, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.

232 Anna Holden Papers, Afro-American (December 15, 1956), pgs. unknown; Clinton Courier-News, November 28, 1956, 1:1; Anderson, Children, 92-93.
organization overnight twist the thinking of fine boys and girls,” teacher Margaret Anderson remembered.233

By blinding themselves to the Tennessee White Youth’s rapidly expanding influence, the authorities blunted their ability to address the situation. Seizing the moment, the segregationist students took over the school. Though the black students had faced harassment throughout the year, much of it had been hidden. By early November, the militant segregationist students no longer felt such scruples. They shoved and abused the twelve in the school’s hallways and classrooms. Simultaneously, the crowd of protestors outside the school again grew. The black students pleaded with the white authorities for increased protection. Their requests were ignored. Fed up with being left to fend for themselves, at the end of November the black students decided to boycott the school, which placed the school board and the town in contempt of court.

**CHANGING TIDES, CHANGING TACTICS:**

The morning of December 4, 1956, everything seemed to be going well for the segregationist students and their adult allies. The black students had missed almost a week of school. Though rumors circulated that they would return soon, every day that passed seemed to cement the segregationists’ victory. December 4 was also the municipal election day. After the preceding three months of conflict at the school, the militant segregationist base was energized while many of the law-and-order whites seemed to be only nominally supportive of their candidates. But all that changed when the Reverend Paul Turner, local attorney Sidney

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Davis and Magnet Mill executive Leo Bolton escorted the black students down the Hill and into Clinton High School. The picketers allowed Davis and Bolton to leave the school unharmed, but a group of about fifteen men and two women—one of whom was the older sister of two of the Tennessee White Youth’s founding members—chased Turner through the town, trapped him against the side of a car and beat him. Then two Clinton High School drop outs—one of whom was Jimmy Patmore—broke into the home economics’ wing, shoved Clarisse Brittain and threatened to kill Bobby Cain. Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. sent the students home. “‘We are going to close the school today, close it tomorrow, and close it until it is safe for children to attend,’” he announced.²³⁴

The attack on Turner and the invasion of the school appalled most of the whites in town. Record numbers voted in the municipal election, and the White Citizens’ Council candidates lost in a landslide. The student council met that very afternoon to denounce the violence. “We were terribly distressed about Mr. Brittain closing the school,” Jerry Shattuck remembered. “We understood why he did it, but we felt that inside the school we had things well enough patrolled that we were putting an end to all this harassment that the black kids were getting in school. … We were so disappointed.”²³⁵ Under Shattuck’s leadership, the Student Council passed a resolution asking that the Anderson County School Board immediately reopen Clinton High School, comply “‘with the Federal Court order to provide an education for all the citizens of Anderson County who desire it’” and keep Principal D.J.


²³⁵ Interview with Jerry Shattuck (Adamson).
Brittain Jr. and all other faculty “‘in their present capacity.’”236 They presented their requests to the school board that very afternoon.

When the faculty council met, they issued a similar statement denouncing the “‘minority group [that] has tried to prevent us from carrying out our professional obligations.’” In particular, they continued, they wanted the dissolution of the Tennessee White Youth. “‘The activities of this small group in our school have been of a vicious nature,’” the teachers explained. Because the segregationists had been allowed to go unchecked, “‘we are now faced with the fact that this minority movement is depriving more than seven hundred children, some of whom are our own children, from receiving the education to which they are entitled.’” They closed by urging all “‘conscientious parents … and all interested residents of this county to investigate the current activities of this minority group which is bringing about a breakdown of respect among the young people for law and order, contributing to delinquency, and an overthrow of authority which results in mob rule’” because what was happening “‘affects the whole future of their children and our democratic way of life.’”237

When the federal judge who had given the desegregation order heard about the attack, he sent the federal marshals to Clinton to investigate the situation. The day after the attack, federal marshals arrested local white adults who had participated in the local white supremacist organizations. Eventually, fifteen individuals were taken into federal custody. They were charged with inciting a riot and violating the court order. The only one of high

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school age was Jimmy Patmore. The remaining fourteen persons were all adults, and most of them had ties to the high school, though only four had children enrolled there. Not surprisingly, these four children were all founding members of the Tennessee White Youth. Chris Foust and Mary Nelle Currier were both school bus drivers. Nineteen-year-old Zella Lou Dishman Nelson, whose charges were dismissed because she was in the early stages of a difficult pregnancy, had twin sisters who had signed the charter for the Tennessee White Youth. Her husband and brother-in-law were arrested with her. John Gates was the man accused of having paid the white boys fifty dollars each to attack the black students. He also owned the Southland Cafeteria where the segregationists gathered. He adamantly denied the charges, but he admitted that he had discussed desegregation with the white students and had opened his cafe to the students, giving them somewhere to talk and organize. “These kids have come to me—as if I was their daddy—and told me things which were happening up at that school which would make your blood boil,” he explained to the East Tennessee Reporter.

They’d tell me about the Negro boys threatening them with knives—sounded like some of them were big enough to row a boat with—and using this foul language around the white girls, and just being obnoxious in general. I would many times ask them why they didn’t just go tell on them. After a while they’d just laugh at me. They would tell me that was one good way to really get in trouble. They said the principal and teacher would try to make them (the white students) feel like fools, said they would tell them they shouldn’t bother the Negros—that they were good kids and just trying to get an education. Boy, let me tell you, … these white kids—especially the girls—are the ones who are getting the education, but in the wrong way. It’s all from the gutter.

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238 Anna Holden Papers, New York Post, December 6, 1956, pgs. unknown.

239 East Tennessee Reporter, March 1, 1957, 1, 6; East Tennessee Reporter, February 15, 1957, 1; East Tennessee Reporter, February 8, 1957, 1, 4.
Gates’ accusation echoed a fear many whites had when faced with desegregation orders. “Desegregation triggered a generalized fear of falling, as threatened whites imagined their sons and daughters sinking socially, intellectually and morally to the perceived lower level of African American adolescents,” explained historian Susan Cahn. What if instead of raising black students up, white students were “pulled down” to the level of the black students?240

For generations, white Americans had justified racial inequality by portraying African Americans as shiftless, lazy, irresponsible, hyper-sexualized and slower mentally when compared with whites. They had justified the legalized codification of inequality and the violent enforcement of these racial boundaries by playing on fears that, left unchecked, these supposed racial deficiencies would topple the society that white Americans had worked so hard to develop. These fears suggested that the less desirable “black” traits were stronger than the more refined “white” ones. After all, just one drop of African blood could render an individual nonwhite. What would a corps of black students do to a school? As one teacher in a recently integrated school in Louisiana explained, “I found that many of our [white] students, perhaps those who were on the “edge,” are emulating the behavior and disrespectfulness that many of the [black] students brought with them.”241

In Clinton, desegregation proceeded despite these concerns. The presence of the federal marshals and the pressure the middle class leaders brought to bear on the school

240 Cahn, Sexual Reckonings, 287.

board gave Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. the reassurance of support he needed. Clinton High School reopened on Monday, December 10. The Anderson County Attorney General attended the opening assembly and read aloud the federal injunction prohibiting anyone from interfering with the black students’ right to attend Clinton High School. He told the students that they could believe whatever they liked and belong to any club they chose, but he would tell them how they “must act as long as . . . [they were] a student in this school.” He warned them that any “uncalled-for provocation will be dealt with swiftly and harshly.” At the very least, the offender would be expelled. If the case was serious enough, school officials would call in the F.B.I. to investigate, and the student might end up in a federal court charged with having violated the court order.242

The young women who headed the Tennessee White Youth felt that the tide of public opinion had turned against them too strongly for them to continue the organized activities that had characterized the earliest stage of their activism. The last official meeting of the Tennessee White Youth occurred the next week. The end of the club did not mean, however, that the girls had decided to stop taking public—and political—stands on the issue of segregation. Rather than speaking as representatives of the White Youth, they began speaking as individuals, courting the segregationist press, making statements about the continued problems within the school and suppling the adult segregationists with the ammunition they needed in the fight against the municipal, state and federal authorities. The boys, meanwhile, continued using less-than-legal means of voicing their disgruntlement. They were suspected

in a string of unsolved break-ins that occurred around Clinton in which cash and other small items disappeared from the homes of local leaders and the town’s schools.²⁴³

When the spring semester began, the white students again abused the black students. Unlike the fall semester, the female students now occasionally joined in, particularly if the harassment occurred anonymously or after school hours. On Thursday morning, January 10, school administrators found two effigies hung on Clinton High School grounds, one from a light fixture at the school’s entrance and the other from a tree behind the school. A card saying, “‘Keep our white schools white’” had been pinned to one of the dummies. In addition, the offenders had smashed the windows in the Clinton High School’s band room and the Clinton Grammar School’s auditorium/cafeteria.²⁴⁴

The police investigating the incident discovered that the dummies had come from two different groups of white youths. Nine boys, who the local newspaper portrayed as being well-known male juvenile delinquents, had hung the effigy from the tree. They originally placed the dummy on the playground at South Clinton Grammar School but later moved it to Clinton High. When the police arrested two of them, they found them driving a stolen truck full of goods taken during the earlier robberies. The police suspected the group had also vandalized the Clinton schools, stolen guns and snatched hubcaps. Some of the boys said that they had also intended to break windows at the Clinton Courier-News building but had lost their nerve. Because the youths were minors, the local newspaper did not give their names, but it did describe them. Three of the boys were Clinton High School students, two others


attended other local schools and the rest were drop outs. Four teenage girls created and hung the other effigy. One of these girls attended Lake City High School, one attended Clinton Grammar School and the other two had attended Clinton High School but were no longer there. Two of them were officers in the Tennessee White Youth.  

The police chief marveled at how much trouble the youths had caused. He wondered how their parents had permitted such misbehavior. “It is difficult for me to conceive of youngsters, 14- and 15-years-old, staying away from home all through the day—not in school—and hanging out in joints through the night,” he scolded. “What are their parents doing? Why can’t they give some attention and supervision to these children?” A lawyer connected to the defense team hired to help the fifteen segregationists retorted that the teens’ actions had nothing to do with what their parents wanted. The youths’ had acted because of their own convictions. “It looks like the kids are making the school boil again,” he crowed. “Some of the die-hard integrationists want to blame it on outside interference. They don’t want to admit that they just can’t indoctrinate those kids to accepting the situation.”

Within a few weeks, tensions between the black and white boys in Clinton High School erupted into open violence within the school. On Thursday, January 31, black student Alfred Williams fought a group of white students who were taunting his younger half-brother. In the middle of the fight, he pulled out his pocket knife and threatened one of the white boys. The school’s administration expelled him but left the white students unpunished,

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245 Ibid.

proving that they would not follow up on the attorney general’s earlier threats. Less than two weeks later, the same group of white boys accused Bobby Cain of threatening them with a knife. Two weeks after that, Cain was reportedly involved in another altercation with segregationist students. A short time later, Cain got into a disagreement with one of the white janitors and his high school son.

Though the first fight drove Alfred Williams from the school, the subsequent attacks failed to force more of the black students out of the school. The administration recognized that white students had instigated most of the conflicts. By mid-semester, a few of the white parents decided that they would have to pull their sons from the school before they were expelled. Others among the group simply dropped out.

During the battle for the school, the young segregationist women remained the group’s spokespersons. After each incident, they courted the press, offering journalists firsthand accounts of what had occurred in the school. Most of the newspapers, including many of the Southern publications, refused to side too openly with the segregationists, but a few such as the *East Tennessee Reporter* and Charleston’s *News and Courier* picked up these reports and used them to fuel white anger against the black students. Many others used anonymous quotes from the girls.

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248 *East Tennessee Reporter*, February 15, 1957, 1; ibid., March 1, 1957, 1; March 29, 1957, 1; *Clinton Courier-News*, February 21, 1957, 1:1; interview with Bobby Cain.

The white students interviewed also insisted that this was part of a pattern of violence by the black students. They gave the Reporter a list of offenses: one accused Williams of using the same knife to threaten someone on January 10; Jimmy Bolton said both Williams and Bobby Cain had pulled their knives on him before this. Someone else said Cain walked down the halls elbowing every white student he passed, trying to pick a fight. Another white student asserted that Cain had not been in school since January 22. One of the female students, who was in tears “and near hysterical,” told the East Tennessee Reporter about a fight between the black and white students that had happened during gym class. “‘Something happens at school everyday, but nothing is reported about it,’” one boy summarized for the paper.  

The articles worked. Though the militant segregationist students would continue to distrust school officials, the irate older militant segregationists paid new attention to what happened in the school and intervened on the white students’ behalf. The girls’ activities attracted the attention of the F.B.I. and other governmental investigators who had come to the region in connection with the upcoming federal trial of the fifteen segregationists. Being interviewed by the federal authorities seems to be what finally ended the girls’ activism. After serving as the key witnesses in the federal case against the arrested segregationists, they attempted to fade from the limelight. After the trial, few of them returned to Clinton High School, but most either dropped out or transferred to other schools.

Most of the overt segregationist activism ended after the federal trial. When Clinton High School was bombed in 1958, open disagreements between Clinton’s whites, whether

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250 East Tennessee Reporter, February 8, 1957, 1, 4; ibid., March 1, 1957, 1.
within or outside of the school, faded as the town attempted to plaster over its differences. Despite the peaceful facade, tensions between working-class and middle-class white students continued over the coming years. The divisions often affected relationships between whites in the town even after the students left school, though the animosity often played out in ways that obscured the reasons for their ongoing acrimony. On May 11, 1957, for instance, Jerry Shattuck was driving back to Clinton from Oak Ridge and hit John French’s car. French was Betty Lou Miller’s fiance. Both drivers had broken legs, but their passengers walked away relatively unscathed. As a result of his injuries, Shattuck was unable to attend his graduation or give his valedictory speech. Though the state troopers said both young men had been speeding, they placed the blame for the accident on Shattuck. A year of conflict and a lifetime of resentment made this seem like a rare opportunity for French to take down his adversary. He sued Shattuck, alleging that Shattuck’s driving constituted “‘gross and wanton negligence.’” When French won the case, he insinuated to a reporter for the *Clinton Courier-News* that Shattuck had been intoxicated. Shattuck, who had by that time begun his freshman year at Yale, was appalled. He wrote to the *Clinton Courier-News* to protest his innocence. “I received the *Courier-News* today, and as usual, I enjoyed reading all the news from my home town.

“The paper’s reputation, as well as your own, has always enjoyed great prestige among the people I know. … Although my reputation lacks your prestige, I feel that what little prestige I did have in Clinton has been greatly reduced by … your article. … The plaintiff failed to bring one witness forward to testify ‘that young Shattuck was driving under the influence of intoxicants.’”
Shattuck then asked the paper to clarify that the allegation was not the reason that French won his lawsuit. Instead, he had won because Shattuck had been driving too fast.\textsuperscript{251}

\textbf{AFTER 1956:}

For the segregationist students, the white supremacist campaigns they waged against the black students in Clinton High School was not just a way to express their racism. Their actions that academic year were also a way to vent the anger they felt toward the white middle class. For these students, the white supremacist movement marked a unique moment when they had influential roles on campus and could make the greater community listen to their opinions. Through the riots and the political and social campaigns they waged against desegregation, these teenagers used this disruption in the usual order to bring charges against Clinton’s white leadership and express their frustration with the way their lives and their futures were conceived.

Despite their efforts, in the years since desegregation, Anderson County’s working-class white students have seen little improvement. In 1983, the county school board further differentiated between the rural and urban students by splitting the school. The town’s teenagers and those in the neighborhoods around Clinton continued to attend Clinton High School. The students from Lake City, Norris and the surrounding countryside were sent to the new Anderson County High School and Vocational School. The separation of the county’s poor white students from the middle class ones was complete. As mentioned in the previous chapter, while both schools have ongoing racial problems, the students at Anderson County

High School and Vocational School show markedly more overt hostility toward minority students by wearing Confederate paraphernalia, harassing non-white ball players on visiting teams and using racial slurs around the handful of minority students who attend the school. Could it be that these students, who are coming through the Anderson County school system fifty years after Betty French and the founders of the Tennessee White Youth, still feel the need to hold onto their racial superiority as a way of combatting the challenges and limitations placed on their lives?

Much of the public attention given to modern problems in American education focuses on the urban districts where minority students crowd into decrepit buildings for a substandard education offered by poorly-trained teachers. We pay much less attention to the state of the nation’s rural school systems, even though these compose almost forty percent of the nation’s school districts. When we consider our rural school districts, however, the picture is as grim as it is for the urban ones. Rural school children are fighting to

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succeed despite poor funding, insufficient access to computers and technology, generational poverty, malnutrition, and limited job prospects.255

Often the students’ complaints echo those made by the black students from Anderson County who were sent to Knoxville’s Austin High School. Like the students who sued for access to Clinton High School fifty years before, these contemporary students talk about missing school dances, being unable playing on sports teams and not getting to sing in the choir. The long hours on the bus can mean that students are too tired to do well in school,256 and because busing cuts into potential homework time, many students chose to take lower-level courses. “The more advanced classes you take in high school, the more homework you have that evening,” one former student explained. “So you bring home five or six courses

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255 According to a 2007 survey by the National Center for Education Statistics, rural students have three advantages over their urban or suburban peers: their parents are slightly more likely to be involved in their school life, their teachers generally are more experienced and their classes are usually smaller. In all other areas, they fall behind. These students are more likely to attend a “moderate-to-high poverty school” than children are in any area other than large urban areas. They go to schools that have the fewest computers per student and are the least likely to have internet access at school. They are also the least likely to have access to tutoring, daycare, Learning Centers or other academic support programming. Their high schools are significantly less likely to have offer to Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, which may be part of the reason these students are the least likely to attend college or vocational school; Stephen Provasnik, Angelina KewalRaman, Mary McLaughlin Coleman, Lauren Gilbertson, Will Herring and Qingshu Xie, “Status of Education in Rural America,” (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2007); “Percent Schools with Formal After School Programs,” Rural Policy Matters (Arlington, VA: The Rural School and Community Trust, March 2009) http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2109.

256 As one West Virginian student explained, “Two hours on the bus a day is doing nothing for my education. I go to school tired, and I come home tired.” A third grader from a nearby district agreed. “When I get to school, I’m just knocked out. You’re halfway asleep. Teachers hate it because you’re passing out in the middle of tests. At lunch, your head is halfway in your food;” Beth Spence, “Stealing the Joy of Childhood: Long School Bus Rides” (Charleston: Challenge West Virginia, 2000), 2-5, http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED441640.pdf.
of homework in the evening and you’re getting home at 6 or 6:30 anyway, it kind of depresses you and you don’t have that zeal the following year to go to the next step.”

“If one posits (as I do) that individual emotions and attitudes are linked to social life and that they reflect something real in lived experience, then it becomes a reasonable premise that white racism is linked to something problematic in white lives,” Beth Roy summarized in her study of the students in Little Rock. She continued, saying, “We cannot get beyond the matter of race until we have come to terms with it. To do that, we must stop demonizing those who stand against social change and instead understand the perspective from which they speak.” Part of the reason that the work of racial reconciliation in Clinton and in the United States is not finished is because we have not yet found a way to hear from the white students who were part of the struggle. We have not yet integrated their difficult, challenging views into the way we talk about our past.

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257 Rural students and their parents often use their school bus experiences to explain their dissatisfaction with their educational system. Nationwide, school buses travel more than four billion miles every year, and education researchers estimate that as many as seventy-five percent of those miles happen in the rural areas where community schools have been consolidated into larger district institutions. For many parents and students, the time children spend on buses represents how little value administrators and politicians place on the students’ time. One woman calculated that in high school, she had spent 2,160 hours (or thirty-two percent of her time) on the bus. “‘If you break that down, I think it’s fifty-four forty-hour work weeks,’” she explained. “‘So anybody in the work force would’ve had to work a whole year on that job to compensate for the time that I spent on the bus.’” Another student had calculated that her high school bus had traveled around the world twice. A third parent argued that if her school district paid every child who rode the bus for two or more hours a day minimum wage for their time, that one school system would owe half a million dollars. “‘Our children’s time has got to be worth something,’” the parent concluded; Craig B. Howley, Aimee Howley and Steven Shamblen, “Riding the School Bus: A Comparison of the Rural and Suburban Experience in Five States,” Journal of Research in Rural Education 17:1 (Spring 2001); Rob Ramage and Aimee Howley, “Parents’ Perceptions of the Rural School Bus Ride,” The Rural Educator (Fall 2005); “School Bus Safety Data,” School Transportation News, 2008-2011, http://www.stnonline.com/resources/10-safety/786-school-bus-safety-data; Spence, “Stealing the Joy of Childhood,” 7; Belle Zars, “Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides,” (Randolph, VT: Rural Challenge Policy Program, 1998) http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED432419.pdf.

258 Roy, Bitters in the Honey, 11.
THE PROTESTORS VERSUS THE AGITATOR

THE OUTSIDER:

On November 20, 2006, Anderson County High School junior Tommy DeFoe sued the Anderson County School Board and its representatives. During the preceding academic year, he had repeatedly come to school wearing a t-shirt and belt buckle emblazoned with a Confederate flag. Each time he did so, school administrators had asked him to either remove or cover the flags. When he refused, the officials sent him home for the day. Because of the ongoing racial violence within Anderson County’s schools, administrators had banned all symbols of white and black power movements from the county’s campuses. They argued that DeFoe’s Confederate paraphernalia violated that policy. Defoe countered that the policy infringed upon his Constitutionally-protected freedom of speech.259

Both sides used history to appeal for public support. Defoe had grown up hearing stories about a family ancestor who fought for the Confederacy and thought of this man as a role model of chivalry and courage. “‘I am proud of my heritage,’” he explained to a local news reporter. “‘And I am proud to be a Southerner. I don’t see any reason that anybody can’t

wear what they are proud of.’’ School officials, on the other hand, reminded the community of the continued racial instability in the school and argued that as a result they could not permit any activity that suggested support for white supremacy. But they also clarified that they did not blame Defoe or his family for the lawsuit. In their view, the Defoes were no more responsible for their actions than the segregationist rioters had been. ‘‘In 1956, an outsider, John Kasper, came in and created a problem,’’ Director of Schools V.L. Stonecipher explained. ‘‘Then, in 2006, it’s an outsider coming in and looking for a landmark case.’’ School board chairman John Burrell agreed. He even accused these outsider lawyers of bribing Defoe and his parents. The men insisted that they resented the legal team who was using Clinton’s school system to test a principle, but they could not blame the Defoes who were duped into participating.260

During the classical phase of the civil rights movement, most of the individuals whom white Southerners denounced as outside agitators were Northerners or urbanites. Local whites accused these individuals of invading their peaceful towns and radicalizing the black community. Believing that African Americans in the South were happy until outsiders provoked them, many Southern whites maintained that their racial structures would have continued unchanged if not for outside interference. In Clinton, however, the local black community was too clearly the impetus behind efforts to desegregate Clinton High for the charge to be credible. Who then would be responsible for the anger and violence that rocked the small Appalachian town of Clinton, Tennessee?

Both Clinton’s white leaders and many among the black community blamed the conflict on a young, charismatic segregationist from New Jersey named Frederick John Kasper who arrived two days before the 1956-1957 school year began. They believed that Kasper used his anti-Semitic, white supremacist rhetoric to enflame the segregationist sentiment. They claimed that without his interference, no one would have rioted, no bombs would have been set and desegregation would have proceeded peacefully. According to this version of events, whites in town may have opposed with desegregation, but they planned to acquiesce to the will of the courts. Then, as local historian Violet Rhea Purcell remembered it, “from out of nowhere, a long faced eerie foreign-looking man appeared.” Suddenly violence erupted within the school, and mobs took over the courthouse square.  

Town leaders identified Kasper as a troublemaker almost as soon as he arrived. Within twenty-four hours, the mayor, police commissioner, sheriff, acting police chief and the town’s newspaper editor had met with him to explain the many ways the town fought the integration order. Then they asked Kasper to leave. When he refused, they threatened him with arrest. When protestors surrounded the school, the men did arrest Kasper and charged him with vagrancy and inciting a riot. The journalists covering the story and later scholarly accounts of the events of 1956 all followed this lead and identified Kasper as the source of Clinton’s trouble. But the men and women of Clinton’s segregationist movement used their

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uprising as a way to fight for their own local goals. They were willing to partner with Kasper if he could help them achieve their aims, but they refused to subsume their agenda to his.262

The allegation that outside agitators provoked a social uprising can be a powerful defense against social change, but the charge masks a much more complex reality. Social uprisings often begin with localized unhappiness that erupts. When it flares, outsiders come to join the movement. These newcomers arrive armed with resources and connections the local community lacks, which guarantee their initial acceptance. But they also bring along their own agendas. As the movement struggles to articulate its aims and purposes, the local activists and visiting leaders must negotiate an alliance that accommodates all their desires. The resulting relationship is often an uneasy and unstable one, and the ongoing struggle for control can reveal much about how differences among the participants determine the course of the movement itself. It can illuminate the ways that divisions such as class can affect a racial uprising or gender can undermine a labor struggle. Focusing on the outside agitators or the local activists hides those tensions.

Blaming social disorder on outside agitators conceals the motivations that drove local citizens into action. For instance, Clinton’s protests were obviously about race, but they were also expressions of longstanding class tensions. Outsiders often come to a town interested in furthering the movement’s stated aim, but they may not recognize, understand, or agree with the secondary, underlying goals held by the crowds. In the story of Clinton High’s desegregation, the myth of the outside agitator silences the power struggle that occurred

between Clinton’s segregationists and Kasper. It glosses over the motivations that drove the local activists into the streets and paints the townspeople who joined the segregationist uprising as being manipulated fools or hate mongers. This retelling of events also dismisses the costs that some of the locals paid for having taken part in the uprisings—including being arrested, fined and boycotted—and hides the complicated, negotiated, contentious relationship between Clinton’s white supremacists and John Kasper, their self-appointed spokesman.

Many historians of massive resistance leadership as an either/or proposition: either the segregationist uprisings were examples of how easily a few charismatic leaders could manipulate a crowd into a frenzy or they demonstrated how little control anyone could exercise over a mob caught up in the hatred of the moment. The story of Clinton’s white

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supremacist movement reveals that the crowds did not assign leadership and power as clearly or as willingly as that. Unfortunately, in the years since, the many individuals who helped shape segregationist resistance have disappeared from the narrative. How did Kasper—a man, who arrived in Clinton uninvited and seemed to wield only limited influence over the actual trajectory of the protests—become mythologized as John Kasper, the agitator who single-handedly orchestrated the riots and bombings? For the town of Clinton, the reconstruction of Kasper became one of they key elements of peacemaking after the riots, and his memory continues to help the town avoid the politics of blame.

**The Roots of the Trouble:**

When the federal judge handed down his desegregation order in January 1956, Clinton’s municipal leaders assumed that whites in the town would follow their lead and obey the court’s ruling, and they made no contingency plans for how they would respond if relations in the town disintegrated. They did not recognize that the segregationist protest movement had begun over a year earlier when the federal government desegregated Oak Ridge’s schools.264

As a military installation, Oak Ridge was subject to the executive orders that desegregated the armed services. In September 1955, one hundred black students enrolled in the town’s junior high and high schools. That event introduced the previously inconceivable possibility that other schools in the county would desegregate as well. Alarmed by that prospect, a group of local whites founded a chapter of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government. When the order to desegregate Clinton High came in January

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1956, the chapter mobilized. Over the next few months, they assembled a mailing list of sympathizers and sent a representative to lobby Tennessee’s Congress, asking the representatives to pull state funds from any desegregated schools. They also spread the word that desegregation in Tennessee had begun. In response, chapters of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government popped across the state. The new members sent money back to Anderson County to fund the resistance efforts there.265

While the Federation’s members lobbied for outside support, other segregationists in Anderson County began planning for local resistance efforts. In late July 1956, they circulated a petition protesting the desegregation of the high school. Over four hundred county residents signed it. As the beginning of the school year neared, they also organized protestors who agreed to stand outside the high school and demonstrate. “‘Nobody [from the outside] told us to do it,” a picketing teenager told The Oak Ridger on the first day of classes. “‘There was supposed to be a lot more of us but they didn’t show up. They just talked big.’” 266

Few among the middle class joined the militant segregationists’ efforts. Almost all of the individuals who signed the petition came from two white working-class neighborhoods: the houses clustered in the textile mill village of South Clinton and Rural Route Two, a county road leading through the heart of Anderson County’s farm land.267 All the individuals


266 Clinton Courier-News, November 15, 1956, 1:1, 1:4; The Oak Ridger, August 27, 1956, 1-2.

267 Many of the individuals who signed the petitions provided their addresses so that their residency within the county could be established, which helped fight the charge that segregationist activists from other counties had signed in lieu of the local whites.
who were later arrested for their activities also came from those two neighborhoods or others like them.

Class tensions had long divided Anderson County’s white population, and the installations at Norris and Oak Ridge exacerbated those differences. Though Clinton was a small town, the two classes of whites worked, socialized, worshipped, shopped and ate at different locations. As a result, the middle-class white Clintonians who led the town had little social contact with the white working class, which meant that they had very little understanding of working-class grievances. Because of their isolation from the workers, middle class whites did not understand how much anger was brewing among the working white community.

Sometimes white working class dissatisfaction was expressed in labor strikes. In both 1941 and 1955, for instance, striking laborers and their sympathizers flooded into downtown Clinton, converged on the courthouse lawn and threatened to dynamite the mayor’s house, activities that were repeated during the riots of 1956. Other times, working-class and middle-class whites battled each other over social issues. In 1956, just a few months before desegregation began, these class differences blossomed into a debate over moonshine whiskey, which was a popular and profitable business in Anderson County.

The county’s mountain farmers were cut off socially, economically and geographically from the rest of the county. Because it was difficult for them to transport

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268 I am defining “social contact” as interactions that are friendly and equalitarian; Vincent Jeffries and H. Edward Ransford, “Interracial Social Contacts and Middle Class White Reactions to the Watts Riots,” SOCIAL CONTACT 16 (Winter 1969), 313.

269 Celdon Lewallen of Clinton, TN, interview by author, October 22, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.
produce to market, some of them turned to the illegal liquor trade and distilled their corn into moonshine. Though prohibition had ended several decades earlier, many middle-class whites in Clinton remained teetotalers. Furthermore, municipal leaders could not allow this trade to go untaxed and unchecked, so they periodically launched campaigns aimed to halt the bootlegging. They began one such attempt in January 1956.270

The first arrest came on January 5 when officers found and destroyed a one hundred gallon still along the banks of the New River, a stream that flows through the isolated eastern edge of the county. The next week, they apprehended a man who was transporting fourteen half-pints of whiskey. Two weeks later, they arrested another man for hiding five-and-a-half gallons of moonshine in his corncrib. He was sentenced to two years in the penitentiary. At that point, the campaign accelerated. By February 16—when the deputies busted up Raymond Harvey’s two stills and confiscated his whiskey—the officers had found and destroyed fifty-three stills in six weeks.271

The raids did not put a significant dent in the bootleg whiskey trade, however. Two years later the sheriff found the largest still ever captured in Anderson County to that date. It held one thousand gallons of liquor, and its operator had twenty barrels of mash and more than forty half-gallon jars, which the Clinton Courier-News estimated would be “enough to supply the average housewife for twenty years.” Nearby, officers found two more stills of similar size. One was under construction, and the third had been discarded recently. The same


week, Oliver Springs’ officers found a one-hundred-twenty gallon still, seventeen gallons of whiskey and seventy gallons of mash.272

As the white supremacist movement gained momentum, they drew on the experiences of earlier labor strikes and the whiskey debate. Despite the tradition of labor organization and uprising, the town’s white leadership steadfastly denied that the workers had the intelligence or sophistication necessary for staging the 1956 protests. For instance, in a 1990 interview with journalist June N. Adamson, Buford Lewallen—the former district attorney and husband of one of Clinton High’s teachers—believed the crowds gathered outside the courthouse understood little of what Kasper said to them. One day early in the first week of school, Lewallen left his office and wandered into the midst of a street meeting where he heard Kasper “regaling them with the laws of Blackstone and Disraeli.” He marveled, convinced that “none of them ever heard of Blackstone or Disraeli unless they thought they might have been a truck driver or up at the coal mines or something.” Lewallen argued that the crowd listened to Kasper and cheered him on because he used scholars and theologians to explain their actions, which lent the unruly mob of mountaineers a veneer of dignity and validity that they otherwise lacked. In the eyes of Lewallen and other town leaders, the white working class in Clinton were Kasper’s pawns, moving about as he commanded rather than using the events to achieve their own ends. Or as his wife Celdon Lewallen explained to me, they concluded that the poorer whites were “prime for these agitators to appeal to because that could make them important.”273

272 Ibid., March 27, 1958, 1:1.

273 Buford Lewallen of Clinton, TN, interview with June Adamson, June 20, 1990, Clinton, analog recording, UT Special Collections, Knoxville, TN; interview with Celdon Lewallen.
Thus, when John Kasper arrived in Clinton, he stumbled into a town already in turmoil. “‘Hillbillies pissed off at TVA, Atom Bomb, niggers, jews, politicians, preachers, professors,’” he gleefully summarized in a letter to his mentor, the fascist poet Ezra Pound. “[Hillbillies are] the most wonderful people living, ready with squirrel guns, ready to find out, need some ammo. … [Clinton is] Hot! Lit Stick of Dynamite.” But while Kasper was thrilled with the anger brewing among Clinton’s whites and eager to join their fight, local segregationists accepted his offers of assistance with some wariness. He did not fit the typical profile of a segregationist sympathizer.\textsuperscript{274}

Kasper was born in Camden, New Jersey, and he seems to have been a troubled child. In early adolescence, his parents sent him to a series of military academies, but even these institutions had difficulty controlling him. At one of these schools he erupted in anger during a Sunday school meeting, yelling that the church members around him were all “‘fakes and hypocrites.’” Following this outburst, his parents took him to Philadelphia for psychological observation.\textsuperscript{275}

Despite his spotty academic record and history of emotional instability, Kasper enrolled at Columbia University after high school. While there he became enamored with the fascist poet Ezra Pound. Pound, who was born in 1885, was an influential modernist poet and literary critic. Like many of his literary contemporaries, he had spent his youth living as an expatriate in Europe. When World War I erupted, he was living in London. The brutality of the conflict caused him to begin questioning the capitalist system. He moved to Italy in the

\textsuperscript{274} John Kasper to Ezra Pound, May 24, 1957, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Yale University, quoted in Adamson, “Dynamite,” 1.

\textsuperscript{275} Adamson, “Dynamite,” 95-97.
mid-1920s and joined Mussolini’s Fascist uprising. When Hitler seized power in Germany, Pound spoke in favor of the new Fuhrer as well, lauding the new ruler’s fight against the Jews. He remained in Italy during World War II and participated in propaganda radio broadcasts criticizing the United States. Invading Allied forces arrested Pound in Italy in 1945. When he was returned to America, he was deemed mentally unable to stand trial for treason and incarcerated in St. Elizabeth’s Mental Hospital in Washington, DC.276

In the summer of 1950, Kasper traveled to Washington, DC, where Pound was incarcerated at St. Elizabeth’s Mental Hospital. Following that meeting, the two men began a correspondence that would last almost a decade. Soon they were exchanging letters on a weekly basis. As the relationship grew closer, Pound’s influence over Kasper increased. Though Kasper had previously been proud of his complex, grammatically-correct writing style, he adopted Pound’s more explosive, unstructured voice. Pound told Kasper what was best in music, art, politics and economics; he advised the young man as to whom he should meet and he told Kasper what books to read.277

Kasper graduated from Columbia in 1951 and attempted to enlist in the armed forces. The military decided he was not fit for service, so he moved to Greenwich Village and opened a bookstore instead. He named it the Make-It-New Bookshop after a 1935 collection of Pound’s essays. He also partnered with another admirer of Pound’s work and philosophies to launch the Square $ book series.278


Because major publishing houses held the rights to most of Pound’s poetry and literary criticism, the Square $ focused on Pound’s political works and selected other authors who shared his fascism and anti-Semitism. The Make-It-New Bookshop, however, had much less ideological coherence. On the one hand, Kasper stocked anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi texts in the store. At the same time, he carried more liberal political works and hosted interracial parties there. At times, Kasper seemed to realize the contradictions within his behavior. In one instance, he piled all the psychology texts in the store in the middle of the floor and stuck a sign on them labeling them “‘Jewish Muck.’” Pound convinced him to put the books back on the shelves.  

Kasper’s personal life exhibited similar dissonance. While in New York City, he joined the National Renaissance Party—an organization devoted to anti-Semitism and the belief that “what national socialism bestowed upon the German people stands before the world as a monument to all of the Western World”—and opened his shop as a gathering spot for the members. He also espoused increasingly virulent anti-Semitic views. “You know Gramps,” Kasper wrote to Pound one week, “This city gets me down. … God! how it stinks! I sometimes go over to Yorkville on the East side to get a breath of fresh air. That’s where the German population of NYC live, and they have managed to keep the Yits out of their lives socially, but not, of course, financially. There are a few Nazis over there still and I enjoy talking to them. They know what is fact and what ain’t.” At the same time, Kasper attended NAACP meetings and distributed their materials in his store. He began a romantic

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relationship with a young black woman and brought her to visit Ezra Pound in St. Elizabeth’s, and he helped a mixed-race couple find housing in New York City.  

Shortly before traveling to Clinton, Kasper moved to Washington, DC, to be closer to Pound. This seems to be when his anti-Semitism morphed into fully developed white supremacy. In Washington, Kasper joined the Seaboard White Citizens’ Council, a fringe chapter of the national organization whose motto was “Honor-Pride-Fight/Save the White!” He wrote and published a series of pamphlets to publicize his new organization. These propaganda pieces laid out Kasper’s racial philosophies.

In “Segregation or Death,” Kasper asserted that different races developed different abilities, which is the reason he warned his readers against the push for racial equality. He alleged that Jewish leaders used the idea of racial equality “to subvert existing Gentile order everywhere.” Ultimately, the Jews hoped to use the civil rights movement to undermine democracy and bring America under communist control, Kasper explained. To achieve “the race-hating, nation-destroying schemes of the NAACP and the red Sanhedrin,” Jewish leaders were transforming “the Nigra” into a “subversive, sharply un-American in character … a stooge of world-Jewry, blindly led into the vortex of Jewish power, dedicated to overthrowing all existing order.”

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When Jewish leadership convinced white Christians that all races were equal, they were undermining the fabric of western civilization. If they were successful, then America’s government would topple and the Jews would be free to step into the void and help “themselves to the loot and booty of the thousand year old civilizations … to benefit exclusively their own race, the Jewish.” The vitriol with which Kasper attacked Jews was one of those qualities that separated him from mainline white supremacists such as the White Citizens’ Council, who avoided “the stigma of anti-Semitism” even while their writings “carried a persistent though guarded strain of hostility toward the Jew.”

Many other segregationists did see the same link Kasper did between the fight against civil rights and the Cold War struggles. Some of them argued that the ruling had undermined Americans’ right to choose their associates. Others alleged that the use of troops in Clinton, Little Rock and elsewhere demonstrated that the federal government was using the movement to promote a totalitarian state. Similarly, others returned to the debate between states’ rights and federal rights, insisting that in a democracy, the states would determine whether to desegregate their schools. Historian Ellen Shrecker summarized segregationists’ effective use of the Red Scare effectiveness. “Besides destroying left-wing civil rights organizations,” she wrote, it “isolated or silenced individual activists, broke up alliances ….

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narrowed the movement’s internationalist perspective and deflected the struggle … toward the attainment of … legal, rather than economic goals.”

While John Kasper and other conservative Americans spoke abstractly about the Red scare, Clintonians understood Communism and the Cold War as an immediate, concrete threat. They knew that if the conflict with the Soviets ever heated up, Oak Ridge was a logical site for a nuclear attack, and they tried to prepare for that possibility. Some concerned citizens organized local defense corps to supplement the protection the government provided. Beginning in the mid-1940s, Clinton High School students manned the Clinton Ground Observers Corps, which watched the skies above Anderson County for enemy aircraft. In January 1956, the county’s Civil Defense Director decided to expand the program. He called for volunteers willing to staff a round-the-clock observation rotation known as “Operation Skywatch.”

To keep town leaders informed on the threat to their community, local civic organizations invited speakers to educate their members on the atomic threat and what it meant for Clinton. For instance, at the November 1956 meeting of the Timely Topics Club—

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a women’s club that included the mayor’s wife and other influential white women—Harold J. McAlduff of the Atomic Energy Commission in Oak Ridge addressed “Clinton in an Atomic Attack,” a speech which the ladies reported was “informative” and “one which all of Clinton should hear.” A few months later, the Clinton Civitans invited Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Friedmann, commander of the Knoxville Air Reserve Center, to their meeting. His lecture focused on the strategic importance of the Oak Ridge installations. The Atomic Energy Commission’s work in Anderson County was key to a diplomatic maneuver called Mutual Assured Destruction, Friedmann explained. Proponents of this idea posited that the best way to guarantee peace was to have an arsenal of weapons so large that in the event of an “enemy attack … the [retaliatory] damage we would inflict would insure there would been no possible chance of gain by the attacker.” Thus, though Clinton would suffer if there was an atomic attack on Oak Ridge, the danger they faced was a patriotic sacrifice that might save democracy from destruction. United States Congressman Howard H. Baker—who represented Anderson County—told the Civitans something similar at their November 1957 meeting. “‘I wish I could say we have no cause for alarm because of Russians scientific advances and increasing military strength,’” he told the assembled men. But because of the work at Oak Ridge, “‘I can and do say … that the Communists would commit suicide if they should attack us or our allies. Our loss and destruction would be great; theirs would be greater.’”

Clinton’s segregationist protestors may not have joined the Civitans and the Timely Topics club, but they shared their wealthier neighbors fear of atomic attack. By 1956, after a

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A decade of worrying about the likelihood of atomic warfare and looking for Russian aircrafts overhead, Anderson County’s residents led lives that were underwritten by the fear that they could be the victims of sudden, catastrophic destruction. And after McCarthyism and the well-publicized threat of Communistic cultural infiltration, they also worried that American society would collapse from within. Any social change might be an example of a Communistic cultural assault. The connection Kasper drew between the fight for segregation and the Cold War made sense to some whites in Anderson County. Furthermore, linking segregation to anti-Semitism and the fight against Communism lent an air of patriotism and intellectualism to the segregationist campaign in Clinton.

As he reflected on the role he believed Jewish conspirators and Communism played in the racial strife erupting across America, Kasper became increasingly unwilling to remain uninvolved. He looked for a cause to join. In the fall of 1956, Clinton High School was one of several schools around the nation that the courts ordered to desegregate. As Kasper evaluated the different cases, he decided that Clinton High School seemed to be the institution where desegregation’s success was the most probable.

Kasper and Clinton:

The easiest way for the segregationists to resegregate Clinton High School was for them to convince middle-class white leaders that it was more problematic to desegregate the school than to defy the federal government, that it was more costly to cross their working-class constituents than to disobey the federal courts. When Kasper arrived in Clinton, the segregationist protestors invited him to explain his philosophies which aligned so well with

286 John Kasper, “Segregation or Death.”
their own fears. They were anxious to connect to the larger segregationist movement and hoped that Kasper’s presence meant that their resistance would gain national support.

They also valued his contacts with national segregationist figureheads. For instance, at Kasper’s invitation, Clinton was visited by Birmingham segregationist Asa Carter. Carter was a leader in Alabama’s White Citizens’ Council and founded a paramilitary terrorist group called the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy. He was also a speechwriter for George Wallace and reportedly penned Wallace’s famous commitment to “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

As many as twenty individuals spoke to the crowds that gathered in the courthouse square for the nightly rallies that first week of school. Though most of the speakers were local white supremacists, Kasper and his friends gave the keynote addresses, and their notoriety attracted attention to the rioters’ message. Since these meetings were the way that the movement recruited new supporters, publicized the plan for the coming day and interacted with the national media, the high profile visitors were key to the protestors’ success.

Kasper’s loose affiliations with the national White Citizens’ Councils, based in Indianola, Mississippi, were also valuable to Anderson County’s white supremacists. Founded in 1954 response to the Supreme Court’s decision in Brown, the White Citizens’ Council denounced by some as being a “‘new Ku Klux Klan without hoods.’” The national Council leadership, however, saw themselves as being more politically adept than the night

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287 After Wallace began to soften his stance on race in the late 1960s, Carter retired from politics and began writing under the pseudonym Forrest Carter. His most famous book, The Education of Little Tree, has been a New York Times bestseller and required reading for many American schoolchildren.

288 Adamson, “Dynamite,” 101-06.

riders were in the 1950s. Though their membership came from all classes of whites, they focused on recruiting members from the middle classes, men who could had the political and economic influence to support white supremacy. Instead of threatening to lynch African Americans who tried to enroll their students in white schools, for instance, White Citizens’ Council members were to get the blacks fired from their jobs, call in their mortgages and loans or in other ways undercut the financial standing of the black community. They were a “network of chamber-of-commerce types … openly endorsed by bankers and judges and congressmen that would affirm publicly that blacks are genetically inferior to whites, that the United States Court yields only to Moscow … [and] that God recoils in disgust whenever white and black children share a common classroom,” according to historian Neil McMillen.

National representatives of the Citizens’ Councils would eventually separate themselves from Kasper and his violent tactics, but his use of their name, affirmation of their complaints against the federal government and affiliation with their political agenda lent legitimacy to segregationist efforts in Clinton. Finally, he brought the people of Clinton propaganda materials they could not afford to produce themselves.290

Though local segregationists accepted Kasper’s help, he and his new allies remained wary of each other. Anderson County’s supremacist leaders wanted to join the national cause but not at the expense of their own goals. They expected Kasper to throw his energies, talents and funds behind their aims. But Kasper hoped to lead their movement rather than join it.

Kasper was a compelling and persuasive public speaker, and he used his speeches to campaign for his leadership. He contrasted himself—the educated and articulate Northeasterner—with the “mountaineers” who headed the local supremacist crusade. On the one hand, he told his listeners at one segregationist rally, he valued their leaders’ isolation and lack of education because these seeming disadvantages had protected their pure sense of their whiteness. They had not been infected by the other ethnicities that had immigrated but had retained their Scots-Irish traditions. On the other, those same factors rendered them naive and unable to negotiate national politics. To win this fight, Kasper argued, Anderson County’s whites needed his worldly voice to show them how to harness their race pride. He even ignored their preferences and called them words which they considered slurs. For instance, during one of his speeches, Kasper stood on the steps of the courthouse. The crowd cheered him loudly until he began to praise them for being “the hardworking hillbillies of East Tennessee,” which he assured them made them into “the most independent people in the world.” At that pronouncement, a deafening silence fell over the crowd. In their silence, they rejected the supportive role he offered them. Could they integrate the eager newcomer into their movement?291

Despite the power struggle occurring among the organizers, the nightly rallies served their purpose, drawing ever larger numbers to the square each evening and encouraging more whites to come to the school protests. Within a few days, the segregationist movement had grown beyond local leaders’ control. The officials turned to the federal courts for help, filing an injunction request. The judge granted it on Thursday, August 30. In it, he declared that

John Kasper and five Clintonians (most of whom were part of the August petition drive) along with “‘all other persons’” were “‘enjoined and prohibited from further hindering, obstructing or in any wise interfering with the carrying out of the aforesaid (integration) order of this court, or from picketing Clinton High School.’”

This tactical move by the city leaders and the federal judge backfired. The federal marshals served the order on Kasper and the five Clintonians that night in front of almost a thousand protestors. Kasper snatched the order from the marshals, scanned it briefly and then shredded it. He told the crowd that he and the five others specifically named in the order would have to step back. But, he continued, the rest of them should “‘go ahead and continue.’” Rather than being cowed by the judge’s actions, the protestors should see the restraining order as a sign of victory. They had finally convinced the authorities that they could not be led docilely forward into integration. “‘Let us keep on until we win it,’” he shouted. After his speech, the marshals arrested the six persons named in the order and took them to the federal prison in Knoxville. The next day, the five Clintonians were released, but Judge Taylor sentenced Kasper to a year in the federal penitentiary. An unknown patron had

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paid for a Washington, DC, attorney to represent Kasper. The lawyer filed an appeal, and Kasper was released on bail a few days later.293

Over Labor Day weekend, while Kasper was in jail in Knoxville, the nightly protests became riots. On Friday night, a small group of segregationists clustered together on the outskirts and voted to found a local branch of the White Citizens’ Council. They elected Willard Till, a machinist inspector at Oak Ridge and a prominent member of Clinton’s First Baptist Church, as their leader. When they announced their new club at the rally that night, approximately a hundred fifty individuals paid the three dollar membership fee.294

The rally that night opened with two local speakers. Then Asa Carter took the speakerphone. “‘I’m Asa Carter,’” he announced. “‘I’m from Alabama.’” His crowd cheered loudly. He reassured the assembled masses that whites’ innate superiority made white supremacism a humanist and patriotic endeavor. Whites were the reason the world had democracy. “‘For every three white men there are seven colored men on this earth,’” he explained, “‘but you’ll find that the Anglo-Saxon races are the only ones that have ever maintained a free government for free men.’” The audience roared their support of his ideas. Carter and the local speakers went on to denounce the federal government and assured the crowd that the will of the people trumped any judicial order, people continued to stream into the square.295


295 Ibid.
Late in the evening, some members of the crowds turned violent. One group of men attacked some of the news photographers, shouting, “‘The only picture we want is a picture of a nigger with a noose around his neck.’” Others rocked cars passing through town on the state highway which passed through Clinton’s square. One car carrying black passengers was overturned. Another carload of African Americans escaped the mob, but not before the whites cut the tires off the car. The vehicle broke down just outside the city’s limits, and the police had to rescue its occupants. Around two hundred people marched toward the mayor’s house, threatening to dynamite it. The police turned them around just before they got there. Others discussed blowing up the courthouse.296

Concerned that they could no longer control the mob, the next afternoon town leaders collected additional weapons from the Knoxville police department and the FBI, and they deputized forty-six law-and-order white men as an auxiliary police force. As the auxiliary police neared the city square that afternoon, they found the crowd already milling.297

A reporter from The Oak Ridger who was following the auxiliary police was surprised by the people around him. Though he expected a mob, this crowd was courteous. Whenever he accidentally bumped into one of the crowd members, they politely exchanged apologies. He walked among “people: tall, small, fat, thin.” He was surrounded by “women, some carrying babies, wide-eyed or sleepy.” He saw young children who “stumbled and straggled along behind their mothers” and teenagers who “laughed and punched each other, mugging for the cameras.” He thought the square would feel unfamiliar, but at “any other


297 The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 8.
time, it would have been a Saturday night crowd in the county seat, in town for a movie or a coke or a chat with friends under the bright lights of the drug store and then home again.”

The difference was that on that night, “no one was going home. Instead more and more came.”

The auxiliary police tried to keep the crowd circulating, hoping that they could keep trouble at bay by preventing onlookers from congregating around persuasive speakers, but as more whites gathered, forcing movement became increasingly difficult. Some of the crowd members began challenging the home guard. Auxiliary deputy Sidney Davis had a “heated discussion” with Mary Nell Currier, one of the Clintonians mentioned in the injunction, and five men were arrested and jailed for their antagonism. As tension rose, some crowd members slashed tires and broke the windows of passing cars.

Soon a number of onlookers gathered on one side of the courthouse, cheering and shouting. The auxiliary police could not budge them. The deputies began to advance on one of the largest clumps of people. “‘Come on,’” the crowd taunted in response. For a few minutes, the crowd and the officers stared at each other, then “suddenly there was a hiss and a large puff of smoke went up from the center of the crowd.” The deputies threw canisters of tear gas one-by-one at the mob. Each time, the crowd drew back until the air cleared and then surged forward again. As the guard threw their final canister, thirty-nine Tennessee Highway

298 Ibid.

Patrol cars carrying one hundred state officers came barreling over the bridge, sirens screaming. The patrolmen regained control and disbanded the auxiliary police.\footnote{300}{The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 8.}

Then another car pulled up, and two representatives of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government got out, carrying a loudspeaker and microphone. They set up a makeshift speaker’s podium on the car and started the evening’s programming. The Reverend Alonzo Bullock—a local grocer, unemployed preacher and “father of nine living children,” at least one of whom was a student at Clinton High School—opened with a prayer, then a series of speakers stepped up to address the crowd. One man, a Nashville attorney and state leader of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government, told the crowd that desegregating the schools placed the local communities in an impossible position. The only solution was for the people to take the money the state collected to support the public schools and use it to open private, segregated schools for their students. “It’s just as if the federal law said you can’t drive down the right side of the street and the state law said you can’t drive down the left side of the street,” he explained. “What would you do in that case? Why, you would take over the streets and make them private streets.” Other speakers advocated sacking the Anderson County Board of Education and impeaching the governor.\footnote{301}{Ibid., 1, 8; East Tennessee Reporter, July 26, 1957, 1; Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1:3.}

The next day, Tennessee Governor Frank Clement replaced the Highway Patrol with the Tennessee National Guard under the direction of Adjutant General Joe Henry. Henry instituted martial law in the town. He decreed that there would be no congregating in Clinton’s town square or around the school; no parking near the Courthouse after dark and no
public address systems or “outdoor speaking.” The Mayor and Board of Alderman passed ordinances in support of these prohibitions and added a curfew for teenagers. Nevertheless, as darkness fell that Sunday night, a crowd gathered on the square. A black Navy sailor who was dating Gail Ann Upton Epps, one of the twelve black students, stepped off the bus from Knoxville into the middle of the crowd of whites. He had assumed that the Guards’ arrival meant that he could visit his girlfriend before he shipped out to Texas. When the whites saw him, they lunged for him. He ran into the nearest building, a service station, where a single military policeman stood guard over him until a convoy of five jeeps filled with armed National Guardsmen rescued him. The Guardsmen drove the sailor back to Knoxville.302

Irate that the segregationists had defied his orders and attacked a member of the military, General Henry sent three hundred Guardsmen armed with rifles and bayonets to clear the square. At first the whites refused to move. “Teenagers, knowing they wouldn’t be harmed, jeered and kidded with the soldiers,” the local paper reported. A few threw firecrackers at passing cars. The standoff continued until about one in the morning.303

On Monday, “Clinton was quiet but ominous,” The Oak Ridger reported. Just after dark, General Henry’s sedan roared out of town toward Oliver Springs, its sirens screaming. Rumors spread that, considering the success in Clinton, black students would enroll in Oliver Springs High School. By nightfall, over six hundred whites gathered there in protest. At first, the white crowd remained peaceful so Henry did not intervene. The situation began to

302 Ibid.; Eugene Weaver, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, January 6, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1:1, 1:3; Adamson, “Dynamite,” 113; Holden, Clinton, Tennessee, 6-9; Anderson County, TN, “Clinton City Recorder Minutes, Volume 12,” Anderson County Records, microfilm collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 201-03.

303 Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1:3; Holden, Clinton, Tennessee, 6-9; The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 8.
deteriorate when four dynamite blasts exploded on the hill above the school. Then someone
set fire to a six-foot wooden cross in the front yard of one of the school board members’
brothers, and there were rumors that a phalanx of armed blacks were coming to force them to
accept desegregation. When two black men drove through town, the segregationists
surrounded their car and rocked it, though they did not turn it over. The men sped away, but
they stopped just beyond the crowd and fired at the whites. One white man was hit in the
arm. 304

The whites surrounded a home where they believed the two men sought refuge.

Henry worried there would be a lynching. He sent almost a hundred armed Guardsmen along
with jeeps, tanks and personnel carriers to Oliver Springs to control the mob. Confident that
the Guardsmen would not attack their fellow white Southerners, members of the mob went
right up to the Guard and leaned on the bayonets. “You could see creases in their shirts when
they finally backed off,” a CBS reporter remembered. After an hour and a half, Henry
ordered his men to arrest anyone who refused to disband. The guard jailed fifteen white men,
all of whom came from one of the nearby communities. They also arrested the two black
men, charging them felonious assault and attempted murder. Though a few hundred whites
gathered in Oliver Springs again the following night, Monday night marked the last time the
rioters challenged the Guard. Henry slowly allowed the Guardsmen to return home. Within a
week, only a few soldiers remained, and Clinton’s segregationist movement began

experimenting with new ways of resisting the municipal government and the federal courts.\textsuperscript{305}

**LEARNING POLITICS:**

Willard Till’s branch of the White Citizens’ Council met for the first time while the National Guard was still in Clinton. Since they could not meet within Clinton’s town limits, several hundred interested whites gathered under a tent on Clyde Cook’s farm. Two uninvited guests were also there that night. The sheriff came to the meeting to remind them of the federal injunction, and he suggested the meeting violated it. Cook took a copy of the injunction and promised to keep the warning in mind. The other interloper was John Kasper, recently released on bail from the Knoxville jail. He asked Till and the other members of his group to put their organization under the umbrella of the Seaboard White Citizens’ Council, which had sponsored Kasper’s activities. Till replied that he believed local whites needed to maintain a separate organization. Attendees voted unanimously to support Till’s suggestion.\textsuperscript{306}

Still hoping to gain control of the local supremacist movement, Kasper chartered his own branch of the White Citizens’ Council which he called the Tennessee White Citizens’ Council. He then founded a local branch of the new statewide organization which he called the White Citizens’ Council of Anderson County. When he again suggested that the local segregationists join his new organization, Till responded that he was not willing to merge his group with Kasper’s. Only a handful individuals joined Kasper club. “‘We had the


organization and he had the charter,’” Till explained to a local newspaper reporter a few months later. “‘He figured we’d fall in line, but a majority of the council members didn’t want a charter with Kasper’s name on it. We didn’t know what he wanted.’” In mid-October, Till’s sect received their charter as well. They became the White Citizens’ Council of Tennessee, and their local branch was the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council. They never invited Kasper to attend their meetings.307

As the local segregationists grew more organized, they wondered how to publicize their message. They decided they needed to begin by managing their public image. They realized that Clinton’s civic leaders and John Kasper were not the only ones who dismissed them as ignorant hillbillies. Most Americans from their municipal leaders and the federal judges who heard their case to the news journalists covering events in Clinton and the readers who were keeping up with the news reports saw them as unsophisticated bigots. They began formulating ways to refute that perception.

The segregationists decided that the first step was to take back control of their image from the media representatives who had flocked to Clinton. The reports of the riots almost unanimously portrayed them unsympathetically, so the local whites decided that they could not trust most of the existing media outlets to portray them fairly. “Some of the news stories out of Clinton, Tennessee, definitely have a pro-Negro bias,” one man explained. He pointed out that media coverage labeled the protestors as “segregationists,” a “mob” and “troublemakers,” but the same sources never called their opponents “integrationists.” Furthermore, “Whenever embittered whites are quoted, any grammatical lapse in their speech

is mercilessly recorded verbatim—including such phrases as ‘them niggers,’ ‘we seen,’ ain’t gonna,’ etc.,” he continued. “Oddly enough, these ‘segregationists’ never seem to speak in a normal manner. They usually ‘snarl,’ ‘yell’, ‘scream’, ‘snap’ and howl.’” He contrasted that with the ways the media handled the black students and their families:

   On the other hand the little Negro pupils, when quoted, invariably speak perfect English. Aside from Clinton’s unrest, these children also are newsworthy because they seem incapable of those grammatical imperfections common to their race. Indeed, their perfect mastery of our language, as indicated in sympathetic news reports, suggests that these colored children should be teaching English instead of studying it.

Another man alleged that television reporters coached black students on how to present themselves while cherry picking segregationist interviewees who “‘show up in as bad a light as possible.’” In essence, these local protestors were identifying part of the national civil rights agenda: civil rights leaders were relying on the journalists’ cameras, microphones and words to publicize the violence and hatred occurring across the South and win public sympathy to their side.308

   As a result of their sympathetic portrayal of the twelve black students and their supporters, cameramen and reporters in Clinton faced increasing hostility when they attempted to cover the local movement. When Till’s Anderson County White Citizens’ Council members saw newsmen approaching a meeting they were holding at the Blowing Springs Grammar School, some of the men left the meeting and chased the reporters shouting, “‘We’ll break your damn cameras if you try to take any pictures.’” The segregationists then blocked the road with their cars and threw rocks at any reporter who

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tried to cross the barrier. Six men attacked Knoxville Journal reporter Bill Anderson when he
tried to infiltrate another meeting. During the riot in Oliver Springs, Life Magazine
photographer Robert Kelley was taking photographs from on top of one of the National
Guard jeeps. Five men came toward him. He saw that three of them were carrying shotguns,
so he jumped to the ground and broke his leg. Tennessean photographer Jack Corn had a
shotgun shoved into his stomach by one rioter. A few days later, another man chased him
down and beat him.309

Despairing of being able to use established media outlets to spread their movement,
the segregationists launched The East Tennessee Reporter, which editor Leo Ely promised
would fight the town’s leaders, whom he characterized as “the ‘go-alongers,’ who … allow …
freedom to be snatched away.” In the inaugural issue, Ely dismissed the federal judges
who had decided Clinton High’s fate as being nothing more than “‘mouth-shutters’ who by
the thump of a gravel and issuance of a decree can silence the people’s opposition.” He
disparaged “civil officials with itchy ‘trigger fingers’” such as the men who joined the
auxiliary police. He also pledged that his coverage would reveal false friends like Kasper and
other “wolves in sheep clothing” who came to Clinton promising support but whose actions
undermined the local movement.310

Perhaps realizing he could not control the Clinton movement, Kasper sought to
establish a new base in nearby Knox County. He planned an organizational meeting for

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309 The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 8; Clinton Courier-News, October 11, 1956, 1:5; “The Press:
The Southern Front,” Time, September 17, 1956 (http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/
0,9171,893568-1,00.html).

310 Clinton Courier-News, November 1, 1956, 1:1; ibid., November 8, 1956, 1:1; The Tennessee
Reporter, October 18, 1957, 2.
September 30, and to attract attendees, he brought in a slate of speakers from Alabama. Unbeknownst to Kasper and his allies, the federal judge who was supervising Clinton High’s desegregation learned of the meeting. He sent a plainclothes court reporter to make a transcript of the proceedings.311

As happened at most of the Anderson County meetings, the Reverend Bullock opened that night’s meeting with prayer. Then a local man recounted how the “Gestapo tactics” used by the auxiliary police convinced him that he had “to do something more.” The man begged his audience to help him protect his children, who were at risk of being polluted by miscegenation. He also urged his listeners to help him defend the state of Tennessee, whose constitution was being destroyed by the federal judiciary. Next, Asa Carter took the podium and gave a speech similar to the one he had delivered on Clinton’s town square. He was followed by Harold McBride, the state treasurer for the Alabama White Citizens’ Council, and Kenneth Adams, who led a mob that had recently broken up a Nat King Cole concert in Birmingham.312 These men listed the threats facing the white supremacist movement across the region, explained the ways they had furthered the fight and praised John Kasper’s dedication to their cause.313

As a result of this meeting, Kasper forged some lasting relationships with the Knox County segregationists. Over the coming years, he would continue to visit with the owners of the farm, who would become leaders of the Knoxville segregationist movement. Kasper’s


312 For more on the attack on Cole, see Chapter 1.

313 “Segregation Report.”
initial intention failed, however: despite the slate of speakers he had brought and the endorsements they offered, he did not regain his foothold in Anderson County. Instead, the distance between Kasper and Clinton’s segregationists continued to grow.

**Deeplening Schisms:**

While Kasper was making new allies in Knoxville, the white supremacist movement in Anderson County was weaving itself through the fabric of white working-class life. Most of the ministers who led the white churches in the town aligned with the law and order crowd, but Alonzo Bullock and many of those who pastored rural congregations joined Till’s Anderson County White Citizens’ Council, helping ensure that the organization “was set up on prayer or Christianity.” Anderson County White Citizens’ Council secretary Sybil Davis testified that “You had to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ before you could become a member of our council.” As many other segregationists around the South would do, the local White Citizens’ Council insisted that segregation was commanded by God. They always opened meetings with prayer, usually led by the Reverend Bullock. They then sang hymns together before beginning the business portions of the meetings. In keeping with the gospel singing tradition in the mountains, each member brought his or her own songbook.  

The events during the fall of 1956 deepened the divide between the rural churches and those based in Clinton, causing some members of the Anderson County White Citizens’

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Council to change their church memberships. The Tills, for instance, had been attending
Clinton’s First Baptist Church. As the fall progressed, the head pastor there became an
increasingly vocal proponent of integration while Willard Till became increasingly prominent
in the segregationist resistance. The Tills eventually transferred their letter of membership to
a more sympathetic congregation.315

In addition to infusing their religious practices into the white supremacist
organization’s activities, the segregationists brought it into their community centers. During
that first fall, they met at the Blowing Springs Grammar School, the New River School and a
local nightclub as well as at the homes and farms of various leading members. While white
supporters of law and order patronized Hoskin’s Drug Store on the square, many days, the
segregationists could be found hanging out at the Southland Cafeteria and Ann’s Cafe, both
of which were on Main Street across from the courthouse and both of which were owned by
John and Ann Gates. John and Ann Gates had been prominent business people in Clinton for
some time. Gates had begun his career in the Army, and he was stationed at Pearl Harbor at
the time of the 1941 Japanese attack on the bases there. His experiences during that attack
seemed to have shaken him physically and emotionally. Shortly into the war, he received a
medical discharge because of stomach ulcers. He also suffered from a heart condition and
“frequent blind spells,” and he may have had an addiction to alcohol, though he gave up
drinking entirely in about 1950. Upon moving back to Clinton, Gates first ran a taxicab

Anderson County, “Recommendations of the Deacon Board, First Baptist Church,” April 21, 1957.
business and then opened the Southland Cafeteria. He and his wife opened Ann’s Cafe a few years later.316

The arrival of the National Guard ended the Councils’ hopes for immediately overturning the court order. Parents in the White Citizens’ Council decided that their priority was to protect white students until the black students were pushed out of Clinton High. Since almost all the black teenagers in the county lived within Clinton’s city limits, Clinton High had been the only high school in the county to desegregate. The white parents organized a temporary bus service providing transportation to Lake City High School for any white student zoned to Clinton High. Hoping to gain some assistance, the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council sent representatives to the Anderson County School Board’s September meeting. Till, their appointed spokesperson, made six specific requests. He asked that the board meet with Judge Taylor and ask him to reconsider the desegregation of Clinton High School; that they give black parents the option of sending their children to Austin High in Knoxville; that they allow any white Clinton High School student to attend another county high school; that they provide transportation for any white student wishing to leave Clinton High School; that they “poll Negro children to determine their school preference;” and that they resign their posts. The board promised to respond at the next meeting.317

Over twenty-five segregationists attended the October meeting to hear the Anderson County School Board’s answer. Before the board responded, the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council members presented a petition asking for Principal D.J. Brittain Jr.’s


immediate dismissal. It was signed by one thousand Anderson County residents. The board said they commiserated with the request but said it did not have the authority to comply. The group also asked the board to supply them with the names and addresses of the black high school students’ parents, a request the board denied but only after reassuring them that such information could be easily found. Then the board responded to the six demands. They announced that they would not meet three of the demands, including meeting with Judge Taylor; providing transportation for white students wishing to transfer and polling the black students. They did agree to allow black students to transfer back to black high schools if they wished to do so and they promised that white students attending Clinton High School could choose to attend any other county high school. Each board member would determine whether to resign. Till protested the board’s decision not to provide transportation for the white students. “‘I think the children who go elsewhere because they don’t want to go to school with Negroes should be recognized,’” he argued. The board still refused. The segregationists continued to apply for a bus to Lake City High at each subsequent board meeting. Each time the board denied their request.318

Next the segregationist activists transferred their focus to influencing Clinton’s politics. A municipal election was scheduled for early December, and the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council decided to endorse a slate of candidates. At the end of September, Till obtained a list of registered voters from the Anderson County Election Commission. Citizens’ Council representatives began canvassing voters they believed might support their cause, and in mid-October, they organized a political rally in the Clinton High School

auditorium to build momentum for their candidates. One newspaper estimated that five hundred people attended the meeting. School officials were unhappy about opening the school to the Citizens’ Council, but they feared that barring them from the campus would be illegal and would provoke further anger and retaliation from the segregationist group.319

The campaigners developed a new political platform they expected their candidates to endorse which included continuing the fight for segregated schools. On Saturday, November 3, that platform turned into a new political party. Local segregationist leaders founded the Anderson County States Rights Party, the political arm of the Anderson County White Citizens’ Party. To celebrate this occasion, almost one hundred individuals met in South Clinton and caravanned through the city. The leadership then met at a local café for dinner before hosting another political rally at Clinton High School. Four hundred people attended that meeting. This would be one of the farthest-reaching and longest-lived outgrowths of Clinton’s segregationist movement. In July 1958, this new political party became the National States Rights Party, which would be associated with a multitude of hate crimes over the next two decades and whose leaders would be associated with the bombing campaign that targeted synagogues and schools across the South, including the 1958 attack on Clinton High School.320

As the Anderson County white supremacist leaders grew more politically sophisticated and better connected, they separated themselves yet further from John Kasper.


320U. S. Court of Appeals, “Alonzo Bullock v. United States v. Kasper,” July 17, 1957, 1022-23. Other connections between the movement in Clinton and the National States Rights Party can be found. For instance, according to a 1966 FBI report on the Party, their motto was “Honor, Pride, Fight—Save the White,” just as the Seaboard White Citizens’ Council’s had been.
They resented his condescension, and after having observed how the national White Citizens’ Council responded to him, they also worried that his politics and rhetoric was separating them from the other national white supremacist groups that they needed to court. The acting spokesperson for the group claimed that the leaders of the Anderson County States’ Rights Party purposefully did not invite Kasper to their meetings. Kasper was “definitely ‘not a friend’ of W.H. Till,” she continued. When Kasper snuck into the public rally on November 3, the organizers prevented him from speaking. After that night, both the States Rights Party and the Anderson County White Citizens’ Council banned him from all of their gatherings. He was also prevented from attending meetings of the Ku Klux Klan.\(^{321}\)

Meanwhile, Kasper infrequently returned to Clinton. Even whites in Clinton who still looked to him for leadership and considered him a friend and advocate felt as though he was “off running around the country and trying to stir up trouble elsewhere” while they fought the battle in Clinton alone.\(^{322}\)

But the local segregationists had not yet completely abandoned Kasper. In early November 1956, he went on trial in Clinton for his activities during the first week of school. At the trial, Clyde Cook, Anderson County Justice of the Peace Guy Jones, Willard Till, Alonzo Bullock and several other local whites took the stand in his defense, testifying that Kasper did not incite the riots, rather they were locally planned. Outside, a small group of protestors picketed the trial, carrying signs proclaiming, “‘John Kasper Deserves a Fair Trial,’

\(^{321}\) *Clinton Courier-News*, November 1, 1956, 1:1; ibid., May 16, 1957, 1:8.

\(^{322}\) *Clinton Courier-News*, February 14, 1957, 1:1, 1:4; Holden, Publication unknown, December 5, 1956, pgs. unknown, “Papers.” For more on this campaign, see Chapter 3.
‘No Rigged Jury,’ [and] ‘We Demand a Fair Trial for Kasper.’” Based on the defense’s witnesses, Kasper was found not guilty.\(^{323}\)

Kasper was not free long, however. His acquittal gave the militant segregationists hope that they too could escape punishment when they acted against the court order. Within a few days, crowds again lined the streets around the school. Within the school, the teenage members of the Tennessee White Youth ramped up their war on the black students. By the end of November, the black students decided to boycott the school—placing the administration, the school board and the local governmental authorities in violation of the court order—until they were provided with adequate protection.\(^{324}\) On December 4, 1956, the Reverend Paul Turner of the First Baptist Church of Clinton and two other white male leaders escorted the African American students to school. After the black students were inside, the men went their separate ways. Two of the men were allowed to depart in peace, but a group of segregationists led by Clyde Cook chased Turner through the town. When they caught him, they trapped him against a car and beat him. Segregationists also invaded the school, and Brittain sent the students home. The school did not reopen until the next Monday.\(^{325}\)

Infuriated, the federal judge supervising Clinton High’s desegregation issued arrest warrants for the arrest of sixteen segregationist leaders. They included grocery store and filling station owner William Brakebill; Lawrence Brantley, who allegedly led the local


\(^{324}\) For more information, see Chapter 1.

\(^{325}\) For more information, see Chapter 3.
Klavern; the Reverend Alonzo Bullock; unemployed laborer Clifford Carter; Union Carbide machinist Clyde Cook; carpenter’s helper J.C. Cooley; bus driver Mary Nell Currier; school bus driver and former deputy-sheriff Chris Foust; house painter John B. Long, another Klansman who was already facing charges of cross-burning; Cleo Nelson; Zella Nelson and her husband Henson, who was a clerk at a Kroger Grocery Store; sixteen-year-old Jimmy Pierce, who was also known as Jimmy Patmore; Knoxville Utility Board employee Thomas Sanders; Till; house painter Raymond Wood and John Kasper. Everyone except for Brantley was a member of the White Citizens’ Council. Cook was also arrested, convicted and fined in the city court for his assault on Paul Turner.326

The arrests did not go smoothly. When the marshals arrived to take Till into custody, he met them carrying a .25 caliber pistol. As news spread of the arrests spread, the accuseds’ families and friends gathered around the jail. The local paper noted that the “bystanders were uttering remarks similar to those heard here … during the September mob action.” Some of them even called out that they would be “‘taking the prisoners’ away from the U.S. Marshals and local officers.”327

During the arraignment hearing, Taylor also had the marshals arrest the Knox County man on whose farm Kasper had held his meeting. The man had been passing out “‘inflammatory’ literature” during a court recess. The pamphlet charged that “‘When good Christian people are arrested like they were in Clinton, we have a Hungarian situation here at home.’” When he read that assertion, Taylor retorted that “‘It would be most difficult to think


327 Ibid.
of any more disrespectful language than that which compares the arrest of people in Clinton … with the Russian oppression in Hungary."^{328}

The case drew national attention back to Clinton. Volunteer defense attorneys appeared from around the South. Included among their numbers were the attorneys general of Georgia, Louisiana and Texas and Governor Ross Barnett. Asa Carter took on the job of raising money to pay the fees and other costs associated with the defense. Within a few days, the lawyers had the charges dismissed against Patmore and Coley on technicalities. The rest of the arrested persons were released under bond, the cost of which ranged from one thousand dollars for the release of nineteen-year-old Zella Nelson and twelve thousand dollars for Till and Cook.^{329}

Local activists finally drove Kasper out of Clinton in late December 1956. On December 28, someone set off a bomb at the headquarters of his White Citizens’ Council of Anderson County, which was located in a small concrete block building one mile south of Clinton. Kasper had rented the space less than a month earlier. He used the bottom floor as a meeting space for his struggling organization while he lived on the second story.^{330}

The attack on Kasper was part of a series of dynamite blasts set off around Clinton and Anderson County beginning in mid-December and continuing through the turn of the New Year. The unknown perpetrators attacked sites that were somehow related to the desegregation controversy. They targeted the bridge over the Clinch River; Clinton High School; homes, business and community centers on the Hill; and the property of white town

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^{329} Ibid.

leaders. Though the dynamiters used bombs to fight both their black and white opponents, only the attack on the bridge, the blasts set in the black neighborhood and the charge left at Kasper’s headquarters caused any significant damage. There the dynamite was placed strategically so as to destroy the structure. The blast occurred at 9:33 in the evening, less than fifteen minutes after a White Citizens’ Council meeting ended. The only reason Kasper was not injured was that he had left for Knoxville immediately after the meeting, a fact that the bombers may not have known.331

Local, state and federal investigators investigated these incidents, but they never arrested anyone for the crimes. No one seemed to doubt which group set the dynamite, however. Even the segregationist newspaper never alleged that African Americans placed the blasts. Instead, everyone’s assumption was that they were part of the segregationist protests. Kasper appeared to get the message. After the bombing, he seldom returned to Clinton, though he did try one last time to gain influence over the segregationist movement there by launching his own newspaper, the Clinton-Knox County Stars and Bars, in February 1957, in which he reiterated the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that buttressed his support for white supremacy.

In the introductory editorial for the Clinton-Knox County Stars and Bars, Kasper predicted that the “heroic courage of the white citizens of Anderson County” would eventually force “Clement and the other scalawags and carpetbaggers [who] were selling Tennessee out to the commies, radicals and politically corrupt … to ‘reconsider.’” Kasper then used the rest of the paper to denounce his enemies. As in “Segregation or Death,”

Kasper’s anti-Semitism remained intimately tied to his commitment to segregation, and his favorite allegation was that his opponents were secretly Jewish. For instance, he asked his readers which town leader was the most revolting: “sob sister [Principal DJ] Brittain [Jr.], ½ Jew Preacher [Paul] Turner, Negroid-featured [Clinton High School teacher] Mrs. Sidney Davis, or the pasty-faced editor Horace Wells.” In another article titled “The Three Jews,” Kasper asserted that Brittain, Turner and local Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government leader John Roy all had “kike written all over their faces.” He then explained the character traits in Turner and Brittain that confirmed their mixed ancestry.\footnote{\textit{The Clinton-Knox County Stars and Bars}, February 8, 1957, 1-3.}  

According to Kasper, Turner and Brittain had proven their mixed-ancestry by their willingness to sell out the white race. He characterized Turner as “one of those type of Christians who originally were Jews but converted to Protestantism or Catholicism years ago to subvert and judaize those bodies,” an accusation echoing his belief that Jews wanted to undermine and destroy American society. In his attack on Brittain, Kasper used the caricature that Jewish men were less masculine than their Christian counterparts. He insisted that Brittain’s diminutive stature and obvious distress proved his racial inferiority. Brittain should have either refused to comply with the desegregation order, Kasper insisted, or he should have resigned and given “the job to a man.” Instead, he had become the school’s “pleading, crying, sobbing leader” and a “sniveling, slobbering imbecile.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Kasper’s vindictive stand against John Roy was especially telling. When Kasper first came to Clinton, he courted Roy’s support. Roy, however, turned down Kasper’s offers of
assistance, insisting that the people of Clinton had prepared their own protests. Kasper could join them, but he should not try to lead them. Over the coming months, as Kasper remained in Clinton and courted media attention, the relationship between the two men deteriorated. Checking into Kasper’s background, Roy discovered his associations with the NAACP in New York City. He questioned Kasper’s reasons for coming to Clinton, asking whether the young man had come to the town to prevent or enable desegregation. Was he perhaps an integrationist plant whose divisive actions were meant to turn public opinion against the segregationists?  

Roy’s suspicions seemed to be confirmed by three photographs news journalists found. The images were taken of Kasper during his time in New York. [See Figure 2.1] In them, Kasper looks like a bohemian rather than an upright, respectable conservative leader. The first one of these may well have been snapped at one of the Sunday night gatherings Kasper hosted. It shows Kasper with an interracial, mixed-sex gathering of young adults in the Make-It-New Bookshop. They have clustered near a bookshelf, and a few of them use a library ladder as a prop. They appear relaxed and familiar with each other. One young white woman stands on the ladder. A few rungs above her, a black man with an engaging smile leans against the shelves, looking at the camera. She grasps the rails of the ladder behind him, encircling his legs with her arms and leaning her torso against his calves. She smiles confidently at the camera. Below her, just in front of another young black man, stands a brunette woman in a midriff-baring shirt. A third white woman stands to her right, between two black men. She glances up at the pair on the ladder with a grin, and one of the black

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334 Ibid.
men’s hands may be resting on her shoulder. Kasper, the only white male in the image, stands at the back of the group. He also grins at the camera.\textsuperscript{335}

In the two other pictures, the friends are outside, standing around an anti-drug poster. Again the friends are interracial and mixed gender, and in both photographs, the friends smirk at the camera as they mock the anti-drug message behind them. Some of them hold hand rolled cigarettes. \textbf{“POT SMOKERS} who want to quit. Correct use of the breathing exercises described in these books will give you ALL the remarkable sensations you can get from marijuana,” the poster proclaims. \textit{“It’s not smart to use HEROIN,”} the sign continues. \textit{“The reds have been using drugs as a POLITICAL weapon since 1927. Don’t be a Rooseveltian dupe!”}\textsuperscript{336}

In retaliation, Kasper wrote that Roy was a “Judas-goat” who wanted to “try and divide and discredit and stop any really effective action against kike-control of the gentile whether it be through the nigger or interest-slavery.” Roy responded by pointing out that whenever Kasper traveled to other sites of desegregation, those communities kicked him out. All of those schools remained segregated, but Clinton, “the one place Kasper has been allowed to remain the longest[,] is the one place where new integration remains and confusion reigns.”\textsuperscript{337}

Kasper’s paper failed after only one issue, and he rarely returned to Clinton after that. When he did come back, he was shunned. He tried to attend one particularly important Klan

\textsuperscript{335} How to footnote it?

\textsuperscript{336} How to footnote it?

\textsuperscript{337} \textit{The Clinton-Knox County Stars and Bars}, February 8, 1957, 3; \textit{East Tennessee Reporter}, February 15, 1957, 4.
rally held in May 1957. On that evening, a caravan of about twenty cars drove through the Hill, three crosses were burned on a hillside just outside of the town and Imperial Wizard E.L. Edwards spoke to the crowd, ranting against local, state and federal governmental officials for their willingness to accept desegregation. When the Klansmen realized that Kasper was standing at the rear of the crowd, they ordered him to leave the rally. He relocated to a restaurant nearby where he could watch what was happening, but they commanded him to leave that location as well.338

**The Trial:**

Despite the rift between Kasper and the rest of the defendants, Judge Taylor refused to separate their trials, insisting that all sixteen be tried at once. In late February, Taylor amended his writ of arrest to include restauranteur John Gates, who was accused of having bribed nine white Clinton High School boys to harass the black students and create other trouble within the school. Late in the afternoon on Monday, February 25, two federal marshals walked into the Southland Cafeteria and asked Gates if there was somewhere private they could talk. When the three men reached the kitchen, the marshals served Gates with the judge’s order and then escorted him to Knoxville. Eventually, Gates was released on five thousand dollars bond, which was paid by another Clinton restauranteur. He was to be represented by John Kasper’s attorney.339

Gates professed to be surprised by his arrest. He insisted that he had “‘done nothing to be ashamed of and certainly nothing to be arrested for,’” though after hearing some of


what the white students told him about events within the school he “‘could almost understand
them arresting me for some of the things I’ve thought.’” He insisted that he had had nothing
to do with the White Citizens’ Council or any other segregationist group. “‘I haven’t had time
to fool with … them,’” Gates protested. “‘I just work about 18 hours a day!’” He admitted
that he had allowed members of the White Citizens’ Council and the Tennessee Federation
for Constitutional Government to use his businesses as organizing centers. “‘Let me tell you,
if you brought a bunch of newspaper men in to have a meeting, I’d rent the place to them,
too,’” he explained. “‘I’m in business.’” Nevertheless, Gates did sympathize with the
segregationists and felt that what happened in the high school violated his principles. “‘John
had few, if any, secrets,’” a friend told a local reporter. “‘You could easily known what he
was thinking because he would tell you. He stayed quiet about this integration question until
he could stand it no longer.’”\footnote{East Tennessee Reporter, March 1, 1957, 1, 6; ibid., March 15, 1957, 1, 6; ibid., March 21, 1957, 1, 4.}

The stress and shame of having been arrested and linked with the federal suit appears
to have been too much for John Gates. After his release on bond pending the trial, he quit
eating and sleeping. “‘He would just go off in a corner and sit down by himself,’” his wife
told a local reporter. “‘His friends would speak to him and he wouldn’t seem to notice them.
He wasn’t unfriendly—he just wouldn’t notice them.’” Worried that her husband’s stomach
ulcers had flared up again, Ann fed him goat’s milk and raw eggs. That did not seem to help.\footnote{Clinton Courier-News, March 14, 1957, 1:1; East Tennessee Reporter, March 15, 1957, 1, 6.}
Then one Sunday, the Reverend Paul Turner told his congregation to avoid the Southland Cafeteria. Though there is no evidence linking this popular local establishment with the illegal liquor trade and though Gates himself no longer drank, Turner implied that the business dealt in bootleg liquor, calling it “a nuisance” and insisting “that it should be closed up” and “John should be run out of town.” Several members of the congregation stopped by the Southland Cafeteria to tell Gates about the sermon. The news that Turner had denounced him broke Gates. He sat alone, quietly murmuring to himself, “I wonder why Brother Turner would say a thing like that. … I wonder what they’re going to think of next.”

Worried for her husband, on Saturday night, March 9, Ann Gates called their family doctor for help. He phoned in a prescription for a sleep aid. Gates took a dose but did not go to bed.  

A few hours later, Gates called the chief of police and asked him to come to the Southland Cafeteria. When the chief arrived, Gates asked the man to turn on his siren and summon all the people to the city square so he could make a speech. The chief of police urged Gates to just go home and get some rest. The chief then returned to the police station. Gates stayed at the cafeteria with a few close friends. At about four a.m., Gates slipped out of the back of the restaurant. Fifteen minutes later, someone who lived near Clinton High School called the police to report that “A drunk is raising cain up here at the high school.”

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The chief of police grabbed a deputy and sped toward the school. They could hear Gates yelling while still several blocks away and remembered that it sounded as though he had a loud speaker. By the time the police reached the scene, Gates had smashed out several windows at Clinton High School with a Norris creamery milk case. The chief called out to Gates, telling him to stop. Gates replied that he “‘had the devil chasing him around.’” He complained about all the “‘financial troubles, lawyers and books.’”

Gates then turned his focus back on Turner. “‘Paul Turner had a church full of people who also fill the street,’” Gates complained. Then he continued, “‘it is just not to be. … We missed the schedule.’” The police hypothesized that the last cryptic remark might relate to a recent unsuccessful bombing attempt on the high school. Gates also told the police that desegregation “‘won’t work, men. … There’s no power on earth that’ll make it work.’” He then asked the police to have Turner come to the school, telling them that he had “‘something to say to him.’”

The police tried to grabbed Gates, but he pulled out a knife, saying, “‘Don’t you come close to me or I’ll hurt you.’” He then turned the knife toward his chest and cried out, “‘I gave my blood once for these people—I’ll do it again.’” The chief of police, realizing that Gates was unstable and not wanting to make the situation worse, decided to try to disarm Gates without force. He asked Gates to hand over the knife, saying, “‘You’re just going to get into trouble.’” Gates replied, “‘I’m already in trouble. … Just call Brother Turner down here so I can talk to him.’”

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Three more officers arrived. The police decided to encircle Gates and try to get his knife. Seeing their movement, Gates yelled, “‘What does the Supreme Court know about the stand we’ve got to take here.’” Then he placed the knife on his left wrist and continued, “‘Yes, I’ll take my stand right here on these school house steps. I gave my blood once. … I’ll do it again.’” With that, he slashed his wrist. Blood dripped down on the steps. Then he pointed the knife at his chest and cried out, “‘I’ll stick it in this old heart of mine.’” He began hacking at his chest, though the knife was too dull to do more than tear his shirt before his attention drifted. He asked the officers why the federal judge did not arrest NAACP officers alongside the White Citizens’ Council members. Then Gates suddenly snapped his head back and forth and blinked rapidly. He appeared to be waking up from a dream. Noticing the knife in his hand, he folded it closed and tucked it in his pocket. He then turned to the chief of police and said, “‘Well, I guess I’ve gotten myself into something. What am I doing here?’” He would later tell a friend, “‘I dreamed I was breaking up a big fight. When I woke up, it looked like I had just got in one.’” The chief of police asked Gates for the knife, and the man quietly handed it over.347

The police took Gates to the county jail, but rather than putting him in a cell, they gave him a cup of coffee and called a doctor to treat his knife wounds. His wife arrived a few minutes later. “‘I’m sorry, honey. I don’t know. I’ve messed everything up now, I guess,’” he told her. After the doctor’s visit, Gates sat quietly, drinking his coffee. An eyewitness remembered that he held “the paper cup in both hands as if he thought it was going to get away. He would take a sip, then put the lid back on the cup carefully as though to protect the

liquid.” He continued to ramble, repeating some of what he said at the school, though he said it more quietly this time. He also continued to apologize to his wife and worried that the “old “booger” Judge Taylor’ll throw me under the jail now.” He also was still asking for Turner to come and wondered how Turner could have been brave enough to escort the students to school but yet not able to come talk with him.348

When Gates seemed stabilized, the police placed him in a cell. Gates took off his belt, wrapped it around his neck and attempted to hang himself. After the second suicide attempt, the police released Gates under two-hundred-fifty dollars bond. His wife admitted him to Eastern State Hospital for treatment. The doctors at the hospital told her that her husband’s condition was worsening and that they had placed him in a room by himself.349

John Gates died in Eastern State Hospital on Tuesday, March 19. According to hospital staff, they served him a glass of milk at about four that morning. When they checked in on him two hours later, he was dead. His wife was suspicious that something else happened. She pledged to “fully investigate” his death. “I’ll never believe anything but that they were doing something to John over there which they’re trying to hid,” she said. Though she did not have his body autopsied, she did catalogue his injuries, which included burned spots on his forehead and charring inside his mouth that went about an eighth of an inch deep. Both of those injuries indicate that Gates may have died following a botched electric

348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
shock therapy treatment. He was buried in the National Cemetery in Knoxville, and the local
American Legion Post provided a color guard in honor of his time in the armed services.350

The remaining fifteen segregationists went to trial at the end of July 1957, though
before the end of the proceedings, the prosecutors had dropped charges against four of the
defendants because of lack of evidence. Zella Nelson was dismissed because she was
pregnant. The federal prosecutors argued that the remaining ten individuals knew of the
injunction Taylor had issued barring any interference with Clinton High’s desegregation and
had willfully “conspired with Kasper or ‘acted in concert with him’ … to violate the
injunction.” The penalty was up to six months in jail and a one thousand dollar fine. The
crowd of defense lawyers decided on a multi-prong defense. First, they argued, the
defendants had been exercising their Constitutionally-protected freedom of speech by
protesting. Second, the federal court should not have charged them in the first place because
it had not jurisdiction to issue injunctions for or against integration. Then they tried to prove
that the federal marshals had failed to properly serve the injunction. For it to be enforceable,
they insisted, the marshals needed to have read it out to the crowd instead of allowing Kasper
to take it, read it and then interpret it. Taylor granted them the right to a jury trial, and their
lawyers predicted that the twelve white men chosen to serve would acquit their clients with
little trouble. The testimony wrapped up after nine days.351

350 Quote from R.P. Oliver, Brainwashing in the U.S.A., 15-20, quoted in Taylor, “Retribution,
Responsibility and Freedom,” Law and Contemporary Problems 44:2 (Spring 1981), 66; East Tennessee
Reporter, March 21, 1957, 1, 4; East Tennessee Reporter, March 29, 1957, 1.

1:1, 1:6; East Tennessee Reporter, July 19, 1957, 1; ibid., July 26, 1957, 2, 8.
After only two hours of discussion and only one ballot, the jury returned its verdict. William Brakebill, Lawrence Brantley, Alonzo Bullock, Clyde Cook, Mary Nell Currier, John Kasper and W.H. Till were all found guilty. The other four were acquitted. Pandemonium erupted in the courtroom. Clyde Cook’s young daughters “broke into hysterical sobs and ran from the courtroom, fleeing down the halls,” a local reporter observed. Till’s wife “slumped forward, hands covering face, in despair.” The state head of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government denounced the verdict. “‘The jury, in spite of defense arguments, forgot the basic reason for a jury system,’” he said. “‘The jury stand sat a bulwark between potential judicial tyranny and the people. … The jury sitting in judgment of the Clinton 10 will go down in history as a tragic failure.” Judge Taylor sentenced Kasper to six months in a federal penitentiary (in addition to the twelve months he had already received for his actions in Clinton). He placed the remaining five on probation. Civil rights advocates were thrilled. Many had wondered whether a Southern jury would convict white defendants in a civil rights case. Though many other juries would not, in at least this one case, they did. Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver had been one of the three Southern senators not to sign the Southern Manifesto denouncing integration (the other two were Senators Albert Gore of Tennessee and Lyndon Johnson of Texas). After the verdict, Kefauver wrote a public letter to President Eisenhower, attempting to pressure the president into strengthening his support of integration. “Mr. President,” Kefauver began. “For a long time now there has been much talk about whether southern juries would or would not convict violators of civil rights cases.

I have always said that in my own state of Tennessee I was confident that jurors would not violate their oaths. I am delighted with the word from Knoxville today in the now famous Clinton trial. … Many of the people on this jury were not in favor of integration—they said as much when they were being qualified. But … they stood up like law-abiding citizens and convicted the violators. Their action … showed that they took their oaths seriously and acted in a discerning manner.\textsuperscript{353}

After the trial, Kasper left Clinton for good. He tried to join other segregationists protest movements around the South, and he regained some brief notoriety for his involvement in the violence that occurred in Nashville in 1957. As he traveled, he used his version of events in Clinton to prove his credentials as a leader. He lost his appeal and served time in a federal penitentiary in Florida. After finishing his sentence in April 1959, he briefly returned to Knoxville to campaign against the consolidation of Knox County and Knoxville, a plan which was opposed by many of rural Knox County resident who worried that their voices, tax monies and other resources would be subsumed under the needs of the city. After that, he dropped out of public view for a few years. He resurfaced briefly in 1964 to run for President of the United States on the National States Rights Party ticket. J.B. Stoner, who would eventually serve prison time for his involvement in a Birmingham synagogue bombing, signed on as his vice presidential candidate. Neither of the men appears to have invested much time or energy in their campaign, and the Kasper/Stoner ticket only won three thousand votes. After that, John Kasper moved to Nashville, where he had a series of failed marriages and operated a used car lot. He died there in 1998.\textsuperscript{354}


THE POLITICS OF BLAME:

When visitors walk into Green McAdoo Cultural Center, John Kasper’s image is one of the first they see. His photograph looms over the front of the exhibit hall, enlarged until he is several feet larger-than-life. Dressed in a suit and tie, he is in the middle of a speech. Looking intensely at the camera and caught mid-word, he holds one hand in the air in an emphatic gesture. Seven white teenage boys cluster around his feet. One of the youths appears to be screaming, but the rest sit in wide-eyed silence, a few staring at the camera as though trapped. “Intent upon fomenting trouble in the South, Frederick John Kasper … arrived in Clinton on August 25th[, 1956],” the exhibit’s text explains. “Descending upon the small town like a whirlwind, the stranger sowed seeds of anger where there had been resignation.” In this narrative, John Kasper is the Pied Piper of Clinton: his is the seductive voice luring the docile people of Clinton into the streets and goading them into a frenzied mob with his music of hatred and bigotry.355

Part of the reason has to do with Kasper’s own brilliant self-promotion. As his relationship with the townspeople disintegrated, he began traveling around the South, visiting civil rights hot spots. During the late fall and into the early spring, he passed through Alabama, Florida, Nashville and North Carolina. Each of these locations had schools that would face court-mandated desegregations the following year, and at each location, he offered to help organize the protests. Officials in most of these communities arrested him within a few hours of his arrival, and the segregationists leaders in most of these spots—many of whom had closer ties to the national White Citizens’ Council movement than he did.

355 Green McAdoo Museum text.
—refused any offers of help from him. Nevertheless, the news media continued to follow him. In his interviews, he claimed credit for the troubles in Clinton and used those protests to prove how much these other cities needed his assistance. In each town, he found a handful of supporters, but the leaders of the mainline segregationist movement, many of whom were members of the national White Citizens’ Council organization, drove him from their towns, arguing that his brand of resistance would ultimately do more harm than good.

For the African American community and some among the white middle class, Kasper helped them make peace with the betrayals they had faced. For the black students and their families, the protests meant that whites who had been their neighbors and friends became threatening. Because the percentage of African Americans in Clinton was so small, even the Hill—where traditionally the black community gathered—was an interracial neighborhood. The black students lived among the mill workers and coal miners who would form the heart of the mobs. Because of the pain of those broken friendships, many of the African Americans found comfort in the idea that John Kasper caused their relationships to go awry. If Kasper “came in here, and he stirred these people up,” as Alfred Williams, one of the twelve black students, said, or if he “was using those white people,” as Gail Ann Epps Upton believed, then the friends and neighbors that betrayed them had not done so out of fear and hatred. These betrayals were instead a result of clever manipulation, which made the break more forgivable.356

Some among the middle-class white community felt similarly hurt by the segregationists’ actions as a result of the personal attacks they experienced. For these individuals, the idea that John Kasper caused the trouble serves much the same purpose. This is particularly true for the white female schoolteachers who had close relationships with poor white students before the students who took to the streets in 1956. Most of the middle class whites in town, however, never experienced a similar degree of trauma or feel as endangered as the black Clintonians did. For the majority of these individuals, however, the Kasper narrative achieves a different end.

The idea that Kasper manipulated the rioters also meant that the town leaders could ignore the class anger that was being expressed through the segregationist protests. Middle class whites could believe, as Celdon Lewallen insisted, that the working class whites had joined the protests “out of sheer ignorance. They didn’t know any better. They were just, really they were victims.” By remaking Kasper into the segregationists’ spokesperson, white leaders placed the threat raised by the militant segregationist movement outside of their local community.357

Kasper also seemed safer than the local whites because he looked and sounded middle class. The local movement had used the tradition and language of the earlier labor uprisings that had occurred in the town, but Kasper had little concern for workers’ rights. Though he referred to the ways the white leaders in the town ignored the workers, he seldom spoke about the specific complaints the workers had nor did he seem to invite feedback from the workers’ as to what they most wanted to see changed. As an Ivy-league educated

357 Interview with Celdon Lewallen.
entrepreneur, he had little exposure to the problems faced by rural Appalachian industrial workers. By making John Kasper into a mythologized outside agitator, Clinton’s leadership found someone to blame for the violence that had occurred.

As Jason Sokol warns in *There Goes My Everything*, both civil rights activists and later scholars have been prone to oversimplify the white southerners who joined the segregationist movement, making them caricatures rather than people. When remembering the civil rights movement, it is easy to fall back on a standard cast of characters that fill out a morality play of good versus evil. But the civil rights struggles in Clinton and elsewhere do not fit this neat, easy narrative. The stories are much messier and complex.358

Telling the story of the segregationist protestors as being a simple narrative of good versus evil, or wise versus manipulated, denigrates the rioters experiences. It also skews our ability to understand why the civil rights movement achieved as much as it did without achieving full racial equality. Until the popular narrative of desegregation shifts to include the white supremacists’ cultural critique and the complexities of their motivations, the rioters will remain bit players in our morality tale. They should be seen as political actors whose beliefs and struggles reveal new truths about politics, power and inequality in America.359

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THE ARMED MEN

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; ... who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a “more convenient season.” Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.360

THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE:

The American experiment has been punctuated by civic conflict and civilian bloodshed. The dream is of a society in which peoples of all colors and classes dwell peaceably—though perhaps unequally—together. The reality has often been something else entirely. For that reason, the knives, rocks, sticks and bombs that met the black students agitating for equality in Clinton and in other communities around the nation should have been predictable. The machine guns and tear gas grenades used to silence Clinton’s white working class should have been expected. The bomb that destroyed homes on the Hill and demolished Clinton High School should have been part of a well-rehearsed narrative. What should be surprising is that no one died as a result. But yet the tumult shocked its participants. Despite all the conflicts that had come before them, the men, women and

children living in Clinton never expected that their town would devolve from order to chaos.\textsuperscript{361}

This chapter is about the men who fought back (and unlike the rioters, whose ranks included both men and women, the individuals who took to the streets to stand against them were always men). It is the story of the young black men who hid around the Hill with their hunting rifles aimed at the road, ready to protect their homes and families from the whites who invaded their community. It is the story of the forty-seven white men who used their own guns and a small arsenal of teargas grenades to protect Clinton’s city hall and mayor’s house from destruction. It is the story of a young white pastor whose faith led him to reject the ways he had been taught to use violence to protect himself and his family. Ultimately, then, this is a story about the politics of violence: who uses violence to protect his home, who is punished for doing so and who can chose to reject it.\textsuperscript{362}

Some common characteristics united these men. Most of them were of the same generation, and the majority were veterans of either World War II or Korea. Since returning from war, most of these men had begun their careers, married, and started families. Many of them also expected to become community leaders either through their churches or through

\textsuperscript{361} In all, between the founding of Jamestown in 1607 and the turn of the twenty-first century, mobs, vigilantes and rebellions caused as many as two million casualties. Included in this number are the Amer-Indians who refused to sell their land and were driven out by armed settlers. The slaves who were maimed or murdered by their masters. The British government representatives who remained loyal to the crown during the Revolutionary era and were tarred and feathered by colonists. The Reconstruction-era freedpeople whose hopes of equality were crushed by the racist terrorist organizations who flourished after the Civil War. The factory workers in the early twentieth century who were clubbed by their bosses’ henchmen when they protested their long hours and dangerous working conditions. The victims of the 1946 race riot in Columbia, Tennessee, which started after an altercation between a white storeowner and a black World War II veteran; “Think Piece: Violence is the Engine of U.S. History (Part I),” The Black Commentator 144 (June 30, 2005) http://www.blackcommentator.com/144/144_think_violence_1.html; Friedman, Crime and Punishment in American History, 174.

\textsuperscript{362} James W. Messerschmidt, Nine Lives: Adolescent Masculinities, the Body and Violence (Boulder, CO: Perseus Book Groups, 2000), 13-14; Barbara Perry, In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crimes (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.
the municipal government, though in most instances, those roles were still held by their fathers.

Despite all these similarities, one key difference divided them: some were white, and some were black. In Clinton in the 1950s—and in other communities across the nation—race was one of the key factors that shaped men’s lives. It even altered how they lived out these shared characteristics. For instance, though many of the men who participated in defending Clinton from the segregationists would become community leaders, the white middle-class men who participated in the violence would eventually become the town’s mayors, councilmen and judges. The black men would become deacons in their churches and the spokesmen who communicated the black community’s concerns to the town government. These ideas of race and the ways that race was used to delineate and define participation in municipal life also influenced how the men participated in the events of 1956.363

Throughout the Green McAdoo Cultural Center and in other popular commemorations of Clinton High School’s desegregation, the militant segregationists are castigated for being violent, but the men who stood up to them are praised as being valiant and chivalrous. They are christened as the heroes of the story: Clinton’s modern knights who defended the community from harm. Or at least that is how the white men who deflected violence with violence are portrayed. The Reverend Paul Turner, one of the few men in Clinton to experiment with the militant nonviolence practiced by the national civil rights movement, is remembered as a courageous anomaly. The men who defended the Hill are omitted entirely. In the Green McAdoo Cultural Center, the only images shown from the Hill

are the aftermath of the bombings. This exclusion robs the African American men of the very equality they had wanted to gain and instead suggests that they responded to the attacks upon them and their homes with the stereotypical docility white supremacy demanded of black men in the South. The truth is much more complicated.

ASSUMING LEADERSHIP:

The area had a long history of racial strife. After Emancipation, many of the county’s former slaves moved to the Hill, which overlooks downtown Clinton. They built two churches and a school, which provided the small enclave with communal meeting spaces as well as giving the newly-freed blacks independence from whites. Their independence did not go unchallenged. The first recorded hate crime in Clinton happened in March 1869 when arsonists burned down one of the churches on the Hill. This marked the beginning of a difficult period for Anderson County’s blacks. The threat of racial violence increased as the twentieth century neared. No lynchings occurred within Clinton, but they were common events in the surrounding communities. A group of Anderson County whites also organized a posse of nightriders patterned after the Ku Klux Klan. These men kidnapped and flogged former Federal soldiers, white Republicans and African Americans. The group disbanded only after the public outcry against them when some of their members murdered a man. During the late nineteenth century, black unemployment in Clinton also worsened, particularly for the men. Previously they had been able to find work in timbering, but deforestation of the local mountains forced the industry to move deeper into the mountains.

364 For instance, between 1892 and 1903, Campbell County had eight lynchings, Loudon County had one, Morgan County had two and Roane County had one.
Now the men often worked as day laborers for local white businessmen and farmers. In the face of continued racism and limited economic opportunities, African Americans began leaving the county, joining the thousands of other African Americans fleeing northward in the Great Migration. Between 1910 and 1920 the African American population in Anderson County was cut in half. Even more left during the following decade.365

The federal government’s actions in Anderson County were what finally ended the exodus of Clinton’s black residents. Though black workers found few opportunities as skilled laborers at either Norris Dam or Oak Ridge, the two federal projects did give them access to industrial jobs. For the first time since the 1870s, more African Americans moved into Anderson County than left. This changed black life in Anderson County. Whereas previously they had run the elementary school and their churches, the new residents allowed Clinton’s blacks to gain new economic freedom from whites. Previously the Hill had not had enough residents remaining to keep black businesses alive, but by the late 1940s, the neighborhood supported a small business district consisting of a nightclub, a sandwich shop and other similar ventures. The new residents and the community institutions they built provided the

black community with the infrastructure necessary to advocate for their rights. They started by demanding that their students receive equal educational opportunities.\textsuperscript{366}

Whereas the men on the Hill had been key advocates for desegregation, the middle-class white men who would lead the support for law and order initially led the segregationist cause. When the black families brought the lawsuit against the school in 1950, the white civic leaders joined forces to formulate a judicial and municipal response in an effort to make it clear that the black families would not win in the courts or in the town’s public opinion. When the federal judge ruled against them and ordered the school to admit the black students, these whites who had led the resistance opted for silent acquiescence. The newspaper editor provided the coming desegregation with little coverage. Neither the mayor nor the Anderson County School Board made public statements offering their support. Later some of these individuals would explain that this was because they believed that drawing attention to the impending change would increase segregationist resistance. But the reason for their silence was personal as well. These men supported segregation. They were willing to obey the court order, but at this early stage, they would not endorse it.

The white leaders’ decision to obey the federal authorities was also a pragmatic one. Over the preceding decades, they had forged valuable relationships with the federal government that they did not want to endanger. The federal projects had made Anderson County the wealthiest county in Southern Appalachia. To facilitate work at Norris Dam, federal authorities had begun currying favor with the town’s white leaders. Local businesses

\textsuperscript{366} “Historical Census Browser,” GeoStat Center Collections; Adamson, “Dynamite,” 6; James L. Cain, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Clinton, TN, October 21, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.
benefitted from the new residents who came to work at the site; federal agencies invested money in the county’s infrastructure; and state senators, cabinet members and other officials made Anderson County part of their regular tour. When the Atomic Energy Commission decided to build Oak Ridge seven miles away, the relationship between the federal and municipal leaders solidified.367

When desegregation came, these white leaders worried that a massive resistance movement would wreak economic havoc on their community. They were willing to fight for segregation only as long as there was a chance for a legal resolution, but they were also products of their culture. It would take more than a court ruling to make them believe that desegregation reflected the best for the town morally, socially, educationally and spiritually.368

One of the first white leaders to question his stand on race was the Reverend Paul Turner, who was the charismatic young pastor of Clinton’s First Baptist Church of Clinton. The summer before desegregation, Turner became concerned that the white community needed more guidance than the municipal leaders had offered. Turner’s stand arose from his own evolving understandings of race. Turner had grown up in a small rural community outside Memphis, Tennessee, and he had not been not raised with the idea of racial equality. The first person to challenge his belief in the inherent superiority of whiteness was Olin T. Binkley, one of his seminary professors who was an advocate of racial equality and

interracial relationships within the church. Under Binkley’s guidance, Turner reevaluated his ideas of race and its meanings, and he began reading about Christian interracial experiments such as Koinonia Farm, an integrated farming community in Georgia that “sought to maintain a witness to Christian brotherhood in a powder-keg situation.”

After graduation, Turner assumed the pulpit in Clinton, and the church boomed under his leadership. Between his arrival in 1948 and the summer of 1956, the church had grown from less than nine hundred members to almost fourteen hundred. As the pastor of the largest and fastest growing church in town, he was an influential community leader. He became a member of the Lions Club, the fundraising chairman for Clinton’s Red Cross, and the chairman of the “Committee of 100,” a business and community planning committee. His gifts and charisma also caught the attention of denominational leaders. By 1956, he had been

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369 Binkley’s stand in favor of interracialism was well-known within Baptist circles. After serving briefly as an associate pastor at a church in Connecticut, he had been the pastor at University Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, from 1933-1938. He then left the pastorate to serve as a professor of religion at Wake Forest College. He joined Southern Theological Seminary’s faculty in 1944 and remained there until 1952 when he accepted a job at Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. In 1958, he participated in planting a intentionally interracial community of Christians in Chapel Hill. Originally intended to be a Southern Baptist congregation, the church refused to adopt standard Southern Baptist membership requirements. Within a few years, the church changed alliances and joined the American Baptist Churches. The church was named in Binkley’s honor. In 1963, Binkley was appointed as the president Southeastern Seminary. He served until his retirement in 1974. He died in 1999; Lee Weeks, “Southeastern’s 2nd President, Olin T. Binkley, Dies at 91,” Baptist Press, http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=457; Courtland Smith, “An Interpretative History of the First Ten Years,” Alive in the Spirit: Essays on the First Fifty Years of the Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, http://www.sitemason.com/files/cJS5vG/BBCHistory.pdf.


371 Four hundred ten of these new members were new converts who were baptized into the fellowship. In addition, under his leadership a higher percentage of members were regular attendees. For instance, average attendance at weekly Sunday school meetings grew from 271 to 617. Accompanying this was an approximately $46,000 increase in annual tithes given at the church; Clinton Courier-News, June 28, 1956, 1:1, 5.
named the president of the Tennessee’s Baptist Pastor’s Conference and was a trustee at Carson Newman College and East Tennessee Baptist Hospital.\textsuperscript{372}

Early in his time in Clinton, Turner also befriended the Reverend O.W. Willis, pastor of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church. The two men established an annual pulpit exchange in which Turner led a service at the black church and Willis came to First Baptist. They also occasionally traded choirs and co-hosted missionary group meetings. Turner would later lament that he did not do more to cultivate the relationship between the two congregations. In retrospect he saw his friendship with Willis as “a token kind of brotherly relationship.” But Willis remembered feeling encouraged by Turner’s overtures, even if the step was small.\textsuperscript{373}

\textbf{“TO GO OUT AND DEFEND WHAT WAS ALREADY OURS”:}

As soon as the 1956 school year began, segregationist violence erupted in Clinton, blindsiding the white town leaders and surprising the black community with its virulence. Though popular retellings of 1956 focus on the mobs that surrounded the school and courthouse, the rioters did not confine themselves to the downtown district. Beginning on first night, white men roamed the Hill, threatening and harassing the blacks. As Alfred Williams, one of the twelve, recalled, at that time “it wasn’t nice to be living in Clinton [if

\textsuperscript{372} \textit{Clinton Courier-News}, June 28, 1956, 1:5; Letter from Robert L. McCan (pastor of First Baptist Church, Clarksville) to Frank Clement, December 4, 1956, Lee S. Greene Collection.

\textsuperscript{373} Paul Turner, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Adamson, “Two Religious Magazines Report,” 13-14; Orville Willis; interview by June Adamson, analog recording, July 10, 1978, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.
you were black].” The black families realized the town’s police could not, or would not, protect them.374

The young men on the Hill, many of whom had combat training and experience from time spent in the armed forces, organized to patrol their community. Most owned their own rifles for hunting. They supplemented their weapons with armaments from other black communities whose men came to help protect their friends and relatives.

Howard Sochurek of Life Magazine spent time with the twelve, documenting them and their families,375 creating a compelling set of images that captured the strain on the students and their families. One of the students he followed was Robert Thacker. He began with a few portraits of Thacker and fellow student Minnie Ann Dickie. Then he took a picture of Thacker, his mother, and father standing behind their small brick house. Finally, having gained the family’s trust, Sochurek photographed Thacker and his father guarding their home. In the first image, Thacker stands by his front door holding a shotgun. He looks down at the stock of the weapon. His expression is serious, and though he stands informally with his weight shifted to one hip, his muscles are tensed. The rest of the pictures show Thacker and his father seated cross-legged on the floor of the front porch, separated by the slender

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375 At the height of the conflict, Life Magazine sent Robert W. Kelley and Howard Sochurek, two of their staff photographers, to Clinton document the riots, the students and the National Guard. Kelley, who was based in the magazines Atlanta bureau, covered much of the civil rights story for Life, including the 1963 March on Washington. While documenting Clinton’s story, he approached a group of segregationists who did not want to be photographed. They chased him, attacked him and broke his leg. Sochurek primarily covered international news stories. He may have been sent to Clinton to replace Kelley after Kelley’s injury.
posts that support the porch roof. They have propped the weapon against the support that separates them, and they stare into the gardens and fields surrounding their house, alert for any signs of danger.\footnote{No clue how to footnote this. They’re uploaded on Google however.}

Less than ten days into the conflict, a journalist from the \textit{Afro-American}, a black newspaper out of Baltimore, visited the Hill. “Each [home] is a veritable arsenal,” the journalist reported. “The living rooms are cluttered with shotguns, rifles and ammunition.” Tension and fear radiated through the community. The men alternated between guarding the roads leading onto the Hill or “sleep[ing] fitfully on sofas near the door.” They parked their cars at strategic points in the neighborhood “so as to quickly evacuate the women and children via the ‘other side of the mountain’ in the dark of night.” Richard Stolley, who worked for \textit{Life} magazine, remembered visiting the home of one of the teens. He spoke with the boy’s father, who “gestured toward a loaded shotgun propped against the doorsill” and said, “‘If he isn’t home right after school, … we’ll go look for him.’”\footnote{Anna Holden Papers, \textit{Afro-American} (September 15, 1956), 1-2, “Papers, 1946-1977,” microfilm collection, Wisconsin Historical Archives, Madison; Richard Stolley, “Book Review: The Young Heroes of a Dirty War,” \textit{Life} (October 21, 1966), 17.}

The black men’s patrol soon developed into a routine. Each evening they would gather to discuss tactics and assign lookout positions. “They were very observant to make sure not to leave [any] thing uncovered,” student Bobby Cain remembered. Then they dispersed to sit and watch for intruders. Though the responsibility for guarding the community was officially limited to the adult men in the community, Cain and some of the other male students joined their fathers and older brothers on the weekends. Cain remembered that his father and his older half-brother Eugene Weaver did not let him have a
weapon. “I’d just be with them were they were,” he said, “out there, lying and waiting and watching over the community.”

From their positions around the Hill, the men could hear the rioters downtown. “We were right up there on the Hill, laying right up there waiting for them. Patiently waiting,” Eugene Weaver remembered. “You could hear them calling, ‘We’re going to get those —.’ You know what they said.”

Because of the tension, the reporter from the Afro-American worried that the situation in Clinton would quickly devolve into bloodshed. “[The] colored persons are armed and waiting,” she wrote, and she was convinced that if the segregationists attacked, “the violence will not be limited to the school or the school children. It will sweep the colored community as a whole.” She lamented that this momentous event was disappearing under the fear, anger and violence. The students and their parents had won their battle and desegregated the school, but rather than rejoicing in that victory, “the colored families are … talking of protecting themselves when the riot comes.”

The men who spoke with the reporter from the Afro-American agreed. “‘I moved here from Mississippi because of white people; this is as far as I run. I’ll die with my guns shooting,’” one Clintonian told her. One of the parents of the twelve added that “nobody better not bother me nor him.” Another man warned, “‘We didn’t start it, but if they come to

378 Bobby Cain Jr., interview with Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, July 18, 2009, in the possession of the interviewer, Durham, North Carolina; James L. Cain, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Clinton, TN, October 21, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN; Eugene Weaver, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, January 6, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.

379 Ibid.

380 Anna Holden Papers, Afro-American (September 15, 1956), 1-2.
my house, I’ll help end it.’’ As the nights passed, even community members had to learn to be careful not be mistakenly attacked. One night, for instance, Robert Cain Sr. saw someone light a match in front of his house. Thinking it might be a bomber, he reached for his gun and got ready to shoot the intruder. His sister-in-law stopped him and urged him to check before he shot. He found his neighbor Herbert Allen, the father of another one of the twelve black students, sitting in a bush by his house, keeping watch on the road and smoking a pipe.381

When the segregationist resistance arose, the white men who had committed themselves to supporting law and order first responded by focusing on John Kasper. They asked him to leave town and then arrested him. When that failed to halt the segregationist movement, they tried to reason with the crowds, explaining that they had pursued every legal means of stopping this process. It was not until the end of the first week of school that the white leaders began to realize that they had lost control of the situation. On Friday night the crowd began to riot, rocking cars, attacking black travelers and assaulting journalists. Clinton’s six-man police force was powerless when faced with the thousands who had gathered in the square on that night, and local FBI agent warned attorney Buford Lewallen, who was also the mayor’s son, that the rioting that had occurred thus far was just the beginning of the violence. The agent had received a tip that the rioters planned to burn the courthouse, Clinton High School and possibly the mayor’s house. The municipal leaders knew they needed help.382

381 Ibid.; Robert Cain Sr., interview by June Adamson, analog recording, January 20, 1979, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.

The next morning, the Board of Aldermen declared that Clinton was in a state of emergency, and they appealed to Governor Frank Clement for help. Then Buford Lewallen, his father, the local newspaper editor and other civic leaders went to Knoxville to meet with the FBI and the Knoxville police force. Knoxville’s police chief apologized for not being able to send men to augment the city’s six-man force, but he offered to loan the town extra weapons to augment their arsenal. “We loaded a car full of guns and ammunition from Knoxville police, got tear gas from Oak Ridge and returned to Clinton,” Buford Lewallen remembered. They took most of the armaments to the courthouse, but at least one of the machine guns went into the mayor’s bedroom so that he could defend his property.  

The Knoxville police had helped offset their dearth of weapons, but the extra pieces were useless without men to use them. Buford Lewallen issued an open call over the local radio stations to white men who supported law and order. He invited them to come join an auxiliary police force being assembled in downtown Clinton. He asked that the volunteers bring their own rifles, pistols, clubs and other weapons with them to ensure there were enough pieces to go around.

Forty-seven men responded. Some of them came to defend their friends and family. “The word got out that they were going to, one of the things they were going to do was

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march on the mayor’s house,” local optometrist Doc Stansberry recalled as he explained why he joined the guard. “Well, the mayor happened to be my brother-in-law, so of course I was going to protect all of them.” As his wife and daughter watched, he “strap[ped] on a gun to go out and defend what was already ours.” Others came because they felt they had a responsibility to defend the community. “They were without humor, these trudging volunteers,” The Oak Ridger’s reporter recalled. “They carried weapons to be used possibly against their friends and neighbors. They didn’t know what might happen, what they might be called upon to do that night which would live with them forever.” The city’s six police officers wore their uniforms, but the home guard had no such identification. They had come to fight “wearing sport shirts, open at the neck, slacks.” They looked like the rioters, highlighting the intra-communal nature of this conflict. All they had to signify their legality and responsibility were the small cards issued at the time of their deputization.385

The mayor and a local judge swore in the men and sent most of them to defend the courthouse, though a small detachment patrolled the mayor’s property. Attorney Leo Grant of Oak Ridge—a decorated war veteran with training in mob control—was appointed as their leader.386

When the auxiliary police arrived at the square, they found that the segregationist rally had already begun, but the crowd was still calm. The men focused on making the crowd members circulate. They hoped that if they could keep onlookers from congregating around the speakers, then they could keep the protest from escalating into a riot. As they worked, the

385 Ibid., The Oak Ridger, September 5, 1956, 4
auxiliary police watched the skies. Local forecasters had predicted rain, which might have
driven away many of the onlookers. Storm clouds gathered overhead, but the promised rain
never arrived.  

As segregationist protestors continued to pour into the square, the forty-seven men
realized they would provide an inadequate defense if the night turned violent. Buford
Lewallen decided to try Tennessee Governor Frank Clement one last time. Though heretofore
Clement had ignored the phone calls and telegrams asking for his assistance, Lewallen was
one of the governor’s personal friends and political allies. He used his connection to force the
governor onto the phone. From a high window in the courthouse and armed with a Thompson
submachine gun he had borrowed from the Knoxville police department, Lewallen told
Clement that the town needed his help. “‘You better get out here with your highway
patrolmen,’” Lewallen demanded. “‘We’re going to have a riot.’” Clement still hesitated, so
Lewallen held the phone out the window, letting the governor hear the shouts from below.
Clement agreed to consult with his advisors.  

After Lewallen’s call, Clement gathered Tennessee National Guard Adjutant General
Joe Henry, his assistant, the secretary of state and the state’s attorney general. The men all
agreed that they should send the Highway Patrol to Clinton that night, and they decided to

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387 Holden, Clinton, Tennessee, 6-9; Horace V. Wells, Jr. The Days Before Yesterday: My Life Sixty
Years as an Editor (Clinton, TN: Courier-News, 1991), 85; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 73-74; The Oak
Ridger, September 3, 1956, 8.

388 Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 75-76, 153-58; Doc and Florence Stansberry, interview by
Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Clinton, TN, October 22, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation,
Murfreesboro, TN.
replace them with the National Guard, who would remain in Clinton until peace was restored.389

As the riots raged downtown, the men on the Hill worried whether they could protect their community. Though only a few roads led onto the Hill, open fields lined the neighborhood’s borders, so even with a guard covering the main roads, small groups of attackers could easily approach undetected. The trees and hillocks scattered throughout the neighborhood would then allow trespassers to infiltrate deep into the cluster of homes. At the height of the riots, rather than trying to protect individual homes, the men moved the women and children into Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, which sat in the heart of the neighborhood. “You grabbed up your blankets and things,” Jo Ann Allen Boyce remembered, “and the kids could lay on the pews.” If the men spotted a suspicious vehicle coming toward the Hill or suspected anything was awry, they signaled those staying at the church. The women and children then extinguished their lights and went down to the church’s basement. Even when everything seemed safe and they were upstairs, the adults demanded that the children remain quiet. “They didn’t want you to get up running around,” Bobby Cain’s younger brother recalled. “They didn’t want people to know we were there.”390

389 At that point the debate began. Some of the men proposed sending the men in unarmed and leaving the youngest soldiers at the base. General Henry announced that he would not consider either proposition. “‘When I take the National Guard, I’m going to take all of them,’” he replied. Furthermore, this situation “‘was not sham or pretense.’” His men would go to Clinton “‘ready’” and armed with all their weapons. Quotes from Lee Seifert Greene, Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 205, quoted in Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 75-76. Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 153-58; interview with Doc and Florence Stansberry.

Meanwhile, the auxiliary police in Clinton, believing they would have to resolve the situation without assistance, tried to maintain order on the square. The reporter from *The Oak Ridger* noted that the crowd seemed to be waiting; “a shot, a fist-fight, an inflamed voice. Anything might happen to make it a mob.” Auxiliary policeman Harold MacAlduff remembered the fear he felt as he faced the angry crowd. He had served in the Army Air Corps during World War II and flown twenty-six missions in North Africa before becoming the personal navigator for Carl Spaatz, commander of the Allies’ air forces. “I have never been so frightened once during those five years as I was on the night that forty of us—the home guard—faced the mob in the Clinton Square,” he told me. “The hatred was almost palpable.” He tried to keep his exchanges with the segregationists friendly and informal, but that eventually backfired. By that point in the evening, the segregationists were not interested in remaining polite. He asked one woman to move and then winked at her “in a nice way. She looked at me and said, ‘Don’t look. Don’t wink at me, you s.o.b.’” Other crowd members also challenged the home guard. “‘Why can’t I stop here?’” a crowd member asked one of the policeman. “‘It’s my courthouse as much as it is theirs.’” Another man agreed. It seems “‘like we don’t have a Constitution anymore,’” he complained.391

Shortly before eight, the protestors began refusing to move. Leo Grant assembled the auxiliary police into a tactical formation and ordered the men to march toward the mob. They told the people to disperse. The crowd refused. The segregationists then surged forward, and Grant ordered his men to toss a canister of tear gas into the middle of the crowd. The mob retreat briefly. When they surged forward again, the auxiliary police threw another canister.

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Each time the courthouse guard threw a canister of tear gas, the crowd briefly retreated, but they returned as soon as the smoke dissipated.\textsuperscript{392}

Segregationist leaders would later argue that the home guard provoked the crowd and turned what could have been a peaceful demonstration into a riot scene.\textsuperscript{392} “I think those special officers were what made the people so mad,”’ said one participant. “They acted like a bunch of storm troopers.”\textsuperscript{393} Those who joined the home guard retorted that their actions that night were “‘absolutely necessary,’” that “‘an overwhelming show of force was the correct method of crowd control.’”\textsuperscript{394}

As the auxiliary police tossed their last canister of tear gas, the wail of sirens echoed through the town square. Thirty-nine state police cars carrying one hundred highway patrolmen roared over the Clinch River bridge and into downtown Clinton. “I never saw anything more welcome, in my life,” Harold MacAlduff told me. The patrol came “‘came in the nick of time just as in a movie,’” remembered a \textit{New York Times} reporter. The patrolmen stepped out of their vehicles and formed a perimeter around the courthouse square. Then the almost seven foot tall Highway Patrol Commissioner slung a sawed off double barrel shotgun

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\textsuperscript{393} During one of John Kasper’s trials, when the prosecution accused him of having incited the people to riot, the defense would bring forward witnesses who had participated in the events of this night and had gassed by the auxiliary police, Herd, “Then and Now,” 47-8.

\textsuperscript{394} \textit{The Oak Ridger}, September 3, 1956, 8; Adamson, “Dynamite,” 110-11.
over his shoulder and said, “‘Boys, it’s all over.’” The state patrolmen took control of the peacekeeping and disbanded the auxiliary police force.395

**THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS:**

Both the men on the Hill and the auxiliary policemen in downtown Clinton were part of America’s vigilante tradition. They were links in the historical chain of “organized extralegal movements, the members of which take the law into their own hands.” They were carrying on the precedent set by the colonists who joined the Sons of Liberty and the lynch mobs who policed the South’s racial boundaries. They took up their arms to defend their homes, families, community centers and ways of life from encroaching chaos. Because their actions supported and supplemented the government’s orders, their violence received official sanction and all of them were tolerated. Only one factor made these men unusual: throughout American history, white leaders had attempted to limit the vigilante tradition to white men.

Vigilanteism had developed on the nation’s frontiers and in its slaveholding districts where the population—or at least the white population—was sparse. The scattered white families had needed to provide their own individual protection against multiple groups who could mean to do them harm. Many feared marauders and thieves; in areas where the native peoples had not yet been eliminated or removed, white settlers watched anxiously for any sign of their attacks; and before the Civil War, white slaveholders also worried that the slaves

surrounding them would claim freedom by massacring their masters. Over time, each white man’s honor and standing in society became tied to his ability to protect his dependents from harm. As the populations in an area grew, criminal justice systems developed to handle these threats, “to control this energy, to keep this rampant physicality within limits and to patrol, violently if necessary, the borders of respectability, protecting it from too many of these eruptions,” explained legal historian Lawrence Meir Friedman. But even after the development of justice systems, the vigilante tradition survived. When disorderly mobs threatened to overwhelm the white men who went out to defend their homes and civic centers, they could expect to escape punishment because they could claim that they had been required to “seize for … the state’s role as enforcer of the law” and needed to use violence to achieve peace.\footnote{Richard E. Nisbett and Doy Cohen, \textit{Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South} (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), xv-xvi; Brown, \textit{Strain of Violence}, 96; Lawrence M. Friedman, \textit{Crime and Punishment in American History} (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 179-82.}

Often, historians have discussed this tradition of armed defense as being something uniquely Southern. They propose that the concept grew out of racialized “notions of mastery.” In the aftermath of the Civil War, they argued, Southern culture valorized the Confederate soldiers who had fought for the Confederacy and remembered them as heroes who had died to protect southern civilization. But the waves of outsiders who relocated to Clinton during the preceding decades had weakened the Southerness of white middle class. Among the white auxiliary police there were men from across the nation. Their numbers included Buford Lewallen, scion of one of the town’s founding families, but it also included Harold MacAlduff, who grew up in Boston and moved to Clinton after World War II ended,
and Don Byerly, who had just come to the area from the Midwest. When forty-seven white men joined the home guard to oppose the segregationist mobs, they were drawing upon a national tradition of justice, violence and honor. Joining the home guard “just seemed to be the appropriate thing to do,” MacAlduff remembered.397

Unlike the white home guard, the armed black guard on the Hill who defended their homes and community centers against the white rioters knew they were making a dangerous choice, one that could either result in them being hurt by the segregationists or prosecuted by the white authorities. They lived in a society that expected them to be subservient to and dependent upon whites. When they took up their weapons, they were challenging the dominant racial codes and asserting that as men they had the same rights and responsibilities for their families as white men had.

Across American history, black men who had organized to defend their families and communities against white violence had been brutally punished and often killed. Only a decade earlier during World War II, whites in Beaumont, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Los Angeles, California; Mobile, Alabama; New York, New York; and elsewhere had assaulted black soldiers whose uniforms and perceived presumptuousness implied that the soldiers were challenging notions of white superiority. When the Hill’s black men took up arms, they did not know whether the white authorities would permit them to guard their homes or

397 Watts, “Introduction,” in White Masculinity in the Recent South, 7-8; see also Craig Thomson Friend, “From Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities: An Introduction” in Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on the South Since Reconstruction, ed. by Craig Thompson Friend (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xi-xii; interview with Harold MacAlduff; Perry, In the Name of Hate, 5.
whether they would be forcibly disarmed and punished. But just as their children demanded
equality by going to school, these men demanded equality by taking up their guns.398

Soon after the black guard formed, they let the white men know about their presence
by appearing during a Ku Klux Klan parade that wove through the Hill. They did not say or
do anything to force a confrontation. They just stood along the road, holding their guns and
watching the cars drive by. “We were telling them, ‘You get out [of] my streets,’” Alfred
Williams explained. “We played it like … if they stopped up there, there would be some
killing.”399

Word of their organization spread quickly. The county sheriff even used the threat of
the armed black men to control the rioters. “He knew what was going on up here,” one man
told me. During one of the segregationist rallies when he saw a group of rioters heading
toward the Hill, “he warned them …, ‘If you go up there, I’m going to send body bags.’”400

In addition to defying racial convention, the men who patrolled the Hill were
disobeying the national civil rights leaders who preached nonviolence. As the Civil Rights
Movement progressed, local and national civil rights leaders would continue to debate the
best response when whites threatened black homes and families. Though the local black men
who joined the armed guards might have conceded that nonviolence made sense as a national
strategy, they believed it was a foolhardy, degrading, feminizing option. For generations,
African American men had been defined by their race instead of being defined by their


399 Interview with Jo Ann Boyce; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 148-51; interview with James Cain.

400 Ibid.
masculinity. When a white man raped a female family member, cheated them in business or talked to them as if they were children, black men could do nothing in response. For these men, then, equality meant having the right to defend their families. Nonviolence, on the other hand, asked “black men to sacrifice their manhood and dignity to acquire it.” Or, as Congress of Racial Equality activist Isaac Reynolds put it, these men “‘had just reached the point to say well, you’re not going to ride through my community any longer and shoot up, pet my women on their butt and snatch the woman off my arm and take her somewhere and screw her and grin.’” By claiming their right to use violence in defense of their homes and families, the men on the Hill were eroding white supremacy in their own way, not in the way the NAACP sanctioned and not in the way the white men guarding the city square expected.401

**LIFE UNDER MARTIAL LAW:**

The arrival of the Tennessee Highway Patrol relieved the white home guard, but it did little to allay the black community’s fears. The white troopers remained downtown as the auxiliary police had done. At noon on Sunday, however, over six hundred members of the Tennessee National Guard assumed responsibility for maintaining order in Clinton. They brought seven tanks, three armored personnel carriers and a helicopter with them. Up on the Hill, the people were still in church. Gail Ann Upton Epps remembered being able to hear the tanks moving into town. The congregation rushed to the windows to see what was happening, and “‘it just about stopped church,’” she recalled. Unlike the auxiliary police or the

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patrolmen, the Guardsmen patrolled the Hill. Furthermore, though General Joe Henry never provided a formal escort for the black students, he pledged to protect them if they were threatened and promised to arrest any picketers who “impeded those entering the school.”

For instance, every afternoon, Theresser Caswell stood alone on the corner of Broad Street and Hillcrest Avenue waiting for the bus to Claxton. Recognizing her vulnerability, Henry sent a tank to meet her. The soldiers watched over her until the bus arrived. “They would just go around me and around me until the bus came,” she recounted to me. “But still I didn’t stand around and shake or worry about it. … We didn’t have a car. No one even drove then. So what you’re going to do? Stand there and wait for the school bus.”

On Sunday, Clement justified his intervention in Clinton in a statewide radio address. “I cannot sit back … and allow a lawless element to take over” the town, he explained. “If they can take over Tennessee because of one issue, they can take it over others. It may be your home next.” Privately, though, he worried that his decision increased the likelihood of bloodshed. He invited Nashville’s religious leaders to the capitol and asked them to pray for the safety of the National Guard troops.

Appalled by events in his adopted hometown, Paul Turner reevaluated his position on the racial struggle. As a middle class white man, he had grown up understanding that he had the responsibility and the right as a man to use violence for defense, but as the situation in Clinton worsened, he began to question both his ideas of masculinity and his ideas of racial

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402 Adamson, “Dynamite,” 107-113; Anderson, Children, 16; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 50-51; Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1:1; Holden, Clinton, Tennessee, 6-9; The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 1; interview with Diane Pemberton.

403 Interview with Theresser Caswell; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 201.

superiority. He decided not to join the white home guard, though in his sermons he aligned himself with the white civic leaders, telling his congregation that the “‘local situation has moved out of the initial issue of segregation versus integration into a question of law and order versus anarchy.’” He encouraged them to obey the court order even if they disagreed with the decision. “‘What we hoped for was an orderly desegregation, despite some outsiders who were trying to be rabble-rousers,’” Turner later explained.405

But as Turner considered the hatred that had exploded around the town, he began to quietly question what the “right” stand was. “The more I saw of the attitudes of the extreme segregationists and the conduct of the White Citizens’ Council members, the more I became convinced that it was morally wrong to treat your fellow man in those ways,” he explained to local historian June Adamson. He wondered at the depth of the segregationists’ hatred, and he worried that the apathetic response of white leaders advocating for law and order had enabled the rioters’ violence. He also reflected further on how racial inequality had affected the lives of the African Americans in Clinton.406 “‘There are a few things I see about the total situation now that I didn’t realize in the first place,’” Turner wrote to Governor Frank Clement. Turner still resisted making any statements from the pulpit lest he “be seen as ‘a crusader,’” but he introduced the topic of race into his Wednesday night and Sunday night Bible studies.407

Turner’s evolving racial philosophies placed him in conflict with everyone around him. Clinton’s militant segregationists and white civic leaders expected him to join their

405 The Oak Ridger, September 3, 1956, 1; Mary L. Cleveland, "A Baptist Pastor and Social Injustice in Clinton, TN," Baptist History & Heritage 14 (1979), 20.


407 Interview with Paul Turner; letter from Paul Turner to Frank Clement, November 19, 1956, Lee S. Greene Collection, box 3, folder 25.
fight. Turner also faced pressure from the radical Christians he had befriended through his professor Olin T. Binkley. Frustrated with his continued dithering, these religious leaders pushed Turner to take a decisive stand in favor of integration. They sent Methodist minister Roy DeLamotte came to Clinton to visit with Turner.

DeLamotte had earned a doctorate from Yale in the early 1950s and then moved to Jackson, Mississippi, where he publicly objected to racial segregation in the Mississippi Methodist Conference. His church soon fired him, and he moved through a series of pastorates in East Tennessee before settling in Augusta, Georgia, where he and his wife taught at Paine College, a historically black college. When DeLamotte came to Clinton, he visited Turner’s church and heard that Sunday’s sermon. After the service, Delamotte confronted Turner and argued that by refusing to use his pulpit to support integration, Turner was failing to live up to his ministerial vows. He was refusing to lead his people into godliness and charity. Turner replied that he believed that his decision to work for peace rather than for a social cause was the godly choice. Delamotte left Clinton, but he continued the conversation by letter, writing Turner that his purpose was not “to win an argument (I hope!) or to get in the last word … [but] to exhort a brother clergyman not to let a priceless chance slip past to make a witness for the kingdom.”

DeLamotte reminded Turner that he was responsible for the souls of his congregants. In this time of upheaval, his flock was “fearful, confused, victims of rumors and gossips and lies and slanders and threats.” The message DeLamotte heard Turner give was not the “clear Scriptural word [the people needed] to steer by in this terrifying situation.” DeLamotte

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408 Roy C. DeLamotte to Paul Turner, September 6, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones.
chastised Turner for telling the people that obedience to the law “was in line with what was American and Christian.” That was drivel, DeLamotte continued. “Surely with the exception of a few lunatics … no sane Christian is against law and order.” Turner could trust that the “newspaper editors will tell them of its values.” Turner, then, could devote his time in the pulpit to fighting “the cancer of race pride” and the “violence, hatred, fear, suspicion” that had gripped his town. That would teach his congregation to “steer by … the example of their Master, … [and] pray in the right direction.” By refusing to do this, “we are failing in our God-given task,” DeLamotte concluded. “If we are called of God at all, if all men ARE brothers, if Christ did for the lowliest members of society, then let us not put [the] whole church and our own professions ahead of the Kingdom!”

Even some church members chastised Turner for not taking a more integrationist stance. One woman wrote to him to tell him that though she and her husband “bear no ill will or hard feelings toward you or the First Baptist Church of Clinton,” they were transferring their membership. She reminded Turner of the many times that he had used his pulpit to take a stand against the legalization of alcohol sales in the county. “You did not seem to mind stepping on church members’ toes then,” she reflected. “In fact, you quite frankly said many times you did not want that kind of church members anyway. … We cannot understand your failure to take a stand now against what we consider so much greater evil—hatred and ill will.” She told him that she worried that “if the church cannot lead the way on social

409 Ibid.
problems, I fear for our county and country.” Turner still refused to change his stance and use
his pulpit to advocate for the civil rights movement.410

On Monday, white rioters who had finally been displaced from downtown Clinton
stormed the black community in the nearby town of Oliver Springs. Word spread that twenty-
five cars full of armed blacks were about to descend upon the town. Two black men then
drove through the town. William Capshaw and his friend L.T. Spraggins had gone squirrel
hunting early that morning and so had not heard about the mob. The first time the men passed
through the square, whites surrounded their car but permitted them to leave unharmed. On
the other side of the town, however, the men decided it was unsafe to travel deeper into the
mountains given the amount of white anger. They turned around. When they reached the mob
the second time, the segregationists surrounded the car and rocked it, though they did not
turn it over. Capshaw and Spraggins sped away. Just beyond the edges of the crowd, they
stopped the car and got out. Spraggins had a pistol, and Capshaw had a shotgun. They both
fired. Spraggins shot at the ground, but Capshaw shot toward the crowd, hitting a white man
in the arm. They then fled.411

The seething crowd heard that the men had hidden in a black home on the edge of the
town. The mob surrounded the home, and many of the white men openly carried shotguns,
pistols and clubs. Concerned that they would soon be in conflict with an armed mob, the
local police called General Henry for assistance. Henry sent eighty guardsmen along with
tanks, jeeps and personnel carriers. When the Guard arrived, the crowd booed them. When

410 Fred and Violet Williams to Paul Turner, September 5, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones.
411 Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1:1, 1:6; The Oak Ridger, September 4, 1956, 2.
Henry arrived, he tried to negotiate a peace with the mob. “‘Can we have our hands on that nigger just one time,’” one of the crowd members asked Henry in reply. “‘It was an ugly situation,’” CBS reporter Vic Weals recalled. Eventually the Guard jailed fifteen white men and arrested Capshaw and Spraggins, charging them felonious assault and attempted murder. Capshaw protested that Spraggins was innocent. “‘Man, I don’t know what happened,’” he told a reporter. “‘I done the shooting. The other man didn’t do it.’”

On Tuesday night, five hundred whites gathered in Oliver Springs to protest the arrest of the fifteen white men, but this time the crowd remained peaceful. On Wednesday, General Henry sent two hundred Guardsmen home, explaining that most of them were high school football players who hoped to be able to play in their Friday night games. Over the next week, General Henry let more Guardsmen return to their homes.

Anderson County’s officials fretted about what would happen when the National Guard left. Not only were the segregationists crowds still gathering at night, but segregationists were anonymously telephoning members of the auxiliary police and threatening to bomb their homes and businesses as soon as the National Guard left. Henry offered to train any white auxiliary policeman who wanted to join a permanent emergency auxiliary police force. Only thirty-five of the expected one hundred fifty men came to the organizational meeting. He also urged the city officials to pledge to protect “the colored population … along with everyone else” so that the black men would “not go armed any

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more.” The white leaders made no sign that they heard that part of his request. By September 11, the last National Guardsman had left Clinton.414

**AFTER THE RIOTS:**

After the National Guard left, the mobs did not return to Clinton’s town square, so the city leaders declared victory. Open defiance to the court order seemed to have ended. Trouble within the school, however, continued, as did the attacks on the Hill. During this next stage of militant segregationist activity, the threats to the black community were harder to prevent. Whereas previously the men on the Hill had faced down caravans of Kluxers. Now the segregationists used the fields, forests and bushes surrounding the Hill to creep into the heart of the community. They placed sticks of dynamite or other bombs and then crept away.415

The first bombing occurred shortly before eleven p.m. on Wednesday, October 3, near the home of black student Ronald Hayden. Investigators later concluded that the attackers had packed two beer cans with blasting powder. The explosion rattled windows around the town, and “light debris” fell on the surrounding homes, but no serious damage was done. Given the number of experienced coal miners in the area who knew how to set charges so as to cause the greatest damage, the sheriff concluded that this blast “was intended to scare.”416


415 Interview with Eugene Weaver.

When the police arrived on the scene, they found Herbert Allen, father of Jo Ann Allen, standing nearby and holding his pistol. Though the police had known about the black men’s defensive guard, they had not seen the men openly carrying arms before this night. The authorities were willing to let the black men protect their community but only as long as they could pretend to be ignorant of the situation. Allen, perhaps realizing that he had crossed an important line, explained to the police that he “heard the explosion and went out to see what happened.” The only reason he had “carried his newly-bought pistol along [was] because he didn’t know what had happened.” His protestations did not help. He had asserted his right to protect his family and community too strongly by walking out openly armed in the sight of the local authorities. The police arrested him.417

By the end of November, the violence both inside and outside the school had worsened. A group of white female students chartered the Tennessee White Youth. Militant segregationists students launched a systematic campaign against the black students inside the school building, and segregationist protestors again lined up around Clinton High School to taunt the black students. On Monday, November 26, protestors threw rocks and eggs at the black students as they walked into the school. Two eggs hit home economics teacher Clarisse Brittain, the principal’s wife. The following morning, protestors blocked the town’s main intersections blocked with their cars. One of the segregationists had even driven onto the Hill and parked by Asbury Methodist to harass the students as they left their homes. The chief and

his officers tried to force people to move their cars out of the road, but the segregationists taunted them, saying “‘Why don’t you go ahead and write me up?’”\textsuperscript{418}

The black students decided to boycott Clinton High School. They hoped that the town authorities would offer them protection since their absence put the town in violation of the court order. Unfortunately, the reverse happened. Their absence convinced the segregationists that they were winning the battle for the school. Turner, frustrated by the events, organized a meeting with sixteen local pastors. Though “‘the customary law of separate but equal may have had some sympathy, … mainly the feeling was that wrong was being perpetuated,’” Turner reported. It seemed to him his fellow ministers had moved beyond a commitment to law and order toward “‘the much higher moral law.’” Perhaps together they could “‘lead the people from where they were to where they needed to be.’”\textsuperscript{419}

Emboldened by the meeting, Turner telephoned Jo Ann Allen’s parents. During that telephone call, Turner told the Allens that he believed that “‘as long as they [the twelve] have a desire to go to the school, it is their moral right to come unheckled and unhindered.’” If they thought it would help protect the students, he would like to escort them to school. After discussing his offer, the twelve’s parents turned him down.\textsuperscript{420}

That Sunday, Turner announced that he believed the black children had a right to attend Clinton High School. “‘It’s not hard to know what’s right in your own community,’”

\textsuperscript{418} United States Court of Appeals, “\textit{Alonzo Bullock et. al. v. United States of America v. Frederick John Kasper},” 1957, Case No. 13512 and 13513,” December 4, 1956, United States District Court, Eastern District of Tennessee at Knoxville, National Archives and Records Administration—Southeast Region, Atlanta, GA, 13-27; Anna Holden Papers, \textit{Nashville Tennessean}, November 30, 1956, pgs. unknown.


Turner reflected several decades later. “‘When you know something is right, you do it.’” He did not lay out specific plans for aiding them, but he did prepare his congregation for the choice he was about to make. He used the Parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke. In the parable, a highwayman attacks a Jewish traveler. Beaten, robbed of all he had and left for dead, the traveler lay abandoned in a ditch. First, a priest and a Levite pass the man. Both of them had important ritualistic duties that they could not perform if they touched a corpse, so they hurried on their way without checking to see if they could help a traveler. Then a Samaritan came. Though descended from common ancestors, the Jews and the Samaritans had been enemies for centuries. Nevertheless, when the Samaritan saw the traveler lying there, “he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, ... set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn.” The next morning, the Samaritan had to continue his journey, so he gave the innkeeper a large sum of money, asking that he care for the man until the Samaritan could return.421

Turner identified three types of Christians in the parable. The first was the robber, who said, “‘What’s yours is mine. I’ll take it if I can.’” Other Christians act like the priest and the Levite who said, “‘What’s mine is mine. I’ll keep it.’” But the godly response is to say with the Samaritan, “‘What is mine is yours. Take it if you need it.’” He told his congregation that Clinton’s white Christians could no longer remain silent. They had to begin standing for what was right because “‘our Christian religion is not one of philosophy but one of action, of applied influence.’” Because of their skin color and class, his church members had a great deal of power in Clinton. Loving God and loving their neighbors meant sharing

their advantages with others. Local, state and national leaders had failed to properly plan for and facilitate integration, he concluded. Clinton’s Christians needed to follow the example of the Good Samaritan by shouldering the responsibility to give every child in the town the best education possible regardless of skin color.\textsuperscript{422}

Leo Burnett, the production-planning supervisor at the Magnet Knitting Mills in Clinton, was a Methodist, but his wife attended First Baptist Church. When he heard that Turner would be discussing desegregation, he decided to attend church with his wife that week. As he listened to the sermon, Burnett remembered that he “more or less felt the same way.” After the service ended, Burnett went up to Turner. “I told him that I would come along with him if that was satisfactory,” Burnett recalled. “He said it was.”\textsuperscript{423}

The morning of Monday, December 3, the crowds were back in front of the school. Turner, Burnett and two other white men climbed the Hill and offered to walk the students to school. The students again declined. As the four men walked back downtown, they were met by a small group of segregationists led by the Reverend Alonzo Bullock, a local grocer, part-time pastor and White Citizens’ Council officer. Bullock told Turner and his friends that “if they did not ‘get that bunch of ‘niggers” out of there someone was going to get killed.’” That Monday night, one of the black parents called Turner and told him the students were ready to return to school, if he was still willing to escort them. “The kids knew and we knew they’d lose if they didn’t go,” Turner later explained.\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{422} Clinton Courier-News, December 6, 1956, 1:3.

\textsuperscript{423} Leo Burnett, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, March 20, 1980, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.

On the morning of Tuesday, December 4, the crowd of segregationists filled the school yard, stretched across the street and curled around corner. Despite the policemen’s attempt to direct traffic, the streets around the school had turned into a parking lot. Turner, Burnett and local attorney Sidney Davis—who had heard about Turner’s efforts and volunteer to help—went to meet the students. The Reverend Bullock and Clyde Cook, another outspoken segregationist and White Citizens’ Council member, followed Turner. During later court testimony, Turner recalled that Cook began trying to provoke Turner, asking “‘Preacher, what business have you got up here?’” Or something roughly similar as Cook had “commingled [his words] with profanity as well as vulgarity,” Turner added. “‘Sir, I do not care to discuss the matter with you,’” Turner replied. “If a lot of these ‘Negro lovers’ would keep their noses out of it, it isn’t their business, things would be alright,” Bullock retorted. Concerned that this was getting out of hand, Turner stopped a passing policeman and told him that the men were hassling him. The policeman said there was nothing he could do about it. Cook resumed his heckling. “‘You can’t get away with this,’” Cook warned him. “‘You know you can’t. We won’t let you.’”

Six black students met the men. To ensure that they did not lose any of the students, the men divided them up. Turner led the group, followed by a couple of the children. Then came Burnett who was followed by a few more of the children. Davis was at the rear. Cook and Bullock tailed the group. Davis found a sympathetic police officer who helped him try to drive away the two men. Bullock replied that the school would not desegregate again, and

anyone who tried to aid the black students “would have trouble.” The police officer asked
what he meant. Bullock replied, “‘You will see.’” Mary Nell Currier—a local school bus
driver and active member of the White Citizens’ Council —then accosted the officer. When
he warned her not to target him, she replied that she “would do what she pleased.” He took
her to police headquarters to try to quiet her, but as he had no reason to charge her, he could
not keep her there.426

When they reached the edge of the crowd, Turner spoke to the black students closest
to him, saying over and over, “‘Don’t be afraid—don’t be afraid.’” The protestors then
pressed in, forcing the students and their escorts to walk single file down the sidewalk.
Students in the Tennessee White Youth leaned out the school’s windows to yell threats down
at the black teens, and one white youth told Turner that if he brought the black students
through the school’s doors, he had “‘better get ready to escort them … all day long.’” Other
protestors called Turner a “‘nigger-lover,’” just a “‘negro-loving preacher.’” A substitute
teacher stood in an upstairs classroom and watched the melee below. She recognized some of
her friends among that “most menacing mob of people” and could not believe that they
would utter the “catcalls, jeers and filth” she was hearing them say. At the entrance to the
school, Mary Nell Currier rejoined Bullock and Cook. Their eyes “looked bright and
aggressive, like they wanted to jump down our throat,” Sidney Davis remembered. “That is
about the best way I can express it. … They looked fierce.”427

426 Interview with Robert Cain Sr.; Court of Appeals, “Alonzo Bullock et. al. v. United States of
America v. Frederick John Kasper,” December 4, 1956, 28-31; ibid., July 15, 1957, 634-44; ibid., July 16, 1957,

427 Court of Appeals, “Alonzo Bullock et. al. v. United States of America v. Frederick John Kasper,”
December 4, 1956, 28-44; ibid., July 15, 1957, 645-54; ibid., July 16, 1957, 761-65; Anderson, Children, 18-19;
Clinton Courier-News, July 18, 1957, 1:6;.
A knot of white students met the group at the door, welcomed the African Americans back to school and offered to walk with them to their classes. At that point, Davis and Burnett left, but Turner went to meet briefly with D.J. Brittain Jr. After a few minutes, Turner walked out of the school door and into the crowd of hecklers.\textsuperscript{428}

As Turner descended the school’s steps, the segregationists taunted him, saying he “ought to be ashamed … working to get the Negroes in school.” The chief of police was directing traffic at a nearby intersection, and Turner asked him to write down the names of the people threatening him. At the next intersection, he asked another policeman for assistance. “Frankly, I don’t think he did a very thorough job,” Turner later remembered. Turner saw that some of the white community leaders were standing on the sidelines, watching the trouble. He tried to get to them, but Mary Nell Currier and another woman blocked his path and tried to “engage … [him] in a fuss.” He stepped around them and continued on his way. When he passed the police office, he stopped and asked for a police escort, but all the officers were on duty as traffic cops.\textsuperscript{429}

He came back to see four men waiting for him. Cook stood at the front, and he “just had blood in his eyes,” Turner remembered. “I was already three feet from him when I saw it, and so I did not have anything to do but try to pass on by.” Cook jumped on Turner and punched him in the neck. Turner threw him off and retreated across the street, but he was quickly surrounded. He heard someone yell, “Watch out, that man has his hand in his

\textsuperscript{428} Court of Appeals, “Alonzo Bullock et. al. v. United States of America v. Frederick John Kasper,” December 4, 1956, 28-44; Interview with Leo Burnett; Anderson, Children, 18-19.

pocket.” So he paused and turned around. “At that time, … in determined language, he indicated that he was going to make a stand right here,” CBS news reporter Bob Allison remembered. The segregationists converged on him and pushed him up against a building. “He was held up against a plate glass window,” Allison continued. “The plate glass window caved in about an inch and a half. It was concave. I was afraid the whole group was going to go through.”

“Nothing much I could do but do what I could,” Turner remembered, “so I plowed into Cook and got him by the neck and turned him over and turned him down. … I think his head is the one that damaged the car on the curb. … I hope it was.” Cook would later tell a coworker that the preacher would have easily beaten him in a fair fight, but Cook was not fighting alone. The crowd of segregationists pulled Turner off Cook. “This time he went down on his knees [with] his head up against the rear fender [of the automobile],” CBS news reporter Bob Allison remembered. “His head was being bounced against the fender of the car … [and the attackers kept] swinging at him or trying to get at him to hit him.”

A businessman urged Turner to run to his office, but Turner could not make it. The businessman’s secretary heard the commotion. “When I saw the Reverend Turner, his face was completely covered in blood,” she remembered. “At the time, I even thought blood was running from his eyes.” She yelled, “‘What are they doing to Brother Turner?’” She begged the person standing next to her to help the pastor, but the individual ignored her. “When there


was no response, I ran in where the Reverend Turner was and pulled at the arms the men who were holding him and asked them not to hit him again,” she recalled. One of the female attackers heard the secretary’s screams and turned on her, scratching at her face, hitting her about the head and keeping her from assisting Turner, who was still pinned against the car. Eventually, two police officers arrived to help Turner. They arrested Cook for the assault. That afternoon, the White Citizens’ Council paid his bond and gave each of the officers a Ku Klux Klan sticker.\(^{432}\)

While Turner was being attacked, another group of segregationists tried to invade the school. “I decided it was no longer safe in that building,” Brittain remembered. The school board told him to do whatever he thought best. Brittain had the police escort the black students back up the Hill to safety. He then summoned the busses and announced to the rest of the student body that the school would be closed indefinitely. Distressed by the school’s closing, the student council and faculty council each petitioned the Anderson County School Board, asking them to protect the students and support the principals, teachers and administration. City leaders including the mayor and newspaper editor also called on board members and added their pleas for help. In response, the board met with Brittain, civic officials and representatives of the student council. They finally promised to provide the support and resources Brittain needed to run the school.\(^{433}\)


\(^{433}\) D.J. Brittain Jr., interview by June Adamson, analog recording, 1978, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Clinton Courier-News, December 13, 1956, 1:1; ibid., December 20, 1956, 1:4.
Tuesday, December 4, was a municipal election day. The White Citizens’ Council had nominated or endorsed a slate candidates.\textsuperscript{434} The whites who stood for law and order were unhappy with how the city’s administration had handled the recent crises that had rocked their town and so were apathetic toward the election. When they heard of Turner’s beating and the school’s closing, however, they flooded the polls. “Tuesday was a black day in Clinton, and tears were shed as word of the brutal and unprovoked attack upon the beloved Paul Turner spread,” Clinton Courier-News editor Horace Wells wrote a few days later. “Many [of us] felt a personal responsibility, a personal failure to do something—but no one knew just what he might have done—except to get out and vote.” One man heard of the attack and rushed home from Pittsburgh to vote. A coed returned home for college to vote after she heard about what had happened. In a letter to her parents the day after the attack, Jane Turner wrote of her relief. “We would have all had to leave town if they [the White Citizens’ Council ticket] had won,” she said.\textsuperscript{435}

While the white community celebrated the unexpected election results, the black community waited to see what the segregationists’ retaliation would be. It came that very night. Someone bombed the house of Owen Long, who owned a beer tavern on the highway connecting Oliver Springs and Clinton. The explosion knocked down Long’s three-year-old

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\textsuperscript{434} Before the election, the White Citizens’ Council had sent a questionnaire to the candidates for various positions asking them where they stood on various racial issues. JB Meredith, a grocer and appliance dealer in Clinton who was running for mayor, was the only one to reply, but the Council highlighted the names of other candidates they believed would stand on their side.
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\textsuperscript{435} Anna Holden Papers, Publication unknown, (December 5, 1956) pgs unknown; Clinton Courier-News, December 6, 1956, 1:1; Anderson, Children, 18-20; Jane Turner to her family, December 11, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones.
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daughter and jarred their television set off of its stand. It fell next to the playpen where his twin infant sons were sleeping. Then the Klan rode through the Hill. Jo Ann Allen Boyce remembered that her father, Herbert Allen, “was an outspoken man.” Allen decided it was time to make “a statement. Nothing more than that.” Though he knew that the previous time he had been arrested for openly carrying his pistol, he again picked up his gun and—as his wife and children watched from the front windows—he “walked out, down his [porch] steps, … through the yard, got as close to the road as he could and … just stood there and watched them.” Boyce remembered that she and her mother felt “sheer terror for his life because we didn’t know what they had. They could have just shot him.” Though he had not raised his weapon or engaged any of the white men driving by him, he had come out armed and prepared to defend his home and his family against them. The police arrested him for the second time. After his release, the Allens moved to Los Angeles to protect him from retaliation.

The attack on the Reverend Turner drew America’s attention back to Clinton. Jane wrote to her parents the day after the attack to describe the madness that had overtaken the house as soon as news of the attack got out. “The phone rang as fast as you could hang it up yesterday – many calls from all over U.S. – People we never heard of,” she wrote. They received a telegram from Harold Stassen in the White House who thanked Turner “as a fellow Baptist and fellow American” for his “courageous, forthright and righteous action.” Bernice Cofer of the Baptist Home Mission Board wrote Turner to thank him for having

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436 *Clinton Courier-News*, December 6, 1956, 1:6; interview with Theressa Caswell; interview with Jo Ann Boyce.

437 Interview with Jo Ann Boyce.
“defended the rights of human souls. … History has forced you to be a ‘first.’ Thank God it is for his children,” she concluded. An English nun wrote that she had blessed a candle for him.  

Turner’s attack also drew the attention of influential television journalist Edward R. Murrow, who told Turner that he had “been waiting for a church to take this stance.” Turner agreed to help Murrow’s See It Now team create a documentary on Clinton called “Clinton and the Law.” That next Sunday, Paul Turner returned to his pulpit. Standing before six hundred fifty congregants and with the See It Now cameras rolling, he began his sermon by announcing, “There is no color line at the cross of Jesus.” But then he clarified that he did not consider himself a racial radical. “Right now, here in Clinton, we’re not against integration, we’re not against segregation, but we are positively against disintegration of our body politic and community,” he explained. He questioned his attackers’ faith. “Either we assert ourselves in the spirit of the Christian ideal,” Turner claimed, “or life and government and business and economics and peace and community integrity and joy and Christian usefulness are all on a toboggan, sliding backwards.” “Clinton and the Law” aired on January 6, 1957, to great national acclaim. It was “one of the most moving shows ever to appear on television,” wrote celebrated educational journalist Fred M. Hechinger, even

438 Clinton Courier-News, December 13, 1956, 1:1, 1:4; Letter from Bernice Cofer of the Baptist Home Mission Board to Paul Turner, December 7, 1957, personal files of Steve Jones; Cleveland, “Baptist Pastor,” 22. Other communities—in particular Little Rock, Arkansas—who were about to undergo desegregation themselves had been anxiously watching Clinton. Following Turner’s attack, several letters Little Rock residents wrote Turner to thank him for his “courage and Christian convictions.”230 “We are proud that a Baptist minister has been one of the first to take a dangerous stand and the first to suffer physically for loyalty to Christ and to our country,” wrote William and Esther Roberts, the parents of Terrence Roberts who would become one of the Little Rock Nine. “We hope and pray that others will take their stand with you in the days ahead,” they continued. “Whenever Christians begin to take their responsibilities seriously, is one of danger and suffering. The call of Christ is not to ‘flowery beds of ease’ but to ‘blood and sweat and tears’. ‘In this world ye shall have persecution.’ May you know, too, that he ‘has overcome the world.’” Jone R. Cotton to Paul Turner, July 24, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones; William and Esther Roberts to Paul Turner, December 6, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones.
though “it was practically all talk.” Nevertheless, he had found “such high drama—almost Shakespearian beauty—in this undramatic show” because of Paul Turner and “the cast of characters.”

Over the holidays, the street violence in Clinton lessened, but bombings continued to plague the town. Dynamiters blew up the meeting place for Kasper’s branch of the White Citizens’ Council and decimated one of the steel struts supporting the highway bridge over the Clinch River. Brittain and Turner worried what the new year would bring. “Dear Paul: … What have you done?” Turner’s father wrote to him. He also asked whether his son had considered the effect his actions would have on his career, warning that his actions “may hurt you there and elsewhere.” His parents’ church in Jackson, Tennessee, had considered calling Turner to be its head pastor, but now that was an impossibility. At Clinton’s First Baptist Church, as well, Turner’s reception was mixed. Some congregants spoke proudly of their pastor’s courage and bravery, but others believed he had been foolhardy or even wrong.

“[The] only one I got a kick out of was preacher Turner,” remembered Dail Skaggs. “The

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Cleveland, “Baptist Pastor,” 21-23; Palmer Williams, Edward R. Murrow, Fred W. Friendly, Arthur D. Morse, and Edmund Scott, “Clinton and the Law: A Study in Desegregation,” directed by Don Hewitt, See It Now, television episode, first broadcast January 6, 1957 (New York: CBS); Anderson, Children, 20; Clinton Courier-News, December 13, 1956, 1:4; Hechinger, “Clinton and the Law,” Herald Magazine (January 20, 1957): 5. After the program, progressive national leaders wrote to encourage Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. and Turner to continue their work. By showing “how Clinton’s citizens, young and old, acted in the showdown,” the program proved “that the Communists lie when they say that all Americans are at heart peanut Hitlers and pocket Stalins,” wrote journalist, play write, politician and former ambassador Clare Boothe Luce. “It is a good example of citizenship to set before the whole country,” agreed David Lilienthal, former chairman of the TVA and of the Atomic Energy Commission and head of the Development and Resources Corporation. He said Brittain was “one of the finest demonstrations … I have ever witnessed of the latent greatness of the individual American.” William Sloane of Rutgers University Press said that the program made him feel “a greater pride in being an American … than I felt during even the most victorious months of the last war. The dignity, the decency, the straightforwardness of the thinking … in that town would made the finest sort of presentation of this country overseas that I can imagine;” Clinton Courier-News, January 17, 1957, 1:1, 1:4. In June, the Fund for the Republic, an educational foundation interested in issues of civil liberty, named “Clinton and the Law” the best network documentary of the year. The honor came with a ten thousand dollar award, which Edward R. Murrow and his co-producer Fred Friendly gave to the First Baptist Church of Clinton and the Clinton High School P-TA because, as Friendly explained at the ceremony, “Mr. Murrow and I are in the business of getting credit for what other people have done;” Clinton Courier-News, June 20, 1957, 1:1, 1:6; ibid., June 27, 1957, 1:1.
whole church members, his own brothers, sisters, told him … “Stay out of it,”’’ Skaggs continued, “‘Tend to his own business, but he would not.’ A few church members even left because of Turner’s actions. The following summer, an anonymous writer told Turner that his church was “not happy. … They will not forget in a year or two as I have heard you saying. You Are Done. Get Smart Go—Go—Go—Go—Go— Not. Wanted.”\footnote{JH Turner to Paul Turner, December 4, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones; J.H. Turner to Paul Turner, December 6, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones; J.H. Turner to Paul Turner, December 20, 1956, personal files of Steve Jones; Clinton Courier-News, December 27, 1956, 1:2; Dail Skaggs, Mary Jane Martin and Antoinette Martinez, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, August 28, 1979, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; First Baptist Church of Clinton, TN, “Recommendations of the Deacon Board, First Baptist Church,” April 21, 1957, “First Baptist Church of Clinton, TN: Records 1840-1990,” microfilm collection, Knox County Archives, Knoxville, TN; unsigned to Paul Turner, undated, personal files of Steve Jones.}

The Turners also worried about their safety. “‘Once I knew a minister by the name of Peck that fell in a well and broke his neck,’” one Knoxville businessman wrote to him, “It served him right. He should have stayed at home, took care of his members and let the school business alone.”’’ Death threats came in among the hate mail and harassing phone calls. “‘I refused to listen to or try to reason with intimidators,’” Turner remembered. “‘It saved my wife and me from being torn emotionally.’” Nevertheless, “‘I was made to understand someone was to die in my house.’” The deacons sent them a guard to patrol their yard, and Turner began sleeping with a pistol and a shotgun.\footnote{Clinton Courier-News, December 13, 1956, 1:1, 1:4; Cleveland, “Baptist Pastor,” 22.}

Even those who had sided with Turner were open to attack. When a pastor in Knoxville announced that he would preach a sermon in support of Turner, a group of militant segregationists drove a black hearse to his door and asked where the dead body was. They also tried to discredit him by having bootleggers place liquor by his front door and take
pictures. “Thereafter, they kept calling us for three months at two o’clock every morning threatening the lives of our boys,” the pastor concluded.  

A NEW METHOD OF ATTACK:

As discussed in chapter 1, when the school year resumed, the attacks on the black students became even more vicious and pointed than before. The violence in the school was accompanied by new threats against the Hill community. The next bombing occurred in early January. Three sticks of dynamite exploded near the railroad tracks that bounded one side of the Hill community. The blast did only minor damage to a nearby home, but it created a shallow hole under the railroad tracks just two minutes before the next train came through Clinton. Thankfully no damage was done to the tracks themselves, so the passenger train passed without further incident. A few days later, someone threw dynamite at the police chief’s house. Again no damage was done. Then in early February, bombers exploded a small packet of dynamite in a school board member’s yard.

The next bombing attack on the Hill occurred on Valentine’s night. A white man drove onto the Hill, placed a suitcase containing what the sheriff estimated to be “‘upwards of ten sticks of dynamite’” on a concrete steel-reinforced slab covering a culvert and drove away. One of the men standing guard saw the car stop and thought he smelled gunpowder. He had just called for reinforcements when the suitcase exploded, shattering the concrete slab and shaking homes around the town. Approximately twenty-five homes on the Hill had

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442 Charles Trentham, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, August 14, 1979, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.

broken windows, collapsed walls, missing roofs or other damage. A steel drum near the blast site was shredded by the impact, and its pieces were embedded in the walls of the nearby homes. Some of the pieces even pierced through the outer walls and were on homes’ inside walls. Two cars were destroyed along with one home and the Chicken Shack, a social club operated by Ethel Gallaher, who lived in the building with her four children. All the furniture in both buildings was destroyed. Amazingly, no serious injuries were reported. Gallaher was thrown into a wall, and her eleven-month-old daughter had minor cuts on her face. One eight-inch piece of the steel drum passed through the outside wall of a home and sliced through a woman’s skirt. It did not cut her legs. “Somebody will be killed the next blast we have,” the Anderson County Constable predicted.444

The violence scared and upset the black community. “Crying children and angry, disheartened people filled the street near the scene of the dynamite,” the Clinton Courier-News reported. “One resident in the area asked, ‘Is this happening in America? In Clinton?’” Though many locals believed they knew who the perpetrator was, no official action was ever taken. The black community decided local law enforcement had to be part of the cover up. “Oh, yeah, they were in on it,” Eugene Weaver alleged later, “especially old [Sheriff] Francis Moore, oh he was a main man. … He was the main man.”445

Less than a month later, police found a bomb outside the home of Alva J. McSwain, one of the twelve and the younger girl of Joheather McSwain who had brought the original lawsuit. The bomb was a concrete sealing-compound can filled with thirty sticks of dynamite


removed from their paper wrappings, crumbled into smaller pieces and then packed tightly inside. The detonator and four foot fuse were attached through a hole in the side. Just after midnight the night before, a white man’s car had stalled in front of the McSwain home. The black men intercepted him and pushed his car down the Hill. The police surmised that the man had probably set the bomb but had not had time to light the fuse before the black men came. “Once again dynamiters, with murder in their hearts, have tried to set off another blast in Clinton,” railed Clinton Courier-News editor Horace Wells. “The would-be murderers must be hunted out and brought to justice—and the hunt should be just as serious as if the blast had been fired.”

Over the coming years, periodic explosions would continue to happen on the Hill. During early fall 1958, bombers attacked with increasing frequency. The final bomb to explode in Clinton was the one that blew up the school.

**A NEW NORMAL:**

The bombing of Clinton High School so shocked the town that they declared a truce, and open resistance to desegregation ended. For the men in the black community, life in Clinton continued much as it had before. They continued to work as laborers at Oak Ridge or for the local white businessmen. The biggest change was for their children. Now able to achieve a credible education, many among the next generation of black Clintonians became professionals. Even among the twelve, who had to survive the harassment and hate, there were nurses, school teachers, armed services officers and governmental employees.

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Within a few years, many of the white men who joined the home guard had become the leaders of the community. For instance, Buford Lewallen and Sidney Davis both became local judges; Don Byerly became a professor at University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Harold MacAlduff remained active in the Clinton community until the early 1960s when he relocated his family to nearby Oak Ridge.

Paul Turner remained at First Baptist Church of Clinton for two more years, though he tried to move sooner. He knew that he was, in his words, “‘too hot to move elsewhere in Tennessee,’” but he hoped that he might go to graduate school. Because of his young family, he needed significant amounts of financial support. Murrow volunteered to try to help him find assistance. “So far as any personal recommendation is concerned, I would recommend you for anything you wanted to do,” Murrow wrote. Turner received sympathetic replies from a variety of institutions, but no one was able to help. The dean of Yale Divinity School replied that he had noted Turner’s “courage last December with gratitude and admiration.” He offered Turner a place at Yale, but he warned that the school could not offer fellowships in the amount Turner required. Turner received similar replies from the Ford Foundation; the Department of Health, Education and Welfare; the Rockefeller Foundation and Union Theological Seminary. No institution provided enough money to keep his young family afloat.447

By 1958, other cities in the South had muddled through their own civil rights struggles, which had made Turner a leader in progressive Southern Christianity rather than

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anathema to it. Brook Hollow Baptist Church, one of Nashville’s largest congregations, called Turner to its pulpit. Turner promptly accepted. “My Dear Friends:” Turner and his wife wrote to their congregation in Clinton, “For the past ten ½ years, it has been our privilege to have you as co-laborers in the Lord’s work, to share with you the challenging ministry of First Baptist Church throughout the needy world.” They explained that they had never doubted that they “felt God’s leadership in coming here in 1948,” but after all that had happened, “that same leadership of God’s spirit now prompts … [us] to accept the call to another church and another field of service.” Turner remained at Brook Hollow until 1967 when he left pastoral ministry entirely to return to school.448

Though he ultimately wrote his dissertation on the attitudes of his fellow seminarians toward ministry, Turner used his time in graduate school to try to make sense of what had happened to him in Clinton. His original dissertation topic was the religious beliefs of the men and women who had sent him hate mail. The “authors [thought] that they had sound ‘religious’ grounds for taking their ‘venomous’ stances,” he explained in his paper proposal. “One letter was signed ‘God.’” They believed “they were doing the Lord’s work in their ‘mouthings,’ criticisms and threats.” Turner proposed a primary research study that would explore the “correlation of religious attitudes and reactions to desegregation by high school students in the United States’ Southern Section.” He planned to mail a questionnaire to fifty former Clinton High students who had been at the school in 1956, and he intended to include all of the Clinton twelve in this group. He would supplement those answers with selected

passages from his personal collection of mail related to desegregation. He believed that the hate mail in particular would “reveal the ‘poisonous’ and mentally unhealthy sentiments [of the segregationists].” To prepare for this work, he wrote “A Religio-Psychiatric Survey of Literature Describing Reactions of Persons under Stress in Segregation-Desegregation Processes.” In this essay, he first attempted to explain the psychological roots of racism and the ties between class and race. He explored how children learn racist attitudes, possible psychiatric treatments for racism and the implications of racist violence on children who participate. He then read more about African-American history and summarized the recent sociological studies of African American culture, communities, education and status.\textsuperscript{449}

Ultimately, he abandoned that topic for one that was more marketable within the Southern Baptist Church. Golden Gate Theological Seminary had been courting him for some time. The first time they offered him a faculty position was one of his final years at Clinton when they asked him to come lead a new satellite campus. Turner was not ready to leave pastoral ministry and so turned the position down. After graduate school, he took a faculty position there as a professor of ministry and the director of professional training. He remained at Golden Gate until 1980 when he resigned to protest a programming decision the administration had made.\textsuperscript{450}

Even after all the success since Clinton, his experiences in 1956 had altered him. As was true for Principal D.J. Brittain Jr., Turner had been one of Clinton’s favored sons before


desegregation. The hate that surrounded him when he did what he believed to be right overwhelmed him. From 1956 on, Turner was plagued by depression. Eventually it became too much. On December 18, 1980, he sat down in his living room and shot himself with his handgun.451

After his death, a man who he had mentored at Brook Hollow tried to summarize what had happened to the brave young minister who marched the twelve into school. “The Paul Turner in Clinton was a true Christian minister,” Roger Grimsley explained. “It took a great deal of courage to make a stand on his convictions. It took a great deal of courage to take a stand that all men have the same rights under God. However, instead of being honored, Paul suffered a great deal of trouble for standing up for the right thing.” This rejection broke him, Grimsley continued. By the time Turner reached Brook Hollow, “the fire that had carried him through Clinton was just a candle glow.” He had lost his belief that God would “protect him in doing what was right even when it was hard and dangerous.” Unfortunately, during these decades after Clinton, Turner struggled through this doubt and pain alone. “Paul Turner had no pastor. Paul Turner had no one to whom he could turn and completely open his fears and needs,” Grimsley concluded. “I hurt in the loss of this man. I hurt for his family. I hurt for all the servants of God who must face their problems and fears alone.”452

In contemporary Clinton, Turner’s actions are celebrated and his attack is remembered as a turning point in the town’s story, though people seldom discuss why he responded as they did, nor do they talk about the consequences he faced as a result of his

451 Marin County, CA, Certificate of Death.
actions. The black men, on the other hand, are omitted from the narrative entirely. Instead, the story focuses on the forty-seven white men who came out for one evening to guard the town’s municipal center. But the story of the men who stood up to the rioters is much more complicated than the events of that one night can reveal. Most importantly, leaving out the men on the Hill also reduces the story in Clinton to being about the “good” whites versus the “bad” whites. It robs these men of the fear and bravery that they exhibited as they did what no white man in Clinton wanted to do: defend the black community.

The men on the Hill and the Reverend Paul Turner also provide a window into the fluctuating meanings of masculinity during this time of social change. The civil rights story is not only about the struggle to redefine race because our society structures itself on multiple categories of difference. The men on the Hill, the white home guard and Turner shared a common idea of what masculinity meant in their individual lives. For the white men in the auxiliary police, being men meant defending their families, homes and civic centers from the working class segregationists. Turner, who probably should have joined them, instead chose to experiment with the nonviolence being promoted by black civil rights leaders. The black men, on the other hand, rejected their race leaders’ message and proclaimed their equality to white men by acting as the white men did. As these men in Clinton demonstrate, as soon as racial attitudes begin to change, ideas of class and gender also go into flux.

Finally, isolating the story of vigilante violence in Clinton to one night implies that the actions of the auxiliary police were exception, arising out of unusual set of circumstances. For the men on the Hill, though, that narrative stretched over the following several years, and they fought to protect their community from parading white supremacists and individual
bombers. Rather than relying on the white community for protection or leaving their families open to attack, these men responded in a typically American way. The men on the grabbed their guns and went to stand guard just as many other black men around the nation would do over the coming years as the fight for civil rights spread. In doing so, they aligned themselves with the armed immigrants who forcibly settled the colonies to the Patriots who drove the British from the new country to the believers in Manifest Destiny who pushed their way westward and all the other American men who have insisted on their right to bear arms when civil order failed.
TEACHING TROUBLE:

My first interview in Clinton was with Margaret Anderson. In 1956, she had been the high school’s business and typing teacher, and she also had served as the unofficial guidance counselor for the twelve black students. During that year, she wrote a series of articles for the *New York Times* which she later transformed into a memoir. In *The Children of the South*, she recounted how her relationships with the twelve and with the militant segregationist students who had protested against them forced her to address her own racism and classism—prejudices she had not before recognized in herself. Because she had seen desegregation from within the school and because she had listened to the students’ perspectives, her memories of that year differed from those of other middle class whites in Clinton.

The guide who introduced me to Margaret Anderson was a respected local white leader who had played a minor role in the events of 1956-57. As he left us, he admonished her: “Now remember, Ms. Anderson, you lied in your book. … You tell Rachel what we agreed had occurred.” I was shocked, but Anderson just nodded. As I dove deeper into my research, I realized that the encounter between Anderson and my guide epitomized how other middle class whites had responded to her work. They countered her memories of daily violence within the school by claiming that the football team members’ efforts at patrolling the school’s hallways had prevented all but a few fights. They questioned her descriptions of
the riots by arguing that her home was removed from the center of town so she could not have seen what happened. They ignored her arguments that the segregationists’ response had been as much a working-class uprising as it had been a white supremacist movement orchestrated by an outside agitator. “Margaret’s a hand wringer,” Judge Buford Lewallen had told local journalist June Adamson. “Her view might be clouded a little bit, and maybe she’s taken a little poetic license—. I think she’s taken a lot.”

On that October morning, as Anderson and I sat down to drink coffee and chat, I realized that she was nervous about speaking with me. As our conversation began, she seemed uncertain of what to tell me about those years. She was unwilling to deny what she had heard from the students and their parents, but she simultaneously questioned whether she was right about what had happened. “When I don’t want you to record it, could I just raise my hand or something, give you a signal?” she asked me. “That way I feel free. You know what I mean?”

Anderson and the other teachers at Clinton High School had been integral to desegregation’s success. From within their classrooms, they stood on the front lines, thrust into the divide between the militant segregationists and the supporters of law and order. Alongside their students, both white and black, they negotiated what desegregation would mean. At the same time, each teacher participated in the conflict in a unique way, reflecting his or her own understanding of and position within Clinton’s society.

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453 Buford Lewallen of Clinton, TN, interview with June Adamson, June 20, 1990, Clinton, analog recording, UT Special Collections, Knoxville, TN.

454 Margaret Anderson of Clinton, TN, interview by author, October 21, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.

For instance, on the same day I also interviewed former English teacher Celdon Medaris Lewallen—who had been Buford Lewallen’s wife—at her house in Clinton’s exclusive Eagle Bend neighborhood. She showed me through her home, pausing over the pictures of her husband and their only child, both of whom had died a few years earlier. She was a petite, stylish woman of eighty-five who had a wry sense of humor and seemed eager to share her memories. In retrospect I can identify places in our conversation where she exhibited early signs of the dementia that would eventually fog her mind, but on that day, her recollections were still vivid and alive.456

She began by recounting the Medaris and Lewallen families’ important roles in Clinton’s growth, and she talked about her relationship with Buford. Then our conversation turned to what had happened at the school fifty years earlier. She had believed that as a Medaris and a Lewallen it was her job to lead the white community down the proper path. In consequence, she focused on correcting the behavior of the segregationist students. Just as her husband Buford would bully the local Klan leader into betraying his klavern, Celdon Lewallen used her authority in the classroom to castigate and punish the poorer white students who resisted desegregation. Unlike Anderson, however, she had few interactions with the twelve black students and spent little time reflecting on the roots of the segregationists’ anger.457

Because each educator developed his or her own individual response to desegregation, each felt alone in the struggle. Celdon Lewallen, who was trying to perform

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456 Celdon Lewallen of Clinton, TN, interview by author, October 22, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.

457 Ibid.
her role as a civic leader, felt abandoned by her friends outside the school. They wanted to “just play like it was not there,” she recalled. She could not do that. “I lost a few friends” because of that, she told me sadly. Principal D.J. Brittain Jr., meanwhile, found his time and energy absorbed by the task of keeping the school open, which involved not only developing the desegregation plan and keeping peace among the students but also guarding the school against incursions by the press and adult segregationists. The civic authorities, including the Anderson County School Board, which should have been responsible for formulating the official response to the court order, refused to get involved in the running of the school. They were just “a bunch of pantywaists” who were most “conspicuous by their absence,” Celdon Lewallen said to me disparagingly. In contrast, Margaret Anderson worked from within her classroom to try to understand and diffuse conflicts. Though the national media would make her the voice of Clinton High School, Anderson did not take public stands in her own community. She never made any heroic gestures nor did she punish her segregationist students. Instead, she stood out in the memories of her students because she persistently treated them with courtesy regardless of their race or class, and she demanded that everyone else in her classroom do the same. Theresa Caswell, one of the twelve, remembered that Anderson stood out because she was “always nice” and seemed to care.458

Anderson’s decision to engage with the twelve and their poor white adversaries enabled her to see how her society’s classed and racialized power structures had kept generations of students from achieving their potential. Her choice made her unique. Most other middle class white adults remained willfully ignorant of those outside of their peer

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458 Interview with Celdon Lewallen; Theresa Caswell of Clinton, TN, interview by author, October 22, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN.
group by limiting their social circles. As most white middle-class Clintonians saw it, creating these divisions between themselves and others was a part of growing up into responsible adulthood. As was often true in the rural South, children, and in particular boys, seemed oblivious to the factors that shaped and divided the social lives of their parents. Children played together. In Clinton, they met up along the railroad tracks. “Lord, we’d meet up there—black, white, and everything—and we’d play ball,” local ophthalmologist C.E. Stansberry remembered fondly. “Football and baseball, it was sports and everything.” Like Stansberry, many of Clinton’s middle-class white men would fondly remember their childhood mates, but few stayed in contact with them after they left grammar school. At that point, they began socializing exclusively with members of their own class and race. Their isolation meant that they were surprised both when the black families on the Hill sued for admittance to Clinton High School and when the county’s white working class residents rose up against desegregation. When the riots began, the middle class white men who banded together in the home guard to resist the working class segregationist mobs that threatened to overrun the town’s municipal institutions, the symbolic seat of civic authority. They did not care to hear the reasons for the segregationists’ actions.459

Their wives were more likely to maintain contact with people of different races and classes over the years. Although wealthier white women had little reason to converse with poor whites, they employed African American maids, many of whom were related to the children who desegregated Clinton High School. The distance between employer and

employee necessarily limited their friendships with the black women. Even so, the intimate jobs done by the maids and the longstanding nature of the relationships—some of which spanned several decades—meant that the white women knew something of the black women’s lives and families. Despite these relationships, most wealthy white women did not understand how deeply inequality had affected Clinton’s blacks and poor whites. “I’m frankly embarrassed by the fact that we didn’t question [whether segregated education was right] sooner,” English teacher Eleanor Davis told June Adamson in 1978. We “just didn’t realize.”460

Following the 1965 Watts Race Riots in Los Angeles, sociologists Vincent Jeffries and H. Edward Ransford conducted a series of interviews with whites in the area, seeking to gauge how social contact with African Americans before the riots affected whites’ understandings of the violence that occurred. Of those who had social contact with blacks before the riots, the majority believed that the violence evolved out of the history of racial prejudice and social deprivation faced by blacks in the city. In contrast, almost fifty percent of the whites who had little social contact with blacks before the riots believed that the riots were caused by outside agitators. Most thought that African Americans had been happy with their lives until these outsiders manipulated them into feeling otherwise.461

Similarly, in Clinton only a handful of middle-class whites maintained friendships with Clintonians from other races or classes. These individuals were aware of the anger and frustration building among the black community and the white working class. The others

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460 Eleanor Davis of Clinton, TN, interview by June Adamson, September 12, 1978, Clinton, analog recording, University of Tennessee at Knoxville Special Collections, Knoxville, TN.

assumed that everyone else was as content with structures that guided life in the town as they were. By purposefully keeping their distance from the lives of working class whites and African Americans, Clinton’s middle class whites could continue to ignore the ways that their lives contributed to the crippling systems of inequality within their town, the state and the nation.462

When the conflict began, however, the teachers’ interactions with students of different races and classes meant that Margaret Anderson along with a few others saw firsthand what inequality had meant for their students. The stories of Clinton High School’s educators illustrate how the relationships forged in the hallways and classrooms caused some teachers to take the rare leap to begin fighting both racism and classism, the leap that city leaders (and some of their fellow teachers) chose not to make. Other teachers, however, used their longstanding assumptions about the other groups of Clintonians to protect themselves from having to ask these harder questions. They came out of that year as blind to their own privilege as they were before.

Despite the teachers’ influential role in the implementation of the desegregation order, their memories—and even their names—are omitted from the exhibits in the Green McAdoo Museum, though Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. is mentioned a few times. None of Anderson’s New York Times articles nor her memoir are listed on the museum’s recommended reading list. Furthermore, as happened to Anderson on the morning I visited her, the town’s white male leaders edit whatever memories the teachers do share when the women’s accounts vary from the official narrative. Despite this public silence, Anderson, Brittain, Lewallen and the

other educators figure prominently in individual memories of the students, particularly among the African Americans students; and their stories demonstrate how much difference a handful of individuals can make when they decide to address inequality head on. The stories of Celdon Lewallen and Margaret Anderson and D.J. Brittain Jr. illustrate how desegregation’s success or failure was negotiated among the administrators, teachers and students. The individuals inside Clinton High School had choices. Teachers could have quit or gone on strike. The white student body could have refused to come to school. Black students could have refused to put themselves in danger. Those who continued to come to classes each day were the ones who made desegregation a success.

**BECOMING TEACHERS:**

Of all the teachers at Clinton High School, Celdon Medaris Lewallen was probably the most socially and politically prominent. Born into one of Anderson County’s older and wealthier families, she began dating Buford Lewallen—the son of another prominent Clinton family—while she was a student at Clinton High School. After graduating in 1939, she attended Ward-Belmont College, a prestigious women’s college in Nashville. Unbeknownst to either set of parents, Buford and Celdon eloped during her first year of college. Because they feared their families would disapprove of such an early marriage and because Ward-Belmont would not allow married women to enroll in classes, the Lewallens kept their relationship secret until after her graduation two years later. Celdon then joined Buford, who was in law school at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.463

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463 Interview with Celdon Lewallen.
D.J. Brittain Jr. also came from an established local family. He spent most of his youth in Oliver Springs where his father, D.J. Brittain Sr., was the principal of the local high school. His mother taught at the same institution, and his uncle was the superintendent of schools in nearby Roan County. After graduating from Oliver Springs High School, D.J. Brittain Jr. went to Maryville College and then to graduate school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he completed a degree in education. When he returned to Anderson County in 1937, he was hired as a teacher and coach at Clinton High School. Four years later, he was appointed to the principalship of Lake City High School, and his wife Clarice secured a job as a home economics teacher there. In 1944, he became the principal of Clinton High School.\textsuperscript{464}

The Lewallens planned to return to Clinton after Buford finished law school, but World War II changed their plans. Instead of going home to open his law practice, Buford enlisted in the military, intending to become a pilot. Shortly before he completed his training, however, one of his instructors asked him to come along on a joy ride. According to Celdon, the instructor wanted to practice some trick moves, but he could not fly unless he had a cadet with him. While executing a roll, the instructor crashed the plane. Seriously injured, Buford spent almost two and a half years in military hospitals. Although he eventually learned to walk with crutches, he never regained full mobility and was plagued with pain for the remainder of his life.\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{464} Interview with Brittain; Snyder E. Roberts, \textit{History of Clinton Senior High School, 1806-1971} (Clinton, TN: The Distributive Education Department, 1971): 50-51; Anderson County, TN, “School Board Minutes,” \textit{Anderson County Records}, April 17, 1941 and April 29, 1941, microfilm collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

\textsuperscript{465} Interview with Celdon Lewallen; interview with Buford Lewallen.
During the years the Lewallens and Brittains spent away, the isolated Anderson County that they had known as children opened to the outside world. The changes began in 1933 when the newly established Tennessee Valley Authority built its first dam at Norris, just seven miles from Clinton, displacing local farmers and bringing the first wave of outsiders to the area. World War II brought the federal government back to Anderson County. The Manhattan Project needed three isolated locations where scientists could develop the atomic bomb in tightly controlled “secret cities.” Anderson County’s rural locale, proximity to Knoxville and abundant TVA power supply made it a perfect location. The government built the military installation in Oak Ridge, just miles from Clinton, which meant that federal officials confiscated tens of thousands of fertile farmland acres and brought even more outsiders to the region, including scientists, government administrators and highly skilled workers.466

Among the new residents who relocated to Anderson County during this growth spurt were Margaret and Raymond Anderson. Margaret Vance Anderson had grown up in Glasgow, Kentucky. She often had heard her father—a lawyer who accepted black defendants—beg juries not to “‘let the color of [my client’s skin] … influence your decision.’” She also recognized that being middle class and white meant that she had different opportunities offered to her. But she convinced herself that African Americans and poorer whites did not resent the limitations they faced. She and her husband Raymond, who was also a teacher, relocated to Anderson County immediately after World War II. She worked at Norris High

School, another secondary school in the county, until the late 1940s when she resigned to give birth to her first child.\textsuperscript{467}

As the Andersons were settling into life in Clinton, the Lewallens were leaving Clinton again, this time so that Buford could enter state politics. Though white textile workers and coal miners were key to his father’s mayoral campaigns, Buford had aligned himself with the federal employees at Oak Ridge and Norris Dam. Because the white workers saw the newcomers as invaders, Buford’s decision sent a clear message to local white laborers that he was not courting their vote. His decision to join Roosevelt’s branch of the Democratic Party confirmed that he had abandoned them. East Tennessee had been strongly Republican since the Civil War when the region had attempted to separate from the rest of the state so as to remain part of the Union. During the early twentieth century, the Democratic Party showed some flickers of life, but that support died when Roosevelt’s New Deal brought the Tennessee Valley Authority and other representatives of federal power to the county. The influx of newcomers to Oak Ridge, however, gave the party new momentum. Though Oak Ridgers, as residents of a military installation, could not vote in local elections, they could participate in state and national races, and they had the numbers to sway elections. Buford Lewallen joined the local Democratic coalition, and he quickly became one of the regional leaders, which connected him to other veterans-turned-politicians, including Frank

Clement, who would be Tennessee’s governor in 1956. Within a few years, he had become an influential voice among Tennessee’s Young Democrats.468

Buford Lewallen was elected to the state’s House of Representatives in 1946. In 1947, he became the youngest speaker of Tennessee’s House of Representatives, and he served in that position until 1949. During his tenure in the House, he extended local voting rights to Oak Ridge’s residents. Having cemented his popularity among Anderson County’s newest members, the Lewallens returned to Clinton in 1949 when his term ended. Celdon accepted a teaching position at Clinton High School to supplement their income, while Buford built his law practice in town. She quickly became integral to the extra-curricular life at the school and served as faculty advisor to the student council. She recalled that although she “started for all the wrong reasons: money, I loved every minute that I taught.” By 1950, Buford had become Anderson County’s district attorney.469

In 1952, Raymond Anderson accepted an appointment as the band director at Clinton High School. When Margaret returned to teaching, she also took a position at the school as the business and typing teacher. She was very impressed with her new situation. “The spirit and morale of the staff and the students were so fine that I thought it was the most wonderful school I had ever known,” she recalled. “Students and teachers were free to explore new ways of teaching and learning; the school was noted for its student leadership.” Especially impressive to her was the quality of the faculty. “One teacher had just returned from England, 468 June Adamson, “The Lit Stick of Dynamite: Clinton, Tennessee Faces Brown v. Board of Education” (Oak Ridge, TN: by the author, 1999), 17. Clement became governor in 1953 and was still in office during Clinton High’s desegregation.

where she had been a Fulbright scholar,” Anderson continued, “and many others had traveled extensively. I felt it a privilege to be associated with these people.”

This ethos of academic pride was fostered by D.J. Brittain Jr. who had turned Clinton High School from a typically troubled Appalachian educational institution into one of the best schools in the state. When Brittain became Clinton High School’s principal in 1944, the school had too little classroom space and too few supplies. In addition, teachers’ salaries were incredibly low. Male instructors, for instance, could earn as much as three times their salaries as soldiers or Oak Ridge employees. That situation meant that competent educators seldom stayed at the school for more than a few terms. Brittain, however, was proactive and determined. He first addressed the space shortages. By 1948, the school board had approved two additions to the building. Five years later, the system also erected a home economics wing, a music department and a new gymnasium that could seat twenty-five hundred. Hoping to help all Clintonians feel invested in his institution, Brittain courted the community, asking faculty, students, parents and residents to help him raise funds and volunteer to be construction laborers.

When he had mitigated the physical challenges facing the school, Brittain began courting teachers who could inspire and challenge students. He brought in a group of young educators and encouraged them to try innovative programs. He also facilitated a collegial, communal approach to learning. For instance, Celdon Lewallen had a difficult time

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explaining grammar and syntax to some of her working-class male students who believed it would not matter to their futures, so she coordinated her lessons with the shop teacher, finding ways to relate diagramming sentences to their vocational courses. “The very challenge of making the forms and putting them in their proper place appealed to the boys,” she remembered, “and they could see [how grammar worked].” Sue Byerly, who taught history and Bible, gave her students the freedom to choose the project that would best allow them to showcase their talents. “The ones that were capable were going to write term papers,” she explained, but the others “were allowed to do something with their hands. They did different projects and things.” At the end of the term, Brittain came into her classroom to see what the students had produced and praised their efforts.472

Recognizing that his young teachers often needed support beyond the classroom, Brittain helped in other areas of their lives. Brittain hired Sue Byerly when her young husband Don started graduate school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. When they moved to town, they had nowhere to stay, so Brittain helped them find an apartment. When Don left for six weeks of fieldwork during their first summer in town, Brittain and his wife took Sue out to see a play at the Carousel Theater in Knoxville. Then Brittain offered Sue the summer class he had taught previously when he found out that she and Don worried that her teacher’s salary and his graduate stipend were insufficient to cover their expenses. He was

“very kind and generous,” Don explained. “I think I could have gone to him for anything,” Sue expanded. “He was just that kind of a person.”

Brittain also encouraged his instructors to play active roles in the students’ lives. He told them that they could help him rescue the upcoming generation of Appalachian children from the poverty and backwardness that had crippled the region by teaching their students to be responsible citizens; to think clearly and objectively; to develop “moral, spiritual and aesthetic values;” to build their physical, mental and emotional health; to learn academic skills; to prepare for the future and to “make wise use of their leisure time.”

With the help of Lewallen, the Andersons and the rest of his new crop of teachers, Brittain’s plan worked. By the early 1950s, over half of the twenty-four faculty members at Clinton High School had graduate degrees, and in 1952 Clinton High earned an A-rating from the Tennessee State Department of Education. The following year, it became a member of the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, which ranked it as an A-1 school, distinguishing it as one of the best high schools in the South. Nevertheless, the continued population growth in Anderson County meant that Brittain battled to keep his school ahead of demands. In the spring of 1956, he launched another campaign to lessen the overcrowding at his school, challenging the people of Clinton to build a separate vocational high school to meet student needs. Not only would this new institution accommodate the growing numbers of high school students. It would also allow Brittain to separate the

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473 Interview with Sue and Don Byerly.

vocational students from the college track students, letting him focus more intensively on developing the next generation of white business and civic leaders.  

**DESEGREGATING THE SCHOOL, 1950-1957:**

In August 1950, five black high school students and their parents walked into Principal D.J. Brittain Jr.’s office. For the past ten years, the black families had fought for better opportunities for their children to no avail. They told Brittain that they believed that the Anderson County School Board’s policy of busing black students to another county violated the principle of separate but equal systems of education, and they asked him to enroll the students in Clinton High School. Brittain replied that he did not have the authority to admit them and advised them to visit the superintendent of schools, who he knew would deny them admission. He suspected this was “the beginning of something that was going to lead into the courts.”  

As Brittain predicted, the five students and their parents filed suit against the Anderson County School Board and its representatives on December 5, 1950. Most whites in Clinton assumed that the courts would defend their educational system, but Brittain was not convinced that the courts would find in the county’s favor nor did he believe that segregated education was an unassailable tenet of Southern life. “From the time it went to court … my feeling was [that] eventually we were going to have to admit the black students,” he recalled.

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476 Interview with Brittain; United States Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain et. al. v. County Board of Education of Anderson County, 1950, Case No. 1555,” 1952, United States District Court, Eastern District of Tennessee at Knoxville, Civil Liberties Cases, National Archives and Records Administration—Southeast Region, Atlanta, GA, 92-98.
Celdon Lewallen remembered discussing the case during faculty meetings and raising the topic of desegregation in her classroom.\footnote{Ibid; interview with Celdon Lewallen; Seivers, “Voices of Discrimination,” 76-77.}

A few other community leaders agreed with Brittain’s assessment of the situation. Because Buford was one of Anderson County’s district attorneys, the Lewallens participated in the desegregation struggle from the time Joheather McSwain et al v. County School Board of Anderson County went to the federal courts in 1950. Buford warned the county that they might lose the lawsuit. The Board won the first phase of the lawsuit, but the case stalled in the appeals process where it was placed on hold pending the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of Brown versus Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas. When the Supreme Court announced that segregated education denied African American students their Constitutional rights, Buford Lewallen told the Board of Education that integration was now inevitable. He urged them to begin making preparations so that they would be ready when the federal court ruled in their case. After the Supreme Court decreed in 1955 that America’s public schools should desegregate with “all deliberate speed,” the federal courts reactivated McSwain v. Anderson County. In January 1956, Federal Judge Robert J. Taylor ruled that in Clinton, “all deliberate speed” would mean that black students would be allowed to attend the high school the following fall.\footnote{Brittain, “A Case Study,” 60-61; interview with Buford Lewallen; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 133-34.}

When he heard Judge Taylor’s ruling, Brittain ramped up his efforts to prepare his faculty and the student body for the changes that were store for them. He predicted that “with time, information and an intelligent plan, the problem would work itself out with fairness to
everyone.” At faculty meetings, he repeatedly stressed the importance of the first few weeks of school. Margaret Anderson remembered that he told the teachers, “‘If we can get through the first two weeks, we will be alright.’” Brittain urged the teachers to set aside class time to discuss desegregation with their students, telling them that the teenagers needed a chance to speak their minds on the subject, no matter where they stood, so that “‘both sides … [could] face the problem as intelligently as possible.’” He also reached out to parents for help and support, attending specially-called meetings of the Clinton High School Parent-Teachers Association so that he could discuss “‘the status of the integration problem in Anderson County and … the many problems connected with integration.’” He reassured community members “‘that we are following the orders of the courts.’”

The Lewallens, who felt a great deal of civic responsibility to lead Clinton through this transition, stepped up to organize the town’s official response to the court order. Buford advised the school board as it adapted its policies to match the new order, and Celdon used her position as the student council’s faculty sponsor to convince the school’s student leaders to help with the transition. She continued to rely on these students—particularly Jerry Shattuck, the incoming student body president and captain of the football team—for support

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479 Brittain, “A Case Study,” 64-72; interview with Margaret Anderson; P.T.A. Minutes, Office of the Principal, Clinton High School, Clinton, TN, February 14, 1956; Clinton Courier-News, August 9, 1956, 1:1, 1:4.
throughout the coming school year. At the same time, she began watching for signs of unrest among the white working class students.\textsuperscript{480}

Margaret Anderson had little to do with the town’s struggles until after Judge Taylor handed down his order. Neither Raymond nor Margaret Anderson had chosen to engage in Clinton’s civic life when they moved there. They did not even register to vote at first. The reason Margaret became a part of the story was that Principal Brittain asked her to help him carry out the injunction. Every spring, he traveled around the county, meeting the eighth grade students who would matriculate into Clinton High School the coming fall. Many students in the rural parts of the county had been given fewer educational opportunities than the town children had received. During these visits, he tested them. Based on their scores, the students were placed in courses that would track them into either the school’s vocational or college-bound curricula. In May 1956, both Brittain and Anderson went to Green McAdoo elementary school to meet the prospective African American students and their parents. Brittain explained to the assembled families that the black pupils would take the same achievement tests that the white students did. After the tests were scored, Anderson returned to Green McAdoo to help the twelve black students choose their classes. Though they were

not as well prepared as the middle class white children, the twelve appear to have done reasonably well on the tests, and several of them entered the college track.481

Because she served as their unofficial guidance counselor, Anderson had earlier and closer contact with the incoming African American pupils than many of the other teachers did. Anderson had never thought of herself as being racially prejudiced, but as she got to know these students and then watched how others reacted against them, she realized that she was ignorant of what life was like for blacks in her town. “There was no talk of ‘segregation’ or ‘integration’” when I was a child, she explained. “These words were unknown to us. … We lived apart, but in basic acceptance of each other. For all I knew, this was the way the Negroes wanted it.” The 1956-57 school year, however, showed her that those assumptions were false. African Americans had not wanted the inequalities of segregation, and when they finally demanded their civil rights, some whites would fight against them. Although she had not fully understood her father’s courtroom pleas as a child, Anderson began to appreciate his message.482

Hoping he could ease the transition within the school, Brittain asked the Anderson County School Board for assistance as soon as the federal order was given. The Board responded with silence. “The county provided no guards … or anything,” teacher Margaret Anderson marveled. “It’s unbelievable, isn’t it?” The state educational authorities were similarly silent when Brittain appealed to them for guidance.483 Presumably, the county

481 Interview with Buford Lewallen; Brittain, “A Case Study,” 74-76.
482 Anderson, Children of the South, 13-14.
483 Interview with Margaret Anderson; interview with Celdon Lewallen; Clinton Courier-News, August 30, 1956, 1:1; interview with Brittain.
and state authorities intended to resist the courts through inaction, but D.J. Brittain Jr. was unwilling to defy the justices. Thus, though it was beyond the purview of his job, Brittain developed the desegregation plan and enrolled the black students without the Anderson County School Board’s approval. “There will be one Negro in the senior class, three in the junior class, three in the sophomore class and six in the freshman class,” Brittain announced to the local paper after seeing the students’ assessment test scores. He then explained how social and athletic activities would be handled. “‘If any of the Negro students make the [athletic] teams, they will be used against other schools only where this is agreeable,’” Brittain said. Recognizing the explosive threat of interracial sex among the teens, Brittain laid out further boundaries to guide the students’ interactions and prevent interracial friendships. “‘We are not going to have mixed social events,’” Brittain clarified to the African American students. “‘You may come [to our school], but you must stay in your own group, and we will stay in ours.’”

At the time—and in the ways he reflected upon the decisions he made that year—D.J. Brittain Jr. never claimed to be for integration. Instead, he rigidly stuck to the rhetoric of law and order. “‘We think the community should know that we are following the orders of the courts,’” he said in early August 1956. “‘We believe that loyal Americans must always do so.’” He repeatedly insisted that he only had three options: he could obey the court order; disobey the injunction and stand in violation of a federal court or resign his job. He believed that as a responsible American, he could not stand in opposition to the federal authorities, and he thought it would be weak and cowardly to resign. Stepping down would simply mean that

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484 Interview with Brittain; *Clinton Courier-News*, August 9, 1956, 1:1, 1:4; ibid., September 6, 1956, 1:1.
he passed his problem on to someone else because “any man who holds this job is in the same position.”

Even though he refused to openly defend desegregation, he was kind to the black students. His was at best tepid support of the twelve’s presence, but it was enough to make them feel welcome. “When I first saw Mr. Brittain, when I walked into the school, he had a smile on his face and met each of us,” Bobby Cain remembered. “I’m sure he was concerned about the students whether you were black or white. … I’m just glad he was the principal at the time.” In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center’s publication Teaching Tolerance addressed the amount of difference kind teachers can make in the lives of bullied teenagers. The article looked at the pressures queer teens face in rural schools. Though these students longed to be able to live “out,” many reported that they felt unsafe doing so. For these students, teachers who seemed to offer “even a ray of support” could make a significant difference. Similarly, in a hostile high school, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. represented a relatively safe authority figure. He may not have wanted the twelve to be there, but he was not going to allow others to drive them out.

Unfortunately, physical factors limited Brittain’s ability to stand up to the protestors. A small, bespectacled man who seemed more scholarly than heroic, he had laryngitis throughout the first week of school, which undermined his attempts to defend his stand. Though his words were strong, Brittain himself seemed weak, wan and vulnerable. For instance, at an August 30 student assembly, Brittain, who looked “haggard” and spoke

485 Ibid., August 9, 1956, 1:1, 1:4; Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain,” August 30, 1956, 15.

486 Interview with Bobby Cain; Sean McCollum, “Country Outposts,” Teaching Tolerance 38 (Fall 2010) 32-35.
“barely above a whisper” commended the twelve for having “‘the guts to come to school today,’” as the *Clinton Courier-News* reported. He compared them to the three hundred white students who were absent from school and said that the black students’ “attendance showed ‘great courage.’”

Because of his kindness toward the black students and the school board’s silence, D.J. Brittain Jr. quickly became a focal point for the segregationists’ rage. They saw that the other communities undergoing court-ordered desegregation that year had successfully sidestepped the injunctions either by using violence as a justification for closing the schools or by simply ignoring the orders. The Anderson County School Board’s continued silence reinforced the impression that Brittain had a choice. “The board of education as a board and the county superintendent in particular had taken a pretty negative attitude towards the whole thing,” Brittain remembered. “They didn’t want to do it.” In early August 1956 he tried to force the board to become involved by drawing attention to the fact that they had “‘taken no stand and issued no instructions’” on the coming school year, but the first time the school board officially acknowledged the coming desegregation was the week before school started. They did not even meet with Brittain and the teachers until the events of December 4, 1956,

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487 *Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain,”* August 30, 1956, 13; *The Oak Ridger,* August 30, 1956; interview with Brittain.

488 This was just the first instance of what would become typical behavior for them. Throughout the 1956-1957 school year, officials looked for support and policy statements from people in authority, but silence would become characteristic of that year. Brittain would turn to the Anderson County School Board. The Anderson County School Board would look to the state educational officials, and the state officials would call on the presidential administration. When federal, state and local officials remained silent on desegregation, they implied that the segregationists spoke correctly when they insisted that the Supreme Court’s ruling was not binding upon them. Even worse were press conferences such as the one Eisenhower held in early September 1956 in which he asserted that “it makes no difference whether he endorses the [Brown v. Board] decision, because the Constitution is as the Supreme Court interprets it,” *Clinton Courier-News,* September 6, 1956, 1:1.
forced him to close the school. That meant Brittain “was swinging in the wind” without the backing or support he needed.\textsuperscript{489}

In the absence of other strong statements in support of the court order, segregationists could believe that Brittain was responsible for allowing the black students to remain in school. Segregationist parents began keeping their children at home in protest. “I will not allow these children to be deprived of an education because Brittain refuses to push those Negroes out,’” John Kasper told the local newspaper. “I told him I would not resign my job under intimidation,” Brittain retorted. When the segregationists continued to push him to step down, he promised to resign as soon as anyone showed him evidence that fifty-one percent of Clinton High’s students and parents opposed him. Following that announcement, the segregationists repeatedly circulated petitions calling for D.J. Brittain Jr’s resignation, although they never gathered the necessary number of signatures to meet the fifty-one percent he had requested.\textsuperscript{490}

While Brittain negotiated the relationship between the school and the surrounding community, Anderson tried to ease the twelve black students’ transition into the school. As the school year began and the conflict escalated, she found the young black women to be particularly sympathetic characters. White boys occasionally picked fights with the black male students, but they primarily targeted the young women, whispering sexual slurs as they walked by, throwing eggs at them and dumping ink into their lockers to ruin their books. One


experience in particular shocked Anderson out of her “blissful apathy.” During a school assembly, Regina Turner, one of the black students, abruptly stood and left the room. The students who had been sitting around her burst into applause. “That night I couldn’t sleep,” Anderson remembered. “How could I call myself a teacher when a child who was under my supervision—any child—had been persecuted?” Worried about what had happened, Anderson called Turner’s home the next morning and asked her about the incident. She was initially unwilling to tell Anderson about it. Turner eventually said that she had left because she felt unsafe. The white students around her had begun by whispering sexual innuendoes about her, which she assured Anderson she could have taken. She had walked out when one of the boys began threatening to molest her. By that point in the year, the segregationist students had begun targeting any white who appeared to be friendly toward the twelve, but Anderson nevertheless decided it was time to be more proactive. “I just knew that I had to be their friend, that they had to have a friend,” Anderson explained.491

Anderson scrapped her lesson plans and devoted class time to discussing the attack on Regina Turner Smith. Some of the students who had sat near the girl apologized. Others resented Anderson’s intrusion. They told the adult segregationist leaders that she had become an integrationist. The next morning, she found a note on her blackboard accusing her of being a “nigger lover,” and over the following months, segregationist adults periodically sat in on Anderson’s classes to monitor her.492


Some of Anderson’s colleagues also disagreed with her approach. During the conflict, most of Clinton High School’s teachers sided with the leaders of the town who had adopted the rhetoric of law and order: they would acquiesce to the court order, but they would offer the black students no further support. Many of these teachers treated the black students with icy politeness and hoped the segregationist students would drive the African Americans from the school. Gail Ann Epps Upton—one of the original twelve black students to desegregate the school—overheard a member of the Tennessee White Youth explain to a teacher that they were causing trouble because “‘we don’t want to go to school with these niggers.’” In response, the unnamed teacher said, “‘I feel the same as you do, but honey, we have to do it.’”

Some of the other teachers challenged Anderson, asking her why she expended so much of her time and energy on the African American students. She countered by asking how her coworkers—individuals who were presumably Christian patriots who had devoted their lives to uplifting the region’s children—could stand idly by. How, she wondered, could a teacher “watch children struggle and not be concerned? Is one’s Christian conscience only for Sunday morning?” To her, supporting the black students was part of fulfilling the biblical mandate to “love one’s neighbor as one’s self,” and desegregation was “an opportunity to exercise not only Christianity but our love for our country and everything it stands for.” She asked her fellow teachers, “Are not these, too, American children who come under our flag and for whom we are also responsible?”

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493 Ibid., 173-74.
The greatest disruption to Anderson’s classroom routine, however, came from members of the media. Liberal national and regional correspondents found her to be a charming and articulate spokesperson for their views, and she remembered that members of the press felt free to “just come into the school, interrupt your classes, or anything.” Even though she hoped that national disapprobation could quell the street violence, she doubted that the reporters roaming the hall understood the cultural schisms that divided her students. Her conviction grew as the months passed and she began to recognize how long-standing class divisions in the town had contributed to the segregationists’ resistance.  

As a newcomer to the region, Anderson stood outside the longstanding class conflicts that had divided the town. Over the course of the fall semester, she began to see how divisions among whites had escalated the violence. To her, it was misleading when reporters, administrators or politicians recounted “the ordeals of the Negro children in the process of desegregation” without relating “the trials of the white children.” She came to see both groups as being co-inheritors of injustice. She decided that when educators and leaders refused to help poor whites, they were only “transferring … [their] prejudices and … hatreds” from a group that had been disadvantaged racially to a group that had been disadvantaged economically. She began publicly denouncing the white middle class in Clinton and elsewhere who refused to address these inequities.

To soften her message and make it more palatable to her audience, Anderson carefully presented herself to show that she belonged in the mainstream even as her ideas acquired a

496 Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 185-86.
497 Ibid., Anderson, Children of the South, 80.
more radical edge. A 1962 television interview shows how she balanced her words with her appearance. It also shows why Anderson was remembered as being “a doll,” “a lady” and “a snowball” even while other Americans who expressed views similar to hers were called radicals, crazies or Communists. For the interview, she sat on a parlor sofa with her ankles crossed and her hands in her lap clutching a pair of horn-rimmed glasses. She wore a black dress with a double strand of pearls around her neck, reminiscent of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Throughout the interview, she remained demure, smiling often and speaking softly but firmly in her cultured Southern accent. (*498*)

Other individuals interviewed for the same episode were white, middle-class businessmen. They blamed the rioting on segregationist John Kasper who, they claimed, had seduced the poor whites from the surrounding mountains. Anderson disagreed. Though she seemed embarrassed by the truth she was speaking, she repeatedly insisted that Clinton’s white leaders were as full of hate as “some of the people who are called radical segregationists.” As she said this, she glanced downward and nervously fidgeted with the glasses she held in her hand, adjusting the stems. But each time the interviewer asked her to condemn the segregationist parents, she refused to do so, explaining again that nothing would change in Clinton until the racial and economic inequalities that affected the town—as well as Appalachia, the South and the rest of the nation—were addressed. (*499*)

Anderson couched her message within the language of the family, much as white progressive female reformers had done at the turn of the twentieth century to justify their

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*499* Ibid.
social activism. As a teacher, she explained, she had been appointed to be a mother to all children, regardless of their race or class. She was responsible for making sure that all her students succeeded, and she was distressed by the knowledge that not all of them had the opportunity to do so. “I am deeply concerned for the children of the South during this transition period,” she said. She thought that the male leaders who had been elected to be the town fathers had shirked their duty when Clinton High School had desegregated. They had refused to solve the racial problems that they had created. “Sometimes I have thought that we’re sending children to do a man’s job,” she concluded. “I don’t think anyone who has seen this drama of human emotions through both the white and the Negro children struggling to do a job that adults really haven’t been able to accomplish could doubt that it is a tremendous responsibility we’ve placed upon the children of the South.” Thus, when she scolded male leaders, she was not nagging them. She was a mother begging a father to protect her children from the evil world surrounding them.500

She worried that the town’s white political and social leaders had turned the segregationist students into their scapegoats. If the riots were the fault of poor whites who had been manipulated into protesting by a clever outside agitator, then middle-class white society did not have to take their complaints seriously.

Her exploration of the ways that class and race intersected in Clinton High School culminated in her memoir *The Children of the South*. In it, Anderson insisted that the reporters, politicians and community members who condemned the segregationist students were demanding too much of the teenagers and ignoring the ways in which adults were

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500 Ibid.
responsible for the conflict. White children should not be expected to be better than the society that had produced them. They had grown up in a world that “sanctions the doctrine of racial superiority,” she argued. “The statutes … directing separation of Negroes and whites in railway cars, theaters, restaurants, parks, playgrounds, schools have made separation seem proper. In other words, the laws in themselves have not only implied but legalized ‘superiority.’”

She reminded her readers that she had never had to face her own racism before the events of 1956. The same was true for many of the white students at Clinton High School. They had never thought about whether black Americans had rights, and they had never learned to think beyond their own lives and situations. These failings were not their fault. Instead, they reflected the blindness of their teachers, religious leaders and parents. Furthermore, she continued, the textile workers, coal miners, manual laborers and farmers in Anderson County, whether white or black, “are usually uneducated.” For the white students “about the only thing they have ever had in their favor is that, because they are white, they have always been considered above the Negro.” When the high school desegregated, working-class children of both races suddenly had access to the same training and educational opportunities, raising the possibility that working-class whites would compete with blacks in the labor market. For these children, racial equality was more than a foreign concept. It was an economic threat.\textsuperscript{502}

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\textsuperscript{501} Anderson, \textit{The Children of the South}, 80.
\textsuperscript{502} Ibid., 81, 89-90.
\end{flushright}
Middle-class white children and their parents, on the other hand, did not perceive desegregation as an economic threat, so it was easier for them to acquiesce to the court order. These families most feared the white working class who demanded equality based on their common whiteness. For this reason, many middle-class white parents in Clinton urged their children to be civil to the black students, respect their town leaders and obey the law. Poorer children, on the other hand, faced contradictory messages from those in authority over them. From their parents, they heard that segregation was morally right and condoned by the Constitution. They were taught to question the value of education in comparison with what they would gain by preventing African Americans from becoming competitive in the work force. As one parent told Anderson, rather than put her child in a desegregated classroom, “I’d raise ‘em up dumb like I am.” Meanwhile, school authorities and civic leaders condemned segregationists parents—many of whom took part in the street riots—as law-breakers. Anderson argued that no one should have been surprised when some poor white students fought against desegregation, which would undermine their one advantage, and against the middle-class white leaders who had castigated their parents. “Such students are very often children who have been neglected [by society] for various reasons, and have been set apart from the mainstream,” she observed. “Suddenly [through the segregationist protest movement] they find … a way of asserting themselves. Much to our sorrow, they are often beyond our control.”

While for Margaret Anderson the events of the 1956-57 school year personalized the inequalities inscribed on American society, for Celdon Lewallen those same events

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503 Ibid., 89-93.
confirmed what she had long suspected to be true of the poorer whites in her community. She viewed the conflict through the lens of her social position and she composed her responses in a way that would reflect her sense of civic responsibility as she tried to guide her working class neighbors toward proper behavior. As a result, Lewallen believed that the conflict was not primarily a racial one. Any incident that occurred “was never a problem between the blacks and whites,” she insisted, but was instead part of an ongoing fight between Clinton’s white middle class and the rest of the white community whom they led. This perspective relegated the black students’ struggles to the periphery of the story and painted the segregationist protestors as determined (or foolish) troublemakers rather than as frustrated, disempowered workers.\(^5\)

The implications of this perspective played out most clearly in her classroom. There, she befriended and relied upon middle-class student leaders like Shattuck, but she had little patience with her working-class white students. When Margaret Anderson designated class time to discuss desegregation with her students and sought to understand their resistance to the idea, Lewallen thought Anderson was indulging their rebellion. “In my homeroom, I didn’t give them a chance … to talk about anything,” she told me proudly. When Lewallen’s students did raise the topic of desegregation in her classroom, she made little effort to avoid antagonizing the segregationist students. She even went as far as to question their whiteness, the one advantage they believed they had. But, she countered, being white meant more than having the right skin tone; it also meant behaving according to proscribed standards. For instance, during one class period, she targeted “one little fiery son of a bitch … [who] wanted

\(^5\) Interview with Celdon Lewallen.
all the time to agitate about something.” She called him to the front of the room. “Well, just get up here and talk about what all this is doing for you,” she told him. He began to talk about the White Citizens’ Councils, which his family had probably joined. “I think you’re dumb,” she interrupted. “I’m white, but it didn’t cost me twenty dollars to prove I’m white. That’s all your [sic] buying is something to say you’re white which makes you different from anybody else.” Staring the boy down, she then questioned his racial purity. “You look white to me,” she concluded.505

From Lewallen’s perspective, this student and the others like him were hillbillies. Rednecks. Mountaineers. White trash. These students, who according to Lewallen had failed to shoulder the responsibilities that accompanied the privileges of whiteness, allowed her to distance herself from her own culpability in what was occurring. Without this class of whites, “the postwar southern story appears shapeless, incomplete,” communication studies theorist Allison Graham explains. “Emerging from the shadows to enact his ghastly rituals, the redneck can be counted on to perform his time-honored, generic duty: roar the hatred that his betters will only whisper.” By casting these white students aside, Lewallen and other white leaders like her could both accept “responsibility for racism (admitting white culpability, in other words)” and deny “it (depicting criminality as an inherent characteristic of class … ).” They could accept responsibility for racism by admitting white culpability in the abstract while simultaneously denying their own participation in it by attributing the hatred to working class criminals.506


Enraged at Lewallen’s response, the segregationist students fought back. For several mornings in a row, she walked into her classroom to see that someone had written “Mrs. Lewallen’s a nigger lover” on her blackboard. One morning, she cornered the three young men she thought were the most likely culprits and asked them what they planned on doing until graduation. “We’ll be right here in this school,” they replied. “Not in my room, you won’t,” she retorted. To graduate, every student had to pass her senior English class. She told those three young men that as long as they continued misbehaving, she would put a zero in her grade book by their name for every assignment. Recognizing that the G.I. Bill had made service in the armed forces an attractive option for working-class men, Lewallen warned them that “even if you get by someplace else, I’m going to write on your permanent record that you were not fit for service with any branch of the government. So if you plan on going into that, don’t. Do we understand each other?” They told her that she could not do that. “You can’t do what you’re doing either, but you’re doing it,” she retorted. Think of this as an object lesson: “This is discrimination. It’s the best example you’ll find of it.”

Lewallen then further antagonized the militant segregationist families by threatening to flunk large numbers of their students. Whenever violence increased, attendance numbers at the school dropped as some students skipped classes to join the mobs and others tried to avoid the conflict. Students who had missed school because of fear usually returned after a few days, and she allowed them to complete their missed assignments. Those who had missed more than a few days were more likely to have participated in the protests. They had a harder time catching up to their classmates, and Lewallen offered them less support. She

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507 Interview with Celdon Lewallen; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 167-68.
hoped that the segregationist students’ difficulties would force them to choose between remaining in school or continuing to protest. After a couple of months of this ebb and flow of students, Lewallen decided to force the issue. She wrote the parents of the most persistently absent students, warning them that their children would not graduate from high school if they did not complete her course. The letters made segregationist parents even more resentful.508

One night in late October, Lewallen returned home with her daughter Dancy to find a mob of robed men on her front lawn preparing to burn a cross. She escorted Dancy inside the house. She then grabbed a small Derringer that Buford had given her. “Mother,” Dancy reminded her, “you don’t know how to shoot a gun.” Lewallen reassured her daughter that she could probably shoot it if she had to protect herself. Lewallen later learned that was a false sense of security. Buford had given her the gun, but he never loaded it because he thought she might be of more danger to herself than her assailants. “But I didn’t know that he did it,” she recalled. “So I thought, ‘Well, here I am. I’m in really good shape.’” Despite Dancy’s pleas, Lewallen walked back out onto the porch to confront the mob. “I thought that anybody who dressed in a robe and only would get out at dark didn’t have much intestinal fortitude,” she explained. Startled by her reappearance, the crowd shifted but said nothing. “What the hell do you think you’re doing in my front yard?” Lewallen demanded. She then stepped off the porch and walked toward the men. Among the mob members, she thought she recognized several of her segregationist students’ fathers. She called out to them: “You can

508 Clinton Courier-News, October 25, 1956, 1.
either get out, or I’ll call the police. I’ll go back in and get a shotgun, and I don’t shoot very well.” The men left.509

The cross burners then headed to the home of Eleanor and Sidney Davis. Like the Lewallens, the Davises were important leaders in Clinton. Sidney had been one of the assistant district attorneys who had fought the original desegregation lawsuit, and Eleanor was an English teacher at the high school. She had one of the black students in her homeroom class, and when the time came to assign roles for the class play, she had given him a speaking part. The Davises had three children, the oldest of whom was a freshman at Clinton High School. They had tried to protect their children as much as they could, but the segregationist protestors recognized that one of the best ways of harassing the parents was to target their sons. “Our children were intimidated constantly,” Eleanor recalled, “and the phone calls were horrible.” That night, Sidney was at a city council meeting and Eleanor was at a rehearsal for a play she was directing, which meant that their children were alone, studying in the den of their home. When the men arrived, the oldest fetched his bow and arrow, prepared to defend the house, while one of the others called the fire department. They told the boy that they could not put out the burning cross because the Davises lived outside the city limits. The child then called the police department. They also refused to come. The boy then called the manager of the telephone company. “It was a tall cross, and it was burning right beside the [telephone] pole, and the flames going up toward the wires,” Eleanor explained. Concerned about his company’s property, the manager sent help. After that night, the Davises began taking additional precautions such as keeping the draperies closed at night

509 Ibid; interview with Celdon Lewallen; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 151-52, 167-68.
and never answering the phone. Like Celdon Lewallen, Eleanor also began carrying a pistol, 
although hers was loaded.⁵¹⁰

Around the time that the cross burners attacked the Lewallens and the Davises, the 
White Citizens’ Council turned their attention back to Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. Earlier that 
fall, Brittain had promised to resign if fifty-one percent of the Clinton High School parents 
requested it. At the October school board meeting, White Citizens’ Council representatives 
presented a petition asking for Brittain’s resignation. It had over one thousand signatures, 
although it was unclear how many of those were parents of Clinton High School students. 
“‘We are going to ask the board to take under consideration a request that a new principal be 
hired for Clinton High School,’” their spokesman said. Another segregationist requested that 
the board investigate Brittain for unspecified charges of wrongdoing. The board responded 
that without a specific accusation, they could neither investigate nor discharge Brittain. But, 
the superintendent added, “‘if I were the person in question and I saw I was not wanted, I 
would just resign.’”⁵¹¹

In November 1956, as the conflict on the streets and in the school intensified, Brittain 
introduced new, more stringent punishments for white students caught abusing black ones. 
The white students appealed to the Anderson County School Board for help. The 
superintendent and a few of the other board members came to see Brittain at the high school, 
marking the first time the board had discussed desegregation with Brittain. When the men 
told him they were there to help, he replied, “… Well, it’s about time. … Now, how are you

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Eleanor Davis; Seivers, “Voices of Determination,” 169; Clinton Courier-News, 
October 25, 1956, 1.

going to help me?’” They responded that if he would “‘just let things go and not punish these people, they’ll drive the black children out of school.’” Aghast, Brittain asked that they give him that order in writing. At that point, he continued, he would either enforce it or resign. “‘Oh, no, we will not put this in writing,’” his visitors replied. “‘We’re just giving you good advice.’” Brittain refused to abide by their decisions, but whenever white students appealed their punishments to the school board, the members overturned Brittain’s rulings. When he learned of these latest machinations, Brittain announced that he would finish the school year. “‘Right now, I am the only person between these Negro pupils and those people,’” Brittain told the Southern School News. “‘I am going to do my duty as I see it, at least for this year.’”\footnote{Interview with Brittain; The Oak Ridger, November 30, 1956, 1; Nashville Tennessean, November 30, 1956, pgs. unknown, Anna Holden Papers; Clinton Courier-News, September 6, 1956, 1; Southern School News, December 1956, 5.}

By that point in the fall, Brittain had come to symbolize all that the segregationist protestors hated: he was an educated, middle class white man who refused to let them drive the twelve black students from the school. Though he had always been a target of the segregationists’ hate, their attacks grew more pointed. Some of them hired a private detective to watch Brittain, trying to find evidence to discredit him. The harassing phone calls got to be so troublesome that he and his wife changed their phone number multiple times throughout the year. He remembered being relieved that they had been unable to have children because he was not sure he and his wife could have protected them. Hate mail also poured in. “I got mail, Lordy mercy, when they brought my mail up, they had to bring a bag of mail every day,” he remembered. People vandalized his car and the cars of other teachers, turning on the
lights to run down the batteries, ripping off door handles and jamming the gearshifts.

Eventually, the Brittains began spending nights at hotels in other communities. “We had to get out of town to get a night’s sleep,” Brittain explained. “We were upset the whole time. We didn’t live a normal day that whole year.” Work provided them with no respite. There, Brittain was plagued by bomb threats, student uprisings, invading reporters, worried parents and militant segregationists. “I wasn’t the hero by intent,” Brittain would remember years later. “I was the one they centered everything on, and I was determined to stay with it. I was determined they weren’t going to run me out, and I was determined to see the thing through after I got into it.”513

Despite the pressures placed upon him, the only time he closed the school indefinitely was following the Reverend Turner’s beating. That day “I then decided it was no longer safe in that building,” Brittain remembered. He decided it was time to force the school board to support him. “My intent was that we were going to have a show down, that [the] board of education and the superintendent were going to face up to their responsibility or that school was going to remain closed,” Brittain remembered. The superintendent was out of town, so Brittain called the two most sympathetic board members and explained what had happened. He then told them that he wanted to close the school for the safety of the students. They told Brittain to do whatever he thought best. Brittain had the police escort the black students back up the Hill to safety, summoned the busses and announced to the rest of the student body that the school would be closed until further notice.514

513 *Clinton Courier-News*, November 29, 1956, 1, 4; interview with Brittain; *The Oak Ridger*, August 19, 1956, 2; Court of Appeals, “Joheather McSwain,” August 30, 1956, 23-36; ibid., September 6, 1956, 224-26; *East Tennessee Reporter*, March 1, 1957, 1

514 Interview with Brittain.
Distressed to hear that the segregationists had pushed Brittain to the point of closing the school, the student council and the faculty council each independently petitioned the board of education to reopen the school with a pledge to protect the students and support the principal, teachers and administration. Other city officials, including the mayor and newspaper editor, also pressured the board to cast their support behind D.J. Brittain Jr. In response to the public pressure, the board called a meeting with Brittain, civic officials and representatives of the student council. At the meeting, the superintendent finally promised to provide the support and resources Brittain needed to run the school. Sensing the changing political climate, one board member announced that he intended to propose a new student expulsion procedure, though the measure did not come up for vote at the next board meeting.  

The student and faculty leaders then rallied to encourage and support Brittain by staging a “This Is Your Life” show in Brittain’s honor at which they presented him with a model car and a pencil. Similarly, at the spring band concert, the group played “Mr. Wonderful,” which they dedicated to Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. Although grateful for the encouragement, Brittain found that the increased attention made his job even more difficult. “Anything that stood out, they [the segregationists] tried to attack and destroy,” he observed.  

After Christmas, the teachers increasingly focused on maintaining a semblance of peace at Clinton High School, which was a challenge as the white boys shifted from


516 Interview with Brittain; Clinton Courier-News, December 13, 1956, 1:1; ibid., December 20, 1956, 1:4; ibid., February 16, 1956, 1; ibid., May 16, 1957, 1:1.
harassing the black girls to picking knife fights with the black boys. Increasingly, the teachers found themselves policing their students rather than teaching them. Brittain ceased making public comments about interracial relations within the school. When asked about how the students were getting along with each other, he commonly replied that any problems that had arisen appeared to be a product of common teenage angst rather than racial tensions. While many who had sided with the law and order perspective accepted this answer—and even seemed relieved by it—those within the militant segregationist community accused Brittain of downplaying the ways that black students were abusing white ones. When Alfred Williams was suspended for pulling a knife on a gang of white boys who had been attacking his younger brother Maurice, the East Tennessee Reporter—the local segregationist newspaper—accused Brittain and the teachers of conspiring to drive the poorer white students from the school. Furthermore, the paper complained, the administration had begun stonewalling concerned white parents and other interested adults. “Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. has not been in his office for comment,” the Reporter announced. “It is understood that he has taken three weeks’ leave from his office under a doctor’s orders. Mrs. Juanita Moser, acting principal in Mr. Brittain’s absence, when asked if she would comment on the situation, firmly stated, ‘Not a word.’”

A few weeks later, The Reporter announced that “a veil of censorship … has blanketed Clinton High School.” Again, white students complained to the paper, the administration was refusing to punish the black students for being troublemakers. Brittain and Moser denied that anything had happened. Ely pressed Moser further, but she “flatly

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517 Ibid., April 11, 1957, 1:4; East Tennessee Reporter, February 8, 1957, 1, 4.
declined to answer questions regarding the incident. ‘A mountain is being made out of a molehill,’” she said, dismissing the incident. “‘We should be able to straighten out our own affairs without people nosing in. There was no fight—there was absolutely nothing to it,’ but she added in a second breath, ‘Mr. Brittain (Principal D.J. Brittain Jr.) took care of it—I wasn’t even here.’” By the end of the year, Brittain gave up any pretense of trying to appease or negotiate with the militant segregationist students and their adult supporters, opting instead to merely enforce a tense peace within the school.518

Recognizing the precedent being set by Bobby Cain’s graduation, the three television networks asked for permission to film the event; but because the presence of the media tended to enflame the segregationists, Brittain announced that no cameras would be permitted. Clarice Brittain led a team of football players who guarded the door and searched the audience, looking for cameras. All the reporters abided by the ruling except for the cameraman for the *East Tennessee Reporter*. When the football players tried to stop him, he fought back and eventually had to be evicted by the police. After the ceremony when the students went to the cafeteria to celebrate, the reporter tried to take pictures through the windows. Noticing him, the students began yelling, using “vulgar and obscene gestures.” Though vice principal Juanita Moser saw the students, she did not correct them. They then raised the window and threw a jug of water on him. He demanded that Brittain punish them, but Brittain just replied, “‘School is out. If you want to do something about it, then go ahead.’”519


519 Ibid., May 24, 1957, 1; *Clinton Courier-News*, May 23, 1957, 1:1, 1:6; interview with Brittain.
“Clinton High School has become a flourishing garden for cultivating precedents,” Ely editorialized a few days later. “Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. has apparently been taking lessons from Federal Judge Robert Taylor in ‘handmade’ law.” He was angry that Brittain had prevented his entrance and furious that “to cap the stack” Brittain “placed his ‘goon squad in charge of a frail woman.’” Ely thought it was a clever ploy, that Brittain “wanted to be in a position to say—in event of resistance to his ‘Gestapo’ setup—‘they were only women and children.’” It did not surprise him that “the left wing and biased press” had not raised “their voices against the barring of news reporters with cameras,” but he suspected the reporters would have responded differently “had their precious ‘freedom of the press rights’ [been] taken from them at a similar function in Sturgis, Ky., where school authorities refused to integrate the school. There would have been a howl raised which could have been heard around the world.” He closed by saying, “if this type of thing is what some of the students have learned under the tutor-ship of integration-minded supervision at the newly integrated school, then may God have mercy upon our children, sympathy for their parents … and compassion for our country while it is fighting against federal judicial usurpation of its citizens’ rights and freedom of the press.”

**AFTER THE STORM:**

At the close of that academic year, Clinton High School was not the supportive, progressive school Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. had fought to make it. Most of the faculty he had wooed, the earnest educators who had helped him resuscitate the struggling Appalachian high

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school, decided they could not continue to teach a student body that was consumed by hate
and characterized by violence. When the next school year began, fewer than ten of the staff
from the previous year remained in their posts.\footnote{Interview with Brittain; Anderson, *Children of the South*, 21-22.}

Celdon Lewallen was one of the few who remained, but she only stayed for one more
year. She resigned her teaching post in 1958 when her daughter Dancy entered high school.
Dancy, who was a vivacious, popular girl, did not want to feel that her mother was watching
her every move. Lewallen never returned to teaching, though she remembered it as being one
of the best stages of her life. Instead, she devoted herself to furthering Buford’s political
career. By the mid-1960s, he was one of the county judges, and they remained an influential
political couple throughout the remainder of his life. She insisted that, despite the violence
that had accompanied desegregation, the events of the 1950s “didn’t leave any bad aftertaste
in our mouth. Everything just went on just like it was before that happened as far as I
know.”\footnote{Interview with Celdon Lewallen.}

The segregationists’ resistance to desegregation did force her to recognize some of the
ways that race had affected the lives of her black students, but by punishing white students’
misbehavior rather than engaging them in conversation, she fought the symptoms of racism
rather than its causes. Celdon Lewallen made her classroom activities into an extension of
what her husband was doing in the courts and what her father-in-law did as the town’s mayor.
She saw herself as a part of larger fight for order in the town rather, and she believed that the
civil rights movement in Clinton had been successful. As a result, she did not continue her campaign after overt violent resistance to the black students had subsided.

By the time we spoke in 2005, she had begun to wonder whether class differences had negatively affected her poorer white students’ experiences at Clinton High School. “I did not know that there was such a difference in groups of people,” she explained to me. “I had lived here all my life, and I didn’t know there was any undercurrent about people resenting, and it was the people who were not as literate and were poor.” As she had tried to find reasons for the anger her students felt toward herself and her family, she began to see how many advantages she had received as a result of her position and connections. She was particularly concerned by how the school had perpetuated these divisions among its students, and she wondered whether separating the students into college preparatory and vocational tracks—which generally dividing the rural children from the urban middle class ones—had contributed to working class resentment.523

Even after realizing that class differences among whites in the town had been a factor in the conflict, however, Lewallen refused to dwell on how the anger the rioters felt might have stemmed from deeper problems in her community. She quickly returned to the idea that outside agitators such as John Kasper had used these differences to manipulate the working class. The poorer whites had been content before Kasper and others of his ilk pointed out their disadvantages and used those items to make the militant segregationists “feel important,” she explained to me. The people who had participated in the violence had done

523 Ibid.
so “out of sheer ignorance,” she continued. “They didn’t know any better. They were just, really they were victims,” she concluded.524

Her belief that the white working class had been manipulated and victimized allowed her to forgive them for their actions. If they were not responsible for their actions, then they could not be punished or even forced to apologize to the individuals they had harmed. Her explanation of their behavior also kept her from having to take their complaints seriously. She could retreat behind her belief that Clinton was a wonderful place to live, and she could be one of the leaders who helped restore the social order that had existed before. For this reason—despite evidence to the contrary such as the electoral efforts that almost swept the museum’s allies from office in 2005—she could argue that the tensions from that time had “most all … [been] forgotten, been swept under the rug. We’ve all gotten old and senile. Our blood does not run hot anymore like it does, you know.”525

While Celdon Lewallen quickly explained away the violence as an aberration in an otherwise peaceful community, Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. was broken by his experiences that year. “This harassment had continued and continued,” Brittain had said in a deposition immediately after the attack on the Reverend Turner. “It has just been a hammering thing, incessantly. Everyday it is something.” Between the first day of school and Christmas 1956, he lost fifty pounds, going from a hundred sixty-five pounds to one hundred fifteen pounds, which made him seem even more vulnerable and showed his enemies how much they had shaken him. Bob Manning, one of the football players at Clinton High, remembered that

524 Ibid.
525 Ibid.
“Mr. Brittain was a little, frail skinny fellow to begin with, [but] before this was over, he was looking pretty haggard.” Those closest to him tried to protect him from as much of the hatred as they could. Others who did not know him as well chose less traditional ways to support him. One man sent him a five-dollar bill with the instructions “Go get you a pint of whiskey and get drunk and forget the whole damn thing.” Meanwhile, his enemies gloated. “Glad to see you’re in bad health,” one letter writer told him. “I just hope it’s fatal.” The most serious changes, though, were mental rather than physical. “The principal just fell apart,” Celdon Lewallen remembered. “It was really sad because he was a fine educator, but it was just more than he could take.”

Midway through the year, the professor who had been Brittain’s academic advisor during his master’s degree came to see him. His mentor told him there would probably be an opening for him to do doctoral studies at New York University if he needed or wanted to continue his education. “That would be a Godsend,” Britain replied. In February, the two men traveled to Atlantic City for a convention of school administrators. During that trip, an admissions committee interviewed him, accepted him to New York University’s program and offered him a teaching fellowship. Not wanting the segregationists to think they had driven him out of his town, Brittain announced that he was leaving to fulfill “a long-held desire to enter college teaching, which will be made possible with … [a] doctor’s degree.” Privately,
however, Brittain admitted that he “knew a change was needed. I had the feeling that if I left, things might settle down, which they did, and I knew I couldn’t stand another year of it.”

Brittain’s supporters used the announcement of his departure as a chance to commend his service to the town and its students. “It is unfortunate that this dedicated man, whose only interest in life has been to provide the best high school education possible for the children of Anderson County in order that the school could produce the best citizen-material possible, has been forced to undergo the suffering that has been his since last August,” Horace Wells wrote in an editorial for the Clinton Courier-News. “We are proud to have known Mr. Brittain and we are proud that our children attended Clinton High School under his guidance.” Another editor noted that while Brittain’s new opportunity arose from the work he had done during desegregation, “a man of lesser stature probably would have accepted the New York University offer with obvious relief … unmarked by the graciousness which the principal threaded into his statement.”

Less sympathetic voices rejoiced over Brittain’s decision. “D.J. Brittain Jr. … should feel very anxious to be leaving this area,” wrote Leo Ely of the East Tennessee Reporter. “By the same token, he could not be more anxious to leave than those multitudes are anxious to see him go. … We think Brittain is going exactly where he belongs. New York University is replete with radical left-wingers, Communists, Socialists and race mixers. … We say adieu, Mr. Brittain.”

527 Interview with Brittain; Clinton Courier-News, April 4, 1957, 1:1.

528 Clinton Courier-News, April 11, 1957, 1:1, 1:5.

529 East Tennessee Reporter, April 26, 1957, 2.
The Brittains moved to New York in August 1957. Somewhat to Brittain’s surprise, he was a celebrity at New York University. He was asked to speak about his experiences before sympathetic audiences who extolled his courageous commitment to his students. He was also offered unexpected professional opportunities. After working as a teaching assistant for one year, Brittain went to work for the school system in Rutherford, New Jersey. After his graduation, he worked at New York University for two more years and then was appointed as the superintendent of the Rutherford schools where his wife again taught home economics in the high school. In 1964, he received New York University’s Ernest O. Melby Award, which was given for “distinguished service in the field of human relations,” because of his work in Clinton.530

His experiences with desegregation and racial conflict were not over, however. After seven years in Rutherford, he became superintendent of New Jersey’s Ewing Township schools. During a 1969 Martin Luther King Day play at the system’s high school, a fight broke out between the minority and white students. “The whole system erupted, racially,” Brittain remembered. The principal closed the school to stop the spread of violence. “I had learned some things from Clinton,” Brittain explained. “I sat down with my Board of Education, and I said, ‘Now you’re going to be with me on this or you’re not because we are going to have a long, hard fight on this.’” Unlike Clinton, the Board of Education came to his support. “The community was a totally different type of community, so we weathered it,” he continued. After the violence ended, he reorganized the system to make each school racially

530 Clinton Courier-News, May 1, 1958, 1:4; interview with Brittain; Southern School News (April 1964), 6; Homer L. Patterson, American Education 59 (Mount Prospect, IL: Educational Directories, 1962), 327.
balanced, adjusted the curriculum to include more African American history, increased the number of black authored books in the schools’ libraries and increased the guidance support offered to minority students. His district became noted as having the best practices in the state.  

Unfortunately, the accolades could not heal the emotional wounds he had received when so many individuals in his hometown had rejected him. He had built his identity on the praise he had received for being a progressive educational leader. He could not forget the hate and rejection that had met his attempts to do what, to his mind, he had been required to do. Before the 1956-57 school year, his nephew Steve Jones remembered, he was a kind, quiet, religious man. After that year, he was bitter and cynical. He began drinking heavily and questioned his faith. After his retirement from the New Jersey school system, he and his wife moved back to Clinton. For a time, he seemed to enjoy being back in his hometown, but then his wife died of cancer in January 1988, leaving him rootless and disconnected. In February 1988, he shot himself. The only thing he asked of his family was that they destroy all his papers and records that related to desegregating Clinton High School.

Unlike D.J. Brittain Jr. and Celdon Lewallen, Margaret Anderson stayed at Clinton High School for the remainder of her teaching career. She refused to blind herself to the school’s problems as Lewallen had done nor did she succumb to the hopelessness that overtook Principal Brittain. Instead, she dedicated the rest of her working life to the

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campaign she had begun in 1956. She served as the school’s vice principal from 1958-60, guiding the student body through the school bombing, its relocation to Linden Elementary School and the rebuilding of the campus. During this time, she also returned to school and earned a graduate degree in counseling. In 1960, the Anderson County Board of Education hired her to be their first guidance counselor. She worked to improve the county’s elementary educational system and tried to offer remedial support for any rural student who wanted to enter the school’s academic track. Especially important to her was the issue of college access, and she tried to ensure that any student graduating from Clinton High was able to attend college. She changed the lives of hundreds of her students, as evidenced by the boxes of thank you letters she has received over the years, which she showed me during our oral history interview. She also continued her campaign to bring the plight of the region’s poor children, whether black or white, to national attention. Using the editorials she wrote for *The New York Times* and supplementing those with her own experiences and the information Principal D.J. Brittain Jr. had collected for his dissertation, Anderson published *Children of the South* in 1966. In the 1960s, she was appointed to the President’s Council for Education where she advised the administration on how to address issues of inequality. Despite her influence in the school, her appearance in national media outlets and her many publications, her analysis of how class and race interacted in Clinton never received much attention in the town itself.\(^{533}\)

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Part of the reason that Anderson could understand the resentment working class whites felt toward the community’s leaders was that she and her husband Raymond had held themselves apart from Clinton’s political life. But this disengagement also meant that the Lewallens and other families like them who had devoted their lives to civic leadership questioned her understanding of the community’s life. Thus, when Buford Lewallen wanted to convince interviewer June Adamson that Margaret Anderson could not have understood the town as well as she claimed, all he had to do was point out that she seldom bothered to vote. Similarly, she rarely spoke directly to adult Clintonians. Unless a Clinton resident happened to be one of her students or a fellow teacher, they had to seek out her perspective by finding one of her articles or reading her book. Furthermore, since she wrote a memoir rather than a footnoted study, they had to make sense of the ways their memories disagreed with hers. She could also be ignored because of her self-presentation as a gentle Southern lady. Her femininity had protected her from much of the nasty backlash that might have come her way had she been more strident, but it also made it easy for local officials to put her in the school and then ignore her softly-worded complaints.534

The final reason Anderson’s voice was ignored was that she was politely calling for a social revolution. She highlighted the inequalities that continued to structure life in Clinton, inequalities that middle class white Clintonians were committed to ignoring. By allowing the high school’s desegregation and preaching a message of “law and order,” white leaders avoided delving into the injustices that had structured their society. Because of this avoidance, the townspeople could restore a veneer of peace to their community as soon as

534 Interview with Buford Lewallen.
open conflict ended. As long as the story of desegregation was remembered quietly within individual families, churches and peer groups, everyone in the town could pretend that the wounds had been healed. Anderson, however, pushed against that silence. She wanted to continue the arguments begun during desegregation because she recognized that remaining silent about inequality would make her complicit in its reproduction. Or, as educational theorist Beverly Tatum explains it, inequality “is so ingrained in the fabric of American institutions, it is easily self-perpetuating. All that is required to maintain it is business as usual.” Tatum illustrates this point by discussing racism, which she compares to a moving walkway at an airport. An “active racist” is someone who “has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it” as though they were walking down the conveyor belt, zipping past the gates on the way to their destination. “Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking,” she continues. The only ones not swept inevitably to the belt’s end are those who walk in the opposite direction of the belt by fighting against the prejudice both within themselves and within their society.  

In different ways and to different degrees, Margaret Anderson, D.J. Brittain Jr. and Celdon Lewallen walked against the flow of inequality in Clinton. Their lives and the experiences they had within Clinton High School reveal just how intimately prejudice is woven into our own daily interactions. By refusing in the aftermath to engage angry working class whites, by refusing to hear Anderson’s call to remove the burden of change from the

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shoulders of the nation’s children, by being content to use willful ignorance as an excuse for the ways in which we participate in and benefit from others disadvantages, we join the Anderson County School Board in standing by as others do the dirty work of preventing change. Margaret Anderson, however, shows how one woman’s transition from complacency to activism could affect the lives of generations of students. Her ideas about the need to overturn not only racial inequality but also the hierarchy of class and her commitment to shouldering the fight herself rather than leaving the burden on her students should be an example in the continuing struggle for a truly equal America.
CONCLUSION

For the people of Clinton, history changed on Sunday, October 3, 1958. At 4:30 that morning, dynamite destroyed Clinton High School. The bombers set three separate charges which exploded approximately three minutes apart. Diane Pemberton was a senior at Clinton High that year. She was asleep when the bomb went off, but it shook her house so hard that it woke her. “I will never forget it,” she told me. “I sat straight up in bed.” Teacher Margaret Anderson’s house also shook with the force of the blast. Her husband Raymond had taken the band to a competition that weekend. When they returned late Saturday night only a few hours before the explosion, he dropped the students off with their parents in the high school’s parking lot. Theresa Caswell, who was the only one of the twelve still enrolled at Clinton High, lived outside of Clinton in the tiny community of Claxton, so she did not hear the bomb explode, but she remembered that she spent all of Sunday listening anxiously to the radio, trying to learn whether she would be able to return to school or whether the militant segregationists finally had won.\textsuperscript{536}

Many other individuals who had been key participants in the events of the first year had moved away, but they could still remember where they were when they learned of the

\textsuperscript{536} “FBI file 44-13723: Clinton High School Bombing,” “June N. Adamson Papers, 1870-2003, MS 2739,” University of Tennessee Special Collections Library, Knoxville, box 2, folder 6; Diane Pemberton, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, Clinton, TN, October 22, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN; Margaret Anderson of Clinton, TN, interview by author, October 21, 2005, Clinton, digital recording, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, TN; Anna Theresa Caswell, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording, October 22, 2005, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
school’s destruction. The Brittains, who were living in New York, learned of the bombing through the radio news. Gail Ann Epps Upton, who had graduated the preceding semester, was in the lobby of her dormitory at Tennessee State University. She saw the headline of one of the newspapers there. “Everybody started talking and screaming,” she remembered.537

This was not the first bombing attempt made on Clinton High School. During the bombing campaigns of the 1956-1957 academic year, segregationist terrorists had repeatedly targeted the school. One attempt in particular which occurred in November 1957 was almost successful. The only reason that it did not transpire was that two of the men involved had second thoughts and turned themselves in to the police instead, which resulted in the arrest and conviction of Anderson County resident Edward Cline.538

The 1958 bombing razed the main school building. The attackers left three separate bombs at strategic points in the hallways, and later investigators estimated that in total the bombs contained one hundred sticks of dynamite. Sixteen of the building’s twenty classrooms were demolished. A charge left outside the boys’ restroom blew out a brick and tile wall that was fourteen inches thick and left a four foot hole in the concrete slab floor. Another charge left by the cafeteria completely destroyed three classrooms, collapsing their walls and blowing away floors. The third charge threw a wall of lockers (along with the nine-

537 D.J. Brittain Jr., interview by June Adamson, analog recording, 1978, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Gail Ann Epps Upton, interview by June Adamson, analog recording, October 1, 1982, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville; Gail Ann Epps Upton, interview by Rachel L. Martin, digital recording. Sweetwater, TN. 2009, in the possession of the interviewer, Durham, NC.

538 Southern School News (May 1963), 3; The Tennessee Reporter, November 8, 1957, 1.
inch thick brick edifice supporting the lockers) into the courtyard. Only the gymnasium and band room were left standing.539

Syndicated columnist Drew Pearson visited the school a few days after the bombing, and he described the devastation around him in a series of articles. He found the examples of life suspended to be particularly compelling. On the floor of one classroom “among ripped books and shattered plaster,” he saw a note. “‘I love you Aleeda,’” was all it said. “On the blackboard of the English room is written ‘Do Not Erase,’” he told his readers. Though the bombers obliterated so much of the campus, “they did not erase the lesson of ‘English III Literature assignment for November.’” He also found the interrupted assignment to be a poignant illustration of the damage the bombers had wrought. The students were supposed to have spent their weekend reading selections by William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell and John Greenleaf Whittier. “Poking through that debris, you couldn’t help but wonder what Whittier or Longfellow or Lowell would have written about the hate and vengeance wreaked upon children. Longfellow and Holmes, Bryant and Whittier would have stirred up the Nation against such vengeance.”540

The destruction of their school shocked the townspeople, but the preceding three years of violence had cemented the locals’ determination. This would not close their school. For the first three days, the students and their teachers met for classes outside on the front lawn. The black students worried about how they would be received after the destruction of


the high school. At first, their fears seemed warranted. When the bus pulled up with her on
the first day after the bombing, Theresser Caswell remembered overhearing someone say,
“Well, here come those damn niggers again.” As classes reconvened, however, the white
and black students settled back into the tense, silent truce that characterized their relations.541

Meanwhile, the principal, Margaret Anderson and a host of parents were scrambling
to prepare a new, semi-permanent home for the student body. The town of Oak Ridge offered
them Linden Elementary School, an abandoned black elementary school closed when the
Oak Ridge system desegregated. The parents and administrators began cleaning Linden,
sorting through the rubble for any useable desks or books and transporting supplies to Oak
Ridge. “As the smoke from the three massive blasts cleared, a strange thing happened,”
Margaret Anderson recounted in an article in The New York Times. “As suddenly as the
building had been ripped apart, the issue of segregation versus integration, which had so
engrossed the community for two years, now seemed small. Never was a town more united.
Within hours, public-spirited citizens were planning ways to have a school.” Diane
Pemberton agreed. “We pulled together in a crisis the way people do, the way real Americans
pull together,” she told me. Volunteers converged on Linden Elementary School to scrub it
clean, haul off the child-sized desks and replace them with appropriate equipment.
“Somewhere I read that there were over two hundred people, mothers and citizens of Clinton,

541 Interview with Theresser Caswell.
who went down there to get the building prepared,” Anderson remembered. “It was just done almost overnight.”

By Thursday, the substitute building was ready. When the buses pulled up to the front of Clinton High’s new home, the students saw the Oak Ridge High School marching band waiting for them. They were playing Clinton’s school song. “‘For the first time in history (probably) students were delighted to have their books,’” the school’s newspaper reported. “‘By Friday, every nook and corner having been inspected, school became school again. Perhaps time will erase the initial feeling of loss, the feeling of physical sickness that one or several persons could have so much hate and venom. … Whoever we are or wherever we may be, as long as there are CHS students to remember, to reminisce and to carry on, the traditions, the spirit and the real Clinton High School will live forever.’” Parents, teachers and volunteers had refitted the elementary school with larger desks, but they were unable to replace everything. A Life photograph shows a high school boy bent double, trying to see himself in a small mirror hung at the height of a typical seven-year-old. Diane Pemberton especially remembered the toilets. “They were almost like little potty chairs, they were so tiny!” she told me.

While the students and teachers adjusted to their new facilities, Principal Human and the school board went to Washington, DC, to ask for federal help rebuilding the school. When they arrived, President Eisenhower sent a message that he was regretfully too busy to

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see them. Then they learned that he had taken off one afternoon of their visit to play bridge with friends. The only officials who gave the Clinton representatives any answers were some members of the Department of Education, who explained that the best they could do was offer twenty thousand dollars toward the county’s maintenance expenses. The Clinton representatives were furious. “‘When we were forced to integrate … the Government gave us no protection,’” one of the men complained. “‘They said the protection of the school and the children was a local problem. Now when our schoolhouse is blown up, again Washington says this is your problem. It isn’t fair.’” Another school board member explained that they had already spent close to four million dollars in the last ten years to rebuild other schools to keep pace with the influx of outsiders coming to work at the federal projects. In addition, the county had condemned three elementary school buildings, and they needed a new junior high. How were they to also now fund a new high school building? they asked.544

The one federal agency that appeared willing to assist the municipal government was the FBI, which came to Clinton to conduct an investigation that was congruent to—and occasionally coordinated with—the town’s own inquiries. This did not please all of Clinton’s officials, and the federal investigators discovered many obstacles to their search. When they arrived in Clinton the day after the explosion, they discovered that the local officers had allowed news photographers, local officials, school administrators and other local residents to go through the school, which had contaminated the scene. The investigators found pieces of the bombs, but they found no sites of probable entry, no fingerprints nor any other pieces of

evidence. Witnesses who lived near the school recalled seeing a car speeding away from the school immediately after the first blast, but they could not recall the make or model. They were not even sure of the color and could only say it was a dark hue.545

As the federal investigation progressed, they failed to find many new leads as to the identity of the perpetrators, but they continued to find bombs. One rural family who owned a farm about five miles from Clinton called the local sheriff to report that while clearing an unused corner of their land, they had found a quart glass fruit jar that had been packed with dynamite. Holes were drilled in the top of it, and two fuses were attached. The local police eventually turned it over to the FBI, but the FBI determined they could learn nothing from the jar, which had been handled by most of the local police staff and so had no useable fingerprints left on it.546

The local police so badly bungled the investigation that some local families concluded that some of the officers were connected to the perpetrators. For Robert Cain Sr., Bobby Cain’s father, the damning evidence was that the police did not immediately go to Clinton High School to investigate. “Ordinarily, when that thing went off the first time, they would have rushed down that hill to see what was happening down at that school,” he explained. “But when that first blast went off, the police car was sitting back over that church right there on that Hill where they could look over there and see it. … They didn’t move. Then the second blast went off, and they went down there.”547

545 “FBI file 44-13723: Clinton High School Bombing,” June Adamson Papers.
546 Ibid.
547 Robert Cain Sr., interview by June Adamson, analog recording, January 20, 1979, University of Tennessee Special Collections, Knoxville.
The investigation lasted for three-and-a-half years. In the end, the officers determined that there was insufficient evidence to indict anyone for the crime, though the federal investigators suspected that the bombing in Clinton was related to other bombings that occurred around the South. They made this determination based on the ongoing associations between Clinton’s segregationists and the terrorist wing of the white supremacist movement. Specifically, the federal authorities noted the presence of the National States Rights Party, which had begun in Anderson County just a few years earlier and had spread to Atlanta, Memphis and other civil rights hot spots across the South. They also mentioned that Asa Carter’s Knights of the Ku Klux Klan had established an office in downtown Clinton just one block from the school. Members from both of those groups would be associated with eighty-four other bombings which destroyed synagogues, churches and schools across the South.

Local residents had other theories. During the time I spent in Clinton, most individuals I spoke with claimed to know who the bomber was, though no one was willing to give me his name and I received varying descriptions his appearance. Some claimed he had a scar on one cheek. Others said that was his brother. But they all agreed that he was still living and still an integral part of Clinton’s civic life. The failure of the authorities to arrest anyone

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548 The FBI had been in Clinton even before the bombing as “observers” to keep an eye on things and keep the government updated; interview with Henry Quinn.

in connection with the bombing meant that the attacks continued. Over the next two months, two homes owned by African Americans were both destroyed by arson.550

When the federal government refused to fund the rebuilding of the school, religious and social leaders used their influence to draw national attention back to Clinton’s struggle. One of the first to come to the town’s aid was evangelist Billy Graham, who conducted a one day revival in Clinton. His speech there on December 14, 1958, marked the first time he spoke to a community that had experienced racial violence, and it was the first time he directly connected his work as an evangelist to his position on racial equality.551

Graham had long held theological and philosophical views similar to Clinton’s Reverend Paul Turner: he was a social conservative on many issues, but he believed in racial equality and integration. He used his identity as an evangelist to soften resistance to his message. “He folded his racial message into his revival sermons and, when pressed, explicitly prioritize the conversion of souls over the transformation of racial sentiments,” historian Steven Patrick Miller remarked.552

Graham began prepping his supporters for his speech in Clinton during two November 1958 addresses at the Alabama State Baptist Convention and at Stetson University in Florida. In these sermons, he told his audience that white Christians in America needed to take the lead on integration. In Clinton Graham insisted that he preach before an integrated audience, a stand he took no matter where he preached in the South or across the globe. “The

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550 Southern School News (January 1959), 8.
White Citizens’ Council made some very strong statements against me and the event,” Graham remembered. “It was reported they said that I would never get out of the town alive. That convinced me of the rightness of my going.”

“What truly distinguished the Clinton rally … were the circumstances behind his appearance in this traumatized Southern town,” Steven Patrick Miller explained. “His decision to affirm Clinton in its response to segregationist violence conveyed a sociopolitical message.” He began his day in Clinton by having breakfast with some of the local civic and religious leaders. Then he went to Clinton High School’s gymnasium for the meeting. This meant that he and the three-to-five thousand people who came to hear his talk walked past the bombed out structure. The number of attendees exceeded the gymnasium’s seating capacity, so the moderators ran a phone line to Clinton’s First Baptist Church’s sanctuary to provide overflow seating. The meeting opened with columnist Drew Pearson presenting the school board superintendent with a check for twenty-seven thousand dollars. Then Graham took the podium.

Graham’s subject for the day was the need for reconciliation within the town, the state and the nation. “As Christians, and I want to say this as a Southerner, we must not allow either integration or segregation to be our Gospel,” Graham began. “Our Gospel as a church is the cross of Christ, which can create an atmosphere in which our problems can be solved.” He reminded his audience that God’s redemption always involved “sacrifice and pain and suffering,” a principle which had been best modeled by Christ on the cross. God’s

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553 Ibid.

554 Ibid.; interview with Horace Wells; *Southern School News* (January 1959), 7.
redemption also involved offering forgiveness to those who caused you pain rather than meeting them with hatred and resentment. “We must not even hate the deluded men who bombed this school,” Graham continued. “We must have the good grace to say with Christ …, ‘Father forgive them, they know not what they do.’” He then broadened the lesson, insisting that these principles applied not only applicable to Clinton’s situation but also to the international challenges facing the United States. Instead of being frightened of or antagonistic toward the Russians, for example, “I believe it would be a wonderful thing if every church in American and every Christian in America would start praying for the Russian people,” he said. “That’s the one way we can penetrate the iron curtain: by our prayers.” He reassured the people of Clinton that they were not alone in their struggle against hate, that the rest of the nation had hurt with the town when the school was bombed, and he read from letters that had accompanied early contributions sent to the school’s rebuilding fund.555

At that point, he turned to his scriptural lesson for the day: John 3:16. He had the audience recite it with him. Together they said: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.”556 Based on that passage, he discussed what theologians call the problem of evil. “Now, the question is coming, if God is a God of love, why does not God stop all the war and the suffering and the hatred in the world,” Graham said. He listed the suffering he saw around the world: the Hungarians whose government had fallen to the Communists three years before; the starving street people of India; the refugees from North Korea who froze to death

556 Quoted from the King James Version of the Bible, which is the version Graham used that day.
trying to reach freedom. “Wasn’t Christ called on that first Christmas ‘the Prince of Peace’? Wasn’t he announced as ‘the Prince of Peace’? Alright, if he’s the Prince of Peace, why doesn’t he bring peace? Has Christ failed? Has Christianity failed? Has the church failed? What’s wrong?” Graham asked. He continued:

The Bible reveals us something more about God. The Bible tells us that ... he’s not just all love like Santa Claus sitting up on a cloud somewhere patting everybody on the back, saying, “you’re good little boys.” God is a holy God and a righteous God and the Bible tells us that God cannot stand for evil to be in his sight. ... But the Bible tells us something else. The Bible tells us that God is a god of love.557

Graham explained that because God is loving, he needed other beings that he could love. That is why he created humans and made them in his image. “Now when I look at you, I don’t see God’s image,” Graham continued, “because when I look at you, I don’t see you. I only see the house you live in. Your body.” Part of being made in God’s moral image was having the freedom to choose whether to love or hate. When the biblical Adam and Eve, the first humans according to the creation story, rejected God, they condemned all of their descendants. Hatred and violence exists because God loved humans enough to allow them to have a choice between good and evil. The message of Christmas is that God came in the flesh to renew friendship with us, Graham concluded. Then he issued an altar call, inviting his listeners to come forward and receive the forgiveness God offered to them, a forgiveness that would then enable them to turn around and forgive the neighbors who had hurt them.558

Though Graham refused to chair the committee that raised funds to rebuild the school, he remained a member of it and encouraged his colleagues to join the effort.


558 Ibid.
Syndicated columnist Drew Pearson also remained involved, launching an international fundraising campaign. His muckraking style of journalism opened his investigative reporting to charges of unreliability, but Pearson also had a history of shouldering difficult humanitarian or justice issues. He had served on the American Friends Service Committee after the First World War, helping to rebuild a city in Serbia. After the next war, he used his syndicated column to drum up support for the Friendship Train, which sent food, medicine and supplies to post-World War II France. He also took on Joseph McCarthy, using his column to discredit the senator and his anti-Communist campaign. He was syndicated in hundreds of newspapers, and at the time of his death, he reached as many as sixty million readers.559

Pearson decided the rebuilding of Clinton High would be one of his pet projects. “I’ve thought sometimes that I would like to have written on my tombstone,” Pearson wrote toward the end of his life. “Two things: first, that I was the organizer of the Freedom Train, and second, that I was the rebuilder of the Clinton, Tenn., High School which was bombed out right after the Supreme Court school desegregation decision in 1954.” He explained that as he walked through its bombed out corridors, he thought of the “other Aleedas and other Jimmys and Joyces and Anns in other schools throughout the country [who] would like to help the children of Clinton rebuild their school.”560


He asked each high schooler in America to donate the price of one bottle of Coke. Each foregone Coke would buy the people of Clinton one brick for their high school, a “friendship brick” to combat the hate they had experienced. This campaign to undo the harm inflicted by racist terrorist would be part of winning the Cold War, he explained to his readers. “In these days when the American people face a battle of wits from the toughest competitor we have ever known,” Pearson wrote, the school’s determination “is symbolic—symbolic of the determination of youth … not to be deterred by hate.” According to Pearson, this determination to overcome hatred and prejudice was one of the defining characteristics of America which made it superior to its adversaries. “Historians may record that this American determination to continue education in a little town in the mountains of Tennessee was one of the great victories of the Cold War,” he wrote in mid-December. “For whereas people cannot build satellites to compensate for the sputnik defeat of Oct. 4, 1957, they can and will build a school to compensate for the hate defeat of Oct. 5, 1958.”

Contributions poured in from around the nation. “While the administration in Washington has pledged only $20,000 aid to Clinton, Tenn., all sorts of Americans are sending dollars and dimes to help the children of Clinton build a new schoolhouse,” Pearson cheered. The president of the Yreka, California, High School pledged that his six hundred twenty-five peers would all participate in a “Coke for Freedom of Education.” The Franklin Institute squadron of the civil air patrol in Philadelphia contributed all of their weekly dues. In addition, builders unions volunteered their labor. “‘We can’t let one little community bear

the brunt of terrorism,’” the president of the Building Trades Council told Pearson. “‘People may have mixed opinions about integration, but none of them have mixed feelings about using bombs to retard school children. We want to help.’” Thanks to Pearson and Graham’s efforts and the contributions of individuals and organizations across the nation, the school board soon raised enough funds to rebuild the school.\textsuperscript{562}

The student body moved into their new facility at the beginning of the 1960 fall semester. Principal W.D. Human used the reconstruction to institute other improvements as well. He appointed Margaret Anderson as the school’s first guidance counselor. He added teachers. The new science laboratories had the latest equipment, and the architects added a language lab that had thirty-six separate booths with microphones and tape recorders so students could practice their listening and speaking skills.\textsuperscript{563}

But the move back to Clinton High School did not mark the end of racial problems within in the school. Over the next ten years, the administrators relaxed a few of the rules, but they still kept the black students separated from the white ones. They were permitted to play intramural sports, but they were not allowed to join the school teams until 1963. One young black man named Ralph Boulware joined the basketball team; he was named the most valuable player of 1964. Similarly, the black students were allowed to attend the school


dances, but the students were to stay on opposite sides of the gymnasium. Blacks and whites continued to sit at different tables in the cafeteria. Furthermore, though the first day of desegregated education had begun with the election of Jo Ann Crozier Allen Boyce as her home room’s vice president, the black students held no leadership positions at the school. As of 1966, no black student had even run for a major school office, much less won the race.

Bobby Cain’s younger brother James attended Clinton High in the mid-1960s. His memories sound discouragingly similar to his older brother’s. “The only thing that was integrated was the classrooms,” he told me. “I think a classroom [in Clinton High School] was almost a haven because in the hallways, that’s where you had most of your problems,” he recounted. “When you’re walking, when you’re changing classes the hall was filled with students and you may get pushed, … stuff like that.”

Because the elementary and junior high schools had not integrated, the black students also continued to struggle to catch up with their white peers. A few of the exceptional black students such as Ralph Boulware—who was in the top ten percent of his class—managed to do well, but excellence required a great deal of self-directed work and access to outside resources. Margaret Anderson recalled that Boulware had come into his first meeting with her and demanded that he be placed in the hardest courses. She worried whether he would be able to handle the workload. “Coming from that school, I didn’t know whether he could,” she explained to me. But he replied, “I have prepared for this. … I read over a hundred books this summer.” Many of his peers did not thrive when they made the transition from Green

McAdoo Elementary to Clinton High. A Knoxville journalist profiled Carol Hayden, younger sister of Ronald Hayden, in 1966 for an article on the tenth anniversary of Clinton High’s desegregation. The teen had already dropped out of Clinton High School twice. “Things seemed hopeless,” she told the reporter. “It got frustrating when you got to high school,” James Cain agreed. “I was put into a college prep class, … [but I had] never been exposed to those things.” He remembered struggling to learn how to diagram a sentence, a skill his classmates seemed to have mastered years before.  

But the ongoing struggle for equality is not what most individuals in Clinton discuss when they remember the bombing’s aftermath. For them, the devastation of the bombing gave way to a new sense of unity and purpose. They worked together to refit Linden Elementary School, then they struggled—with the aid of sympathetic individuals from across the nation—to open their new, improved school building. Thus they turned a moment of defeat into a moment of victory.

Americans have done something similar with the larger civil rights narrative. Some moments—the bombing in Clinton for the residents of the town or the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (or in modern America the attacks of September 11, 2001) for the nation—mark breaks in the linear motion of time. These moments of trauma are times when we are threatened with such violence and fear that our previous perceptions of the world suddenly seem inadequate. We need new ways to make sense of our lives. As we move forward, we must return to them time and time again to renarrate them, experiment to see if a new version of the past helps us to better make sense of them, test new theories to see if we

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565 Interview with Margaret Anderson; Bob Gilbert, “10 Years after Race Rift, Clinton Blames Outsiders;” interview with James Cain.
can somehow integrate them and contain them. This makes history circular. Each time we return to them, they are relived. They even alter the history that preceded it. How else to make sense of such tragedy? “Until this new story is produced,” political theorist Jenny Edkins explained, “we quite literally do not know what has happened: we cannot say what it was, it doesn’t fit the script.”

Over the last several decades, we have experimented with various ways to talk about the fight for equality, but we have not yet settled on a narrative that includes all the participants. My attempt to rewrite the ways we talk about the past has shown that this will be a messy process, but we need our story to encompass the pain experienced by those children who entered Clinton High School and the dream of a better life that kept them coming back every day. We need to hear and address the anger felt by the working-class whites who took to the streets to riot against it, and it should include the voices of the white teenage girls who took advantage of this moment of disruption, using it to make the adults listen to their hopes and fears. We can learn from the example of the Reverend Paul Turner, Margaret Anderson and other whites who fought to overcome their prejudice. We should recognize the courage of the white men and women who stood up on the side of law and order, and we should celebrate the black men who took up arms despite the risk of prosecution or violence.

As we revisit the painful moments in our past, we open our wounds for healing. We need a history then that reflects our nation’s difficult, troubled reality. We must create a story of the past that includes the complexity, the pain, the choices, the conflict and the courage

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566 Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiv.
that got us to this point. This new history of the struggle for equality will be what sociologist
and racial activist WEB DuBois called for in his 1935 history of Reconstruction: it will be “at
once so simple and human, and yet so futile.

… No villain, no idiot, no saint. There are just men; men who crave ease and power,
men who know want and hunger, men who have crawled. They all dream and strive
with ecstasy of fear and strain of effort, balked of hope and hate. Yet the rich world is
wide enough for all, wants all, needs all.567

This new narrative will allow us to explore the complex ways that we have woven racial,
class-based and gendered inequalities into the waft and the woof of our society. It will open
new questions and solutions for us. It will remind us that each of us are responsible for our
own complicity in the seemingly insurmountable obstacles faced by so many of the nation’s
minority, poor and rural school children. It will be the mirror that allows us to see the
ongoing ugliness of our own prejudices, much as Margaret Anderson learned through her
relationships with her students. Only then will we finally be able to move beyond the
inequalities that continue to divide us today. Only then will we be able to join my dad in the
ongoing fight to reconstruct ourselves into recovering racists, recovering elitists, recovering
sexists and more engaged, compassionate people.

Even as I write this, I am tempted to dismiss my thoughts as idealistic and starry-
eyed. Then I remind myself that less than fifty-five years ago, twelve rather ordinary black
teenagers, their parents and a handful of their white allies in small Appalachian town found
the courage to challenge the limitations that had defined their world. In the process, they
unmasked the schisms that divided their class across the lines of race and class. Their
example exposes the ways similar pain continues to infect our society today. Only as we

understand the depth of our fears can we begin to recognize the real humanity of each other.

Thus history allows us to gain a new perspective, a deeper level of understanding.
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