BUILDING MODERATE PROGRESS:  
CITIZENSHIP, RACE, AND POWER IN DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM, 1940-1992

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ABSTRACT

CATHERINE A. CONNER: Building Moderate Progress: Citizenship, Race, and Power in Downtown Birmingham, 1940-1992
(Under the direction of W. Fitzhugh Brundage and Jerma A. Jackson)

This dissertation examines the meanings of race, citizenship, and democracy in relation to economic restructuring in postwar metropolitan America. It argues that the goals of postwar New Deal liberalism to build a more inclusive society and expansive economy not only succeeded in broadening the middle class but also created the foundations for new forms of inequality and political polarization in post-1965 America. At mid-century, Birmingham, Alabama, was one of the most heavily industrialized cities and had gained national attention for its civil rights abuses. In response to civil rights activism and massive resistance as well as deindustrialization and suburbanization, black and white businessmen, doctors, media executives, and university administrators used a variety of federal policies to build a post-industrial, post-civil rights city. Birmingham’s biracial civic elite used the rhetoric of progress to justify their economic and political ambitions for the city. The postwar development of the local professional service economy, anchored by the University of Alabama at Birmingham and its Medical Center and A. G. Gaston Enterprises, provided citizens access to healthcare, education, and middle class status and safeguarded the city during an era of industrial decline. After changing the form of government in 1963, black and white civic elites connected to the professional services erected a biracial civic democracy to govern a city torn by its crises. Black and white civic elites and public officials supported economic restructuring,
expanded the size of downtown, implemented neighborhood public improvement programs, and broadened access to citizen participation within municipal government. Through these processes, white suburban businessmen and black elites formed crucial partnerships with black neighborhood advocates as they pursued their collective and sometimes conflicting goals of progress. Their collaboration created a powerful yet unrecognized metropolitan political coalition dedicated to redefining citizenship, reforming political structures, and securing economic opportunity in Birmingham. Their sharp attention to bridging the racial, class, and residential divides of metropolitan Birmingham expanded the boundaries of citizenship and democracy in unexpected ways. The politics of progress enhanced political self-determination for black residents of urban neighborhoods, yet it also narrowed economic opportunity to favor an educated suburban middle class.
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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACHE – Alabama Center for Higher Education  
ACMHR – Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights  
AME – African Methodist Episcopal Church  
BAG – Business Advisory Group  
BCP – Birmingham Citizens for Progress  
BDIA – Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association  
BPD – Birmingham Police Department  
CAB – Citizens Advisory Board  
CAC – Community Affairs Committee  
CDBG – Community Development Block Grant  
CME – Christian Methodist Episcopal Church  
CPP – Citizen Participation Program  
FNB – First National Bank of Birmingham  
FHA – Federal Housing Authority  
FOP – Fraternal Order of Police  
HABD – Housing Authority of the Birmingham District  
HEW – US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare  
HHFA – Housing and Home Financing Agency  
HOLC – Home Owners Loan Corporation  
HSF – University of Alabama Health Services Foundation, Inc.  
JCCC – Jefferson County Citizens Coalition  
JCCEO – Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity
JCMS – Jefferson County Medical Society

JCPDC – Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council

LPN – Licensed Practical Nurse

NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

NIH – National Institutes of Health

NPP – Neighborhood Planning Program

NSRP – National States’ Rights Party

ONB – Operation New Birmingham

PAT – Police Athletic Team League

SAC – Southside Action Committee

SCLC – Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SOS – Southside Organization of Small Businesses

TCI – Tennessee Coal and Iron Company

UA – University of Alabama

UMW – United Mine Workers of Alabama
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 1944 the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal completed *An American Dilemma*, a multi-volume study of race and democracy in the United States commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation.\(^1\) As the nation engaged in a world war against tyranny and oppression, Myrdal examined the contradiction between America’s democratic ideals of equality, freedom, and justice and its practices of racial inequality and segregation. Second-class citizenship for African Americans derived not from inherent racial inferiority, he argued, but from the limited opportunities in education, housing, and employment available to them. These economic and social impediments reinforced whites’ negative perceptions of blacks. Racism was so pervasive at the time that even Myrdal reduced African American thoughts and behaviors to pathologies created in reaction to whites rather than deliberate strategies for building a life and culture of their own making.\(^2\) Still, Myrdal’s overall findings deserve attention, for he

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\(^1\) In the mid- to late 1930s, scholar W. E. B. DuBois began work on the *Encyclopaedia Africana* that would have charted the history and contributions of Africans and African Americans to world history. He approached the Carnegie Foundation for funding. The Foundation, however, chose to proceed with its plans to publish a report on the state of African Americans in the United States as a way to decide its future funding mission. Because of DuBois’ race and Marxist leanings, the Carnegie Foundation chose Myrdal to conduct the study.

pointed out how the rhetoric of democracy continually obscured America’s race problem.¹ Institutional and personal racism that denied full-citizenship to millions of Americans could only be defeated, he argued, if whites fully embraced their democratic values.²

Few white Americans, however, believed they were responsible for racial discrimination and black inferiority. Whites acknowledged their racism only when it was brought to their attention.³ Such was the case with white civic elites in postwar Birmingham, Alabama. More than a decade of violence had passed before white businessmen, doctors, educators, and media executives recognized their civic responsibilities toward black citizens. The turning point occurred in the spring of 1963. Commissioner of Public Safety T. Eugene “Bull” Connor met civil rights protestors, most of whom were children, with high-pressured water hoses and police dogs. Within hours after leaders of the demonstrations negotiated a peace accord with white businessmen, a Ku Klux Klan bombing spree ignited the first urban riot of the decade. White civic elites in the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (BDIA) pleaded with their fellow citizens to “put aside personal pride and prejudice and approach the problems facing our city and nation with understanding and charity.”

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¹ In reconsidering Myrdal’s observations within the context of TIME magazine publisher Henry R. Luce’s declaration of the twentieth century as a uniquely American one, Gary Gerstle considered the contradiction between civic and racial nationalism in The American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2001).


“build a better Birmingham for the benefit and enjoyment of all its citizens,” the BDIA failed to convince citizens of the urgency of its call. On September 15, 1963, Ku Klux Klan members killed four teenage girls and wounded a dozen others when they bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the spiritual home of middle-class blacks and recent center of civil rights activity. Two teenage boys also died that day, as white extremists and police officers took the bombing as a license to murder African Americans.

The death of six black children in the church bombing and its immediate aftermath incited a range of white responses across the country and world. The city became a symbol of American racism in the popular imagination. Dorothy Gkonos of San Carlos, California, captured the sentiments of many whites who were transformed by the events in Birmingham: “I have been one of the ‘gray masses’ who have done nothing and said nothing about the racial crisis where ever it might occur but…as of today I can, as a loyal American citizen who believes in the Constitution, remain silent no longer….Birmingham, Alabama, stands before the world today as a symbol of how low our nation can sink.”

The incident awakened Gkonos to the dilemma Myrdal had described back in 1944. “Birmingham” provided the impetus for white support of the

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8 Dorothy J. Gkonos to Albert B. Boutwell, September 15, 1963, File 5.4, Boutwell Papers.
Civil Rights Act of 1964 after President John F. Kennedy called on Americans to confront the “moral crisis” of black inequality.9

The church bombing and other acts of terrorism in Birmingham, however, also provided a clarion call for whites who opposed equality for African Americans and the perceived encroaching powers of the federal government on individual liberties. H. E. Smith, writing from Toronto, condemned the church bombing only because “whites in [Birmingham] have to stoop to such depths to show your jackass government that they do NOT want integration.”10 After a failed bombing campaign in the spring of 1965 that targeted the homes of blacks and whites, including the mayor of Birmingham, Mack H. Jones of San Francisco congratulated the would-be bombers by declaring, “God knows we need white men with guts these days.”11

Often defined and remembered as a problem of the South, “Birmingham” was a bellwether signaling a nation in transition. Although no other event matched the moral shock of the church bombing, the crises and violence engulfing Birmingham represented much larger civil rights and massive resistance movements taking shape across American cities by the end of the decade.12 Indeed, urban historians have investigated those social and political transformations in industrial and Sunbelt cities. To hold Birmingham as exceptional to other cities is to miss the power and subtlety of racism in postwar America. As historian Matthew D. Lassiter has argued, the insistent quibbling about the

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10 H. E. Smith to Gentlemen, September 16, 1963, File 5.4, Boutwell Papers


differences between _de jure_ and _de facto_ segregation that ascribe regional and historical meanings to racial inequality obscures the fact that racism continues to exist in every facet of American life.\textsuperscript{13}

Postwar deindustrialization, ghettoization, urban renewal, and white flight ravaged Birmingham and a host of cities, including Chicago, Detroit, Newark, Oakland, and Pittsburgh.\textsuperscript{14} African Americans outside of the South experienced these destructive processes and demanded civil rights, equality, and justice through a variety of strategies, including rioting.\textsuperscript{15} After studying the cause of mid-1960s urban rioting, the US Commission on Civil Disorders came to the same conclusion Myrdal did nearly a generation before. Instead of issuing a moral plea, the 1968 Kerner Report directly implicated white Americans for the stark living conditions of blacks that led some of them to engage in violent acts of civil disobedience. Its dire warning, “our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal,” largely fell


on deaf ears.\textsuperscript{16} By most accounts, a nation seemingly sympathetic to civil rights sharply turned rightward in the late 1960s, rejecting its moral and legal responsibility to ensure the full equality of all citizens.\textsuperscript{17}

Returning to Birmingham after its civil rights and economic crises sheds light on how blacks and whites reordered their society in response to these problems and the contradiction between democracy and racial inequality.\textsuperscript{18} The city remained a site of public debate, contestation, and collaboration over the meanings of race and citizenship well after 1965. As the center of political, economic, and cultural life, downtown influenced the development of metropolitan Birmingham. Citizens defined themselves in


relation to how they perceived the city, and their ideas of citizenship differed based on their race, class status, and location of residence.\textsuperscript{19} Thousands of whites and blacks left the city for the suburbs throughout the 1960s and beyond, yet a powerful biracial coalition across the metropolitan area arose and continued to invest in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{20} Led by black and white civic elites, this coalition designed a biracial civic democracy in order to confront the various problems the city faced. They fashioned a new economic order, expanded the boundaries of citizenship, changed the politics of race, and remade the urban environment. Throughout this generational process, they created new urban public spaces of racial interaction and understanding.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{20} The majority of Americans lived in suburbia by 1965. Millions fled the cities beginning in the postwar period due to the declining housing stock of cities as well as federal programs that encouraged homeownership. Many scholars previously cited see suburbanization as “white flight,” a response by whites to the economic, social, and spatial mobility of African Americans after World War II. African Americans, however, also found homes in suburbia. See Kenneth T. Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) for a classic interpretation of suburbia, and Andrew Wiese, \textit{A Place of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) for a reinterpretation.

\textsuperscript{21} In \textit{The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory} (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), W. Fitzhugh Brundage argued that public spaces were key sites of contestation between blacks and whites over how they remembered the southern past. The remaking of Birmingham after 1965, however, included both blacks’ and whites’ conceptions of their recent pasts. White suburban elites initially controlled this process, but by 1969, they shared power with blacks across class. Downtown’s public institutions and sites of power continued to bolster white suburban privilege and protect black political power.
This post-civil rights, post-industrial vision of Birmingham partly emerged out of the city’s transition from an industrial to a professional service economy, which began in the early 1940s.\textsuperscript{22} By then, Birmingham’s designation as a “Magic City” must have seemed ludicrous to the hundreds of thousands of black and white residents living and working there. So named by civic boosters in the 1880s who wanted to attract industrial investors and labor, Birmingham grew like “magic” from an unpopulated, undeveloped area into one of the nation’s fastest growing cities by the turn-of-the-century. Boosters promised opportunity and prosperity to the thousands of whites, blacks, and immigrants who flocked to Birmingham. Early industrialists and civic leaders erected beaux-art and art deco style buildings to mark the city as modern and prosperous. Citing its emergence after the Civil War and its industrial economy, civic boosters and national news media championed Birmingham as an exemplar of the “New South.”\textsuperscript{23} The “Magic City” was supposedly free of the region’s old labor and racial practices, yet its economy quickly came under the control of an industrial aristocracy.\textsuperscript{24} White industrialists and civic


\textsuperscript{24} David R. Goldfield, \textit{Cottonfields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1982).
leaders violently enforced Jim Crow, largely withheld social welfare services for citizens, and profited enormously from rampant inequality in metropolitan Birmingham. In contrast to the masses of residents who failed to find opportunity and prosperity in the “Magic City,” a small corps of white and black elites harnessed the professional service economy in the postwar era to gain civic prominence and wealth.

The cornerstone of Birmingham’s professional service economy was the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and its Medical Center. The growth of UAB was part of a national movement to expand access to healthcare services and higher education in the postwar era. In 1941 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt defined “freedom from want” as the development of secure economic systems to provide for the health of a nation’s citizenry. In a near literal interpretation of Roosevelt’s pledge, academic healthcare provided a framework to build a growth economy in Birmingham and elsewhere across the nation. Healthcare was a service everyone needed, and its employment structure derived from the continuing breakthroughs in medical research and development of specialized care. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman insisted that healthcare was a “public responsibility” and outlined access, standards, and an


individual’s ability to pay as key legislative goals. Democratic politicians from Alabama agreed. Senator J. Lister Hill, a surgeon’s son, co-sponsored the Hill-Burton Hospital Survey and Construction Act of 1946. Intended to serve rural areas that lacked medical services, the act also funded hospitals and medical complexes in urban areas like Birmingham that had physician shortages, high patient-per-bed ratios, and generally poor public health services.

As the product of New Deal liberalism, UAB created an alternative political economy that challenged Birmingham’s Jim Crow industrial order. Even before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, UAB provided African Americans with spaces of opportunity and middle-class respectability. The university also welcomed measures of racial inclusion that increasingly became attached to the federal funding used to expand its healthcare programs and physical campus. Led by Dr. Joseph F. Volker, UAB became a site of utopian urban aspirations for a city struggling to reinvent itself, politically and economically. Volker imagined an “urban university” that served and responded to all metropolitan citizens of Birmingham. UAB also encouraged civic elites to establish a meritocratic society in which education rather than race dictated a person’s access to

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opportunity. By 1976, when Volker left UAB after nearly thirty years of overseeing its development, the university was the largest employer in metropolitan Birmingham.

Another important aspect of the professional service economy in Birmingham that challenged Jim Crow was the strengthening of black capitalism between 1940 and 1965. Incorporating the perspectives of entrepreneur A. G. Gaston and other black elites illuminates often overlooked strategies to wage the black freedom struggle. Discriminatory federal policies and Birmingham’s segregated markets provided Gaston with the means to develop a professional services empire of banking, insurance, and education catering to the black middle class. In 1937, 132 black businesses employed 89 people. By 1963, Gaston had over 500 African Americans working for him as bookkeepers, bankers, insurance agents, instructors, and secretaries. Following in the footsteps of his childhood hero Booker T. Washington, Gaston firmly believed in economic self-determination and education as tickets to first-class citizenship. He also never directly challenged segregation, preferring instead to work behind the scenes in


33 These figures do seem off balance. One possible explanation could be that African Americans held multiple jobs in black businesses. Another is that there were more black businesses listed in a registry than ones actually engaged in providing services or selling goods. Robin D. G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 109.

negotiating small to major concessions. Although many black civil rights activists labeled him an “Uncle Tom,” the businessman’s public silence on the issue of segregation stemmed from his belief that protecting black economic power, his as well as his customers, was foundational to achieving civil rights. A multimillionaire, Gaston garnered the trust and respect of white civic elites who frequently called on him whenever a racial crisis emerged in the 1950s. The phenomenal growth of his business empire before 1965 provided him and other black civic elites with the economic power to negotiate Birmingham’s transition from a segregated to a desegregated society and to determine what civil rights meant.

Collectively, the growth of UAB and black capitalism expanded Birmingham’s white and black middle class, and those who belonged to it increasingly demanded the recognition of their citizenship in Birmingham. Indeed, what made Birmingham so explosive in the long summer of 1963 was not the demands for full citizenship by African Americans but the ones made by white suburbanites. Commissioner Connor’s actions and the dynamite terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan were assertions of white working-class power reeling from the recent takeover of municipal government by affluent middle-class white suburbanites. Financed by members of the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association, white civic elites initiated a municipal reform campaign that began in

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36 Without dismissing the undeniable importance of local black civil rights activists, their efforts to desegregate public and private life consistently were met with white state opposition and paramilitary retribution without inciting broad national support for civil rights before 1963. On black activism in Birmingham, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993); Andrew M. Manis, *A Fire You Can’t Put Out: The Civil Rights Life of Birmingham’s Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).
August 1962 and ended in April 1963. Suburban whites partnered with their black urban counterparts to remove Connor, his working-class white supporters, and their industrial bosses from power. The change in government successfully accomplished what black activism could not do alone—overthrow Jim Crow. Biracial civic elites across metropolitan Birmingham launched a new political order defined by democracy, civility, and shared citizenship in the city of Birmingham. Citizenship, they argued, extended to anyone who considered themselves a Birminghamian. Their intentionally vague rhetorical strategy collapsed class, racial, and residential distinctions in citizenship codified by law and practice.

In an era of white flight, some of Birmingham’s most influential white suburbanites refused to abandon the city. Although most scholars have ascribed conservatism to white suburbanites, their attitudes on racial equality and expanding government involvement look different when focused on the city. Living in the prestigious “Over-the-Mountain” suburbs directly south of Birmingham behind Red Mountain, middle-class white suburbanites entered the city nearly every day because of the locations of their workplaces, civic institutions, and religious houses. Yet they could not vote in the city. To rectify their loss of citizenship rights, they launched democratic reform measures and lobbied for suburban annexation and metropolitan consolidation from 1949 to 1969. Their reasons for joining the city varied, from promoting economic development to diluting the black vote, but they continually failed in their efforts. That they continued to work toward improving Birmingham, however, speaks to how they saw themselves as citizens of the city rather than the suburbs of Birmingham.

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37 An exception to the conservative narrative is Lassiter’s The Silent Majority. His rather liberal suburbanites in Atlanta and Charlotte undertook measures to desegregate public life but fiercely protected their “innocence” when the ongoing struggle threatened the suburbs.
Black and white civic elites used expressions of civic identity—the connection between space and citizenship—to claim their rights to Birmingham. Historian Heather Ann Thompson implicitly explored civic identity in *Whose Detroit?* by showing how labor union activists, white politicians, and African Americans first fought over and then negotiated the transition of power in Detroit from whites to blacks.\(^3^8\) Expressions of civic identity add crucial new dimensions to postwar change because they show how individuals saw themselves in relation to the state of the city.\(^3^9\) Birmingham’s increasingly tarnished reputation reflected poorly on white and black civic elites who did not see themselves as violent racists or as conciliatory Uncle Toms. Rather, they saw themselves as concerned citizens of Birmingham who, up until the municipal reform campaign, lacked the political power to shape the city. Elites used middle-class values of respectability and civility to determine who had the right to the city, thus excluding those they saw as militant civil rights activists or as recalcitrant segregationists. Their vision of citizenship, however, extended beyond their own identities marked by race, class, and residence toward others who were different from them.

Gaston, Volker, and other elites who led the restructuring of Birmingham after 1965 were men of difference. They were Jews or Unitarians in a Baptist town, blacks in a city made for whites only, or northerners or immigrants denied acceptance as southerners. Usually a quiet, unassuming man, Volker erupted in frustration when others denied him the southern identity he claimed. He came to Birmingham from the northeast in 1948. He


\(^{39}\) One of the most prolific scholars to consider citizens’ perceptions of where they live is Zane L. Miller. Miller calls this the “taxonomy of social reality” in which citizens have a “conception of what society is, what it is becoming, and what it ought to be.” Zane L. Miller, *Visions of Place: The City, Neighborhoods, Suburbs, and Cincinnati’s Clifton* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2001), 167.
had spent decades building UAB, the most powerful public institution in the state, and raising his family in Birmingham. “Hell, don’t tell me I’m not a southerner,” he would yell when others questioned him.\textsuperscript{40} Volker’s love of Birmingham derived from the opportunities, power, and influence he gained in the seemingly unwelcoming “Magic City.”

In letters from personal manuscript collections, memoirs, and dozens of oral interviews, elites increasingly expressed desperation over their inability to reverse the downward course of the “Magic City” and steer it back toward progress. That became their singular goal, yet civic elites had different ideas of what progress meant.\textsuperscript{41} They increasingly defined it as evidence of change they could see and experience on a near daily basis after 1963. Progress was not just empty rhetoric to disguise their political and economic ambitions. They strove to distance themselves and the city from the events that placed Birmingham in the harsh international spotlight by erasing the landscape, economy, and politics of a Jim Crow past. Within this context, almost anything was better than what came before. Yet, as blacks and whites claimed victory over social problems, new ones always arose.\textsuperscript{42} Black and white civic elites, however, did not expect structural change overnight. In fact, they were erecting the new economic and political systems that would guide Birmingham’s post-1965 development. Building progress was a continual process that allowed for new goals and ideas to emerge, even some that were antagonistic or contradictory.

\textsuperscript{40} James Jefferson Bennett, interview by Virginia Volker, May 11, 1990, File 2.2, transcript, UAB Archives Oral History Interview Collection, UAB Archives.

\textsuperscript{41} For a critical assessment on the American pursuit of progress, see Christopher Lasch, \textit{The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics} (New York: Norton, 1991).

Metropolitan whites and blacks who saw themselves as citizens of Birmingham had a stake in its redevelopment, and they used a broad politics of representation to demand access to and shape post-1965 public life. Although some civic leaders believed that the new Birmingham was color-blind, they prominently featured race in their claims of progress. White civic elites launched a national media campaign overtly promoting areas of black advancement, yet elite African Americans seized on these images to push open the doors of power. Black civic elites used publicity campaigns highlighting biracial communication and racial disturbances as tools to initiate substantial dialogue and reform in Birmingham. It mattered to civic elites that the other race was involved in the process of remaking Birmingham. Biracial leadership indicated to themselves and outsiders how much the city had changed.

The politics of representation also extended beyond race to include residence and class as identifying markers of citizenship. Because white suburban elites lacked formal representation in the city of Birmingham, they used Operation New Birmingham (ONB), the successor to the BDIA, to access City Hall. ONB was the city’s public-private redevelopment agency initially focused on downtown revitalization; it also acted as the shadow government of Birmingham. The majority of African Americans who lived in Birmingham, however, rejected ONB’s control of Birmingham. In response, City Hall implemented a citizen participation program that provided blacks representation through their neighborhoods. This system allowed those previously excluded by elites to exert their rights of citizenship in Birmingham and shape it according to their ideas. By the mid-1970s, metropolitan citizens used their race, class, and residence to gain access to Birmingham’s biracial civic democracy.
Civic elites used federal urban renewal programs and public-private partnerships to rebuild downtown Birmingham from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s. Beginning in the 1950s, downtown had become tainted by the rampant violence against civil rights activists as well as neglect. Like their counterparts in other cities, civic elites used urban renewal programs to stimulate economic growth. The largest one was the expansion of UAB by forty-five blocks in the late 1960s, but the city of Birmingham also built new cultural facilities, such as the Civic Center, to entice visitors to the new “Magic City.” Suburban whites gained access to downtown through the construction of the Red Mountain Expressway, a highway that cut through the physical barrier separating the city from its prestigious suburbs. All of these urban renewal programs, however, destroyed middle-class and working-class black neighborhoods. To rectify the loss of these neighborhoods, ONB and City Hall launched major public improvement campaigns to the ones still standing. In addition, the rise of blacks to high-profile positions in municipal government remade the once lily-white City Hall. By the 1990s, this new landscape announced the emergence of the professional service economy, led by UAB, and the opening of City Hall to African Americans as the centerpieces of a new Birmingham.

Birmingham’s biracial civic democracy enhanced citizens’ involvement in public life by transforming the local political economy. Their project attests to the longevity of postwar New Deal liberalism that simultaneously promoted economic development and civic inclusivity. In practice, postwar liberalism was never as expansive or as inclusive as New Deal rhetoric made it seem, but the ideas and the structures that enabled it were elastic. The local implementation of federal programs gave them different outcomes and contours. In Birmingham, postwar liberalism served to counter conservative and radical
forces that sought to exclude those they disagreed with from power. It also undermined a racially and economically inequitable industrial order by fostering a meritocratic and multiracial society in post-1965 America.

In their efforts to rebuild Birmingham, black and white civic elites created a liberal democratic vision of society and sustained it through continued growth in the professional service economy. The broad expansion of public education provided by UAB enhanced citizen access to this new order, but the decline in public funding and concentration of private resources disrupted the balance. The contours of urban decline and suburban growth reflected this long-term economic shift, creating a metropolitan area marked by white affluence and black inequality. Theorist David Harvey and other scholars have called these consequences of a meritocratic society the foundations of a neoliberal order devised by white economic elites.43 African Americans, however, have made substantial economic and political gains that accelerated after federal and local laws in the mid-1960s barred racial discrimination in public life. Far from receding into the background as conservatism reemerged, postwar New Deal liberalism adapted to the fundamental economic and political restructuring of society it wrought after 1965.

To chart the trajectory of a post-civil rights, post-industrial Birmingham, I organize my dissertation into two parts to show how a black urban middle class and a white suburban middle class gained power before 1965 and how they wielded that power after 1965. In the first section, “Building Power: The Rise of a Black and White Middle Class,” I explore the economic and political impact of the postwar New Deal welfare

43 David Harvey, The Conditions of Postmodernity (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), and David Harvey, “Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction,” The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 610, no. 1 (March 2007).
state in Birmingham from the early 1940s to the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{44} In chapter 1, “City of Perpetual Promise,” I show the development of a “consumers’ republic” by looking at the black and white men who provided the professional services necessary to achieve middle class status through higher education and homeownership.\textsuperscript{45} The postwar growth of UAB and A. G. Gaston’s enterprises created new spaces of racial interaction and economic mobility in Birmingham. In the second chapter, “Who Speaks for Birmingham,” I investigate white suburbanites’ claims of citizenship and the municipal reform campaign. Although whites fronted the campaign, blacks were crucial to its success. Gaston and other black civic elites who believed in the strategy of biracial communication rather than protest politics served as mediators between black civil rights activists and white suburbanites not yet ready to abandon their beliefs in segregation.

In Part 2, “Building Progress: Making Birmingham a Place to Live and Work,” I examine how blacks and whites across class and residential lines implemented a biracial civic democracy after the fall of the Jim Crow industrial order. White suburbanites and black urbanites had little in common with each other, but both groups strongly desired economic and political change. The at-large nature of the new city council promoted consensus and biracialism as the guiding principles of governance in a new Birmingham. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965, elites cultivated the black vote. Municipal reformer and eventual mayor David J. Vann, along with other civic elites, used political moderation rather than conservatism or militancy to create the broadest possible electoral


\textsuperscript{45} Cohen, \textit{Consumers’ Republic}. 
base to support biracial civic democracy. Moreover, Birmingham’s civic leaders relied heavily on federal funding to rebuild Birmingham. Racial liberalism within the Great Society pushed them to adopt new policies and programs that further distanced the new city from the old one.

In Chapter 3, “Design for Progress,” I investigate how elites used urban renewal programs and the desegregation of public life to build the foundations of a new Birmingham from 1965 to 1970. Operation New Birmingham (ONB), the political organization of white suburbanites, constructed a narrative of progress by using advertising campaigns, press releases, and news accounts. The explosive growth of UAB also strengthened claims of progress. The remaking of forty-five urban blocks in Southside—a project so immense that it shifted the boundaries of downtown—announced academic healthcare as Birmingham’s new economic anchor.

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46 Earl and Merle Black, two political scientists, have traced the evolution of the South from solidly Democratic to solidly Republican. One consequence of this shift was the disappearance of white southern Democrats in federal government. These politicians often used moderation to appeal to both black urbanites and white suburbanites until redistricting in the 1990s erased their support base. Earl Black, “Presidential Address: The Newest Southern Politics,” *Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (Aug. 1998).


In Chapter 4, “One Great City,” I show how the postwar university transformed higher education and healthcare from public services to economic sectors at the same time desegregation unfolded. After 1965, UAB administrators celebrated African American presence in the university as evidence of diversity. Volker also adopted a comprehensive affirmative action program he continually modified to meet demands from black and female employees, who filled service and support roles for a white male clinical faculty. Led by superstar cardiologist John W. Kirklin, white physicians rebelled against the public nature of academic healthcare at UAB. They won the privatization of healthcare services that siphoned off revenue from the public university, turning federally supported knowledge and resources into engines of private wealth generation. However much it created a “new” economy, UAB simultaneously replicated aspects of the racial and gender hierarchies of the old industrial order.

In Chapter 5, “All-America City,” I examine the rise of black political power and the opening of City Hall to non-elite African Americans. Black and white civic elites worked primarily with African American women advocates to make Birmingham’s


declining neighborhoods livable.\textsuperscript{51} Progress for black urban residents and women differed substantially from suburban elites, yet the shared philosophy of self-help as well as the continual desire for material evidence of progress made these two opposing groups political partners. African Americans demanded and won public improvements for their neighborhoods as well as representation in City Hall. Black civic elites and white liberals helped to usher in this transition of power. The new relationships between white suburbanites, black civic elites, and neighborhood advocates were critical to maintaining a biracial civic democracy as Birmingham changed from a majority white to a majority black city during the tumultuous 1970s.

As I show in Chapter 6, “City Stages,” the culmination of civic elites’ efforts was the mayoralty of Dr. Richard Arrington Jr., Birmingham’s first black mayor. Throughout the post-1965 period, black civic elites remained the crucial mediators of progress. Arrington and others bridged the communication gap between black Birminghamians and white suburban businessmen. They also communicated with white civic elites operating through ONB and UAB when its leaders often acted independently of each other. Under Arrington’s mayoralty, black Birminghamians, white liberals, and white suburban businessmen all found open access to City Hall. Arrington provided urban blacks with a political voice to express their claims on the city, while he worked to ensure the continued growth of UAB and the revitalization of downtown. Yet, most whites in the city and the suburbs rejected biracialism when led by an African American. In 1989, white urbanites dismantled the consensus-building nature of the city council by suing the

city of Birmingham for violating rights protected by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They won district seats, turning Birmingham from a city working for all its residents into one that served identity-based groups living in specific neighborhoods.

Birmingham’s biracial civic democracy was short lived, but from the mid 1960s to the early 1990s, it transformed the economic and political structures of the “Magic City.” Whites and blacks across the metropolitan area continually asserted their citizenship rights to the city. Civic identity enabled biracial communication because black and white civic elites recognized that they needed each other to accomplish their goals. Black and white elites, however, never convinced the majority of metropolitan citizens of their visions of inclusive citizenship and shared power in Birmingham. Thus, they built moderate progress rather than securing transformative changes. That some blacks and whites continually worked with each other to accomplish structural and material change speaks to their efforts to face the problems of citizenship and race outlined by Myrdal in 1944 and the Kerner Report in 1968. Birmingham’s postwar history shows the complexities of reconciling democratic values and practices with the personal attitudes and power structures that govern modern life. By considering the perspectives of others who were different from them as valid and important, blacks and whites reached across class, ideological, and residential lines in Birmingham to reinterpret what the “Magic City” meant to them. In the process, they created two different versions of Birmingham: one black and one white.
CHAPTER 2

“CITY OF PERPETUAL PROMISE”: BLACKS AND WHITES IN THE POSTWAR PROFESSIONAL SERVICE ECONOMY

In 1940, a group of white civic leaders and physicians lobbied the Works Progress Administration to fund a new hospital in Birmingham. With the help of high-placed Alabama politicians in Washington, DC, the group received $4.25 million to construct Jefferson Hospital. Shortly thereafter, Oscar Wells, president of First National Bank of Birmingham, raised $160,000 in a campaign to attract a four-year medical school to the city. Wells’ lobbying along with other factors led Gov. Chauncey Sparks to reopen the Medical College of Alabama, which had been in Mobile but closed in 1919. The decision to locate the renewed college in Birmingham, however, was not a given. Competing with boosters from Mobile, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa, Wells and others involved with the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce convinced the Jefferson County Commission to cede control of the newly constructed Jefferson Hospital and its charity hospital, Hillman, to the proposed college. Wells then raised funds to purchase land surrounding the hospitals as an extra incentive to win the Medical College. These actions, as well as the city’s large number of physicians and diverse patient population, successfully convinced the Governor’s special committee to locate the college in Birmingham. In the fall of 1945, the state legislature also authorized the creation of the School of Dentistry, which
These schools soon became known as the University of Alabama Medical Center, a collection of departments, clinics, and affiliated hospitals that served as the epicenter of Birmingham’s postwar professional service economy.\(^2\)

As the site of healthcare and medical education in Birmingham, the Medical Center benefited enormously from the postwar expansion of the New Deal liberal state. Alabama Senators Lister J. Hill and John Sparkman made sure to direct federal largesse to their home state in a variety of packages.\(^3\) Through the National Institutes of Health and the Housing and Home Finance Agency, UAB received grants to fund its research and expand its campus through urban renewal programs. Academic healthcare subsequently became an agent of economic and urban development that slowly would transform the Birmingham metropolitan area.\(^4\)

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2. I use the term “Medical Center” to describe the University of Alabama Medical College and School of Dentistry, University of Alabama Hospitals and Clinics, the Veterans Affairs Hospital, the Crippled Children’s Clinic, and other clinics located in the Southside campus that Birminghamians generally referred to as the Medical Center.


This far-reaching vision of urban change was that of Dr. Joseph F. Volker, a Unitarian from New Jersey who rose through the ranks to become the top administrator of the Medical Center by 1962. Volker believed that the Medical Center could change Birmingham for the better, both economically and socially. In its first twenty years, the Medical Center became a site of racial interaction between whites and blacks and of social mobility for African Americans. The relationships Volker developed among black civic elites during the institution’s urban renewal campaigns forged new networks of biracial communication sorely lacking in Birmingham’s top civic and economic circles.

The postwar New Deal liberal state also had a substantial impact on local black capitalism.\(^5\) During a time when the federal government was slow to embrace racial equality, entrepreneur A. G. Gaston used the openings and limitations of various federal programs to offer a variety of professional services to a growing black middle class. Birmingham’s local political culture also favored Gaston’s ambitions. Capitalizing on his motto, “find a need and fill it,” Gaston offered African Americans education, homeownership, and insurance, among other services, that whites often denied them.\(^6\) His actions to build a black middle class challenged Birmingham’s Jim Crow order that kept African Americans as second-class citizens.

Collectively, Gaston’s enterprises and Volker’s Medical Center transformed an industrial Jim Crow order into a “consumers’ republic” for a black and white middle class.

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in Birmingham. Scholars often have overlooked this economic development in Birmingham as well as other industrial and southern cities. It occurred simultaneously with deindustrialization, urban decline, suburban growth, civil rights activism, and white resistance, yet the professional service economy formed the economic underpinnings of modern middle-class and affluent status. By focusing on the emergence of professional services in postwar Birmingham, the broad middle ground of politics, experience, and collective spaces shared by blacks and whites comes to the forefront. Within the Medical Center and the black business district, whites and blacks developed new avenues of economic power and biracial communication in a city that supposedly lacked them.

**The Problem with the “Magic City”: Industrialization and Inequality**

After its founding in 1871, Birmingham quickly became the South’s iron and steel center because of its proximity to coal, iron ore, and limestone. Early civic leaders, a mishmash of industrialists and railroad men from the South, the North, and Great Britain, created an inequitable economy to capitalize on the wealth of Birmingham’s mineral resources for themselves. Competition among local industrialists reduced the number of major steel and iron companies in the region to just three by 1900. A few years later, the financier-cum-industrialist J. P. Morgan used the suspension of anti-trust laws during the Panic of 1907 to buy out competitors of the U.S. Steel Corporation, including the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company (TCI), the biggest industrial power in Birmingham.8

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Civic leaders welcomed the national corporation by declaring it would make Birmingham “the largest steel manufacturing center in the universe.”

Industrialization drove Birmingham’s growth and national reputation during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Over 140,000 people moved there between 1900 and 1920, resulting in a 365 percent growth rate that far outstripped its southern rivals and other cities such as Los Angeles (See Appendix, Table 1). New residents often arrived at Terminal Station, a railroad depot designed in an opulent Byzantine style. In 1926, the Birmingham Terminal Company erected a large red electric sign outside the building’s entrance that read, “Welcome to Birmingham, the Magic City.” So named for its astonishing growth within a few decades, one resident “marvel[ed]” at the fact that the “huge and wonderful city” was only “a wilderness such a short time ago.” Civic boosters and national news media championed Birmingham as a “New South” city because its industrial economy supposedly made it free from the region’s old labor and racial practices.

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Although hailed as the engine of economic and technological progress in the early twentieth century, industrialization was hardly a salve for the millions of workers, including immigrants and children, slavishly laboring in mills, mines, and plants in Birmingham and elsewhere across the country. In his scathing account of the *Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash blasted the southern quest for progress as a disguise for perpetuating the class and racial hierarchies of the Old South: “Progress—the continuing industrial and commercial development of our country—was felt to be at least dependent upon the preservation of the advantage of cheap labor.”\(^1\)

By 1910, 1 percent of Birmingham’s population enjoyed wealth valued above $35,000, while 80 percent of all citizens earned less than $500 a year.\(^2\) Cheap labor poured in from the rural Alabama countryside creeping out of plantation slavery into new forms of slave labor. The convict-lease system sold the labor of mainly black men deemed criminals by the state to steel plants, iron mills, and coal mines. Industrialists used convict labor to inhibit unionization among their workforce. They also implemented a race wage in which whites, who held skilled positions, enjoyed a higher racial and class status than unskilled African Americans workers. Company towns such as Bessemer, Ensley, and Fairfield began to surround Birmingham to the west to house these industrial workers.

Union organizers and reformers attempted to combat industrialists’ exploitation of their workforce. By the turn of the century, white steel workers, some of whom came from the North and abroad, formed unions but excluded blacks on account of their unskilled labor. In 1910 African Americans held 90 percent of all unskilled positions in


the mining and production of coal, iron, and steel.\textsuperscript{15} Unions had more success in bridging racial barriers in the iron ore and coal mines, the most significant of which was the United Mine Workers (UMW) of Alabama. In 1908, the UMW held a two-month strike when the U.S. Steel-owned TCI Company sharply reduced wages to root out union workers. Black and white coal miners maintained their solidarity in the face of lynchings, other mob violence, and a concentrated lobbying effort among Birmingham’s industrialists to use the power of the state to quash the strike. The UMW lost their battle against the owners of the coal mines, but they continued to organize workers until the Red Scare of 1919.\textsuperscript{16} White reformers, especially women, led a crusade to end convict labor, one of the main weapons industrialists used to undermine unionization. Their efforts finally succeeded in 1928 when the state of Alabama outlawed the practice.\textsuperscript{17}

The city commission, which was implemented in 1911 to advance business efficiency in government, developed a civically bankrupt relationship with absentee industrialists who desired low taxes, fixed municipal borders, and little economic competition. Consequently, the city failed to meet the demands for public services and employment from nearly 260,000 residents.\textsuperscript{18} Birmingham placed dead last in every category imaginable, such as public health, literacy, and murder, for a city its size.\textsuperscript{19} The Great Depression exacerbated the city’s inability to provide for its citizens. Over one-

\textsuperscript{15} In 1900, 55 percent of coal miners and 65 percent of steel workers were African American. Ibid., 5, 2.


\textsuperscript{17} J. Wayne Flynt, \textit{Alabama in the Twentieth Century} (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 46-49, 253-363.

\textsuperscript{18} “Birmingham’s Population, 1880-2000.”

\textsuperscript{19} Leighton, “City of Perpetual Promise.”
third of Birminghamians were unemployed. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared Birmingham the “hardest hit city” in the nation. White civic elites responded philanthropically to the depression through the Community Chest, but the overwhelming need for relief quickly depleted these private sources. In dire circumstances, civic elites and municipal officials welcomed various New Deal agencies to the city. Overseen at the state level by Thad Holt, a local broadcaster, New Deal programs eased the burden of white families while doing little for black ones.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, Birmingham’s reputation as an exception to the South’s economic and social backwardness turned into one that epitomized what was wrong with the region. Although industrial corporations and local and federal governments were decidedly anti-labor before the depression, the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 extended legitimacy to unions. Birmingham’s anti-labor stance was now out of fashion. Whites increased their union organizing activities among themselves, while rural and urban blacks organized under the southern wing of the Communist Party based in Birmingham to advocate for racial equality, higher wages, and the right to vote. Communists exposed Alabama’s grotesque racial terrorism by publicizing the case of the Scottsboro boys, nine African Americans ranging in ages from

20 Ibid.
thirteen to twenty-one falsely accused of raping two white women. The case garnered international attention for the guilty verdicts and death sentences that came with them.24

Within this hotbed of civil rights and union activity, industrialists amped up their control of Birmingham. They cajoled the populist and very popular state legislator T. Eugene “Bull” Connor to run for a seat on the city commission. He easily won. In charge of the Birmingham Police Department, Connor turned it into paramilitary organization dedicated to running the communists out of the city, stifling union activity, and terrorizing African Americans.

By the postwar era, industrialization and the political system that supported it had failed Birmingham. The city’s Jim Crow industrial order had concentrated wealth and power in the hands of the few, while it had robbed citizens of equality, justice, and opportunity. A wartime boom briefly reignited the fires of blast furnaces, but the city’s plants never regained their pre-depression levels of output. Industrialists and the Birmingham City Commission continued to poorly manage Birmingham. They discouraged new industries, fought unionization, ignored smoke pollution laws, and encouraged widespread suburbanization that threatened to swallow the city whole.

The New Postwar Economy: Joseph F. Volker, Academic Healthcare, and the University of Alabama Medical Center

A “defeatist symphony” arose among white civic elites who bemoaned Birmingham’s failure to live up to its name as the “Magic City” in the postwar era. In 1948, Birmingham News journalist Irving Beiman described Birmingham as a “steel giant

with a glass jaw,” easily broken by demands, changes, and structural shifts largely outside of local control. Beiman diagnosed Birmingham with a severe case of “civic anemia” and criticized civic leaders for inflicting violence in all its forms against the city. With a hefty dose of sarcastic contempt, Beiman noted, “Wheels in the war plants have ceased to turn and the stream of returning GI’s increase the rolls of the unemployed, [yet] businessmen smile benignly as the jingle of cash registers goes on unabated.”

Change few recognized at the time was afoot.

Despite the power of white civic elites who lobbied for the University of Alabama Medical Center, the development of the postwar professional service economy largely went unnoticed in Birmingham. That was in part due to the rocky infancy of the Medical Center, which experienced poor state funding and frequent turnovers in leadership. The latter was especially disruptive. Roy R. Kracke, the first dean of the Medical College, came back to his home state of Alabama after a successful career in hematology at Emory University. Unlike Oscar Wells and other civic leaders, Kracke had rather radical views on race. Between 1945 and 1950, Kracke consistently challenged segregated medical education in the University of Alabama (UA). He also established collegial relationships with black doctors in Birmingham and elsewhere. His actions clashed with the racially conservative UA President John Gallalee. Kracke eventually lost fiduciary and administrative control of the College to the president. In 1950, the fifty-year-old Kracke suffered his second and fatal heart attack. For the next four years, the College ran through

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26 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 71-74.
a series of administrative leaders, none of who had a coherent vision for the Medical Center.

After 1950, it was Kracke’s counterpart in the School of Dentistry, the young Dean Joseph F. Volker, who gave the Medical Center a sense of mission. He shared with Kracke the goal of making the Medical Center a world-class research university. Working through the perpetually slighted School of Dentistry, Volker infused the Medical Center with his dynamic energy and vision for its future. He also benefitted from the 1950 arrivals of internist Tinsley Harrison and surgeon Champ Lyons, both of whom specialized in cardiology and enjoyed national stature. Indeed, Harrison’s textbook, *Principles of Internal Medicine*, was so influential that it remains in publication today.\(^{27}\) Both doctors enjoyed personal relationships with some of Birmingham’s white civic elites and directed their supporters’ attention to Volker and the development of the Medical Center. US Senators Lister J. Hill and John Sparkman also were crucial players in carrying forth Volker’s vision. Sparkman, who was Kracke’s roommate at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, chaired the Housing subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, and Hill drove federal sponsorship of the health sciences through the Hill-Burton Hospital Survey and Construction Act and the National Institutes of Health.\(^{28}\) Volker used these powerful networks at the local and federal levels to accomplish his goals. One protégé remarked, “Once Joe gets into a network, it’s his, because…he works it…and he delivers.”\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) *Harrison’s Principles of Internal Medicine* is in its 18\(^{th}\) edition and most recently published by McGraw-Hill Co. in 2011.

\(^{28}\) McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 49.

Volker was an unlikely leader of postwar Birmingham. Born in 1913, Volker grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, where his German grandparents ran a corner store. Volker’s father, who never finished grade school, made a living as an electrical contractor, and his mother volunteered for the Catholic Church and Democratic Party. The Volker household was loud, gregarious, and fit in with their “melting pot” neighborhood. Volker’s awareness and sensitivity to religious and ethnic diversity made him “very liberal with his approach to people,” his wife Juanita recalled.\(^{30}\) He left the New York City area for dental school at Indiana University, but returned to the northeast for a Ph.D. in biochemistry at Rochester University. His research connecting the use of fluoride to cavity prevention won him international acclaim. Administrators at the School of Dentistry at Tufts College, one of the best in the country, soon courted Volker for a faculty position; he quickly became the youngest dean ever to run the school. While living in Boston, Volker cultivated an active spiritual life through Unitarianism. Its tolerance of difference, promotion of humanitarianism, and foundation in objective reasoning appealed to him.

In June 1948, UA President Gallalee lobbied the path-breaking Volker to become the dean of the new School of Dentistry. It was a hard sell. Gallalee wanted classes to start that fall, and the Medical College, barely four years old, had struggled to secure minimal funding. Volker also knew of Kracke’s impotence as dean of the Medical College. With a young family to support, Volker would be leaving his position as dean of the dental school at Tufts to start a program without status or support. Despite these

concerns, the chance to start a new school proved too tempting for Volker.\textsuperscript{31} “I want the intellectual challenge of building something from the beginning,” Volker told Gallalee, and he demanded and received the full autonomy to do so.\textsuperscript{32}

Building the School of Dentistry from the ground up allowed Volker to shape it around his ideas and values. Volker saw Birmingham as a “land of opportunity,” a place he “felt he could make a difference.” Dentist Leonard Robinson also remarked, Volker “liked challenges, and the idea of a Northerner coming down and becoming dean of the dental school in the deep South was something that would appeal to him.” Given the lack of medical and dental education in Alabama since 1919, Volker recruited faculty from outside the state. He persuaded Tufts faculty members and former students to come to Birmingham, bringing together a diverse, young faculty of immigrants, veterans, and Unitarians. They found a different world in Alabama. Robinson, a veteran and Unitarian from Rhode Island, recalled, “Birmingham was alien to me. First of all, the summers were very, very hot and humid, and secondly, I’m not a radical, but I sort of found the separation of the two races somewhat distasteful.”\textsuperscript{33} Volker also recruited Frederick Kraus, a Czechoslovakian immigrant who entered the US Army in 1943 to have “a stake in avenging some of my relatives who had perished under Hitler.” In Birmingham, Kraus would become involved in civil rights organizations led by whites, such as the Alabama Council on Human Relations and the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 74-75.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 75. He kept his job at Tufts during his first year in Birmingham.
\textsuperscript{34} Frederick W. Kraus, interview by Virginia Fisher, December 14, 1994, File 3.48, transcript, UAB Oral History.
subtle yet powerful influence within the Medical Center made it a forceful agent of change that had far reaching implications for Birmingham’s future.

By choosing men who shared his personal philosophy and background, Volker created an institutional culture of inclusion and community that extended beyond the Medical Center. The camaraderie he encouraged among his faculty was partly to assuage their culture shock. As Robinson stated, “In 1950 Birmingham wasn’t the greatest place to live…. Birmingham society was focused around the church and the country club.”

While some medical faculty joined clubs, Volker established the Unitarian Universalist Church of Birmingham where he gave many sermons on public welfare, leadership, and the importance of independent thought.

Despite resistance from local Baptist preachers, Volker’s small Unitarian congregation found space in suburban Mountain Brook’s town hall, thanks to fellow Unitarian and mayor Charles F. Zukoski Jr. 37 Zukoski, a senior trust officer at First National Bank of Birmingham, was fifteen years senior to Volker and had consistently advocated for racial liberalism and other social justice causes since his arrival in Birmingham in 1926. The two men not only shared a common ethnic heritage but also had converted from Catholicism to Unitarianism while living in Boston. 38

35 Robinson, interview.


served as an advisor to both Kracke and Volker, which brought Medical Center faculty closer to the small networks of white liberals and African Americans working toward social change in Birmingham. By the end of the decade, Volker regularly held round-table discussions on reform and the city’s future with blacks and whites at the Dutchman, a pub a few blocks east of the Medical Center that did not follow strict adherence to Jim Crow laws.39

Within the Medical Center, Volker earned praised for his administrative skills in building the School of Dentistry. Unlike his colleagues in the Medical College, Volker ran a solvent and expanding school. After Kracke’s death in 1950, Volker continued to pursue federal grants for research and clinical space for faculty across the Medical Center.40 His vision of a university came one step further with the 1954 release of the Duckett Jones Report, an independent audit. In response to its findings, the UA Board of Trustees combined the Medical Center and the Extension Center into one administrative unit, Birmingham Affairs. The Extension Center had set up shop in 1936 to cater to adults in need of continuing education; it had been experiencing large enrollment growth since World War II.41 Although praised in the report, Volker was passed over for the top administrative position, executive vice-president for Health Affairs. Volker’s political views and position in the School of Dentistry hindered his ability to climb the administrative ladder. Many believed only a doctor could manage the Medical Center.


41 Enrollment from 1940 to 1945 grew from 200 to 800. By 1954, half of all enrollment in the University of Alabama came from the three Extension Centers (Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery). Twenty-five percent of total enrollment, however, derived from the pre-engineering programs located in Birmingham. McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 20-21, 122.
Volker intended to resign, but University of Alabama President Oliver C. Carmichael convinced him to stay by offering him another administrative position.  

Continuing in his capacity as dean, Volker enhanced his influence within the Medical Center through his new role as director of Graduate and Research Studies. In this position, Volker created an interdisciplinary research environment that “didn’t have any walls” typically separating academic disciplines. The core of that environment was the Basic Sciences program, initially funded by the National Science Foundation, because it academically bridged the Medical and Extension Centers. Faculty also began to collaborate across discipline lines, particularly making strides in the development of public health as a distinct discipline within academic healthcare. The city’s poor public health record and the Medical Center’s function as an indigent hospital gave its faculty abundant teaching and research material. In response to its needs and continuing scientific breakthroughs, the Medical College created new departments in growing fields like microbiology and allied health sciences. Volker tapped into funds from the National Institutes of Health to launch new clinical programs and the Hill-Burton Act to build new facilities. Between 1955 and 1960, outside research grants and donations grew by over 200 percent to reach nearly $1.3 million—one-sixth of the total Medical Center budget.

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42 Ibid., 103-07, 113-14.
44 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 76-78.
Volker’s administrative style facilitated rather than managed this rich research environment. John Dunbar, one of Volker’s protégés, believed the administrator created an exciting place for research and knowledge. “It was the advancing of knowledge, the curiosity about research…the idea of having an imagination, [and] of exercising that creating side” that defined academic life under Volker’s tutelage. These lessons had an effect because students and faculty could see the growth of a university on a monthly basis. Dunbar believed Volker’s vision “was coming true.”

According to S. Richardson Hill, a faculty member of the Medical College, Volker’s philosophy in building a university was to “get the best person you can,…develop the resources that they need to do their job as they see it and remove roadblocks.” Another colleague later recalled, “Everybody around here who worked for Joe had total freedom.” Volker’s style gave clinicians and academics an opportunity to develop their own national or international reputations. But, as Hill explained, “Everybody had complete faith that everybody was working toward the same goal,” which was the overall development of the Medical Center.

To Volker, the expansion of the Extension Center was crucial to his vision of an urban university with a world-class medical center. According to Dunbar, Volker often talked about how “all of the university skills and sets of knowledge…tended to reinforce

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46 Dunbar, interview.


49 Hill, interview.
one another for the good of society."

The organization of the Extension and the Medical Centers into one administrative unit in 1954 was one step toward creating a full-fledged university. The rapid development of the Extension Center filled a gap in Birmingham, which lacked a public four-year institution of higher learning. It offered classes in business and education, and it was better suited for emerging healthcare-related fields such as hospital management.

Community demands often shaped the Extension Center’s programs. In 1957, one prominent white family donated the Clark-Little Theater to the Extension Center to encourage the teaching and enjoyment of the dramatic arts. Alabama Power Company’s Thomas W. Martin called for the development of an engineering school and extensively lobbied support for it among high-placed industrial executives. Martin’s efforts paid off in 1962 when the UA Board of Trustees created the School of Engineering, the first non-clinical school for the University of Alabama, Birmingham Affairs.

Urban educational institutions like the University of Alabama, Birmingham Affairs experienced tremendous growth throughout the 1950s as the result of demand stimulated by federal programs and local needs. Urban academic centers also faced barriers to expanding beyond campus lines into the neighborhoods surrounding them. Volker and his allies wanted to build new research and teaching facilities to satisfy growing enrollment and developing disciplines, but the four-and-a-half block campus constrained his ability.

In late 1951, officials for the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD) began the process of applying for urban renewal funds to purchase nine-and-a-

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50 Dunbar, interview.
half blocks in the Southside neighborhood to expand the Medical Center. These maneuvers were done before policy changes regarding urban renewal laws. The federal Housing Act of 1949 allowed a public agency such as the HABD to buy private land for public housing; the 1954 version of the act gave the HABD the right to acquire land for commercial purposes. This new act was an attempt to revitalize aging downtowns. In the Birmingham’s case, urban renewal was used to build a world-class medical center.

University administrators and HABD officials announced their plans to Birmingham’s white civic elite in a large, open meeting at the city auditorium in the spring of 1953. Frank E. Spain, the lawyer for the HABD, invited Birmingham City Commission President W. Cooper Green, realtor Robert Jemison Jr., and former Birmingham Chamber of Commerce president and realtor William P. Engel to speak at the meeting. Speeches touched on the need for land, the purpose of the Medical Center, and the importance of collaboration between city officials, private citizens, and university administrators. The meeting, required by federal law, represented the continuation of the partnership between Birmingham’s white civic elite and physicians. As historian Charles E. Connerly has argued, four main interest groups trumpeted Medical Center expansion: the HABD, city planners, physicians, and realtors, who were “the single largest source of leadership” in the project.

Sen. John Sparkman of Alabama also played a significant role in shaping the Medical Center’s urban renewal project. Despite the changes to the Housing Act of 1949,

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51 Public Meeting on the Medical Center, program booklet (Birmingham, AL, March 30, 1953), File 023K, Hill Ferguson Papers, UAB Archives.

the University of Alabama could not afford the land necessary to expand its Birmingham Affairs campus. Presidents of Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania also lobbied federal officials to revise urban renewal laws in favor of academic institutions. In 1959, Sparkman pushed through two amendments to the Housing Act that enabled universities to expand more easily. One allowed them to receive “credits” from their building activities toward the cost of land. The other excluded projects for educational institutions from the requirement of constructing sufficient numbers of public housing for displaced residents. These amendments transformed universities into agents of urban development.

As the director of Graduate and Research Studies, Volker intimately knew the demands of the Medical Center and shaped its urban renewal program. He had coordinated with the dean of the Medical College in designing a “master plan” for the campus. It called for sixty-five blocks, far more than the nine-and-a-half the University of Alabama bought. They had envisioned the expansion of the Extension Center, too.

Volker’s reliance on federal funding to drive the creation of a university created a cyclical process of growth. As it won more grants and contracts, the Medical Center needed space to fulfill them; as it received more clinical and research space, faculty developed new subfields or made major scientific discoveries that then prompted more grant applications. Volker brilliantly used federal funding and his network of local and federal allies to build a world-class academic medical center.


54 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 109.
By the late 1950s, Volker had earned an international reputation for his expertise in developing universities. The University of Iceland and the University of Kansas called on him for his consulting services for their dental schools. Volker also advised the Regents of the University of Arizona on the need for and location of the first Medical Center for that state. All of these activities took Volker away from Birmingham in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He welcomed them; he had grown frustrated with the administrative structure of Birmingham Affairs and his lack of advancement. As one protégé who collaborated with Volker on the Arizona study and Icelandic research remembered, Volker’s advisory trips stemmed from “politics back home” and his desire “to send messages” to the University of Alabama administration. In September 1962, the University of Alabama president and Board of Trustees finally recognized Volker’s contributions to the Medical Center by asking him to become the executive vice-president of Health Affairs. Volker insisted and won full autonomy to pick his administrative team, most of whom he had worked closely with throughout the 1950s.

In 1960, the Medical Center was Birmingham’s third biggest employer, the largest private real estate developer, and the most visible symbol of federal largesse. Most Birminghamians, however, gave little attention to the developments in Southside. Local financing accounted for a very modest $547,000 of the total cost of the urban renewal project, or roughly 11 percent. Few national media outlets reporting on Birmingham’s civil rights crises recognized the new growth industry either. Heavy industry, both its promises and abuses, still held the city in its grip. Volker and his

55 Dunbar, interview.

56 Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 107.
administrative team built the foundations of Birmingham’s professional service economy without anyone but their federal and local allies paying attention.

![Aerial view of the University of Alabama Medical Center, from the northwest, 1955.](image)

**Figure 2.1** Aerial view of the University of Alabama Medical Center, from the northwest, 1955. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

**Forging New Spaces of Interaction: African Americans and the Medical Center**

The Medical Center’s expansion highlighted the central tensions over black and white spaces in postwar Birmingham. African Americans were a part of the Medical Center from the very beginning, as patients, employees, and neighbors. In its role as Jefferson County’s indigent hospital, the Center served vastly more black patients than white ones. Because of local segregation laws governing healthcare, the Medical Center needed blacks as nurses and other allied health employees. Its mid-1950s urban renewal
campaign, however, would destroy almost ten blocks of African American housing, businesses, and churches. Yet, the effects of Jim Crow as well as the racial liberalism of key administrative leaders surprisingly made the Medical Center a space for African American middle-class respectability and biracial communication. Drs. Joseph F. Volker and Roy R. Kracke, first dean of the Medical College between 1944 and 1950, often worked with black civic elites in ways that challenged the boundaries of segregation in Birmingham and the healthcare profession. Black civic elites and white racial liberals forged personal and professional relationships as they faced the challenge of both removing and expanding black presence in and around the growing Medical Center.

In Birmingham and other cities, creating more white spaces of employment and education came at the cost of destroying black living spaces. The Medical Center’s expansion project would displace 529 African American families, 90 percent of whom were renters.\footnote{Three-fourths of the 150 white families affected, a study found, could afford homeownership. Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 115.} Attorney Oscar A. Adams Jr., whose father had decried racial zoning and residential segregation as editor of the Birmingham Reporter in the 1920s, represented twenty-four black residents at the spring 1953 meeting officially announcing the project. The fundamental objection, as Adams and other leaders stated, was the lack of adequate public housing and private residential developments for blacks.\footnote{Ibid., 117.} The year before, the Birmingham City Commission opted not to proceed with plans to fund three new public housing projects even though urban renewal laws at that time required units for displaced
residents.\textsuperscript{59} The current number available to blacks was woefully inadequate, and few black neighborhoods could meet the incoming wave of displaced residents.

Racially-motivated bombings against black homeowners had begun four years before, making black housing a subject of intense public debate, but black and white civic leaders engaged in a relatively open one regarding the effects of the Medical Center’s expansion. Many of those involved in the discussions were members of the newly established Interracial Committee.\textsuperscript{60} Its subcommittee on public housing, which included one of Volker’s advisors, Charles F. Zukoski Jr., already had discussed the consequences of the Medical Center expansion. White civic elites also recognized the value of black presence, however small, in the urban renewal process to help deflect local and federal charges of discrimination. Attorney Arthur S. Shores was the only black member of the Medical Center Planning Committee, a position he won based on his work overturning local racial zoning laws. Rev. John W. Goodgame Jr., pastor of one of the largest black churches in the city, gave the public meeting’s closing benediction. He did so after publicly criticizing whites for failing to discuss or solve the issue of black housing: “We find ourselves hemmed in in Birmingham. We cannot move right or left because of certain regulations and laws.”\textsuperscript{61} Adams, Shores, and Goodgame publicly shamed white civic elites for limiting black living spaces through the use of urban renewal and other legal measures.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 111.

\textsuperscript{60} The Interracial Council, established in 1951, was a group of fifty civic leaders evenly split among blacks and whites. Its stated purpose was to establish a network of biracial communication to address problems in Birmingham.

\textsuperscript{61} Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 116.
Local and national black leaders wanted to use the Medical Center expansion project as a way to change federal urban policy and challenge discrimination in Birmingham. Adams represented thirty-six property owners, including a few white families, who sued the HABD and Medical Center. He and others involved with the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) worked with their counterparts at the national level to contest the Medical Center expansion project. These middle-class black professionals met with white officials at the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) in Washington, DC, to discuss the project and their complaints of racial discrimination. Earlier plans had included public housing for whites only, and the Medical Center was a segregated institution that barred black physicians and paying-patients.

Figure 2.2 Urban renewal project area, 1958. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)
Although HHFA officials initially entertained the NAACP’s objections, they eventually lost interest in making the HABD, and thus the city of Birmingham, an equitable agent of public housing. By 1955, before Sparkman’s amendments to the Housing Act, the HHFA approved expansion plans for the Medical Center that did not include new public housing construction. The agency accepted the city commission’s preposterous claim that enough was available for displaced residents. The small minority of homeowners received direct fiscal compensation. The vast majority was shunted to inadequate public housing facilities and substandard rental housing. Only 5 of the 146 urban renewal projects in the nation at that time put more displaced residents in substandard housing than the Medical Center expansion.62 The cost of the continuing legal battle, after its first dismissal by a federal court, was enough to pull the plug on the NAACP lawsuit and lobbying efforts by the spring of 1955.

Adams, who eventually became the most prominent black Republican in Alabama as one of its Supreme Court justices, later acknowledged other reasons for the failure of the case against the Medical Center project. Although he and other middle-class black professionals associated with the NAACP wanted to use the case to upend racial discrimination, the homeowners they represented were uninterested in the politics of the case. “It turned out that they really were not that upset about having to move,” Adams remembered. “They wanted to be sure that they were given a fair, adequate compensation for the property.” The overall feeling in the affected community, Adams declared, was supportive of the Medical Center. “‘We’re not really opposed to’” it, he restated their argument. “‘We think it’s a good thing, but we don’t want the Medical Center built…on

62 Ibid., 127.
our backs.”\textsuperscript{63} Other early opponents of expansion such as Rev. J. B. Carter changed their minds for financial reasons: “I am in dire need of the money.”\textsuperscript{64} For some African Americans, the forced move relieved them of living in one of the three worst slums in Birmingham. Over 80 percent of housing in the project area had no indoor or private bath and nearly 95 percent were without central heating.\textsuperscript{65} If black civic leaders saw the forced removal as an issue of discrimination, some of the affected residents may have seen it as an improvement in living standards.

The Medical Center also escaped sustained protest and criticism by African Americans because its expansion provided some of them with new opportunities and professional networks. As an indigent hospital, the Medical Center needed black healthcare professionals, excluding physicians, to treat African American patients. Black women, in particular, benefitted from a state law that banned white female nurses from caring for black male patients. Medical Center administrators, however, gave little regard to following Alabama law in the application of health services.\textsuperscript{66} Dean Roy R. Kracke of the Medical College admitted three black women into the hospital’s nursing certificate program in the fall of 1947, quietly desegregating education at a University of Alabama-affiliated institution. After Commissioner Eugene T. “Bull” Connor called to threaten an

\textsuperscript{63} Oscar A. Adams Jr., interview by Virginia Fisher, June 19, 1989, File 1.58, transcript, UAB Oral History.

\textsuperscript{64} Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 127.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 106.

\textsuperscript{66} UAB administrators received external inquiries into their practice of providing patient care without regard to race or gender. Matthew McNulty, who became the Director of University of Alabama Hospitals and Clinics in 1954 during the reorganization of the Medical Center, defended the practice. He argued that it served an integral function of medical education and embodied the professionalism within the Nightingale Pledge and Hippocratic Oath. Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, December 4, 1963, File 22.54, Office of Vice-President for Health Affairs of the University of Alabama, Joseph F. Volker, 1962-1966 (hereafter cited as Volker-VP), UAB Archives; Matthew F. McNulty to Robert C. Berson, July 23, 1958, File 22.54, Volker-VP.
injunction against the Medical Center, Kracke quipped, “I need nurses. I don’t care whether they are white, black, red, or green.” Kracke eventually bent to the will of the UA Board of Trustees and removed the women a year later.

Black women found employment at the Medical Center in a variety of healthcare positions such as registered nurses, medical technicians, and lab aides. Nellie Felder, a licensed practical nurse (LPN), had worked in Jefferson Hospital since it had become part of the Medical College in 1945. Her Baptist church was three blocks south of her workplace. As an LPN, Felder took vital signs, tended to small wounds, and assisted in personal hygiene for patients. An integral part of an expanding healthcare team, LPNs were vocationally trained in a system that increasingly valued formal academic education. LPNs like Felder, however, received informal continuing education at the Medical Center as they moved around the hospital to different clinics specializing in medical services. Felder eventually worked with the highly demanding Department of Surgery. Felder would become involved with the local chapter of the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses; professional associations asserted the value of LPNs and other groups in the expanding hospital system. At the same time the Medical Center acquired a national and international reputation for healthcare services, Felder gained

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67 McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 64.


69 The National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses began in 1949 in New York. It is unknown if membership was restricted to whites at that time, but the American Nursing Association desegregated in 1950. It is highly likely that the NFLPN was an integrated association.
respectability. When she received her 25 year service pin in 1969, she stated she had "really enjoyed" her experience in the Medical Center.  

![Image of nurses training African American hospital orderlies in the use of the tank respirator (iron lung) as part of the University of Alabama Hospital's in-service education program, 1958. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)](image)

**Figure 2.3** Nurse training African American hospital orderlies in the use of the tank respirator (iron lung) as part of the University of Alabama Hospital's in-service education program, 1958. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

Felder’s experience reveals the central if hidden roles African American women played in the development of the Medical Center. By the early 1960s, one-third of its...

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70 "Twenty-Five-Year Pins Presented to Four Employees," *The Beacon*, August 1969, File 8.44, Office of Vice-President for Health Affairs, S. Richardson Hill, 1968-1977, UAB Archives. In this article, one white and two black nurses in addition to Felder were also recognized.
workforce was African American, and there was one black healthcare technician like Felder for every ten employees. Moreover, nearly 60 percent of its patient base was African American. Felder’s more than 25 years of service to the Medical Center is even more impressive given the significant turnover rate and the extremely low wages healthcare aides and service workers received in the early, lean years. Of course, black healthcare workers had few places to work in Birmingham. The Medical Center, which had both racially liberal and conservative clinicians and administrators, was their only viable option until 1953. Although limited by race, gender, and local customs to specific professions and education within healthcare, African American women such as Felder found new spaces of self-expression, personal pride, and respectability at the Medical Center.

Black male clinicians, however, found cracking the Medical Center more difficult, but some influential Medical Center faculty and administrators continually reached out to them on a host of issues. Both Kracke and Volker collaborated with their peers at the Tuskegee Institute, a black educational institution made famous by Booker T. Washington. Kracke often visited the campus over 120 miles away in southeast Alabama to escort Howard University medical faculty members on trips to recruit students and give speeches. Volker worked with Tuskegee dentist Cliff Dummett Jr. to develop an exchange program of continuing education. Black clinicians could use the Veterans


72 Author calculation derived from information in Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, October 22, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VP.

73 Indeed, these problems were significant enough to be mentioned in T. Duckett Jones, “Report of the Special Survey Committee.”

74 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 64, 91.
Affairs Hospital, which was a part of the Medical Center and desegregated according to federal statues. That hospital often served as a site of black-white clinical collaboration. Black physicians often consulted with their white counterparts as a way to legitimize their practice among their patients. The majority of African Americans, one black clinician explained, believed that “if you got sick you went to see a white doctor because they had the training.”

The most pressing problem for the thirty-five black physicians in private practice was the lack of hospital space in Birmingham. Segregated healthcare practices denied black clinicians the use of modern equipment and facilities in an age of rapid technological advancement. In 1947, Kracke negotiated with the Mineral District Medical Society to build a hospital for black physicians and their paying patients within the Medical Center complex. The space demands of the Jefferson County Department of Health, however, which had been a planned part of the Medical Center since 1945, pushed this hospital out of the four-and-a-half block campus. Kracke then opted to cede use of the fourteenth floor in Jefferson Hospital for Mineral District physicians, but internal pressure from faculty and UA President John Gallalee forced him to renege on his promise. After Kracke’s death in 1950, Volker continued to support efforts to build a new black hospital in Birmingham. He joined Zukoski, department store owner Louis Pizitz, and financier Mervyn H. Sterne to raise funds for the all-black Holy Cross Hospital. When ground broke in 1953, nearly seven years after Kracke began discussions

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with black doctors, Pizitz reportedly told Volker, “We should have done it a long time ago.”

A few black doctors saw the segregated conditions in Birmingham as a reason to practice there. In 1957, Dr. James T. Montgomery returned to his hometown after completing his medical education. Upon hearing Montgomery’s decision, one of his mentors at Howard University School of Medicine reportedly told him, “I thought you had more sense.” Montgomery moved back to Birmingham in the midst of extremely high racial tensions such as the return of house bombings and public beatings of high-profile African Americans. He saw himself as both a civil rights activist and a doctor. When one white colleague told Montgomery to choose between the two, he retorted, “I was a man before I was a doctor.” Montgomery also saw an opportunity in Birmingham. The city had lost a generation of black doctors. That nearly one-third of the thirty-five black doctors in Jefferson County were nearing retirement by the early 1950s acutely pointed to the detrimental effects of segregated healthcare education and the lack of such education in Alabama for nearly 25 years before the re-establishment of the Medical College.

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77 “Dr. Volker’s Remarks at Memorial for Mrs. Smolian,” n.d., File 1.67, Office of Public Relations and Marketing, Benefactor Reference Files, UAB Archives.

78 Montgomery, interview.

79 After Brown vs. Board of Education (1954), bombings against black housing or construction projects returned as a form of white resistance to desegregation. In April 1956, white Ku Klux Klan members dragged singer Nat “King” Cole from the stage of the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium and beat him savagely.

80 Montgomery, interview.

81 Mrs. J. K. Robertson and Miss Wattie T. Cole to Clifton H. Penick, April 23, 1951, File 023K, Emmett B. Carmichael/Alabama Museum of the Health Sciences Collection, UAB Archives. Robertson and Cole represented the Auxiliary to the Mineral District Medical Society; other organizations such as Delta Sigma
With a postgraduate specialization in cardiology from Harvard University, Montgomery’s credentials matched or exceeded some white clinicians at the Medical Center. He also came from a middle-class background. The light-skinned Montgomery grew up with his extended family in Rosedale, an African American neighborhood in an Over-the-Mountain suburb. His uncle D. M. Montgomery was the principal for Rosedale High School, and the younger Montgomery was a few years ahead of future civil rights leader Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth in school. The young doctor easily moved between black and white Birmingham from the privileged position education and class provided.

Abraham H. Russakoff, a cardiologist and friend, invited Montgomery to informal meetings with clinicians at the Medical Center every other Friday to discuss cases for consultation. “I’ll never forget it,” he said, about those late 1950s and early 1960s meetings; “everybody else was Jim or Jack or Joe, but I was always Dr. Montgomery.”

Around 1960, Montgomery approached Wally Frommeyer, a “very good friend” and dean of the Medical College, about officially attending clinical rounds in the hospital that would give him the hands-on learning experience he needed to qualify for national board certification in internal medicine. “It was the only time in my life I’ve ever asked anybody could I come and sit on the back row or something,” Montgomery recalled, but his friend, constrained by policies outside his control, said no.82

As early as 1958, Russakoff encouraged Montgomery to file a suit to desegregate the faculty of the Medical Center, but the temper of racial politics in Birmingham and the

Theta, Tau Sigma Chapter, National Council of Jewish Women, Birmingham Section, and the Young Men’s Business Club also wrote in support of the Mineral District Medical Society.

82 Montgomery, interview.
University of Alabama was too hot at the time.\textsuperscript{83} Between 1956 and 1963, civil rights activities led by Shuttlesworth, Montgomery’s good friend and patient, placed pressure on white civic elites to desegregate Birmingham and its public spaces. In the Medical Center’s original contract with Jefferson County in 1944, only physicians who belonged to the Jefferson County Medical Society (JCMS) could practice in either Hillman or Jefferson Hospitals. The society, of course, was whites-only. Its members initially filled out the faculty, which caused a split within it between those who pushed racial and medical boundaries and those who kept them closed.

In October 1963, Montgomery applied for membership to the JCMS with the full support of Russakoff, Frommeyer, and Volker, who by then was executive vice-president of Health Affairs. Volker incessantly lobbied JCMS members who practiced across the Birmingham area to admit Montgomery, which they did unanimously.\textsuperscript{84} In this one act, the Medical Center became publicly desegregated, with its first black faculty member with hospital privileges. Volker, Montgomery, and others trumpeted this accomplishment as a breakthrough in civil rights, a designation that rendered invisible the Medical Center’s long history of employing black women and providing healthcare to indigent black patients since its establishment in 1944.

\textsuperscript{83} In 1956, Autherine Lucy enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Alabama. White students and onlookers harassed her for three days, but administrators suspended Lucy because of the disruptions to class. In that same year, the Board of Trustees chose Frank A. Rose, a native of Mississippi, a Unitarian theologian, and president of Transylvania College, as the new president of the University of Alabama. Rose recalled that Hill Ferguson, an avowed segregationist and Board member, broke down in tears when he pleaded with Rose to accept the position. “Dr. Rose,” Ferguson cried, “if we can’t depend on Southern young men like yourself to come and help us face our integration crisis and bring blacks into our university without trouble, what are we going to do?” Upon accepting the job, Rose recalled that then Gov. James Folsom slapped him hard on the back and said, “Son, God damn, we’ve been looking for you.” Rose would not integrate the University of Alabama until the summer of 1963. Frank A. Rose interview by Virginia Fisher, September 21, 1989, File 3.7, transcript, UAB Oral History.

\textsuperscript{84} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 151.
African Americans played crucial roles in shaping the early development of the Medical Center and forging spaces of interaction and opportunity within it. Women provided the often overlooked, less glamorous aspects of healthcare that white men, because of their sex or education, would not do. Poor, indigent African Americans received healthcare, with varying degrees of compassion and respect from white clinicians. In their capacity as patients, however, they fulfilled both the teaching and research mission of the academic Medical Center. Black middle-class professionals such as Montgomery and Adams challenged the Medical Center and found friendly if constrained white allies who would continue to advocate for racial inclusion. As Montgomery explained years later, “Liberal white folks helping black folks” was central to the local civil rights movement. “We could [not] have done anything about it without liberal white folks. Don’t misunderstand me. You need both.”

Laws prevented the Medical Center from being an equitable space for African Americans, yet in the 1950s it remained one of the most open public spaces for them in Birmingham.

The Emergence of Black Economic Power: A. G. Gaston, the Black Middle Class, and Suburban Homeownership

The business empire of A. G. Gaston served as the center of postwar black middle-class development in Birmingham. Gaston made the most of segregation, as did the men and women who came before him. Beginning in the 1890s, Birmingham’s segregated markets had produced a thriving black business district and sites of racial

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85 Montgomery, interview.

86 Although few works have traced African American involvement in the professional service economy, some have written about the material gains of the black middle class across the twentieth century. See Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar*; Wiese, *A Place of Their Own*. 
uplift that catered to the larger African American community. Carrie Tuggle, a woman of African American and Cherokee ancestry, for example, began a school for black boys that enjoyed the support of white philanthropists who believed in making “separate-but-equal” a reality. Rev. William Pettiford and other Knights of Pythian established the Alabama Penny Savings Bank, which unfortunately closed in 1915. Black men and women moved into the middle class by providing services whites denied African Americans. Historian August Meier has called this class a “small petit bourgeois” who served as models of economic, moral, and racial uplift. Gaston, who grew up with Jim Crow and idolized Booker T. Washington, became the most powerful African American in postwar Birmingham.

The grandson of former slaves who owned their land, Arthur George Gaston was born in Demopolis, Alabama, in 1892. He experienced a lonely childhood, with a mother who worked for a white family in Birmingham and other children who thought he was “a square.” Gaston followed the rules, even when his peers encouraged him to break them during play. His first business venture was selling rides on his tree swing for a button, which was also an attempt to win friends. At age eleven, he moved to Birmingham to be with his mother Rosie and the Lovemans, a white Jewish family who owned one of the state’s largest department store chains. Bernie Loveman was his constant playmate and one he did not have to bribe. While he lived with the Lovemans, Gaston experienced

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“true kindness and affection from white people,” a belief that would influence how he related to white elites as an adult.89

Although life with the Loveman family provided Gaston with a safe, comfortable home, Rosie wanted her son to see the other side of Birmingham. She sent Art to the Tuggle Institute in the black middle-class neighborhood of Enon Ridge; her employer Minnie Loveman was a major donor to the school.90 Rosie explained to her son, “A boy your age, he needs to go to school. He needs to have some education or he’ll wind up swabbing by the flames in the blast furnace and falling into bad company. He needs to meet well-to-do, educated colored people early.”91 Rosie wanted to teach her son that he could be more than the son of a favored servant. By sending Art to the Tuggle Institute, she hoped he would learn race pride by living in a world created by African Americans.

Through his experience at the Institute, Gaston learned early that racial uplift, while created and nurtured by African Americans, needed the financial support whites gave to black institutions. When he left school, however, he quickly realized the limits of white benevolence. Despite his connections to the white elite community, Gaston found few employment opportunities that suited his entrepreneurial ambitions. He wandered down to Mobile, but his only significant employment there was as a hotel porter. He sired a child out-of-wedlock, a fact he considered so shameful and unbecoming he made no mention of his son in his autobiography. After a tour of duty in World War I, he came

89 Ibid., 27.


91 Gaston, Green Power, 20.
back to the United States expecting first-class citizenship. Instead, he found his position as a black man had not changed. Fulfilling his mother’s speculation, he “w[ou]nd up swabbing by the flames in the blast furnace” at the Tennessee Coal and Iron plant in Fairfield where he earned “top dollar—$3.50 a day.”

Gaston’s desire to be his own man continued while he labored for one of the worst industrial companies in Birmingham. He diligently saved his money and earned a reputation for “being cheap” among the ladies. He started selling his mother’s home-cooking to his co-workers and soon graduated to a loan shark business, charging 25 percent interest to the men courting the women who spurned him. In 1923, Gaston started the Booker T. Washington Burial Society from these growing assets. The business was practical, given the high mortality rate of African Americans due to disease, murder, and poor industrial working conditions, and symbolic, acting as a new institution of race pride within the black community. Gaston funneled profits from the burial society into his next logical project: the Smith and Gaston Funeral Home.

In 1940, Gaston moved his funeral business headquarters from the industrial suburb of Fairfield to a building he renovated at the corner of Kelly Ingram Park in downtown Birmingham. The park served as one of the borders of the small black

92 Ibid., 43.

93 Ibid., 50.

94 In the first two decades of the twentieth century, Birmingham was given the dubious honor of being the “murder capital of the world.” In 1931, there were 148 murders in the city. Birmingham also had one of the highest industrial death rates, especially for African Americans in the convict-lease labor system, poor housing conditions, and poor public health. See Beiman, “Steel Giant with a Glass Jaw;” Flynt, Alabama in the Twentieth Century, 47; Leighton, “City of Perpetual Promise;” and Kelly, Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coal Fields, 78. Death was also a profitable business, although the national death rate declined from 1890 to 1910. Suzanne E. Smith, To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), 78-80.
business district. Gaston’s new building, formerly a coal baron’s colonial residence, held the Smith and Gaston Funeral Home, the Booker T. Washington Insurance Company, and the newly established Booker T. Washington Business College. Over the next twenty years, he commissioned more buildings in the black business district to house administrative operations for his bottling company, cemetery, hotel, radio station, realty investment company, and bank.

Gaston’s business expansion depended on his relationships with local white bankers, particularly those at First National Bank of Birmingham (FNB), and his ability to capitalize on segregation’s effect in Birmingham’s consumer marketplace. Gaston carefully cultivated race relations and largely followed the dictates of whites to maintain his entrepreneurial empire. Because FNB approved capital investment loans and mortgages for his businesses and home, white banks often used economic intimidation against Gaston and other African Americans who challenged segregation. In 1957, for example, banks in Tuskegee used loan payments to threaten African Americans who launched a boycott of department stores in response to recent citizenship restrictions. Gaston personally experienced the limitations white bankers placed on African Americans, such as when one FNB banker denied him a loan to buy his first Cadillac in the 1930s. After that experience, he admonished blatant consumerism as irresponsible in

95 African Americans organized the Tuskegee Merchant Boycott from 1957 to 1961 in response to the state legislature’s approval to rezone the town’s limits to exclude African Americans. Tuskegee, a town with a population that was nearly three-fourths black before the rezoning, became nearly all white with only nine African Americans within its new limits. The boycott was one of the first instances in which African Americans used their purchasing power to launch a political protest. It was also one of the longest running boycotts in the classical phase of the civil rights movement. This case of gerrymandering led to the US Supreme Court decision *Gomillion vs. Lightfoot* (1960) that declared such districts unconstitutional. “RACES: Boycott in Tuskegee,” *TIME*, July 8, 1957, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,825088,00.html; August Meier and Elliot M. Rudwick, *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 369-70.
light of the need for African Americans to own homes, run businesses, and earn degrees.\textsuperscript{96}

Gaston launched the Booker T. Washington Business College in 1939 out of frustration in finding educated African Americans to work as secretaries, bookkeepers, and other skilled office jobs in his businesses. He realized what few white businessmen did at the time: Demand for professional consumer services would reshape the local economy. “The vast need for unskilled labor had passed,” he noted in his memoir; “the need for skilled workers was greatly increasing.”\textsuperscript{97} Consignment to unskilled labor jobs kept many African Americans from enjoying economic stability, mobility, and the privilege of a federally-designed social security system. New opportunities in professional or skilled jobs opened up through local initiative and state action. The effects of the GI Bill, although concentrated on white students and universities, created demand for higher education among African Americans. According to Gaston, the college grew faster in its first few years than either his funeral home or insurance company.\textsuperscript{98}

Federal opportunities buoyed the young college and extended its reach beyond the borders of Birmingham. In 1943, the college became a testing site for the civil service exam; the federal government needed African American office workers during World War II. Professional office jobs for local blacks, however, were limited. African Americans used their education at the college to become secretaries and bookkeepers all over the nation as they migrated out of Birmingham. The college was aided yet again by

\textsuperscript{96} Gaston, \textit{Green Power}, 71.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 80.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 79-81, 80.
the state through the desegregation of the armed services at all levels in the late 1940s and early 1950s, driving demand for more professionally-trained African Americans in the federal government. African American men and women used the college to tap into areas of employment in Birmingham and elsewhere that previously were unavailable to them.

Gaston used his college to provide first-class citizenship denied to him and African Americans in Birmingham’s Jim Crow industrial order. The college gave him the workforce he wanted, and he often underwrote the tuition for some of his employees. His desire for a professional work staff was part of his effort to create a new image of local black capitalism. He believed education taught young African Americans about “personal responsibility, self-respect and good citizenship,” and he drew personal “satisfaction of seeing our people learn to perform efficiently and avoid the ‘nigger business’ stereotype.”99 Gaston personally wanted to steer clear of such characterizations, and he molded his workers and protégés into reflections of himself. The professionalism Gaston demanded of his workers was part of his quest to fashion himself as a respectable and profitable businessman in black and white Birmingham.

Through his business and educational endeavors, Gaston significantly contributed to the development of a black middle class in Birmingham. Although secretaries and bookkeepers hardly earned an income comparable to accountants or doctors, African Americans who worked in these positions gained middle-class respectability, an intangible symbol of social status. Other African Americans found new work within the growing Medical Center or other places of professional employment created by Gaston.

99 Ibid., 79, 80.
and other African Americans. Together, these employment opportunities, though small, were significant enough to push some African Americans into new social and economic positions within Birmingham.

Professional opportunities as well as salary equalization for teachers and labor activism wrought substantial change in economic mobility for some black Birminghamians in the 1950s. Overall family income for African Americans grew in the postwar era. Labor activism, both on the factory floor and the school room, partly accounted for this increase. Skilled black industrial laborers made more in Birmingham than elsewhere in the South, and their recent entry into craft unions enhanced their ability to earn decent wages. Similarly, Birmingham World editor Emory O. Jackson, a former educator, drummed up support for salary equalization for teachers in the early 1940s. By 1959, the average annual income for African American teachers was $4,583, which was nearly $100 more than white ones. Over 10,000 black Birmingham families earned more than $4,000 a year, which was two-thirds of the national average in 1960. Although this discrepancy reflected the racial discrimination in the industrial and professional workforce, the number of families who made this level of income grew by nearly 300 percent in 10 years.

Gainful employment in professional or skilled labor enhanced the ability of African Americans to become consumers. Although black retailers did exist, their inventory and selection did not compare to the national or regional chains like

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101 “Alabama Groups Protest to Times,” New York Times, May 4, 1960. The letter was written by William P. Engel who was president of the Committee of 100, a group of industrialists who staunchly opposed racial and economic change.
Loveman’s, Pitzitz’s, and Sears & Roebuck, Co., that dominated the downtown central business district. Gaston’s sole business failure, the Brown Belle Bottling Company, was his only venture that offered consumer goods rather than professional services. African Americans instead bought household and consumer items from white retailers. In 1959, 98.2 percent of black homes had refrigerators, 84.7 percent had televisions, and 76.2 percent had washing machines, all of which were increases from their consumption levels in 1948.\textsuperscript{102} Clearly, wage increases and new professional employment opportunities provided African Americans with the means to buy goods indicative of homeownership.

Postwar black homeownership in Birmingham reflected the legacy of a Jim Crow industrial order that forced African Americans into the poorest quality neighborhoods and the emergence of a suburban middle class that demanded more living spaces. Slightly more than 50 percent of African Americans in metropolitan Birmingham owned homes in 1960, but the number and location of their neighborhoods were limited.\textsuperscript{103} Black suburban residential neighborhoods were squeezed in by industrial plants, rail lines, and white neighborhoods; they were also extremely limited. Shortly after racial zoning laws governing residential spaces were overturned in 1949, whites associated with the Ku Klux Klan bombed the recently-acquired home of William German in an area separating black Smithfield from the white Graymont neighborhood, launching a fifteen-year terrorism campaign to preserve white supremacy.\textsuperscript{104} As Oscar Adams stated at the open meeting for the Medical Center expansion project in the spring of 1953, “[The Negro] has

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} Gaston, \textit{Green Power}, 119.

been forced to confine himself into particular areas because of legal restrictions in some cases, and because of physical violence in the form of bombings in other cases."

African Americans also faced major obstacles in acquiring their own homes in Birmingham due to the discriminatory policies of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the legacy of the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC). Under HOLC guidelines established in 1933, federal officials designated areas unsuitable for home construction, improvements, or mortgages. The “redlined” areas were often residential neighborhoods for African Americans and were considered ill-suited for investment, a policy that continued after World War II. African American neighborhoods decreased in land value, experienced blight, and fell victim to urban renewal projects. FHA mortgage policies discriminated against potential African American homebuyers, a policy local white banks in Birmingham readily upheld. Gaston observed, “This resulted in Negroes living in sub-standard homes and paying exorbitant rates of interest, if any money at all was available to them at white lending institutions.”

In 1957 Gaston launched Citizens Federal Savings and Loan Association in response to the demands for and the federal and local obstacles to black homeownership. He could use his bank to support his own business expansion and take bolder actions in

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105 Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 117. Postwar black suburban homeownership in Birmingham more closely resembled that of Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh, among other industrial cities, than its southern counterparts that created room for black suburban housing on the outskirts of the city. See Wiese, A Place of Their Own. Racial violence over homeownership was not unique to Birmingham, at least in the 1940s and early 1950s. Neighborhoods in Detroit and Chicago erupted in violence and rioting in 1943 and 1951, respectively, as blacks moved into white areas. Cross-burnings and harassment greeted a black family who moved into Levittown, Pennsylvania, in 1957.


107 Gaston, Green Power, 112.
supporting the local civil rights struggles without fear of reprisal. Local white bankers opposed the creation of Citizens Federal, partly as a way to control the market for home mortgages but also to prevent Gaston and other middle-class blacks from challenging the racial status quo. Initially denied a charter, Gaston appealed to the Federal Home Loan Banking Board in Washington, DC. It agreed to approve the bank if Gaston and his fellow black investors could raise $350,000. Some of those investors, and the first members of the board of directors, included Arthur S. Shores, Oscar A. Adams Jr., businessmen John Drew, and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. They quickly raised the money to form Citizens Federal. Gaston supposedly told his associates at First National Bank of Birmingham, “I am free of you people.”

Citizens Federal provided home mortgages, capital loans, and economic security to hundreds, if not thousands, of African Americans for homes and churches. Its creation was a direct response to local and federal discrimination in mortgage lending. Gaston used these limits to strengthen black middle-class citizenship claims as well as the local economic power of black Birminghamians. Moreover, a black-owned and -operated bank would be less likely to cheat illiterate African Americans out of their deposits. Gaston claimed Citizens Federal also strengthened the leverage of prospective black homeowners, who could either conduct business with his bank or white banks. It was Gaston’s “special joy to drive through the streets of Birmingham and see the better homes being built and purchased by our people.” Black suburban neighborhoods in the city also became evidence of middle-class gains and a way “to improve the image of the

108 Ibid., 112-14.

[Birmingham] community” after it had gained notoriety as “Bombingham” in the 1950s.110

Although Gaston pledged that his various businesses served all African Americans across income, most of his business enterprises in fact served those who could afford professional services. Indeed, middle-class blacks in Birmingham represented a midcentury version of the “Talented Tenth,” and Gaston was the most preeminent of them all. Gaston’s business success brought him international stature, and he was an invited guest of the heads of states of Ghana and Liberia in the 1950s. He noticed the lack of a middle class in Liberia and the division between rich and poor, yet he did not make the connection that this economic caste system closely resembled Birmingham’s, either across race or within the black population.111 Rather, he saw Birmingham’s black middle-class—the customers he served—as evidence that Birmingham transcended such a strict class hierarchy.

Gaston lived a separate life from most black Birminghamians, but race still governed how he lived his life. His hometown denied him the first-class citizenship he received abroad. A lover of the downtown Chinese restaurant Joy Young’s, he ordered take-out and picked it up in the back alley because local segregation ordinances and customs denied him entrance and seating in the restaurant.112 In the mid-1950s, he bought a sprawling suburban home in the outskirts of Tarrant City, an industrial suburb to the northeast of downtown Birmingham. His race excluded him from living in the prestigious

110 Gaston, Green Power, 113.
111 Ibid., 104-10.
Over-the-Mountain suburbs. Jim Crow erased his class privilege and placed him on the same plane as the poorest African American, which undergirded his belief that there was a total entity called the “black community.”

Figure 2.4 In the spring of 1960s, A. G. Gaston opened the new Booker T. Washington Insurance Company building on Fifth Avenue and Seventeenth Street South. (Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library.)

Gaston’s empire of professional services dominated the black business district, which expanded to accommodate the growth of local black capitalism and consumerism. The renovation and construction of new buildings there contrasted sharply with the white central business district in which no new building had been erected since the 1920s. In 1954, Gaston opened the A. G. Gaston Motel to serve non-white visitors to Birmingham,

113 Ibid., 111.
but some whites stayed there as well. He also opened a Supper Club near the Motel, which protected out-of-town black guests and locals from having to endure the same treatment that he did at Joy Young’s. Both establishments were modern architectural structures with first-class amenities that projected images of progressive race relations and the strength of local black economic power. Although he was not immune or oblivious to Birmingham’s racial terrorism, Gaston desired these images because he believed in them. His buildings and business holdings were concrete examples of his lifetime work in serving others as well as his navigation of segregated markets, discriminatory policies, and racist attitudes.

Gaston shaped the local black freedom struggle through his commitment to building the foundations for economic self-determination and a black middle class. Segregated local markets and discriminatory federal policies allowed him to build the spaces and capital for African American citizenship claims that subverted and challenged the unequal racial status quo in Birmingham. By the early 1960s, Gaston employed over 500 African Americans whose collective payroll exceeded $1.5 million dollars, making the black business district buzz at a time when the central business district laid stagnant two blocks away. White civic elites took notice. In 1960, John E. Bryan, general manager of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, expressed great pride in the new building for the Booker T. Washington Insurance Company that represented Gaston’s accomplishments and contributions to Birmingham: “His financial investment in the area where his business is located is, perhaps, one of the finest examples of local citizens

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114 Gaston, Green Power, 110.

115 Ibid., 74-75, 119.
investing their financial successes in their own community. There is no limit to what the economic growth of Birmingham could be if we could get more citizens like Dr. Gaston who not only believes in Birmingham but is doing something about it.” Following his life-long philosophy of finding a need and filling it, Gaston’s contributions to local black capitalism symbolized the postwar emergence of African American economic power, consumerism, and suburban homeownership.

**Conclusion**

On the periphery of downtown Birmingham, businessman A. G. Gaston and university administrator Joseph F. Volker separately built the foundations for a “consumers’ republic” for middle-class blacks and whites. They offered professional services in short supply in Birmingham. Gaston became the king of the black business district by capitalizing on Birmingham’s strict adherence to racial segregation and discriminatory federal policies, while Volker oversaw the development of the University of Alabama Medical Center by tapping into the abundant federal programs that supported the expansion of higher education and healthcare services. Both men deftly navigated the opportunities and limits of Birmingham and postwar New Deal policies. In doing so, they constructed spaces of complex interaction, loose coalitions, and shared ideals for a black and white suburban middle class across metropolitan Birmingham.

Although part of the same professional service economy, Gaston and Volker operated under different constraints in Birmingham’s Jim Crow industrial order. As an African American multimillionaire, Gaston drew the attention of whites who either

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116 John E. Bryan to Emory O. Jackson, February 15, 1960, File 3.1, *Birmingham World* Correspondence Files, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.
celebrated him as proof that “separate-but-equal” worked or attempted to curb his access to first-class citizenship. His continued success challenged racial hierarchies in Birmingham for himself and other African Americans with middle-class aspirations. The politics of respectability gave them a platform to issue complaints and grievances to white civic elites. Yet, whites often used evidence of black consumerism and homeownership to support their claims of “separate but equal” and economic mobility for both races. The presidents of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Committee of 100 cited such gains to dispute the image of Birmingham as a “city of fear and hatred,” so described in a blistering New York Times article in 1960.117 These white civic elites implicitly were pointing to men such as A. G. Gaston, Oscar A. Adams Jr., and Dr. James T. Montgomery who symbolized a black middle class.

Volker, on the other hand, escaped intense scrutiny of his actions that challenged the racial and cultural orthodoxy of Birmingham at the time. He operated within one of the most powerful public institutions in the state—the University of Alabama. The nature of the services Volker provided also gave him and others room to bend the rules regarding segregation. Because healthcare was seen as a service rather than as a sector of the local economy, high-placed Birmingham officials and civic elites hardly contested African American presence within the Medical Center. Although poor African Americans living in the Southside neighborhood paid the price for the institution’s expansion, some blacks received benefits from the project in the 1950s and beyond. Black women such as Nellie Felder gained middle-class respectability while working there, while Adams and Montgomery established new networks of interaction and understanding with white racial

lifers at the Medical Center. Volker also created alternative spaces of thought and interaction within metropolitan Birmingham, from encouraging black-white clinical collaboration to establishing the Unitarian Universalist Church. Because of his race and ability to work behind the scenes, Volker avoided strict oversight in his efforts to build an alternative economic and racial order in postwar Birmingham.

Collectively, the efforts of Gaston and Volker would transform the economy of the “Magic City” and produce new avenues of racial mobility and biracial communication for black and white citizens. Professionals determined who had access to the wide variety of services in a “consumers’ republic,” and the postwar surge in consumerism ensured the continued growth of this new sector of Birmingham’s economy. Professional services offered citizens education, homeownership, and healthcare and generated the development of local capital in Birmingham. The achievements of Gaston and Volker created the economic foundations of middle-class political power. In the early 1960s, Birmingham’s new middle class would challenge industrial elites and the white working class for control of the city. Their campaign would answer a call to action first voiced by an outside critic over twenty years before: “If Birmingham, the city of perpetual promise, at last comes into its own…‘equal justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion’ might actually come to pass in a region where democracy never had a chance.”

118 Leighton, “City of Perpetual Promise.”
CHAPTER 3

“WHO SPEAKS FOR BIRMINGHAM”: CITIZENSHIP, MUNICIPAL REFORM, AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY, 1956-1965

By the late 1950s, Birmingham had gained national notoriety for its particularly virulent form of white supremacy and public displays of violence against African American property and bodies.¹ One neighborhood to the west of downtown was the site of over fifty racially motivated bombings throughout the 1950s, recasting the faded “Magic City” as the less distinguished “Bombingham.” In April 1956, Ku Klux Klan members dragged the singer Nat “King” Cole off the stage at the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium and beat him. Nearly eighteen months later, the Klan struck again, this time kidnapping Edward Aaron, an illiterate black veteran walking down a street. On the night of September 2, 1957, six white men pistol-whipped and then castrated Aaron with a dull razor blade, doused him with turpentine, and left him on the side of the road for dead. One week later, white segregationists and Klan members attacked the Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth and his wife Ruby in downtown as they attempted to enroll their children

in the all-white Phillips High School. Such atrocities placed Birmingham at the near center of mass media reporting on the civil rights movement.

In the spring of 1961, CBS News sent reporter Howard K. Smith to Birmingham to investigate local race relations in response to the previous year’s front-page article in the *New York Times* that declared “Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham.” As Smith and his producers were finalizing their report, downtown Birmingham burst into violence yet again when, on May 14, 1961, the Ku Klux Klan attacked white and black Freedom Riders intent on desegregating interstate travel. Pictures documenting the assault traveled around the world, causing civic and national leaders embarrassment over the discrepancy between the claim of American democracy and the existence of American apartheid in Birmingham. Smith’s report aired four days later. Shuttlesworth recounted his experiences and displayed his battle scars, while acclaimed journalist John Temple Graves of the *Birmingham Post-Herald* steadfastly defended segregation and denied the existence of violence. Throughout the documentary, a national audience heard two vastly

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4 Salisbury, “Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham.”

different accounts of life in Birmingham, one for whites and one for blacks. At the heart of the documentary was the rhetorical question, “Who Speaks for Birmingham?”

At the time, white extremists and black militants spoke the loudest. Historian Thomas J. Sugrue recently summarized the popular narrative of the southern civil rights movement, one Birmingham epitomizes, as a “morality play, one that pits the forces of good (nonviolent protestors) against evil (segregationist politicians, brutal sheriffs, and rednecks).” Poised between those opposing forces stood the white moderate as Martin Luther King Jr. observed in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Across the South, these “men of good will”—lawyers, businessmen, educators, and clergy—were members of local power structures who protected economic growth and suburban independence above all else. King indicted these white moderates for the slow pace of desegregation. It was the “shallow understanding of people of good will” more than the “absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will” that was “the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom.” The white moderate, King explained, “prefers a negative

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peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

Until a few months before King’s letter, Birmingham’s black and white “men of good will” lacked the political power to negotiate a negative or positive peace in the city. The growth of the University of Alabama Medical Center and local black capitalism had created the foundations of a professional service economy and new communication networks for affluent and middle-class whites and blacks. Their emergent economic power, however, had failed to translate into political power in Birmingham by the early 1960s. Between the summer of 1962 and the spring of 1963, white suburban businessmen sought to correct this power imbalance by launching a municipal reform campaign. They very loosely worked with black civic elites to overthrow the city commission and replace it with a strong-mayor council system. The culmination of their success in changing the political structure of Birmingham coincided with the infamous civil rights movement led by King that was subsequently followed by violent acts of white resistance. At the heart of the spring of 1963 conflict was the right to city as expressed by groups with different ideas of what Birmingham should be. As one reformer observed, the storm of protest brought the city “almost to the point of a civil war.”

10 King, “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

11 I use “suburban” to describe people (white, middle class, and professional) and places (spacious single-family homes, lush landscaping, and homogenous communities) that fit the traditional definition offered by Kenneth T. Jackson in Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). I also use “suburban” expansively to include blacks and whites who lived in suburban neighborhoods in the city as well as a political culture bounded by middle-class values. Lassiter, The Silent Majority; Andrew Wiese, A Place of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

12 In 1968 Henri Lefebvre explained the explosion of social protests across the world as the articulation of “the right to the city.” As an imagined space, the city acts as a public, which is a representation of a larger community that is uniquely shaped by identity, politics, and experience, and different ideas of the city exist at the same time and in competition with each other. The postwar city was also the most immediate
The dialogue over municipal reform began when there was an “absence of tension” in Birmingham between June 1961 and March 1963. During that time, no major violence over civil rights activism occurred in downtown. This brief cold war between black activists and white extremists followed five years of explosive confrontations that continually scared whites from working toward or accepting desegregation. White extremists took aim at bombing targets such as Temple Emanu-El in addition to black housing. In 1958, *TIME* magazine described white civic elites as living in “the silence of fear” when it identified Birmingham as “Integration’s Hottest Crucible.” Nevertheless, the continual fear white men of good will lived in finally pushed them to initiate dialogues with their black counterparts over how to end the constant terror in Birmingham.

White and black men of good will recognized that they belonged to a larger Birmingham community that transcended political borders, geography, and identity. An increasingly powerful coalition of whites and blacks, Christians and Jews, and conservatives and liberals across the metropolitan area banded together to create that


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14 “Integration’s Hottest Crucible.”
larger, more inclusive vision of Birmingham. Mervyn H. Sterne, a prominent Jewish investment banker, described Birmingham’s men of good will as civic leaders who had “the ability to sit together and discuss problems on which they may disagree in a reasonably objective way.” Internal disagreements existed, and resistance from black civil rights activists and white segregationists to elites’ vision continued. These black and white civic leaders, however, worked toward finding mutual agreements to better the city—their home—at a time when Birmingham nearly imploded. Changing the municipal government was an immediate necessity to gain what they separately wanted: the political power to accomplish economic growth, civil rights goals, and metropolitan consolidation. Their dialogue would fashion a moderate biracial politics for the post-civil rights and post-industrial era.

The Geography and Political Culture of Metropolitan Birmingham

Throughout the 1950s, the Birmingham metropolitan economy and landscape experienced growing pains. The city’s population grew by a paltry 4.6 percent throughout the decade, while the metropolitan area grew slightly more at 13.6 percent, with approximately 635,000 people living in Jefferson County by 1960 (See Appendix, Table 1). In the city and metropolitan area, respectively, African Americans represented 39.6 percent and 34.6 percent of the population, the highest proportion of all major southern cities (See Appendix, Table 2). Class also marked areas of black and white

15 Mervyn H. Sterne to Art Hanes, December 16, 1961, File 4.3.4.9, Mervyn H. Sterne Papers (hereafter cited as Sterne Papers), BPL-DAM.

Birmingham. An emergent professional service economy had created a dispersed and expanding suburban middle class at the same time industrial decline squeezed the urban black and white working class.

Laws, land use patterns, and violence shaped segregation in the city of Birmingham. After a federal circuit court overturned discriminatory local zoning laws in 1949, Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene T. “Bull” Connor attempted to pass a municipal ordinance that would make it illegal for blacks to buy homes for sale by whites and vice versa.17 Even without these formerly legal means, long-term land use patterns acted as substitutes to confine blacks to a few areas of the city. Industrial plants, mass transportation routes, and commercial districts helped to separate blacks and whites within an economic class, such as steel workers in Ensley. In reference to these laws and land use patterns, Emory O. Jackson of the *Birmingham World* declared that blacks were “bottled in the slums and restricted to the blighted areas.”18 The forthcoming interstate system threatened Jackson’s home in Enon Ridge, an historic neighborhood for the black middle class. When middle-class African Americans attempted to move across these legal and physical barriers, whites retaliated through violence, turning the North Smithfield neighborhood into “Dynamite Hill.”

“Red Mountain” separated the urban working class from the suburban affluent and middle class in the Birmingham metropolitan area. Birmingham sits at the bottom of the Appalachian valley and ridges range, and a tree-lined, red iron ore crest called Red Mountain separates urban Jones Valley from suburban Shades Valley. A large cast-iron

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18 Ibid., 382.
statue of Vulcan, god of iron, stands on top of Red Mountain overlooking Jones Valley and defining it as a place of production. Vulcan, as local mythology has it, represented the white industrial captains of Birmingham who lived in Shades Valley. One resident called Red Mountain an imaginary Maginot Line that separated working-class blacks and whites from affluent whites.19 While enjoying an overview of the city, Mrs. George Bridges remarked in 1961, “I haven’t heard of Negroes just spontaneously break into song in four, five years, and that’s bad, because they’re not happy and we’re not happy

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about it.” Red Mountain reinforced class privilege and a nascent racial innocence by protecting affluent white suburbanites, mainly women and children, from witnessing or experiencing industrial decline, rampant violence, and racial turmoil that occurred in the city.

Home to some of Birmingham’s most prominent white civic leaders and an expanding middle class, the three politically-independent “Over-the-Mountain” suburbs were more diverse than their caricature suggests. Established in 1926 through the incorporation of three separate communities, Homewood was a mishmash of architectural styles and peoples. One of the original communities, Rosedale, was home to a black middle class. It served as the site for one of the few black high schools in Jefferson County, which local civil rights leader Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth attended in the 1940s. Robert S. Jemison Jr. planned Mountain Brook during the 1920s in ways that avoided what were to him the aesthetically and racially undesirable results of Homewood. His designs for the suburb called for bigger homes with more acreage and stricter covenants. Located directly south down Red Mountain and east of Homewood, Mountain Brook was home to some of the city’s wealthiest and most prominent white families in Birmingham and their African American domestic servants. Mountain Brook and Homewood experienced growth rates of over 50 percent in the 1950s (See Appendix, Table 3). Powerful Jewish men such as department storeowner Isadore Pizitz and investment banker Mervyn H. Sterne lived in the area that became Vestavia Hills in 1951. That suburb’s incorporation drew more development for middle-class homes, attracting Dr. Joseph F. Volker and some of his colleagues at the University of Alabama Medical

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20 CBS News Reports, “Who Speaks for Birmingham?”
Center. The Jefferson County school system served all three politically independent
suburbs. Differences of race, religion, and class status shaped these developing areas, but
all of them shared the common identifier of “Over-the-Mountain.”

While Over-the-Mountain suburbanites crossed over Red Mountain to access
downtown Birmingham, black and white working-class residents of Jones Valley rarely
entered Shades Valley as anything but employees or bused school children. Class
antagonisms ran strong in 1950s Birmingham. Economically and socially, some members
of the urban white working class felt under assault. Unlike Over-the-Mountain
suburbanites, they could not buy out of the implications of desegregation. Neither could
whites living in the industrial suburbs of Bessemer, Fairfield, or Tarrant City. They did
not have the economic means to safeguard their homes or families from perceived threats
by moving to independent suburbs, sending their children to private schools, or using
recreational facilities at country clubs (See Appendix, Table 4).

The prospect of desegregation in public facilities coincided with economic
Restructuring, a double blow for the urban white working class. A long industrial
production slump in Birmingham led to mass lay-offs. The inability of civic leaders to
attract new industry after 1957 further constricted the blue-collar job market. By 1961,
unemployment hovered at 7 percent. African American miners were hit hard, with one

21 Individual conceptions of the city, based on where people go within it, also effect how they see other
social groups and spaces. See Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” and Lynch, Kevin Lynch, The Image

22 On white southerners’ response to civil rights, see Jason Sokol, There Goes My Everything: White

23 The last major industry to locate to Birmingham was in 1957. Eskew, But for Birmingham, 170-71.
out of every seven unemployed. Economic growth fueled by the University of Alabama Medical Center created professional, middle-class jobs or low-wage service ones. Its sister institution, the Extension Center, largely catered to professionals such as engineers or teachers in need of continuing education. Birmingham’s industrial working class was left out of an emerging professional service economy.

Working-class whites used their political power, however, to counter the effects of desegregation and increased civil rights activism. After the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, whites across the state of Alabama demanded political redress over the potential loss of their way of life. Politicians listened. In 1956, Alabama Lieutenant Governor John Patterson demanded that the state’s chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) hand over its membership list. When the group did not comply, state courts issued injunctions that crippled its ability to organize in Alabama. Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth launched the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) to fill the void. Shuttlesworth took his activism to the courts and streets in downtown Birmingham, and whites, some associated with the Ku Klux Klan, usually met him and others they deemed troublemakers with violence. In the fall of 1957, Connor returned to his post as Commissioner of Public Safety with the smallest margin of victory in his political career. Connor’s re-election resulted in a hardening of white resistance and a revival of Klan violence in Birmingham.

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25 In 1952, the Birmingham News broke the story of Connor’s affair with his secretary and published photos of the two entering a hotel room. The scandal sparked a corruption investigation into the Birmingham Police Department. Under these circumstances, Connor decided to opt out of the 1953 municipal election.
Connor was a master politician of industrial Birmingham. A former radio announcer for the Birmingham Barons baseball team, Connor’s gruff, bullhorn voice and idiosyncratic speech patterns reflected his working-class background. Connor never went to college, and he briefly worked security for the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel. These were concrete experiences of working-class life in Birmingham that he shared with a large portion of Birmingham residents. They differentiated him from his fellow commissioners, who were smoother and more polished. In 1960, U.S. Steel, Republic Steel, and other industrial companies employed 30 percent of the metropolitan area workforce (See Appendix, Tables 5 and 6).\textsuperscript{26} Their executives, Over-the-Mountain suburbanites who supported Connor, fiercely resisted unionization. Connor balanced these two components of an industrial economy: He spoke for the concerns of a threatened and exploited white working class by virulently upholding segregation while working with their industrial bosses to prevent further unionization, enforce racial hierarchies in labor, and keep the price of doing business in Birmingham to a minimum.\textsuperscript{27}

Although Connor and his supporters controlled Birmingham, they did not necessarily represent the views and opinions of all area or city residents. His 1957 return to office represented the political indecisiveness of urban whites over the issue of


desegregation. While some whites favored the incumbent and moderate Robert Lindbergh, others wanted Connor in office either to take a stronger stand against Shuttlesworth or to control the Klan. Of the 340,000 people who lived in the city, only half of the 80,000 who had the right to vote did so.\textsuperscript{28} Less than 12 percent of Birmingham residents typically decided the outcome of municipal elections. Connor’s wins in 1957 and 1961 were the results of electoral power concentrated in the hands of the few who increasingly spoke less for the overall metropolitan area and more for white working-class and industrial interests.

**In Search of Progress: Suburban Citizenship, Downtown Birmingham, and Challenges to an Industrial Jim Crow Political Order**

Led by prominent white civic leaders who lived in the Over-the-Mountain suburbs and the city’s affluent suburban neighborhoods, postwar annexation campaigns sought to make the city of Birmingham reflect its white middle-class population.\textsuperscript{29} White elites wanted to attract economic growth derived from the postwar boom in consumer and professional services. In 1949, suburban industrialists mounted a counter-campaign against annexation, and Connor publicly supported them. Potential revenues from an increased tax base would have funded a $29 million capital improvement campaign. Federal urban renewal programs for public projects and commercial developments required matching local funds.\textsuperscript{30} Ten years later, suburban annexationists bemoaned the

\textsuperscript{28} Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 11.

\textsuperscript{29} For a critical appraisal of Birmingham’s annexation campaigns, see Charles E. Connerly, “‘One Great City’ or Colonial Economy?: Explaining Birmingham’s Annexation Struggles, 1945-1990, *Journal of Urban History* 26, no. 1 (Nov. 1999).

loss of urban vitality. In the 1959 campaign, editor Vincent S. Townsend of the
"Birmingham News" pleaded, “If Birmingham, strangled as it is by smaller municipalities
on all sides, deteriorates into a second class city every suburb will suffer with it.”\textsuperscript{31}

Although the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, the Birmingham Downtown
Improvement Association, and the Birmingham Real Estate Board supported annexation,
Connor and the Committee of 100, a group of politically powerful suburban industrialists,
opposed it.\textsuperscript{32} Connor’s active stance against annexation, unheard of among municipal
leaders, was to the city’s detriment. By insisting Birmingham did not need Shades Valley,
he engaged in class politics that reinforced the supremacy of white working-class
political power.

Altogether, the two annexation drives revealed an increasing split among
Birmingham’s white suburban business leaders. Only one-fourth of the 700 self-
designated civic, economic, political, and religious leaders were born in Birmingham, and
a little over half were from Alabama. In a 1959 survey of Birmingham’s leadership class,
respondents listed their top four goals, in order, as personal success, corporate success,
personal power and prestige, and personal wealth. A personal commitment to
Birmingham and its prosperity and welfare came in last.\textsuperscript{33} One historian inferred that the
dearth of native leadership and the overwhelming taste for personal gain indicated that
Birmingham’s leaders were absentee landlords. Consequently, civic leaders would be

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 98-101.

\textsuperscript{33} Southern Institute of Management, Inc., “The Birmingham Metropolitan Audit: Preliminary Report,
1960,” Appendix 1, pg. 10, BPL-SHC.
“less concerned with Birmingham’s problems and their solutions.”\textsuperscript{34} A contemporary local critic called Birmingham “a farm club for Pittsburgh.”\textsuperscript{35}

In 1959, a small group of white civic leaders commissioned a management consulting firm to perform an audit of metropolitan Birmingham and recommend solutions to its problems.\textsuperscript{36} The authors of the audit found that the city still suffered from the “civic anemia” journalist Irving Beiman diagnosed a decade before.\textsuperscript{37} Based on a survey of nearly 14,000 citizens, the large majority of whom were middle class whites, the audit concluded Birmingham possessed “a chilling and inhibiting fear of failure” and “doubt of self.”\textsuperscript{38} The “people of Birmingham do not speak well of their city,” but “they feel, even though unconsciously, an embarrassing need” to defend it. Plagued by economic decline, racial turmoil, City Hall corruption, and downtown deterioration, there was “evidence of frustration” among white civic leaders whose confidence had been “replace[d]…with a virtual admission of futility, even inferiority.” Secretly, whites felt “afraid, without daring to admit…that [they] ha[ve] forfeited the title of the Magic


\textsuperscript{36} The white men who financed and coordinated the audit were some of Birmingham’s most powerful civic leaders. Sidney W. Smyer owned the Birmingham Realty Company, the predecessor of the Elyton Land Company that organized, divided, and sold plots of land Birmingham in the 1870s. The father of Joseph Forney Johnston Jr. was the former governor and United States Senator of Alabama who became president of Alabama National Bank and Sloss Iron and Steel Company. As one of the area’s leading lawyers, Forney served on multiple boards, including his father’s bank and Hayes Aircraft, the second largest employer in Birmingham. Lew Jeffers, president of Hayes, joined Johnston and Smyer and represented the city’s industrial interests. Self-made businessman James A. Head, owner of an office supply business, rounded out the audit’s Executive Committee.


City.” 39 The authors’ urged Birmingham’s leadership class to adopt a communal spirit: “The citizens of Birmingham [must] realize their community directly affects them and that their selfish interest is in most cases completely dependent on the thoroughness of Birmingham’s development and progress.” 40

The metropolitan audit came as a shock to the white civic leaders who had commissioned it primarily because they recently had taken proactive stands to combat “civic anemia.” In 1957, white suburban men who were invested in the professional service economy formed the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (BDIA). The BDIA promoted pro-growth policies, downtown revitalization, annexation, and an expressway to connect the Over-the-Mountain suburbs to downtown by cutting through Red Mountain. The civic organization represented the interests of an affluent white middle class who increasingly lost power to affect change in downtown as they moved to the suburbs. The 1957 election, in which Connor was re-elected, saw the three-man commission government fall to the hands of two arch segregationists whose political support came from the white working class resentful of token desegregation and Over-the-Mountain suburbanites. After the 1961 municipal election, all three commissioners took public stands against “daylight” citizens who lived Over-the-Mountain.

“Daylight” citizens, as Connor and his working-class supporters called them, were those white suburban businessmen who spent their daytime hours in Birmingham but left the city at night. Two-thirds of Over-the-Mountain suburbanites owned or worked in downtown banks, department stores, law firms, and other professional services such as

39 Ibid., 2, 4, 6. 
40 Ibid., 12.
architecture, engineering, and healthcare. Not all of them were divested from Birmingham, as the formation of the BDIA suggests. Original members of the BDIA had engaged in an active citizenship with the city of Birmingham by using philanthropy and civic organizations to expand its opportunities and improve its public welfare. To these white men, Red Mountain merely separated their suburban homes from their downtown offices, churches, temples, and civic spaces; it did not mark the political boundaries of their personal citizenship. These civically engaged white suburbanites gave back to the city that provided them with the opportunities to become affluent and powerful.

Realtor William P. Engel epitomized a “daylight” citizen who had close ties to the city. Born in 1895, Engel was a first-generation Jewish immigrant from modest rural beginnings, but he rose to powerful positions within the Birmingham business community. After a postwar industrial boom failed to materialize in Birmingham, Engel advocated a “hold that steel” policy as president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1950 to attract industrial companies that made consumer-end goods to the area. He often served as a liaison between leaders of the industrial and professional service economy, serving as the first president of the BDIA in 1957 and then two years later as president of the industrial Committee of 100. In his farewell address to the latter organization, he lambasted its members by telling them they had “too much labor trouble” exacerbated by “the violence and attempted mob rule” that began in 1956. He advised, “The three principals—management, labor, and the public—must approach the problem with a full spirit of cooperation and willingness to meet together on a reasonable give and take

41 The majority of business offices for heavy industrial corporations were located near plants outside the city limits of Birmingham. Some, such as Sloss-Sheffield, were inside municipal boundaries.
Engel, a powerful civic leader, increasingly questioned how the Birmingham business community and its government operated by the end of the decade. Engel’s leadership roles in Birmingham were expressions of his suburban citizenship to the city. He raised his family in the prestigious Highland Park suburban neighborhood before he moved to a Mountain Brook home one street away from Birmingham’s city limits sometime after World War II. He amassed substantial wealth based on real estate and finance in Birmingham, and he volunteered his time and donated money to support favored causes such as Zionism and healthcare. He explained his philosophy of philanthropy as an exchange between an individual citizen and his larger community: “I do not believe in a one way street. I believe if a community is acting well toward you and you’re making a living there and have a position in the community, then you owe a great deal back.” All of Engel’s philanthropic activities were a part of his “civic rent,” as he called it, and they informed his sense of ownership and belonging in the city of Birmingham.

Downtown held a special significance for suburbanites like Engel. As the Birmingham News declared, downtown “is the FOCAL POINT, the IMAGE, of our community,” but it was in a state of decline by the late 1950s. Sagging power lines, overflowing sewers, potholes, obnoxious electrical signs, the dark cast of smog, and the

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45 “CBD: Where Is It? What Are Its functions? Why Is It so Vital to YOU?” *Birmingham News* Special Section, August 20, 1961, Clipping Files-Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (hereafter cited as Clipping Files-BDIA), BPL-SHC.
absence of greenery marred the man-made beauty of downtown’s beaux-art and art-deco architecture built to resemble a “Magic City.” The News asked, “Who would want to establish a new business or industry in a city whose heart seemed to be failing? Who would want to move into such a city to make a home?” The BDIA adopted a new master plan paid for by member donations that the city needed to qualify for urban renewal funding. Announced in the News in a special insert in August 1961, the ambitious “Sky City” planned for open air plazas and aboveground walkways to invite pedestrian use in downtown. Nineteenth and Twentieth Streets North, which were the central arteries of the downtown central business district, also would be repaired. Despite the hype, city voters rejected financing for Sky City in a failed bond issue in the fall of 1961.

Faced with the rejection of the BDIA’s master plan for Birmingham, Engel took matters into his own hands. Birmingham was Engel’s home, despite his official residence outside of its political borders, and downtown Birmingham was a landscape on which he could write and invest his values. “The growth of any city rests upon the progress of its building,” he wrote, “and the progress of its building lies in the foresight of its men.” To revitalize downtown, Engel commissioned the seventeen-story Bank for Savings Building. Its completion in September 1962 marked the first addition to Birmingham’s skyline since the 1920s. The new downtown building represented Engel’s belief that he was a city builder leading Birmingham toward economic progress.

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46 “All Birmingham Should Join in Working for Downtown Progress,” Birmingham News, June 30, 1957, Clipping Files-BDIA.

Engel stood to make a sizable return on his economic investment through the attraction of new business, but he also understood his actions as his “civic rent” to Birmingham. Other white suburbanites paid theirs by directly advancing social justice causes. Engel’s friend James A. Head followed him as president of the Committee of 100. Like Engel, Head also had connections with leaders of industry and professional services. As owner of Alabama’s largest office supply store, Head worked with industrial companies, businesses, department stores, and libraries most of all. He supported the real estate magnate’s challenge of the industrial political economy and shared his belief that economic growth “can cure every other ill,” including racism and anti-Semitism.48

Historian and former municipal official Edward S. LaMonte recently noted that no other “high-profile [white] person in Birmingham…was as consistently outspoken” in advancing social justice causes as Head.49 Born in Ohio, Head moved with his widowed mother and brothers to Birmingham’s Norwood neighborhood, about three miles north of downtown, when he was ten. A devout Southern Baptist, Head accepted a more inclusive view of Christianity than most of his fellow southerners. In 1932, amid economic, religious, and racial turmoil in Birmingham, he co-founded the Alabama Chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.50 One peer dismissively described him as a “white Negro with red stripes” because of his long-standing commitment to human rights


50 Head remained on its board, ex-officio, until he died in December 2010.
issues that ran counter to the “southern way of life.” Head reflected in his twilight years that “the good Lord directed me” to work towards social justice causes.

Head served on nearly every biracial organization in Birmingham until 1956, when most of them disbanded under pressure from massive resistance campaigns. Head eagerly signed on as a member of the Alabama Advisory Committee of the United States Civil Rights Commission in 1960 and served for ten years. In that same year, he served as president of the industrial Committee of 100. Although shunned by some white peers because of his views and actions, his presidency gave the group a much-needed image makeover as one working toward rather than against change. While he served as its nominal leader, Head was an outspoken activist for civil rights and critical of his peers who remained silent on civil rights or supported Jim Crow. A year later, he toured the state of Alabama with the National Conference of Christians and Jews speaking out against segregation. The fact that Head owned his own business, which by the early 1960s largely supplied libraries across the state’s growing secondary and higher education systems, provided him with some protection against reprisals and the security to speak his mind freely.

There were costs for suburban white men who challenged Birmingham’s Jim Crow industrial order. Charles F. Zukoski Jr., a former four-term mayor of Mountain Brook, lost his job with the prestigious First National Bank of Birmingham after critically

51 Marshall Haynes to James A. Head, ca. February 11, 1961, File 1.24, Head Papers. Haynes was the first chairman of the BDIA’s Young Business Men’s Committee, further indicating that this division within the white power structure also existed within the organizations that attempted to reform Birmingham.

questioning Gov. John Patterson’s commitment to segregation in the spring of 1962. He had been with the bank since he first arrived in Birmingham nearly forty years before. During the 1950s, Zukoski voiced his concerns over the state of Birmingham affairs in his weekly editorials under the pen name “Button Gwinnett” in the Shades Valley Sun, a newspaper distributed across the Over-the-Mountain suburbs. Although he was a vocal racial liberal involved in many civic organizations dedicated to civil rights and social welfare, Zukoski needed the cover of anonymity to protect his position with the bank and Birmingham society. That he was fired after a long history of expressing opposing views, in private and in public, spoke to the heightened tensions that silenced any voice of opposition or difference in early 1960s Birmingham. Feeling the sting of rejection, Zukoski largely focused his attention away from Birmingham toward global health and family planning issues after 1962.

Another white suburbanite stung by the backlash against him was the outspoken young lawyer Charles A. Morgan Jr. who fled Birmingham in disgust to work for the American Civil Liberties Union in 1964. Unlike Head, Morgan increasingly refused to collaborate with those with whom he disagreed on social justice issues. He also criticized fellow white suburbanites who viewed progress solely through an economic lens. At the dedication of Engel’s Bank for Savings building, Morgan critically reflected on the absurdity of a few thousand spectators standing on the broken streets of downtown Birmingham and sweating on a hot, humid summer night. “They were that hungry for a sign of progress,” he commented; “the frustrations of decades were wrapped in the hope

that those lights represented a ‘new era’ for Birmingham.” The young lawyer knew the
city needed more than new lights and economic development to address structural
inequality and overthrow Jim Crow.

Morgan had moved to Birmingham as a teenager and attended the University of
Alabama, establishing connections there that he later would use in the early 1960s to
challenge the distribution of political power in Alabama. He worked with other lawyers
in the Young Men’s Business Club, a junior, more progressive alternative to the
Chamber, to reapportion the state legislature and advocate for stronger social services.

Crossing Red Mountain every workday from his Mountain Brook home to his downtown
office, Morgan donated legal services to poor African Americans accused of crimes. He
often made home visits to clients who lived in neighborhoods outside of the “civilization”
of downtown and the Over-the-Mountain suburbs. Every time he entered these
neighborhoods, Morgan confronted “the other side of [his] own li[fe] that [he] had never
known existed.” Morgan’s experiences with the underbelly of Jim Crow led him to fight
for social justice in a city that he called “home.” “For some,” he noted, “there was no
peace in our valley.” Along with pro bono cases for poor African Americans, Morgan
also represented Rev. Robert Hughes in a slander suit filed by the city commission in
1960. Hughes was the New York Times informant who dared to speak the truth about
Birmingham.

54 Morgan, A Time To Speak, 4.
55 Ibid., 47.
56 Morgan repeatedly asserted that Birmingham was his home throughout his autobiography. Ibid., 46, 164, 167.
Morgan, Head, and Engel used the economic, judicial, and civic spaces of downtown Birmingham to express citizenship claims and by extension to shape Birmingham’s larger political culture according to their values and priorities. These men did not act alone. Rather, they represented the varied approaches reform-minded suburban white men took to advance economic growth and social justice. Downtown was still the center of civic, cultural, and economic life in Birmingham, but these men no longer had the political power to direct the city. As suburban citizens, they could not vote. They tried to influence Birmingham politics through downtown-based civic associations, but they often compromised with conservative businessmen and paid some personal costs. Stymied by the Jim Crow industrial order, this minority of white suburbanites remained committed to fashioning progress for Birmingham.

**The Political Power of Consumer Citizenship: Lucius H. Pitts and Miles College**

White suburban citizenship claims on Birmingham coincided with new developments in the local and national civil rights struggles. In February 1960, four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College attempted to desegregate the lunch counter at a Woolworth’s department store in Greensboro, North Carolina. In a few days, over 300 African Americans participated in the “sit-in.” Local white businessmen quickly acquiesced to black students’ demands to desegregate semi-public facilities in an effort to save their city from a negative image and possible economic decline that had greeted cities of resistance such as Birmingham.  

57 The sit-ins reflected a new strategy for direct action that called attention to inequities through

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57 For a classic account of the sit-ins, its context, and its aftermath, see Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*. 

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consumerism and hit white suburban businessmen in their pocketbooks. As one Birmingham civil rights leader later explained, “How come a Negro can spend $100 on a dress and not a dime on a Coke?” African American students in Birmingham soon adopted this form of protest that emphasized consumer citizenship.

This shift in tactics also represented a change in local civil rights leadership. In the summer of 1961, the Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth left the city for a pastorship in Cincinnati. Shuttlesworth’s confrontational style of activism often incited retaliatory physical violence from whites. Temperatures also rose in Birmingham in response to the spring 1961 riot that greeted Freedom Riders seeking to desegregate interstate travel. It was precisely this perpetual violence that led Ruby Shuttlesworth to urge her husband to leave Birmingham. Shuttlesworth frequently returned to the city and retained his presidency of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). When he moved to Cincinnati, white leaders labeled him an “outside agitator” with the same denial of citizenship that Connor and the commission used against suburban citizens. Shuttlesworth’s departure, however, gave other black leaders more room to assert their own ideas over how to achieve racial progress.

One such person was Lucius H. Pitts, who arrived from Atlanta to become the new president of the historically black Miles College in the fall of 1961. Miles had recently lost its accreditation due to an insufficient library, lack of faculty with Ph.D.s,

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58 For a broad view of black consumerism that calls attention to collective buying power as a political tool, see Robert E. Weems Jr., *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).


60 Another reason for Shuttlesworth’s departure included the hesitancy of Bethel Baptist Church members to link the pulpit to civil rights activism. Manis, *Fire You Can’t Put Out*, 255-61.
and capital deficiencies. Charged with restoring its accreditation, Pitts deftly used the media and existing networks of biracial communication to address Birmingham’s separate and unequal society. Pitts strove to convince Birmingham’s philanthropic class that, despite their financial contributions, African American education was woefully unequal. He remarked to CBS News in the “Who Speaks for Birmingham?” report, “The inadequacy in Negro education would astound the average white man if he knew it.”

Pitts had an unshakable faith in education, and he dedicated his career to not only explaining the costs of segregation to whites but also to African Americans themselves. Pitts described how segregation negatively affected him: “It’s a painful thing to be…an educated Negro in the South, with a family, to try to decide how much you tell your child and how you interpret the situation to him, so that he doesn’t develop the kind of hatred and fear and conditioning that I’ve had to strive to get rid of.”

Born in rural Georgia and educated at Paine College and Fisk University, Pitts worked hard to earn self-dignity and middle-class respectability in the Jim Crow South. Similar to the white civic elite philosophy of “civic rent,” Pitts gave back to the communities that provided him with opportunities. Although an ordained minister in the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, Pitts was primarily a teacher and principal in grammar schools. In Atlanta, he was the executive secretary of the Georgia Teachers and Education Association, vice-president of the Georgia NAACP, and president of the Georgia Council of Human Relations. Perhaps because of his existing service commitments, he turned down an invitation to join the leadership ranks of the Southern

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61 CBS News Reports, “Who Speaks for Birmingham?”

62 Ibid.
Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Initially, Pitts thought his move to Birmingham and new role as college president signaled a change in his activism. “I thought my involvement in civil rights was over,” he confessed. The urgency of the situation in Birmingham soon changed that.\footnote{John Egerton, \textit{A Mind to Stay Here: Profiles from the South} (New York: Macmillian, 1970), 109, File 9.24, Operation New Birmingham Papers, BPL-DAM.}

In the winter of 1961, a group of students at Miles College began planning a “selective buying campaign” to force owners and managers of downtown department stores to desegregate services and hire blacks.\footnote{The state of Alabama outlawed boycotts.} Frank Dukes, president of the Miles student body, led the Anti-Injustice Committee. Raised in Birmingham, Dukes was a thirty-three-year-old Korean War veteran who had worked in an automobile factory in Detroit. After being laid off at a Dodge plant, he returned to his hometown, “hustling in the pool room, shooting craps,” he recalled, before he enrolled at Miles in 1959. Dukes had experienced a different world in Detroit. “Oh it beat Birmingham in a thousand different ways in terms of discrimination and segregation,” he remembered. Detroit “was not a panacea,” but Dukes’ experience there taught him to want, expect, and demand more back home.\footnote{Rev. Frank L. Dukes, interview by Horace Huntley, May 11, 1995, transcript, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Online Resource Gallery, http://www.bcri.org/resource_gallery/interview_segments/index.htm. On life in Detroit for postwar black autoworkers, see Thomas J. Sugrue, \textit{Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), chaps. 4, 5, and 6; Heather Ann Thompson, \textit{Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).}

Pitts quickly became aware of Dukes’ plans for a boycott, and he called him and leaders of the Anti-Injustice Committee into his office to advise them on how to protest.
He even contributed his name to the Anti-Injustice Committee literature, emphasizing his full support of his students rather than attempting to hide behind them. As Dukes recalled, “He wanted us to do it in organized fashion and to do it in such a way that hopefully, we wouldn’t get killed off the bat.” The year before, Pitts had encouraged his students to use CBS News to air their complaints rather than demonstrate in downtown after the Freedom Rider riot because “a march would be murder at that tense time.” Pitts believed the group benefitted from a lack of “associat[ion] with any of the existing Negro organizations” such as Shuttlesworth’s ACMHR. White businessmen might be more willing to negotiate with the students. The president’s penchant for biracial communication also led to an initial delay of the boycott, originally slated for January but began in March of 1962.

Pitts continued to arrange a series of meetings between Miles students, black leaders, and white businessmen before and during the selective buying campaign.

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66 Glenn T. Eskew asserts that Pitts wanted to dissuade Dukes from launching the protest because he feared violence and disliked militancy. Dukes states otherwise. Admittedly, Dukes’ recollections are swayed by Pitts’ untimely death in 1974. However, Dukes and his fellow students had no previous experience in mass protest while Pitts was well versed based on his experiences in Atlanta. Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 195; Dukes, interview.

67 Dukes, interview.


70 A complete list of who attended these meetings is unknown. White leaders gave Pitts the names of ten black leaders who they were willing to meet with, but after protest from black leaders, white leaders quickly apologized for their unintended insult in their renewed spirit of biracial communication. Ironically, the leaders whites named were also the men Pitts corralled together with one obvious exception: Bernice C. Johnson, a long standing voting rights activist who whites named. Richard Arrington, who was a member of the Miles College faculty, remembers a few of the men in this group: entrepreneur A. G. Gaston, physician James T. Montgomery, the Revs. Edward Gardner, Abraham L. Woods II, and Calvin Woods (all associated with the ACMHR), Peter A. Hall and Arthur S. Shores (local attorneys), and W. C. Patton (educator and former president of the local NAACP branch). Other black leaders involved in these negotiations included John Drew (a local insurance magnate), W. E. Shortridge (funeral home director and treasurer of the ACMHR), Ernest W. Taggart (dentist and former officer of the local NAACP branch), and
Dukes was initially hesitant about meeting with white businessmen because he knew that they “didn’t have any power to change anything in Birmingham because they lived in Mountain Brook.” Pitts, however, realized the necessity of forging new dialogues with businessmen already shamed by the 1961 Freedom Rider riot episode. He had established relationships with white liberals, such as Head, Zukoski, and Joseph F. Volker, and he had joined regional biracial organizations such as the Alabama Council on Human Rights and the Alabama Advisory Committee of the US Civil Rights Commission. Although they often disagreed, Pitts and Dukes worked together to create a potent mix of Pitts’ older form of black activism that focused on legal battles and biracial communication with Dukes’ new model based on direct action and consumer citizenship.

The students’ protest was a form of black activism that economically-minded white elites understood best. The selective-buying campaign changed the look of downtown by encouraging African Americans to disappear from it, thus protesting segregation through absenteeism. Instead of insisting on their right to be served, these students expressed their rights as consumers by boycotting stores that discriminated against them. African Americans spent $4 million a week in downtown department and

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71 Dukes, interview.

retail stores, the absence of which cut deeply into 15 percent profit margins. The recent pull of white suburban shoppers to Eastwood Mall located near Mountain Brook amplified the loss of blacks to downtown’s daily population. Dukes and other students walked in front of targeted stores with placards, further keeping suburbanites away, and Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene T. “Bull” Connor ordered their arrests. Downtown became “lily white” and less alive in the absence of black shoppers. When asked about the campaign, an anonymous retailer retorted, “Don't ask us how effective it is. Just tell us how the hell to get out of it.”

Although the campaign failed in its efforts to desegregate downtown stores, it succeeded in pushing Miles College and Pitts into the national spotlight and onto the local political stage. The boycott, which dwindled by May, was not much of a story but the city commission’s response to it was. Led by Connor, the city slashed its contribution to the county food surplus program, which largely benefitted poor African Americans, and prevented Miles from conducting a fundraiser for its library. Pitts held a press conference exposing these actions, which provoked a national response and further shamed downtown’s daylight citizens in their failure to lead Birmingham and embrace the times. Large and small donations flooded Miles; Pitts later remarked, “We’ve gotten a great deal of good will from the outside.” Miles’ reaccreditation process benefitted from the boycott and his deft use of media.


74 Dukes, interview.


76 Egerton, “A Mind to Stay Here,” 111.
Pitts also emerged as a new black leader in Birmingham by harnessing collective consumer power into political power. By largely removing themselves from the retaliatory violence that greeted black activism in Birmingham, Miles students challenged popular conceptions that linked the two. Pitts believed it “was a beautiful way to register protest” because it prevented African Americans from being “beaten up and arrested” *en masse.* The college president spoke in a measured, moderate tone of voice that conveyed common sense to local actors and the wide national audiences of CBS News, *Newsweek,* and the *New York Times.* By playing the role of a black moderate in a local drama broadcast to a national audience, Pitts became a leader both white and black Birminghamians called on during the early 1960s. The relatively quiet tenor in the spring of 1962 enabled Pitts and others to politicize black economic power in ways downtown’s daylight citizens understood and did not fear.

**A Metropolitan Coalition: *Reynolds v. Sims* and the Beginning of Municipal Reform**

In mid-August 1962, a golden opportunity for reform presented itself to area citizens of Birmingham who had grown tired and frustrated with the city commission led by Eugene T. “Bull” Connor. The Alabama Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in *Reynolds v. Sims,* a case led by Birmingham attorneys, including Charles A. Morgan Jr., George “Peaches” Taylor, and David J. Vann, who sought to reapportion the state legislature. Postwar demographic movements rewrote the political landscape of the South as rural folk moved to cities, and new suburbs sprouted up around major cities to house

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77 “Boycott in Birmingham.”
these and other migrants.\textsuperscript{78} Birmingham was no exception, but the distribution of political power did not follow Alabama’s demographic realignment. Although 1 out of 5 Alabamians lived in the Birmingham metropolitan area by 1960, citizens there elected only 6 percent of state legislators. Designed by the 1901 state constitution, legislative districts reflected the political economy, racial order, and spatial configuration of late-nineteenth-century Alabama.\textsuperscript{79} The court called for a special election on August 28 to select new representatives on a conditional basis.

Legislative reapportionment was the first step toward consolidating metropolitan Birmingham, a goal that became more urgent after the failed annexation campaign of 1959. The Alabama constitution discouraged the emergence of urban political power by adopting strict annexation laws. It supported a landowning class composed of white elites and industrial corporations that gained power through tax codes, the disfranchisement of black residents, and legislative malapportionment. The state legislature also discouraged annexation by drawing school districts as coterminous with municipal boundaries, which established the legal justification for all-white suburban cities roughly around the same time public schools emerged in the state.\textsuperscript{80} Suburban housing developed outside central cities because most municipal borders, limited by annexation laws, became fixed at the turn of the century. Independent, all-white suburbs had been a three-generation phenomenon in Birmingham.

\textsuperscript{78} Migration to southern cities is an understudied aspect of the New South, but the theme has been explored in postwar African American migration to non-Southern cities. See Louis M. Kyriakoudis, \textit{The Social Origins of the Urban South: Race, Gender, and Migration in Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003).

\textsuperscript{79} J. Wayne Flynt, \textit{Alabama in the Twentieth Century} (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 87.

\textsuperscript{80} Connerly, “‘One Great City’ or Colonial Economy?” 49-51.
An astute analyst of Alabama politics, Vann recognized that the spatial separation of blacks and whites who shared similar views prevented the emergence of new political coalitions. Using the returns of the May 1962 gubernatorial primary, Vann deduced that there existed “an unconscious coalition of voters” in Jefferson County located in its middle-class white suburbs and black voting districts in the city.\(^{81}\) The plurality of Jefferson County voters chose moderate Ryan DeGraffenreid over George C. Wallace and “Bull” Connor in the Democratic primary. Vann believed an extremist minority ruled municipal politics to the detriment of area citizens. As Morgan, one of Vann’s colleagues in the *Reynolds* case, explained, “The city was locked into a box—it’s every avenue of escape blocked by the vote of a majority of its white population.”\(^{82}\) Reapportionment would help Vann and other annexation advocates in reshaping the political boundaries of Birmingham around this moderate metropolitan coalition.

Vann himself was a recent convert to racial equality. Like Morgan, Vann had arrived in Birmingham as a teenager from rural Lee County in southeast Alabama. His family cook moved with him to Birmingham because, he recalled, “she was just part of our family.”\(^{83}\) Raised in “a completely segregated society,” Vann “never questioned” a separate-but-equal society until he was an adult. In 1954, he clerked for US Supreme Court Justice and Alabama native Hugo Black during the *Brown* decision, an experience that redirected the young lawyer toward seeking the legal end of segregation. Once he


\(^{82}\) Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 100.

\(^{83}\) David J. Vann, interview by James Baggett, January 8, 1996, File 1.8, transcript, “One Great City” Oral Interview Collection 1995, BPL-DAM.
was back in Birmingham, Vann reconnected with Morgan in various civic and professional organizations. A deep rivalry had existed between them while both were students at the University of Alabama. Vann, the more politically ambitious of the two, often sought compromise in his efforts to reform Birmingham.

Vann believed that the shift in metropolitan electoral behavior indicated that white voters had grown increasingly wary of the costs of segregation. One cost was the closing of city parks at the beginning of 1962. The actions of the city commission dumbfounded suburban citizens. In a full-page advertisement in the *Birmingham News*, over 1,200 white civic leaders who lived in the city’s prestigious suburban neighborhoods and the Over-the-Mountain suburbs boldly declared their citizenship to Birmingham in “a plea for courage and common sense”:

> Some of us live within the Birmingham City Limits. Some of us live in adjacent municipalities but within metropolitan Birmingham….All of us depend for our livelihood and happiness upon the well-being of Birmingham. All of us are devoted to the city and to its future. We believe it entitles us to be heard. All of us have in the past given of our time, our energy, and our financial resources to the betterment of Birmingham.⁹⁴

In a public hearing on the issue of closed parks, Connor rejected these suburbanites’ claims of citizenship. He lambasted some of the most respected and progressive white civic leaders by asking them, “How many of you live in Birmingham?”⁹⁵ Vann retorted that he lived in the city’s Crestview neighborhood, which abutted Mountain Brook. One commission supporter said, “Nearly all of them live outside of our city limits and should not have a say-so as to how our city should be run,”

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while another one called open-park advocates “the Mt. Brook ruling clique and money-mob.”\textsuperscript{86} Clearly, citizenship in Connor’s Birmingham was not based on a personal connection. The artificial lines creating the city and its political borders cut through and eviscerated suburbanites’ claims of civic identity. Connor and his supporters narrowly defined citizenship in Birmingham through residence and whiteness.

Upon hearing the decision in the \textit{Reynolds} case to hold a special election, Vann telephoned one of the most powerful men in Birmingham and asked, “How would you feel about getting up an election to throw ‘Bull’ Connor out of office?”\textsuperscript{87} On the other end of the line was Sidney W. Smyer, a suburban resident, former president of the Chamber of Commerce, and president of the Birmingham Realty Company that owned “basically the entire downtown.”\textsuperscript{88} A little over a year before, Smyer was in Japan promoting Birmingham to International Rotarians when news of the Freedom Rider riot spread. He was embarrassed, which was not a familiar feeling for him. White businessmen and reformers had discussed changing Birmingham’s form of government as early as 1953, and the state legislature passed the legislation to do so by 1955. Reformers dropped the issue because moderate Robert Lindburgh briefly replaced Connor as Commissioner of Public Safety from 1953 to 1957. The issue had become moribund over the years until increased civil rights activism and Klan violence forced the discussion among white elites.

\textsuperscript{86} Thornton, \textit{Dividing Lines}, 257, 256.

\textsuperscript{87} Vann, speech, “Birmingham 1963-1978: Civil Rights and Social Change.”

A few months before the Freedom Rider riot occurred, however, Smyer, acting as the president of the Chamber of Commerce, had commissioned the Birmingham Bar Association to study the possibility of changing the form of municipal government. The Bar recommended a strong mayor-council form because the commission, Vann summarized, “lack[ed] the wholesome system of checks and balances between co-equal and independent branches of government.” As the Bar committee worked on its findings, which were not released to the public until June 1962, William Engel notified his reform-minded colleagues of his brother’s role in successfully overturning the Tammany Hall machine in New York City in the fall of 1961. Engel implied that this feat could be accomplished in Birmingham, too. To the more conservative Engel and Smyer, the problem in Birmingham was not segregation but how Connor implemented it through state-sanctioned violence and his political machine that neglected their rights. With all of the defeats and abuses suffered by many under the commission form of government, white suburbanites took the initiative to overthrow it.

**Birmingham Citizens for Progress**

During a special election held on August 28, 1962, volunteers for the “Birmingham Citizens for Progress” (BCP) campaign placed petitions in white sections of the city and gathered over 10,000 signatures to hold a referendum on municipal government. The campaign served as a vehicle for white suburbanites to claim their

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91 Eskew and Thornton cite different numbers of petition signatories, either 11,000 or 10,000, respectively. Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 182; Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 272.
rights to the city. Sidney W. Smyer envisioned a group led by twenty-five men (always men) “everyone would agree were first-class citizen leaders who everyone would follow, that had no blemishes, and were free from criticism” to lead the campaign.92 These men, most of whom who lived in the city’s suburban neighborhoods, refused to lend their names to the cause. One of Vann’s colleagues explained their refusal: “Some, having business now pending before the city, indicated their inability to be forward in the matter.”93 Lacking the participation of elites, 500 white “anybodies” who lived in the city led the committee. This change in composition allowed Vann to characterize the BCP as a grassroots citizen organization.94

Connor and his supporters called the BCP for what it was—a campaign by Over-the-Mountain suburbanites to control the city. Indeed, white suburban men financed almost the entire campaign.95 The BCP’s Steering Committee, however, was led by a diverse array of white men employed in the professional services or union labor. All of them lived in the city rather than the suburbs, which would combat charges of the group being led by “outside agitators” from Over-the-Mountain. No administrator from the Medical Center joined the campaign, perhaps for fear of political risks to local and state budget allocations. Roy R. Kracke Jr., a dentist and son of the first dean of the Medical College, was the exception. He “nearly cut [him]self shaving” when Smyer personally


95 I deduced suburban residency based on donation letters with listed home addresses, donor’s assertion of it, and civic organization membership lists with home addresses found in various record collections. Donation letters are in File 25.24 and File 25.41, Vann Papers. For specific donation amounts, see “List of Donors to Change Government,” ca. October 1962, File 25.24, Vann Papers.
called him about joining the Steering Committee. The titular head of the entire campaign was William A. Jenkins, a housepainter and union leader who volunteered when no one else would.

It was no secret that the referendum to change the form of government also had implications on the maintenance of segregation, but not a single African American served on the committee or worked publicly on the campaign. As one consultant warned, “The race problem has relation to whatever we shall recommend and what the people will accept.” The public absence of African Americans in the BCP was a strategic decision by Vann and Smyer to smooth tensions over the issue of desegregation. Indeed, they had decided not to place the petition outside voting places used by African Americans.

Conner called the referendum “just another ‘nigger’ petition.” His charge referenced Frank Dukes’ appearance at a public meeting at City Hall to present a petition signed by 833 African Americans on the very same day as the special election. Dukes articulated two points that white suburbanites also used when he demanded the repeal of municipal ordinances enforcing segregation. During the spring 1962 boycott, merchants continually insisted they could not desegregate because of existing laws. Thus, Dukes asked Connor “to give freedom to our downtown merchants,” underscoring the fact that they did not have political power in the city.


97 Morgan, A Time to Speak, 152.


99 Vann, speech, “Program for Progress.”

100 Thornton, Dividing Lines, 274.
his residency because Miles was located in the industrial suburb of Fairfield. Dukes asserted his civic identity: “I have a stake in Birmingham. I have family here. I love Birmingham just as you do.”

Dukes’ actions were independent of the BCP, but they reflected the common ground that some blacks and suburban whites held regarding citizenship, segregation, and municipal reform at this time in Birmingham. Dukes had negotiated with Smyer during the student boycott a few months before, and Pitts had been talking with the realtor on a continuing basis since the Freedom Rider riot. Indeed, after that infamous event highlighted the loss of control and leadership in Birmingham, Smyer set up a committee of black and white civic elites. This new group, Smyer explained, “won’t be a group set up just to pass resolutions either….We intend to seek a solution to this problem and are prepared to back it up financially.” Since the spring of 1961, ongoing formal and informal talks had emerged between whites and blacks as they responded to various civil rights crises and discussed municipal reform.

Biracial communication, albeit from behind closed doors, was essential to the entire Birmingham Citizens for Progress campaign. Vann and Smyer relied on Lucius Pitts and entrepreneur A. G. Gaston to advance the cause of municipal reform among African Americans. A planned ACMHR-SCLC demonstration for late September threatened to disrupt the relative peace of the spring and summer of 1962. The resulting demonstrations and probable violence would do irreparable harm to the referendum election scheduled for November, which white suburban moderates and their black allies

101 McWhorter, Carry Me Home, 286-87.

102 Eskew, But for Birmingham, 174.
hoped would shift political power in their favor. Pitts and Gaston insisted that white leaders such as Vann and Smyer meet with Shuttlesworth directly to delay the demonstration. “We’re just businessmen,” Gaston reportedly told Smyer, “and we don’t have no say. You got to talk to Fred….He’s the man with the folks.” Pitts also used his Atlanta connections to secure a delay in the demonstrations. Shuttlesworth, planning the protest from Cincinnati, agreed to the request.

Black elites organized a supportive campaign through the Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council (JCPDC), a voting rights organization. By the 1960s, the JCPDC had become an effective minority power of 8,000 registered black voters. The Birmingham Citizens for Progress campaign could not be successful without them. ACMHR stalwarts, however, criticized the at-large seats in the mayor-council plan as a way to avoid black council members. This idea was neither the intent of the BCP nor the Birmingham Bar Association that made the recommendation. Initially, the Bar committee investigated changing state law to allow for district seats because they would be attractive to suburbanites who favored annexation. Smyer also told committee members that he would not “object to a negro councilman, if elected and serving his ward only.” The lack of time and immediacy of reform prevented those involved with the Bar committee or the BCP from lobbying the legislature to change the Mayor-Council

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104 Minutes of the US Civil Rights Commission, Alabama Advisory Committee, September 20, 1962, File 1.9, Head Papers.


106 Abe Berkowitz, “Report to the Birmingham Bar Association City Government Committee.”
Act. The lack of district seats eventually would strengthen the formation of a moderate coalition between black and white civic elites for nearly twenty-five years.

Although municipal reform needed African American electoral support, the voters that could sway the election were ambivalent working-class and middle-class whites. While they may not have supported Connor, they most likely supported segregation.  

The BCP committee worked to convince both urban and suburban white voters of the undemocratic nature of the commission and the representative promise of the mayor-council system. The committee promoted the petition and forthcoming municipal referendum as “an historic demonstration of Democracy in Action” in which “a free people stood together in unity, demanding an opportunity to speak for themselves.”

The now “free” people of Birmingham “had won the right to vote.”

The subsequent actions of the city commission further proved the democratic promise of municipal reform. Connor declared that he would fire municipal employees who signed the petition. One of them, “being not free,” asked to be removed from it, while another explained, “I signed feeling that I was exercising my rights in behalf of betterment for our city.”

When Arthur Hanes, president of the city commission,

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107 Eskew and Thornton also disagree over who the “margin of victory” voters were. Although both see the number of black voters as critical to the referendum campaign, Eskew’s electoral analysis of voting locations reveals slim majorities for the mayor-council existed in working-class white neighborhoods. Thornton’s analysis of the park closing suggests that these white voters chose public services such as parks and schools over the maintenance of segregation, but he deems the black voting pool as the “margin of victory” for the campaign. Eskew, But for Birmingham, 187-88; Thornton, Dividing Lines, 257-58, 271-73.


announced in late September that he would refuse to call the election, he bolstered reformers’ claims that the commission denied Birmingham citizens a voice in their government. One suburban insurance executive sent a donation and remarked that “the need and reason for the change became quite apparent” after Hanes “reneged on his promise to call an election so that the people of Birmingham could express their wishes.” By making the right to vote in a representative democracy a central feature of the campaign, Vann and others legitimized long-standing black and white demands that citizens had the right to vote regardless of race or residence in Birmingham.

In a thirty-minute special television broadcast, Vann reminded the people of Birmingham that the right to vote on their municipal government “has been denied [to] you by every trick in the book for over seven years.” He urged citizens “in the privacy of your voting booth” to “look through all the bitter smoke screen[s] that selfish interests have thrown around you.” Vann advised viewers, “If you want your city to grow, the secret of that growth and the first step to be taken in bringing about that growth is the revitalization of our city’s leadership and the establishment of more representative government.” Such representative government included “the outlying white communities.” In reference to the physical as well as imagined Red Mountain, Vann

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informed viewers, “There seems to be a wall built around this city, a wall that has been
built brick by brick by our Commission. Let’s tear down that wall that they have built.”¹¹³

On November 8, 1962, more than 37,000 voters went to the polls, and by a
margin of 2,401 votes, the strong mayor-council form of government won. “That’s
democracy,” Connor dismissively commented.¹¹⁴ The turnout was nearly the same as that
which had elected the commissioner a year before. The Birmingham Citizens for
Progress committee declared victory, noting without irony that the election was “one of
the most dramatic demonstrations of democracy that any of us will ever witness.”¹¹⁵ The
battle for control over municipal government would continue as citizens voted for their
new mayor and city council over the next five months.

**Birmingham’s “Civil War”: Protests, Terrorism, and the Second Referendum**

Citizens decisively elected the conservative Albert B. Boutwell over the extremist
Eugene T. “Bull” Connor as their new mayor on April 2, 1963.¹¹⁶ On the very next day,
Revs. Fred L. Shuttlesworth and Martin Luther King Jr. launched their delayed
demonstrations against downtown department stores to end segregation in Birmingham.
Miles College students, who had led the economic boycott the spring before, were shut

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¹¹³ Ibid. Historians, most notably Glenn Eskew and J. Mills Thornton, have charged the Birmingham
Citizens for Progress committee with playing the race card, usually in response to Connor. But in reviewing
Vann’s files on the referendum campaign, including press releases and news clippings, this broadcast was
the first time race was mentioned.

¹¹⁴ Birmingham voters were given three municipal forms to choose from: strong mayor-council (19,317
votes), commission (16,916), and manager-council (942). Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 188.

Vann Papers.

¹¹⁶ In one of the largest voter turnouts, Boutwell won 57.7 percent (29,630) of the vote compared to
out of discussions among civil rights leaders, but President Lucius H. Pitts, entrepreneur A. G. Gaston, and Dr. James T. Montgomery, soon to be the first black faculty member of the Medical Center, worked with Shuttlesworth and King. Connor refused to leave his commission post even though Boutwell assumed his mayoral office on April 10. This situation created a political vacuum in Birmingham in which Shuttlesworth and King led protests to force change in a city without a clear or legitimate form of government. The Alabama Supreme Court would not rule in favor of the strong mayor-council form until May 17.

Those blacks and whites who worked with the Birmingham Citizens for Progress campaign negotiated with Shuttlesworth and King, the respective leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Although scholars have often singled out Vann for his racial liberalism, they have shown less understanding for other white or black civic elites involved. Sidney W. Smyer’s interactions with King and Shuttlesworth violated his personal beliefs in the racial inferiority of African Americans and the natural order of segregation. Confiding to Mayor Boutwell over his new role as civil rights negotiator, Smyer wrote, “I take no pleasure in so doing, but I feel that I owe a duty to my community and to [my] company.” Smyer most likely believed municipal reform had the potential to lessen the occurrence of civil rights protests, white supremacist violence, and the need for his involvement in such affairs. The protests betrayed that belief. Rev.


Abraham L. Woods II, who would become the local president of the SCLC in the 1970s, remembered, “This old white man…broke down and cried” at one point during negotiations.¹¹⁹ For Smyer, as well as white department store owners S. Roper Dial, Emil Hess, and Louis Pizitz, their efforts to reform the government came at personal and financial costs.

Entrepreneur A. G. Gaston cited the lack of a legitimate government as his central reason for opposing the ACMHR-SCLC campaign, but he supported its goals. He financially contributed to the campaign, even bailing King out of jail before the civil rights leader was ready to leave. He also gave in-kind contributions, such as distributing paper fans bearing the likeness of Booker T. Washington to those who attended mass meetings at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.¹²⁰ Gaston corralled the traditional black civic elite behind the campaign after inviting King to talk with them about strategies, which would change throughout the campaign’s duration. Because of these changes and the power vacuum in Birmingham, Gaston and others pressured King and Shuttlesworth to end the demonstrations. Louis J. Willie, an executive at Gaston’s Citizens Federal Bank who worked with the leaders, explained, “We learned that this was the very kind of environment that the SCLC wanted, and the SCLC at that time was not really interested in Birmingham; they were interested in a mass movement for the whole South and the country.” He added further, “We had to live here, and we just thought it was stupid to

¹¹⁹ Eskew, But for Birmingham, 388, n. 53.

come in and start a mass movement when there was nobody that you could address your wrongs to and nobody who could redress the wrongs if they wanted to.”

On May 11 after six weeks of protest, Birmingham’s black and white reformers reached an agreement with Shuttlesworth and King, but a night of violence undermined their peace. Within hours of announcing an accord to desegregate downtown stores and establish a biracial citizens committee, members of the Ku Klux Klan bombed the Gaston Hotel, the headquarters of the local movement, and the home of Rev. A. D. King, Martin’s brother and local pastor of the First Baptist Church of Ensley. An angry crowd developed outside the bombed King home. Meanwhile, poor and working-class black males who did not participate in the protests launched a full-scale riot and tore through a 28-block area in downtown.

This riot of protest from marginalized African Americans was the first urban riot of the decade and the first of several that summer in Birmingham in response to the terrorist actions of white extremists. Blacks attacked white police and firemen with bottles, rocks, and knives, stabbing one officer nearly to death. Unruly members of the police force led by Connor assaulted innocent black bystanders, further enraging the rioters. The mob blocked emergency response vehicles, looted and set fire to white-owned businesses, and harassed people, particularly whites, passing through the area. Rioters threw stones and shouted slurs at civil rights leaders who pleaded with them to return to their homes. Willie, who witnessed the riot from the bombed-out motel, feared for his wife’s safety as they tried to make their way home around three o’clock in the

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122 The Klan’s target, Martin Luther King Jr., had already left Birmingham. Eskew, But for Birmingham, 300-06; Thornton, Dividing Lines, 331-32.
morning. “Take that scarf and cover your hair….lie down on the seat” he recalled instructing her; “You look too white.”

By Sunday dawn, the eight-hour riot finally fizzled out.

After Boutwell legally assumed office and Connor left his in mid-May, white segregationists launched a wave of terrorist actions that continually threatened the tenuous peace stitched together in the immediate aftermath of the civil rights protests and riot. Operating under the newly formed National States’ Rights Party (NSRP), white segregationists organized a boycott of downtown department stores that had desegregated in compliance with new municipal ordinances passed on July 23. The NSRP flooded downtown with leaflets proclaiming “Birmingham Betrayed!” that reminded shoppers to “never forget these stores which joined hands with Martin Luther King to destroy our way of life.”

The writers for the Birmingham Daily Bulletin, the NSRP newsheet, directly tied desegregation to the change in government. “Remember,” they advised readers, “white people can regain control of this city. The next election is two years away.”

The NSRP and its various supporters, however, had little patience with the democratic process. On August 15, NSRP members threw a tear bomb into Loveman’s department store, compelling black and white shoppers to stumble blindly out of the store.

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123 Willie, interview.


and downtown. In response to the US District Court order to desegregate Birmingham city schools, the Klan bombed the home of civil rights attorney Arthur S. Shores. Rioting by several thousand African Americans followed. Two weeks later at the beginning of the school year, white groups protested the new racial order. Mobs of angry white parents lined up outside Graymont Elementary School in the long-contested Smithfield neighborhood and downtown’s Ramsey High School near the Medical Center. The clashes between protestors, police, and African Americans turned violent on September 4. Later that night, the Klan bombed Shores’ home for the second time and also took aim at Gaston’s residence. A far more dangerous riot broke out among frustrated African Americans. Gov. George C. Wallace sent state troopers to enforce martial law. This deadly pattern—white protest followed by Klan violence and black rioting over the issues of desegregation and the change in government—culminated in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963.

The severity of the church bombing forced Boutwell to call his Community Affairs Committee (CAC), a group of 185 white and 27 black civic leaders established as a concession to King and Shuttlesworth. One of its primary tasks was to set up a desegregation plan for the city. This group last convened at their organizing meeting on July 16 when Klan and NSRP members had harassed them upon entering the Municipal Auditorium. Boutwell appointed an executive committee among civic elites later that summer, but no African American, including Gaston, served on it. The subcommittees on school desegregation, economic development, public welfare, and suburban annexation,

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among other issues, remained dormant without a mayoral order to meet until that fall. National disgrace finally moved Boutwell and other white civic elites to act. When the unwieldy CAC finally submitted its expansive recommendations to desegregate Birmingham in April 1964, Boutwell flatly rejected them in a twelve-page speech. The role of municipal government, he scolded black and white business leaders, “is to provide the public services of this city and to protect its security of person and property…not to prescribe its morals or prompt its conscience.”

Despite Boutwell’s rejection of racial reform, white segregationists attempted to bring back the commission form of government in the summer and fall of 1964. Led by Raymond Rowell, a member of the Birmingham Planning Commission, white segregationists charged that the new city government followed the orders of Over-the-Mountain civic elites. Rowell declared that the “spare time” Birmingham City Council placed “an oppressive city sales tax on the working class…to save the over the mountain rich from the Occupational Tax.” The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also angered Rowell and his followers. By October, over 21,000 urban white voters signed a petition to hold another referendum, more than twice the number needed and 2,000 more than the number of votes for the commission in the referendum two years before. The potential of returning Birmingham to the very recent past prompted various downtown civic associations to launch the “Citizens to Keep Progress” campaign.

128 Albert B. Boutwell, “Statement to All Members of Executive Committee of the CAC Group Relations Committee and City Council Committee on Community Relations,” April 27, 1964, File 25.49, Vann Papers.


On December 1, 1964, nearly 47 percent of an estimated 90,000 registered voters went to the polls a second time to choose their form of government in two years. The strong mayor-council system won in a landslide, receiving 63 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{131} Boutwell understood it as “an expression of public approval of our administration,” but one writer to the \textit{Birmingham News} dismissed his claim.\textsuperscript{132} Although Paul Vizzino voted for the mayor-council system, he was “far from pleased” with elected officials but believed the time to give his “stamp of approval” was the upcoming 1965 city council election.\textsuperscript{133} The defeat of the Rowell referendum ultimately was the result of the huge increase in the urban black electorate, rising from 8,000 in the early 1960s to over 14,000 by the end of 1964.\textsuperscript{134} The substantial increase in black voters resulted from federal registrars sent to Birmingham after the 1963 demonstrations. These African Americans most certainly did not support Boutwell, and their electoral numbers could have accounted for more than half of the mayor-council vote.

The lingering illegitimacy of the mayor-council form of government also hurt annexation advocates who wanted to unite the city and its suburbs. Political leaders in the city, Homewood, and Mountain Brook discussed the possibility of merger in which the smaller suburbs would have a voice in the newly expanded Birmingham.\textsuperscript{135} They signed a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131} “Certificate of Votes Cast, and Results at the Special Municipal Election for the City of Birmingham, Alabama, Held on December 1, 1964,” ca. December 1, 1964, File 7.37, Boutwell Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Albert B. Boutwell to William S. Anderson, December 4, 1964, File 7.36, Boutwell Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Paul Vizzino, letter to the editor, \textit{Birmingham News}, December 18, 1964.
\item \textsuperscript{134} The number of the black voters varies from source to source. J. Mills Thornton uses 14,000 voters in 1964, whereas Glenn Eskew cites 22,000 by 1965. Eskew, \textit{But for Birmingham}, 328; Thornton, \textit{Dividing Lines}, 369.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Merger is a partnership between cities. In annexation, smaller cities and areas are swallowed whole by the city.
\end{itemize}
contract that stipulated the Jefferson County legislative delegation, which had ten more members after *Reynolds v. Sims*, would lobby the state legislature to amend annexation and consolidation laws in favor of suburbanites. The delegation would push for district seats in the mayor-council form of government and revise laws that made school districts coterminous with municipal boundaries. With this agreement, the two premier Over-the-Mountain suburbs would have a direct say in municipal government and maintain their recently-developed independent school systems if annexation was successful.\(^{136}\)

Continuing violence in the city and Rowell’s protests of city government, however, made many Over-the-Mountain suburbanites wary of becoming a part of Birmingham. In the summer of 1964, Homewood voters decided to join the city, only to have their decision overruled by the Alabama Supreme Court based on a technicality, while Mountain Brook voters narrowly rejected merger.\(^{137}\)

**Conclusion**

Although the goals of the Birmingham Citizens for Progress committee remained unfinished by the end of 1964, political power to shape the city transferred from the white working class to the middle class through municipal reform. Throughout the long campaign, white suburbanites used the rhetoric of democracy to assert their rights to the city, and in the process, legitimized others’ rights. They used their civic engagement and

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\(^{136}\) See personal letters, meeting minutes of the Birmingham City Council Merger Committee, and Birmingham City Council resolutions in File 7.22, George S. Seibels Papers, BPL-DAM.

\(^{137}\) Homewood residents were deeply divided over suburban annexation, with just two votes separating annexation advocates and opponents. At the same time, Mountain Brook voters defeated annexation by roughly 250 votes, but annexation supporters grew by 10 percent between the 1959 and 1964 annexation elections, suggesting that the change in government was a significant factor. See Connerly, “‘One Great City’ or Colonial Economy?” 56; Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 97-99.
interest in social welfare issues and economic growth as evidence of their citizenship in Birmingham. In doing so, they formed new alliances bounded by a pro-growth and inclusive vision of progress that hinged on biracial communication and moderate politics. By orchestrating the change in municipal government, white suburbanites ensured that their rights to the city would reign supreme in a new political order.

Although elite biracial communication began in crisis and remained uneven, it symbolically announced the beginning of a “new” Birmingham. Through their communication with white suburbanites, black elites solidified their positions as civic leaders of a black and white Birmingham. Even though the biracial committee organized by Mayor Albert Boutwell was ineffective, Miles College President Lucius H. Pitts and entrepreneur A. G. Gaston continued to talk with whites in various settings. The more militant Shuttlesworth and his ACMHR supporters consistently contested the leadership of black and white men of good will. The demonstrations in the spring of 1963, however, did not have the local impact Shuttlesworth envisioned. Historian J. Mills Thornton III noted, “The share of power that Birmingham blacks did eventually achieve flowed in the end, therefore, not to the heirs of Shuttlesworth, but largely to the heirs of…Lucius Pitts.”

Middle-class and affluent blacks who collaborated with their white counterparts in municipal reform won their rights to the city.

Indeed, moderate African American leaders who worked in the shadows of municipal reform would become central players in constructing the white suburban vision of a “new” Birmingham. With annexation unsuccessful, suburban whites needed black allies who lived in the city. The long process of reform, which would continue under the

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leadership of Operation New Birmingham (formerly the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association), also personally changed these white suburban businessmen. For older men like Sidney W. Smyer and William P. Engel, both of whom would retire from civic affairs by the late 1960s, municipal reform forced them to accept the end of a social order they always had known. Unlike James A. Head, David J. Vann, or Charles A. Morgan Jr., these older white civic leaders did not believe in racial equality, but the civil rights crises and municipal reform campaigns led them to acknowledge the political power and rights of African Americans. White suburbanites recognized that their right to shape the city of Birmingham could not be accomplished in any other way. By casting off segregation and realigning the city with American conceptions of democracy and progress, Birmingham’s men of good will began to fashion a post-industrial, post-civil rights political culture.

This process would continue as it started, behind closed doors and among private citizens of Birmingham. When Boutwell abdicated the municipal government from the moral responsibility to lead Birmingham, he forced the decisions over the city’s future into the hands of the biracial civic elite. The avenues of political representation and biracial communication expanded through the informal networks connecting white suburban businessmen, white racial liberals, and black elites. Civic leaders working through Operation New Birmingham as well as the University of Alabama Medical Center would lobby for an activist local government to accomplish economic growth, racial progress, and the long-held desire to consolidate the city with its suburbs.
CHAPTER 4

“DESIGN FOR PROGRESS”: URBAN RENEWAL AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION, 1963-1970

In late June 1966, fifty white and black civic leaders flew to New York City to tell the “Birmingham story” to a group of journalists and media representatives at the Plaza Hotel. Organized as Operation New Birmingham (ONB), participants included Mayor Albert B. Boutwell and nine city council members, Birmingham News editor Vincent S. Townsend, and entrepreneur A. G. Gaston. ONB represented a privileged white and black middle class across metropolitan Birmingham who worked in government, business, education, healthcare, and the media. Some of the white men, standing among few women and black men, were behind the recent change in government and the civil rights negotiations. Speaking first, Boutwell loftily began, “The story you are about to hear…includes a story of change—change in government—change in public attitudes—change in people’s attitudes toward their responsibilities…. We regard this as a solid expression of the sentiment of Birmians [sic] to build a better city for a better urban life.”

Beginning in the summer of 1962, the key leaders of this biracial coalition promised area citizens a more representative government, economic growth, and better race relations. This agenda was a lot to deliver. Described by Townsend as the “new

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hands, brains, and hearts in civic enterprise,” the founders of ONB were in New York City to promote their public-private partnership to build a new Birmingham. A “spirit of cooperation,” Townsend claimed, prevailed between private citizens and public officials.\textsuperscript{2} Through implementing biracial communication, economic development strategies, and urban renewal programs, these civic elites redesigned the spaces of downtown around their collective vision of a new Birmingham. Federal laws and funding policies also pushed these elites to adopt new modes of action and behavior. Non-discrimination mandates and representative citizens committees pushed open the doors of public institutions and political power, providing both black and white civic elites with the progress they claimed existed in Birmingham. “We haven’t created Utopia since 1963,” Townsend bluntly confessed, but he believed his team had a lot to brag about to national media outlets that had shamed and continued to misunderstand Birmingham.\textsuperscript{3}

Through their designs for progress, key players in the metropolitan coalition combated contemporary problems of urban America with an awareness of the shifting economic and political terrain of Birmingham. Public disorder, decaying downtowns, financial instability, population decline, suburban growth, and political challenges by conservative whites and militant blacks ruptured the economic, political, and social systems of urban life in major industrial cities.\textsuperscript{4} The bloody events of Birmingham’s

\textsuperscript{2} Vincent S. Townsend, speech, June 22, 1966, transcript, “Plaza Hotel Press Conference.”

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

summer of terror in 1963 had pointed a glaring spotlight on these various symptoms of an urban crisis, but the media and the nation at the time saw them only through the lens of civil rights. “It’s no fun to be a sociological test case city,” Townsend confessed to media representatives, but “what happened in Birmingham can happen in any community. It just happened to us in 1963.”\(^5\) The civil rights demonstrations and violent acts of white resistance, however, were not the major events that prompted change for this biracial metropolitan coalition. The municipal reform campaign that culminated in the spring of 1963 ushered black and white civic elites to political power, gave them hope that they could unite the city with its suburbs, and signaled the emergence of a professional service economy.

In late 1964, Boutwell declared Birmingham’s commitment to “eradicat[e] those conditions of poverty” that “chain this great city and its people to an economy based largely on heavy industry and common labor.”\(^6\) The institution most responsible for achieving Boutwell’s goal was the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). UAB was not yet a university when ONB leaders visited New York, but it was metropolitan Birmingham’s third largest employer. Its expansion by forty-five blocks, which speakers frequently mentioned during the press conference, promised a new healthcare and knowledge economy in which to secure the development of a post-1965 Birmingham.

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Top administrator Dr. Joseph F. Volker challenged the economic, social, and political order of Birmingham in his crusade to build a full-fledged urban university, but he was notably absent from ONB’s New York City press conference announcing such transformations. Volker disdained the “publicity of announcement” and preferred to work behind-the-scenes in accomplishing substantial change. Although he strategically delayed the total desegregation of UAB, his reputation as a racial liberal as well as his past measures of inclusion helped him win the support of black civic elites in building his urban university.

Although initially limited in their power, black civic elites used the symbolic politics of representation to make Birmingham more open and responsive to African Americans. Biracial communication transformed from a public relations stunt, as evidenced by the New York press conference, to meaningful dialogues over urban problems that primarily affected black Birminghamians. The establishment of ONB’s Community Affairs Committee in 1969 was in direct response to black elite demands for the presence of African Americans in high-profile positions in municipal and county government. This committee provided black civic elites and white suburbanites with an informal mechanism to shape local public policy. Entrepreneur A. G. Gaston and Miles College President Lucius H. Pitts also worked to sustain the strength of community-building institutions among African Americans during an era of desegregation and urban renewal.

Birmingham’s civic leaders worked privately to build new structures of economic and political power in an era “in which the legal foundations of racism in America were

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7 Gloria Goldstein, interview by Virginia Fisher, August 31, 1990, File 2.41, transcript, UAB Archives Oral History Interview Collection, UAB Archives (hereafter cited as UAB Oral History).
destroyed.” In 1965 social activist Bayard Rustin commented that the classical phase of the civil rights movement “hit Jim Crow where it was most anachronistic, dispensable, and vulnerable”—in the realms of consumerism and public services. It was now time to turn from “race relations to economic relations” and “from protest to politics” to address systematic inequality. Progressive coalitions based on “common political objectives” must be formed, Rustin advised, and compromises must be made. “The difference between expediency and morality in politics is the difference between selling out a principle and making smaller concessions to win larger ones,” he wrote. In Birmingham, the power to exact those concessions to build progress continually shifted among public officials, white suburbanites, and black civic elites. Seeking compromise and negotiation as winning strategies, their moderate approach to economic, political, and social change resulted from their personal beliefs, federal policy, and the ongoing transformation of metropolitan Birmingham.

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Three days after Mayor Albert B. Boutwell took office on April 10, 1963, Dr. Joseph F. Volker wrote to the new mayor, “The destiny of Birmingham and the University of Alabama Medical Center is intimately related and…we cannot hope to achieve our major objectives unless the government of the community understands our aspirations and limitations.”¹⁰ As the executive vice-president of the University of Alabama, Birmingham Affairs, Volker wanted to transform the city by turning the Southside neighborhood into the site of Birmingham’s only four-year public university with world-class healthcare services. An amateur historian interested in the intertwined development of higher education and cities, Volker was convinced that urban universities could be instruments of economic, social, and political change.¹¹ His vision called for an active partnership with the city of Birmingham in determining the expanded campus’ needs such as engineering, waste management, and zoning. In return, the university could provide academic policy studies on housing, police-community relations, political governance, and other urban issues. A growing university also provided education, employment opportunities, and public services to many different sectors of the Birmingham community such as working-class white adults, African Americans, and suburban white youth. Volker’s urban university could tie all the elements of a divided Birmingham community together to a specific place and institution within the city.


Volker first needed to create momentum in the University of Alabama, Birmingham Affairs to force the creation of an autonomous university. His vision of an urban university, however, was hard to reconcile with the look of a ramshackle campus sitting in the middle of a black slum. Poor African Americans, vacant lots, and decaying warehouses surrounded the campus, which flooded with drain water on rainy days. Some parts of the Medical Center were falling apart, such as Hillman Hospital’s emergency clinic described as a “facility literally built for the horse and buggy traffic of 1904.” Crimes, especially personal assaults and robberies, around the Medical Center were increasing; “a nurse or anyone else would be in danger of being molested,” a concerned councilman wrote. University lobbyist Jefferson Bennett thought Volker “sounded just as crazy as hell” when he spoke about an urban university. Volker used his public office to remove some of the key obstacles preventing the fulfillment of his vision. His three main concerns were solving the indigent care fiscal crisis, acquiring more land, and desegregating the University of Alabama, Birmingham Affairs without risking funding.

White Birminghamsians largely regarded the Medical Center with disfavor because of its twenty-year association with serving overwhelmingly black indigent patients. Councilman George S. Seibels summarized the attitudes of some whites when he described indigent care as a service for “so many thousands of good-for-nothings.” For nearly twenty years, Medical Center physicians and dentists contractually provided...

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12 Matthew F. McNulty to Thomas E. Bradford, Marcy 23, 1964, File 9.37, George S. Seibels Papers (hereafter cited as Seibels Papers), BPL-DAM.


in-patient indigent care for residents of Jefferson County, including the city of Birmingham. They continually lobbied local officials for increases in the per-diem rate, coverage for out-patient care, or other in-kind support. Indigent care was a financial black hole, siphoning off an estimated $5 million in Medical Center operating revenue from 1952 to 1962. By 1963, all out-patient clinics operated on a four-day week schedule because of deficient funds. Even though 75 percent of indigents lived in Birmingham, the city had never contributed to this vital public service. As one administrator wrote, “It is not fair for the Medical Center to finance the operation of the emergency clinic and outpatient care out of teaching funds when the City of Birmingham pays nothing.”

Duard LeGrand, editor of the *Birmingham Post Herald*, believed that Volker and other Medical Center administrators always “complain[ed] about not getting enough money.”

Volker believed that the emergency clinic, which was where indigents usually sought treatment first, was a public service akin to the police or fire departments. Working with both the Birmingham Police Department and Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, the clinic served as first-response to any life-threatening illness or accident. During Birmingham’s summer of terror in 1963, healthcare workers tended to riot

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16 Matthew F. McNulty Jr. to Tram Sessions, June 25, 1963, File 38.21, Administrative Files of Dean of School of Medicine and Medical College of Alabama, S. Richardson Hill, 1962-1968, UAB Archives (hereafter cited as Hill-Dean Papers).


19 Fred Woodress to George Seibels, March 12, 1964, File 38.21, Hill-Dean Papers.

20 Fred Woodress to Joseph Volker, December 23, 1966, File 3A.2, Office of Public Relations and Marketing, Director’s Files, UAB Archives.

21 Fred Woodress to George Seibels, March 12, 1964, File 38.21, Hill-Dean Papers.

victims, shoppers fleeing from tear gas, and those who were maimed or killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing. African Americans also routinely sought treatment from the wounds and lacerations inflicted on them by white police officers.\footnote{McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 152.}

Volker lobbied Mayor Boutwell in July 1963 to secure funds for a new facility. “If and when new sources of revenue become available,” Volker proposed to the mayor, “consideration should be given to allocating funds for” the emergency clinic.\footnote{Joseph F. Volker to Albert Boutwell, July 16, 1963, File 13.42, Boutwell Papers.}

At the beginning of 1964, members of the Birmingham City Council debated the merits of a sales or occupational tax to raise revenues for public services and infrastructure projects. The former hit consumers and merchants while the latter affected everyone who worked within the city limits. As a suburban citizen of Birmingham, Volker wrote to the council in favor of the occupational tax. He cited the “major contribution” Medical Center “faculty and staff would make” to the city’s tax rolls. It would “relieve the present fiscal crisis of the community” and meet “pressing community problems” such as indigent care.\footnote{Joseph F. Volker, “Statement to City Council,” ca. November 1963 and January 1964, File 22.10, Office of the Vice-President of Health Affairs for the University of Alabama, Joseph F. Volker, 1962-1966 (hereafter cited as Volker-VPHA), UAB Archives.}

Volker privately confided to a friend, “As a citizen of the Birmingham area I am hopeful that a program of taxation can be developed that will permit the city-county community to meet this civic responsibility.”\footnote{Joseph F. Volker to Thomas E. Bradford, February 7, 1964, File 22.81, Volker-VPHA.}

Volker favored the occupational tax because it would raise more money than a sales tax and would force suburban citizens to contribute to city services such as his beloved university.

Volker, who led the city’s third largest employer in the early 1960s, stood alone
among Birmingham’s top business leaders in supporting the occupational tax. A group of thirty employers, including the presidents of the two largest banks, insurance companies, and industrial plants, favored the sales tax. They called the city council to the Relay House, a private downtown club, to browbeat them into submission. With few exceptions, these men had sat out of the reform campaigns. The majority were invested in the industrial economy, employed tens of thousands of workers, and collectively shared in the profits of $2 billion in industrial resources. The occupational tax, they argued, would hinder merger with Over-the-Mountain suburbs by forcing companies to relocate from the city to the suburbs. Their argument, however, neglected the fact that Birmingham’s biggest industrial employers were already outside its city limits.\textsuperscript{27}

Nina Miglionico, the only woman on the council, believed an occupational tax would alleviate the problem Birmingham “faced with fewer and fewer residents paying for necessary municipal and metropolitan services enjoyed by all area citizens” due to the “continuing trend” of “suburban living.” A sales tax, she countered to the Relay House businessmen, “would isolate the city and make merger an absolute impossibility.” No other municipality in Jefferson County had one. Retail sales in downtown had been in decline for over a decade and showed no signs of reversing, which made the sales tax a losing proposition. Moreover, the tax would pay for public improvements sponsored by ONB for white suburbanites, but the financial burden to pay for those projects would fall on urban residents. If the council reversed its decision, Miglionico wrote, it would “return the Commission form of government to power.”\textsuperscript{28} Miglionico, however, was outvoted.

\textsuperscript{27} Mervyn H. Sterne to Edward Norton, February 13, 1964, File 2.1.1.20, Mervyn H. Sterne Papers (hereafter cited as Sterne Papers), BPL-DAM.

\textsuperscript{28} Nina Miglionico to Mervyn H. Sterne, February 17, 1964, File 2.1.1.20, Sterne Papers.
The council reversed its decision in favor of Birmingham’s top employers.

After the debate over taxation, the council allocated $300,000 annually to cover emergency clinic expenses at the Medical Center. Volker and others also convinced the Jefferson County commission to increase its per diem rate for indigent care, which it financed through a new tobacco and liquor tax. Matthew McNulty, director of University of Alabama Hospitals and Clinics, explained the tax’s approval as the result of disenfranchisement: “The indigent patients didn’t vote, so you don’t put the tax on the people who voted.”

The passage of the Title XIX of the Social Security Act of 1965 also provided Volker with fiscal relief. Medicaid and Medicare would serve low-income persons and the elderly, the two populations that typically qualified as indigent. Jefferson County quickly announced plans to build a new charity hospital to use these new federal funding sources for healthcare and end its contract with the Medical Center upon completion. Although new funding policies eased the financial burden of providing indigent care, the Medical Center continued this service and incurred subsequent losses until October 1972.

The removal of indigent care from the Medical Center simultaneously occurred with its expansion by forty-five blocks into Southside, a black residential neighborhood. Almost all of the previously acquired land was developed, mostly with parking lots, and there was no remaining land available for a growing Extension Center or new facilities for medical research. Land was absolutely necessary to Volker’s vision of an urban university. When Volker and other administrators finalized their expansion plans, Boutwell announced their project to Birmingham citizens by proclaiming the Medical

Center as “our gift not only to the human needs and aspirations…but equally to our city and nation and all the free world.”

According to federal policy, the city needed a representative citizens committee to approve urban renewal projects. Boutwell agonized over the selection of his committee. He wanted to “make other appointments which would increase the effectiveness of it.”

In December 1964, Boutwell appointed a group of 134 citizens to serve on the Mayor’s Committee for the Medical Center. Twenty-nine citizens lived in Mountain Brook, which spoke to some civic elites’ ongoing quest to bring the suburbs into the city. Industrialists, who still exerted powerful influence in the city, represented the largest group on the committee. According to Jack McSpadden, Boutwell’s friend and mentor, he was disturbed by the inclusion of liberal and left-wing groups in the committee and was concerned about the city’s need to maintain the status quo. 

Figure 4.1 The campus of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1966. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

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committee. Boutwell, however, only selected four black men and nine white women.\textsuperscript{32} Wilbur Hollins, a black real estate executive Boutwell recently appointed to the Birmingham Planning Board, was a strategic choice. Hollins, the \textit{New York Times} reported, “would be valuable” because of “proposed urban renewal projects involving hundreds of acres owned by Negroes.”\textsuperscript{33}

The Mayor’s Committee was an example of the new public-private partnership governing Birmingham. Jack D. McSpadden, a debonair executive vice-president at Liberty National Life Insurance, chaired the committee. A native of Birmingham, McSpadden had married into one of the city’s founding industrial families. McSpadden’s job was to “tell the story” of how an expanded Medical Center was the future of Birmingham. He recruited “people who really know the true potential” of the Medical Center to speak at a planned public meeting on February 23, 1965, at the newly constructed Rust Engineering Building.\textsuperscript{34} Former Commission President James Morgan and attorney Frank E. Spain reprised their speaking roles from the last public meeting on Medical Center expansion in October 1953. An introductory slideshow revealed the remarkable growth of the Medical Center from one-and-a-half blocks in 1945 to the

\textsuperscript{32} The four black men Boutwell appointed were entrepreneur A. G. Gaston, real estate executive Wilbur H. Hollins, attorney Arthur Shores, and dentist John Nixon. Only two white men declined the Mayor’s invitation. The Committee is also notable for who it left out: Douglas Arant (attorney), Edward Norton (president of Royal Crown Cola), L. O. Sims (labor leader), Thomas Martin (president of Alabama Power Company), Isadore Pizitz and Bertha Smolian (department store owners), Erskine Smith (attorney), W. Sydney Smyer Sr. (realtor), William Spencer III, (former president of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce), Dr. Henry King Stanford (president of Birmingham Southern College), David J. Vann (attorney), and Charles F. Zukoski Jr. (retired banking officer). All of these men had long-standing ties to liberal causes or the Medical Center and had been involved in the negotiations and aftermath of the Spring 1963 demonstrations. Their omission speaks to Boutwell’s personal politics.


\textsuperscript{34} Jack D. McSpadden, comment on copy of Mayor’s Speech, December 12, 1964, File 1.2, McSpadden Papers; Jack McSpadden to Fred Woodress, January 29, 1965, File 1.3, McSpadden Papers.
current twelve-block campus. After the visual aid set up the story, McSpadden excitedly announced, “I think that all of us have had the feeling that something big is about to happen.” He then introduced the man “hiding behind the screen.”

Although Volker had been involved with the development of the Medical Center for fifteen years, he was not the face of the institution. In some elite circles, Volker had been dismissed as a northern communist—“Pink Joe”—and civil rights sympathizer. The announcement of the Medical Center’s expansion was also his as its leader. Volker announced to the audience, “Community potentials cannot be realized unless substantial amounts of new land is acquired” for the Medical Center. The project called for an additional forty-five blocks, three times the campus’ current size. The 1964 Long-Range Plan “highlighted Birmingham’s great opportunity to become a health center of national and international prominence.” The expansion of the Medical Center would bring progress and positive attention to the city as its faculty continued to make breakthroughs in research and service. “We can anticipate growth, continuous growth, unending growth” for Birmingham, Volker argued, but only if the Medical Center grew. “We would do this community a great injustice,” he concluded, “to dream too little dreams.”

Volker’s “good salesman[ship]” set the stage for the Medical Center’s economic impact on Birmingham. “Since Birmingham is a manufacturing town,” former City Commission President Morgan related to his audience, “we know a little more about

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36 Joseph F. Volker, speech, February 23, 1965, transcript, “Mayor’s Committee for Expansion of the Medical Center.”

37 McSpadden, speech, February 23, 1965, transcript, “Mayor’s Committee for Expansion of the Medical Center.”
manufacturing plants than we know about the Medical Center.” Morgan equated the Medical Center’s current $18 million in payroll with 5,000 employees as “49
manufacturing plants.” Expansion would turn that number into the equivalent of 104 plants, or “three miles of solid plants” stretching across the city of Birmingham, and a corresponding doubling or tripling in jobs, payroll, construction, and outside investment. “If we should lose the Medical Center” for failure to pass a favorable resolution, Morgan warned, “the Chamber of Commerce would have quite a job” in replacing it. 

Figure 4.2 The planned campus expansion for the University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1966. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

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38 Morgan used these statistics: An average of 80 workers in each plant with an average hourly wage of $2.80 and an average yearly salary of $4,800.

39 James B. Morgan, speech, February 23, 1965, transcript, “Mayor’s Committee for Expansion of the Medical Center.”
Former lawyer of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD) Frank E. Spain explained a watered-down version of urban renewal laws. “The whole chapter in this book which deals with hospitals and universities,” he boasted about the laws, “was a chapter that was written by the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District.” In 1959, Alabama Senator John Sparkman pushed through two beneficial amendments to the Housing Act of 1949. One allowed educational institutions to use their future building needs as credits toward the purchase, and the other relieved cities from constructing replacement housing for projects involving universities. The expansion called for the removal of 994 families and 714 individuals within the forty-five block site in the Southside neighborhood. Eighty percent of all those displaced qualified for public assistance. Spain assured his listening audience that he had “yet to hear of anyone who suffered any hardship” upon relocation. Thus, Spain promised, the city of Birmingham could purchase the forty-five blocks at almost no fiscal or social cost.

In the public meeting, Volker briefly mentioned the University of Alabama Extension Center that offered continuing and professional education. The architectural blueprints were drawn precisely to plan for a full-fledged university, but the idea of Birmingham gaining its only four-year public institution was inconsequential compared to the promise of unbridled economic growth. A university was a side benefit for those in

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40 Nearly 82 percent of the families and 58 percent of individuals were African American. Minutes of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District Planning Conference in connection with Medical Center Expansion Urban Renewal Area, ALA R-70, May 19, 1966, File 1.5, McSpadden Papers.


42 Through state funding, the University of Alabama would pay the remainder at a cost of $9 million. The state legislature did not allocate the funds until 1975.
the audience. The Medical Center trained the healthcare workforce needed for its own growth. It was a self-sustaining economic engine located in the city close to downtown. In a time of deep transition in Birmingham, an expanded Medical Center promised economic stability and urban growth without requiring significant efforts on the part of white civic elites.

The emphasis on economic growth—at almost no cost to those in attendance—was a political necessity to accomplish Volker’s vision of an urban university at that time in Alabama. Volker oversaw the biggest budget of higher education in the state, but he remained hamstrung by the administrative structure of the University of Alabama (UA) that contained the academic growth of its Birmingham Affairs.43 Powerful alumni sat in the audience that day, and McSpadden and Volker hoped they would place pressure on the Board of Trustees to create either a branch campus or an autonomous university.

Volker and UA President Frank A. Rose also lobbied state officials in Montgomery, a hot house of segregationist politics. Gov. George C. Wallace needed new industries and more universities to train the state’s workforce, but he held on to white supremacist beliefs and viewed reformers in Birmingham with suspicion.44 The promise of economic growth, however, could help win university designation for Volker’s campus.45


45 On battling the state legislature and University of Alabama Board of Trustees to expand UAB, see James Jefferson Bennett, interview by Virginia Volker, May 11, 1990, File 2.2, transcript, UAB Oral History; John A. Caddell, interview by Virginia Fisher, November 2, 1989, File 2.10, transcript, UAB Oral History; Ehney A. Camp Jr., interview by Virginia Fisher, July 7, 1989, File 2.11, transcript, UAB Oral History; J. Rudolph Davidson, interview by Virginia Fisher, August 15, 1990, File 2.19, transcript, UAB Oral History. Bennett was UAB’s lawyer, Davidson was UAB’s state lobbyist, and Caddell and Camp were UA Board of Trustee members.
The Medical Center’s second expansion campaign was an example of how Volker navigated the emerging politics of a post-civil rights Birmingham. It was decidedly different from the one in October 1953 in which black civic leaders used the public forum to criticize their white counterparts for their failure to recognize the housing needs of black residents. The lack of public or private housing remained a critical issue in the mid-1960s, and Volker proposed a project nearly five times the size of the first one. Black response was limited to Wilbur Hollins, who seconded a supportive resolution in favor of the urban renewal project. The meeting represented Boutwell’s version of moderate biracialism, or tokenism, but it also showcased Volker’s political savvy in winning support for his urban university, a socially liberal vision, among elites who still favored the status quo.

Volker was unwilling to risk controversy over racial matters if it threatened needed economic and political support both at the federal and local levels. “Our dilemma is a simple one,” Volker explained to an old ally in late 1963. “On the one hand, we are increasingly dependent upon federal support for construction, and the financing of research and instruction. On the other hand, the elected officials have what they believe to be a mandate from the population to maintain the local custom of segregation of the races.”

By the mid-1960s, over a fourth of UAB’s operating budget derived from federals sources, making compliance with federal non-discrimination requirements in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandatory. Volker still needed state funding, especially for

46 Joseph F. Volker to Emmett Carmichael, December 5, 1963, File 22.11, Volker-VPHA.

the Extension Center, but Montgomery politicians continued to fight desegregated education. When Frederick Kraus and Roger Hanson, two dental faculty members, marched in support of voting rights in Selma in the spring of 1965, Volker berated them. Kraus recalled him angrily asking, “Didn’t you think of the fact…that we had applications in for increasing monies from the state? How could you do such a thing?” Volker had to minimize the appearance of any racial or social change in the Medical Center while negotiating with white officials in Montgomery and Birmingham who resisted it.

Volker unofficially encouraged desegregation of the Medical Center. Some faculty members had protested the continuation of Jim Crow in the Medical Center by individually taking down “white” and “colored” signs during the fall of 1963. Black service workers in the Basic Sciences building prompted a faculty discussion of desegregating the main cafeteria. Two of the seven members of the Medical Center’s faculty council voted to maintain segregation and eventually convinced two more to agree that “the educational mission of the institution have priority as far as the use of the lunch room facilities are concerned.” As these men saw the issue, educated whites should be the first ones in the lunch line.

Education, and Welfare investigated UAB as well as other academic medical centers across the South such as Emory, Tulane, and UNC for non-compliance with non-discrimination mandates.


49 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 150.

50 Minutes of Medical College of Alabama Faculty Council, September 10, 1963, File 22.38, Volker-VPHA.
Even after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Volker did not act to end segregation until he secured local approval for his urban renewal project. In April 1965, Volker called lawyer Oscar A. Adams Jr. to discuss his plans for desegregating the Medical Center. The year before, Adams had filed a racial discrimination lawsuit against the Medical Center similar to the one he led during the institution’s first urban renewal project in the 1950s. Adams established a friendship with Volker through that case. The executive vice-president also included UAB faculty member Dr. James T. Montgomery, private practice dentist Dr. John Nixon, Rev. John Porter of the Sixth Street Baptist Church, and businessman Louis J. Willie of A. G. Gaston Enterprises in his discussions to desegregate the Medical Center.51 These black civic elites became known as Volker’s “Kitchen Cabinet” among faculty and administrators, although the group was officially called the “Negro Advisory Committee.” Volker had established relationships with all men except for Willie that extended as far back as the early 1950s. “It was important, not only for moral and ethical reasons” to consult these men, one of Volker’s protégés explained, but “it was important politically to be in tune with the blacks.”52

Unlike other public institutions in Birmingham, parts of the UAB campus were interracial spaces of service and employment before 1965. Nearly 60 percent of the Medical Center’s patients in the mid-1960s were African American.53 Black and white healthcare workers (but not black doctors) served both races without regard to state law

51 McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 160.


53 Author calculation derived from Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, October 22, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.
before Montgomery began practicing there in the fall of 1963.\textsuperscript{54} The Medical Center had provided space for African Americans to earn a living and receive healthcare, and its sister institution the Extension Center offered education by the spring of 1964. In preparation for the desegregation of general academics, Volker worked with the Mayor’s Office and the Birmingham Police Department to avoid the ongoing white protests. The group agreed: “No public announcement of the acceptance of the [black] students should be made before registration.”\textsuperscript{55} The desegregation process went smoothly.

In April 1965 Volker and his administrative team created the appearance of desegregation by opening up existing spaces in the university previously ordered by Jim Crow. University Hospital maintenance staff removed water fountains, closed admitting lines previously used singularly by whites or blacks, and posted black placards with white letters stipulating compliance with desegregation. Federal investigators found the signs “a very permanent, attractive notice to the public.”\textsuperscript{56} Federally funded hospital renovations demolished dual elevators, entrances, and clinic waiting rooms that ordered how blacks and whites moved within the facilities. Nurses and technicians opened up curtains that separated blacks and whites in large patient wards and also moved patients around the hospital, disregarding their medical conditions, to present the appearance of desegregated

\textsuperscript{54} Physicians at the Medical Center had to be faculty members and members of the Jefferson County Medical Society. UAB administrators received external inquiries into their practice of providing patient care without regard to race or gender. McNulty defended the practice by arguing it served as an integral function of medical education as well as the professionalism embodied in the Nightingale Pledge and Hippocratic Oath. Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, December 4, 1963, File 22.54, Volker-VPHA.

\textsuperscript{55} Minutes of Meeting of University Extension Center Concerning Registration Procedures for Spring Semester,” January 15, 1964, File 24.10, Boutwell Papers.

\textsuperscript{56} Sherry Arnstein, Rose Brock, and Clifford Allen to Richard H. Lyle, May 14, 1965, File 24.4, Volker-VPHA.
healthcare. Officials at the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare saw these material changes as evidence of “total integration” at University Hospital in May 1965.  

Volker’s actions prompted resistance among whites unwilling to let go of the Jim Crow order. Vocal and physical altercations between blacks and whites ensued in the elevators, halls, and clinics. Former UA Trustee Hill Ferguson expressed his dislike of the newly desegregated surgical recovery wards, but Volker supposedly quipped about the patients, “Mr. Hill, they don’t know where the hell they are.” Because of this opposition, Volker and Matthew McNulty organized a “Committee on Community Sociological Factors.” Committee members observed blacks and whites to address and rectify the psychological remnants of Jim Crow that perpetuated self-segregation and discrimination among patients and employees. McNulty ordered “the permanent assignment of several key Hospital individuals to the cafeteria area to serve as arbiter, race relations leader, persuader and policeman.” Volker’s Kitchen Cabinet found these efforts commendable. Adams recalled that checking the status of desegregation “was one of the hardest jobs I’ve had in the world, going from one hospital to another” and asking people “were they satisfied.” Willie praised McNulty for his “boldness” and “good

57 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 160-62.

58 Private rooms remained segregated because they were based on patients’ ability to pay as well as the type of care (surgery or obstetrics, for example) they received. Sherry Arnstein, Rose Brock, and Clifford Allen to Richard H. Lyle, May 14, 1965, File 24.4, Volker-VPHA.

59 Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, October 22, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.

60 Bennett, interview.

61 Bennett remembered the group as the “Committee on Sociological Readjustments,” while McNulty referred to it as the “Conference Committee on Community Sociological Factors.” Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, October 22, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.

62 Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, September 19, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.
faith” as they worked together to “advance the ministry of reconciliation.” Gov. Wallace, however, still inquired about UAB’s desegregated practices into the late 1960s.

Volker’s “Kitchen Cabinet” also helped him to preserve some elements of the black Southside neighborhood within the desegregated campus. Ullman High School was one of the three such schools for black Birminghamians before 1964, and it was in the project area for the Medical Center’s expansion. Rather than destroy the building, Volker spent money on improving its facilities for classroom use. In 1971, he lobbied the state legislature and UA Board of Trustees to rename it the Ullman-Bell Building as a way to honor its long-serving yet deceased African American principal George C. Bell. The building was the first of its kind named for an African American in any Alabama college or university, a meaningfully symbolic gesture in an era of black school closings, demotions of principles, or transfers of teachers and students. Volker’s advisory group also helped him to promote the new university to potential black students and employees. All of these efforts sought to build a representative black presence within UAB as it erased another form in Southside.

By 1966, Volker challenged the political, economic, and racial order of the city in his quest to solve key problems preventing the formation of a full-fledged urban

63 Adams, interview.
64 Louis J. Willie to Matthew F. McNulty, May 17, 1965, File 24.4, Volker-VPHA.
65 Hugh Maddox to Matthew F. McNulty, September 19, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.
66 McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 200-03.
67 Joseph F. Volker to Frank E. Spain, April 23, 1963, File 22.59, Volker-VPHA; Joseph F. Volker to Jefferson Bennett, April 24, 1968, File 27.27, Volker-VPHA.
university. He demanded that the city and county fund public welfare services and adopt a new tax on white suburbanites, a position few business leaders adopted at that time. The promise of the Medical Center’s economic growth became the key selling point to unite white civic elites behind its expansion. Yet, Volker never publicly stepped forward as an advocate of racial inclusion, although that precisely was his reputation. Volker’s spiritual approach to the matter promoted individual rather than group action: “The former requires continued and conscious personal effort; the latter all too often becomes a matter of words, slogans, and meeting[s].” He subverted his beliefs to build political power and autonomy around the public institution he oversaw, part of his long-term strategy to build an urban university. Because of the massive growth Volker initiated through the urban renewal campaign, the UA Board of Trustees created the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), a branch campus, in 1966. Within three years, it became an autonomous university with Volker as its president.


Originally organized as a subcommittee of the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (BDIA), Operation New Birmingham (ONB) became the city’s unofficial government in the mid-1960s. In 1965, ONB unveiled its urban redevelopment plan called “Design for Progress.” Nominally a civic organization of around 350 members, ONB had about 170 members working in 13 subcommittees, with one or two

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68 Joseph F. Volker to W. Edward Harris, ca. July 22, 1964, File 23.61, Volker-VPHA.

69 The name of UAB from 1966 to 1984 was the University of Alabama in Birmingham. I am using the University of Alabama at Birmingham for clarity purposes.
African Americans on almost each one. By the fall of 1965, ONB superseded its parent organization. About a dozen ONB staff members moved into new offices at City Hall to facilitate interaction between them and municipal officials. Whites publicly promoted the involvement of key African American leaders in ONB.

Led by S. Vincent Townsend, editor of the *Birmingham News*, ONB focused on manufacturing a new image of Birmingham as much as a new cityscape. While he was an undergraduate at Birmingham Southern College in the early 1920s, Townsend began his career at the *Birmingham News* as a sports writer. He rose through the *News*’ ranks, eventually becoming city editor and then managing editor by the mid-1950s. He spent over forty years pounding the streets of Birmingham in search of news and sources, which he used to great effect during the spring of 1963. Townsend negotiated with the Revs. Martin Luther King Jr. and Fred L. Shuttlesworth, yet he buried his reporters’ stories of the demonstrations in the back pages and highlighted the change in government on the front page of the *News*. In reflecting on his participation during the civil rights movement, Townsend boasted, “I’ve taken great pride in making news as well as covering news.” Urged on by *News* publisher Clarence Hanson II, Townsend became ONB’s permanent chairman of the board while at the editor’s desk, using both roles to

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70 Operation New Birmingham, Committee Roster 1965, File 1.20, ONB Papers.

71 The Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association officially dissolved in 1967.


73 “Townsend Retired as VP and Assistant to the Publisher,” *Birmingham News*, December 31, 1975, Clipping Files—Operation New Birmingham (hereafter cited as ONB Clipping File), Southern History Collection, Birmingham Public Library.
focus on “renewing the city’s self-confidence and rebuilding the badly-damaged central business district.”

Townsend had a simple philosophy in directing ONB: “Settle on some first-priority causes. Depend on a network of civic-minded friends, a group of ‘team players’ to motivate in behalf of worthy projects. Know things. And work hard.”

Townsend, as a colleague described him, was “single-minded, untiring, persuasive, [and] a genius at developing a network of people who tell him things.” He tapped his wide networks throughout the city to find “team players.” “Only those persons,” Townsend remarked to a group of ten white businessmen and public officials, “who could expedite and bring to completion the projects outlined for ONB” would be asked to join. Finding white men with the necessary power to get things done in Birmingham was easy, but Townsend reached out to entrepreneur A. G. Gaston and realtor John Drew to find black civic elites for ONB membership.

Black ONB members did not come from the ranks of the ministry or labor unions but from boardrooms, courtrooms, and academic halls. The exclusion of civil rights activists from the new power structure invited outside criticism, but white civic elites needed African American participation to enact their designs for progress. The municipal

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.


referendum and civil rights campaigns had given black civic elites new access to their white counterparts, who were not yet official citizens of Birmingham. The near doubling of the black electorate from 1963 to 1965 forced white civic elites to cultivate their support.\textsuperscript{79} ONB also depended on federal funding for its brick-and-mortar projects. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 required contractors such as ONB to follow non-discrimination mandates. Token black membership in ONB qualified the organization as the city’s official representative citizens committee for workable programs like urban renewal. Federal officials accepted this designation of ONB without question in 1965, allowing affluent white and black men to bypass a broader and more representative public discussion of their plans.

The cornerstone of ONB’s plans for a new Birmingham was “Design for Progress,” a twelve-step urban revitalization program announced in the spring of 1965 after the Medical Center expansion project. Rather than commission an outside firm to design a new master plan, ONB asked local architects who had intimate knowledge of the city to volunteer their time. These architects gave over 5,000 hours—nearly seven months—to imagine a new Birmingham.\textsuperscript{80} “Design for Progress” held the premise that Birmingham was the capital of the New South, if not the “Football Capital of the South.” Its plan to refurbish Legion Field Stadium, capture a regional postal facility, expand the municipal airport, and build a civic center spoke to ONB’s ambitions to place Birmingham strategically on the southern and national markets for industries and services.

\textsuperscript{79} The black electorate grew from 8,000 in 1962 to 14,000 in 1965. Glenn T. Eskew, \textit{But for Birmingham: The Local and National Struggles for Civil Rights} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 328.

dependent on rapid distribution and ease of transportation. Promotional materials highlighted the city’s central location within the southeast. With this twelve-step program, ONB sought to change outside and local opinion that the city was not one of “perpetual promise” as critics had described but the realized promise of the “Magic City.”

Park West, a public housing and commercial redevelopment project, was one of the lesser publicized twelve steps in ONB’s “Design for Progress.” Gaston and other businessmen such as realtors John Drew, Wilbur Hollins, and insurance executive Leroy S. Gaillard all sat on public housing committees either through the Mayor’s biracial citizens committee or ONB by the fall of 1963. Planned for fourteen blocks northwest of the black business district, Park West would erase the violence inflicted by the rioters, police, and bombers around the immediate area during the long summer of 1963. As homeowners, business owners, or workers, African Americans felt the impact of urban decay that Park West promised to reverse. By the fall of 1967, Gaston was in talks with Hugh Denman, director of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD), to begin the project. Two years later, ONB won a $190,000 federal grant to survey the area. Public housing, however, was the selling point of Park West. The city needed to construct a sufficient number of units to house residents displaced by urban renewal programs. All such projects slated for the late 1960s would displace over 11,000

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82 The Mayor’s biracial citizens committee was established in the spring of 1963 as part of white business leaders’ concessions to civil rights leaders. It was largely defunct by the summer of 1964.

individuals, yet the HABD only planned to build 1,900 units of public housing. New housing construction was left to the private market.  

“Design for Progress” was the raw promotion of a new and better Birmingham free of the constraints placed on it by civil rights protests and violent adherence to Jim Crow. It also was based on an imagined and highly privileged suburban conception of the city. William M. Silsbee, ONB’s first executive director, believed “the image of our cities is the image of ourselves.” Aside from plans for a new downtown public library (which would not be built until 1986) and postal facility, the main components for “Design for Progress” were cultural amenities targeted to middle-class suburban citizens or affluent out-of-town guests. Red Mountain Expressway, which members of the BDIA championed since the 1950s, would connect the Over-the-Mountain suburbs to downtown so that suburbanites could readily access the planned cultural and commercial centers. Birmingham’s new master plan reflected the civic ambitions of suburban white men who claimed the city as theirs.

Silsbee and Townsend worked to convince others of their vision of a new Birmingham through a media blitz that was as important to them as netting federal financing for their urban renewal projects. Townsend often referred to it as “the Birmingham story.” “Design for Progress” was the reason why key ONB leaders flew to New York City in the summer of 1966. It provided material evidence of change. After two failed bond initiatives to support similar projects in the 1960s under the city commission, Boutwell applauded urban voters for recently passing a $60 million bond

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84 Ibid.
issue. It provided local matching money to finance “Design for Progress” and the second Medical Center expansion project, which speakers also referenced.\textsuperscript{86} The Civic Center alone cost $35 million and spanned four blocks to the north of Birmingham’s civic square, Woodrow Wilson Park. Alex Lacy, chairman of ONB’s Civic Center committee, also bragged about a recent sales tax increase passed by the state legislature for Jefferson County only. “Taxing is no more popular in Birmingham than it is in New York,” but Lacy guessed that doing so suggested “overwhelming” support from the metropolitan taxpayers, “the people who must pay the bills.”\textsuperscript{87}

Birmingham’s public officials and preeminent private citizens stood together in New York City to challenge national media outlets to see the change for themselves. They announced a worldwide architectural competition to design the Civic Center. It was an ambitious project that included a coliseum, concert hall, theater, exhibition halls, parking, and retail spaces. Over 250 architectural firms traveled to Birmingham in search of $50,000 in prize money and a $3 million contract. The selective judging panel, filled with world-renowned architects and noted cultural curators, were also introduced to Birmingham as top civic leaders knew it from the “vantage point” of Red Mountain.\textsuperscript{88}

The media also came. The \textit{New York Times} published a half-page spread of the eventual

\textsuperscript{86} Boutwell, speech, “Plaza Hotel Press Conference.”

\textsuperscript{87} Alex Lacy, speech, June 22, 1966, transcript, “Plaza Hotel Press Conference.”

winning design, described by the lead architect as “an inviting but sequestered part of the city.”

In preparation for the winning announcement at home, Townsend corralled editors, station managers, and public relations executives to promote civic pride, pro bono, among Birmingham area residents in the summer of 1967. Centered around a write-in contest with nearly $2,500 in total prize money, 1,000 citizens wrote short essays explaining why “Birmingham is A-Number-One-derful!” “place to live and work.” The clumsily crafted contest name aside, winners clearly expressed what ONB wanted to promote. Lola Waters, second place in the junior division, cited the “many opportunities” in “better learning, recreation and good government,” while the teenage girl who bested her and won $500 wrote Birmingham “has a purpose that allows men of all races and faiths to work together and face the future without fear.” Emily White’s winning entry was her personal belief about Birmingham, but it also expressed what white ONB leaders wanted to believe about the city, too.

By 1969, ONB’s civic investment in building a new Birmingham through urban renewal programs and aggressive publicity developed a wave of economic activity. Over $400 million of construction, including the Civic Center and Medical Center, transformed the downtown area. Ground also had broken or money had been obtained for airport

89 Fried, “Design is Chosen for Birmingham Center.”

90 Sell Birmingham Committee, “You Can Win $1,000 by Telling Us Why Birmingham is A-Number-One-Derful!” advertisement, ca. summer 1967, File 1.12, ONB Papers.

expansion, the regional postal facility, and Red Mountain Expressway. More buildings went up in downtown after 1963 than the forty years before that singular year. Central Bank & Trust Company, established in 1964, saw its deposits grow twenty-fold thanks to new construction and investment. South Central Bell Telephone Company chose downtown Birmingham for its headquarters in 1968. The metropolitan area swelled by over 100,000 people in the decade, pushing it toward a population of 735,000. Reflecting on the work ONB had accomplished in a relatively short amount of time, Ferd Weil Sr., director of the Downtown Action Committee, proudly boasted, “Birmingham has come 25 years in the last five.”

Despite these aggressive promotional pushes trumpeting a new Birmingham, white ONB leaders failed to convince some media outlets and the broader American public. Birmingham’s recent past was the barometer for which any progress would be measured. Exiled local critic Charles A. Morgan Jr. agreed Birmingham had changed since 1963, but “compared with the civilized world, it has not kept pace.” In January 1968, the New York Times sarcastically remarked, “Negro business and professional men are cast in the role of good pals of their white counterparts.” It compared Birmingham unfavorably to Atlanta, GA, Charleston, SC, Dallas, TX, and Jacksonville, FL, other southern cities that also trumpeted biracial communication. As one top Reuters chief confidentially told an ONB staff member, he had “rather unpleasant memories and misgivings about” Birmingham and very much doubted “the notable progress and the motives and sincerity

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
of some of our leaders.”  

ONB leaders chafed at such criticisms and negative press coverage. In response to *LOOK Magazine*’s photojournalism piece of black poverty in Birmingham’s neighborhoods, one ONB director wrote its editors, “I realize that the national news media has gone out of its way to keep this image before the world….I cannot allow it to go by without expressing the feeling that you have not been at all fair.”

Overcoming 1963 was the larger urban renewal project white ONB leaders implemented in their designs for progress from the mid- to late 1960s. Brick-and-mortar projects such as the Civic Center and Red Mountain Expressway were concrete examples of change they could see. Working and socializing with elite black leaders, though few, was something they experienced. Equally important, changing the image of Birmingham in the local and national imagination validated their sense of self and citizenship to a broader public. In 1970, they won a major victory when the glossy *LOOK* magazine and the National League of Municipalities named Birmingham an “All-America City” for its commitment to racial progress, economic growth, and urban development. Orchestrated by Townsend, ONB used urban renewal programs, biracial communication, and public relations to create the image of a new cityscape for Birmingham’s white suburban middle class.

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96 Other editors and bureau chiefs of major news outlets echoed these sentiments. They were ABC News, CBS News, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, and *TIME*. Stan Vainrib to Dan Roper and Gloria Goldstein, March 13, 1970, File 11.29, ONB Papers.

In naming the executive members of the mayor’s biracial citizens committee in the summer of 1963, Albert B. Boutwell refused to recognize the civic influence of any African American, including entrepreneur A. G. Gaston. The multimillionaire’s absence from that committee signaled a downright rejection of black involvement in a more representative government that municipal reformers had promised. The doors to the new economic and political power structures of Birmingham, however, remained relatively open to them. Working behind the scenes with white men in the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and Operation New Birmingham (ONB), black civic elites fashioned responses to the various problems that making a new Birmingham caused, including the loss of traditional black spaces due to desegregation and urban renewal.

Black elites used their civic influence to implement their vision of civil rights in post-1965 Birmingham. Their middle-class respectability, expressed through their language, decorum, and commitment to biracialism, connected them to their white peers. Indeed, their professions read as near carbon copies of those white men involved with ONB: accountants, bankers, doctors, educators, insurance executives, lawyers, and realtors. The color of their skin, however, denied them the respect they coveted. They secretly boiled when white men refused to address them as “mister,” something Wilbur Hollins surely must have experienced during his participation at the meeting to sell the Medical Center. Hollins and other black elites, however, were privy to discussions about building a new Birmingham that affected black citizens. In theory, their representation on powerful committees and municipal government would benefit all black Birminghamians. This emphasis on black elite participation in civic affairs as
definition of racial progress transformed biracial communication as an image promoted by both races into a concrete mechanism to implement civil rights. By demanding the right to participate in the building of a new Birmingham, black civic elites manipulated the politics of representation promoted by white elites to gain the respect they desired and strengthen their positions of power.

Black leaders in the professional service economy shared with their white counterparts the threat of losing business due to desegregation, but they alone faced the loss of their economic and institutional power in a new Birmingham. Gaston’s business enterprises had launched markets on banking, housing, and dying for blacks, but he never enjoyed white clientele in any significant number. John Drew, president of Acamar Realty, catered to black middle-class families in Enon Ridge, Smithfield, Titusville, and a few areas outside the city lines, while Lucius H. Pitts provided higher education to black youth. Equal access laws would undermine the segregated markets black businessmen and educational leaders had used to develop economic and institutional power but do nothing to help them expand the color or residential lines of their services. The market of black professional services—education, business, and home buying—was in crisis. Black elites worked to protect their sources of power and preserve traditional institutions of black mobility in metropolitan Birmingham.

After 1964, Lucius H. Pitts turned his mission to win accreditation for Miles College into a crusade to preserve historically black institutions of higher education. At

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the beginning of his Miles career in the fall of 1960, the college had no accreditation, was
heavily in debt, and lost all but one of its local white donors in response to student civil
rights activism. But media attention on Birmingham during its civil rights crises turned
out to be an overwhelming financial and publicity victory for Miles. Pitts used this
windfall as a way to corral local white and black leaders into a charitable group known as
the “Friends of Miles.” This group, which included white racial liberals such as
businessman James A. Head, Dr. Joseph F. Volker, and retired banker Charles F. Zukoski
Jr. acted as a biracial advisory board to help Pitts raise money and the college’s local
profile. Through numerous campaign drives in Birmingham and across the nation, Miles’
operating budget eventually reached $3.1 million by 1969.

As part of the reaccreditation process, Pitts worked to strengthen the academic
rigor and attract highly qualified faculty members for Miles. In the summer of 1964, Pitts
convinced Harvard University’s Dean of Undergraduate Studies John U. Munro to teach
on a volunteer basis in Miles’ basic skills program for entering freshman. Most Miles
students read and wrote at a ninth-grade level. Munro instructed his students to write an
essay entitled “My Hometown” that revealed to him the systems of oppression blacks
experienced in Birmingham as well as their commitment to “change things.” Pitts later
said, “Those students pulled a chunk out of his heart.” They also transformed Munro’s
life. He later remarked, “I live in a black world now….I am uneasy now in the white
community. White people simply fail to see black people as people. It’s a tiresome

possession.

100 Nancy Hicks, “Miles College President to Return to Alma Mater,” New York Times, December 24,
1970.
failure, and I’m utterly bored by it.”

For Munro, significant racial progress took place in Miles College, not in ONB or downtown Birmingham.

After three summers of volunteering in the program, Munro left Harvard and joined Miles full-time as director of Freshman Studies in the fall of 1967. His decision was an easy one. “I cared about education for underprivileged kids, not whether well-endowed, well-educated kids wanted to use drugs,” he told the New York Times. “I wanted to find out what curricula are fundamentally relevant to getting kids on with higher education. Somebody else could always take care of the job at Harvard, but no one was about to do” that at Miles. The remedial education programs he implemented helped black students, most of whom had matriculated from academically substandard and physically deteriorating high schools, prepare for college. The academic rigor Munro demanded of his students attracted the attention of investors and national media as well as brought new faculty members to Miles. By the end of the decade, 35 percent of the faculty was white.

Although Pitts finally secured reaccreditation for Miles in 1969, the future of black education in Birmingham and elsewhere remained uncertain. After 1964, desegregation and affirmative action policies threatened the viability of universities and colleges that historically served African Americans. The New York Times described these colleges as “victims of progress” as white universities attracted black middle-class


102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.
students, recruited black instructors, and created black studies programs.\textsuperscript{104} Private colleges such as Miles also lacked state appropriation, which helped to buttress about a third of the South’s black public colleges.\textsuperscript{105} Although Pitts raised a substantial amount of money for Miles, the bulk of it went to replenish supplies for its libraries and laboratories or construct new academic halls and dormitories. Pitts could not afford faculty salaries commensurate to those of UAB or the two white private colleges in the city.\textsuperscript{106} Raising student tuition to cover these costs was not an option for Pitts, who believed an increase would make a Miles education too expensive for some.

During the late 1960s, another historically black college in Birmingham saw its fate sealed by a different form of progress. A.M.E.-affiliated Daniel Payne College in the Airport Hills neighborhood was in a tract of land targeted by the city for municipal airport expansion. President Howard Greggs could do little to stop its destruction. Gaston, himself a member of an A.M.E. church, confidentially informed Boutwell that although he and other black leaders expressed concerns about the “hazard[ous]” location of the College, “a move would not receive any serious adverse reaction” from them. Gaston, who also owned a business college that his wife oversaw, proposed to Boutwell that the city help relocate the College by trading land with it.\textsuperscript{107} Boutwell and the city council accepted Gaston’s offer, and ONB worked to obtain federal financing for


\textsuperscript{105} Greenhouse, “Reincarnation of John Munro.”

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107} George Simmons to Albert B. Boutwell, April 20, 1967, File 10.7, Boutwell Papers.
building construction grants and student loans to keep the college viable. The relocation, however, was too disruptive for the underfunded and uncelebrated college to survive. After limping along throughout the 1970s, Daniel Payne closed its doors in 1979, one of the many hidden costs of “Design for Progress.”

Pitts and other leaders of black colleges and universities appealed to the federal government to help them preserve their institutions. Pitts proclaimed, “Black colleges face the greatest challenge of their lives, and this country can’t afford to let them fail.” In 1968, Pitts lobbied the US Department of Education to provide desperately needed funding for black colleges and universities. A few years earlier, Minnie Gaston, president of the Booker T. Washington Business College, pleaded with members of Congress to consider providing loans to students attending black schools of vocational or higher education. Safeguarding these colleges was a critical endeavor in the mid- to late 1960s. “The black community needs an intellectual focus, a channel for rage and frustration and for building institutional strength,” Munro explained. “These colleges are that place. If that’s black separatism or black power, so be it.”

The destruction of black cultural institutions and communities through urban renewal prompted some youth to develop a new political consciousness. The Southside neighborhood, which the Medical Center expansion project transformed from a black

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110 Hechinger, “Negro Colleges.”

111 Gaston, Green Power, 141.

112 Greenhouse, “Reincarnation of John Munro.”
space into a predominately white one, was a breeding place for it. Since the 1890s, Southside had been a black neighborhood between Fourth to Eighth Avenues South. It was home to the third largest black church, Sixth Street Baptist Church, and one of the three black high schools in Birmingham. By midcentury, most residents in the neighborhood lived in poverty. One Southside resident who was evicted from her home two times by the Medical Center nicknamed the institution “the cancer because it was eating everything in its path.” In the summer of 1968, a group of young artists, poets, and essayists published The Southside Voice to express their thoughts about Southside. “Life on 8th Court may be very hard and depressing, but there is something here that is not up on the mountain,” a young Mark Davis wrote. “Here, people associate with their neighbors, people talk on the streets, and sit on their porches. Up on the mountain, everyone sits all day behind closed doors and window[s] and never comes out.” Others used the Voice to express their opinions about the “huge government redevelopment project.” Tommy McCaskey urged his readers into action: “It’s time for the black men to get up off their asses and fight for their people. The white men is going to take from us as long as we let them—it’s time to stop them now!”

In 1966 Gaston attempted to address the growing political radicalism among some black youth living in neighborhoods targeted for urban renewal projects. He launched the A. G. Gaston Boys Club in a neighborhood located near the future site of the Civic

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Center. Gaston hoped the club would make the youth “in a section of Birmingham which now seethes with frustration-borne restlessness” into “doers instead of drifters.” Quite a few future black political leaders, such as former Acting Mayor Roderick Royal, passed through the Boys Club as teenagers. Gaston conceived of it as a way to “help build boys...not mend men.” The increasing rate of juvenile delinquency and movement toward Black Power among youth was of grave concern to him and white elites. The mayor, police chief of Birmingham, and acting superintendent of the Jefferson County Board of Education wrote glowing letters of recommendation and solicitation for the Boy’s Club. White elites generously donated money to Gaston’s cause, raising over $300,000 in a few months’ time.

In 1967 Gaston published his autobiography *Green Power: The Successful Way of A. G. Gaston* to encourage economic self-determination, autonomous community formation, and race pride among black youth. These tenets formed the core of Gaston’s green power, yet maintaining his relationships with white elites was equally important. Although Gaston did not confess as such, whites still controlled the economy and determined the limits of black economic power. He accepted Vincent Townsend’s offer to help publicize *Green Power*. The news editor believed “Dr. Gaston’s inspiring autobiography…is constructive, timely, and must-reading for everyone.” He wrote a glowing cover letter to over 150 national media outlets lauding Gaston’s phenomenal up-

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from-bootstraps success story of a “farm boy of Alabama’s rural ‘black belt’ to [a] multi-
millionaire Birmingham philanthropist-businessman.” NBC’s Today show offered
Gaston an opportunity to explain how his philosophy was an alternative to Black
Power.

The “Successful Way of A. G. Gaston” depended on a give-and-take relationship
between whites and blacks. Whites in ONB used Gaston for their image of racial progress
as much as he used them to advance his goals of creating a self-sustaining and self-
respecting black community. Gaston also pushed City Hall to recognize black leaders
who did not typically follow the politics of respectability or engage in biracial
communication. In order to “strengthen the pipeline of communication between the
Mayor’s office” and African Americans, he urged the Boutwell administration to “take
the initiative in making your office available to a cross section of the Negro community.”
Such an action, he believed, would help City Hall “possibl[y] keep a step ahead of any
unreasonable demand or pressure that might embarrass or adversely affect the improved
relationship which presently exists” among blacks and whites. “Without my name
attached,” Gaston sent a list of black leaders who included Emory O. Jackson, the
outspoken editor of the Birmingham World, Rev. Abraham L Woods II, leader of the
local branch of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and James X, leader of the
local Nation of Islam group.

122 Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines, Black Titan: A. G. Gaston and the Making of a Black
Gaston’s actions to raise white awareness of black urban problems and the diversity of black leadership were part of his efforts to transform the politics of representation into a viable tool of political power. This became a central strategy of black civic elites to advance racial progress in Birmingham. They believed that if more African Americans participated in the governance of Birmingham, all blacks would benefit.

Townsend and Volker had welcomed black civic elites to varying degrees in the decision-making process of designing a new Birmingham, but African Americans saw appointed positions in municipal and county government as their greatest chance to make a difference. These seats, however, were hard to obtain. Alabama state law barred new municipal administrations from appointing anyone to an independent board or department-head position until a vacancy occurred, which kept many of the old city commission’s appointments in place. When openings did occur, Boutwell and his successor George S. Seibels named black civic elites such as Wilbur Hollins. A vacancy on the city council in 1967 led Seibels to appoint civil rights attorney Arthur S. Shores. “Finally,” ONB’s executive secretary Jane House exclaimed, “after two years of waiting for a first-class news break in this area,” Shores’ seat prompted her to write press releases announcing the presence of progress in Birmingham to national and international media outlets.124

Breaking the color barrier in the Birmingham Police Department (BPD) was a particularly high-profile goal of black activists and civic elites. Birmingham was the only

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major southern city that did not have a black police officer until 1968. As early as the fall of 1963, black and white civic elites had demanded the hiring of black policemen and the revision of the civil service system. The Birmingham Fraternal Order of Police, which acted as a union for white officers, rebelled against these calls. The proposed reforms in the civil service system, overseen by segregationists appointed by the Jefferson County Commission, in order to hire black officers was “absolute blackmail” that would only “satisfy the demands of outside Negro leaders.” In 1965 Emory O. Jackson noted in the *Birmingham World* the inexplicable coincidence of the Over-the-Mountain suburb of Homewood employing two blacks on its force while the city of Birmingham, which had a bigger African American population, could not even find one. “If City Hall desired Negro policemen,” Jackson wrote, “it would find a way to get them.”

The lack of black officers symbolized the continuing influence of former commissioner T. Eugene “Bull” Connor in the Birmingham Police Department and municipal government. From 1963 to 1967, over twenty African Americans died or were wounded by white officers who did not receive reprimands from the BPD. In early April 1969, white policemen shot three African Americans in the Ensley neighborhood, sparking a small riot. Long left out of Birmingham, these working-class and poor blacks used rioting to protest police brutality, perpetual discrimination, and the lack of a

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125 George Seibels to Quinn Tam, n.d., File 15.42, Boutwell Papers; Dunbar, interview.


representative government. In response, Gaston, Pitts, and other black civic elites convinced their white counterparts to implement a more substantial version of the politics of representation.

In a public letter to the Mayor and ONB released on April 2, 1969, black civic elites issued the “Fourteen Points” to call for the appointment of African Americans in all areas of municipal and county government. They asserted their desire for a “progressive community” by invoking civic identity and middle-class values. Black elites expressed concern over Birmingham’s growth and its image. We all have a definite stake in this community. We are, therefore, asking you to join hands with us to assure the continued growth of this community and to enhance its image as a place where all men may expect justice. As men of goodwill, we trust that you, like us, sense the urgency of taking positive steps to alleviate the fears and frustrations which are very real and critical in the black community.

One of the main issues elites focused on was the charge of police brutality. Stories about it “are heard too often to be all imagined and to continue to be ignored by responsible officials or by those of us in the black community.”\textsuperscript{129} The “Fourteen Points” sought to grant justice to black Birminghamians. The majority of the points focused on police brutality, the judicial system, and the civil service system. Judgiships, appointments, and racial sensitivity trainers were positions best suited for the authors, men engaged in the professional service economy. Through the “Fourteen Points,” black civic elites consolidated their power to open the formal and informal structures of political power in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{129} “Fourteen Points,” April 16, 1969, File 2.1.1.52, Thad Holt Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library (hereafter cited as Holt Papers).

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
Within two weeks after black civic elites issued their demands, ONB established its Community Affairs Committee (CAC) to foster biracial communication in municipal governance. The “Fourteen Points” did not call for such a group, but it was warmly embraced by its authors who self-selected their participation. Nine blacks, nine whites, and nine municipal and county representatives (all white) served in CAC. Within a year that membership grew to forty-eight but retained the same black-white, public-private ratio. Only Birmingham’s most influential men (and few women) served, but the smallness of CAC made it an effective form of representational politics. CAC formally connected the three elements of the biracial coalition—the mayor-council system, white suburbanites, and black civic elites—and gave two of these groups the representation they lacked in formal municipal politics.

Lucius Pitts co-chaired CAC with newcomer W. Cecil Bauer, president of South Central Bell. Their statement of purpose reasserted the need for CAC as “a direct answer to…bridge the understanding gap between ethnic groups within the community and between the private citizen and public officials.” The first objective of CAC was “to look at the problems in our community that hold back progress and attempt to find solutions.” The other ten ranged from adopting the Fourteen Points to using measured rhetoric. The group encouraged media, public officials, and businessmen to use “purr” instead of “snarl” words in discussing racially sensitive matters. Unthinkable in Birmingham just six years before, black and white men in CAC ate breakfast with each


other every Monday morning and talked for nearly two hours about specific urban issues such as police brutality, poverty, housing, education, and unemployment with an acute focus on how they affected African Americans. These meetings were held outside the prying eyes of the media, excluding Townsend’s omniscient presence. “We’ve finished the little niceties like sitting down at the same table for breakfast,” dentist John Nixon noted, but “now, we’re getting down to the nitty-gritty.”

Gaston, Pitts, and other black civic elites formalized their networks of biracial communication and the politics of representation through CAC. They did it at a fortuitous time. Most whites feared black political militancy, and its public presence, such as rioting, moved ONB to counter it by including black leaders within an informal yet powerful new system of metropolitan governance that invoked the rhetoric of citizen participation. Black civic elites needed CAC as much as white suburbanites. The professional, personal, and political relationships among Birmingham’s biracial civic elite secured the political power of black elites with white suburban economic power. CAC was the consolidation of a black-white, urban-suburban, and public-private coalition composed primarily of elite “men of good will.”

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133 CAC was fundamentally a committee of sub-committees. Every sub-committee had co-chairman, one white and one black, and CAC had a two-month rotation of co-chairman. Each group of co-chairs determined what the general membership would focus on for each meeting. Each Monday, one sub-committee presented its report for discussion among the general CAC membership. Sub-committees met multiple times each week or month. After a year and a half of CAC’s existence, there were over 182 sub-committee meetings. The early sub-committees were Employment, Hunger, Poverty and Welfare, Law Enforcement and Community Relations, Policy Making Boards, Public Improvements and Public Services, and Recreation. Community Affairs Committee, “Statement of Purpose of the Community Affairs Committee of Operation New Birmingham.”

134 “Can Birmingham Break with Its Past?”
“One Great City”: The Failure of a Metropolitan Vision of Progress, 1969-1970

In 1970, Birmingham won the “All-America City” award from LOOK magazine and the National League of Municipalities because of its civic leaders’ commitment to biracial communication, democratic reform, and economic diversification. ONB’s application emphasized the city’s break with its past image as “America’s Most Segregated City.” In the last five years, the organization noted, “Citizen initiative and involvement have revolutionized Birmingham—politically, socially, and economically. It has created a new civic pride, and a period of progress and inter-racial cooperation considered impossible five years before.” The organization used the award ceremony to challenge the dominant media conception of the city that still saw Birmingham through the lens of 1963. Mayor George S. Seibels invited Chris McNair, father of one of the girls killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, to join him on the stage to accept the award. With McNair standing beside him, Seibels tearfully admitted, “There were times, many times, when I wondered if the very fabric of this city would survive the dishonor, the pressure, the tears, the bitterness of those dark days.”

The award validated civic leaders’ commitment to change Birmingham, a process that continually shifted to meet new demands. UAB and ONB provided the new structures of economic and political power for civic elites to rebuild downtown as a post-industrial, post-civil rights Birmingham.

135 Jane House, David Canfield, Fred Renneker III, Judy Hill, and Albert Mills, “All-America City Award,” application, September 26, 1968, File 33.24, Seibels Papers.

136 Seibels’ speech to the National League of Municipalities and Cities and ONB’s full presentation was replicated for a Birmingham audience to celebrate the “All-America City” designation. Seibels and McNair were members of ONB. George S. Seibels, speech, March 9, 1971, “All-America City’ Awards Luncheon,” File 15.23, Seibels Papers.
On the heels of this award, advocates of metropolitan consolidation moved forward with their plans to unite the city of Birmingham with its suburbs. “LOOK Magazine and the National League of Municipalities could see us as we truly are,” reformer David J. Vann boasted to area citizens, but he asked, “The question is, ‘Can we?’” Vann had retreated into private law practice after his failed 1964 bid for a US congressional seat when a group of suburban white men asked him to become involved in the metropolitan consolidation campaign in 1969. The lawyer had the legal expertise needed to craft enabling legislation. “One Great City,” as the plan was called, sought to unite Birmingham with the 23 major suburban cities surrounding it in Jefferson County. All governing and service functions of the cities would collapse into one political body, but each would retain some form of autonomy. “The real Birmingham,” Vann argued in one of his many speeches for consolidation, “is not the area within its city limits—the real Birmingham is the urbanized area which include the city proper and the suburbanized areas which surround and imminate [sic] from it.” “One Great City” would make citizens out of all those “who really consider themselves Birminghamians.”

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137 “One Great City” Committee, “‘All-America City’ Award Not to City but the Area,” news release, March 4, 1971, File 28.31, Vann Papers.

138 The principal organizers of the consolidation campaign were William Smith (president of Royal Cup Coffee) and Jim White III (lawyer for the University of Alabama at Birmingham), and David Herring (local chair of the Jefferson County Democratic Party). David Herring, interview by James Baggett, November 29, 1995, File 1.2, transcript, “One Great City” Oral Interview Collection 1995 (hereafter cited as “One Great City” Interviews), BPL-DAM.

139 David J. Vann, interview by James Baggett, January 8, 1996, File 1.8, transcript, “One Great City” Interviews.


141 Ibid.
Metropolitan consolidation would reverse the city’s declining population and push it toward 555,000, carrying forth the myth of a “Magic City” that seemingly grew overnight. The metropolitan area gained over 100,000 people in the 1960s, while the city of Birmingham’s population slipped almost to 300,000 (See Appendix, Tables 1 and 3). Most of the new suburban residents were white. Vestavia Hills, home to Joseph Volker, rivaled Homewood and Mountain Brook as an Over-the-Mountain suburban haven for an affluent white professional class. The African American population decreased in the Over-the-Mountain suburbs, most likely due to the decline of live-in domestic service work or, in Homewood’s case, the destruction of their neighborhood for Red Mountain Expressway. Whites and blacks also left the industrial suburbs of Fairfield, Irondale, and Tarrant City, but the immediately adjacent suburbs of Fultondale, Midfield, and Pleasant Grove grew in population. By 1970, the city of Birmingham lost 40,000 residents, and a fourth of those were African American. Blacks, who represented 40 percent of the city’s population, began a forced migration when urban renewal programs for UAB, multiple “Design for Progress” elements, and interstate construction demolished their homes.

Population decline in the city worried civic leaders because their projects depended on a healthy tax base. Federal programs also considered per capita in

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142 Ibid.


allocating resources, as did companies in deciding where to invest and build plants. UAB, ONB, and City Hall depended on federal funding to stimulate economic development and subsidize education, public health, and neighborhood improvements. The city matched those funds with sales tax revenue and bond initiatives. Suburban municipalities surrounding Birmingham increasingly offered public services of their own rather than contract with the city or county. Consolidation would combine these resources into a more efficient system of service. David Herring, who was the new chairman of the Jefferson County Democratic Party, believed, “It’s kind of foolish that we have so many city governments….It’s a waste of energy, efforts, dollars.”\textsuperscript{145} In speeches throughout the metropolitan area, Vann claimed county, city, and suburban city officials would let a fire rage while they argued over jurisdiction. Businesses with branches located throughout the metropolitan area could pay one license, pay roll, and sales tax rather than the numerous ones they paid to the city of Birmingham and its suburbs.\textsuperscript{146}

Since the end of World War II, civic leaders believed Birmingham’s future depended on uniting the city with its suburbs, especially the affluent Over-the-Mountain ones. Two annexation campaigns in 1949 and 1959 and one merger attempt in 1964 had failed, but the last one yielded a partial victory. Residents in the industrial suburbs of Fairfield, Irondale, and Tarrant City overwhelmingly defeated the 1964 initiative, but Over-the-Mountain suburbanites were more favorable toward it. By a margin of less than 50 voters, Homewood residents opted to merge with the city of Birmingham, but opponents filed a lawsuit to overturn that decision based on improper notification of the

\textsuperscript{145} Herring, interview.

\textsuperscript{146} As well as speeches cited, see Jean Sanger to David J. Vann, October 20, 1970, File 28.30, Vann Papers; David J. Vann to Jean Sanger, November 10, 1970, File 28.30, Vann Papers.
election. The Alabama Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and Homewood remained an independent suburb. Mountain Brook narrowly defeated merger by a 4 percent margin, or roughly 250 votes, but 10 percent of its residents had switched their votes in favor of uniting with the city between 1959 and 1964.147 This turnaround indicated that the 1962 change in municipal government was a positive factor in their decision. After the merger defeat, citizens of Homewood and Mountain Brook continued to talk with the Birmingham City Council about how to design a more successful plan, which included safeguarding the suburbs’ independent school systems.148 Indeed, these dialogues provided the “theoretical thought” behind the “One Great City” legislative package to ensure some autonomy for suburban municipalities.149

In the “One Great City” enabling legislation, Vann hoped to fix one of the core problems in the mayor-council system. Due to issues of time, municipal reformers in 1962 proceeded with at-large rather than district seats for the city council. A consolidated Birmingham would have nine districts, guaranteeing suburbanites representation. The wealth behind Red Mountain also would be shared across the entire metropolitan area through taxation (See Appendix, Table 4). The restructuring of Birmingham and Jefferson County governments, however, threatened to limit black political power. A


148 Except for Mountain Brook, which operated one school, all of these suburbs used the Jefferson County school system in 1964. By 1969, however, Mountain Brook, Homewood, and Vestavia had launched separate school systems. See personal letters, meeting minutes of the Birmingham City Council Merger Committee, and Birmingham City Council resolutions in File 7.22, Seibels Papers.

consolidated Birmingham would keep urban and black representation in check in relation to the growth of the white suburbs. Two-thirds of Jefferson County residents were white, whereas blacks accounted for two of every five citizens in the city in 1970 (See Appendix, Table 2). As whites continued to flee the city for the suburbs, urban African Americans stood to gain politically from their departure. People who sat on the at-large city council responded to an electoral majority, and the continuing increase in the number of black voters indicated that they would have more influence in the coming years.

According to James White III, one of the principal architects of “One Great City,” however, African Americans supported the campaign.

Despite its potential limits to black political power, “One Great City” attempted to overcome the substantial divisions in metropolitan Birmingham by uniting area citizens around the designs of progress fashioned by businessmen, doctors, educators, journalists, and lawyers. An early poll conducted by the Birmingham News revealed that 65 percent of Over-the-Mountain suburbanites favored “One Great City.” Every major civic organization controlled by these suburbanites, including Operation New Birmingham, the Birmingham Rotary Club, and the Downtown Action Committee, supported consolidation.

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153 Vann, interview.
News did as well. University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) President Joseph F. Volker, who by 1970 controlled the second largest employer in the metropolitan area, was an advocate of consolidation. He corralled a group of thirty white business leaders to the UAB campus and asked them “to assist the consolidation effort by individually contacting two or three people” in the county delegation and state legislature to support enabling legislation.155 One opponent recalled, “The power structure of downtown Birmingham was…really pushing” the campaign. The overwhelming influence of Birmingham’s business community resulted in the opposition’s inability to “get any local public relations firm to handle our advertising.”156

Despite the power behind “One Great City,” the opposition successfully killed metropolitan consolidation by claiming it was undemocratic. Lawyer Charles Speir, who once shared offices with municipal reformer H. Erskine Smith, became one the key organizers of the Jefferson County Citizens Committee for Local Self-Government. Speir argued that “One Great City” denied suburbanites political self-determination. Vann and others believed a one-time, county-wide election would make consolidation successful at the polls because voters in the city of Birmingham could outweigh suburban voters who did not favor it. The measure would fail if each suburban city held separate elections. Speir and his allies also purposely confused the legal distinctions between consolidation


156 Charles Speir, interview by James Baggett, November 9, 1996, File 1.6, transcript, “One Great City” Interviews.
and annexation in their rhetoric against “One Great City.” It was easy to do; the enabling legislation was so complex, one of lawyer explained, that its proposed “constitutional amendments…were thicker than most statues” in the state constitution.

By all accounts, white suburbanites feared losing their way of life in a consolidated Birmingham. For example, sanitation workers in Mountain Brook picked up garbage behind houses, whereas in the city residents had to take their trash to the curb. Lawyer Thad Long explained, “That was going to make their lives less pleasant” in the Over-the-Mountain suburb. Long did not personally support consolidation but he wrote portions of the enabling legislation. He described himself as “a lawyer, acting and functioning as a lawyer” rather than as an individual citizen. Other white suburbanites, he recalled, “were scared to death that this hovering monster of the city of Birmingham… was going to come in and gobble them up somehow.”

“Lurking in the background” of the entire debate over “One Great City,” Long described, was the issue of school desegregation. It had sabotaged the 1964 merger and 1959 annexation campaigns, which was why the “One Great City” legislative package took special care to provide for multiple school systems within a consolidated Birmingham. Liberty National Life Insurance Company had loaned its private jets to Vann and others to fly to Washington, DC, to make sure their plans for schools would not

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157 Ibid.
158 Long, interview.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
161 Alabama state law stipulated that school districts were coterminous with municipal boundaries. “One Great City” sought to amend that law.
be in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Yet, Speir and others believed that the federal government would not approve the new school plans. Speir attributed his desire to preserve the autonomy of the Vestavia Hill School System, which he partly designed, as his “prime motivation” to stop “One Great City.” Very few African Americans lived in the Over-the-Mountain suburbs, yet Speir denied that his position against consolidation was “a racial matter.”

Speir shifted the blame to his working-class white neighbors in western Birmingham for harboring racist attitudes, but their reasons for opposing “One Great City” also spoke of class antagonisms. Some whites fled the city in the 1960s because they opposed the biracial civic elite. Speir’s colleagues had been members of the White Citizens Council; the Over-the-Mountain suburbanite called them “some mean characters.” In response to Richard Pizitz’s support of “One Great City,” western-area whites cut up their Pizitz department store charge cards and mailed them to their lender. White business leaders also had expressed concerns about Vann’s participation because he was “too controversial.” The last time he was a spokesman for a civic campaign, Jim Crow had fallen in Birmingham. The city had a completely new political culture and downtown landscape that some whites in metropolitan Birmingham rejected. They also had experienced the cost of “Design for Progress.” One small business owner declared, “In every city victimized by Urban Renewal, thousands of home owners have been uprooted, their homes demolished, and real estate operators enriched fabulously

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162 Vann, interview.
163 Speir, interview.
164 Ibid.
165 Vann, interview; Herring, interview.
while the victims [sic] of Urban Renewal become burdened with debt load for a new home which the great paternal liberal government has forced upon them.” Urban renewal, he elaborated, was a “monstrous crime against humanity” intent on “racial integration and mongrelization [sic].”\(^\text{166}\)

The failure of “One Great City” revealed the limits of the civic elite vision of a new Birmingham. It was highly idealistic and utopian, without the slightest recognition that a sizable portion of black and white metropolitan citizens disagreed with or experienced the costs of progress. Thad Long, the lawyer who worked on the enabling legislation despite his opposition to it, remarked that Vann and his allies should have sold metropolitan consolidation to area citizens as a sacrifice for the greater good. The city, Long said, “face[d] a crisis of leadership” in that “the more talented, the more affluent people” living in the suburbs left the city to “a poorer, less educated, less wealthy base.”\(^\text{167}\) Speir reflected twenty-five years after the campaign, “Since Birmingham has now turned out to be minority and with all the problems…I thought, well maybe it would have been better” if consolidation had been successful.\(^\text{168}\) Speir and Long revealed white suburban ambivalence toward black political leadership of Birmingham, something that other white suburbanites in ONB accepted when they created the Community Affairs Committee. Even though “One Great City” would have limited black political power, it also would have bolstered the city’s tax base to provide services to its black and white residents. Neither racial equality nor economic opportunity could emerge if the city of

\(^{166}\) “A Citizen who has had too much Dictatorial Government” to Albert Boutwell, February 17, 1966, File 2.9, Boutwell Papers.

\(^{167}\) Long, interview.

\(^{168}\) Speir, interview.
Birmingham could not finance them. This trade-off between black political power and the strengthening of Birmingham was a compromise that some white suburbanites refused to make. Core decline was a consequence of failed metropolitan consolidation.

Conclusion

By 1970, Birmingham’s economic and political reformers had experienced major victories and disastrous setbacks in implementing their designs for progress. The changes that occurred in the mid- to late 1960s were the result of constant compromises between black and white men working on specific issues in a particular place and time. Volker, Gaston, and Townsend hardly represented the progressive coalition social activist Bayard Rustin imagined, but they individually held visions of Birmingham that were elastic enough to incorporate new challenges and agendas. In an era of intense political division, this new coalition was no small feat. Volker’s urban university, Gaston’s black business district, and Townsend’s suburban city could never immediately satisfy critics who derided their claims of progress. Their goals and strategies were long-term investments in building sources of economic, political, and spatial power in post-1965 Birmingham.

The informal structures of power remained the place for black and white civic leaders to hash out the details of governing a new Birmingham. Volker’s “Kitchen Cabinet,” Pitt’s “Friends of Miles,” and ONB’s Community Affairs Committee provided blacks and whites and suburbanites and urbanites with networks to design a new Birmingham hidden from public view. ONB’s role represented an elite version of citizen participation that combined the goals of representative government and metropolitan consolidation. Suburban whites and middle-class blacks had direct access to City Hall when voters and laws prevented their formal entrance. Within a few years, citizen
participation with municipal decision-making ability would include the working poor and other groups of citizens left out of the middle-class vision of the city. In contrast, the doors of access literally fell to the floor at UAB once Volker accomplished the first step toward forming an urban university. Volker recognized UAB’s long ties to African Americans as patients, employees, and residents of the Southside community. Federal non-discrimination requirements attached to research, building construction, and public health grants further prodded him to expand spaces for blacks and women within UAB. His urban campus soon would be bigger than the central business district.
CHAPTER 5

“ONE GREAT CITY”: BUILDING DIVERSITY AND POWER IN THE NEW METROPOLITAN POLITICAL ECONOMY, 1966-1976

The phenomenal growth of the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB) in the late 1960s and early 1970s made President Dr. Joseph F. Volker one of Birmingham’s most powerful civic leaders.¹ In 1971, members of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce chose him as one of the city’s top ten leaders throughout its 100-year history.² Volker’s selection was remarkable for a man who had a twenty-year reputation among some whites as a northern communist intent on “integrating” Birmingham. Volker slowly chipped away at Birmingham’s values and ideas to better reflect his own, and UAB was the physical site and public institution in which he invested them. Also on the Chamber’s list were realtor William P. Engel, entrepreneur A. G. Gaston, Alabama Power Company President Thomas W. Martin, department store magnate Louis Pizitz, lawyer Frank E. Spain, and founder of Liberty National Life Insurance Frank Samford—all of whom were involved with UAB in some form. Only one of the top ten leaders was an industrialist. Spain, who had been working with Volker and other administrators since the early 1950s, had long believed his civic investment in UAB would “make it a larger industry” for

¹ In 1969, the University of Alabama Board of Trustees established the University of Alabama in Birmingham. In 1984, it changed the name to the University of Alabama at Birmingham. For clarity purposes, I use the latter throughout this dissertation.

Birmingham. For a city born out of the industrial revolution, the Chamber’s selections spoke to the emergence of Birmingham’s professional service economy.

Figure 5.1 President Joseph F. Volker, 1969. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

In the 1970s, UAB became a “city within a city” with a daily population of 30,000 metropolitan area citizens moving within a 60-block campus. According to Operation New Birmingham (ONB), the city’s public-private redevelopment agency, the university “out-mushroom[ed] the parent community” of downtown’s central business district. UAB’s expansion was “staggering even in a city that had traditionally pointed

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3 Frank E. Spain to John Woods, November 9, 1970, File 32.100, Office of the President of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Joseph F. Volker, 1969-1976 (hereafter cited as Volker-President), UAB Archives.
out its own rapid growth as a hallmark.” As president of UAB, Volker managed federal funding to build a new city of knowledge with quasi-municipal departments such as planning, facilities maintenance, and campus security. Block clearings, building construction, and parking decks expanded UAB’s presence in the city’s skyline and visually reinforced the university’s increasing power in civic affairs. Mayor George S. Seibels recognized Volker’s ability to mark progress through construction: “You have set an atmosphere that could be an example for the rest of the city to follow.” Volker wielded a near absolute control in how UAB would look and function as the economic and cultural center of a new Birmingham.

Under Volker’s leadership, UAB symbolized the image of progress Birmingham’s civic leaders had desired since 1962. Volker saw UAB as an “urban university” that would be a responsive and inclusive public institution for all metropolitan residents. “The fabric of the urban university,” he publicly remarked in 1975, “is determined by the overall needs of the community.” Volker often used local demands to justify many new components of UAB, including the Center for Labor Affairs, School of Engineering, Spain Rehabilitation Clinic, Rust Computer Center, and Women Studies curriculum. From the late 1960s onward, federal funding requirements regarding equal access and Volker’s agreeable implementation of them enhanced the image of UAB as an open, welcoming space for women and minorities. Its expansion physically made room for

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5 George S. Seibels to Joseph F. Volker, July 10, 1970, File 47.48, George S. Seibels Papers, BPL-DAM.

6 Joseph F. Volker, speech, October 13, 1975, transcript, “Conference on Urban Universities,” Auburn University, Joseph F. Volker Papers, UAB Archives.
those previously excluded or discouraged from using public institutions in the city. By the end of Volker’s tenure as president in 1976, the university’s growth reinforced racial diversity, economic growth, and land development as measures of progress in Birmingham.

UAB’s prominence emerged out of its various services to black and white individuals, the massive infusion of federal funding, and the strengthening of private-public partnerships in developing the professional service economy. Postwar programs of the New Deal welfare state had created the foundations for UAB and the expansion of the middle class in Birmingham. After 1964, federal officials accelerated this process through the Great Society. Through non-discrimination measures in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans gained access to the university as students. The act also applied to women, who perhaps became the biggest beneficiaries of non-discrimination and affirmative action programs. Both groups in Birmingham used their college education to gain access to the new professional service economy.

The healthcare industry received a financial boon through the creation of Medicare and Medicaid in the Social Security Act of 1966. These programs expanded the market demand for maturing healthcare specialties, such as cardiac surgery, for an aging population. They also provided African Americans with unparalleled access to medical care in Birmingham. As UAB’s first black faculty member Dr. James T. Montgomery bluntly noted, “It’s been Medicare and money….that integrated” hospitals. The National Institutes of Health, of course, continued to fund clinical research for medical breakthroughs. Universities with medical centers such as UAB benefited enormously

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from this infusion of federal dollars to strengthen markets for healthcare. Consequently, supporting industries such as insurance and banking grew in kind. By the end of the 1970s, the healthcare industry was the third largest segment of the national economy and the fastest growing one in the Birmingham region (See Appendix, Tables 5 and 6).³⁸

Volker and other university administrators supported an emerging set of rights for UAB that promoted the maxim, what is good for the university is good for Birmingham. A natural politician, Volker used UAB’s growing political and economic power in Birmingham as ways to prevent public officials and citizens from questioning its interests, needs, and actions. The university became the largest employer in the city by 1978, an achievement certainly aided by the ongoing industrial disinvestment that stripped Birmingham of a stable blue-collar workforce. UAB was the single largest land developer in the city, which ultimately resulted in the re-forging and relocation of Birmingham’s identity as a “Magic City” within UAB’s campus. Volker, however, continually compromised his vision of a progressive and unified urban university as he made UAB an economic and civic powerhouse. The institution’s growth brought disruptions to Birmingham that perpetuated its economic, racial, and spatial divisions. Although UAB acted as a buffer to the continuing influence of deindustrialization in the metropolitan area, it primarily protected an educated and suburban white middle class.

Building an Urban University: The Center for Urban Affairs and Planning a New City

In his first annual report as president of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Volker wrote, “The city, with its multitude of problems in government, transportation, race relations, services, education, [and] health, is the great inspiration for today’s thinkers and doers.” For over two decades, Birmingham had been “an immense laboratory for observation, case material, research, and professional practice,” but it was now time for UAB to shape the city. “The University of Alabama in Birmingham, its philosophy closely and properly akin to the latter part of the twentieth century,” Volker carefully noted, “is unlikely to look to the traditions of the past for its identity. It is of the present, and the needs of the future will shape its destiny.”

Separated by rail tracks from downtown’s marble and steel skyscrapers, UAB’s multi-storied red brick buildings created a second point of focus in the city’s skyline. Yet in 1966, poverty surrounded the campus in the form of shotgun housing, overgrown lawns, and the presence of African Americans. It also crept into the campus. Flooding plagued it because of the lack of drain sewers in the Southside neighborhood. Public officials at the municipal and federal levels joined with top executives of Liberty National Life Insurance and UAB to wipe out these slum conditions to build a new economic engine for Birmingham. After four years of planning, UAB acquired forty-five blocks of its surrounding neighborhood through federal urban renewal programs in 1969. Shortly thereafter, UAB became an autonomous university.

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Through the expansion of UAB, Director of Planning Alfred A. Moffett destroyed the Jim Crow order that once dominated downtown. Moffett, previously of the University of Colorado Medical Center, saw the urban campus as a chance to “approach the ideal, and to provide for future conditions.” He emphasized an anticipatory, forward-thinking approach such as providing pedestrian walkways and landscaped greenery on top of campus buildings and above the city streets. UAB’s expansion wave knocked down block after block of black urban poverty and structural inequalities. These blocks could not support the university’s expected needs, including the weight of its buildings, power supply, and traffic system. Moffett lobbied municipal engineers, traffic coordinators, and utility companies to address these remnants of Jim Crow planning. He also loathed downtown planning based on “outmoded standards and conditions” and “pre-automobile concepts of 19th Century vintage” main streets. Moffett’s design of UAB rendered it a modern city with a different look and identity from Birmingham’s decaying central business district less than six blocks away.

Moffett often altered campus plans to accommodate the needs of the Medical Center. By 1969, over one-third of UAB’s operating budget derived from federal funding and private investments in new programs, clinics, or classrooms (See Appendix, Tables 7

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12 Alfred A. Moffett to Joseph F. Volker, September 28, 1966, File 25.62, Volker-VPHA.
and 8). Between 1969 and 1976, UAB established 16 academic and medical centers of specialized study and added through construction or acquisition 28 buildings. Medical education broadened to include a School of Community and Allied Health, School of Health Services Administration, and Regional Technical Institute for Health Occupations, a center derived directly from War on Poverty programs. UAB also established the Alabama Regional Medical Program that was part of federal efforts to concentrate healthcare specializations such as cardiac care, cancer treatments, and stroke rehabilitation in regional zones. The University of Alabama School of Nursing finally moved from Tuscaloosa to Birmingham in 1967. Most of UAB’s new hires worked within the Medical Center, where faculty hires there outpaced University College’s three to one.

University College, the academic side of UAB, made significant gains as well. Arguing that an urban university had to be “convenient to the people,” Volker continued its offerings of early morning and late night classes in the Schools of Business, Education, Engineering, and Arts and Sciences. Before 1969, UAB served primarily non-traditional college students such as engineers and teachers seeking continuing education. The new UAB now attracted traditional, college-aged students. Black and

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14 Author calculation derived from UAB Archives, “A Chronology of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and its Predecessor Institutions and Organizations, 1831–,” http://www.uab.edu/historical/uabchron.html.


16 Volker, speech, “Conference on Urban Universities.”
white students flocked to Birmingham’s only four-year public university. Enrollment jumped from 3,881 in 1969 to 8,471 in 1976. As early as 1973, 11 percent of all undergraduate students were African American, and five years later, that number almost doubled to reach 21.7 percent.

Figure 5.2 Aerial view of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, looking west, 1979. The hospital complex is in the upper left corner. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)


In 1969, Volker established the Center for Urban Affairs to help implement his version of an urban university.\textsuperscript{19} The Center worked with municipal departments and community agencies to develop policy solutions for the city’s problems. Volker initially tagged John Dunbar, one of his protégés, to lead the Center after his brief stint as a consultant for the National Institutes of Health.\textsuperscript{20} In the mid-1960s, Dunbar had gained an interest in urban affairs after his involvement with the Jefferson County Committee on Economic Opportunity (JCCEO), the local community action agency for the War on Poverty. In those meetings, Dunbar realized poor African Americans “ha[d] the same desire for their kids as my mama had for me.” A child of a divorced working mother, he further reflected, “I had almost been around black people all my life and never knew them, absolutely didn’t. And all of a sudden they became human beings, individuals, senses of humor, people.”\textsuperscript{21} Passion could not make up for the knowledge needed to run the Center effectively. Dunbar left the Center in 1970 to become UAB’s affirmative action officer, and Assistant Director Edward S. LaMonte took his place.

Under LaMonte’s leadership, the Center for Urban Affairs transformed into a civically engaged think-tank shaped by “New Left” scholarship. LaMonte first arrived in Birmingham in 1964 as a Harvard University undergraduate to work with students at the historically black Miles College. He returned to the city five years later after completing his doctoral coursework in political science at the University of Chicago. For his dissertation, he chose Birmingham as a case study of race, reform, and social welfare.

\textsuperscript{19} Its original name was the Center for Urban Studies.

\textsuperscript{20} A native of Birmingham, Dunbar was a dental student, a faculty member, a grant writer, advisor to other academic research institutions, and dean of Student Affairs in his thirty-year involvement with UAB.

LaMonte represented a new generation of scholars who not only asked new questions but also broadly applied their knowledge by working with communities outside of academe. LaMonte served on numerous committees, including the Community Affairs Committee of Operation New Birmingham (ONB), in which he advocated for policy changes to further push Birmingham toward racial progress and urban vitality. Along with historian Blaine A. Brownell, who was chair of the Department of Urban Studies, LaMonte used the Center to introduce Birmingham to new ways of thinking. Their work in UAB and Birmingham subsequently influenced the development of a new field, southern urban history.22

UAB’s stated focus as an “urban university” provided a place for LaMonte and Brownell to fuse their knowledge based on scholarly literature and hands-on experience in urban affairs to raise social consciousness among white and black students. The Department of Urban Studies offered courses in black history, contemporary black political thought, and the urban crisis. Brownell confided to LaMonte, “I am not interested in turning out bureaucrats, but a bunch of tigers who have not only the skills but the intellectual proclivity to make fundamental changes when they seem necessary. To do this, we need to concentrate on social awareness, social criticism, etc., and work their butts off!”23 Brownell and LaMonte secured student internships at City Hall through

22 Unlike Brownell, LaMonte did not publish any major works until the mid-1990s. He studied with Richard Wade at the University of Chicago at the same time that Carl Abbott, Kenneth T. Jackson, Roger W. Lotchin, and Zane L. Miller did. Wade’s students launched the “new” urban history. In 1972, Brownell wrote an article that placed Birmingham’s development in the 1920s in a national framework and, along with David R. Goldfield in 1976, co-wrote a volume that served as a template to study southern urban history. See Blaine A. Brownell, “Birmingham, Alabama: New South City in the 1920s,” Journal of Southern History 38, no. 1 (Feb. 1972); Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, ed., The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977).

23 Blaine A. Brownell to Edward S. LaMonte, July 4, 1973, File 2.3, CUA Director’s Files.
their connections to ONB. This service-learning component gave students the opportunity to see how the municipal system worked and how it could change. Brownell and LaMonte also wanted to hire a black faculty member because urban studies necessarily involved issues affecting African Americans. In the fall of 1973, Odessa Woolfolk joined the Center of Urban Affairs as a full-time project coordinator and the Department of Urban Studies as a part-time instructor of black history courses.24

LaMonte and Brownell also encouraged their students to launch innovative initiatives that addressed urban problems. One such student was Prince C. Chambliss Jr. who majored in political science. Chambliss quickly attracted the attention of Brownell and LaMonte after his transfer to UAB in 1970. Brownell characterized him “as a friend of our program and as someone whom we should cultivate whenever possible.”25 Chambliss was instrumental in establishing the student-led Afro-American Association. As its president, he organized a Saturday morning tutoring program for black middle school students at the Bell-Ullman Building, which was formerly the site of one of the three all-black high schools in Birmingham before 1965. “Since the building was taken from the community,” Chambliss explained to the Birmingham News, “we feel it’s in the interest of the University to give the building back to the community.”26 Chambliss also urged University College administrators to implement a deferred payment plan for textbooks to help keep low-income, predominately minority students from joining the

24 Paul W. Brann to Edward S. LaMonte, May 25, 1972, File 8.33, CUA Director’s Files.
25 Blaine A. Brownell to Edward S. LaMonte, December 21, 1974, File 2.1, CUA Director’s Files.
“ever-increasing undergraduate probation list.” Chambliss’ student activism won him the attention of Volker. The president hired him as his special assistant to study approaches for encouraging black students to apply to professional schools. Indeed, Chambliss left UAB to attend Harvard Law School.

Despite the Center’s importance to Volker’s vision of an urban university, it lacked administrative and financial support. Indeed, as early as 1970, Dunbar worried about the Center’s funding, role, and placement in the university because it served both academic and community development functions. The issue was never resolved until the Department of Urban Studies folded into the Department of Political Science in 1980. LaMonte later confessed that Executive Vice-President of University College George C. Campbell never understood the Center’s purpose or the role of an urban university. Consequently, the Center remained underfunded. It drew heavily on outside sources to fund its work, often tying LaMonte and his staff to ONB and municipal departments. Center staff developed policy recommendations to reform the Birmingham Police Department, rehabilitate the city’s inadequate housing stock, and revitalize urban neighborhoods. They also worked with Miles College and the Jefferson County Department of Public Health to encourage and prepare African Americans for higher education, especially in the health sciences. Woolfolk, in particular, worked with the

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27 Prince C. Chambliss Jr. and Parnell Cephus to Fain Guthrie, February 1, 1970, File 3.11, CUA Director’s Files. By the end of the Fall 1969 quarter, roughly 10 percent of all undergraduates were on academic probation. Of those 300 students, 80 percent were transfer students. Almost 60 percent of transfer students on probation were from the predominately white Tuscaloosa campus and the recently established Jefferson State Community College. Clay S. Sheffield to George C. Campbell, November 11, 1969, File 7.41, CUA Director’s Files.


29 Edward S. LaMonte, in telephone conversation with the author, Birmingham, Alabama, June 8, 2007.
JCCEO to help their clients prepare for the civil service exam. All of these activities in the Center, which were funded largely by non-UAB sources, were part of LaMonte’s efforts to bring African Americans into the political and civic life of Birmingham. The Center’s relative isolation in UAB, however, indicated that LaMonte’s social justice advocacy was not a central concern of university administrators.

**Equal Opportunity Employer?: Affirmative Action for Women and African Americans**

In June 1969, over 70 black maintenance employees in University Hospital filed a complaint with the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) charging UAB with racial discrimination. Their grievances included limited employment advancement, segregated women’s locker rooms, and uniforms of a different style and color that set them apart from their white co-workers in the main hospital cafeteria. HEW officials found the charges to be true. They also noted that white supervisors continued the practice of referring to blacks in “traditional and customary terms” that “dehumanized rather than dignified them as persons.” If HEW officially charged UAB with disregarding non-discrimination mandates, the university could lose $17 million in federal contracts and grants in that academic year (See Appendix, Table 7). A non-compliance finding also could delay or cancel UAB’s urban renewal campaign, which the Department of Housing and Urban Development had not yet approved.

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team quickly acted. Administrators ordered one of the dressing rooms closed, thereby
forcing black and white women to use the other one that remained open. Volker
recognized that different cafeteria uniforms “suggest[ed] difference by race rather than
job function,” so he ordered all of them to wear the same style and color. All of these
material changes resembled the ones Volker and his team undertook in 1965 to
desegregate UAB.

As the result of the initiatives taken by employees and the dictates of federal
policy, Volker turned his attention to developing an affirmative action plan for UAB. Volker prefaces the plan by characterizing UAB “as an instrument of the finest ideals of
citizenship.” The university “holds as traditional its responsibility for improving the
conditions of life for the people of Alabama, the Nation, and all countries of the world
community….Inherent in its implementation is the University’s design to lend new
efforts, imagination, and resources to the recruitment, employment, development, and full
utilization of our country’s disadvantaged citizens.” The plan focused on university-
wide communication, on-the-job training, and minority recruitment in the non-academic
workforce.

To overcome personal bias in employment, UAB implemented a universal hiring
system that vetted all openings through the Personnel Department. That department

34 Volker asserted that the difference in uniforms was one of job function. Cashiers were part of the “Office
and Clerical” job category, the majority of whom were white females, and cooks and dishwashers were
considered to be “Service Workers,” the majority of whom were black females.

35 Volker communicated with administrators at Emory University, Tulane University, and the University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill to find out how they addressed recent non-compliance reports from HEW.

restructured employment categories to better reflect job duties, explain qualifications for those jobs, and addressed HEW’s concerns.37 HEW had noted the overall placement of African Americans in “dead-end jobs of lower level categories.” An earlier and anonymous complaint made mention of the fact that supervisors told “the Negro women to do some of the duties that men are suppose[d] to perform.”39 The precision of the plan could point to where employment segregation existed and affirm UAB’s commitment to “equal pay for equal work.”40 Leonard Harper, director of the Personnel Department, hoped that the expansive nature of UAB’s affirmative action plan would “get us out of the numbers business.”41

Except for the rejection of numerical objectives for employment and education, UAB’s plan mirrored the demands and suggestions for affirmative action made by many labor and civil rights activists at the national level.42 UAB administrators, Harper explained to HEW, “were philosophically opposed” to quotas. “The idea suggest[s] limiting features to our program” that “work against the realization of full equal employment opportunity,” and numerical objectives would “minimize efforts once they are reached.”43 Practically, however, administrators could not reach them. In 1969, only three black men and one black woman had joined the Medical Center faculty and enjoyed


38 HEW, Southeastern Regional Office, “Findings and Memoranda of Understanding.”

39 “An Employee for Three Years” to “Whom It May Concern,” June 9, 1965, File 24.5, Volker-VPHA.

40 Matthew F. McNulty to Joseph F. Volker, October 22, 1964, File 22.86, Volker-VPHA.


42 On the development of affirmative action at the national level, see Nancy MacLean, Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006), 103-14.

hospital privileges. Although these sparse numbers in professional employment suggested discrimination, they reflected the detrimental effects of Jim Crow on African American higher and secondary education. As late as 1973, there were only seventy black doctors, thirty-nine black dentists, and one black optometrist practicing in the entire state of Alabama. Volker fretted that “the marginal Negro applicant is doomed to rejection” under standard medical school admission practices. Against intense opposition from clinical faculty, Volker adopted a double-review system to “close the gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots.’”

UAB failed to gain more than token black male admissions for the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, but its newly created schools in healthcare support services attracted black women. This discrepancy resulted in the historical employment positions African American men and women held in the university. Because of Jim Crow laws that governed healthcare services and UAB’s role as an indigent care provider, black women always had been a part of the campus as allied health professionals. The desegregation of education at UAB granted them the educational qualifications to become occupational therapists and licensed practical nurses or to learn new healthcare support specialties. By 1973, blacks comprised 16 percent each of the School of Community and Allied Health, School of Nursing, and Graduate School enrollment. Within five years, black women

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44 They were James T. Montgomery (School of Medicine faculty, 1963), Clifton O. Dummett (School of Dentistry faculty, 1963), Herschell Lee Hamilton (general surgeon at University Hospital, 1969), and Deloris Skipwith (School of Nursing faculty, 1969). UAB Archives, “A Chronology.”


46 Joseph F. Volker to S. Richardson Hill and Cliff Meador, August 6, 1969, File 30.34, Volker-President.

47 “Institutional Study Program Report.”
represented 68.3 percent of all African American students. Their presence as students spoke to how far public universities in Alabama had come since Vivian Malone attempted to enroll at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in June 1963.

Volker took a hands-on approach to recruit promising black instructors, undergraduates, and professional students and often pursued candidates suggested by prominent civic leaders and friends. John Munro, director of Freshman Studies at Miles College, suggested a program to enroll talented black high schoolers in pre-collegiate classes as a way of moving them “toward UAB and toward a profession, especially in the sciences.” Munro, who was white, also suggested Rev. Abraham L. Woods II, a prominent religious and civil rights leader, as an instructor for black history courses at

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University of Alabama Trustee Ehney Camp urged Volker to employ one promising black male student who currently attended Dartmouth University and was interested in a healthcare career. Camp urged Volker to see these personal connections to UAB as vital to building progress: “The Birmingham community needs to retain as many as possible of the bright young black people in order to provide more effective leadership as we attempt to maintain good race relations.”

School of Dentistry Dean Charles A. “Scotty” McCallum asked entrepreneur A. G. Gaston to fund summer school tuition for the School’s first two black dental students. He also wanted Gaston “to assist us in developing more community support for those students who have proven themselves as being fine citizens and who are desirous of attending professional schools.”

Volker and his allies used their relationships with black civic elites to find the high-profile black students and faculty members needed to create a more desegregated UAB. These actions rendered UAB as a public institution eager to advance racial progress in Birmingham.

Despite Volker’s embrace of affirmative action and measures to correct the racial imbalances in medical education and employment, UAB did more to standardize racial and gender hierarchies than correct them. In 1969, women accounted for two-thirds of the UAB workforce, and African Americans held one-third of all jobs. These groups provided support services such as housekeepers, secretaries, technicians, and lower-level healthcare workers. Nursing and allied health professions, which were expanding employment options for white and black women, fell under the affirmative action plan,

49 John Munro to George C. Campbell, August 14, 1970, File 2.19, CUA Director’s Files.

50 Ehney A. Camp to Joseph F. Volker, December 18, 1970, File 33.6, Volker-President.

but the predominantly white male clinical faculty did not.\textsuperscript{52} Because the university’s plan published job descriptions and salary levels of its non-academic workforce, the labor of women and African Americans fell under public review. In 1975, administrators removed the years of experience from job descriptions because they felt it potentially excluded women and African Americans from employment advancement.\textsuperscript{53} In practice, the policy negated experience as a factor in determining promotion and salaries.

The adoption of the affirmative action plan occurred at the same time different colleges, schools, and departments administratively reorganized into one university. Yet, academic freedom often meant that most schools and departments operated independently of each other.\textsuperscript{54} Deans and department heads frequently failed to post job openings through the Personnel Department. Academic employment did not fall under the purview of affirmative action until 1973. Administrators urged academic and medical department chairs to make “good faith searches” for new faculty members that included African Americans and women.\textsuperscript{55} Chairs in the hard or applied sciences insisted that the lack of Ph.D.s among these groups made it “a matter of chance” to hire them.\textsuperscript{56} Neither they nor administrators, however, set up mechanisms to encourage black and women undergraduates to pursue graduate education. Less than a year later, faculty hires largely remained white men. John Dunbar, UAB’s affirmative action officer, nevertheless

\textsuperscript{52} Clinical practitioners were either academic faculty members or local doctors and dentists that enjoyed hospital privileges. The latter were not employees of UAB.


\textsuperscript{55} John Dunbar to Joseph F. Volker, June 29, 1972, File 49.5, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{56} Joseph H. Appleton to M. C. McCollum, July 1, 1971, File 49.10, Volker-President.
thanked administrators for doing “a commendable job in recruiting and hiring females and minorities in relationship to their availability in the market place.”\textsuperscript{57} Dunbar also believed that further oversight over faculty employment “would be contrary to the dearest traditions of this university.”\textsuperscript{58} The continuing legacy of racial inequalities in secondary education and the ideals of academic freedom that infused the university inhibited equal opportunity employment in professional positions.

Department chairs often overlooked internal candidates such as the numerous female instructors hired to meet growing enrollment demand in the Extension Center, University College’s predecessor, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the spring of 1972, Grace Andrews, a white instructor in the English Department, sued UAB on the grounds of sex discrimination. Andrews, who earned a masters degree from the University of Alabama, charged UAB with failing to promote or grant tenure to her after a decade of teaching experience.\textsuperscript{59} A similar suit followed in early 1974 from Martha Johnson in the Art Department.\textsuperscript{60} Part of becoming a university was having faculty with Ph.D.s. UAB administrators rejected the claims of these and other lawsuits by pointing out that women were 23.1 percent of the faculty in 1973. Most of these women, however, were not teaching as professors. In 1971, there were 62 female instructors and 15 female lecturers, representing 69.4 percent of all women academics in UAB.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{57} John Dunbar to UAB Deans, January 7, 1974, File 49.17, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{58} John Dunbar to Joseph F. Volker, June 29, 1972, File 49.5, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{59} Information on Andrews gathered from File 58.7, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{60} Information on Johnson gathered from File 49.11, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{61} “Table III: Equal Employment Opportunity, Female/Male Comparison,” ca. April 1973, File 49.13, Volker-President; Hugh A. Brimm to Joseph F. Volker, May 7, 1971, File 49.9, Volker-President.
An increase of labor activism among service workers and public employees in the late 1960s to mid-1970s also drove Volker’s acute attention to support workers. UAB’s top financial officer Paul A. Brann remarked, “Since the civil rights movement and the labor union movement have joined hands in programs of this type, I assume that the hospitals…may be targets.”\textsuperscript{62} Brann indirectly referenced the 100-day strike of hospital workers at the Medical College of South Carolina in Charleston from March to June 1969. Black hospital workers, mostly women, sought higher wages and unionization, and their efforts attracted the national branch of the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Workers Union and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Brann and others urged Volker to privatize food and laundry services, jobs held by blacks and women, to avoid unionization, but they remained public employees during Volker’s tenure.\textsuperscript{63} In 1972, Volker ordered raises for University Hospital staff on the orders of the University of Alabama Board of Trustees to inhibit unionization among workers.\textsuperscript{64}

Volker and his administrative team also adopted wide-ranging employee benefit programs to appease UAB’s workforce. Beginning in 1971, the university provided free education to qualified workers at all levels. Programs for a general education degree for high school dropouts and continuing education for healthcare professionals allowed workers to take classes for certification, self-interest, or self-improvement.\textsuperscript{65} These


\textsuperscript{63} Paul W. Brann to James E. Moon and James Pegues, August 14, 1970, File 30.81, Volker-President.

\textsuperscript{64} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 256.

classes did not necessarily result in higher salaries. A biweekly bulletin highlighting service workers and programs available to them was distributed across the campus, which announced their contributions to casual faculty or student readers. UAB also implemented a twenty-four hour complaint and suggestion hotline as another way to symbolize the university’s open-door policy.\textsuperscript{66} Volker had a reputation for checking in on the lowest-paid employees of the hospitals. One female director sarcastically remarked, Volker “wasn’t very interested in whether I was happy or not, but he was interested in whether the cashier was happy and the person who was taking care of the grass.”\textsuperscript{67} A male colleague remembered, “You might see him at six o’clock down there talking to a janitor….He had a heck of a G-2 system, and it was a personal.”\textsuperscript{68}

The presence of and opportunities for women and African Americans as workers and students gave UAB a progressive image, one cultivated by Gloria Goldstein, director of UAB’s Office of Public Relations and Marketing. Goldstein oversaw all bulletins and magazines for UAB employees, and she often worked with Operation New Birmingham (ONB) staff to help publicize UAB and its scientific breakthroughs in the national media.\textsuperscript{69} She assumed the directorship of her office in 1968 after a male colleague ignored the president’s directives. “Believe you me,” she said, “I learned what was acceptable to [Volker] and what was not, and I didn’t do what wasn’t acceptable to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Ibid., 40.
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him.” A niece of realtor William P. Engel, a major donor to UAB, Goldstein had worked with Volker since 1962. She was both intimidated and inspired by the president. Volker loathed public relations because he believed accomplishments should be celebrated once they were achieved rather than when they remained mere goals. However, he encouraged Goldstein to “get her tickets,” or earn professional credentials and personal confidence as a publicist through higher education. She never did so, but Goldstein worked hard to overcome her fears of inadequacy. “I had to prove I could do it because I was female,” she explained.

Despite its image as an equal opportunity employer, UAB remained an elite club for white men, as Goldstein knew all too well. She was one of the few white women who occupied a top-level administrative position at UAB. At the time, she did not see her ascent as a form of women’s liberation and later characterized her past attitude as the “married with children syndrome.” Her advancement within UAB’s administration was personally significant and served as evidence of equal opportunity employment, but it was also rare.

UAB’s affirmative action plan, employee benefit system, and image of progressive race relations were ways Volker interpreted federal mandates and worker demands to avoid discrimination and unionization. All of these actions provided the means to measure and promote racial and gender diversity but not the equal opportunities advocates demanded. Barriers to women and African Americans in high-level positions continued in spite of the fact that educational opportunities for them expanded after 1965.

70 Goldstein, interview.

71 Ibid.
As of 2007, women remained roughly two-thirds and blacks one-third of the UAB workforce. In that year, women held 38.1 percent of all faculty and executive administration positions, representing a substantial increase from the early 1970s but not proportional to their placement in the overall workforce. African Americans fared much worse, representing only 5.7 percent of those positions. UAB’s workforce, then and now, resembles those of universities across the nation that have implemented affirmative action programs. Institutions of higher education have played central roles in sustaining the myths of a meritocracy and a diverse public life.

Building the Modern Research University: Dr. John W. Kirklin and the Privatization of Academic Healthcare

In September 1966, Dr. John W. Kirklin arrived in Birmingham to become the new chair of surgery in the School of Medicine and surgeon-in-chief of University Hospital. A world-renowned pioneer in open-heart and transplantation surgery, Kirklin decided to leave the Mayo Clinic and turned down an offer from the Children’s Hospital in Boston to join UAB. According to an anonymous colleague, he could “build an empire in Birmingham” without interference. Birmingham’s civic elite interpreted the arrival of Kirklin as an indication of a changing city. As future mayor Richard Arrington Jr. recalled, “All of us who were trying to find a way to a new city took [it] as a strong

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72 Women and African Americans made substantial gains in professional non-faculty positions such as librarians or admissions officers. Women held 66.7 percent of those positions, while African Americans represented 16.8 percent of that workforce segment. UAB Office of Planning and Analysis, Facts and Figures, 2006-07 (Birmingham: University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2007), 57.

73 Original source is an anonymous and sealed oral interview conducted by Tennant McWilliams. McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 184.
indication of the future.” “People would gush over me” at cocktail parties, Kirklin recalled. They said, “‘how happy we are to have you in Birmingham [but] I just hope I don’t have to be a patient in your hospital.’” After meeting private-practice surgeons in the Birmingham area, Kirklin learned, “I had come to preside over a charity hospital that no one would go to if they had the choice of going somewhere else.”

Figure 5.4 Dr. John W. Kirklin, ca. late 1960s. (Courtesy of the National Institutes of Health Portrait Gallery Online.)

74 Ibid.

Within a year, a number of professional organizations and national media outlets took note of the dramatic changes converging on UAB. Volker had won university designation for UAB in 1966. Kirklin’s arrival that same year, however, was the catalyst for transforming UAB from a teaching hospital for indigent patients into a modern research university with a world-class medical center. In 1967, UAB was one of the top 25 favored recipients of the National Institutes of Heath (NIH), and *Ladies Home Journal* named it one of “America’s Ten Best Hospitals.” According to an informal poll conducted by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, UAB was the most rapidly improving medical school in the South. By late summer in 1969, Volker received word from the Department of Housing and Urban Development that it approved UAB’s 45-block urban renewal application. Shortly thereafter, Volker won full autonomy for UAB.

By 1972, Kirklin had brought a level of prestige and professionalism to the Medical Center that complemented its modern renovations and specialization of services. His influence extended to minor details, such as implementing a professional suit-and-tie dress code for physicians to recruiting top-notch specialists in gynecology and radiology. His ego also grew proportional to the increasing stature of the Medical Center based on cardiovascular healthcare. As S. Richardson Hill, who was executive vice-president of Health Affairs at the time, recalled, “If you come to a place like Alabama, whatever you did was bound to be your own and not a part of Harvard or Johns

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76 For an overview of Kirklin’s arrival in Birmingham, see McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 182-86.

Hopkins.” Kirklin chose UAB because his authority and expertise would not be questioned. In less than six years, he had transformed the image of the Medical Center as an indigent hospital into a world-class institution.

Even as the Medical Center brought in millions of dollars in the early 1970s, University Hospital operated in the red. It could not afford its immediate and projected growth needs. Even with Medicaid and Medicare, indigent care costs drained University Hospital revenue, with a projected $600,000 to $1 million deficit for 1972. Administrators believed this annual deficit, produced by insufficient and contractual municipal, county, and state funds, drained money from research and teaching objectives. These and other costs left University Hospital, the centerpiece of the Medical Center, nearly bankrupt.

Over a ten-year period, Paul W. Brann, executive vice-president of Fiscal Affairs, “changed a fiscal tower of Babylon into a fiscal tower of strength” by offsetting hospital losses and poor state allocations with money from the Faculty and Professional Service Fund. The Fund pooled all for-fee patient services delivered by clinicians. Brann allocated the remainder to specific departments within the Medical Center that chairs then used to recruit new faculty, give bonus incentives, or throw social or charitable cocktail parties—all activities that state appropriations would not cover. Brann’s centralized

79 Kirklin, interview.
80 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 255.
82 Tinsley Harrison, “Reminiscences” (unpublished manuscript, ca, 1971), 5, File 5.13, Tinsley Harrison Papers, UAB Archives.
control of the Fund led many Medical Center faculty, including the School of Medicine’s Dean Clifton Meador, to believe their professional services subsidized the cost of University College. In fact, bond initiatives, tuition, and state appropriations for University College often supported the Medical Center’s growth during the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{83} Nevertheless, as UAB lawyer Rufus Bealle remembered, “The doctors thought it was their money and they wanted to spend it the way they wanted to and they didn’t want any restrictions over it.”\textsuperscript{84}

In May 1972 “all hell broke loose” when Kirklin, Meador, and John T. Reeves, chair of the Department of Medicine, resigned in protest over Brann’s practice of “taxing” the Faculty and Professional Service Fund.\textsuperscript{85} Brann perceived their actions as a personal attack against him and resigned in humiliation. Under orders from Volker, Gloria Goldstein rushed to the local newspapers and pleaded with them not to report the resignation of Kirklin. A $5 million NIH grant for cardiovascular research and the prestige of a rumored Lister Medal by the Royal College of Surgeons of London for Kirklin hung in the balance.\textsuperscript{86} Volker instructed Hill to meet with Kirklin and resolve the crisis. At the heart of the revolt was clinician control over the revenues they produced; clinicians wanted salaries that reflected their knowledge and skill. As Kirklin recalled, former faculty had left UAB “to make their fortunes and to make certain that this remained an indigent hospital.”\textsuperscript{87} The only way to reverse this trend and attract top-notch

\textsuperscript{83} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 254-59.

\textsuperscript{84} Rufus Bealle, interview by Virginia Fisher, August 19, 1989, File 2.1, transcript, UAB Oral History.

\textsuperscript{85} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 254.

\textsuperscript{86} Goldstein, interview, and McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 257.

\textsuperscript{87} Kirklin, interview.
faculty, Kirklin believed, would be to offer them commensurate salaries. Indeed, in 1966, Volker asked University of Alabama President Frank A. Rose to raise the salaries to private-practice levels for Hill and Charles A. “Scotty” McCallum for their “continuous sacrifice[s]” in building the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry. Hill’s unsuccessful resignation had prompted Volker’s request. Kirklin firmly believed that “for academic medicine to succeed it has to be a real-life combination of public and private enterprise.”

Within a week, Hill and Volker acceded to Kirklin’s demands to privatize healthcare services at UAB. All resignations were rescinded. The UAB Health Services Foundation (HSF), a private, non-profit corporation controlled by physicians, replaced the Faculty and Professional Service Fund. Whereas clinicians’ profits had provided UAB with extra revenue to fill the holes in its budget, the Foundation adopted a new formula. Kirklin agreed that the Foundation would pay for indigent care cost overruns for the rest of the year and would annually donate money to central administration and University Hospital to use publicly funded services, facilities, and equipment. Yet, the central contribution of the HSF to the development of UAB was to make the practice of academic medicine more lucrative. The Foundation supplemented poor state appropriations by paying white male clinicians a salary based on the growing market demand for their specialized services. Because the HSF was a private corporation, clinicians’ total salaries as state employees were not public information. At a time when

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89 Kirklin, interview.

90 Garikes, interview.
the administration actively discouraged unionization among healthcare support and service workers, Volker essentially allowed dentists, physicians, and other clinicians to organize themselves into one large private practice. The Foundation, of course, excluded allied health professionals and nurses. Kirklin’s revolt successfully privatized healthcare services provided by professionally educated white men.

Internal reaction revealed a split between administrators, clinicians, and faculty over how to develop UAB. Goldstein was shocked: “I just couldn’t believe [Hill] had done it; I really thought he ought to fire all of them.”91 To her, Kirklin’s demands broke the team spirit that had built UAB for over twenty-five years. Volker privately argued with clinical faculty about University College’s central role in the development of the Medical Center because of its Basic Sciences program. Dean Meador continued to disagree, and Volker and Hill pressured him to resign later that fall.92 Bealle, who was aware of how underfunded UAB was in a key period of growth, expressed regret about “the apparent loss of control by the administration over such a large amount of money and resources.”93 The consequences were grave, especially to Volker’s vision of an integrated urban university in a state with historically poor allocations to institutions of higher education. As Goldstein remarked, UAB was a system of “the haves and the have-nots.” “All the money [wa]s up here” at the Medical Center, she explained, and “they struggle[d] a lot more down there” at University College.94 The creation of the HSF

91 Goldstein, interview.

92 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 259-60.

93 Bealle, interview.

94 Goldstein, interview.
ultimately built a chasm so wide between the Medical Center and University College that neither Volker nor his predecessors could overcome it.

Following administrators’ concessions to Kirklin, the foundation for a modern research university with a world-class medical center was complete. UAB now was a public-private partnership. The university received public funding to provide education and healthcare services, while the Health Services Foundation generated wealth for a select group of individuals, primarily white men. Indigent care ceased to drain money after the opening of Jefferson County’s new Mercy Hospital in October 1972, a few months after the establishment of the HSF. Kirklin’s arrival coincided with the maturation of healthcare specializations and the federal government’s policies to consolidate those services by region. Patients who had Medicare or private insurance flocked to the Medical Center. In the 1970s, UAB became nationally known for cardiac care performed by Kirklin, especially after Douglass Cater, a Montgomery native and former presidential advisor on health, education, and welfare programs, raved about the surgeon to a *New York Times* audience in 1978.\(^{95}\) By then, Kirklin had broadened the patient population across race and class and received more than ample financial compensation in return. Together, these changes in clinician compensation, patient population, and market demand made healthcare services an enormously profitable enterprise in Birmingham.

**Building the Professional Service Economy: Private Philanthropy and Liberty National Life Insurance**

Although federal funding largely spurred the clinical and research growth of the

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Medical Center, local white civic elites also had sponsored many of these developments since the mid- to late 1950s. Frank E. and Margaret Spain bemoaned the lack of healthcare in their hometown and across the southeastern region. Their daughter survived polio, but Margaret was acutely aware of the dearth of rehabilitation facilities in the South. Her brother had been born blind and paralyzed. Although her father had been a president of First National Bank of Birmingham, his money could not buy comfort or therapy for his son. In 1962, the Spains made the single-largest individual contribution to the Medical Center when they gave nearly a million dollars to match federal funding for what became the Spain Rehabilitation Clinic. While he was the lawyer for the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District (HABD), Frank orchestrated the 1953-1959 urban renewal campaign that expanded the Medical Center from four to twelve blocks. The Spain family was an invaluable asset to UAB administrators.

Although the Spains were not the first high-profile family to donate to the Birmingham campus, their philanthropy prompted others to give. One prominent white family established a chaired professorship in surgery that ultimately went to Kirklin. Bertha Smolian, heir to the Pizitz’s department store fortune, donated matching money for the Smolian Psychiatric Center in 1960. She also donated her palatial estate with sculpture gardens atop Red Mountain in the late 1960s that administrators used as a faculty club, international hosting facility, and fundraising activity center. Following recovery from heart surgery in the Medical Center in 1969, George Rust, scion of the Rust Engineering Company family fortune, donated a significant sum to develop a

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97 Ehney A. Camp to Paul W. Brann, August 25, 1966, File 27.32, Volker-VPHA.
computer center, one of his new interests. He also co-sponsored drives to raise money for a cardiovascular center and secured donations from Birmingham’s two largest employers in the early 1960s, U.S. Steel and Hayes Aircraft. Realtor William P. Engel, formerly a president of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, donated almost half of the local matching funds to establish a federally supported Psychiatric Day Care Center in 1967. By the early 1970s, private donations from individuals and corporations nearly matched state-appropriations for UAB’s total operating funds, with 15 percent from private sources and 20 percent from the state of Alabama.

This infusion of local wealth stemmed from a long tradition of white philanthropy to support social welfare initiatives in Birmingham. The Spain family, for example, was driven by spiritual and communal values. A son of a Methodist preacher, Frank, as his daughter described him, believed he “didn’t own his money but was a steward of it.” In 1952, he served as the president of Rotary International, a service organization for business leaders who believed in giving back to their home communities. Spain lived by the organization’s twin mottos, “service above self” and “one profits most who serves best.” He defined the Rotarians as “a fellowship of noblemen….measured by its obligations, not its rights or privileges.” During the Jim Crow era, Spain believed his

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100 McWilliams, *New Lights in the Valley*, 240.


interest in community welfare was “controversial” because philanthropic endeavors sought to change established policies and behaviors in Birmingham. In 1959, he organized the Greater Birmingham Foundation to shape local welfare services such as healthcare and education.

Wealthy white families of Birmingham, however, partnered with UAB for more than philanthropic reasons. Although inspired by ideas of Christian charity and service, the Spains did not welcome other foundations, agencies, or non-profit services that challenged what they believed. In 1971 Peggy Spain McDonald, Frank’s daughter and president of the Greater Birmingham Foundation, asked Volker to help quash the local Community Service Council’s recent effort to organize a statewide public health planning agency. The Office of Economic Opportunity funded the council. McDonald disliked its “liberal thought” that would transform “the volunteer sector…from service oriented agencies to…social action planning groups.” Frank agreed with his daughter. He suggested that the Community Chest, a charitable organization that pooled private wealth, withdraw funds from the Community Service Council because it “has demonstrated its ability to obtain all the funding it needs and more from the federal government.” Such logic did not apply to UAB. Spain also complained to Volker about the actions of faculty and students he disagreed with such as civil rights activism and

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104 Peggy Spain McDonald to Joseph F. Volker, March 8, 1971, File 32.34, Volker-President; Peggy Spain McDonald to the Board of Directors of the Community Chest, May 31, 1971, File 32.34, Volker-President.

105 Frank E. Spain to Joseph F. Volker, Mervyn H. Sterne, et al., April 7, 1971, File 32.34, Volker-President.
consumer advocacy. Although generous, the Spains’ philanthropy to UAB also bought the family influence over its total development.

Besides his personal commitment to UAB, Frank Spain helped to strengthen the university’s ties to Birmingham’s business community, especially with Liberty National Life Insurance Company, the largest such company in Alabama. Spain was its general counselor and sat on its Board of Trustees. Two of Liberty National’s executive vice-presidents played crucial roles in the development of UAB. Ehney A. Camp joined the University of Alabama (UA) Board of Trustees in 1959, and Jack McSpadden oversaw a citizens committee appointed by Mayor Albert B. Boutwell that approved UAB’s urban renewal campaign in 1965. Liberty National stood to capitalize on UAB’s expanding employment base and healthcare services because it offered life and health insurance. Engineering executive George Rust recalled with humor a story about the financial connection between the university and the company. At a fundraising dinner for the new cardiac care center attended by Birmingham’s business elite, Rust related, John Kirklin commented on UAB’s relationship with Liberty National: “Every year this hospital keeps me in it, that insurance company makes” money. McSpadden “whoop[ed]” with laughter.

Through his role in the urban renewal campaign, McSpadden embodied the link between the private and public interests that built UAB. As a suburban citizen and businessman, McSpadden became intimately involved in the urban renewal acquisition.


107 Rust, interview.
for the public university. He volunteered countless hours over eight years in discussions with officials from UAB, HABD, and City Hall. UAB renewed his civic pride in Birmingham. He saw the university as an answer to so many urban problems. “Not only does it carry with it a high economic value,” he explained to a colleague, “but in addition it carries with it promise for better education…[and] better health for our community.”

McSpadden ensured that his company did not experience any hardships from the university’s growth. UAB’s snaggletooth border on Fifth Avenue South excluded lots owned by Liberty National.

Private interest in Southside grew tremendously after the 1965 announcement of the urban renewal project. Volker and McSpadden lobbied various municipal agencies to cease rezoning or property improvement hearings around the project site. Interest from commercial enterprises and private practice clinics drove up the value of land UAB wanted to buy. The Birmingham City Council acquiesced to UAB’s request in late 1966, but Volker met fierce resistance from the Birmingham Planning Commission. William H. Grimmer, chair of the commission, “went into a tirade about the Medical Center constantly requesting property for future development,” “disrupting free enterprise,” and “hindering progress.”

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109 The omission of this lot, bound by Twelfth and Thirteen Streets South, created an uneven border along Fifth Avenue South. Undocumented correspondence between Ehney A. Camp to Jack D. McSpadden, ca. March 1969, File 1.9, McSpadden Papers.


111 Arthur G. Garikes to Joseph F. Volker, July 25, 1966, File 64.1, Volker-VPHA.
entire forty-five block area “not necessarily because [it] planned to use all of the property but because [the university] wanted to use it or control the use of the property.” Rather than blocking private enterprise, Volker wanted private businesses, such as Liberty National, a drive-thru bank, or parking decks, near specific parts of the campus to complement an expanded UAB.

Liberty National executives worked tirelessly on behalf of UAB, and Camp, one of its executive vice-presidents and UA trustee, expected his company to profit from its relationship with the university. He was irate when Liberty National was excluded from bidding on an insurance package designed to placate Kirklin. “You fellows,” he wrote to Brann and Volker, “have a much greater obligation to conduct yourselves in such a way as to build loyalty and devotion on the part of those interested citizens who have shown an interest in your work and who have demonstrated a desire to be of help.”

Camp also had close relationships with and served on the boards of some of Alabama’s premier banks. After local and state banks loaned money for Medical Center construction, Camp confided to one of its chairmen, “I hope in the years ahead we will be able to find some substantial position in the overall financial program of the University. As one of the leading five banks, I think we should participate on both sides of the ledger—deposit-wise and loan-wise.”

UAB’s position as the anchor of Birmingham’s professional service economy affected the development of support industries. One early forecast predicting the future

112 Memorandum by Jack D. McSpadden, September 25, 1970, File 64.22, Volker-President.

113 Ehney A. Camp to Paul W. Brann, August 25, 1966, File 27.32, Volker-VPHA.

114 Ehney A. Camp to Frank A. Plummer, August 20, 1969, File 30.4, Volker-President.
needs of UAB called for companies that provided disposable medical supplies, laboratory animal farming, and textbook warehousing as well as printing plants in the Birmingham area. UAB’s impact on Birmingham’s biggest banks loosened the grip that industrialists previously had on them. From 1973 to 1976, university-related deposits expanded the credit base of local banks to $187 billion (See Appendix, Table 9). Other big professional service industries such as architecture, engineering, and retail also benefited from UAB’s growth. University-related business activity contributed over $220 million to local business volume in 1974 and over $306 million three years later. Between 1974 and 1977, the number of construction jobs directly attributable to UAB rose 74.4 percent; this number did not include new homes, suburban malls, and office buildings that popped up around the Medical Center and metropolitan area to serve new residents. University students and employees influenced the development of the local service industry, generating demand for new businesses ranging from bookstores to bars with good beer (See Appendix, Table 10). By the end of the 1970s, Southside’s commercial district, Five Points South, experienced a revitalization driven by university activity.

Private citizens like Camp, McSpadden, and Spain as well as Liberty National and

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other companies ensured Birmingham’s transition from an industrial to a service economy by wholeheartedly supporting the development of UAB. Banking, insurance, construction, architecture, and other professional service companies expanded the market shares for their services and capitalized on the billions of dollars generated by UAB. So, too, did their shareholders. Camp, McSpadden, and Spain enjoyed the ear of Volker and other top administrators in trying to shape university policy to suit their politics and corporate needs. In 1985, Peggy Spain McDonald reflected on her family’s role in developing “our excellent medical facilities”; “We have…benefited from our work with UAB….This whole city has changed.”

Far from being memorialized through new buildings, white elites enjoyed immense returns on their investments in developing UAB and tying it to their corporate and civic interests in the professional service economy.

The Spatial Implications of UAB on the Birmingham Metropolitan Area

Metropolitan development in the 1970s and beyond reflected the growth of the professional service economy in Birmingham. In that decade, professional and related services, which included healthcare and education, grew by nearly 60 percent, and the finance, insurance, and real estate industries experienced a similar increase. In contrast, manufacturing jobs in the metropolitan area grew by only 2 percent (See Appendix Tables 5 and 6). White working-class neighborhoods to the immediate north and west of downtown experienced a correlated population decline or stagnation (See Appendix, Tables 3 and 4). They also underwent stark racial transitioning as African Americans,

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118 “A Family Tradition.”

119 Bureau of the Census, Census of the Population, 1970, Volume 1, Table 87; Census of the Population, 1980, Volume 1, Table 122.
driven out of their homes by the late 1960s urban renewal campaigns, sought new places to live. Private housing developers bypassed the city and drove market demand for middle-class suburban housing to the east and south of Birmingham. Whites overwhelmingly flocked to these areas. Because of the failure of metropolitan consolidation in 1970, a campaign known as “One Great City,” racial and class divisions further marked the city and its independent suburbs.

As Birmingham’s economic anchor, UAB’s growth largely contributed to the clustering of white middle-class suburbs south of Red Mountain that sustained racial and class privilege in metropolitan Birmingham. In 1974, a small survey of top faculty and administrators revealed that 47 percent lived in Jefferson County suburbs surrounding Birmingham; within ten years, nearly 60 percent did. The affluent Over-the-Mountain suburbs of Homewood and Mountain Brook reached a population capacity of around 20,000 in 1970, but the population of the two adjoining suburbs, Hoover and Vestavia Hills, swelled throughout the decade. In 1980, residents in these overwhelmingly white suburbs enjoyed a median family income ranging from $22,455 to $42,389, whereas those in the working-class suburb of Fairfield earned $17,376. The median family income of the city of Birmingham was even less, coming in at $15,210; more than 50 percent of its residents were African American by 1980 (See Appendix, Tables 3 and 4).

120 University of Alabama in Birmingham, Economic Impact of the University of Alabama in Birmingham on the State of Alabama, Fiscal Year 1973-1974 (Birmingham: University of Alabama in Birmingham, 1974), 41; UAB Division of Business and Economic Data Services, Economic Impact of the University of Alabama at Birmingham: 1985 (Birmingham: University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1985), 70.


122 The Over-the-Mountain suburb of Homewood contained the historic African American Rosedale community. Urban renewal programs for Red Mountain Expressway and US Highways 31 and 280 ran through this neighborhood, leaving almost 1,500 African Americans in Homewood in 1970. Its lower median family income ($22,455) could be attributed to the presence of African Americans and a working
new residents who lived in the upper- and middle-class Over-the-Mountain suburbs saw Birmingham as a place to work rather than as a place to live.

Black and white urban residents experienced the consequences of UAB’s growth. Over 11,000 African Americans pushed out of Southside and other neighborhoods by urban renewal projects had to move somewhere they could afford. Due to changes in federal public housing programs in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the city of Birmingham added no more units. It shelved plans for Park West, a middle-class public housing project near the black business district that was one of the twelve steps in ONB’s “Design for Progress.” Over one-third of the city’s entire housing stock was unsound, but white flight opened up neighborhoods long off limits to African Americans.123 One of those neighborhoods was Woodlawn, the former political stronghold of T. Eugene “Bull” Connor and the white working class.124 Woodlawn served as a buffer between land zoned for heavy industry and the politically independent Over-the-Mountain suburb of Mountain Brook. In the mid-1970s, the city used federal funds to upgrade Woodlawn’s main street and rehabilitate housing as ways to keep local commerce and white residents in the neighborhood. Whites, nevertheless, continued to flee to the suburbs, leaving their

class population. Mountain Brook had the highest income ($42,389), followed by Vestavia Hills ($33,544) and Hoover ($30,069). Bureau of the Census, Census of the Population, 1970, Volume 1, Tables 41 and 42; Census of the Population, 1980, Volume 1, Tables 124, 161, and 168.

123 Charles E. Connerly argues that the forced migration of African Americans through urban renewal programs was the key factor in racial transitioning in Birmingham’s urban neighborhoods in the 1970s. “The Most Segregated City in America”: City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), chap. 6.

124 In 1960, portions of Woodlawn were divided between two census tracts. One was 75 percent white and the other, containing its commercial main street, was 96 percent white. Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 323, n. 111.
old homes to African Americans. By 1980, 40.2 percent of Woodlawn residents were black.\footnote{125 Ibid., 241.}

The transformation of the Southside community was yet another erasure of African American presence in and around UAB as it became a world-renowned medical center and Birmingham’s economic engine. Organized into three separate neighborhoods, the community experienced a complete overhaul. UAB’s 1969 expansion wiped out the black Southside neighborhood, displacing over 5,000 African Americans residents and setting in motion a decline in the total African American population in the larger community from 40 to 20 percent by 1972.\footnote{126 Author’s calculation based on population statistics in Leonard Chamblee, “Southside Group Eyes Long-Range Plan for Area,” \textit{Birmingham Post-Herald}, May 28, 1972, Digital Collections, Birmingham Public Library (hereafter cited as BPL-DC), http://bplonline.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4017coll2/id/861.} The Five Points South neighborhood was once a thriving, upscale business district that now catered to employees and students. Prominent first families of Birmingham built stately mansions in Glen Iris, which also had more moderately sized, middle-class homes.

The demand for student and faculty housing caused by UAB’s expansion directly affected the character of the larger Southside community. Volker saw Southside as “potentially a site where many of our faculty, students, and staff would live provided their particular residential needs be met.”\footnote{127 Joseph F. Volker to Nina Miglionico, February 23, 1972, File 8.22, CUA Director’s Files.} Campus plans did not include dormitories, a promise Volker made to the UA Board of Trustees and alumni to distinguish his university from the one in Tuscaloosa. Traditional college students caused a severe housing crunch in Southside. An informal University College survey in 1970 revealed that 86 percent of current students expressed an interest in renting a home or apartment in
Southside. One of Volker’s protégés was particularly interested in transforming Glen Iris into a “university type neighborhood” for faculty. Because of the demands for housing and university activity, the Birmingham Planning Commission adopted a new land use plan that rezoned large portions of the Southside community for commercial businesses, multi-family homes, and apartments. A Texan real estate developer began the process of constructing huge apartment complexes in Glen Iris, destroying the neighborhood’s integrity, historical character, and stately views of downtown Birmingham.

Southside residents pushed back against the encroaching development of apartment complexes, multi-family homes, and commercial areas brought about by UAB’s growth. In addition, most whites and white-ethnics in the community believed that “the black, the hippie, and the student have placed a certain stigma on Southside living.” In November 1971, a group of residents, business owners, and community agency representatives formed the Southside Action Committee (SAC). The new group offered “a forum for all individuals who live in or are part of the Southside community, to identify the needs of the Southside community and to attempt to mobilize and


130 William E. Ricker to Edward S. LaMonte, May 9, 1972, File 3.3, CUA Director’s Files.


132 Casson, “Different Types of People.”
coordinate resources to meet needs.” Joe Walker, one of LaMonte’s assistants, was the initial convener of SAC; eight more people affiliated with UAB joined the group. In all, UAB-affiliated members constituted nearly a tenth of the attendees at SAC meetings in 1972. LaMonte notified Volker about the group and justified his involvement as a way to “bring up some questions concerning the relationship of the University to the community around us.” Walker stated SAC was not intent on “stopping change but committed to making change more humane.” Betty Bock, SAC member and future Center for Urban Affairs staff member, promoted citizen participation in making these changes: “It is more a question whether it will be apartments and businesses only or a community with houses, apartments, business, and green space.”

Bock, Walker, and other SAC members were among many people in Birmingham who demanded control of their neighborhoods at a time of headlong change, yet they did not criticize their expanding neighbor. UAB most likely escaped such criticism because of the university’s range of social services that it offered to neighborhood residents, including early childhood development and medical clinics. Center staff also

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134 UAB-affiliated SAC members in 1972 included the Center for Urban Affairs’ Edward S. LaMonte and Robert Juster (formerly of the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission), Community School Director Delbert Long, Planning Director Alfred A. Moffett, Student and Community Affairs Director John Dunbar, Student Government Association President Elizabeth Long, and University Senate Representative Roberta Long. Future Center staff member Betty Bock also attended SAC meetings.

135 Edward S. LaMonte to Joseph F. Volker, Paul W. Brann, et al., January 20, 1972, File 7.29, CUA Director’s Files.


personalized the institution in their interactions with SAC members and Southside residents. The target of SAC’s criticism, as well as that of other neighborhoods, was Operation New Birmingham (ONB), the public-private redevelopment agency led by white Over-the-Mountain suburbanites. Its pro-growth vision and emphasis on downtown and commercial development alienated urban residents reeling from economic change and neighborhood disruption. The transition residents felt and the growth ONB promoted, however, centered on UAB. The university emerged unscathed from the debates between residents and ONB over the direction of urban Birmingham. This lack of community criticism reflected Volker’s successful marketing of UAB as an urban university and agent of social change.

**Conclusion**

At a time when white flight, deindustrialization, soaring crime rates, and the rise of black political power wrought welcome and unwelcome changes to Birmingham, UAB’s growth as an employer and provider of education brought all races and stability to downtown throughout the 1970s. By cultivating an image of UAB as a responsive public institution, Volker’s “Birmingham community” was an inclusive one in which members had a personal connection to specific people, features, and services within the urban campus. According to Gloria Goldstein, Volker strove to create “a feeling of family” he believed was essential to a university community. “We did try and make everybody feel that they were part of this university,” she noted.  

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138 Goldstein, interview.
UAB’s image as a welcoming institution and the foundation of the city’s progress was reinforced by its 1978 conference “Birmingham 1963-1978: Civil Rights and Social Change.” The conference marked the fifteenth anniversary of Birmingham’s civil rights demonstrations and brought together key black and white participants. Since 1963, most of these men had forged a biracial political coalition that addressed the city’s continuing racial strife and urban decline. The development UAB and the professional service economy were part of their answers. The conference offered Birmingham’s biracial civic elites an opportunity to tell their corresponding yet conflicting stories of the long summer of 1963 as well as their opinions of the progress made since then.  

Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, the militant leader of the local civil rights movement who fought against an industrial Jim Crow order in the early 1960s, noted, “This [conference] is the first time that a largely white institution has invited me back” to Birmingham. His participation publically signaled how Volker’s UAB successfully combined economic growth and racial inclusion as the twin pillars of a new Birmingham.

Although Goldstein and others believed that UAB “saved Birmingham,” the university transformed the metropolitan area in unequal ways. Hierarchies based on

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139 Conference participants were, in order of appearance: Howell Raines (reporter for the New York Times), Dr. Horace Huntley (UAB professor), U. W. Clemon (attorney, former organizer of the Miles Student Select Buying Campaign), Rev. Edward Gardner (president, Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights), Rabbi Milton Grafman (Temple Emanu-El), Arthur A. Shores (attorney, Birmingham City Council), Dr. A. G. Gaston (entrepreneur), Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth (founder, Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights), David J. Vann (mayor), James C. Parsons (former Chief of Police, Birmingham Police Department), Dr. W. C. Patton (president, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Birmingham branch), Dr. Louise Branscomb (UAB professor), Rev. James Crutcher (Sixteenth Street Baptist Church), Bishop Furman Stough (Episcopal Diocese of Alabama), and Dr. Wilmer Cody (Superintendent, Birmingham Public Schools). “Birmingham 1963-1978: Civil Rights and Social Change,” program booklet (Birmingham, AL, November 1978), File 5.22, CUA Director’s Files.


141 Ibid.
class, sex, and race remained embedded in the university’s workforce. UAB’s economic power rested on its ability to educate and train students in new employment fields, especially the health sciences. In 1972, Volker explained to a friend, “A manpower pool of educated people is an assurance of economic growth.” Education and ability rather than race or sex became the keys to accessing the new political economy. UAB’s mission as an educational institution advanced notions of a meritocracy, but one’s level of education, often dictated by race and sex, determined how they financially benefitted from the healthcare economy. While women and African Americans gained a foothold in the health sciences, they largely labored under white men who dominated the high-paying administrative, clinical, and research positions.

UAB’s open access policy and image of diversity concealed the segregation of education, employment, and resources that was visibly evident in the total campus. Alfred Moffett’s original campus plan called for the physical integration of the Medical Center and University College by constructing plazas and promenades on top of buildings connected by skywalks. These above-ground green spaces would offer views of downtown and Red Mountain and would serve as community gathering spots for faculty and students from both sides of the campus. These designs never materialized. The Medical Center and University College remained separated, in funding, stature, and aesthetics. The UAB campus, in its actual design and the people who remain ordered by it, recreated the spatial divisions of metropolitan Birmingham by race and class that continued to harden throughout the 1970s and beyond. The affluent, overwhelmingly

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142 Joseph F. Volker to Emory Cunningham, May 26, 1972, File 34.14, Volker-President.

white Over-the-Mountain suburbs, home to UAB’s top professional class, faced off with the increasingly poor, black city of Birmingham, home to UAB’s low-wage service workers. The UAB campus stood in the middle, on the south side of downtown Birmingham representing a compromised vision of “One Great City.”
CHAPTER 6

“ALL-AMERICA CITY”: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS, AND BIRACIAL COMMUNICATION, 1969-1979

In the summer of 1969, sixty-four-year-old Lula Menefee led a group of forty African American women to City Hall in downtown Birmingham. As president of the Collegeville Coordinating Council, Menefee demanded police attention and protection of her neighborhood, which was wracked by murder, prostitution, gambling, and the drug trade. Located less than three miles from downtown yet isolated by rail lines and industrial plants, Collegeville was a structurally deteriorating neighborhood with shack housing, unpaved streets, open ditches, poor utility service, and heavy pollution. It was home to almost 7,000 African Americans, the majority of whom lived below the poverty line.\(^1\) Although civic leaders historically neglected the neighborhood—or “rejected” it as one resident remembered—Mayor George S. Seibels warmly greeted Menefee and her group.\(^2\) Seibels promised Menefee that his administration would address Collegeville’s problems, including police-community relations. With his usual candor, Seibels confided

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to a colleague that Menefee’s concerns “were nothing new to me….The only thing new about it was the fact that [she] had gotten up the nerve to come in.”³

By going directly to City Hall, Menefee forced Seibels to rethink how his administration interpreted who “citizens” of Birmingham were and where they lived. In 1970 over 125,000 African Americans lived in neighborhoods spread across the city. Some encircled the downtown area, but more still were scattered across the west and north. Former civic leaders had limited where African Americans could live in the city through zoning laws that boxed black neighborhoods into areas zoned for heavy industry. Devastating urban renewal programs also destroyed black neighborhoods. Birmingham’s interstate-highway system ran through hard-won middle-class neighborhoods, while the Civic Center and the University of Alabama at Birmingham replaced some of the poorest ones.⁴ Over 10,000 blacks left the city of Birmingham entirely in the 1960s, but the 10 neighborhoods most affected by urban renewal lost 24,000 residents.⁵ The evolution of the industrial and thus far the post-industrial economy eviscerated black neighborhoods (See Appendix, Tables 11 and 12).

Beginning in 1969, black neighborhood advocates and civic leaders strove to improve the material and political conditions for African Americans living in Birmingham. Seibels turned the task over to Operation New Birmingham (ONB), the city’s public-private redevelopment agency run by suburban whites with the aid of black

³ George S. Seibels to Thad Holt, October 28, 1969, File 33.31, George S. Seibels Jr. Papers (hereafter cited as Seibels Papers), Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library (hereafter cited as BPL-DAM).

⁴ In 1940, the city zoned eleven out of fifteen majority black census tracts for heavy or light industry. In contrast, only three of twenty-six majority white census tracts were. Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 56-57.

⁵ Ibid., 162-63.
civic elites.\textsuperscript{6} ONB established the Community Affairs Committee (CAC) in the spring of 1969 as a response to black elite demands to broaden minority representation in Birmingham’s public life. Menefee, however, brought elite attention to neighborhood conditions, which too often lacked basic public services such as an adequate water supply. Her actions prompted Vincent S. Townsend, ONB’s permanent chairman of the board and editor of the \textit{Birmingham News}, to change the image and scope of the organization from a downtown redevelopment agency to one working in the neighborhoods. In an essay published in \textit{Ebony} magazine in its August 1971 special issue “The South Today,” Townsend described ONB as a “community action agency.” Black and white members used civility rather than extremism to influence the direction of Birmingham. ONB, Townsend claimed, created new spaces of interaction where blacks and whites “can meet face to face and thrash out the problems of” Birmingham “in the conference room and not in the streets.”\textsuperscript{7} By including Menefee in those discussions, black and white elites in ONB launched wide-ranging programs to combat poverty, upgrade structural conditions of neighborhoods, and improve overall black-white relations in the city.

As new power players in the biracial metropolitan coalition, Menefee and other black neighborhood advocates worked through ONB to redraw the boundaries of

\textsuperscript{6} Operation New Birmingham was a private non-profit agency that focused on redevelopment projects. In 1965, it was designated as the city’s official representative citizens body required for federal workable programs, including urban renewal. From 1969 onward, ONB worked toward ameliorating poverty. It serves as another example of a non-profit organization working outside local politics to implement programs empowering the poor. James L. Leloudis and Robert R. Korstad, \textit{To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{7} Vincent S. Townsend, “In Birmingham, the Phrase ‘Status Quo’ is a Bad Word,” in “White Voices of the South,” \textit{Ebony}, August 1971.
citizenship in Birmingham. In Monday morning CAC meetings in downtown and field trips to neighborhoods, blacks and whites exhibited an understanding that their culturally constructed differences such as race and class shaped their perceptions of Birmingham. At the center of their discussion was how to renew urban space. Their answers included citizen participation, public improvements, and representation within municipal government. The policy legacies of Great Society programs, including “maximum feasible participation” and non-discrimination requirements, continued to influence federal urban policies in the 1970s. Civic elites and municipal officials depended on federal funds as an alternative to raising taxes. They broadly interpreted federal mandates rather than implementing the bare minimum that further pushed the city toward democratic governance. Birmingham’s new image as an “All-America City” for its racial progress also motivated municipal officials and white civic elites to look beyond the needs of Over-the-Mountain white suburbanites. Birmingham’s citizen participation program based on neighborhoods did just that.

The recognition of neighborhoods had a profound impact on municipal politics in the 1970s as larger economic and spatial changes occurred in metropolitan Birmingham. In 1971, industrial plants began to close, including one of the first in Birmingham, Sloss Furnaces. Long denied entrance to many labor unions and limited in industrial employment, some African Americans increasingly turned to higher education and the healthcare field at the rapidly growing University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) as alternative avenues of economic power after 1964. Although class differences had created deep divides among African Americans, they mattered little in determining where blacks could live in metropolitan Birmingham. Dr. Richard Arrington Jr. told a journalist from
TIME magazine in 1976 that blacks had “difficulty” in “cracking the suburbs,” which revealed the limits of moderate biracial politics and federal policy in changing the location of black living spaces. As the decade came to a close, African Americans were 55.6 percent of urban residents, virtually switching places with whites who were 57.8 percent of the 1970 population (See Appendix, Table 2). Blacks also represented 44.5 percent of the total urban electorate by 1979. Deindustrialization, urban renewal programs, white flight, and the failure of metropolitan consolidation had created the conditions for African Americans to use their neighborhoods, and eventually the city itself, as sites of political power.

The composition of the biracial metropolitan coalition also shifted in response to the concentration of black voters in the city. The at-large composition of the city council continued to yield black and white municipal officials. In 1971 Birmingham’s perpetual reformer David J. Vann and political newcomer Dr. Richard Arrington Jr. won council seats. Both enjoyed black and white support. Four years later, Vann became mayor after Seibels adopted a race-baiting campaign. Whites had grown fearful of black political power, while blacks resented white control of Birmingham. Yet, the sweeping changes citizen participation and neighborhood representation wrought pushed Vann and his black allies to govern Birmingham on behalf of its urban rather than suburban citizens. “We don’t make any claim that we’ve licked racism,” Mayor Vann confessed in 1976, but

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8 “A City Reborn,” TIME, September 27, 1976.

black and white elites have “learned to face the problem candidly.” White liberals and black elites still believed biracial communication was the most important governing strategy as Birmingham shifted from a majority white to a majority black city.

**Redefining Progress: Lula Menefee, Black Women’s Activism, and Collegeville**

In 1971, Lula Menefee declared that progress in Collegeville could not be measured by other “sections of our city and surrounding suburbs” that were affluent or stable “but in comparison to Collegeville itself.” The neighborhood originally developed at the turn of the century as company housing for an upwardly mobile and industrial black working class. A small elementary school, Lauderdale College, gave the neighborhood its name; a tiny commercial district provided residents with services and goods. Rev. Milton Sears, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church from 1916 to 1938 and father of future City Councilor Bessie Estell, was one of the neighborhood’s formative leaders.

Sears promoted ideas of race pride, uplift, and community similar to Booker T. Washington, and he was practical in his navigation of Jim Crow in Birmingham. He did not raise questions about “separate-but-equal.” In his fight to allow the National Baptist Convention, an all-black organization, to hold its annual meeting in the municipal auditorium in 1924, Sears gained local fame for challenging civic officials to allow blacks use of public facilities. He also became an informant for the Birmingham Police Department as a way to win favor and protection among municipal officials. When

10 “A City Reborn.”


communists entered his church on a Sunday morning in 1934 after learning Sears turned in one of their organizers, the pastor wielded a shotgun in front of thousands of worshipers to ward off the intruders. Attendance at Bethel dropped from 2,000 to 200 after the incident. Because Sears had lost his influence among black Birminghamsians, Collegeville also fell from its position as a favored black neighborhood among white officials.  

As a lifelong resident of Collegeville born in 1905, Menefee grew up under the influence of Sears and others who worked toward uplifting the all-black industrial neighborhood. “Doctors and lawyers and everything came out of Collegeville,” recalled LaVerne Revis Martin, a youth civil rights activist and one of Menefee’s neighbors. Although employment options for black women remained largely limited to the home and school, Menefee became an agent for the Durham-based North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company in the early 1940s. Her job gave her the mobility to move throughout black Birmingham, collecting premiums around industrial plants on payday and visiting clients in their homes. She enjoyed a reputation as an agent who cared about her clients. She also was a married mother of two daughters. Martin remembered Collegeville as a “very quiet” and safe neighborhood for youth in the 1940s. Tragedy struck, however, in 1949 when Menefee’s husband Clifford passed away. By 1957 Menefee had moved from

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16 Martin interview in *Foot Soldiers for Democracy*, 88.
the northeastern part of the neighborhood to Twenty-Eighth Avenue North in a home one block south of Bethel Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{17}

The environmental conditions that made the neighborhood—industrialization and Jim Crow—unmade the neighborhood by the late 1950s. Boxed in by an industrial landscape, Collegeville was completely separated from the rest of Birmingham. Coke and metals plants bordered the neighborhood to the north, while the Southern and L&N Railroad Companies and US Highway 79 encircled the neighborhood to connect the plants to the mines of northeastern Alabama. Huntsville Road, which diagonally split the neighborhood into two halves, was the only street that led residents out of Collegeville. Life in Collegeville was “trucked in, trained in, smoked in,” as one present-day resident described it.\textsuperscript{18} Air pollution cast the neighborhood in shadows and induced poor health among its residents. Soil used for backyard gardens became highly toxic with arsenic and other cancer-causing agents due to nearly seventy years of coke production by U.S. Pipe and Foundry, formerly Sloss Industries.\textsuperscript{19} Some residents did not have sewer, water, or electricity service. Black men employed in the industrial economy steadily began losing their jobs from 1950 onward, forcing hundreds of families into poverty.\textsuperscript{20} Crime was on the rise along the neighborhood’s dead end streets.

\textsuperscript{17} Menefee’s funeral services were held at Tabernacle Baptist Church in the Smithfield neighborhood, the home of the black middle class in the 1950s. It is unknown if she was a life-long member as she was a life-long resident of Collegeville.


\textsuperscript{20} Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 167-68.
No African American living within the borders of Collegeville escaped the material inequalities of Birmingham’s Jim Crow industrial order, yet the neighborhood had a long history of racial uplift. One way residents combated the effects of segregation and structural racism was through the Collegeville-Harriman Park Civic League. Since the 1920s, black Birminghamians had used civic leagues to order, improve, and govern their living spaces. Unlike civil rights organizations or labor unions that pulled support for their efforts from all over Birmingham, civic leagues were neighborhood-specific. They sought to combat environmental racism and the maldistribution of municipal resources at the micro-level. Beautification campaigns, neighborhood watches, and social
gatherings were all ways the leagues kept neighborhoods together in the face of chronic problems.  

African American responses to life in Collegeville produced a variety of “crabgrass-roots” civil rights activism, vaulting the neighborhood to one of the most active centers of the local movement in the late 1950s. From 1953 to 1961, the Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth occupied the pulpit at Bethel Baptist Church. As Shuttlesworth’s biographer Andrew Manis observed, Sears’ formative influence on Bethel made it “an unlikely congregation for a pastor that would eventually challenge the racial status quo” in Birmingham and the nation. Shuttlesworth’s initial contributions to Bethel included attracting younger parishioners, launching voter drives with other black churches and organizations, and cleaning up the neighborhood. His civic activities in Collegeville shed light on the ways he could “destroy segregation…embarrass the system, and challenge the system from within.” In the summer of 1955, he convinced black ministers to support his petition to the Birmingham City Commission requesting black policemen. Shuttlesworth wanted these new officers to patrol areas of high crime in black neighborhoods such as Collegeville. Citing the need for law and order but also

21 On the history of Birmingham’s civic leagues, see Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 215-30.

22 Thomas Sugrue described the late 1960s politics of the urban white working class as “crabgrass-roots.” Whites believed black presence in their neighborhoods brought down the value of their homes. Correspondingly, they retaliated through harassment campaigns or moved out of the city. African Americans, however, also sought to protect their rights as homeowners. Limiting “crabgrass-roots” to the white working class denies black activism based on homeownership and neighborhood concerns. Thomas J. Sugrue, “Crabgrass-Roots Politics: Race, Rights, and the Reaction against Liberalism in the Urban North, 1940-1964,” Journal of American History 82, no. 2 (Sept. 1995); Andrew Wiese, Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

23 Manis, Fire You Can’t Put Out, 70-71.

24 Ibid., 79, 82-83.
questioning the existence of an all-white force, Shuttlesworth’s subversive attack on Jim Crow and the Birmingham Police Department catapulted him into a leadership position for blacks across the city. In 1956, he organized the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) after a state court injunction banned the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other civil rights organizations.

As Shuttlesworth became one of Alabama’s most militant civil rights activists, he and Collegeville residents experienced the extreme measures some whites undertook to maintain segregation and white supremacy. Acting without fear of reprisal from the Birmingham Police Department, Ku Klux Klan members bombed Bethel Baptist Church and its parsonage twice. One youth who lived nearby described the impact of the December 1956 bombing “as if the earth had just erupted. You could feel the thrust of it and the smell of it.”

LaVerne Revis Martin, who lived near the parsonage, recalled that the force of the 1958 explosion shattered her home’s windows; flying shards of glass injured her infant daughter asleep in her crib. Menefee most likely experienced the effects of the 1958 bombing given the proximity of her home to the church. These bombings also shook the faith of some Bethel worshipers. By the early 1960s, criticism of Shuttlesworth’s pastoral duties as well as worries over further destruction to Bethel emerged as topics of conversation among members. As Martin, who attended Bethel every Sunday and marched with Shuttlesworth, explained, “The church and the movement is separate.”

For these and other personal reasons, Shuttlesworth left Bethel

25 James Roberson interview in *Foot Soldiers in Democracy*, 112.

26 Martin interview in *Foot Soldiers in Democracy*, 90.

and Birmingham in the summer of 1961, pushing Collegeville out of the public spotlight as a center of civil rights activism.\textsuperscript{28}

Although Shuttlesworth’s activities rightly have been hailed as heroic and successful, life for residents in Collegeville continued to deteriorate into the 1960s due to municipal policies and chronic environmental, economic, and social problems. One anonymous public official sympathetically noted that most residents were “beating their heads against a brick economic wall,” a situation made worse by the continuing rate of industrial disinvestment.\textsuperscript{29} A public housing project, completed in 1964, wiped out an entire section of western Collegeville. Not all of the displaced residents found new homes there. Carver High School, established in 1956, lost teachers and students as part of the city’s school desegregation plan. Scores of black men largely disappeared from the neighborhood through abandonment, unemployment, disability, death, or imprisonment. Lynburg Sanders, a probation officer assigned to parolees living in Collegeville, remarked, “In most families, there are no fathers and the youths look to any adult male for direction. When they can’t find it, they flounder and get into trouble.”\textsuperscript{30} Collegeville was experiencing a drain of traditional leadership roles and loss of community members. By the end of the 1960s, Collegeville was a “ghetto-poverty track” with a high unemployment rate and an increasing number of households led by single women.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{28} Once Shuttlesworth left Bethel, it no longer served as a meeting site for the ACMHR. Manis, Fire You Can’t Put Out, 259.

\textsuperscript{29} Casson, “Collegeville Violence, Crime is Curbed.”

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

A complicated underworld of crime involving African Americans and white police officers threatened to take over the neighborhood. Violence committed by youth gangs became more prevalent in the neighborhood’s main streets and schools. Menefee and others feared young women and children risked personal assault or falling victim to prostitution. Residents identified apartment buildings and other multi-family housing units as the breeding places for crime, but the Birmingham Police Department did nothing to address their concerns. White police officers sanctioned criminal activity. Menefee described one who went door-to-door collecting his fees “like an insurance agent.” Officers violently extracted kickbacks from owners and patrons of houses of prostitution and gambling and underground whiskey joints in black neighborhoods. Whether it was money, booze, or sex, these perks of brute white power were “institutionalized” behavior at the Birmingham Police Department.

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32 Some African Americans entered the world of crime for economic reasons. These women and men were the surplus labor of Birmingham’s declining industrial economy. They were squeezed out of the workforce and civic life. As theorist Roderick A. Ferguson noted, “Surplus labor becomes the impetus for anxieties about the sanctity of ‘community,’ ‘family,’ and ‘nation’” and “throws the normative boundaries of race, class, gender and sexuality into confusion.” Menefee’s attack on the criminal element in Collegeville was an unrecognized one against the forces that threatened her sense of “community,” pegged all blacks in poverty neighborhoods as deviant, and depicted black women in ghettos as welfare queens. The illegal trades such as drugs, whiskey, and prostitution in Collegeville, however, functioned as a way for African Americans to survive in a city and political economy that offered them little opportunity. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), 17, 1-30.


34 Ralph E. Logan to Thad Holt, August 17, 1972, File 1.12, Community Affairs Committee of Operation New Birmingham Papers (hereafter cited as CAC Papers), BPL-DAM.


“Tired of the crime, violence, and filth,” Menefee organized her neighbors into the Collegeville Coordinating Council and surveyed residents on how they wanted to improve the neighborhood. Menefee drew from her experience with the North Birmingham Federation of Women, a voting rights group, to identify and organize voters block-by-block. In the summer of 1969 Menefee and her group of women “went down to the city fathers and asked for help.” They demanded that the city increase police enforcement to combat gangs and crime, fine landlords who refused to refurbish substandard housing up to municipal code, and extend basic utilities to residents without them. Menefee’s demands, which became known as the “Collegeville Fourteen Points,” concretely focused on African American living conditions. They sharply contrasted with the black elite’s “Fourteen Points” issued a few months before that emphasized black representation in the legal functions of local government. The conditions of the neighborhood had made life unbearable for Menefee and other respectable black citizens, especially women, who chose to live in Collegeville for familial and community ties or who slowly found themselves economically boxed into the neighborhood.

The “Collegeville Fourteen Points” recognized the central contributions of women in everyday life. Black women’s activism deeply reflected neighborhood conditions and the legacies of racial uplift. Some of their demands previously had been advocated by Collegeville’s male civic leaders, including Shuttlesworth, but Menefee and other women pushed for programs to address problems specific to their roles as

38 “Objectives of Local Committee of North Birmingham—Collegeville Community (And Suggested Assignment),” ca. 1970, File 2.3.33, ONB Papers.
community matriarchs, mothers, wives, and sisters. Indeed, her group was an alternative to the older Collegeville-Harriman Park Civic League run by Benjamin Greene. For decades, black women like Menefee had struggled to hold their families together and survive in a neighborhood they no longer recognized. The neighborhood’s “Fourteen Points” called for daycare centers for “working mothers,” juvenile delinquency prevention programs, and rehabilitation centers for parolees. These programs would relieve women from the total burden of providing support for youth and adult men. Menefee wanted residents to “take greater responsibility and pride in their children and consequently their neighborhood.”

Menefee’s promotion of citizen participation based on moral values, self-help, and community identity aligned with the goals of civic elites in building a “new” Birmingham. Although she came from the same neighborhood and tradition of activism as Shuttlesworth, who civic elites disdained, Menefee’s personality and methods appealed to Mayor Seibels and civic elites in Operation New Birmingham (ONB). As an elderly black woman, Menefee had an unquestionable moral authority over issues that appeared to be domestic and material but were also deeply and deceptively political. She achieved measures of first-class citizenship as a black woman despite the odds against her; she was a respectable member of society, meeting standards for both Collegeville and downtown. She worked in the professional services, witnessing the boom of southern black middle class expansion, and also experienced the effects of

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39 Separated from Collegeville but directly northeast, the smaller Harriman Park neighborhood shared the same railroad borders and diagonal cut of Huntsville Road.

40 “Objectives of Local Committee of North Birmingham—Collegeville Community (And Suggested Assignment).”
deindustrialization. Menefee, not black men or black civic elites, gave voice to her neighborhood. ONB and Seibels needed Menefee to convey an image of open, responsive governance to black Birminghamians as much as she needed them to improve Collegeville.

**Into the Neighborhoods: The Community Affairs Committee and the Neighborhood Planning Program**

Civic leaders’ strategic embrace of Lula Menefee shifted the focus of Operation New Birmingham (ONB) from downtown to the neighborhoods. ONB replaced its Downtown Development Committee with a Community Development Department led by former New Dealer Thad Holt.\(^41\) Holt matched multiple federal programs with goals outlined by the Community Affairs Committee (CAC), an elite biracial citizens group established in the spring of 1969. CAC subcommittees, each co-led by a black and white member, studied urban problems and suggested policy recommendations to public officials. Black and white civic elites’ exposure to Lula Menefee grounded their discussions of poverty, health, and housing and challenged their privileged perspectives. On field trips to areas “tucked away out of the sight and minds of most of Birmingham,” civic leaders witnessed conditions far from the comforts they enjoyed in their suburban neighborhoods.\(^42\) As Holt explained, “The more on-site inspections we have by members

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\(^{41}\) The Community Development Committee was a broad mix of “private enterprise” developments, the continuation of “Design for Progress” projects including the Park West public housing development, and structural improvements such as housing, utility service, and transportation. The date for the reorganization is unknown. While the following records appeared in a file with communication from 1973, Vincent S. Townsend referred to the renamed committee in an August 1971 article for *Ebony* magazine. The City of Birmingham did not have Community Development Department until 1973. Operation New Birmingham, “Statement of the Community Development Committee,” ca. 1973, File 4.5, ONB Papers; Operation New Birmingham, “Possible Projects for the Community Development Committee,” ca. 1973, File 4.5, ONB Papers.

\(^{42}\) “With Pilot Project.”
of the Community Affairs Committee, the more understanding and feeling of confidence will be developed.”  

By purposefully recognizing class, racial, and spatial barriers to citizen participation and representation in Birmingham, CAC and Holt’s department transformed ONB into the community action agency Vincent Townsend claimed it was.

Between 1969 and 1974, ONB and its various programs created new spaces of political and interpersonal interaction between urban blacks and suburban whites. Influenced by federal programs, motivated by political necessity, and anchored in shared values of self-help, these networks of cross-class biracial communication in metropolitan Birmingham were unprecedented. Most whites never had dared to enter all-black neighborhoods like Collegeville, yet most white elites required black presence in their neighborhoods and work spaces. By confining blacks to service roles at home and work, whites personally interacted with blacks in ways acceptable to them. Menefee’s middle-class respectability and self-help philosophy made it easier for white civic elites to understand her. Visiting Collegeville, however, challenged their perceptions of what life was like in Birmingham. For urban blacks like Menefee, they became a recognized part of Birmingham’s shifting power structure. The police department, utility companies, and the media listened to them, if not always satisfactorily. Although limited to advisory and beneficiary roles, African Americans who used ONB resources gained what were for them new public services and access to power.

With vast experience in distributing federal funds, Holt was an ideal choice to lead ONB into Birmingham’s neighborhoods. A retired broadcasting executive, Holt’s greatest achievement was establishing the publicly funded Alabama Educational

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Television network. He went back to work for ONB on a volunteer basis at the request of Townsend, a longtime colleague. In the 1930s, Holt oversaw the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Works Progress Administration, and National Youth Administration for the state of Alabama. Keeping with the racial politics of the era, he maintained an unequal distribution of federal aid among whites and blacks. Yet, these New Deal agencies were similar to the programs he launched to address the needs of Birmingham citizens like Lula Menefee. A full-time lobbyist in Washington, DC, notified Holt and other ONB directors about the availability of federal funds for nearly every type of urban program, from housing modifications to beautification. ONB’s reliance on federal aid initiated sweeping political and social changes few foresaw.

Holt used innovative strategies and a combination of federal funding and private philanthropy to address basic standard of living issues. Before 1969, one office in downtown Birmingham served all Jefferson County citizens who potentially qualified for food stamps, a US Department of Agriculture program. Lack of transportation to the office coupled with long lines discouraged potential clients and made the program ineffective in combating hunger. On the recommendation of a CAC subcommittee, Holt launched a fundraising campaign among ONB members to expand the food stamp program. One ONB director won local business support for the program by citing potential tax increases from subsidized food sales at grocery stores.44 These efforts led to the opening of a new food stamp office in a racially mixed industrial area between Birmingham and its sister city of Bessemer to the west. Holt also took the food stamp program on the road. Using refurbished school buses, volunteers traveled throughout

Jefferson County to meet in-need citizens where they lived to speed up the verification process.⁴⁵ The bus visited Collegeville regularly.⁴⁶ The simple acts of opening a new office and creating mobile clinics were reversals of the city’s and county’s historic refusal to expand social services or remove impediments that curtailed access to them. They also won ONB good publicity. Holt and others traveled to Washington to share their methods with federal officials who wanted to revise food stamp policies. By the mid-1970s, Holt’s work led to a 400 percent monthly increase in local food stamp distribution, reaching an average of 10,000 households.⁴⁷

Launched in 1970, the Neighborhood Planning Program put blacks from sixteen poverty neighborhoods in direct contact with white municipal department heads and presidents of utility companies.⁴⁸ It used comprehensive planning assistance funds from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development to help residents identify and implement public works initiatives (See Appendix, Table 11). The stature of ONB opened municipal and corporate doors previously closed to urban blacks. Some of metropolitan Birmingham’s poorest black citizens and wealthiest white ones met face-to-

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⁴⁵ Thomas B. Pinson to all Jefferson County mayors, August 12, 1969, File 1.9, CAC Papers; Dan Roper to Alan Drennan, October 3, 1969, File 1.9, CAC Papers; Dan Roper to Michael Monroe, October 24, 1969, File 1.9, CAC Papers.


⁴⁷ William Voight to Operation New Birmingham Members, June 12, 1974, File 33.34, Seibels Papers; Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, February 3, 1975, File 2.2.1.58, Thad Holt Papers (hereafter cited as Holt Papers), BPL-DAM.

⁴⁸ Neighborhoods included Big Mulga, Central City, Collegeville, Docena, East Birmingham, Eureka, Evergreen Bottoms, Gate City-Marks Village, Iskooda, Martin Quarters, Mason City, Melvin Court, North Birmingham, North Pratt, Powderly, Titusville, and Smithfield. The program was not conceived solely for the benefit of black communities; rather, white neighborhood leaders did not want it or other federally funded programs in their back yards. The Neighborhood Planning Program was closely associated with the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity, the city’s official community action agency for the War on Poverty. William E. Ricker, “Neighborhood Planning Grant, Project Completion Report, Project No. ALA P-95,” July 9, 1971, File 33.33, Seibels Papers.
face to discuss neighborhood improvements. Their personal interaction eroded racial, class, and structural barriers that previously had fostered a culture of benign neglect in Birmingham. Residents in poverty neighborhoods had their streets paved, ditches covered, parks and recreation facilities built, safer traffic patterns established, and water, sewer, and power lines extended to their homes. Holt believed the program would “help develop confidence in the residents of these communities in helping them help themselves.”

The Neighborhood Planning Program gave poor and black residents of Birmingham a chance to personally lobby for public services most whites took for granted. Menefee’s original demands inspired the creation of the program, and Collegeville became a pilot site in its first year. About 3 percent of Collegeville residents did not have access to water in their homes, but many more did not have adequate service and supply. “It is an unbelievable situation,” black insurance executive and CAC member John Drew remarked, that in 1970 Jefferson County residents lacked running water in their homes. W. Cecil Bauer, president of South Central Bell Telephone Company and co-chair of CAC, explained to the public, “Problems like Collegeville’s water have been there for a long time” because “they’ve been given a low priority for action.”

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51 Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, May 27, 1972, File 1.12, CAC Papers.

recalcitrant Birmingham Water Works Board insisted user fees would not cover the cost of extending water and sewage service to Collegeville and other black poverty neighborhoods. Drew, Bauer, and other CAC members successfully lobbied board members and the city of Birmingham to subsidize the cost of new service lines.\textsuperscript{53} CAC continued to press the Birmingham Water Works Board and other utility companies to extend services to poor neighborhoods off the grid. The collaboration between black neighborhood advocates like Menefee and white corporate leaders in expanding access to water service profoundly affected black citizens who went without this fundamentally basic standard of living.

ONB staff members visited neighborhoods throughout Birmingham from 1970 to 1974 as part of their work for the Neighborhood Planning Program. Ralph Logan and Charles Montgomery, who were white, and William Sherman, who was black, listened to citizens’ needs, recommended a variety of programs, and connected them with the proper municipal or county agency. Logan worked in Collegeville and formed a personal relationship with Menefee. He enjoyed a birthday supper with her, an occasion that surely deepened their mutual trust and fostered their professional relationship.\textsuperscript{54} Field agents drove to obscure neighborhoods, even on the weekends, “for the express purpose of learning their location,” as Sherman reported. Many residents did not know that ONB worked in the neighborhoods, and most blacks had a generally negative image of the

\textsuperscript{53} The battle to extend water and sewer lines continued after success in Collegeville. Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, May 27, 1972, File 1.12, CAC Papers; Arthur Shores and Walter Wilson to Reeves Sims, August 28, 1972, File 1.12, CAC Papers; C. D. Colee to Arthur Shores and Walter Wilson, October 5, 1972, File 1.12, CAC Papers; Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, May 7, 1973, File 1.3, CAC Papers.

organization. Sherman repeated ONB’s mantra when he told residents that the Neighborhood Planning Program was “a catalyst to help them help themselves.”

African Americans used their homes and communities in the Neighborhood Planning Program as tools to access the formal and informal structures of power in Birmingham. No other program, committee, or segment of municipal government recognized residence in the precise way the Neighborhood Planning Program did. As one ONB executive remarked, the program “ha[s] taken the establishment and related them to the neighborhood groups.” Menefee and other African Americans shared with white elites the values of self-help and community improvement. When Menefee met with Logan and others affiliated with ONB in the streets of Collegeville, she lobbied for immediate and material changes in the living spaces of African Americans. Her home became her source of political power. The dialogue she fashioned in her neighborhood continued in downtown at Monday morning CAC meetings. In 1973, Menefee joined ONB’s Board of Directors, symbolizing the importance of black neighborhood representation in Birmingham’s new power structure.

The Community Affairs Committee and Holt’s Community Development Department also addressed police-community relations, one of the most explosive issues in Birmingham that largely pitted blacks and whites against each other. Indeed, a riot over a police shooting of African Americans prompted the formation of CAC. Poor


police-community relations also resulted from a lack of services and collusion between white officers and black criminals. Mayor Seibels, Holt, and CAC members placed pressure on the Birmingham Police Department to launch a crime prevention program in Collegeville in 1970. More officers patrolled its streets, warding off criminal activity with their presence and engaging in conversations with residents. Citizen participation was crucial to crime prevention and renewing police-community relations. Crime did abate for a while. Menefee received death threats from those who made their livelihoods from neighborhood crime, but she shrugged them off: “I’m old enough to die…as long as I have not lived in vain.”

Menefee welcomed the changes to her neighborhood. “It’s safe to walk the streets now,” she admitted, “but there’s still work to be done.”

The Collegeville crime prevention program transformed into one of ONB’s most inspired if superficial efforts, the Police Athletic Team League (PAT), to improve police-community relations. A pick-up game of baseball between white officers and black youth turned into a citywide recreational program. Over 500 youths tried out for 200 slots in 1972; the program eventually expanded to basketball. Holt and ONB members, particularly W. Temple Tutwiler II from one of Birmingham’s first prominent families, actively solicited civic elites to fund the program. Donations provided equipment, team jerseys, field maintenance, tutoring programs, and transportation costs. Teams played on the diamond in the historic Rickwood Field, previously home to the Black Birmingham Barons and repeatedly closed to prevent the desegregation of athletic teams and public

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58 “With Pilot Project.”

facilities from the 1940s to the early 1960s. Collegeville’s team was the league champion for three years in a row, enabling it to play other teams in national and international competitions in Houston, Kansas City, and Tokyo. White ONB members also arranged for winning teams to meet the New York Yankees and the Baltimore Orioles.

Figure 6.2 An unidentified Collegeville youth with a first-place trophy for the Police Athletic Team championship, 1973. (Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library.)

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PAT provided “disadvantaged boys,” as Tutwiler described them, with the opportunity to travel outside of Birmingham and the South and to escape, however briefly, the urban poverty that surrounded them. By describing African American youth in class terms, Tutwiler and ONB directors removed race from a program that primarily derived from bridging race and power relations between black Birminghamians and white officers. Holt believed that PAT was the most critical tool in fostering good police-community relations and relating to urban youth. “The boys learned many of the officers names where heretofore they were just a blue uniform, a symbol to keep away from,” he remarked.

While PAT primarily challenged black youth perceptions of the Birmingham Police Department, black and white civic elites working in CAC sought to reform the police force. CAC members worked with Police Chief James C. Parsons to launch major public relations campaigns in black and white media and hosted special seminars promoting police employment among African Americans. From 1969 to 1972, their efforts raised the number of blacks in uniform from 1 to 18. These new recruits belonged to a force of 669 officers, making CAC’s efforts symbolic more than substantial. CAC members also lobbied county officials to appoint an African American to the Jefferson County Personnel Board, which controlled the civil service system for municipal

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65 Newspapers included the two major white dailies, the Birmingham News and Birmingham Post Herald, but only one black daily, the Birmingham Times.

employment. They finally succeeded in December 1973, two years after one of the three seats remained vacant. Reform also proceeded within the police department under Parsons, who earned a masters degree in sociology at UAB. He implemented a series of meetings between white officers and black residents of neighborhoods to enhance communication between them. The number of police brutality claims reported to the department, the Birmingham City Council, and the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) declined. W. C. Patton, the local NAACP president, remarked in a June 1973 CAC meeting, “Changes in the Police Department might not have happened so rapidly unless all of [us] had been sitting around the table on Monday morning.”

Between 1969 and 1974, Menefee, Holt, and CAC shifted the attention of ONB and municipal government from downtown to the neighborhoods, African Americans, and the poor. Their layered biracial and cross-class communication represented a breakthrough in metropolitan race relations and politics. Black and white citizens who worked through ONB personally experienced a new Birmingham as they formed professional and personal relationships with those they otherwise never would have known. CAC’s co-chair W. Cecil Bauer declared that Birmingham’s “white leaders have discovered the human anguish behind the statistics of poverty and discrimination while Negroes have learned that whites are genuinely concerned.” A devoted member of CAC who was heavily involved in efforts to meet the needs of Collegeville residents, Bauer


believed the committee “produced a physical as well as a moral reshaping of the city.”
Perhaps with a nod toward Lula Menefee, he insisted that the key to change was
“responsible black leadership which wanted to build Birmingham—not burn it” and “the
so-called white ‘power structure’ which recognized that the power which resides in the
hearts of men is as potent as that which flows from an economic base.”
The Community Affairs Committee and Holt’s programs connected people who had different life
experiences and understandings of urban problems but who believed total community
welfare must address the needs of all Birmingham citizens.

“We Have Them Listening to Us”: African American Opposition, the Politics of
Racial Solidarity, and the Citizen Participation Program

Many African Americans in neighborhoods destroyed by industrialization,
poverty, and urban renewal rejected Operation New Birmingham’s (ONB) programs and
new municipal role in community development. Residents wanted more than sewer lines
and stop signs. Public improvements based on the philosophy of self-help could not
address joblessness, structural inequalities, or systematic racism in municipal
government. “Rather than attacking the root causes of poverty,” one Collegeville youth
perceptively noted, “they’re attacking the results of poverty.”
Another remarked to a journalist, “We don’t have any money, and there isn’t anything to do. You know as well
as I do that things ain’t getting better, so don’t go telling me what I should do.”
Perpetual neglect of black neighborhoods had made many residents disdainful of the new

70 Ibid.
71 Casson, “Collegeville Violence, Crime Is Curbed.”
72 Brazeel, “Collegeville Residents Have Mixed Opinions.”
power structure and its plans for Birmingham. Mattie Coleman, a public housing resident in Collegeville, explained the disconnect between what people in the neighborhood experienced and what civic leaders in downtown promoted: “An All-America City ought to be able to provide jobs for its people…. Nobody wants to live in a slum, but sometimes it’s all you can do to get a piece of bread.”

Since the 1940s, *Birmingham World* editor Emory O. Jackson was one of the most powerful black voices who spoke out against Jim Crow as well as the actions of blacks elites. In his “Tip Off” column, Jackson wrote editorials on racial zoning battles, unequal teacher salaries in Jefferson County, and the importance of voting. A former high school teacher, he saw his role at the *World* as extending public education to the masses. “To me,” he wrote in 1951, “an editor’s chair is little more than a teacher’s desk moved into the public square. For much of the work of an editor is the field of mass education. A good newspaper informs, enlightens, and entertains.” He also continually engaged in sparring matches with other black leaders of Birmingham whose tactics he found suspect. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Jackson repeatedly resigned in protest from his position as Secretary of the local NAACP because he believed it did not fight hard enough against Jim Crow. During the battle to overturn racial zoning laws, Jackson wrote to the national NAACP office to complain about “the faint and declining leadership we have

73 Ibid.


75 Ibid., 31, 109.
Despite the contradictions of his actions and words, Jackson fiercely believed racial solidarity was the key to liberating African Americans.

By the early 1970s, however, Jackson concluded racial solidarity had brought power for some blacks at the expense of liberation for all. “Black southerners have not yet found a working formula for building their own power as a means of progress rather than as a contest,” he wrote in a 1971 opinion piece that took aim at the “shackled” black civic elite. Jackson personally experienced the cost of building a new Birmingham. In the late 1960s, the new interstate-highway system quartered his neighborhood Enon Ridge, home to middle-class blacks since the turn of the century. His health was also failing; prostate cancer finally killed him two days after his sixty-seventh birthday in September 1975. Toward the end of his life, his personal writings reflected bitterness over a cause and strategy—racial solidarity—that professionally and personally failed him. After years of editorial interference by C. A. Scott, Republican owner of the Atlanta-based World syndicate, he angrily wrote that after a lifetime of “hop[ing] that the Negro group would build great enterprises, I now realize that there was no justification for such a faith. I would have perhaps been better off materially and certainly richer spiritually had I taken a different road.” Six months later, he confided to his unrequited love, “I should have done something for myself…like buy an automobile…take a vacation…build a bank account.” Jackson was a life-long bachelor who lived alone and

76 Ibid., 28.

77 Emory O. Jackson, “Many Racial Barriers are Down,” in “Black Voices of the South,” Ebony, August 1971.

78 Emory O. Jackson to C. A. Scott, ca. July 8, 1972, File 5.1, Birmingham World Correspondence Files (hereafter cited as Birmingham World Correspondence), BPL-DAM.

79 Emory O. Jackson to Anne Rutledge, December 20, 1972, File 6.2, Birmingham World Correspondence.
financially supported his siblings on a meager salary. He translated his overwhelming sense of frustration and impotence into scathing editorials against his old allies.80

Jackson’s opposition to black civic elites working through ONB revealed the enormous class, ideological, and strategic divisions within black Birmingham. The editor privately acknowledged that the Birmingham World gave him “a vehicle and a voice” as a “means to campaign for political unity” when black civic elites pushed for biracialism after 1965.81 Jackson spoke for the thousands of African Americans who opposed the leaders of the biracial metropolitan coalition and resented black civic elites.82 CAC’s W. Cecil Bauer insisted on inviting him as a guest speaker because “we need to hear people who do not agree with us.” Jackson, however, repeatedly denounced the group as a “grits club,” a description many African Americans adopted in their attacks on ONB.83 He repeatedly denied requests by ONB directors to run public service announcements for recruiting blacks for the civil service exam in the World; he claimed they were advertisements. In a 1972 World editorial, he asked, “Are NAACP leaders in such debt to the downtown power structure that they no longer can speak out against wrongs committed against black citizens?”84 His question reflected where he lived and worked in Birmingham: the black business district, hard-won neighborhoods, and the imagined

80 For an examination of masculinity and civil rights activism, see Steve Estes, I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

81 Emory O. Jackson to Bernice C. Johnson, November 13, 1967, File 1.19, Birmingham World Correspondence.

82 Jackson, “Many Racial Barriers Are Down.”

83 Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, June 12, 1972, File 1.2, CAC Papers.

public forum of the *Birmingham World*. All of these traditional black spaces were shrinking in the “new” Birmingham.

Because black civic elites actively participated in remaking Birmingham after 1965, their perspectives on the importance of biracial communication were vastly different from Jackson’s. Biracialism had won them civic and political power. Councilor Arthur Shores and City Clerk Judge Peter A. Hall had spent over thirty years pushing civil rights issues with whites, and they won high profile spots in municipal government for their efforts. Postwar economic growth and civil rights organizations produced new systems of power from which black civic leaders emerged. Louis J. Willie, executive vice-president of A. G. Gaston Enterprises, became a proxy for Gaston, who kept a busy calendar filled with civic affairs and business activities. Miles graduate and faculty member Dr. Richard Arrington Jr. joined Shores on the council in 1971. Rev. Edward Gardner, president of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), Shuttlesworth’s former group, became a CAC member in 1970. Gardner worked side-by-side the same white men whose stores he picketed just a few years before. The rise of the ACMHR to civic power prompted civil rights activists such as Shuttlesworth and Rev. Abraham L. Woods II to use the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as their organization of protest. All of these elites believed their high-profile political and civic positions would benefit black Birminghamians.

Black civic elites occupied a contentious middle ground in Birmingham politics by balancing the interests of white civic elites against an emerging black electorate that increasingly rejected biracialism. To businessman A. G. Gaston, white support was necessary to open avenues of economic opportunity, social mobility, and first-class
citizenship for African Americans. Black economic power had not yet proved sufficient to do these tasks alone. In the 1970s, Gaston continued to shape black consumerism through his radio station WENN-FM, which enjoyed the largest listening audience in metropolitan Birmingham as the only “black” station.\(^{85}\) Radio and print advertisements for Gaston’s companies continued to hawk his beliefs in thrift, charity, and “green power.”\(^{86}\) Gaston also peddled his message about the importance of black economic power to audiences around the state of Alabama. “Black power minus economic power is no power. It’s essential that we get our economic power,” Gaston argued. “We’ve got more power than we can afford. We’ve got more rights than we can afford.”\(^{87}\) Without economic self-determination, Gaston believed, black political power would remain marginalized and ineffective in liberating African Americans. Gaston’s status as a multimillionaire, however, separated him from the experiences of the overwhelming majority of black Birminghiamians.\(^{88}\)

The 1973 midterm election revealed a division among African American voters over the political strategy of biracialism. The majority of the black electorate pushed U. W. Clemon into a run-off race for a city council seat. Clemon was a graduate of Miles College and Columbia University School of Law, both of which should have indicated to


\(^{88}\) By the mid-1970s, Gaston resented his de facto introduction as a “millionaire” in print and public engagements. He believed that distinction was one reason why he and his wife Minnie were assaulted and abducted in January 1976. The assailant was black. Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines, *Black Titan: A. G. Gaston and the Making of a Black American Millionaire* (New York: One World Books, 2004), 248-52.
Gaston and white civic elites that the newcomer was a respectable black candidate. Clemon, however, represented a new generation of black leaders who drew support strictly from the neighborhoods. Gaston joined whites in ONB in a smear campaign that labeled the newcomer as a “black radical.” Many blacks decried Gaston’s actions as a betrayal to the race. Black elites in the Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council (JCPDC) responded to the outrage in black neighborhoods by endorsing Clemon.\textsuperscript{89} The JCPDC also supported a white incumbent. Other black elites joined their white allies in the Community Affairs Committee to repudiate the actions of Gaston and ONB, the committee’s parent organization. CAC co-chairs Rev. Gardner and W. Cecil Bauer “deplore[d] the fact that race has been injected into the election;” they refused to endorse a candidate.\textsuperscript{90} White and black civic elites had different ideas about what biracialism meant based on their personal and political beliefs.

The 1973 midterm election also coincided with an intense public debate regarding citizen participation and ONB’s control of Birmingham. Earlier that summer, the Birmingham area director of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development notified Mayor Seibels that the city needed to involve citizens directly in the overall planning process to qualify for federal funds. ONB previously served as the city’s representative citizens group for workable programs such as urban renewal. The limited nature of the Neighborhood Planning Program, which was in 1 of every 5 neighborhoods,

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{90} Community Affairs Committee, Resolution, October 28, 1973, File 3.11, CAC Papers.
\end{footnotesize}
was not a sufficient replacement either. Before the election, Seibels announced a new citizen participation plan that essentially expanded the role and programs of ONB in the neighborhoods even more. The plan ignored residents’ perceptions of neighborhood boundaries, and it organized neighborhoods into larger communities. For example, Collegeville was part of the North Birmingham community. From the community districts, elected representatives would sit on the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) to the mayor; the mayor also would appoint one-third of that body’s members. ONB would work with CAB in meeting neighborhood objectives, primarily in public improvements. Local NAACP President W. C. Patton warned Vincent Townsend that ONB “would sign its own death warrant by such involvement” in the plan.

Even though the Neighborhood Planning Program was a success, it had divided African Americans between those who worked with ONB and those who demanded autonomy in their neighborhoods. Lula Menefee, who was a member of ONB’s Board of Directors by 1973, earned considerable power in shaping Collegeville’s public improvements agenda. ONB field worker Ralph Logan informed his boss that she “will

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91 Jon Will Pitts to George S. Seibels, July 6, 1973, File 2.18, David J. Vann Papers (hereafter cited as Vann Papers), BPL-DAM.

92 For more information on these events leading to the formation of the Citizen Participation Program, see Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 230-40.

93 Seibels’ plan was not without precedent. Its structure for the CAB resembled the Board of Directors of the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity, the official community action agency in the local War on Poverty.

94 W. C. Patton to Vincent Townsend, January 18, 1974, File 33.34, Seibels Papers.

send [us] a letter in a few days telling us what projects she wants to do.” For some residents, however, Menefee had become too closely associated with ONB. Some residents “accus[ed] her for the delay” in promised projects such as the construction of a community center adjacent to Carver High School or increased police patrol after a random gang shooting into the school killed a teenage girl. The lag in building a community center resulted from a general deficiency of federal and municipal funds, a problem that would plague the new citizen participation program as these funds continued to decline. The massive development of the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in the early to mid-1970s also pulled valuable municipal resources like engineering and sanitation away from neighborhoods. The municipal government simply did not have the manpower or the financing to upgrade the entire city. Crime, however, was too deeply embedded in Collegeville to be removed by small prevention programs like police-youth baseball teams. Despite Menefee’s influence in ONB and municipal government, all of these delays and the general decline of Collegeville made many residents believe that things in Birmingham had not changed.

African Americans strongly opposed the mayor’s new program of citizen participation based on the grounds of self-determination. They made their opinions known at the first public meeting held in Collegeville and organized by ONB. Benjamin Greene asked, “Why can’t we use the organization we already have? Why do YOU have to organize us?” Some Collegeville residents enjoyed working with ONB, but they saw


97 Ralph E. Logan to Thad Holt, August 17, 1972, File 3.33, ONB Papers; Robert N. Washington and Essie L. Horton to George Seibels, ca. 1971, File 3.33, ONB Papers.

98 Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 235.
themselves as the catalyst for change. “We in Collegeville,” Menefee declared three years before, “are the ones who started much of the work” in improving the neighborhood.\(^9\)

Greene led the Collegeville-Harriman Park Civic League, which was older and more established than Menefee’s Collegeville Coordinating Council. Some tension existed between the two groups. One resident confided, “We need more cooperation and coordination of efforts and less bickering between people to see who gets their name in the paper or an award first.”\(^10\) Menefee and Greene, however, worked together in organizing their neighborhood against the mayor’s plan. Indeed, Collegeville’s concerns played a large role in reshaping the city’s plan, no doubt influenced by Menefee’s relationship with ONB and municipal leaders.\(^11\) “Since we have talked loud and clear,” Menefee and Greene wrote in a letter to their neighbors, “we have them listening to us.”\(^12\)

White liberals also influenced the revision of the citizen participation plan. Edward S. LaMonte, director of UAB’s Center for Urban Affairs, had advised ONB on new housing developments in Southside in the early 1970s when the neighborhood experienced dramatic shocks in the wake of the university’s expansion. Many Center staff members had become involved in the Southside Action Committee, a biracial group dedicated to preserving community in a neighborhood that increasingly became a

\(^9\) Brazeel, “Collegeville Residents Have Mixed Opinions.”

\(^10\) Casson, “Collegeville Violence, Crime is Curbed.”


\(^12\) Collegeville Neighborhood Committee, “Let’s Put Action Where Our Mouth Is!” April 1, 1974, File 3.32, ONB Papers.
commercial area. LaMonte was familiar with how differently blacks and whites saw urban spaces. Despite his professional ties to ONB, he was against the organization’s involvement in the citizen participation plan. “It simply seems to me odd—and perhaps inappropriate—to allow any essentially private organization to stand between the citizens of the community and their government,” he wrote. LaMonte worked with Charles F. Lewis of the city’s Community Development Department in re-drafting the plan. Lewis had recommended Collegeville over the racially mixed Ensley neighborhood, ONB’s top choice, as the site of the first open meeting to discuss the citizen participation plan. His department worked with neighborhood representatives, including Menefee, in designing districts and the structure of the program.

Intense African American opposition to the biracial metropolitan coalition and the multi-layered networks of communication in Birmingham pushed municipal leaders into adopting one of the most democratic citizen participation plans in the nation. It went far beyond what was federally required of the city. The plan was a model of political self-determination. Everyone who was sixteen years of age or older had the right to vote for representatives in neighborhood districts with political borders defined by residents. For the first time, Collegeville as Menefee, Greene, and others knew it appeared on municipal maps. “When the program began, feeling by some citizens’ groups for city officials included misunderstanding, antagonism, and distrust,” Lewis recalled years later. “When the new map was prepared which…changed the boundaries in accordance

103 Edward S. LaMonte to Charles F. Lewis, February 22, 1974, File 3.16, Center for Urban Affairs Director’s Files, UAB Archives.

104 Citizens chose from neighborhood officers to represent them at the community level. Community representatives were eligible to run for the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) in a citywide election. There were 86 neighborhoods and 19 communities.
with citizens’ recommendations, an important step was taken in establishing a trust relationship and two-way communication between citizens and city officials. As historian Charles E. Connerly noted, the plan recognized that “Birmingham’s black neighborhoods reflected the historical identities that their residents, often through the civic leagues, had given them.”

After decades of federal mandates and black activism, Birmingham’s Citizen Participation Program (CPP) guaranteed blacks representation in municipal government. In November 1974, about 8,500 residents elected presidents, vice-presidents, and secretaries to represent their neighborhoods. A majority of the seats were competitive. Although it is unknown if Menefee ran for office, Benjamin Greene won Collegeville’s presidency. Residents from fifteen other black neighborhoods elected civic league leaders to represent them in the new program. The CPP replaced the function of ONB’s Neighborhood Planning Program, which continued working in neighborhoods outside the city’s borders that had potential annexation value. Citizens elected to the CPP allocated resources for public improvement projects for all of Birmingham’s 86 neighborhoods. Yet, this widespread dispersion of declining federal funds could not address all citizens’ demands. One steep cost of the CPP was the loss of support from white civic elites who had lobbied municipal agencies and corporations on the behalf of citizens in black neighborhoods.

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106 Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 238.

107 Ibid., 252, 239.

108 Under President Nixon, the Housing and Urban Development Department reduced and reorganized how it distributed funds to urban programs. Community Development Block Grants would be administered through the state rather than given to cities directly, and the funding had specific uses and functions. Arlene A. Sweeny to William E. Ricker, May 3, 1973, File 2.1, CAC Papers.
neighborhoods. But through the new Citizen Participation Program, black
Birminghamians not only gained spatial representation—access to municipal government
based on neighborhoods—but won political self-determination.

The New Face of Birmingham: The Vann-Arrington Alliance and the Bonita Carter
Controversy

With the implementation of the Citizen Participation Program and the continued
advocacy of the Community Affairs Committee, Birmingham moved closer to adopting
the more responsive and representative government first promised by reformer David J.
Vann in the early 1960s. In 1975 he became mayor of the city he politically engineered
through municipal reform. “We can be proud of our progress,” Vann told one of the last
graduating classes of Daniel Payne College in 1976, a historically black college soon to
close its doors, “but we cannot be satisfied. A void still exists….that cannot be removed
by inaction, good intentions, rhetoric, marches, or even open minds by themselves. It is a
void that can only be filled through patient, competent hard work.”109 Vann, who used
many of the strategies he cited, had spent over fifteen years trying to move Birmingham
toward a post-civil rights era he and others envisioned. Although metropolitan
consolidation had failed to unite the suburbs and the city, Vann continued to use biracial
communication and measures of inclusion to build a new Birmingham. He also
maintained his belief that municipal government should work for its citizens, which now
decisively included black urbanites.

109 David J. Vann, speech, May 10, 1976, transcript, “87th Annual Commencement Exercises, Daniel
Payne College,” File 11.15, Vann Papers.
The 1973 midterm election revealed that the balance of electoral power within the biracial coalition was shifting to African Americans. Urban whites were divided between those who supported biracialism and those who rejected it. Black voting behavior revealed class distinctions and strategic differences among African Americans, but they favored both black candidates and white liberals at the polls. When organized behind a candidate, blacks were a powerful minority power. Vann earned 51 percent of the total vote by winning 76 percent of the black vote and the support of union whites. He was the only mayor until 1999 who did not receive white middle-class backing. The biracial metropolitan coalition counted on black voters from the beginning, but now it was utterly dependent on them. Some of its leaders such as Vann more easily navigated the changes within the urban electorate and political landscape.

In one of his first acts as mayor, Vann publicly announced his Tuesday mornings would be reserved for meeting directly with citizens, from both the neighborhoods and downtown. No other mayor or public official in Birmingham’s history opened their office like Vann. By all accounts, the portly, jolly mayor conveyed empathy and compassion whenever he listened to anyone. He might have been satisfied with ribbon-cutting had it not been for his love of policy. He had an unquestionable faith in the law and its capacity to promote change. In 1977 he signed an executive order requiring municipal employees to live in the city of Birmingham, a policy designed to increase black hires. Until this decision was overturned, suburbanites could no longer work for the city. Vann’s decision

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110 Since the emergence of conservatism and the rise of the Republican Party in the early 1970s, white southern Democrats such as Vann relied on black and white support. Earl Black, “Presidential Address: The Newest Southern Politics,” *Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (Aug. 1998).

111 Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 515-17.
narrowly defined citizenship to residence in Birmingham. This interpretation resembled
the one advocated by former Police Commissioner T. Eugene “Bull” Connor and
contradicted the inclusive vision of citizenship Vann promoted during the 1962 municipal
referendum campaign. Vann’s new definition of citizenship, however, meant that he
governed Birmingham for racially undefined residents rather than white suburbanites.

The “absence of a door” to Vann’s mayoral office indicated his commitment to
move Birmingham’s government more toward citizen participation.112 Indeed, as a
councilor he had devised an alternative plan based on aspects of his failed “One Great
City” legislative package when he had tried to reform the city council from at-large to
district seats.113 His support of spatial representation was also good politics. At a 1977
US Conference of Mayors, Vann boasted that Birmingham’s Citizen Participation
Program was worth $62 million. Citizens recently approved a successful bond issue
mainly to fund public improvements desperately needed in black neighborhoods. The
Citizens Advisory Board (CAB), which was the highest tier in the program, originally
had objected to “frills” in the bond such as the rehabilitation of Sloss Furnaces into a
museum of early southern industrialization. After CAB’s input, the bond received wide
support.114 “The people who live in” the neighborhoods, Vann wrote, “know best what
they want.” The Citizen Participation Program gave residents “a more direct link with
their elected City officials.”115

113 Connerly, “Most Segregated City in America,” 233-334.
114 Ibid., 253-54.
Vann formed a close partnership with Dr. Richard Arrington Jr. when they joined the Birmingham City Council in 1971. Arrington was raised in Fairfield; his house was on an “all-dirt street” equipped with one water faucet and an outhouse.\textsuperscript{116} Out of these inequitable beginnings, Arrington climbed to prominence in Birmingham by way of Miles College. Between 1952 and 1971, Miles was his home base. He had been a student and later became an instructor there after he earned a masters degree at the University of Detroit. Although Arrington had been privy to some meetings involving various black leaders during the Miles Student Selective Buying Campaign in the spring of 1962, he left Birmingham the next year during the height of its civil rights crises. He came back to Miles as its academic dean in 1966 after earning his doctorate in zoology at the University of Oklahoma. He joined an administrative team that included Pitts and John Munro, director of Freshman Studies, to reaccredit the college. Arrington found allies with his peers at UAB, including Center for Urban Affairs Director Edward S. LaMonte, and served on the faculty there in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1971, he became executive director of the Alabama Center of Higher Education (ACHE), a consortium of the state’s eight historically black colleges.\textsuperscript{117} Arrington was well on his way to becoming the most important black educational figure in Alabama when a few young black men asked him to run for mayor.

Because he had worked in colleges and universities throughout his adult life, Arrington was a blank slate in municipal politics. As LaMonte, one of his closest


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 36-39, 43.
advisors, explained, “He had not been an activist during the civil rights movement.” He was a highly educated African American man in a city with civic leaders and an electorate who desired respectable black political representation to mark progress for them. Lucius H. Pitts, Arrington’s mentor, departed for his alma mater Payne College in Georgia in the summer of 1971 after turning Miles College into a civic powerhouse in race relations and civil rights activism. Arrington, who loved academic life, had high hopes to become president of Miles. As a self-described “foot-washing primitive Baptist,” however, his religious background conflicted with the beliefs of the Christian Methodist Episcopal institution. Arrington moved on to ACHE, but he also chose to run for a city council seat based on the suggestion of the young black men.

Arrington handily won a four-year council seat in 1971 with broad black and white support. Even though Arrington was a drafted candidate of black civil rights activists, he won the support of the biracial civic elite. He was the protégé of Pitts, who had served as CAC’s co-chair with W. Cecil Bauer until his departure from Birmingham. A. G. Gaston, Arrington’s advisor to white civic elites, also arranged for Vincent Townsend to endorse the young man in the _Birmingham News_. Emil Hess, owner of Parisian, a downtown department store, gave Arrington his largest campaign contribution of $500. Arrington received Hess’ gift from Vann, who peeled off bills from a fat roll of

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119 LaMonte, interview.

120 Four of Birmingham’s city council seats were two-year terms and five were four-year terms. Elections, however, were not for specific terms or districts but for a general, district-wide seat. Those candidates with the most votes overall won four-year seats.
cash. The department store owner, who had negotiated civil rights demands with Pitts throughout the early 1960s, hoped his donation would yield a second African American on the city council. It did. Arrington joined Vann and Angi Grooms Proctor, daughter of the federal circuit judge who continually ruled in favor of civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s, as new council members. Their elections signified a decisive political shift in the biracial metropolitan coalition toward supporting white liberals and black civic elites as municipal officials.

In his years on the city council, Arrington became embroiled within the old and new systems of power vying to govern Birmingham. By Arrington’s own admission, his desire to win a “civil rights badge” drove his council activities. Many African Americans did not trust him because he chose academics over protests in the streets. Arrington did not have regrets about his personal choices, but he felt the weight of responsibility toward black Birmingham. As LaMonte explained, Arrington felt compelled to “be an example of black political leadership” and to “take advantage of the opportunities that the civil rights movement had created.” Arrington used his seat to become the “new black political voice and power of Birmingham.” He addressed issues such as police brutality and civil service reform in the city council and in ONB’s Community Affairs Committee (CAC). Vann often advised him, too. Arrington’s clashes with Mayor Seibels made him a hero in black neighborhoods, while Seibels and more conservative whites accused

121 Arrington, _There’s Hope for the World_, 45-47.
122 The black electorate was 37 percent in 1967. Thornton, _Dividing Lines_, 513-14.
123 Arrington, _There’s Hope for the World_, 130, 59.
124 LaMonte, interview.
125 Arrington, _There’s Hope for the World_, 130-31.
Arrington of “‘ty[ying] the hands’ of police officers.” Arrington appealed to both middle-class and liberal whites, who saw his up-from-poverty background as evidence of self-help, and blacks, who recognized themselves in his struggles against injustice, segregation, and racism.

Throughout the 1970s, Vann and Arrington formed a solid governing relationship based on their personal friendship and deep admiration and respect for one another. They were highly intellectual and prone to collaboration, whether in the academic halls, courts, or council chambers. Born six years apart, Arrington and Vann experienced parallel lives. Jim Crow had dictated where they could live and go to school. Vann remained in Alabama and Birmingham, while Arrington’s pursuit of education led him to leave the city at key times in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These circumstances influenced their participation in local civil rights campaigns. Yet, both men were connected to institutions of power that shaped Birmingham once Jim Crow began to fall. Through ONB, Miles College, and City Hall, Vann and Arrington arrived at middle-age with a shared political vision based on biracialism, equality of citizenship, and democratic governance.

Their shared vision of Birmingham became evident after a police shooting controversy in the summer of 1979. A two-day riot in Kingston, two miles east of Collegeville, broke out in response to the latest incident of police brutality. On a Friday afternoon in late June, Alger Pickett shot a gas station manager over a minor dispute. In his escape, Alger spotted Bonita Carter, a friend, and ordered her to drive his car. Officer George Sands arrived on the scene at this time and shot Carter, who had ducked under the dashboard of the getaway car. A riot soon emerged. Vann and Arrington spent the

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126 Ibid., 130.
weekend in Kingston speaking with residents and calming protestors. Arrington described it as “a pretty tense situation out there.”

After Vann talked with concerned residents and onlookers, he sympathetically understood the riot to be one “against the police.”

On Monday morning, Dr. James Montgomery, the first black faculty member of UAB, called for a discussion of the events at a CAC meeting. Vann and CAC members displayed strengths in understanding the different points of view on the Carter controversy and their steadfast commitment to citizen participation. Although prompted by a white officer’s use of deadly force against a black citizen, Vann noted that the Kingston riot called “in[to] question” the actions of police officers to maintain order and secure the personal safety of innocent bystanders and themselves. Vann unequivocally accepted the neighborhood’s view that Carter was “innocent” despite her participation in an unfolding crime.

He adamantly pushed CAC to endorse a state legislative bill he had spent a year lobbying for that would create a coroner’s jury, an independent citizens body to investigate questionable deaths. The jury would counter the Birmingham Police Department’s Internal Affairs division that usually dismissed claims of police brutality without any sanction to the officer in question. Vann also wanted CAC to form an independent ad hoc committee to investigate the Carter shooting. Vann believed an ad hoc citizens group, an organizational form that had continued success in influencing municipal government, was the best answer to the unfolding controversy.

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127 Minutes of Executive Committee of Community Affairs Committee, June 27, 1979, File 1.61, Holt Papers.

128 Minutes of Community Affairs Committee, June 25, 1979, File 1.61, Holt Papers.

129 Minutes of Executive Committee of Community Affairs Committee, June 27, 1979, File 1.61, Holt Papers.
Liberal whites and other public officials also voiced the need for change in community-police relations. Councilwomen Nina Miglionico, who had strong labor union support, and Bessie Estell, a former elementary school principal, joined Chief of Police Bill Myers as representatives of municipal government in CAC. Myers, who replaced Frank C. Parsons in 1978, fully supported the ad hoc citizens committee even though the Fraternal Order of Police had fought such oversight since the early 1960s. UAB’s Center for Urban Affairs staff member and Southside neighborhood President Betty Bock urged CAC to include representatives of the Citizen Participation Program. “If we are going to make decisions,” Bock said in reference to CAC’s image in the neighborhoods, disaffected blacks “are going to continue to throw rocks.” James A. Cotton, former director of the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity, Birmingham’s official community action agency in the War on Poverty, heartily agreed. The group clearly understood that any citizens committee charged with investigating the Carter shooting would “have a credibility problem.”

Black civic elites dominated the discussion and exposed the deep divisions between themselves and “the thinking of every black man in this metropolitan area.” In the ten-year history of CAC, black members had never acknowledged to whites the depths of intraracial conflict. “We have come a long way,” Judge Peter Hall lectured to the group. “When we came on this committee 10 years ago we were almost put out of the tribe. We were attacked daily by our own black press. We had to fight. I had to fight at every meeting to justify why I sat here at this meeting.” Hall advised the group to consider a black person’s “experience in [their] neighborhood” in CAC members’

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130 Ibid.
CAC had been an enormous source of political power for black leaders. They sought to protect its credibility and strengthen its ability to adapt to residents’ demands.

CAC’s selection process for the ad hoc committee was fraught with self-aggrandizement and hesitation from black leaders. Rev. Edward Gardner, whose church was one block from where the crime occurred, immediately volunteered his participation. Despite his stated closeness to the Kingston community, Gardner was unaware that a riot had occurred until two days after it started. A. G. Gaston supported Gardner’s participation in the proposed citizens committee to investigate the Carter shooting but with the caveat that “some black leaders…are against” Gardner. Indeed, Gardner had rejected protest methods in favor of politics earlier in the decade. In 1972 he admonished a local pastor who had attempted to organize a demonstration by lecturing, “The days of marching and acting without some basis or character were over.”

Montgomery had insisted that CAC review the “Fourteen Points” every five years and discuss the issues of police brutality whenever they occurred. ONB directors had blamed him for the long absences of the Birmingham chief police and Jefferson County sheriff from regular CAC meetings. Montgomery’s activism in CAC, however, was not well known among black Birminghambians. The doctor pushed for Arrington’s participation over his own because

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Memorandum by William E. Ricker, May 2, 1972, File 1.11, CAC Papers.

the councilor “has the respect of the community.” Arrington’s image as a crusader against the police department would give the committee credibility among blacks but “might open it for criticism” from whites or those who questioned an elected official’s participation in a citizens committee. The councilor “didn’t mind serving on it,” but CAC wisely appointed Montgomery over Arrington.\textsuperscript{135}

Vann’s ad hoc citizens committee evolved from his conversation with CAC over two days and included diverse representation. Four whites and four blacks, each connected to neighborhoods or educational and religious institutions, held court over the police shooting of Carter.\textsuperscript{136} Within this group, Rev. Gardner and Rabbi Milton Grafman reprised their roles from the early 1960s campaigns as civil rights negotiators. This time, however, the clergyman sat together on the same side of the discussion. Historian Blaine A. Brownell’s participation spoke to the intellectual contributions UAB’s Center for Urban Affairs made to Birmingham’s civic dialogue. Two neighborhood presidents from the Citizen Participation Program, including Emmett Lockett of Kingston, also served on the mayor’s ad hoc committee. Vann wanted his CAC-approved committee to “lay all the evidence on the table” and gave it the power to call witnesses and subpoena documents.\textsuperscript{137} Within three weeks of Carter’s death, the ad hoc committee, with one abstention, unanimously found the actions of Officer George Sands unjustified.

\textsuperscript{135} Minutes of Executive Committee of Community Affairs Committee, June 27, 1979, File 1.61, Holt Papers.

\textsuperscript{136} Black members were Rev. Sam Davis, Rev. Edward Gardner, Emmett Lockett (president of the Kingston neighborhood), and Dr. James T. Montgomery. White members were Julie Anderson (president of a neighborhood), Dr. Blaine A. Brownell, Dr. Wilmer Cody (superintendent of the Birmingham school system), and Rabbi Milton Grafman (Temple Emanu-El).

\textsuperscript{137} Minutes of Executive Committee of Community Affairs Committee, June 27, 1979, File 1.61, Holt Papers.
Although the ad hoc committee conveyed moral guilt, Vann still needed to take a course of official action regarding Sands. During deliberations, Arrington had provided local SCLC leader Rev. Abraham Woods with Sands’ internal record that showed a history of unpunished police brutality. Woods and Arrington had crossed paths many times before. Woods had graduate degrees from and was a former faculty member of both Miles College and UAB. He demanded Vann form a permanent civilian police-review board, which was in the same vein as a coroner’s jury, and fire Sands. Vann, however, was limited by current laws and policies designed or approved by Jefferson County. Sands acted in accordance with Birmingham Police Department policies regarding firearm use and general officer training. Thus, the Jefferson County-controlled civil service system, which forbid firing a municipal employee without due cause, protected the officer. The system, no less than the individual, was at fault. Because Vann did not have the legal grounds to fire Sands, he placed the policeman on desk duty and immediately sought revisions to the firearms policy and officer training program. Those reforms were attempts to resolve the perpetual racism embedded within the police department, which complemented Vann’s strategies for implementing affirmative action in the municipal workforce. Vann’s decision was a legal one that pleased no one.

As a private citizen, Vann joined Woods in a demonstration march from Kelly Ingram Park to City Hall to protest yet another unpunished incident of police brutality. On their way, marchers chanted, “Sands, Vann, and the Klan must go.” One speaker equated the mayor with former Police Commissioner T. Eugene “Bull” Connor, the man who refused to step down after Vann successfully launched a political coup to remove

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138 Franklin, *Back to Birmingham*, 120.
him. Vann no doubt felt utter humiliation as African Americans compared him with segregationist whites he had fought so hard to remove from power. Woods summarized his and others’ feelings by telling him, “You have turned on your black folk.”\textsuperscript{139} Vann’s participation in the demonstration, however, indicated his twenty-year personal commitment to civil rights causes and reforming the system that inhibited change in Birmingham.

In the wake of the Carter controversy, Vann’s future in the upcoming mayoral primary looked bleak. Vann represented liberal whites, a small minority in Birmingham’s electorate, but African Americans from the churches and neighborhoods refused to acknowledge any difference between those whites and conservative whites. The Carter controversy drove extremely questionable white candidates, including the local Ku Klux Klan’s Imperial Wizard, to run in the 1979 mayoral election. Blacks did not have viable candidates to represent their interests, an argument Woods used to convince Arrington to run for mayor. Arrington wrestled with the personal ramifications for running against his political mentor, but Vann fully supported his friend. Vann placed a humiliating fourth in the primary, while the full support of the black vote carried Arrington into the run-off. Affluent and middle-class white support in Birmingham’s southern neighborhoods then transferred from Vann to Arrington.

Arrington’s eventual election as mayor maintained the core of the biracial metropolitan coalition. He won the support of black neighborhood leaders from the Citizen Participation Program and, as LaMonte described, “the upper middle-class white community among professionals and people who by virtue of their own education, their

\textsuperscript{139} Franklin, \textit{Back to Birmingham}, 131-32, 132.
own experiences, were far more open to the possibility of a white southerner supporting a black political candidate.”

Many hailed Arrington’s election as a breakthrough in civil rights and race relations in America. President Jimmy Carter called to congratulate the new mayor, and the Kennedy family visited Birmingham during Arrington’s inauguration. Although Arrington had the unquestionable support of black neighborhoods, black civic elites and white liberals saw in his election their continued quest to make Birmingham reflect their values and their efforts to achieve progress. Arrington became the new face of the fraying but intact biracial metropolitan coalition.

Conclusion

In October 1976, a month before Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter won the White House, TIME magazine declared Birmingham “a city reborn” in its special issue “The South Today.” The profile neatly resembled the one Vincent Townsend put forth in Ebony magazine five years before. Townsend had declared ONB a “community action agency” in an attempt to emphasize how much Birmingham had changed. Now, TIME had the statistics in population, education, voting, and employment to prove the oft-repeated claims of progress. These markers of change appeared when racial unrest

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140 LaMonte, interview.

141 This alliance between white liberals and black civic elites in the face of increasing militancy, from both whites and blacks, was not unique to Birmingham. Heather Ann Thompson argues that the election of Coleman Young was the product of this complicated dialogue between civic leaders, labor union activists, and African Americans in Detroit. Her argument places the pinnacle of white flight, expressed as the civic abandonment of white liberals who long ago relocated to the suburbs, in the mid-1970s. Heather Ann Thompson, “Rethinking the Politics of White Flight in the Postwar City: Detroit, 1945-1980, Journal of Urban History 25, no. 2 (Jan. 1999).

142 “A City Reborn.”

143 Townsend, “In Birmingham, the Phrase ‘Status Quo’ is a Bad Word.”
occurred in Boston and Detroit just a few years before, which made Birmingham and the
South appear more normal in the eyes of the nation.144 The waves of anniversaries
marking civil rights victories moved journalists, politicians, academics, and activists to
comment on the South in celebratory tones.145 The 1977 conviction of Robert Chambliss
for the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing further signaled Birmingham’s rejection
of its past and embrace of the lessons of the civil rights movement.146 Arrington’s
mayorality, widely pitched in the local and national media as the first African American
mayor of “America’s Most Segregated City,” represented the pinnacle of change.
Collectively, these events and statistics created the exact image of progress the biracial
metropolitan coalition sought since its assumption of power in the early 1960s.

Birmingham arrived at progress through the continued collision of oppositional
politics and the politics of power.147 The spectacles of these collisions, such as riots and
elections, may have forced immediate change, but the continued dialogue prompted by

144 In 1974, public protest in Boston over school busing turned violent when angry whites threatened an
uninvolved, professional African American man with death by impalement with an American flag. Jeanne
Theoharis, “Hidden In Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South,” in The Myth of
Southern Exceptionalism, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University
Press, 2010).

145 On debates of southern exceptionalism shaped by this historical context, see John Egerton, The
Chap. 1; C. Vann Woodward, “The South Tomorrow,” TIME, September 27, 1976; Blaine A. Brownell and
David R. Goldfield, ed., The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South (Port
The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism.

146 The literature on civil rights memorialization largely has been critical of civic leaders’ claims of
progress after such trials. See S. Willoughby Anderson, “The Past on Trial: Birmingham, the Bombing, and
Restorative Justice,” California Law Review 96, no. 2 (2008); Renee C. Romano, “Narratives of
Redemption: The Birmingham Church Bombing Trials and the Construction of Civil Rights Memory,” in
The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory, ed. Renee C. Romano and Leigh Raiford (Athens:
University of Georgia Press, 2006), 96-133.

147 Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the
Jim Crow South,” Journal of American History, 80, no. 1 (June 1993).
these events actually fostered new modes of behavior and policy. As Emory O. Jackson cynically observed, “Events often are a dramatic coming to head of gradualism.”\textsuperscript{148} Black and white citizens across the metropolitan area worked within various systems of power to effect change in the city and municipal government despite various barriers and local opposition. Lula Menefee, for example, was instrumental in using moral suasion to convince suburban white businessmen to broaden their conceptions of a Birmingham community. Menefee navigated neighborhood civic leagues, the Community Affairs Committee, and Operation New Birmingham to make Collegeville a livable space. Her neighborhood advocacy provided the template for the Citizen Participation Program. Her civic voice moved from Collegeville to downtown over the decade, revealing the fluidity and cross-membership between the systems of formal and informal power in the city.

All of these systems of political power worked toward achieving the basic structural changes and service demands Menefee outlined to make Birmingham a livable space in the summer of 1969. White and black participants did not agree on what that meant or the strategies to achieve that goal, but they believed in the basic idea of helping others help themselves. Experimental programs derived from their dialogues. Each system of power governing Birmingham was elastic enough in its representation to allow black civic elites, white liberals, suburban businessmen, and neighborhood advocates room to assert their points of view, move disagreements toward resolutions, and influence municipal policy. These systems formed from the internal power struggles of the biracial metropolitan coalition and the ideas of democratic reform and biracialism that had been central to its creation. A key turnover in civic leadership beginning in the mid-1970s,

\textsuperscript{148} Jackson, “Many Racial Barriers are Down.”
including the deaths of Miles College President Lucius H. Pitts, editor Emory O. Jackson, and editor Vincent S. Townsend and the departures of South Central Bell President W. Cecil Bauer and UAB President Joseph F. Volker from Birmingham, made room for the remaining black civic elites and white liberals to reshape the biracial metropolitan coalition around neighborhoods.

The political shift in the mid-1970s from Seibels to the Vann-Arrington alliance moved these dialogues from the private sphere of ONB to the public forum of City Hall. African Americans used the central lessons of the Citizen Participation Program—the political organization of neighborhoods—to launch a new coalition that represented black Birminghamians in 1977. Arrington was its leader, but he understood the importance of biracial communication, especially with whites who shared similar views. Two of Arrington’s top mayoral advisors were UAB’s Edward S. LaMonte and former mayor David J. Vann. Despite the increasing calls of racial solidarity espoused by neighborhood leaders, black civic elites and white liberals continued to communicate with each other as well as with neighborhood residents to make Birmingham a livable space. Who led the government set the tone for how Birmingham responded to continued collisions of race, class, and residence.
CHAPTER 7

“CITY STAGES”: DIRECTING ECONOMIC GROWTH AND POLITICAL POWER IN BIRMINGHAM’S NEW DOWNTOWN, 1979-1992

To celebrate its thirtieth anniversary in 1987, Operation New Birmingham (ONB) asked Mayor Richard Arrington Jr. to pose for the Birmingham Post-Herald to promote downtown revitalization and economic growth. A shoeless Arrington jumped on a trampoline to showcase downtown’s new skyscrapers. “The city center is jumping because of cooperation between the public and private sectors,” he enthusiastically proclaimed.¹ Suburban white businessmen agreed. Investment banker James White III advised, “You can do a deal with Richard Arrington because he knows how to be a good partner.”² Although the mayor was quick to note that his publicity stunt did not signal a change in his political style, the photograph perfectly captured it. At the beginning of his third term, Arrington was managing a magnificent turnaround of Birmingham’s economic base, and its growth potential was only in the beginning stages. Those skyscrapers and the ones to come were as much his accomplishments as they were ONB’s. National attention shined on him. US News and World Report recently had named Arrington one of the nation’s best mayors, and he enjoyed a reputation as a black moderate in national politics. By acting out a scene ONB directed, Arrington’s race was


² “Birmingham: A City Reborn, the Arrington Years 1979-1999” (Birmingham, 1999), 13, in author’s possession.
central to selling the idea of a new Birmingham: Once at odds, black political power and white economic power coexisted harmoniously in downtown.

Figure 7.1 Mayor Richard Arrington Jr. jumping in downtown, spring 1987. (Photograph from Mendelson, “ONB Notes Achievements, Reveals Plans.”)
Arrington’s mayoralty signaled the fruition of a post-civil rights, post-industrial Birmingham that arose from a twenty-year civic investment in economic development, social change, and democratic reform. In his inaugural speech in the fall of 1979, he proclaimed, “We no longer deserve the image of the Birmingham of the early 60s….Our record of hard work for biracial communication and cooperation has earned for us a new image.” Arrington remained committed to the core of the biracial metropolitan coalition, linking together black neighborhood advocates, white liberals, and suburban professionals. “I pay the greatest tribute to local people, homegrown folk,” he said in a 2001 interview, “in that we were able to juggle…three important transitions at the same time.” Since the early 1960s, they had “move[d] the city out of the doldrums of steep racism and bigotry…a really sick economy, and…exclusion of people from the political system. We’ve moved to inclusion of people in the political system, and of course I am a symbol of that, being the first black mayor.”

Although the city thrived under Arrington’s mayoralty, historic racial and class tensions and long-term shifts in the systems of power governing Birmingham brought an end to biracial moderate politics. Instead of becoming the center of a new Birmingham, Arrington’s downtown became a contested site of citizenship among metropolitan whites and blacks. Arrington continued to use biracialism as a governing strategy to meet the challenges of economic restructuring and urban redevelopment, but it increasingly lost electoral viability among whites and blacks in the city of Birmingham. In 1981, urban

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whites controlled 51 percent of the electorate even though they represented about 45 percent of the city’s population, a lingering legacy of black disenfranchisement before 1965. As more whites continued to leave the city limits throughout the 1980s, those who remained feared losing their political influence in Birmingham to African Americans. They also resented Arrington’s close relationship to Birmingham’s white business community.

Systematic and internal changes within Operation New Birmingham, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and City Hall disrupted the unrecognized metropolitan coalition of urban blacks and suburban whites who supported Arrington. Bankers and doctors remade key downtown districts to reflect the continued growth of the professional service economy through deregulation and privatization, the new mantra emanating from Washington, DC, in the 1980s. The Reagan administration accelerated the shift in urban policy from targeting neighborhoods to encouraging downtown private enterprise, and Birmingham’s neighborhoods, schools, and other public services suffered for it. Arrington, however, retained his base of electoral power in African American neighborhoods. He earned their loyalty in his challenge of white suburban oversight in municipal government in his first term, and their electoral dominance in an at-large city council further advanced the image of black home rule in Birmingham. Arrington managed these two sides of the metropolitan coalition, but the nature of it changed throughout his mayoralty. The new stages of white economic power and black political power in downtown effectively weakened biracial civic democracy as the key governing system of a post-civil rights, post-industrial Birmingham.

Before Dr. Richard Arrington Jr. became mayor in 1979, it was easy for some whites to forget that he was an African American. A 1975 *Birmingham Post-Herald* editorial in favor of his city council reelection stated, “Arrington happens to be black and is often viewed as a spokesman for black causes [but this view] misses the whole point.” Editor Duard LeGrand explained, “His interest is in people and seeing that government and its representatives treat all individuals with respect.”

By the late 1970s, however, both whites and blacks questioned Arrington’s image as a politician who used biracialism as a governing strategy. Birmingham was experiencing the height of deindustrialization and racial tensions unmatched since the early 1960s. Although many in Birmingham had formed personal or professional relationships with others of a different race, “whites” as a group “worried not so much about Richard Arrington Jr.,” his biographer noted, “but about blacks, the group they believed he represented.”

The 1977 emergence of Arrington’s political organization the Jefferson County Citizens Coalition (JCCC) sparked fear in many whites in eastern and suburban Birmingham. Despite the deep economic and political divisions among African Americans, the JCCC acted as a front of racial solidarity in municipal politics. Unlike the Citizen Participation Program that provided African American citizens with municipal representation based on the neighborhood unit, the JCCC was a citywide network untethered to political districts that connected blacks in southwest Birmingham with those in the northeast. Some neighborhood presidents in the Citizen Participation

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6 Ibid., 172.
Program served as JCCC leaders. All members equally decided its agendas, recommendations, and endorsements in public forums. Using the rhetoric of citizen participation, the JCCC successfully concentrated black electoral power to win high-profile political positions for African Americans. Arrington’s 1979 mayoral challenger Frank Parsons compared the JCCC to the “Negro bloc vote” that white segregationists harangued about before 1965. The purported danger of the organization, Parsons accused, was that it exploited, *en masse*, naïve black voters “who ought to make up their own minds.”

Ignoring the fact that most whites also voted along racial lines, urban whites like Parsons saw the JCCC as Arrington’s black political machine that threatened their political power and racial status in Birmingham.

African Americans, however, increasingly disagreed over the strategies of racial solidarity and biracialism in municipal politics. Their divisions largely fell along class lines. The JCCC evolved out of an ideological split from the more established Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council (JCPDC) run by black civic elites. Since the 1930s, the JCPDC had used racial solidarity as an effective strategy to build minority electoral power. John Drew and A. G. Gaston, some of its longtime leaders, drew on that power to gain civic influence and engage in local politics. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 expanded black suffrage, JCPDC leaders continued to support white liberals and moderates for office as part of biracial governance. Biracialism remained the source of power for black civic elites, who mediated the debate between urban blacks and white suburban elites over the direction of Birmingham. Affluent and middle-class blacks used a variety of power networks, from Miles College and the University of Alabama at

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*7 Ibid., 166.*
Birmingham (UAB) to the JCPDC and ONB, to create more economic and political opportunities for African Americans from the 1950s onward. These opportunities, however, were out of reach for many African Americans who lacked access to middle-class prerequisites such as homeownership, higher education, and basic public services.

As poor and working-class blacks began to exercise their vote after 1965, they used racial solidarity to disrupt the JCPDC’s long-standing practice of using black votes to support white candidates. In the 1973 midterm election, these new voters pushed U. W. Clemon, a Columbia-trained lawyer and Miles graduate, into the city council run-off race. Despite his credentials, Clemon drew the ire of white civic elites who managed to keep their influence on the city council with the help of the JCPDC. To an increasing majority of black voters, biracialism hindered progress in advancing black political power through gains in office and appointed boards. When the JCPDC endorsed a white incumbent over Arrington’s protégé Jeff Germany for a 1977 council seat, Arrington broke ranks with the established black leadership by organizing the JCCC. The new organization, supported by disgruntled black voters, won Germany a spot on the council.

Unlike the black civic elite, the rank-and-file members of the JCCC lived primarily in a black Birmingham. “‘Carryovers’ from the old days of civic leagues,” as Arrington called them, core members of the JCCC were black men from declining neighborhoods who had “paid their dues” but had been sidelined from leadership positions in civil rights organizations. They had “less formal education” and held more militant racial and political views than black civic elites. ⁸ The JCCC allowed heretofore obscure African American male leaders to organize and wield power across the city.

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Benjamin Greene, for example, who first represented Collegeville in the Citizen Participation Program, was the president of the JCCC by 1987. He also was an appointed board member of the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District throughout the 1980s.\(^9\) According to Arrington, core JCCC members like Greene believed they “were entitled to some of the harvest” of the civil rights movement by “being the first of their race to hold these important [appointed] offices.”\(^10\) If Birmingham was a majority black city, JCCC members reasoned, then it needed a black government.

Although blacks represented more than half of the city’s population in 1981, whites were the majority of the voting and working public. Jefferson County, which was two-thirds white, virtually controlled the look and composition of the city’s public service workforce, further undermining black visibility in Birmingham. The discriminatory policies of the Jefferson County Personnel Board such as seniority hires and civil service exams continued to favor whites and deny blacks access to municipal employment. By 1984, only 35.1 percent of municipal workers were African American, and the majority of those worked as maintenance men and clerical support staff.\(^11\) Former mayor David J. Vann made a point to hire an equal number of blacks and whites on his staff, something that Arrington continued. Vann’s office “serve[d] as an example of what can and must be done” to achieve “equilibrium” in employment and City Hall.\(^12\) Neither


\(^10\) Arrington, There’s Hope for the World, 203.


\(^12\) W. Gordon Graham to David J. Vann, March 13, 1979, File 1.8, David J. Vann Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library (hereafter cited as BPL-DAM).
Vann nor Arrington, however, had control over the general municipal workforce or choice in their division heads. The city engineer and the chief of the Birmingham Police Department were positions that had no term limits and no affiliation with a sitting mayor. Openings for these public offices were rare. With so many key positions in municipal service vetted through the county, the process of desegregating Birmingham’s public life and implementing equal racial representation took decades.

When the first opportunity arose to challenge the Jefferson County Personnel Board, Arrington struck at the heart of white power in Birmingham. In January 1981, Police Chief Bill Myers resigned over his frustration with new reforms and his inability to control the nearly all-white Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) that was hostile to Birmingham’s first black mayor. Previously in 1977, Mayor Vann entered into a consent decree, fully backed by the US Department of Justice, to implement a comprehensive affirmative action plan targeting the police and fire departments. The FOP legally challenged the decree, but the issue was not settled until its reaffirmation by a federal judge in 1981. By then, only 62 African Americans served on a force of nearly 700 officers. Vann also began the process of departmental reform by instituting a new weapons policy and an officer-training program in the wake of the controversy surrounding the police shooting of Bonita Carter that vaulted Arrington into office. Arrington, who carried on virtually every initiative Vann implemented, bore the brunt of the white officer backlash. Gaining control of the Birmingham Police Department was

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13 Arrington noted that two out of sixty-two African Americans belonged to the Fraternal Order of Police. Arrington, *There’s Hope for the World*, 80.

not only a mandate from African Americans outraged at unpunished police brutality but also a key symbol in crushing the culture of white supremacy that continued to run rampant through the department and municipal government.

Arrington refused to accept the Personnel Board’s first recommendation to replace Myers with former Chief James C. Parsons. Parsons recently had left Birmingham for New Orleans to become the city’s white chief of police under its first black mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial. His Big Easy tenure was hardly that. In his less than three years as chief, a police strike caused the first-ever cancellation of Mardi Gras and a police-murder scandal tainted both Parsons and Morial. Parsons wanted his old job back, but Arrington refused. The new mayor did not want a white chief who fled another majority black city after generating disastrous police-community relations there. Whites saw Arrington’s refusal as an act of revenge against an old enemy. Although the two publicly butted heads in their work as municipal officials in the 1970s, Arrington conceded thirty years later that their relationship was “[n]ever anything but professional.” Indeed, Arrington had recommended Parsons to Morial based on his “progressive steps to upgrade the department.”

Throughout his nearly twenty-year career in the Birmingham Police Department, Parsons cultivated an image as a reformer among white and black civic elites. Parsons attributed his lack of “racial hang-ups” to living in coal mining communities in the 1930s

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15 The Board, which consisted of two whites and one black, submitted to Arrington a list of ten ranked candidates chosen through civil service review. By law, Arrington had to choose from the top three.


as his father sought to organize workers. Company police often ran his father out of various towns, and Parsons confessed that he “really broke his [father’s] heart when [he] became a police officer.” After a decade working for the US Navy, he joined the Birmingham Police Department in 1954 and was shocked by what he saw. The departmental culture “would just absorb” young officers “and corrupt them so fast.” Parsons’ vocal objections to corruption often resulted in multiple reassignments that stunted his career. Public Safety Commissioner Eugene T. “Bull” Connor frustrated his ambitions to make detective despite merit-based recommendations from the Jefferson County Personnel Board. In a public speech at UAB in 1978, Parsons denounced Connor as “the most vindictive, vengeful bastard that [he] ever met.” He also cited his crucial yet secretive support of the 1962 municipal referendum to change Birmingham’s government. While chief in Birmingham, Parsons used open meetings to foster communication between white officers and black community members over issues such as police harassment and neighborhood improvements. To many civic elites, Parsons’ leadership was the result of continued reform and biracialism in Birmingham.

Because the Jefferson County Personnel Board acted as a system of white governance in a black city, Arrington saw the battle over Parsons as a larger test of black self-determination. “It is a very serious matter which cannot be ignored or go unchallenged,” Arrington wrote to the concerned president of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce. The board’s refusal to submit more candidates was “a position

18 In the 1962 municipal referendum election, the manager-council system won less than 1,000 votes. It provided an alternative to ambivalent whites who could not fully support the mayor-council system and its implied change in race relations but were unwilling to support the commission. James C. Parsons, speech, November 13, 1978, transcript, “Birmingham 1963-1978: Civil Rights and Social Change,” File 5.22, Center for Urban Affairs, Director’s Papers, UAB Archives.
[it] has never taken before with any other Mayor of this City or any other cities under its jurisdiction….Why the Board chose to impose restrictions on me,” he carefully posed to his white supporter, “or to take me to court without any discussion of the matter is a mystery to me.”

Former Mayor Vann argued Arrington’s position in court, citing the need for a city to be politically independent of a county, but the county circuit court ultimately forced Arrington to choose a chief by mid-November 1981. The mayor selected Brooklyn police captain and sometime pulp fiction writer Artie Deutsch, who ranked third among the board’s original candidates. Deutsch’s selection was a forced compromise, but Arrington clung to victory. By denying the Personnel Board its first choice, Arrington made clear that Birmingham’s black mayor would fight the system of white oversight in municipal government.

Arrington’s unwavering position of black self-determination, however, had a disastrous impact on the fall 1981 midterm election for black supporters of racial solidarity. White fears of “black Birmingham” were at an historic high. The JCCC, emboldened by the mayor’s actions against the Jefferson County Personnel Board, further inflamed white anxieties by endorsing an all-black slate of city council candidates. The Fraternal Order of Police and former mayoral challenger Frank Parsons named an all-white slate in response, but the JCCC’s actions were more controversial. The all-black slate ignored Nina Miglionico, a white incumbent who had consistently enjoyed black support and had championed civil rights causes for nearly forty years. Although Arrington was not its president, the JCCC was widely regarded as his organization. His

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detractors roundly portrayed the mayor as “a king to whom all must bow down.”\textsuperscript{20} The mayor’s promise of biracial governance rang hollow in the wake of controversies over the police chief selection and the JCCC’s slate. The result was a reduction of black representation and Arrington supporters on the city council after the election.

Although some whites cheered the defeat of the JCCC, others raised questions about the viability of biracial moderate politics as evidenced by Miglionico’s near dismissal from the city council. Harry Brock, CEO of Central Bancshares, believed the “real strong building of rapport” between blacks and whites that Miglionico had encouraged was “deteriorating.”\textsuperscript{21} Miglionico represented an older generation of liberal whites who had campaigned for equal rights and social justice as they came of age in the 1930s and 1940s. Born in 1913 to Italian immigrant grocery store owners, she stood out in her neighborhood of Avondale. “You walked to school,” she recalled in 1975, and “all your neighbors were white, and of course the black people lived in the alleys around you.” The Klan terrorized white ethnics and Catholics, including the Miglionico family, during the Red Scare following the first world war. Only later did Miglionico realize that her family stopped attending St. Paul’s Cathedral for a time after a Klansman assassinated a priest there. Despite these tensions, Miglionico’s family was financially secure. Nina worked for “pin money,” not her tuition or board for Samford (née Howard) College and the University of Alabama School of Law, where she was one of five “girls.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Franklin, \textit{Back to Birmingham}, 220.


While struggling to establish a law practice in the late 1930s, Miglionico quickly became involved in women’s organizations and political issues such as the campaign to abolish the poll tax. Few women, either married or single, could afford the tax. In 1944, she linked the battles for women’s and African American suffrage in an open protest against the Boswell Amendment, which the state legislature designed as a response to *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) to limit the black electorate.\(^{23}\) By the end of the decade, black and white women in civic and professional associations across the South began having conversations about “the commonalities of gender and racial prejudice,” as historian Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman observed. Miglionico’s “democratic feminist principles” heavily influenced her continued involvement in the long civil rights movement.\(^{24}\) In 1961, she was one of twenty civic, political, and religious leaders from across the country selected for John F. Kennedy’s Presidential Commission on the Status of Women.

“Miss Nina,” as she was known, was the most notable, high-profile member of the first city council, which was filled with car salesmen, insurance agents, dentists, and other white men who thought museums rather than finance suited her abilities.\(^{25}\) Standing just 4’11,” she fended off sexism in City Hall and won respect citywide after surviving an assassination attempt on April 1, 1965. In response to the “March on Selma” as well as local desegregation measures, Ku Klux Klan members placed a bomb on Miglionico’s front porch in a home she shared with her parents. Miglionico held her ground when

\(^{23}\) Sarah Wilkerson-Freeman, “The Second Battle for Women’s Suffrage: Alabama White Women, the Poll Tax, and V.O. Key’s Master Narrative of Southern Politics,” *Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 2 (May 2002), 357.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 362.

challenged on her positions, such as her defense of the 1964 occupational tax after Birmingham’s top business leaders belittled her. “She was really, really tough,” Arrington recalled, but thankfully, he “happened to be on her side on most issues.” John Katopodis, the mayor’s top political rival in the early 1980s, fondly remembered her “patronizing manner” when he first joined the council in 1977. “Every meeting she was slamming me out of order” in her role as council president, but Miglionico would become an advisor and close friend of Katopodis throughout his twenty-year political career.26 Despite the controversy of the racial slates in 1981, she earned 18 percent of the black vote to win her seat on the council for another four years.27

The near dismissal of Miglionico from municipal government in 1981 exposed the continuing decline of biracial politics in the face of racial solidarity promoted by both blacks and whites. Throughout her career on the city council, Miglionico received broad support from “middle-ground voters who didn’t look at color,” including African Americans, white union workers, and white liberals.28 As Birmingham transitioned from a majority white to a majority black city during the late 1970s and early 1980s, those voters increasingly disappeared. “We had black folks perceiving that the white folks were going to try to take it all,” Alabama’s state representative Antonio Harrison explained about the 1981 election, but “then white folks responded that way, too.”29 Heightened racial animosity in the last five municipal elections had created an electorate that distrusted the biracialism practiced by Miglionico and Arrington.

26 Ibid.

27 Franklin, Back to Birmingham, 237.


29 Stuart, “Mayor of Birmingham Assailed for Runoff Role.”
Arrington’s desire to reduce racial tensions in the electoral process led to a gentleman’s agreement with John Katopodis to bring civility back to Birmingham politics in the 1983 mayoral campaign. Both rejected race-baiting strategies and rhetoric in favor of biracialism. Katopodis, who was twelve years younger than Arrington, grew up as the son of Greek immigrants in a white working-class neighborhood in west Birmingham near Arrington’s hometown of Fairfield. Like the mayor, Katopodis experienced Birmingham’s shift from an industrial Jim Crow political order to biracial systems of governance sustained by the professional service economy. “You have two individuals,” Katopodis explained to the *New York Times*, “who have seen the bitterness of the past in Birmingham, and don’t want to see it again.”

Even if voters agreed with his argument, the bulk of them disagreed on what “past” that meant: black home rule or white supremacy. The racial composition of the electorate largely determined the number of votes cast for Katopodis and Arrington. With blacks now the majority electorate, Arrington won in a landslide with 60 percent of the vote, and one more black representative joined the council.

Arrington understood the critical importance of biracialism in the ongoing project to build a new Birmingham. It allowed blacks and whites to feel represented in the political process. Although he could win on the basis of the black vote alone after 1983, Arrington cultivated white support for black governance throughout his mayoral career. Indeed, the all-black JCCC slate in 1981 was never replicated. After retaining 10 percent of the white vote primarily from those in affluent south Birmingham neighborhoods,

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Arrington remarked in 1983, “We’ve begun to fashion a new coalition of voters.” This coalition of urban blacks and affluent whites, however, was not new. Its look had changed to reflect the racial shifts in the city’s electoral base and population. Most Birminghamians, however, failed to see the nuances behind Arrington’s coalition. Voting strictly along racial lines, the majority of the black and white urban electorate continued to reject biracialism in a municipal government led by an African American.


Arrington assumed office during a time of major transition in Operation New Birmingham (ONB) after the death of its longtime Chairman of the Board and editor of the Birmingham News Vincent S. Townsend in 1978. Giving voice to white suburban ideas of community and the common good since the early 1960s, Townsend’s boosterism in ONB and the News was an attempt to “inspire confidence” in Birmingham and its citizens as they wrestled with the implications of political and economic change in their daily lives. Along with entrepreneur A. G. Gaston, the city’s most powerful African American, he occupied a middle ground, if rightward leaning, in Birmingham politics. Both men had the power to put opposing groups such as white suburban businessmen and black neighborhood advocates into communication with each other. Townsend’s key endorsement of Arrington in both city council races in the Birmingham News came out of


32 “Townsend Retired as VP and Assistant to the Publisher,” Birmingham News, December 31, 1975, ONB Clipping Files.
his personal and professional relationship with Gaston.\textsuperscript{33} As Jessie J. Lewis, editor of the black newspaper the \textit{Birmingham Times}, remembered decades later, “Townsend was a typical Southerner, born in Mississippi, and very typical of people during those times, but I had a way of getting along with those kind of people.”\textsuperscript{34} The type of personal and private communication Townsend and Gaston engaged in, or the old ways in race relations, had been central to forming new relationships between blacks and whites in a post-civil rights era.

Townsend’s death, as well as the loss of key leaders in the biracial civic elite in the 1970s, represented the passing of an older generation who had negotiated the transition between the old and new Birmingham.\textsuperscript{35} Although Lucius H. Pitts, president of Miles College, left Birmingham in 1971, his sudden death from a heart attack at age 59 three years later was a blow to those blacks and whites he befriended and continued to advise. The Unitarian Universalist Church, the spiritual home of white liberals such as Charles F. Zukoski Jr. and Dr. Joseph F. Volker, organized a memorial service for Pitts.\textsuperscript{36} Volker, the visionary behind UAB, left Birmingham for Tuscaloosa in 1976 when he became chancellor of the University of Alabama System.\textsuperscript{37} Although he retained his

\textsuperscript{33} Arrington, \textit{There’s Hope for the World}, 45-47.


\textsuperscript{36} Charles Frederick Zukoski Jr., “A Life Story” (unpublished manuscript, ca. August 1980), 414, Southern History Collection, Birmingham Public Library.

\textsuperscript{37} The University of Alabama System used the title “chancellor” because each independent university within it, such as UAB, had a “president.” The Board of Trustees established the System in 1976 after seven years without an administrative system to govern three universities.
Vestavia Hills residence, Volker never returned to his high level of civic engagement once he returned to Birmingham in 1982. Finally, W. Cecil Bauer, the president of South Central Bell who used ONB’s Community Affairs Committee as an instrument of social welfare and personal change in racial attitudes, was reassigned to another regional headquarters branch in 1978. His company, which ONB hailed as the most prominent new arrival to Birmingham in the late 1960s, left downtown for the suburbs.

With these key losses in civic leadership, ONB slowly shook off its role as a community action agency working toward improved race relations in Birmingham. The activities of ONB’s biracial Community Affairs Committee (CAC) in the 1970s alienated some white suburban supporters as white liberals and black elites steered it toward a more activist body working with Birmingham neighborhoods. In April 1978 Dr. James T. Montgomery bitterly noted that top ONB leaders, those who represented “the power structure,” had stopped attending CAC meetings. Townsend, who did so “at a great sacrifice,” was the only exception.38 Peggy Spain McDonald of the Greater Birmingham Foundation and state senator Paschal P. Vacca resigned from CAC earlier that spring, signaling the departure of white philanthropists and suburban politicians from biracial metropolitan governance. The group, Vacca wrote, “is too large and continuously growing” and should keep to “matters relating to the purpose designed by [CAC] when founded.”39 In that year, CAC’s steering committee, led by retired principal and councilwoman Bessie Estell, had more blacks than whites for the first time. “We are going to have to stand up to Mrs. Estell and other blacks,” Jane House, Townsend’s

38 Minutes of Executive Committee of the Community Affairs Committee, April 6, 1978, File 1.8, CAC Papers.

longtime assistant, advised to ONB’s new Executive Director William C. Green Jr. in 1980. “We will never have a good CAC until we get rid of all the paid staff people” who run the neighborhood programs and “put the policy makers back on it.”\(^{40}\)

After a decade of working in the neighborhoods, with the problems of poverty hardly abated, Green announced that ONB would “return to its basic role of revitalizing the Central Business District of Birmingham.”\(^{41}\) By the late 1970s, however, stagflation, high interest rates, and a decaying downtown made redevelopment a risky business. Foremost among white businessmen’s concerns was crime, which had spread from deteriorating black neighborhoods surrounding downtown. A planned nightclub district suffered a mortal blow when a gang of black youths murdered out-of-town white executives in 1978. The historic Redmont Hotel on Nineteenth Street North, less than two blocks from City Hall, became known for its hourly rates and clientele of prostitutes and drunks. Such illicit activity further eroded sales in downtown department stores as shoppers increasingly visited branches spread across the metropolitan area. Concerned about “urban decay,” Emil Hess, owner of the department store Parisian, advocated for a higher property tax in 1975 to improve downtown conditions and business volume for his store. Although handsomely profiting and paying higher taxes on his suburban stores, Hess was “willing to pay a more modern price for city privilege” if it meant the survival of downtown Birmingham.\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\) Jane House to William C. Green Jr., September 3, 1980, File 2.1, CAC Papers.


Downtown’s rapid deterioration after nearly a decade of growth reflected many structural changes in national and local urban policy. In 1973, federal officials began to shut down the very programs civic leaders had used to support the creation of a new Birmingham. Large-scale redevelopment projects were a thing of the past; as one civic leader explained, “The Federal Government is going out of the urban renewal business.”

It also went out of the public housing business. By 1975, urban funding that had been earmarked for social welfare and infrastructure projects consolidated into one package, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). The Citizen Participation Program gave residents access to CDBGs for neighborhood improvements, but a portion of funds were set aside for economic development and other public projects. The continued decline in federal funding and its widespread dispersion throughout eighty-six neighborhoods and downtown made CDBGs inefficient urban redevelopment tools. Downtown’s survival depended on private redevelopment.

Although ONB recommitted to downtown by 1980, its reputation among powerful white business leaders had been damaged by its foray into community matters. Moreover, it lacked a strong leader who could corral the business community behind new projects. Many powerful members of the white Birmingham business community distrusted Arrington and the implied promise of black home rule in the city of Birmingham. “I really cannot find words to adequately express how totally unprepared the white community was for a black mayor and particularly the white business

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43 Jack D. McSpadden to Joseph F. Volker, April 13, 1973, File 64.8, Office of the President of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Joseph F. Volker, 1969-1976, UAB Archives.
community,” Edward S. LaMonte, Arrington’s executive secretary, recalled in 2004.  

Important differences among suburban white businessmen, however, always existed.  

Although Henry Goodrich, president of Southern Natural Gas Company, and James White III, from one of Birmingham’s leading financial advisory firms, had never been involved with ONB, they proposed the Business Advisory Group (BAG) to Arrington near the beginning of his mayoral career.  

Acutely focused on downtown rather than “people’s problems,” BAG was the virtual remaking of the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association, ONB’s original parent organization.  

Except for Arrington, A. G. Gaston, nearing ninety years in age, was the only African American who met with the presidents of UAB, Alabama Power, Engel Enterprises, Liberty National Life Insurance Company, Rust Engineering, and South Central Bell as well as downtown retailers Emil Hess and Richard Pizitz. Bank presidents, who largely had been absent in the civic crusade to build a new Birmingham, also joined the group.  

In these “candid conversations” that were “always unpublicized” as LaMonte described, Arrington and Birmingham’s top 25 business leaders “got to know one another” and talked city affairs.  

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45 Goodrich was a member of the Seniors Citizens Council, a group of 89 businessmen representing industrial interests. It opposed negotiations with any black representative throughout the late 50s and early 60s civil rights crises.  

46 Jane House to Bill Sheehan, July 30, 1974, File 4.1, ONB Papers. BAG and ONB worked separately with Arrington.  


48 LaMonte, interview.
As Arrington’s executive secretary for two terms, LaMonte played a key role in forging relationships between the mayor’s office and the white business community on downtown redevelopment projects. Based on his decade of experience as the director of UAB’s Center for Urban Affairs, LaMonte brought his unique knowledge of Birmingham’s political landscape and networking skills to his job. In his meetings with white business leaders, LaMonte “was able to…persuade members of a very agitated and concerned white business community that they ought to at least give [Arrington] a chance.” LaMonte and Arrington had formed a lasting personal and professional relationship since their days at Miles and UAB in the late 1960s, and they developed a synergy in governing Birmingham. “I have never worked more comfortably or easily with anyone in a working relationship than I did with Dick,” LaMonte noted. Over time, LaMonte’s role “was to interpret [Arrington] to others” and rally support around him from the business community.49

LaMonte was the key point person on Block 60, an urban redevelopment project the city hoped would attract visitors, bring in white-collar professionals, and ease crime and fear in downtown. Metropolitan Properties, Inc., a real estate development company founded by two Birmingham natives, won the city’s bid to develop Block 60 in the summer of 1980. Its plan included high-rise office towers, condominiums, and a Westin International Hotel. The design, project architect Roger W. Dodson remarked, would make Block 60 “a good neighbor with the existing buildings” such as the South Central Bell building, the new headquarters of the Alabama Power Company, and Park Place

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49 Ibid.
Tower, which Metropolitan Properties had developed a few years before. The new structures on Block 60 would be made of glass, marble, and stone; these reflective surfaces would highlight existing downtown architecture and would make the new city center feel bigger to its pedestrians than it was. LaMonte called Block 60 a “critical turning point” in downtown: “A long process of steady erosion will be halted and a real reversal will take place.”

Although Metropolitan Properties recently had developed downtown’s Park Place, owners Raymond D. Gotlieb and Robert D. Bohorfoush did not have the experience of cobbling together contracts from so many invested parties that Block 60’s development required. In a little over ten years, Metropolitan Properties had grown into an upstart real estate firm specializing in suburban development. Neither Bohorfoush nor Gotlieb expressed any larger reason for developing in downtown other than economic gain. “There’s no limit on how much money you can make, if you’re willing to work at it and take some risks,” Bohorfoush explained. Gotlieb flatly dismissed public assistance for Block 60 from municipal resources or federal grants that encouraged partnerships between the public and private sectors. “There’s nothing wrong with doing business without federal grants,” Gotlieb rationalized; referring to his earlier success without

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50 Mitch Mendelson, “Block 60: Can Metropolitan Pull It Off?” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, September 26, 1980, Clipping Files–Block 60 (hereafter cited as Block 60 Clipping Files), Southern History Collection, Birmingham Public Library.


52 Their only urban development project, Park Place Tower, did not require negotiating with over two dozen property and business owners.

53 Mendelson, “Block 60.”
them, Gotlieb stated, “The proof is in the pudding.” \(^5^4\) Others scoffed at their intent to forgo public support to develop the $120 million project. One prominent banker anonymously confided, “I cannot imagine that it is economically feasible to pay for anything like that….I’d hate like hell to have any of my money in it.” \(^5^5\) Brimming with youthful arrogance, lacking a larger civic purpose, and promoting a free-market ideology, the two developers failed to inspire confidence in Block 60.

Property and business owners quickly painted Block 60 as an attack on locally owned mom-and-pop stores by Birmingham’s biracial partnership between city officials and business leaders. A small number of these businesses, which had served bankers, industrialists, and lawyers, had been in the same location since the 1920s, including Birmingham’s first Chinese restaurant, Joy Young’s. By the 1970s, drug stores, restaurants, and specialty shops of low caliber such as an adult bookstore occupied one- or two-story buildings on the block. J. Edmund Odum Jr., co-owner of Cliff’s Cleaners, pointedly argued, “The city claims to want thriving businesses in downtown. They claim to actively solicit businesses. Then they take a business like ours that’s been in the same place for 30 years and they put them on the street.” \(^5^6\) Block 60, tenants argued, was one of the most profitable and occupied blocks in downtown Birmingham, but that claim bore little weight given that the entire central business district qualified as blighted. Restaurant

\(^5^4\) Mendelson, “Downtown;” and Mendelson, “Block 60.”

\(^5^5\) Mendelson, “Block 60.”

\(^5^6\) Mendelson, “Downtown.”
owner George Sarris, an immigrant from southern Greece, remarked, “I’m not against the
progress of the city,” but Block 60 “won’t fill my belly.”

Fearing the loss of Block 60, especially during a midterm election season
dominated by the personnel board controversy, LaMonte and the mayor urged the pro-
Arrington city council to take action. Metropolitan Properties only had acquired 30
percent of the block within a year of the project’s announcement. LaMonte argued that
the cornerstone of downtown redevelopment was for “the public good.” Block 60 was
too important to lose. On September 8, 1981, the council declared the majority of the
block blighted, which would allow the city to condemn the land and force owners to sell
at reduced market value. Birmingham’s municipal government and white business
leaders previously used such tactics in the building of “Design for Progress” in the 1960s,
resulting in public projects with economic value such as UAB, the Civic Center, and Red
Mountain Expressway that primarily benefited white suburbanites. Although these
projects incited public opposition, federal policies and Townsend’s control of local media
effectively silenced the voices of those affected by urban renewal. The loss of African
American living spaces was also of little concern to most white Birminghamians. This
time, however, victims of revitalization were white small business owners.

Block 60 revealed an increasing division between whites who rejected the biracial
partnership between city officials and business leaders and those who realized the
necessity of it in making Birmingham a post-industrial city. Arrington’s leadership

57 Ibid.

58 Kitty Frieden, “Block 60 Spokesmen Protest, City Delays Vote on Whether to Condemn,” Birmingham News, August 25, 1981, Block 60 Clipping Files.

59 Kitty Frieden, “Block 60 ‘Splintered’ Interests Converge on City,” Birmingham News, August 30, 1981, Block 60 Clipping Files.
remained under question, but he used his weekly conversations with influential white suburban businessmen to rally their support for the larger goal of redeveloping downtown. Near the end of 1982, portions of financing for Block 60 suddenly fell apart. Cameron Grammas suddenly demanded sharply higher prices for his properties that Metropolitan Properties had not yet acquired. With the entire project at stake, Arrington asked SouthTrust Corporation to float a last minute loan. Formerly known as the Birmingham Trust and Savings Company, SouthTrust demanded certain conditions such as office space in the planned towers even though it initially refused to relocate its headquarters there. The city also insured the project by entering into an agreement to purchase nearly half the block should Metropolitan Properties fail to gain final financing within a set time frame.60

Despite these hurried efforts by Arrington and SouthTrust, the Block 60 project fell apart at the beginning of 1983. Gusty Yearout, the lawyer for Grammas, the last property-owner holdout, unexpectedly left the city for vacation on December 30 in the midst of renegotiating contracts with the city of Birmingham and Metropolitan Properties that were due the next day. This missed deadline voided the contracts between the city, the redevelopment company, and property owners that stipulated the full purchase of Block 60 by then. Grammas was a prominent member of Birmingham’s small Greek community, which included John Katopodis, Arrington’s rival on the city council. After the 1981 midterm council election, Katopodis led a new conservative white majority. He was an outspoken critic of Metropolitan Properties and the city’s potential new role as a private property owner. Arrington was furious with all three men, but he continued to

60 Kitty Frieden, “Enough Block 60 Blame For All,” Birmingham News, January 5, 1983, Block 60 Clipping Files.
negotiate with them into the new year. Pleading with Yearout, the mayor told the lawyer that he would “step aside” in his role as the one who brought the project to completion. “I will even go along with you to a press conference and stand with you,” he argued. “You can give credit to whomever you want, [but] the city needs the project.”

Arrington learned hard lessons in the struggle to redevelop Block 60 in the wake of shifting federal policy, local politics, and deindustrialization. The rules and players had changed since “Design for Progress” in 1965. Although industrial flight began in the early 1970s, the shutdown of U.S. Steel operations in early 1982 pushed the city’s unemployment rate up to 16 percent. This economic environment discouraged public spending. The Reagan Administration also drastically cut funding to urban areas and social programs, but the funds that did exist required private investment and a concentrated target. Free enterprise was the new ethos in Washington, which launched a wave of financial deregulation that reverberated in downtown Birmingham. Arrington chose a development firm that promoted the ideology to lay the cornerstone for a new city center, demonstrating his administration’s commitment to private investment. Civic boosters had a history of promoting both privatism and public-private partnerships, but since the 1930s, redevelopment had been contingent on massive infusions of federal funds. Even though Reagan’s urban policies favored private redevelopment in downtown, white Birminghamians as well as the owners of Metropolitan Properties largely rejected the principle of government involvement in business affairs.

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61 Ibid.

Arrington and LaMonte, however, brilliantly nurtured relationships with Birmingham’s major corporations that depended on favorable federal policy. SouthTrust Corporation, which Arrington hailed for its “corporate and civic commitment” to downtown, eventually bought the Block 60 site for its new headquarters.\textsuperscript{63} SouthTrust and AmSouth Bancorp, formerly First National Bank of Birmingham, were entering their second decade of rapid expansion thanks to a 1972 Alabama state law that allowed banks to form holding companies. In the 1980s, other state and federal deregulatory laws allowed these companies to cross state lines and extend consumer credit. By the early 1980s, AmSouth controlled nearly one-fifth of all deposits in the state of Alabama, with local deposits reflecting the transition in Birmingham’s workforce.\textsuperscript{64} Healthcare providers, financiers, realtors, and other professional services accounted for 3 of every 10 workers in metropolitan Birmingham in 1980, whereas in the decade before they represented 10 percent.\textsuperscript{65} UAB’s economic impact on personal income alone yielded $298.7 million in local deposits in 1982.\textsuperscript{66} SouthTrust had the capital to develop Block 60 by itself.

SouthTrust and AmSouth were instrumental in helping Arrington revitalize downtown and expand Birmingham’s commercial tax base. The new SouthTrust tower,

\textsuperscript{63} Kitty Frieden and Andrew Kilpatrick, “Lone Holdout KOs Block 60 Plan for Now,” \textit{Birmingham News}, January 4, 1983, Block 60 Clipping Files.


completed in 1986 with the distinction as the state of Alabama’s largest building, used materials intended for the Metropolitan Properties project. It provided a reflective mirror to highlight the new buildings popping up in downtown. AmSouth and Harbert Construction Company, an internationally recognized firm, used light brown marble and a modern art deco style for their joint tower, completed in 1989. Donald Hess, heir of Parisian, quickly set up a small, upscale branch of his department store in this new building. Regions, which had formed as a holding company in 1971, constructed a new headquarters across the street from SouthTrust. The intersection of Twentieth Street and Fifth Avenue North held all three new skyscrapers, creating a new finance center to match Birmingham’s position as the fourth largest financial district in the nation by the late 1980s. This explosion of construction from Birmingham’s preeminent banks caused a wave of revitalization across the downtown area.

The long redevelopment of Block 60 revealed both the weakening and strengthening of Birmingham’s biracial partnership between municipal government and business leaders that traditionally had operated through ONB. The loss of Vincent Townsend as ONB’s leader had implications on the entire Block 60 campaign. Even while the Birmingham News lavished attention on another private redevelopment project in downtown, it remained skeptical of Block 60. After Townsend’s death in 1978, the News had developed a new cynicism about public institutions and leaders that other media outlets adopted earlier in the decade. Its newly pessimistic tone represented a shift in its orientation toward the city of Birmingham. Older civic leaders recognized it and called the News’ coverage destructive. Don Newton, an original ONB member and current president of the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce, declared, “If the
newspapers had stayed away from” critical stories highlighting the point of view of property owners, the failure of Block 60 “might not have happened….When you’re dealing with private property, too much knowledge is a dangerous thing.”67 The News, the former mouthpiece for ONB, was now one of the biggest public detractors of Block 60 and Arrington.

New leadership at ONB, which largely had been silent during the Block 60 campaign, remade the organization in response to changes in federal policy and public opinion. Mike Calvert arrived in Birmingham in the spring of 1982 as ONB’s new Downtown Development director. Calvert quickly went to work on the Block 60 project, explaining available options to tenants and collaborating with LaMonte. An architect turned city planner, Calvert came to Birmingham from Baltimore, where he used federal programs to keep small businesses in neighborhood commercial districts and on the much-praised Inner Harbor project. In Birmingham, he strongly pushed for federal grants, condemnation acts, and eminent domain, citing the assembly of land as “a valid public purpose.” Many Birminghamians saw eminent domain as a government takeover of private property. Given the temper of land politics, LaMonte and others in the Arrington administration believed that Alabama courts would not favor the use of eminent domain.68 Nonetheless, Calvert pushed forward. Favorable laws and federal programs were vital to economic development, and he aggressively pursued them.

67 Terry Horne and Katharine Biele, “Block 60 Now Back in City’s Planning Court,” Birmingham Post-Herald, January 5, 1983, Block 60 Clipping Files.

Calvert further transformed the rhetoric and function of ONB, the former epicenter of a biracial metropolitan Birmingham, to reflect a national and local political culture enthralled by ideas of privatism. Reagan’s urban and economic policies concealed the public’s crucial role in redevelopment and economic growth. Calvert made it clear that ONB represented business interests, not the Birmingham public or the city. The new ONB letterhead rolled out in 1983 even reflected this change. “A partnership of Businesses, Civic Leaders and Public Officials” replaced the “All-America City” tagline also found on municipal letterhead, previously making the city and the organization indistinguishable. Vincent Townsend’s ONB assumed it represented a broad, inclusive Birmingham public, and he believed the Community Affairs Committee brought private citizens closer to their public officials. By the 1980s, some former members of ONB moved those discussions directly into the mayor’s office. Calvert’s relationship with LaMonte and the Business Advisory Group’s one with Arrington drove the planning of city affairs. Not surprisingly, new development strategies in downtown primarily benefitted white suburbanites. ONB’s divestment of a larger civic vision of Birmingham reflected a new conservatism that diminished public life at the expense of private gain.

**The University that Ate Birmingham: The Kirklin Clinic and the End of Volker’s Urban University, 1979-1992**

As the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) became the city’s largest employer by the mid-1970s, the institution entered into an identity crisis. From the 1940s onward, Dr. Joseph F. Volker and other administrators had justified the growth of the Medical Center and then UAB as meeting the needs of citizens in an urban environment. UAB was the only public university in the area, and it had long been a site of African
American advancement and employment. UAB had become so well known as a site of black higher education that after 1983 student breakdown by race was no longer featured in the annual “Facts and Figures.” In 1980 UAB reached an enrollment peak of around 14,500 students. Given this stagnation, the thousands of unemployed industrial workers hardly found refuge in higher education. After Edward LaMonte’s departure for municipal government, the Center for Urban Affairs focused less on shaping public policy and more on implementing community programs. The Urban Studies Department also folded into the Department of Political Science in 1980. UAB’s apparent success seemingly mitigated its earlier mission based on urban needs. The crucial part of UAB’s identity—its urbanness—was losing its relevance.

S. Richardson Hill, former dean of the School of Medicine who served as president from 1977 to 1987, led the charge to give UAB a new identity. UAB’s rapid and unusual growth prevented the formation of a cohesive, unified university. In the late 1970s, it was still referred to as the “Medical Center” or as part of but not different from the University of Alabama. “UAB’ was probably not in their vocabulary,” Public Relations Director Gloria Goldstein recalled. “What a tremendous job we had to do, public relations-wise, of promoting the name of this place.” Goldstein began referring to

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69 One of every five students was African American. UAB Office of Institutional Studies and Services, Facts and Figures, 1982-1983 (Birmingham: University of Alabama in Birmingham, 1983), 36.

70 Ibid.


72 Ibid., 294-99.
“UAB” in all public relations announcements as a way to brand the university.\textsuperscript{73} Hill launched a men’s Division I basketball program in 1978 by attracting championship-winning coach Gene Bartow from the University of California, Los Angeles, a move an outside critic described as “the answer to UAB’s identity crisis.”\textsuperscript{74} Bartow led the new UAB Blazers, who played in the Civic Center Coliseum, to prominence within three years, landing the team a coveted spot in the 1982 national quarterfinals. These actions helped to give UAB its name—a singular identity anyone could refer to and easily recognize in Birmingham, the state, or across the country.

Despite an emerging athletic brand, UAB remained synonymous with healthcare. Its long-term effect on the metropolitan political economy began to show in dramatic ways in the 1980s. People came to Birmingham for world-class healthcare, and UAB was consistently ranked as one of the top five medical centers in the nation by the late 1980s. Once again, faculty growth in the Medical Center far outpaced University College, rising from an already impressive number of 589 in 1981 to 1,188 in 1987.\textsuperscript{75} Local competitors such as St. Vincent’s Hospital Services and HealthSouth Corporation surrounded the campus and hired UAB’s healthcare graduates. Over 30,000 people visited the UAB campus each day by using Eighth Avenue South exits located on both Red Mountain Expressway and Interstate 65. In 1984, Hill petitioned the city council to rename the avenue “University Boulevard” in recognition of the primary purpose of the

\textsuperscript{73} Gloria Goldstein, interview by Virginia Fisher, August 31, 1990, File 2.41, transcript, UAB Archives Oral History Interview Collection (hereafter cited as UAB Oral History), UAB Archives.

\textsuperscript{74} McWilliams, \textit{New Lights in the Valley}, 276, 273-81.

\textsuperscript{75} Faculty in University College rose from 246 to 387, or 61 percent, during the same period. UAB Office of Institutional Studies and Services, \textit{Facts and Figures, 1987-1988}, 8\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Birmingham: University of Alabama at Birmingham, February 1988), 65.
thoroughfare. It was the first street in downtown Birmingham, which only had numbered and directional roads, to be named.\(^76\)

Healthcare support industries such as Liberty National Life Insurance Company benefited tremendously from UAB’s growth. Top executives sat on the University of Alabama Board of Trustees, directed UAB’s two major urban renewal programs, and earned enormous financial rewards for themselves as their company grew in relation to the healthcare economy. Intricately connected to UAB, Liberty National’s growth across the Southeast attracted the attention of a competitor, Torchmark Insurance of Texas, in 1986. By then, Liberty National’s headquarters were in the explosively growing suburb of Hoover, home to a new middle class squeezed out of the three historic Over-the-Mountain suburbs.\(^77\) Corporate relocation partly was explained as the result of moving the workplace to where employees lived, which were in suburban municipalities with better public services than the city of Birmingham.

By the late 1980s, Liberty National’s former headquarters housed the administrative offices of the University of Alabama Health Services Foundation (HSF), a private non-profit corporation that organized UAB’s medical and dental faculty into a private practice. Established in 1972 by UAB’s Chief of Surgery John W. Kirklin, the

\(^76\) Renaming of roads and buildings established a new symbolic tool of revitalization that emphasized those institutions and people who shaped a post-civil rights Birmingham. Examples include: Albert B. Boutwell Municipal Auditorium; Hugo Black Federal Building; David J. Vann County Court House; Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard (Twentieth Street); Abraham Woods Boulevard (Eighth Avenue North); Fred L. Shuttlesworth Birmingham International Airport.

\(^77\) Mountain Brook and Homewood are the two oldest suburbs behind Red Mountain. Homewood was more diverse from the start. By the 1980s, its per capita income was closer to the city of Birmingham’s than it was to Mountain Brook and Vestavia, but key sections of it still held prestigious value. Although the origins of Vestavia began in the 1920s, it did not grow substantially until the 1950s. Its location abutted the southern borders of the two older suburbs. Hoover sat directly south of Vestavia but above the undeveloped northern border of Shelby County. Hoover incorporated in 1971 with a population of less than 1,500; by 1990, almost 40,000 people lived there.
Foundation had become an even more powerful entity within the university. In 1986 Kirklin announced to top university administrators his intentions to build new office and clinical space for HSF members. In an era of healthcare maintenance organizations, Kirklin argued that the new mega-facility spanning four blocks would provide better patient care than the maze of hospitals and clinics at UAB. Modeled after the Mayo Clinic, which Kirklin left for UAB twenty years before, the facility would offer a team approach to healthcare, one billing system, and increased patient-per-diems. Hill and Charles A. “Scotty” McCallum, who succeeded him as president of UAB in 1987, joined Kirklin in negotiations with the city of Birmingham and Operation New Birmingham.

As long-time allies of UAB in their work to rebuild Birmingham, Arrington and ONB fully supported Kirklin’s brick-and-mortar project for the Health Services Foundation. 78 Mike Calvert, one of the clinic’s primary boosters, declared that ONB “sees the future of Birmingham as tied very closely to the health field and to UAB.” 79 Now ONB’s new executive director, Calvert strongly argued for the use of eminent domain. Block 60 had failed, he believed, because the city was too hesitant in using the powers available to it. “We don’t intend to repeat the mistakes of that project,” he told reporters; “we learned lessons from that.” He won Birmingham’s right to use eminent domain in a 1985 Alabama Supreme Court case, and Calvert used that in his negotiations with property owners. “If the project is important enough to the city to use

78 Edward LaMonte chose to step down after Arrington’s second term in 1987. He eventually joined the faculty at Birmingham Southern College.

condemnation,” Calvert explained, “everyone needs to know that up front.” Arrington fully embraced the project and Calvert’s methods. “We must seize this opportunity,” he remarked in a 1987 mayoral debate. “There are, in our short history as a city, too many examples of missed opportunities and resulting hindsights filled with regrets.”

Despite the overwhelming support from Birmingham’s biracial public-private partnership, criticism of the proposed clinic arose from within the Medical Center, the city council, and the metropolitan public. Internal resistance at UAB to the clinic reflected the perpetual tension within its identity as a provider of public and private services, which the practices of the Foundation had made more apparent over a fifteen-year period. The proposed clinic emphasized private practice over research and teaching responsibilities among Medical Center faculty. Even though faculty and department chairs financially benefited from the HSF, they largely opposed the new facility on the grounds that it would lead to a loss of control over patient services. They also did not like the “Kirklin Tax,” which tapped into their professional fees to fund the new clinic to the tune of $68 million.

Kirklin attributed internal opposition to his plans as the fetishization of academic freedom. “Faculties feel that they are the university,” he remarked, rather than “simply employees…in a corporation.” The Health Services Foundation changed academic healthcare at UAB to a “more corporate instead of, less of a collegiate type of enterprise,” Kirklin explained. Aside from housing the largest private practice in Birmingham, the

80 Ibid.
HSF was also a major investor through a subsidiary company of a rapidly growing healthcare maintenance organization, Complete Health, Inc. In 1987, McCallum fended off plans from some University of Alabama trustees who wanted to create a new organizational structure that effectively would have acknowledged Kirklin’s observation and separated UAB’s academic and healthcare functions.  

Although UAB was a divided campus, former President Joseph F. Volker always had envisioned a full-fledged university as a central partner to the Medical Center.

Because members of the Health Services Foundation were UAB faculty, it was one of the most powerful yet largely unknown healthcare corporations in the region. The Birmingham public only knew Kirklin as UAB’s star cardiologist. A reader of the Birmingham News raised a question of critical importance when she asked of the clinic, “Is it or is it not a UAB undertaking?” Area citizens widely supported the public university, but they were wary of public-private initiatives in the wake of Block 60. That debacle, roundly used by Arrington’s critics as proof of his failed leadership, colored the discussions of the Kirklin Clinic, which the new facilities would be called. Although it was co-developed by UAB, the Kirklin Clinic was a project of the Health Services Foundation, a private corporation.

A vocal minority of white public officials spoke out against the role of the city of Birmingham in the Kirklin Clinic project, which reflected a shift in white thought about the relationship between the public and private sectors. In the past, city and county officials heartily endorsed urban redevelopment projects, most of which federal grants

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and programs spurred, to provide public services and attract private investment. ONB and UAB drove key development projects in the late 1960s, but their benefits were spread unevenly throughout the metropolitan area. Urban whites had opposed the city’s relationship with ONB since then, but their conservative voices gained influence on the council and in federal government by the early 1980s. John Katopodis, who had moved from the city council to the Jefferson County Commission by 1987, objected to Calvert’s threat of eminent domain. Looking back on Block 60, he said, “I could not vote to condemn [Grammas’] property so someone else could make a profit.”

Councilor Bettye Fine Collins, a Katopodis ally, publicly stated that “to allow a private developer” such as the Health Services Foundation “to come in and use a power that belongs to us by law, I think, is abdicating our responsibility. This [matter] should stay over there in the private sector.” As a private company, Collins reasoned, the HSF should use the free market to bargain with the owners of thriving Southside businesses.

Restaurant owner George Sarris, previously evicted from Block 60, dominated the public outcry with his folksy charm, idiosyncratic sound bites, and faith in free enterprise. Launching S.O.S. (Southside Organization of Small Businesses), Sarris’ group plastered the city with flyers “in the memory of a Healthy Small Business Climate in Birmingham.” Although Kirklin and Calvert promoted the clinic, Sarris found Arrington’s government responsible: “Have you ever worked very hard for something only to have someone else take it away from you for their own personal gain? Well, we,

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the members of S.O.S., believe that is exactly what is happening to us at the hands of the
city planners of the City of Birmingham who apparently are working in concert with the
University of Alabama Health Services Foundation.” HSF executives, Sarris argued,
“surely should understand and appreciate our view towards property ownership and
private enterprise. We simply are business people who want to earn a living, serve the
public, and enjoy the advantages of living in Birmingham.”

87 To Sarris and his supporters, the city, not private business, was to blame. Such intense outcry as well as
incomplete planning forced the HSF to scale back its project by one block. Sarris’ Fish
Market Restaurant was saved, but he mocked the move. “With that kind of planning,” he
said, “if the Health Services Foundation was NASA and they tried to put a man on the
moon, as far as they would go probably is Bessemer,” about ten miles west of
downtown. 88

Sarris and other critics also zeroed in on the private nature of the HSF, tapping
into long-standing class antagonisms between whites in the metropolitan area. Sarris
confessed to the reading audience of the Birmingham News, “I gave my allegiance to
America and became a citizen, never knowing that I was not good enough to own
property if some big doctors wanted my property to make themselves more rich and
famous.” 89 Another citizen wrote that unbeknownst to the public, the HSF “became the
money handler and administrative arm of UAB’s medical system….Nearly unlimited

87 Southside Organization of Small Businesses, “SOS In Memory of a Healthy Small Business Climate in

88 Bob Blalock, “UAB Group Passes Up One Block for Health Clinic,” Birmingham News, April 13, 1988,

hidden wealth can corrupt the motivations of even the most honorable men and organizations if given a particular set of circumstances.”

Such sentiments expressed local opinion that doctors, rather than industrialists, now controlled Birmingham. The intense backlash against the HSF pressured Kirklin, an intensely private man, into publicly revealing his salary, about $379,000 in 1986. Even though he believed demands for such information were “inflammatory, divisive, and damaging,” Kirklin’s astronomical salary only fed the fire of critics such as Sarris whose livelihood was threatened by the project.

The dominance of the healthcare economy and the new image it provided for Birmingham drowned out the intense public outcry against the Kirklin Clinic. When the clinic opened in 1992, city officials and civic boosters heralded it as a new era in healthcare. A private super-clinic of medical all-stars, it increased patient-per-diems, consolidated services, reduced costs, and ensured higher profits for clinicians; more patients meant more money. Internationally recognized architect I. M. Pei, fresh off the success of reimagining the Louvre courtyard as a series of glass pyramids, designed the facility. C. Mark Smith, director of Birmingham’s economic development office, boasted, “Having an I. M. Pei building in town says something.”

The selection of Pei suggests a more ambitious meaning than patient care in launching the new clinic. The building was a monument to Kirklin’s achievement in privatizing academic healthcare and

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revolutionizing Birmingham’s image as a world-class medical center for specialized healthcare services.

Figure 7.2 Aerial view of Birmingham from the southwest, 1992. The UAB campus is in the foreground, and downtown is in the background. University Boulevard connects US Interstate 65, on the left, and Red Mountain Expressway on the right. (Courtesy of UAB Archives.)

The Kirklin Clinic effectively ended any attempt by UAB administrators to create an integrated urban university, but that vision, so beloved by former President Volker, never had a chance. Student life expanded under both of Volker’s successors, and University College accounted for much of UAB’s physical growth in the 1990s and beyond. 93 Every president of UAB, however, has been a healthcare professional. Less

93 McWilliams, New Lights in the Valley, 270-83, 349-60.
than two months after Volker’s untimely death due to complications from surgery in the early spring of 1989, Kirklin resigned from UAB and divorced the clinic completely from the university. As long as Volker was alive, the cold, analytical surgeon could have never pulled the project away from UAB. Kirklin’s move symbolized the autonomy and privatization of academic healthcare that further undermined Volker’s vision of a fully integrated urban university. By 1992, the Kirklin Clinic occupied three blocks with modern, reflective buildings designed by a Pritzker Prize-winning architect that clearly distinguished them from the red brick campus and matched downtown’s new finance center. In sharp contrast, Volker Hall, home to the Basic Sciences program in University College that had been so crucial to establishing an interdisciplinary research life in the 1950s, was a small, utilitarian, yellow-brick building tucked behind University Hospital.

In the debate over the Kirklin Clinic, urban and suburban whites called into question the power of the second generation of biracial civic elites led by Arrington, Calvert, and Kirklin to direct Birmingham. Black and white civic elites working through City Hall, ONB, and UAB had united in the 1960s to reform the economic, political, and social structures of Birmingham that had limited progress and restricted citizenship. Over twenty years later, urban whites accused civic elites of committing the same crimes. The new generation of coalition leaders operated from an incredibly strong base of economic power—the healthcare economy—to accomplish their redevelopment goals. ONB’s Calvert was a dynamic and aggressive leader who saw the way things were done in Birmingham as inefficient, which was similar to how Kirklin saw the need to revolutionize patient care at UAB. Although they officially divorced their activities from

94 Kirklin, interview.
the city of Birmingham and UAB, area citizens did not acknowledge the separation between the public and private entities. When the Kirklin Clinic opened in 1992, Sarris remarked, “I’ve never seen anything UAB built that they didn’t run out of space….It could be the monster who eats the Southside.”\textsuperscript{95} The “University that Ate Birmingham,” as it was nicknamed in the 1990s, was no longer a sacred cow in metropolitan politics.

The End of Biracial Moderate Politics

Within his first ten years in office, Arrington oversaw a political, economic, and material transformation of downtown Birmingham that was nothing short of remarkable. Civic leaders since the 1940s had invested in the growth of a federally subsidized segment of the national economy—healthcare—that was strong enough by the 1980s to offset the effects of deindustrialization. Arrington worked with his Business Advisory Group, Operation New Birmingham, and other redevelopment groups in adding 10 new buildings to the central business district, renovating 80 office buildings through the strategic use of Urban Development Action Grants and historic preservation grants, and encouraging over $1 billion of public and private investment in downtown.\textsuperscript{96} Black representation in municipal government continued to improve, with 6 African Americans sitting on the city council by 1987. Arrington won his second re-election in another landslide victory in that same year. National publications and municipal associations began calling Birmingham one of best places in the nation to live, work, and invest.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{95} Massolini, “New Southside Medical Clinic Draws Economic Raves.”

\textsuperscript{96} “Birmingham: A City Reborn, the Arrington Years 1979-1999,” 13.

\textsuperscript{97} Birmingham was ranked fourth best city for business by \textit{US News and World Report}, top ten places to work by \textit{Newsweek}, and the most livable city by the US Conference of Mayors.
In 1989, civic pride reached new levels with the arrival of City Stages, a three-day annual music festival in downtown. Organized by George McMillan, Alabama’s former Lieutenant Governor from 1979 to 1983, the first event showcased musical acts Chuck Berry, the Temptations, and the Georgia Satellites playing on three stages surrounding downtown’s new skyscrapers and newly renamed Linn Park, the city’s civic square. City Stages rapidly gained national attention. Few outdoor music festivals were held in downtown centers, but Birmingham’s success proved their usefulness as a revitalization tool for 1990s urban America. Within a few years, Atlanta, Charlotte, NC, Jackson, MS, and Mobile, AL, all attempted their own downtown festivals. By 1998, City Stages grew to 15 stages and 270 musical acts that the Chicago Tribune called “one hot, glorious weekend.”

The impact of City Stages on Birmingham was more than national acclaim for its creative use of urban space and popular culture. It was central to bringing people to Richard Arrington’s Birmingham. As former Mayor Larry Langford noted, the festival “brought people inside the city who don’t live in the city and maybe dispelled some false notions about” it.

Despite the image of growth conveyed by these happenings in Birmingham in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a close look at metropolitan demographics reveals how blacks and whites reordered themselves in response to the local political economy. Arrington’s mayoralty, a key symbol of racial progress, and the growth in finance and healthcare attracted blacks and whites from across the state and nation to Birmingham, but overall

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the city, county, and metropolitan area showed population \textit{decline} between 1980 and 1990.\footnote{The city lost 18,445 residents, the county lost 19,799, and the metropolitan area, which contained four counties, lost 7,545. “Birmingham’s Population, 1880-2000,” Government Documents, Birmingham Public Library, http://www.bham.lib.al.us/resources/government/BirminghamPopulation.aspx; “Jefferson County Population, 1880-2000,” Government Documents, Birmingham Public Library, http://www.bham.lib.al.us/resources/government/JeffersonCountyPopulation.aspx; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, \textit{Census of the Population, 1980, Volume 1, Table 56}; \textit{Census of the Population, 1990, Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population, Chapter C: General Social and Economic Characteristics, Alabama} (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), Table 1.} Although the city gained 10,053 new black residents, 29,074 whites left. Of those whites, only 10 percent stayed within the limits of Jefferson County. The areas that experienced population loss—Birmingham, Fairfield, Forestdale, Midfield, and Tarrant City—were historically homes to a white working class employed in heavy industry (See \textit{Appendix, Tables 1, 2, and 3}). Although Birmingham’s manufacturing base transitioned from durable to non-durable goods during the decade, the area experienced a net loss of 8,322 industrial jobs. Twenty-five percent of the 73,125 new jobs in the metropolitan area were in healthcare services, finance, and real estate (See \textit{Appendix, Tables 5 and 6}).\footnote{Calculations by author. Bureau of the Census, \textit{Census of the Population, 1980, Volume 1} (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1983), Table 122; \textit{Census of the Population and Housing, 1990, Population and Housing Characteristics for Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas in Birmingham, Alabama, MSA} (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), Table 18.} Middle-class suburban growth tied to the professional service economy occurred in the Over-the-Mountain area, spilling into neighboring Shelby County, which grew by 33,000 (See \textit{Appendix, Table 13}). Mountain Brook, known as the “Tiny Kingdom,” had a median family income of $80,366 in 1990 that made it one of the top ten wealthiest cities of its size in the nation. In contrast, the city of Birmingham’s was $23,892, giving it the distinction as one of America’s ten poorest large cities (See \textit{Appendix, Table 4}).\footnote{Connerly, “\textit{Most Segregated City in America},” 273; Bureau of the Census, \textit{Census of the Population, 1980, Volume 1, Table 124}; \textit{Census of the Population, 1990, Volume 1, Table 3}.} The
geographic contours of class within metropolitan Birmingham became much starker in the 1980s.

As Birmingham transitioned from a majority white to a majority black city between the 1960s and the 1980s, the at-large nature of the city council sustained biracial moderate politics and diluted extremism. As Arrington explained in 1989, “In the past, people who had to run for office had to moderate their views because they couldn’t afford to offend blacks or whites.”103 In Arrington’s Birmingham, many whites, including those who supported biracialism, became increasingly uncomfortable with the majority black electorate and increasing power of the Jefferson County Citizens Coalition (JCCC). The debates over Block 60 and the Kirklin Clinic also revealed class antagonisms between whites in the metropolitan area. Sarris and his supporters believed that Arrington favored Over-the-Mountain suburbanites instead of the “little guy.” Indeed, Sarris, whose livelihood both Block 60 and the Kirklin Clinic threatened, symbolized those whites who felt under attack by Arrington’s Birmingham.

When endorsed candidates of the Jefferson County Citizens Coalition swept the mayoral and council races in 1987, many urban whites and some conservative blacks believed that they had lost their voice in Birmingham. Defeated councilor Russell Yarbrough was one of them. Since his first council term in 1969, Yarbrough had enjoyed the reputation as a conservative in city politics and often found himself at odds with Nina Miglionico. His concern over his community North Birmingham, however, which had experienced racial transitioning and economic decline in the 1970s, earned him the

endorsement of the JCCC in 1979 and in 1983. Yarbrough and other whites like him remained in Birmingham in the 1980s as one-fourth of urban whites fled the borders of Jefferson County. This decrease in population amplified white fears of black home rule (See Appendix, Tables 2 and 12). City councilors Yarbrough, John Katopodis, and Bettye Fine Collins spoke on whites’ behalf as constant critics of Arrington. With black neighborhood leaders and white suburban businessmen behind him, however, Arrington was unstoppable by the 1987 election.

After losing his council seat, Yarbrough filed a suit against the city of Birmingham for violating his rights as a minority protected under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many observers found the case baseless because three whites served on the city council. To Yarbrough, the issue was not the racial composition of the council but the dominance of the JCCC, which endorsed whites after the 1981 midterm fiasco. “The preferred candidates of the black racial majority,” he observed, were the only ones who could be elected.\(^\text{104}\) Bettye Fine Collins, who also lost her seat in 1987, displayed little understanding of Birmingham’s history when she explained, “We as a white community are seeking the same representation blacks were seeking in the 1960s.”\(^\text{105}\) Benjamin Greene of the JCCC called the suit “sour grapes.”\(^\text{106}\) By the 1980s, whites had forgotten how they used racial solidarity disguised as white supremacy in municipal politics and encouraged widespread disenfranchisement to stymie black political power.

\(^{104}\) Ibid.


Across the country, *Yarbrough v. the City of Birmingham* and other cases like it in the rural South raised the question of whether or not whites could be considered minorities and receive civil rights protections. These cases arose as whites fled cities, small towns, and rural areas for suburbs, which left whites who remained in those places with decreased electoral power at the local level. City attorney Donald V. Watkins remarked, “So-called reverse discrimination cases will be the wave of the future….The new attitude of the US Supreme Court…seems to be giving encouragement to white citizens to challenge black gains in virtually every aspect of social and economic life.”

Indeed, white firefighters filed suit against the city of Birmingham for its purported discriminatory affirmative action plan approved by federal officials in 1981. This reverse-discrimination case resulted in a landmark US Supreme Court decision in 1989 that allowed whites across the country to challenge affirmative action plans and federal decrees in employment across the public and private sectors.

Although Yarbrough’s challenge to at-large council seats represented a larger white conservative backlash against black home rule, it raised fundamental questions about the state of Birmingham’s biracial civic democracy. Without the influence of the Operation New Birmingham’s Community Affairs Committee and its activities, which had bridged the class, racial, and spatial divides of its members and program recipients, the metropolitan coalition had become a perverted mechanism for expressions of white economic and black political power by the late 1980s. The language of the “public good”

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107 Applebome, “‘65 Rights Act Now a Tool for Whites.”

Edward LaMonte first invoked in the decade had disappeared from civic rhetoric, and the community-oriented vision of Birmingham advocated by Vincent Townsend, David Vann, and Joseph Volker had been abandoned. Indeed, metropolitan readers of the four local editions of the *Birmingham News* only read community items from their geographic area, whereas in the early 1970s Townsend introduced Lula Menefee and Collegeville, a declining black neighborhood, to citizens across metropolitan Birmingham. Menefee, who first initiated political and personal contact between poor urban blacks and affluent white suburbanites, continued to work with ONB until 1982, but her death three years later received a standard obituary treatment in the *News*. White suburban businessmen and black neighborhood leaders, the two most powerful groups in the coalition, each had the ear of Arrington, yet they shared almost nothing else in common except making downtown—from Southside to Linn Park—a reflection of their power.

Arrington was one of the only politicians in Birmingham who could bridge the differences between this unlikely coalition of white suburbanites and black urbanites who lived in completely separate worlds. He rose to political power based on the support of black civic leaders and white liberals, two groups whose voices within the coalition had been drowned out by the JCCC and white suburban businessmen by the 1980s. The black civic elite lost their political influence as the younger JCCC overtook the more-established Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council, but they continued to exert economic and civic power. A. G. Gaston added a construction company to his enterprises to meet the demands for minority contractors, and *Black Enterprise* named him “Entrepreneur of the Century” in 1992. Some white liberals bemoaned the loss of civic identity among white businessmen. Long-time reformer James A. Head believed too
many leaders “spen[t] too much time and effort to ‘cash in now’ for themselves rather than thinking of the good of the ‘community’ and the future!” Although white liberals and black civic elites had lost visibility in shaping Birmingham, Arrington and LaMonte embodied the legacy of moderate biracialism first established by them.

The at-large representation of the city council had kept the biracial coalition in power and accommodated the shift from a majority white to a majority black city. Since 1962, David Vann and others had sought to change the representation of the city council because they recognized the discriminatory nature of at-large seats. A majority of voters selected councilors without any room for candidates supported by a minority of voters. Nina Miglionico, who represented the seven white and four black plaintiffs of Yarbrough, also shared Vann’s concerns. She enjoyed broad political support in Birmingham during the height of biracial moderate politics, but she recognized that those days were over. “If we are working towards a color-blind society,” she argued in 1989, “a district system would seem to be the wave of the future.”

Although Birmingham had never been color-blind as Miglionico liked to think, race mattered in post-1965 Birmingham politics as evidence of progress for both whites and blacks who believed in a biracial civic democracy. By the late 1980s, whites and blacks no longer agreed on that vision. They now used race to claim power in ways that pitted blacks and whites and urbanites and suburbanites against each other.

Instead of insuring a fairer democracy in Birmingham, the arrival of district seats in 1989 politicized racial and class segregation and brought even more political


110 Smothers, “Suit Seeks to Alter Voting.”
polarization. The new council organization, based on neighborhoods, included three white seats and six black seats. The 1989 election saw Arrington lose a black and a white ally on the council. The new city council reflected the deep racial and class antagonisms in Birmingham. The mayor had predicted that district seats would produce “candidates whose views are more extreme, white and black, on racial issues.” They did. The new seats, however, enabled the Jefferson County Progressive Democratic Council to regain some of its former power. Increasingly in the 1990s, black politicians on the council such as future Mayor Bernard Kincaid challenged Arrington. The mayor’s acute focus on downtown development came at the cost of public education, transportation, and other social services; the city’s expanding commercial tax base required perpetual reinvestment that siphoned public funds away from urban residents. Resentment began building in black neighborhoods. When Arrington resigned a month before the end of his fifth term in 1999, the JCCC was finished as a political power in Birmingham.

By the 1990s, where people lived had become a more significant factor in representational politics in Birmingham and across the nation. *Reynolds v. Sims*, the lawsuit filed by Vann that created the opportunity for municipal reform, had far-reaching and unintended consequences. As early as 1973 and again in 1981, the Alabama state legislature considered reapportionment to create single-member districts, but its plan violated federal statues of the Voting Rights Act until a federal court finally approved the revised districts in 1983. Between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s, the legislative intent of single-district seats changed from diluting the effect of newly enfranchised African Americans to marginalizing politically powerful minority bodies. In 1992, the

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111 Applebome, “‘65 Rights Act Now a Tool for Whites.”
Alabama State Legislature split metropolitan Birmingham’s federal legislative district served by white Democrat Ben Erdreich into two new districts. After 1993, Republican Spencer Bachus represented white suburban Birmingham while Democrat Earl Hilliard served urban blacks. All of these state decisions further politicized Birmingham’s suburban and urban spaces that were already marked by class and racial antagonisms. Within these new spatial frameworks of political power, biracial moderate politics could not survive.

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APPENDIX

Table 1
Populations for Birmingham, Jefferson County, and Birmingham SMSA, 1940-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Birmingham</th>
<th>Jefferson County</th>
<th>Shelby County</th>
<th>Birmingham SMSA</th>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>267,583</td>
<td>459,930</td>
<td>28,962</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>326,037</td>
<td>558,928</td>
<td>30,362</td>
<td>558,928</td>
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<tr>
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<td>340,887</td>
<td>634,864</td>
<td>32,132</td>
<td>634,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>300,910</td>
<td>644,991</td>
<td>38,037</td>
<td>739,274</td>
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<td>284,413</td>
<td>671,324</td>
<td>66,298</td>
<td>847,487</td>
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<tr>
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<td>265,968</td>
<td>651,525</td>
<td>99,358</td>
<td>907,810</td>
</tr>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>249,459</td>
<td>662,047</td>
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Table 2
Populations for Birmingham and Jefferson County by Race, 1940-2000

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Black</th>
<th>Jefferson County</th>
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<th>Black</th>
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<td>205,620</td>
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<td>95,655</td>
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### Table 3

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<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Hoover</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<td><strong>East</strong></td>
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<td>2,510</td>
<td>2,985</td>
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<td>8,266</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessemer</td>
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<td>5,090</td>
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<td>8,458</td>
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<td>2,001</td>
<td>5,163</td>
<td>6,217</td>
<td>6,400</td>
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<td>6,537</td>
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<td>2,241</td>
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### Table 4
**Median Family Income by Cities, Towns, or Places, 1960-1990**

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<td>$18,548</td>
<td>$31,527</td>
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<td>$7,737</td>
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<td>$23,892</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$16,436</td>
<td>$24,277</td>
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### Table 5

**Industry of Employed Persons in Birmingham SMSA, 1960-1990**

<table>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries</td>
<td>1,457</td>
<td>2,802</td>
<td>2,693</td>
<td>5,453</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>5,812</td>
<td>4,804</td>
<td>9,211</td>
<td>5,702</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
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<td>15,303</td>
<td>20,892</td>
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<td>59,241</td>
<td>66,038</td>
<td>67,341</td>
<td>59,009</td>
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<td>50,015</td>
<td>50,221</td>
<td>37,888</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nondurable Goods</td>
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<td>16,023</td>
<td>17,120</td>
<td>21,121</td>
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<td>Transportation</td>
<td>10,268</td>
<td>11,051</td>
<td>15,504</td>
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<td>10,795</td>
<td>18,731</td>
<td>21,153</td>
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<td>54,610</td>
<td>66,246</td>
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<td>31,825</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7,733</td>
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<td>19,064</td>
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<td>17,501</td>
<td>11,882</td>
<td>11,501</td>
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<td>1,511</td>
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<td>31,642</td>
<td>42,691</td>
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<td>25,562</td>
<td>30,233</td>
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<td>26,611</td>
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<td>15,887</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>217,420</td>
<td>268,879</td>
<td>349,013</td>
<td>405,915</td>
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### Table 6

Industry of Employed Persons in Birmingham SMSA by Percent, 1960-1990

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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<td>Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mining</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durable Goods</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondurable Goods</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Transportation</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
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<td>Communications and other Public Utilities</td>
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<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
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<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Repair Services</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Services</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment and Recreation Services</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and Related Services</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Services</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Professional and Related Services</td>
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<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
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<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>217,420</td>
<td>268,879</td>
<td>349,013</td>
<td>405,915</td>
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### Table 7
Total UAB Active Grants and Contracts, 1969-1990

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<th>Federal Training</th>
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<td>$2,904,451</td>
<td>$5,145,027</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>$20,649,463</td>
<td>$1,455,211</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>$4,002,258</td>
<td>$6,187,671</td>
<td>$9,004,323</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>$23,955,873</td>
<td>$2,086,967</td>
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<td>$4,393,325</td>
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<td>$9,690,510</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>$30,792,327</td>
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<td>93.1%</td>
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<td>$9,184,974</td>
<td>$13,432,519</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>$32,556,229</td>
<td>$3,926,856</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>$6,090,601</td>
<td>$8,152,024</td>
<td>$14,386,748</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>$35,948,960</td>
<td>$3,803,185</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>$6,205,087</td>
<td>$8,487,591</td>
<td>$17,453,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>$41,887,411</td>
<td>$3,926,856</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>$6,090,601</td>
<td>$11,567,861</td>
<td>$21,261,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>$41,942,718</td>
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<td>89.4%</td>
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<td>$9,003,893</td>
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<td>83.2%</td>
<td>$3,027,903</td>
<td>$10,681,870</td>
<td>$25,900,260</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$48,573,932</td>
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<td>$13,101,896</td>
<td>$25,667,261</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>$53,875,739</td>
<td>$7,474,826</td>
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<td>$3,176,598</td>
<td>$12,954,492</td>
<td>$30,269,823</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>$48,450,670</td>
<td>$6,908,062</td>
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<td>$3,679,186</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>$52,424,884</td>
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<td>1985</td>
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<td>$10,318,089</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$74,174,054</td>
<td>$15,338,811</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>$82,065,219</td>
<td>$14,614,414</td>
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<td>$3,148,490</td>
<td>$7,363,200</td>
<td>$56,939,115</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>$96,142,445</td>
<td>$17,513,084</td>
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<td>$2,483,244</td>
<td>$7,673,261</td>
<td>$68,472,856</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>$105,571,876</td>
<td>$21,409,859</td>
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<td>$2,189,288</td>
<td>$5,959,269</td>
<td>$76,013,460</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$99,852,858</td>
<td>$18,821,860</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>$1,204,459</td>
<td>$6,464,429</td>
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### Table 8

**Total UAB Revenue, 1969-1990**

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<th>Year</th>
<th>UAB Revenue</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Grants as Revenue</th>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>$46,815,431</td>
<td>$18,190,620</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>$54,263,491</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>$63,050,735</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>$77,903,000</td>
<td>$30,792,327</td>
<td>39.53%</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>$89,985,333</td>
<td>$32,556,229</td>
<td>36.18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>$109,224,559</td>
<td>$35,948,960</td>
<td>32.91%</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>$126,436,872</td>
<td>$41,887,411</td>
<td>33.13%</td>
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<td>$156,665,437</td>
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<td>$168,341,433</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>$200,600,634</td>
<td>$43,418,977</td>
<td>21.64%</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>$235,322,402</td>
<td>$47,471,028</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$261,125,715</td>
<td>$48,573,932</td>
<td>18.60%</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>$292,846,165</td>
<td>$53,875,739</td>
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<td>$303,806,140</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>$313,450,176</td>
<td>$46,166,166</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>$346,684,162</td>
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<td>$350,805,587</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>$409,884,784</td>
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<td>$498,538,131</td>
<td>$96,142,445</td>
<td>19.28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>$556,846,334</td>
<td>$105,571,876</td>
<td>18.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$629,933,554</td>
<td>$99,852,858</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Business Volume</th>
<th>Construction Business Volume</th>
<th>Expansion of Credit Base</th>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>$220,819,000</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>$306,855,000</td>
<td>$22,530,000</td>
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<td>$409,809,025</td>
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<td>$300,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>$634,936,248</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>$838,029,138</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>$1,222,948,916</td>
<td>$128,817,722</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Personal Income</th>
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<td>$117,078,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>18,772</td>
<td>1,950</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>24,670</td>
<td>1,844</td>
<td>$298,688,613</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>32,645</td>
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<td>44,244</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>62,033</td>
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<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Blighted (Y or N)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Tuxedo</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Wylam</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Grove</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Grasselli</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Hillman</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Hillman Park</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inglenook</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Avondale</td>
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<tr>
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<td>West End</td>
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Source: Community Development Department, "Community Renewal Plan for the City of Birmingham," (August 1979), 8, File 22.6, David J. Vann Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham Public Library.
### Table 12
Racial Classification of Selected Birmingham Neighborhoods, 1980

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<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>White</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belview Heights</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>Central Pratt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bush Hills</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>North Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>86.7%</td>
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<td>81.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>57.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>East Birmingham</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3.9%</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>College Hills</td>
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<td>Smithfield</td>
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<td>93.2%</td>
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<td>Southside</td>
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<td>78.2%</td>
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<td>81.6%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acipco-Finley</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>North Titusville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegeville</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
<td>South Titusville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairmont</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
<td>Woodland Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriman Park</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooper City</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>98.3%</td>
<td>Arlington-West End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Birmingham</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
<td>Germania Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northside</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oakwood Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central City</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>Rising Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druid Hills</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>98.7%</td>
<td>East Avondale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain Heights</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
<td>Oak Ridge Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwood</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>Woodlawn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 13
Percentage of Workforce in Managerial, Professional, and Specialty Occupations and Median Family Income in Selected Places, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City, Town or Place</th>
<th>Percent in Professional</th>
<th>Median Family Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham SMSA</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>$31,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby County</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>$42,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson County</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>$31,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Clair County</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>$27,388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blount County</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>$26,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Over-the-Mountain Suburbs (South)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahaba Heights CDP</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>$45,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoover</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>$53,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homewood</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>$42,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Brook</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>$80,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestavia Hills</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>$61,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shelby County Suburbs (South)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabaster</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>$42,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>$42,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverness CDP</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>$70,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadowbrook CDP</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>$71,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelham</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>$47,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>East</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trussville</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>$42,862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forestdale CDP</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>$39,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardendale</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>$37,488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: These municipalities were chosen because more people living in these cities worked in Managerial, Professional, and Specialty occupations than the Birmingham SMSA average.
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