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**BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE:
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, 1945-1972**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of History

by

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December, 1999**

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For Professor Joseph Logsdon (1938-1999)

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Abstract

The civil rights movement in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, went beyond a battle between blacks and whites over segregation. Within each racial group, factions developed along class, generational, and educational lines. Interactions among these groups shaped the nature and pace of change in the city.

In 1945, black World War II veterans launched the movement. Committed to working within the legal system, they established voter registration schools, participated in the 1953 bus boycott, and sued to equalize teachers' salaries and to integrate public schools. In the 1960s, black college students rose to prominence in the movement and used direct action, including sit-ins and marches, to challenge segregation laws. At the same time, working-class activists undertook protests of their own. Like the veterans and the students, they wanted increased voter registration and integrated public facilities, but they also demanded equal employment. In the late 1960s, young blacks abandoned nonviolence, embraced Black Power, and advocated racial separatism.

Each stage of the movement frightened the city's white leaders. Although they supported segregation, white leaders realized that civil rights demonstrations threatened industrial development in their community. To preserve the stability they felt essential to continued economic expansion, they attempted to appease the activists by meeting with traditional black leaders — racial diplomats — and making small changes to the system of segregation. The compromises delayed integration and angered the activists.

Agreements reached by black and white leaders also infuriated segregationists and white liberals. Segregationists believed that any changes to Jim Crow would

destroy southern society and promised to defend racial separation at any cost.

Conversely, white liberals supported the civil rights activists and believed that compromises undercut the movement. However, most white Baton Rougeans supported the delaying tactics of their leaders.

In 1972, the black activists' pent up anger at the slow pace of change erupted in deadly clashes with the police. By then, strict segregation in Baton Rouge had ended, but blacks had made inroads into the city's political system. Although whites remained in control, older African-American activists believed that they could work within the existing framework to facilitate change.

Introduction

Located on the Mississippi River, 240 miles north of its mouth, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, served as the state's capital city and was a thriving port and business center at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cotton farmers and sugar cane planters from the rural areas surrounding the city used the port to ship their goods to market and bought equipment and supplies from local wholesalers. In 1908, one wholesale grocery, Holmes & Barnes, Ltd., did more than one million dollars worth of business. Even with its prosperity, the city possessed few industries and grew slowly. That changed in 1909 when Standard Oil opened a refinery in the community. When production started on the facility, the city's economy grew at an astonishing rate. Construction wages for the plant equaled two-thirds of the value of all those in East Baton Rouge Parish, of which Baton Rouge served as the parish seat, for 1909, and when the facility opened, the community's economic base quickly went from one that relied on agriculture to one based on industry. As the twentieth century progressed, the city's economy continued to flourish until the Great Depression when many small businesses closed and thousands of citizens lost their jobs. However, Standard Oil's refinery remained open and helped to ease the city's financial woes by employing large numbers of Baton Rougeans. As the nation's economy began to improve in the late 1930s, three more national corporations — Solvay Process, Consolidated Chemicals, and Ethyl Corporation — opened plants in the Baton Rouge.¹

¹Mark Carleton, *River Capital: An Illustrated History of Baton Rouge* (Woodland Hills, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1981), 156-157, 174, 189;

Although all of Baton Rouge's industries played a vital role in the city's economic success, Standard Oil remained dominant and, in 1940, employed one-third of the metropolitan area's population. The bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 launched a wave of industrial growth. During the war, industries spent \$125 million on new construction or expansion of existing facilities in Baton Rouge. In fact, on the day after the Japanese attack, Standard Oil announced that it would expend \$17 million to expand its Baton Rouge refinery. The plant soon produced more than 75 percent of the nation's aviation fuel and opened a chemical division that manufactured synthetic rubber. By the end of the war, Standard Oil-Baton Rouge was one of the largest facilities of its kind in the world. Industry so dominated Baton Rouge's economy that in 1944 approximately 55 percent of the population worked for one of the major corporations.²

With the rapid industrialization during World War II, the city of Baton Rouge and East Baton Rouge Parish experienced a period of phenomenal growth. In 1930, approximately 68,000 people lived in the parish. By 1940, the number increased to

Works Progress Administration, *Louisiana: A Guide to the State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 136-164.

² Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, History of the South Series, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 10-21; Conrad Louis Rein, "From Southland to Sunbelt: The Legacy of Dependent Development in New Orleans and Louisiana," (Ph.D. diss., University of New Orleans, 1997), 229, 238; Carleton, *River Capital*, 156-157, 174, 189; Works Progress Administration, *Louisiana*, 254; Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *The Master City-Parish Plan: Metropolitan Baton Rouge, Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: City-Parish Planning Committee, 1948), 8; Jerry Sanson, "A History of Louisiana, 1939- 1945" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1984), 421-507; Stuart O. Landry, ed., *Louisiana Almanac and Fact Book, 1940 - 1950*, (New Orleans: Louisiana Almanac and Fact Book, Inc., 1949), 100.

88,500, and five years later, it topped 107,000. A decade later, the parish boasted more than 158,000 residents. Throughout this period of expansion, African Americans made up approximately 35 percent of the population. With the huge influx of workers, the city of Baton Rouge quickly outgrew its corporate limit of five square miles, and unplanned neighborhoods with poor streets and drainage systems sprang up on the outskirts of town. Because these unincorporated urban areas were outside its boundaries, the city government could not provide basic services, such as sewerage or water to these residents. The police jury, Louisiana's form of parish government, was dominated by representatives from the rural areas of the parish and was ill-equipped to handle the demands of its urban residents. Realizing that the unplanned, haphazard growth created by industrial expansion needed to be addressed, the city and parish governments, at the request of the Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce, created a joint committee to study the problem.³

Members of this planning commission quickly recognized that the existence of both a city and a parish government was "badly divided, inefficient, and obsolete." This dual system threatened to undermine Baton Rouge's continued economic expansion. White leaders proposed creating a consolidated government with a mayor-president as the chief executive and a city-parish council as the legislative body. The plan also expanded Baton Rouge's corporate limits to include the suburban areas surrounding the

³Harland Bartholomew and Associates, *Preliminary Report: The Twenty-Five Year Plan for Metropolitan Baton Rouge, Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: City-Parish Planning Committee, 1945), 13, introduction; Milburn Calhoun, ed., *Louisiana Almanac, 1992-1993* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 1992), 142; Rudolf Heberle, *The Labor Force in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 40; Bartholomew, *Master Plan*, 1.

city. In 1947, the state legislature approved a constitutional amendment to alter the parish's governmental system, and a heated debate erupted in the parish. Reaction to the proposed constitutional amendment was mixed. People who lived in urban areas supported the new plan of government wholeheartedly. Rural residents balked at the expansion of Baton Rouge and feared that the growing metropolis would engulf them. To appease the rural population, the plan allowed the small towns of Baker and Zachary, located in the northern part of the parish, to elect their own mayors and city councils. On August 12, 1947, voters approved the new plan of government with 7,012 people voting for the change and 6,705 against it. Rural voters comprised most of the nays. Hailed as a sign of progress, the plan went into effect in 1949.⁴

Although its city and parish governments were unified, the community's educational system remained divided by race. Baton Rouge served as the home of the state's largest institutions of higher education for both whites and blacks — Louisiana State University and Southern University. While funded by the state, the two schools played integral roles in the community. Many local men and women, who went on to be community leaders, received their education from these institutions and quickly became staunch supporters of their alma maters. The faculties and staffs of LSU and Southern, many of whom came from other parts of the country, made up an academic elite in both the white and black communities and played a role in the civil rights movement.

Along with the two universities, by 1946, Baton Rouge boasted ninety manufacturing plants, most of them small, that pumped approximately \$30 million in

⁴Carleton, *River Capital*, 196-197; Bartholomew, *Master Plan*, 1.

payrolls into the city's economy and produced more than \$160 million in goods annually. The city sustained more than nine hundred retail establishments, four hotels, and sixteen movie theaters. Many of these businesses, including Kress, Welch & Levy, and Rosenfield's, lined Third Street, which served as the heart of the downtown commercial district.⁵

Although they frequented the businesses on Third Street, African Americans in Baton Rouge created a separate society for themselves. They owned their own businesses, formed their own social and fraternal organizations, and attended their own churches. The city boasted many black-owned businesses, including thirty-nine restaurants, twenty-three barber shops and twenty-five beauty parlors, six drug stores, two funeral homes, and one hotel. Seven African-American doctors and three dentists practiced in the community. One of the most successful black businessmen, Horatio Thompson, owned several service stations. In the early 1940s, a group of African-American entrepreneurs formed the Negro Chamber of Commerce to encourage the growth of business in their neighborhoods, and, by 1945, the organization was thriving.⁶

Religion played an important role within Baton Rouge's black population. The city had seventy-eight African-American churches, including sixty-four Baptist, eight African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), one Catholic, and one Presbyterian. These churches varied greatly in size and in the wealth of their congregations. Reverend

⁵*Polk's Greater Baton Rouge City Directory, 1946* (Dallas: R. L. Polk and Company, 1946), 11-12.

⁶*Ibid.*, 761-800.

Gardner Taylor headed the largest and most prominent, Mount Zion Baptist, which played a key role in the early years of the civil rights movement.⁷

Black Baton Rouge also enjoyed a very active social life. Headed by John G. Lewis, proprietor of the Fraternal Press, the Prince Hall Masons owned and operated the Masonic Temple. By day, a variety of black businesses used it as an office building, but on the weekends, the Temple's Roof Garden served as a ballroom for members of the black middle and upper classes. For members of Baton Rouge's black elite, several social clubs existed. Men could join the Purple Circle or the Bonanza, both of which held formal dances. Several organizations existed for women as well. One, the Junior Matrons, later renamed the Matrons, organized in 1941 and quickly became the most prominent. In 1946, it established a debutante ball; a similar debutante system already existed in the white community. Besides these social organizations, members of the black community belonged to several benevolent societies including the Knights of Pythius, the Daughters of Universal, four Odd Fellows Lodges, and one Elks' lodge. Most of these groups met at the Masonic Temple, which served as the center of black social life.⁸

Although African Americans created a world for themselves, they could never forget that they lived in a segregated society and were considered second-class citizens. Each encounter with a white person reminded them of their inferior status. When they

⁷Ibid., 771.

⁸Dupuy Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, tape recording, December 29, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 18; Carleton, *River Capital*, 209, 193; *Polk's City Directory*, 781.

shopped at downtown department stores, they could not eat a sandwich or have a glass of lemonade at a department store's cafeteria or be served at the same lunch counter as white customers. African Americans also suffered wage and job discrimination.

Although the plants and refineries hired black workers, these facilities relegated African Americans to low-paying menial and unskilled positions. The East Baton Rouge Parish School Board also paid its black teachers a fraction of what it paid white ones.

Disparity also existed between the parish's white and black public schools. The School Board maintained seventeen elementary, three junior high, and two high schools for the approximately 7,700 white children that it served. All twenty-four were constructed out of brick. Seventeen had auditoriums, six had laboratory facilities, and five had cafeterias. Baton Rouge and Istrouma High schools contained gymnasiums. While the board maintained a sufficient number of facilities to meet the needs of white children, it crowded nearly 5,000 black children into seven elementary and two high schools.⁹ The enrollment of white elementary schools ranged from 350 to 500 with a maximum class size of 35 pupils. More than 700 students attended the larger black schools whose class size ranged from 51 to 73. Schools housing black students were poorly constructed and not well maintained. Only four black schools were made of brick; the others were wood-frame. Churches provided and maintained the buildings for two elementary schools — Zion City and Valley Park. Only McKinley High School had both an auditorium and laboratory facilities. None housed cafeterias or gymnasiums.

⁹The School Board maintained no junior high schools for African Americans. Most elementary schools included grade seven, and the two high schools offered either grades seven or eight through eleven.

African-American children also used cast-off materials from the white schools, including textbooks. Black parents could do little to force the School Board to equalize public education because they were, for the most part, disenfranchised and could not exert political pressure on elected officials. East Baton Rouge Parish's Registrar of Voters kept a tight rein on the number of black voters and only allowed African Americans to register as Republicans. In 1940, only 144 black Baton Rougeans could vote.¹⁰

The discrimination faced by African Americans on a daily basis and the disparity that existed between black and white society had long been a source of concern to many within Baton Rouge's black community, and in the late 1920s they organized a branch of the NAACP to address these problems. Insurance agent Benjamin Stanley headed the organization from 1930 to 1955 and created a stable institution that survived the Depression. When the nation's economy crashed, most of Louisiana's NAACP branches collapsed only to be reorganized as conditions improved. Having survived the Depression intact, the Baton Rouge branch boasted 800 members in 1940, and by the end of World War II, many of them, especially the young veterans of World War II, stood poised to fight the system of segregation.¹¹

¹⁰At the time, the Democratic Party dominated Louisiana politics and most elections were decided in party primaries. Therefore Republicans rarely voted in state and local elections but could cast votes in presidential contests. Bartholomew, *Preliminary Report*, 13-26.

¹¹Perry Howard, "An Analysis of Voting Behavior in Baton Rouge," *The Proceedings of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences*, XV (5 August 1952): 88; Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 46-47.

One of the first large-scale challenges to the Jim Crow occurred in 1953 when African Americans in Baton Rouge launched a boycott against segregated seating on the city's buses. The protest lasted for nine days and ended with a compromise that maintained separation of the races on the city's buses by reserving two seats for whites and two for blacks. The deal allowed the rest of the seats to be filled on a first come, first served basis. Of course, the agreement stipulated that African Americans could not sit with or in front of white passengers. This agreement maintained segregated seating to continue until 1963 when a federal court order formally banned the practice. The boycott established a pattern of protest, compromise, and anger that continued to characterize the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge. This pattern did not develop spontaneously but grew out of a well-established tradition of race relations in Louisiana's capital. When the civil rights movement began in the mid 1940s, white businessmen and politicians turned to the African Americans with whom they had had long associations for help in ending the demonstrations and ignored the black "agitators" who were challenging the status quo. White leaders believed that the activists represented a small portion of the population and were convinced that the members of the black leadership represented the entire African-American population. In reality, African-American leaders occupied a tenuous position in the black community and when their meetings with whites produced compromises that fell far short of the protestors' demands, their influence declined. The agreements also created animosity between the black leaders and the activists, and as the civil rights movement progressed, the anger and discontent of both the activists and the black community grew. Dissatisfaction reached a boiling point in November 1972 when students at the

historically black Southern University clashed with police on the school's campus. That encounter left two students dead. The only way to understand fully how a movement that began with negotiations and compromises ended in violence is to look beyond black and white and examine how the interplay between race, class, and generations shaped the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge.

The relationship between white and black leaders that developed in the decades before the civil rights movement was not unique to Baton Rouge. Similar relationships existed in communities throughout the South. In Greensboro, North Carolina, for example, white leaders felt paternalistic toward African Americans and selected representatives of the black community, usually ministers, businessmen, and professionals, with whom they would work. When these black leaders needed assistance, they would approach their white benefactors and, with proper deference, ask for help. The benefactors would then render aid and were "convinced that the exchange testified to how good communications were between the races." Whites believed that their hand-picked representatives were the true leaders of the black community. Therefore when the civil rights movement began, they turned to them to help ease tensions and assumed that black activists would gladly accept any compromise their "leaders" reached.¹²

Yet, in Baton Rouge, as in other cities, African-American leaders did not represent their entire race. The black leaders with whom members of the white power structure associated belonged to the city's small black middle and upper classes. Most

¹²William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8.

were ministers, doctors, lawyers, school teachers, or businessmen, and because they earned more money than most African Americans, industrial workers also belonged to this group. Daniel Thompson in *The Negro Leadership Class* called them racial diplomats. The racial diplomats understood southern traditions and felt a sense of pride for their cities. They identified “with the problems of the total community and . . . [cared] about the welfare of [all] human beings . . . [,] not just about ‘what is good for the Negro,’ ” according to Thompson. While protecting their own interests, racial diplomats thought they were also looking out for the well-being of their communities. They knew that the system of segregation made all African Americans second class citizens, and most of the diplomats wanted to end segregation. Fearing that protests and demands for change would only strengthen resistance in the white community, however, they believed that meeting with white leaders and asking for small concessions would eventually bring an end to segregation.¹³

Although white leaders used them to advance their own programs, the racial diplomats also benefitted from the relationship. Before the civil rights movement, being one of the “chosen few” with whom whites met gave them immense power. If “ordinary” African Americans needed help from a white leader, they would have to ask a racial diplomat to intercede for them. In his memoir *Black in Selma*, J. L. Chestnut recalls that some black leaders in his hometown profited from their relationships with whites. Reverend D. V. Jemison, the father of Baton Rouge’s black leader Theodore

¹³Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 39; Daniel Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 68-70.

Judson Jemison, was “the most powerful black man in Selma,” according to Chestnut. “White people showed uncommon respect for Jemison, too.” They called him “Dr. Jemison.” Chestnut said, “for little crumbs of power, black preachers and other leaders could be counted on ‘to keep the natives in line’ — to cool off potential uprisings and to preach that blacks should clean up their own back yards rather than challenge the system.” These advantages came with a price. Racial diplomats could not openly criticize the status quo. If they did, they lost all of the benefits that went along with being part of the African-American leadership class.¹⁴

Before World War II, Baton Rouge’s black population allowed the racial diplomats to represent them and regarded the concessions that their leaders wrested from the white community as signs of progress. As veterans returned to Baton Rouge from the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific, the willingness of African Americans to accept small changes to the status quo diminished rapidly, and the first group of civil rights activists emerged. These World War II activists came from backgrounds similar to those of the racial diplomats but were, for the most part, younger and just starting their careers as professionals and businessmen. Almost all had served in the armed forces and had risked their lives for principles of freedom and democracy in foreign countries, only to be treated as second class citizens when they returned home. World War II activists nevertheless believed in the American system and wanted to claim a piece of it for themselves. They championed voter registration, played an active role in the city’s 1953 bus boycott, and sued to desegregate LSU’s Graduate and Law Schools

¹⁴J. L. Chestnut and Julia Cass, *Black in Selma: The Uncommon Life of J. L. Chestnut, Jr.* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990), 39-41.

and to gain admission to the city's public parks and golf courses. The racial diplomats and the World War II activists shared many of the same goals; for example, both advocated voter registration and participation in the electoral process. They differed on a key point. While the diplomats used their votes to curry favor with white leaders, the World War II activists wanted to take part in policymaking, so they ran for public office. None won. When the movement entered its direct action phase in 1960, college students supplanted the World War II activists as the driving force behind the fight for racial equality, but the group of older activists remained staunch supporters of the civil rights movement and the students. However, they also continued their efforts to end segregation by working within the system.

Unlike the World War II activists, student activists believed that working through legal and political channels would accomplish little. They came of age in a decade marked by the civil rights victory of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and watched as white southerners used every means at their disposal to prevent its implementation. In response, student activists around the South, including Baton Rouge, adopted the strategy of direct action and nonviolent civil disobedience to desegregate lunch counters and other public facilities. Baton Rouge's student activists attended Southern University, and when police arrested them for staging sit-ins, they obtained financial and legal support from both the World War II activists and the racial diplomats. Older African Americans assisted the younger college students for several reasons. First, student activists belonged to the upper echelons of black society, and many were the children of racial diplomats. In addition, when they protested, they did so with dignity, even civility. They dressed in their finest clothes for their sit-ins and

politely asked for service at segregated lunch counters. When arrested, they held their heads high and allowed the police to lead them away. Although student activists garnered support from the black community, white leaders viewed the students as a threat to the city's image of racial harmony and ordered Southern University's president, Felton Clark, to expel them. Fearing white reprisals against the university if he refused, Clark complied.

The nature of student activism changed as the civil rights movement progressed, and, by the late 1960s, a group of angry young men and women spouting Black Power slogans and advocating the use of violence to overthrow the white oppressor replaced the first student activists. Black Power activists believed that the best way to change southern society was through force. Naturally, the white community feared the Black Power activists even more than they did their predecessors, and white leaders went after them literally with their guns drawn. The racial diplomats and World War II activists never identified with this group of young African Americans and refused to support or help them. Instead, they greeted Black Power activists with scorn, and some blamed them for the 1972 riot at Southern University. In return, the students despised the racial diplomats and called them "sellouts" and "Uncle Toms" because of their willingness to work with white leaders.

A final group of activists, working-class African Americans, came to the forefront of the movement in 1962. Like other activists, they wanted increased voter registration and the desegregation of schools and public facilities, but they differed from the other groups in that they also pushed for equal employment. In 1962, the working-class activists announced their plan to conduct sustained protests until white

leaders capitulated to their demands. Like the Black Power activists who arrived on the scene several years later, they did not subscribe to the principles of passive resistance. They fought back when arrested and shouted while they picketed; their protests often ended in violent clashes with whites. The white leaders saw the working-class activists as uneducated and undignified and refused to meet with them. Other than race, the black leadership had little in common with the working-class activists and sought to undercut their demands for change. For example, when the working-class activists reorganized the city's chapter of the NAACP in 1962, racial diplomats, who had been the mainstay of the branch in the 1940s and 1950s, abandoned the organization. Instead, they formed their own association, Federated Organization for the Cause of Unlimited Self-Development (FOCUS), which worked to increase voter registration, thus undercutting one plank of the NAACP's program. The creation of a competing organization led to animosity between the two groups and almost completely severed the ties between the racial diplomats and the working-class activists. Working-class activists also garnered support from the black masses and threatened the racial diplomats' position of leadership within the community. To protect their emissaries, white leaders consciously granted concessions aimed at appeasing the African-American population. In 1963, they established a biracial committee to discuss and recommend solutions for racial problems in Baton Rouge. In turn the committee requested and received approval for the hiring of black police officers, the desegregation of facilities in the Municipal Building, and the admission of black doctors to the staffs of white hospitals. The biracial committee failed to address the

working-class activists' concerns, however, and the gulf between them and the racial diplomats continued to widen.

Although white leaders created the biracial committee to bolster the status of the racial diplomats and prevent dissension within the ranks of the African-American population, they could do little to stop the divisions within their own community. The majority of white Baton Rougeans wanted to maintain segregation, but their level of commitment to the system of Jim Crow varied. White leaders belonged to the city's business and political elite and embraced industrial expansion.¹⁵ They realized that to convince national corporations to build multimillion dollar plants and refineries in the community they needed to create a stable environment in Baton Rouge. White business leaders had spearheaded the consolidation of the city and parish governments in large part to create a plan for the economic growth of East Baton Rouge Parish. When the civil rights movement began, white leaders feared that racial conflict would disrupt the stability that they wanted to maintain, so they worked closely with the racial diplomats to end any protests quickly. Although they wanted to maintain segregation, the white leadership had "no dogmatic commitment to segregation" and refused to risk the city's economic well-being to preserve it. When they could, they made small changes to the system of segregation. White leaders knew that granting token concessions would appease the black leaders and make the activists look like irrational troublemakers. They also believed that with these compromises, they could forestall demands for

¹⁵The terms white leaders, white business leaders, and business leaders are used interchangeably throughout this account.

greater desegregation and, at the same time, maintain control of the city's government and economy.¹⁶

Segregationists, on the other hand, thought that any changes to the system of segregation would destroy the "southern way of life" and lead to the mongrelization of the white race. In the years following the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, segregationist sentiment in Baton Rouge increased as whites faced the prospect of black and white children attending the same schools, and three anti-integration organizations formed in the city. Immediately following the *Brown* decision, businessman John Easterly formed a segregationist group, the Southern Gentlemen, to preserve "the southern way of life." Drawing members from the city's upper and middle classes, it actively searched for integrationist sentiment in Baton Rouge's public institutions, including LSU; when the Southern Gentlemen found any inkling of it, they publicly denounced the offending office holder. Baton Rouge also had a chapter of the White Citizens' Council, a segregationist organization founded in October 1954 in Mississippi. Like the Southern Gentlemen, the Citizens' Council wanted to expose and destroy integrationist sentiment in the community. In the 1960s, District Attorney Sargent Pitcher, a charter member of the Baton Rouge chapter, placed black activists under surveillance, arrested them on trumped-up charges, and sought the longest possible sentences for them. He filed motions in court to ban civil rights organizations, such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), from holding protests in the city. A

¹⁶Numan Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 16.

third group, the Ku Klux Klan, made a brief appearance in the city in the mid 1950s, but it played virtually no role in the segregationists' fight against integration.

In the early 1960s, the white leaders gained an ally when a new group, the accommodationists, stepped into the fray. Although this group preferred, even advocated the continuation of segregation, its members refused to destroy Baton Rouge's economic well-being to maintain it. Disgusted by the state's open defiance of the federal government during the 1960 New Orleans school desegregation crisis, the accommodationists wanted East Baton Rouge Parish to acknowledge the authority of the federal government and to comply with court-ordered school desegregation. They feared that open defiance would lead to immediate and sweeping school integration and believed that accommodation would allow them to draft a plan to drag the process out for years. As Numan Bartley pointed out in *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, "a considerable number of segregationists were unwilling in the end to tear apart the fabric of southern society and commit the region to anarchy in defense of segregation." Like the white leaders, the accommodationists were businessmen, professionals, and educators who belonged to the city's middle and upper classes. The accommodationists wielded economic power and possessed enough clout to silence the segregationists, and their support gave white leaders enough power to devise a plan for the peaceful but piecemeal integration of the parish's schools.¹⁷

In addition to white leaders, accommodationists, and segregationists, Baton Rouge's white community boasted another group that played an active role in the civil

¹⁷Ibid.

rights movement — liberals. Most of the city's liberal population belonged to one of three groups, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Council on Human Relations, and the Louisiana Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (LCLU). Although all three worked to end segregation, they were active at different times and focused on different issues. The AFSC arrived in Baton Rouge in 1955 and initially, sought to end workforce segregation in the city's plants and refineries. When this failed, they turned their attention to social issues and began to support the black activists' fight to desegregate public facilities and schools. The AFSC left Baton Rouge in the mid 1960s when its national office turned its attention to ending the war in Vietnam. The Council on Human Relations picked up where the AFSC left off. Its members worked closely with the World War II activists to bring a peaceful end to the segregation of public facilities and took part in sit-ins in local restaurants. Some members of the organization even tutored the first African-American students to attend integrated schools. Although active in the school desegregation fight of the late 1950s, the LCLU focused most of its attention on combating police brutality. Most of the liberals came from other parts of the country, and many worked at LSU. Although some were southern-born, white leaders and segregationists accused the liberals of being outside agitators intent on stirring up the city's content black population.

Both groups targeted the liberals for "special attention" and intimidation. White office holders ordered the police and sheriff's department to place all three organizations under surveillance. Policemen would cruise the parking lots where the groups met, write down the license plate numbers of all of the cars, and either they or the FBI would pay a visit to those who attended. Segregationists used harsher methods

to silence the liberals. In 1955, a group of them shot out the windows of the AFSC's office, and in 1960, they tapped the phones of several prominent liberals. Despite the threats and harassment, white liberals remained committed to ending segregation and attaining full citizenship for African Americans.

The divisions that existed within Baton Rouge's white community were not unique to Louisiana's capital city. In fact, historians have discovered similar splits in cities throughout the South. Subsequent historians have examined the roles played by these different groups in the civil rights movement. The essays in *Southern Businessmen and the Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn, examine the impact of industry on the South and conclude that in New South cities controlled by business leaders who were committed to industrialization desegregated with very little violence. David Chappell, in *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement*, agreed with the essayists in *Southern Businessmen* that white business leaders helped to shape the outcome of the civil rights movement but added that the divisions within the white community also led to the ultimate destruction of the system of Jim Crow. According to him, African Americans understood that white solidarity on the issue of segregation was fragile and directed their protests at the segment of the community most likely to abandon the system of Jim Crow, the moderate white leaders. However, the willingness of the white leaders to agree to changes in segregation laws led black leaders to accept incomplete victories while white supremacy remained intact. Works on liberals also abound. In one of the

most notable works, *Outside Agitators*, Charles Eagles studied northern liberal Jonathan Daniel's battle against segregation in Alabama.¹⁸

Although they are discussed in most studies of the civil rights movement, few works specifically examine segregationists. One of the most comprehensive studies of staunch segregationists is Neil McMillen's *The White Citizens' Council*. In it McMillen looks at the creation and development of the organization and its use of massive resistance to prevent integration. Bartley's *Rise of Massive Resistance* also examines the evolution of segregationist sentiment in the South, specifically during the post-*Brown* era. Unlike McMillen, whose focus is narrower, Bartley discusses the response of "business conservatives" and "neopopulists" to the extreme segregationists.¹⁹

While most studies of the era focus on either whites or blacks, the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge and in other southern cities went beyond black and white, and the divisions that plagued both communities and the interactions between different racial groups determined the course of the movement. However, few scholars have

¹⁸Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 1-24; Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn, eds., introduction to *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 1-14; David Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), xxii-xxv, 214-215; Charles Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Other works on southern liberals include: Gary Huey, *Rebel with a Cause: P. D. East, Southern Liberalism and the Civil Rights Movement, 1953-1971* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1985); Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938 - 1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); John T. Kneebone, *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

¹⁹Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*.

examined the impact of these divisions and interactions on the freedom struggle. In the 1960s, a bevy of political scientists, sociologists, and historians conducted studies on the civil rights movement, and by the 1970s, their number burgeoned. These early studies examined various aspects of the movement, including the nature of black leadership, the impact of direct action on desegregation, and the segregationist's reaction to *Brown*.²⁰ They usually depicted the movement as one driven by national leaders and organizations and focused on key events such as the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and violent clashes between activists in cities such as Birmingham and Selma, Alabama. These studies implied that national leaders and organizations drove the movement. But, in fact, as Clayborne Carson pointed out in his introduction to *Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement*, the lives of residents of communities throughout the South "were affected as much by concessions gained from local white officials and from the development of the local movement . . . as by the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 Voting Rights Act."²¹

²⁰These early studies include: Emmett Buell, Jr., "The Politics of Frustration: An Analysis of Negro Leadership in East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, 1953-1966" (masters thesis, Louisiana State University, 1967); Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class*; James H. Laue, *Direct Action and Desegregation, 1960-1962: Toward a Theory of the Rationalization of Protest*, Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement Series, ed. David Garrow (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989); Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization*, Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement Series, ed. David Garrow (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989); Earlean M. McCarrick, "Louisiana's Official Resistance to Desegregation" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1964); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); David L. Lewis, *King: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

²¹Steven Lawson, *Running For Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), ix; Clayborne

Beginning with Aldon Morris's groundbreaking work, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, scholars shifted their attention away from the movement as a national phenomenon and examined grassroots activism. Recent studies, including Charles Payne's *I've Got that Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* and John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, also emphasized the importance of community activism. However works such as these rarely depict the divisions that existed within black communities. Dittmer, for example, alludes to the existence of a black leadership class that worked with white officials to bring an end to protests, but he does not examine the impact of their relationships with whites on the movement.²²

Although most of these studies mention the divisions within the black and white communities and the interactions among the different factions, few examine the impact of these groups on the movement. William Chafe's study of Greensboro, North Carolina, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, is one of the books that looks at the movement in a mid-size New South city and examines both the black and white communities.²³ It

Carson, introduction to *Essays on the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. John Dittmer, George C. Wright, and W. Marvin Delaney (Arlington: University of Texas Press, 1995), 4-5.

²²Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984); Charles Payne, *I've Got that Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

²³Other studies that examine community development are David Colburn's *Racial Changes and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877- 1980* (New York:

focuses on the impact of civility on the civil rights movement, which brought small changes to the system of race relations through a series of polite interactions between black and white leaders. Greensboro and Baton Rouge had much in common. Industry served as the basis of both of their economies. Each had an African-American and a white college and possessed black communities with clear class delineations. The AFSC opened offices in both cities in the mid 1950s. The white populations of both Greensboro and Baton Rouge included white leaders, accommodationists, segregationists, and liberals. The movement these two communities followed a pattern of protest, compromise, and delayed resolution that culminated in violent clashes between police and the students from the African-American universities. Chafe claims that this pattern grew out of the politics of moderation rooted in white leaders' commitment to the principle of civility and their desire to preserve their city's peace and stability, but devotion to these two abstract ideals cannot explain the actions of white leaders. Why did they hold on to the politics of moderation in the face of rabid segregationist attacks? Why did they meet with black leaders to hammer out compromises? Where did their commitment to maintaining peaceful race relations come from? White leaders in most Alabama and Mississippi cities did not share their

Columbia University Press, 1985) and Robert Norrell's *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). Large cities have merited more studies. Works on Atlanta, for example, include: Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996); and David Garrow, ed., *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1989); Gary Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta* (New York: Schribner, 1996).

concerns; they allowed segregationists free reign. Leaders in these cities did not try to meet with African Americans to bring an end to protests. What was different about Greensboro, Baton Rouge, and other cities that exhibited a similar pattern of race relations?²⁴

²⁴Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 1-47.

Chapter 1

The Civil Rights Movement in the 1940s

During World War II, Baton Rouge experienced a period of rapid growth and industrialization. As the demand for wartime material increased, the chemical plants and refineries that had lined the banks of the Mississippi River since shortly after the turn of the century began producing jet fuel, synthetic rubber, and other military necessities. Increased wartime production brought prosperity to East Baton Rouge Parish, and white business and political leaders wanted this economic growth to continue after hostilities ended and that made industrial development their primary concern. Like their counterparts in other southern industrial and business centers (Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Tampa, and Greensboro) the economies of which relied on influxes of northern investment, white leaders in Baton Rouge knew that racial unrest was bad for business and committed themselves to preserving order and stability. Montgomery and other "Old South" cities lacked this industrial base, and when the civil rights movement began, their political leaders allied with ardent segregationists and met demands for equality with massive resistance. When black veterans who fought for the principles of freedom and democracy returned from the war determined to bring an end to segregation and to win full citizenship for African Americans, white leaders in Baton Rouge and other New South cities adopted two methods to silence them, delay and diplomacy. Whites employed the first tactic when the veterans began launching legal challenges to segregation laws and used motions and appeals to tie these cases up in court for years. When civil rights activists continued to demand changes in the system of segregation or launched protests, members of the white power structure turned to

traditional African-American leaders — businessmen, professionals, and ministers who had served as liaisons or diplomats between the white and the black communities for decades — to negotiate compromises to end the protests. These racial diplomats understood the nature of race relations in the South. While they too wanted equality and an end to segregation, they believed that these goals could only be obtained by working with white leaders and not fighting them in court or holding demonstrations. Their policy of conciliation angered the veterans and led to divisions within the black community that grew as the civil rights movement progressed.¹

In 1945, racial diplomats were the undisputed leaders of Baton Rouge's black community. They belonged to the city's middle and upper classes and served as intermediaries between the black and white communities. Racial diplomats could bring problems to the white leaders and ask for their assistance in solving them. "Common" African Americans, ones without ties to the white leadership, could also ask the diplomats to intercede for them. Like their white counterparts, black leaders included businessmen and professionals who wanted to insure the continued economic expansion of Baton Rouge. Many belonged to the Negro Chamber of Commerce, and most were active in social, fraternal, and benevolent societies. One of the most powerful racial diplomats, John G. Lewis, Jr., served as president of the Prince Hall Masons, operated

¹Jacoway and Colburn, *Southern Businessmen*, 1-6; W. Marvin Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas, Texas?" in *Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement*, 66-95; Christopher Silver and John Moeser, *The Separate City: Black Communities in the Urban South, 1940-1968* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), ix-xi; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 4-8; J. Mills Thornton, "Challenge and Response in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-1956," *The Alabama Review*, 33 (July 1980): 184-186; Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class*, 68-70.

the Fraternal Press, and ran the Masonic Temple Building. Lewis formed a close alliance with the NAACP in the 1940s and provided meeting places, offices, and financial support for the organization. Like his father, John, Sr., he was active in Republican Party politics and attended every national convention from 1928 to 1940. Other leading racial diplomats included Doctors George and Leo Butler, Beverly V. Baranco, and Horatio Thompson. Not only did the Butler brothers practice medicine, they also owned the Ideal Drug Store and were socially active. Both brothers belonged to the NAACP, and Leo was active in the Boy Scouts and the YMCA. A dentist, Baranco was the son of a long-time black leader and businessman who had been active in the Black and Tan faction of the Republican Party and served as a delegate-at-large to several Republican national conventions. A graduate of Southern University, Thompson owned several service stations and developed the city's first up-scale subdivision for African Americans — Southern Heights. He worked his way through college by chauffeuring Southern President J. S. Clark, handling campus mail, operating a branch of Ideal Drug Store out of his dorm room, and establishing a taxi company. In the early 1940s, he served as secretary of the local branch of the NAACP.²

The ranks of the racial diplomats also included another group — plant workers. Although the city's industries segregated their workforces and relegated black workers to menial, unskilled positions and paid them less than whites, these industrial workers

²Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 70; "Baton Rouge Raises Scout Camp Fund," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1940, 22; "Baton Rougeans Protest Unwarranted Attacks on Citizenry by Policemen," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 28, 1941, 1; Carleton, *River Capital*, 121; "Thompson the Man Behind the Scenes," *Advocate*, February 19, 1995, 1G.

earned more money than most black Baton Rougeans. Working for Standard Oil or another national corporation also provided these black employees with both economic and job security. Most belonged to labor unions and established relationships with white leaders through these organizations. Both white and black workers at the city's major plants and refineries belonged to segregated labor unions. Usually, one union represented the workers at a plant but was divided into a white section and a black section. When asking for higher wages or improved working conditions, the two sections usually joined efforts in their meetings with management. This cooperation did not transfer into a sense of working class unity. Although they asked their employers for increased wages and better working conditions, these African-American employees never sought major changes in their employment status and never asked that the managers integrate the workforces. They took great pride in the fact that they worked for these national corporations, and some formed all-black booster clubs to promote industrial development and expansion. In June 1941, two ESSO employees, Joe "ESSO" Williams and the Reverend Anderson Brooks announced their support of the plant's fifteen million dollar building program and secured the promise of plant officials that the company would employ more African Americans. When the same group held a picnic in 1952 over 7,500 attended. Black ESSO employees also formed a health association in 1948 to provide insurance for themselves and their families. By 1952, ESSO employed 1,200 African Americans. Because of the community's industrial base, the economic status of black Baton Rougeans was the highest in the

state. That year, 40 percent of the city's black population owned their own houses as compared to 12 percent in New Orleans and 18 percent in Shreveport.³

When they saw a need within their community, these plant workers and the other racial diplomats approached white leaders and asked them for help in meeting it. As long as the request did not challenge the racial status quo, white leaders usually complied. If African Americans needed the financial assistance of their white benefactors, they asked the black community to provide a portion of the funds. In June 1940, Leo S. Butler asked white leaders to help pay for black youth to attend a segregated Boy Scout camp. A white attorney, Fred Benton, promised to donate \$1,000 to the cause if African Americans matched that amount. To meet their quota, black Boy Scout supporters held various fund raisers.⁴

In the early 1940s, racial diplomats recognized the need for a black elementary school in an African-American neighborhood inhabited by plant workers. They obtained the money for this school from the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald had amassed millions of dollars through an investment in Sears, Roebuck and Company in the late 1890s and established a philanthropic fund to improve the well-being of Americans, particularly African Americans. As one of its primary goals the fund

³Eugene Sutherland to Thelma Babbitt, March 2, 1955, American Friends Service Committee Papers, Visits with Community Leaders, South Central Regional Office, 1954-1955, American Friends Service Committee Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as AFSC); "Baton Rouge Column," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 28, 1941, 7; "ESSO Boosters Picnic a Spectacle of Fun," *Weekly Leader*, June 28, 1952, 2; "ESSO Health Ass'n to Hold Election," *Weekly Leader*, March 29, 1952, 1; "Legislative Lobby Reports," *Weekly Leader*, June 28, 1952, 7.

⁴"Baton Rouge Raises Scout Camp Fund," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 8, 1940, 22.

established a program to build elementary schools for black children. It provided one-third of the money to construct the school, and the local community contributed the rest. In Baton Rouge, black parents, who wanted their children to attend a neighborhood school, raised the money for the new building and turned it over to the School Board to staff and administer. The board, over the protests of black parents, promptly assigned white children to the school and renamed it Gilmer Wright, after one of its deceased members. The racial diplomats who raised the money to construct the school knew that challenging the board on this issue would complicate their future dealings with whites, so they remained silent.⁵

The classification of Gilmer Wright as a white school revealed the disregard that many white Baton Rougeans had for the city's black citizens and hinted at the racial tension that the city's economic prosperity masked. In 1940, a Louisiana State University sociology class studying race relations polled a group of African Americans and discovered discontent within the black community. Black Baton Rougeans complained "that the lack of hospitalization, proper housing facilities, prejudicial attitudes on the part of whites and the low economic sphere" in which the city's blacks were placed created a situation that would lead to racial unrest instead of peaceful discussion. A year later, violence erupted. While responding to a call about a fight between two men at one of the city's black-owned theaters, the McKinley Theater,

⁵Patti Elizabeth Smith, "The Distribution of Rosenwald Schools in Louisiana and Their Suggested Impact on Black Education" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1992), 20-25; Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 28; Minutes of the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, June 30, 1943, Minute Book, vol. 4, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board Office, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

police chased their suspects into Ideal Drug Store. The officers beat and then arrested several people, including Leo's chauffeur. The Butler brothers had long been active in the NAACP and had worked with white leaders to improve conditions for black Baton Rougeans. These men never expected to be the target of such an attack. In the end, George paid the bail for every one arrested and then circulated a petition denouncing police brutality. Many racial diplomats, including members of the all-black Baton Rouge Civic League, several ministers, and numerous prominent black professionals signed it.⁶

Fearing racial unrest, white leaders convened a grand jury to investigate police brutality. Over two hundred African Americans attended the hearing, and many testified to the brutality of the Baton Rouge police force and the sheriff's department. One woman, Florence Atkins, claimed that police beat her because she refused to say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir," when they addressed her. Thomas Delpit, the owner of the Chicken Shack, one of the city's most popular black restaurants, testified that several officers entered his restaurant and beat him because he "did not know how to talk to a white man." Immediately following the incident, the state's leading African-American newspaper, the *Louisiana Weekly* reported, "This is the first time Negroes of Baton Rouge have been so aroused. They indignantly requested that the Attorney General investigate the reported police brutality and unwarranted arrests" and even threatened to

⁶"Discuss Race Relations in Baton Rouge," *Louisiana Weekly*, May 4, 1940, 4; Sociology Class Report, "The Negro in Baton Rouge, 1939-1940," (Louisiana State University, 1940), 48-56; "Baton Rougeans Protest Unwarranted Attacks on Citizenry by Policemen," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 28, 1941, 1; "Baton Rouge Column," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 28, 1941, 7; "Baton Rouge Citizens Seek Federal Aid to Stop Police Brutal Attacks on Negroes," *Louisiana Weekly*, July 26, 1941, 1.

send a petition to the federal government. In the end, the grand jury found that the police acted properly in using force in the arrests at Ideal Drug Store and that they had not used excessive force in other encounters with African Americans. Although they grumbled, the racial diplomats accepted the grand jury's ruling. But the brutality did not end. On December 25, 1942, police for no apparent reason launched a raid into one of South Baton Rouge's black neighborhoods. Armed with sawed-off shotguns, submachine guns, revolvers, and tear gas, they combed the area, terrorizing the citizenry and arresting sixty-nine African Americans. Once again, African Americans circulated a petition that white leaders ignored. The racial diplomats, rather than demand change, dropped the issue.⁷

In the 1940s, other groups of whites attacked the city's African-American population, with bus drivers being the worst offenders. Unlike many white Baton Rougeans, bus drivers had daily contact with large numbers of African Americans. They ferried black passengers around the city and expected them to follow their orders. In March 1944, a bus driver shot a black passenger for being insubordinate. The passenger, Wiley Kent, a defense plant worker from Washington, D. C., was visiting his parents in Baton Rouge. While riding a bus from his parents' house to his brother's home, several young white boys started calling the black passengers "niggers" and "black birds." Kent told them to stop, but the boys ignored him and continued their taunts. The driver did nothing until Kent reached his destination. As he disembarked, he

⁷"Baton Rouge Grand Jury Completes 'Wrong Way' Police Brutality Probe," *Louisiana Weekly*, August 2, 1941, 1; "Baton Rouge Citizens Continue Their Fight Against Police Brutality," *Louisiana Weekly*, January 23, 1943, 1.

held the door for two black women, and the driver angrily got off the bus and asked him why he was holding the door. When he tried to leave, the driver shot him. Once again, Baton Rouge's black population grumbled, and once again, the racial diplomats refused to confront the white power structure.⁸

Although these incidents strained race relations in Baton Rouge, they did not lessen the support of the black community for World War II. African Americans saw their backing of the war effort as proof of their loyalty and of their worthiness for full citizenship. Racial diplomats in Baton Rouge also believed that their support of the war would improve conditions for blacks when the fighting ended. Shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Southern University President Felton Clark, a racial diplomat who used his relationship with white leaders to secure funding for his school, declared "The negro [*sic*] is most proud of his record of loyalty to his country." He added that by supporting the war effort African Americans would show their worthiness for being integrated into "American life and democracy." Felton, the son of president emeritus of Southern J. S. Clark, had taken over as head of the university in 1938. Like his father, Felton Clark realized that accommodation and not confrontation could assure the safety of Southern. The city's Negro Chamber of Commerce also sponsored war bond rallies and parades to encourage black Baton Rougeans to show their patriotism by purchasing bonds. As Clark said at the 1941 rally, the best way to integrate black citizens into American life was for them to show their readiness for full citizenship. Other African

⁸Catherine Barnes, *Journey From Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 38; "Defense Worker Shot by Driver in Baton Rouge," *Louisiana Weekly*, March 4, 1944, 11.

Americans realized that their demonstrations of patriotism would never convince whites that they deserved equality.⁹

While the racial diplomats attempted to show their merit by purchasing war bonds and holding parades, thousands of black Baton Rougeans were drafted into a segregated armed forces. Most servicemen who later became activists came from backgrounds similar to those of the racial diplomats. The majority came from middle class families. Many were in college when the Japan launched its attack against Pearl Harbor. For the most part, the activists were at least a decade younger than the racial diplomats, and even before becoming soldiers, they took pleasure in defying the system of segregation at every available opportunity. But it was the war itself that convinced many young veterans to fight for racial equality.

African-American soldiers encountered discrimination on all fronts. They reported to segregated camps for training, lived in substandard quarters, and served in non-combat companies headed by white officers. Drafted into the Army Air Corps immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, dental school student Dupuy Anderson encountered a racist colonel at an induction center. Upon examining the new inductees, who were all medical students and second lieutenants in the Medical Administrative Corps, he commented, "Well I'll be damned, here's a bunch of niggers without syphilis or gonorrhea." At one point, the army sent Anderson to Baton Rouge's

⁹Iris Johnson Perkins, "Felton Grandison Clark, Louisiana Educator," (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1976), v; "Negroes Urged to Rally for Defense in Present Crisis," *State-Times*, December 22, 1944, 10; "Baton Rouge to Hold Bond Rally and Parade Tues.," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 9, 1945, 1.

military air base, Ryan Field, to serve as a medical officer. When he reported for duty, he received a cold reception.

I went over to the hospital, every typewriter stopped typing, every head turned toward me. A gray-haired colonel walked out; the captain gave him my papers. He threw them back to me [and] said, "They must have made a mistake." I took my papers, and I came home [and] took off my uniform. I felt like burning it. I stayed around here [for a year] and received my pay until I got orders to move. I got a letter from the Air Force surgeon general wanting to know where I had been. Where had I been? I was furious!"

The army then sent Anderson to the all-black Tuskegee Air Field, and this time his commanding officer accepted his paperwork. He soon discovered that conditions for black soldiers there were dismal as well.

The base was known as the old and the new base. We were put on the new base [and a group of white soldiers occupied the old base]. [There were] hardly any recreation facilities [on the new base], no swimming pools, nothing. Up on the main base, they had a nice club, swimming pool, and everything. We weren't allowed up there. So, a group of us decided we were going up there. We were given a reprimand [for our actions, but] they couldn't do anything about it. . . . People don't realize what we went through wearing a uniform.

Southern University student Johnnie Jones also encountered racism. As one of army's first black warrant officers, Jones held a position of leadership in his unit and occupied a position slightly below the officers' corps. Because he ranked higher than a regular enlisted man, he received benefits not afforded to the rank-and-file soldiers. He lived in the officers barracks, ate in their mess hall, and had his own driver. Yet his position meant nothing to white troops and the white citizenry. To them, he was just another "nigger." As Jones's unit prepared to leave for England, the army sent it to Charleston, South Carolina, for last minute preparations. Most bases had separate barracks for white and black officers, but Charleston did not. In fact, Jones was one of the first black officers to go through the facility. Unsure of how to handle him, the

base's administration decided to place him in the same barracks as white officers. After being shown to his living quarters, Jones unpacked his belongings and then left to attend to his duties. While he was gone, the white civilian crew that cleaned the barracks dumped all of his possessions out into the street. He reported the incident to his white colonel, but his commanding officer refused to take action, claiming that to do so would lead to bloodshed. Left with no place to stay, Jones went into the city and rented a room. On base, he also encountered racism from enlisted men who refused to salute him and called him derogatory names.¹⁰

Although the war served as a catalyst for their activism, most of these veterans had developed a resentment against segregation as children and even before the war had challenged the system whenever possible.¹¹ Born December 30, 1918, Dupuy Anderson grew up in middle-class black family in a predominately white neighborhood. His father worked as a postman, and his mother stayed at home to care for the family. With white children as his playmates, he became aware of discrimination at an early age. Unlike his white friends who rode the bus to a school that was only a few blocks away from their homes, he walked two miles to and from school every day. In the mid 1930s,

¹⁰Barbara Dennis, "A Second Front: Racial Violence and Black Soldiers in Alexandria, Louisiana During World War II" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1992), 31-33; Richard Dalifume, *Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 1-4; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 8, 1993, 6-10; Johnnie A. Jones, Sr., interview by author, tape recording, September 4, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, 27-35.

¹¹Chafe points out in *Civilities and Civil Rights* that the men and women who become activists during the civil rights movement grew up fighting the system in segregation in small ways and had parents or school teachers who encouraged defiance.

African Americans in Baton Rouge organized a Boy Scout troop, but the local white council refused to allow them to wear the organization's uniforms. Angered by this blatant discrimination, Anderson and some of his fellow Scouts protested. Initially, the local council refused to change its policy, but in the late 1930s relented and allowed them to wear uniforms. As a teenager, he also recognized the inequities that existed between black and white schools. On one occasion, the principal of his high school asked him and several other students to pick up a case of used books at a white high school. Realizing that the books he and the other students at his school had been using were cast-off, he became angry. His anger at the system of segregation continued to grow as he became an adult. His contempt for racial diplomats did as well. He recalled:

They were part of unions at the Standard Oil, which was a big company then, with its prejudices and racism. They were ministers and the like, and they had the control of the union. . . . They were little clowns. Baton Rouge wasn't a Montgomery or Birmingham or a Mississippi, but it had its faults and brutality and the like. But not as bad as some places. People were, "Don't rock the boat." Well, it's time we rock the boat.

One of his first acts of protest occurred before the end of the war. While on leave he traveled to Baton Rouge to take the state's dentistry exam. He went to the public library to study and to read through some medical books only to be told by the librarian that African Americans could not use the facility. She offered to send the book over to the black library, which consisted of a poorly lit room. Anderson, who was dressed in his uniform, refused and told her, "I'm not going. I'm going to read this book here." Sympathizing with the young soldier, the librarian led him to an empty reading room and allowed him to use the books. "I didn't need to go there every day," he recalled,

“but I went every day, walked through the front door and got the books and went in there and read.”¹²

Johnnie Jones’s activism also had deep roots. A native of Laruel Hill, Louisiana, a small town located in West Feliciana Parish, halfway between St. Francisville, Louisiana, and Woodville, Mississippi, he grew up defying the system of segregation. Unlike most other African Americans in the area who worked as sharecroppers, the Jones family rented their land outright from white landowners. His father, Henry Jones, served as an unofficial member of the West Feliciana School Board in 1918 and told his children that the way to achieve better lives for themselves was through education. Unlike the children of sharecroppers who could not attend school because they had to work in the fields, Jones and his younger brother, George, went every day. The school year for black children lasted six months, and then, their father hired the teacher to hold classes for the two boys and a few other neighborhood children for three more months. Because the family had very little money, Henry Jones paid the teacher with vegetables and meat that the family produced. Whites objected to the amount of time the Jones children attended school. White men driving log trucks from Woodville, Mississippi, often taunted them and attempted to force them off the side of the road as they walked to school. Although his brother and the other children would run from the drivers, Johnnie Jones refused to back down. He stood on the shoulder and faced them, but never stepped off the shoulder. Similarly, his father refused to back down on the issue

¹²Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 22, 1994, 23; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 15, 1993, 1-10, 16-18; Class Report, “The Negro in Baton Rouge,” 112.

of education for his children. Jones' intelligence became apparent while he was in elementary school, and that made whites, who disliked the idea of educating black children, uneasy. Before he completed elementary school, the man from whom his father rented land ordered him to take Jones out of school and put him to work in the field. Henry Jones refused. The school for black children in Laurel Hill ended with grade six, and there was no black high school in the area for Johnnie to attend. His father sent him to Southern University's demonstration school in Baton Rouge, and upon graduation, he enrolled in the industrial education program at Southern. Although his father scrounged together the money to pay his tuition to the demonstration school, Jones was the poorest member of his class and the only one whose parents farmed. To help out with expenses, he took a job as a dishwasher at the white-owned Mike and Tony's Restaurant but refused to take part in the degrading tipping practice perpetuated by white customers. They would announce that they were tipping and invite any black kitchen help — the waiters were all white — who wanted a tip to step outside. The white patrons would then flip coins into the air and require that the black workers catch them in their mouths.¹³

After the war, Jones resumed his studies and began to openly fight the system of segregation. He immediately helped to organize a college chapter of the NAACP at Southern. To stir up the student body, he made what he called a rabble-rousing speech, in which he proclaimed that he could no longer accept the racial status quo and urged them to join him in fighting it. "Parents and all didn't believe too much in the

¹³ Jones, interview, September 1, 1993, 1-64; Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 102-103.

movement that we was making," Jones said. They thought that he and this new group of activists were too radical, but Henry Jones supported his son's stand.¹⁴

Johnnie Jones made his determination to fight Jim Crow clear in the summer of 1946 when a state policeman pulled him over for a traffic violation and beat him. Jones was on his way to New Orleans to have a piece of shrapnel that had lodged in his neck during the Normandy Invasion removed. With him were two teenage boys on their way to visit family. The officer stopped Jones and accused him of speeding. (In a 1993 interview, Jones claimed that he had not been speeding.) The trooper pulled Jones out of the car by his collar, threw him to the ground, and began kicking him. After the attack, he let Jones go telling him, "Nigger, I don't want you to be driving over the speed limit anymore." Angered by the abusive treatment he received, Jones drove directly to the office of New Orleans civil rights attorney Alexander Pierre Tureaud, filed an affidavit with him and Daniel Byrd, Field Secretary for the NAACP, and decided to sue the state police. Tureaud and the NAACP brought his complaint to the superintendent of state police who met with Tureaud and other black leaders and promised to dismiss the officer. The racial diplomats viewed the meeting with the superintendent as an honor and saw the dismissal of the trooper as a victory for all African Americans. The superintendent urged Tureaud not to file a suit and claimed that if he did racial tensions in the state would escalate.

After conferring with the racial diplomats, Tureaud, who was the state's leading civil rights attorney, reluctantly agreed to drop the suit. Because Tureaud was one of the

¹⁴ Jones, interview, September 4, 1993, 51-53.

only black lawyers in the state and no white lawyer would take his case, Jones was forced to drop his suit, but he did so reluctantly. "Those guys hadn't gone to war. They hadn't fought over at the Normandy Invasion," Jones recalled. "They didn't have that same feeling [as those of us who did]. They were all good people and good friends of mine, and I respected [them]. But, . . . times was [*sic*] changing." He added that the racial diplomats belonged to a different generation, one that believed demonstrating and demanding change was too militant.¹⁵

Although Jones and the other World War II activists returned from the war determined to obtain equality and therefore chafed at the conservatism of racial diplomats, they lacked the organization and the support within the black community to challenge the racial diplomats' cautious leadership of the black community. In 1945, most activists were in their early or mid-twenties, were either still in college or just starting out in their careers, and had yet to establish themselves as community leaders. On the other hand, the older racial diplomats were well-established and well-respected. They owned businesses, taught school, and worked in the city's plants and refineries. The diplomats also played active roles within the black community and served as church deacons, sang in the choir, or headed Boy Scout troops. The black masses knew them, so when racial diplomats championed a cause, they could count on support from the African-American community. World War II activists realized that they could not strike out on their own and often cooperated with the racial diplomats on projects aimed

¹⁵ Jones Affidavit, ca. July 1946, A. P. Tureaud Papers, box 15, folder 21, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as APT); Jones, interview, September 4, 1993, 55-63.

at advancing the cause of racial equality. At the same time, they criticized the racial diplomats for accepting compromises offered by white leaders that actually perpetuated segregation. The activists also revitalized a project initiated by the racial diplomats but abandoned when they became controversial — the equalization of teachers' salaries. They even initiated some of their own programs and even garnered support for them from racial diplomats, most notably voter registration and the desegregation of Louisiana State University. Through their efforts to gain recognition within the black community, the World War II activists succeeded in creating a strong civil rights constituency in less than a decade.

The reaction of World War II activists to the construction of a public swimming pool for black children revealed their willingness to simultaneously work with and criticize the racial diplomats. In the summer of 1946, Reverend Willie K. Brooks, a thirty-eight-year-old employee of ESSO and scoutmaster for the city's black Boy Scout troop, proposed that African Americans build a public swimming pool for black children. At the time, the city's only public swimming pool was located in City Park and was reserved for whites. African Americans who wanted to swim were forced to brave the rivers and lakes that surrounded the city. The previous summer, several Boy Scouts from Brooks's troop drowned in the treacherous Mississippi and Comite Rivers while trying to earn their swimming badges. Saddened and angered by their deaths, Brooks decided that the city's African-American population needed a pool of its own. Knowing that white leaders would never agree to use public funds to build one, he proposed that the black community pay for its construction and then turn it over to the Recreation and Parks Commission to administer. Because he worked within the

traditional framework of race relations and did not demand that the city integrate the white pool or finance a black one, white leaders embraced his proposal and announced that they would raise \$40,000 of the \$60,000 necessary to construct the new facility. The willingness to pay for such a facility was a typical response of white leaders in New South cities. With the sanction of white leaders, racial diplomats sprang into action. They created the United Negro Recreation Association (UNRA) to direct the fund drive and asked African-American businessmen, churches, and other organizations to procure black volunteers to build the pool. With the approval of Felton Clark, Southern University proudly donated \$5,000.¹⁶

While racial diplomats whole-heartedly supported the idea of building a pool for black children, World War II activists opposed it. Although they agreed that black children needed the facility, they thought that the city should either pay for it or desegregate the white pool. Dupuy Anderson explained the World War II activists' reservations: "We were paying taxes. We were part of the community. They had a white swimming pool that we could not use. I objected to raising money to build a black swimming pool." He believed that the pool at City Park should be available to all children, not just white ones. Johnnie Jones concurred and also spoke out against using private funds to build the public pool. To him, the idea seemed ludicrous. Yet he realized that black children needed such a facility and donated \$100. As he put his

¹⁶Charles Smith, interview by Marc Sternberg, tape recording, August 24, 1994, October 25, 1994, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; "City Planners to Determine Site for Negro Pool," *State-Times*, August 2, 1946, 11A.

money into the collection plate, he told the racial diplomats, "Let this be the last time." Not accustomed to having their deals with whites questioned, the racial diplomats attacked Jones. They labeled him as a militant and attempted to discredit him in the black community by calling his ideas crazy and foolish. They claimed that by speaking out against the pool, he was challenging their authority as leaders. Jones defended himself. He asserted, "I wasn't against what Brooks was doing. Brooks was doing a community service. He was going about it the only way he thought it could be done." Jones and Anderson wanted to find a new way of doing things. Turning a deaf ear to the objections of World War II activists, racial diplomats proceeded with their fund raisers and within a year, raised the required \$20,000. In June 1947, city planners selected a site for W. K. Brooks Park pool three blocks away from the all-white City Park pool.¹⁷

In addition to reluctantly cooperating with the construction of the Brooks Park pool in 1946, World War II activists also rekindled interest in East Baton Rouge Parish's teacher salary equalization suit. In 1943, racial diplomats launched a legal battle to equalize the salaries of black and white teachers in East Baton Rouge Parish. Heartened by the 1942 ruling by Federal Judge Wayne Borah that required the Orleans Parish School Board to pay white and black teachers equal salaries, the Louisiana Colored Teachers' Association (LCTA) decided to file similar suits throughout the

¹⁷W. K. Brooks, interview by Marc Sternberg, tape recording, October 25, 1995, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 22, 1994, 24-25; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 20-25; Marc Sternberg, "Perpetuation, Accommodation, and Confrontation: The Evolution of Civil Rights Protest in Baton Rouge, 1946-1961" (senior thesis, Princeton University, 1995), 11.

state. The discrepancy between teacher salaries in East Baton Rouge Parish was appalling. First-year white teachers with no degree earned \$104.14 per month, and those with a degree earned \$123.85. The salary for an African-American teacher with fifteen years experience and a master's degree was only \$97.35. In early 1943, LCTA President J. K. Haynes contacted the pastor of Mt Zion Baptist Church, Gardner Taylor, a friend of Dupuy Anderson and an activist. Haynes asked Taylor to call a meeting of black leaders to discuss teacher salary equalization in East Baton Rouge Parish. A native of North Louisiana, Haynes was older than most World War II activists but shared their commitment to obtaining equality for African Americans. As president of the LCTA, which later became the Louisiana Education Association (LEA), he used the organization's funds to finance school desegregation suits. As the pastor of one of the city's largest and wealthiest African-American churches, Taylor commanded respect within the black community and occupied a position of leadership. When he asked the traditional black leaders to talk to Haynes, they complied. Several prominent black businessmen and educators attended the meeting at Mt. Zion Baptist. The attendees included: Doctor George Butler and Doctor Beverly V. Baranco, Jr., Horatio Thompson, ESSO employee Roosevelt Smith, and educators Leon Netterville and Fred Piper. After listening to Haynes, the group decided to sponsor a suit to equalize the salaries of black and white teachers and asked A. P. Tureaud to handle their case. Earlier that year, the LCTA had retained Tureaud as a lawyer and agreed to fund all of the education suits filed under the auspices of the NAACP. The group searched for several months but could not find a plaintiff because any complaint against the School Board would endanger the job of the teacher who filed the suit. This threat became a

reality in October 1943 when the Jefferson Parish School Board fired that parish's plaintiff, Eula Mae Lee, and the boards in several other parishes did the same. In the end, teachers in Baton Rouge decided to limit the danger of job loss by filing as a group. Yet they could not agree on how to proceed, and their suit died.¹⁸

Fearing that equalization would come at their expense, white teachers throughout Louisiana lobbied for a plan that would pay teachers according to their qualifications, experience, and ability. The State Board of Education endorsed their proposal and added merit and responsibility to the criteria that parishes would use to determine the pay level of their teachers. Parishes throughout the state quickly adopted these new guidelines.¹⁹

In 1946, Haynes once again tried to organize the black teachers in Baton Rouge to file suit for salary equalization. Once again, he enlisted the help of Gardner Taylor and also turned to W. W. Stewart, the activist dean of Southern's College of Education. Both men looked for a plaintiff, but no one wanted to sue. "Most of the people were afraid back then," Haynes recalled. "The black-white relationship was not very good, and there was a lot of fear about it [filing suit]." After searching for a plaintiff, the group convinced Malcolm Legarde, a World War II veteran who headed the Department of Math at McKinley High School, to act as the plaintiff. Knowing that

¹⁸J. K. Haynes interview by Miranda Kombert, tape recording, March 15, 1995, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Leon Wallace to A. P. Tureaud, March 29, 1953, APT, box 31, folder 13; A. P. Tureaud to Leon Wallace, December 6, 1943, APT, box 31, folder 13.

¹⁹Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 100.

Legarde would either be fired or forced to leave his position at McKinley, W. W. Stewart met with the parish's black teachers and asked each of them to donate ten dollars to help support him. The activists also tried to convince teachers to sign a petition declaring that Legarde represented them in this class action suit. Only a few black teachers signed. The majority feared that if they openly supported the suit, they would lose their jobs. Although most of them agreed to contribute ten dollars to a fund to support Legarde, few actually chipped in.²⁰

Fearing that the School Board would use intimidation to force Legarde to drop his suit, Tureaud filed suit before the board had a chance to act. Although not above resorting to intimidation to get their way, white leaders knew that meeting Legarde's suit with outright resistance would only unite the teachers and strengthen their resolve to sue. The board adopted a plan of action designed to keep Tureaud off balance. First, in August 1946, its secretary, C. L. Barrow, refused to give Tureaud a copy of the minutes for the meeting in which they voted on the budget for the 1946-1947 school year which prevented the civil rights attorney from knowing how much money had been allocated for teachers' salaries. Barrow claimed that the board had not approved or published the minutes, so he could not release the information. In a letter to Gardner Taylor, Tureaud claimed, "I am not expecting him to comply with this [request]." He

²⁰Malcolm Legarde to A. P. Tureaud, March 1, 1946, APT, box 31, folder 14; Willis Reed, interview by author, tape recording, June 23, 1998, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Willis Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg, tape recording, August 24, 1994, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

also warned Taylor not to discuss the suit because he believed that informants would tell board members about their plans. White leaders also tried to use the courts to delay the case. H. Payne Breazeale and Victor Sachse, two of Baton Rouge's most powerful attorneys, represented the board and filed petition after petition to secure continuances. A frustrated Tureaud wrote to NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) head Thurgood Marshall, "They are going to delay all they can and are using this method for that purpose."²¹

In addition to delaying the suit, the School Board also adopted a policy of divide and conquer; it offered to raise black teachers' salaries by 20 percent a year over five years if Legarde dropped his suit. Sachse warned, "any other terms . . . would impede the budgetary program of the Parish School Board." Tureaud denounced this offer and argued that a five-year delay was much too long. Although the proposed equalization schedule was protracted, Tureaud feared that the black teachers in East Baton Rouge Parish who supported Legarde would abandon the suit if he pushed the case through the courts. "It has been a difficult problem to get the teachers organized for these fights, because no one wants to sacrifice his job," he noted in a letter to Carter. Tureaud added that only a few die-hard teachers, the ones who started the equalization fight, wanted to continue with the case. The board destroyed the resolve of the less committed teachers by offering this incremental equalization and immediately raised the salaries and classifications of black teachers not involved in the suit. White leaders would return to

²¹A. P. Tureaud to Thurgood Marshall, April 30, 1946, APT Papers, box 31, folder 14; A. P. Tureaud to Gardner Taylor, August 30, 1946, *ibid.*; A. P. Tureaud to Robert Carter, August 12, 1946, *ibid.*; A. P. Tureaud to Thurgood Marshall, September 18, 1946, *ibid.*

their strategy of appeasement throughout the civil rights movement. "Baton Rouge is known for appeasement," Dupuy Anderson recalled. "Give us a little taste of the pie, and they quieted us down."²²

Those African Americans who wanted more than "a little taste of the pie" failed to get it. With the support of the majority of black teachers lost, Tureaud quickly negotiated a settlement with Sachse. The board agreed to equalize salaries in three years if the teachers agreed to drop their suit. J. K. Haynes denounced the plan. "We do not want any such compromise," he proclaimed. "They've had all these years to do these things and have done literally nothing. We insist that something must be done now." African-American teachers in East Baton Rouge Parish refused to follow Haynes' advice. Instead, they accepted the concessions offered by the School Board and trusted its members to equalize their pay by September 1948. Of course, the School Board did nothing.²³

Two years later, in April 1948, the teachers of East Baton Rouge Parish asked Tureaud to revive the case of *Legarde v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board*. Once again, the School Board maneuvered to avoid a legal battle. In early August 1948, it promised the parish's African-American teachers that it would equalize salaries beginning in the 1948-1949 school year if they dropped their suit. A year earlier, a

²²A. P. Tureaud to Robert Carter, September 23, 1946, APT, box 31, folder 14; A. P. Tureaud to Robert Carter, October 11, 1946, *ibid.*; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, January 5, 1994, 3.

²³A. P. Tureaud to Robert Carter, October 11, 1946, APT, box 31, folder 14; J. K. Haynes to A. P. Tureaud, October 2, 1946, *ibid.*; A. P. Tureaud to Victor Sachse, November 11, 1946, *ibid.*

federal judge had ordered the equalization of teachers' salaries in Iberville Parish, and in 1948, a similar ruling brought the salaries of white and black teachers in line in Jefferson Parish. At that point, the NAACP formulated a plan to file equalization suits throughout the state in an attempt to force the State Department of Education and the state legislature into action. To forestall further litigation, the Department of Education ordered every school system to equalize the salaries of its African-American and white teachers, and the legislature voted to allocate \$8 million for that purpose. With money in hand, the East Baton Rouge School Board quickly voted to equalize pay beginning in September 1948.²⁴

The School Board still punished Legarde for his insubordination. He lost his job as head of McKinley's Math Department. Although he obtained other teaching positions, the stigma of being the man who sued the School Board followed him. Years later, he was appointed principal for the summer school session, and somebody reminded the board that he had filed suit to equalize salaries. The board promptly dismissed him, and according to J. K. Haynes, he made no money that summer. Fearing that any interaction with Legarde would label them as troublemakers, African-American school teachers shunned him and his wife, and he lost his status within the black community.²⁵

²⁴Horatio Thompson to A. P. Tureaud, April 3, 1948, APT, box 31, folder 15; Victor Sachse to A. P. Tureaud, ca. August 1948, *ibid.*; Daniel Byrd to A. P. Tureaud, August 11, 1948, APT, box 9, folder 12; A. P. Tureaud to Horatio Thompson, August 14, 1948, APT, box 31, folder 15; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 106-108.

²⁵Steven Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), x; Haynes, interview by Miranda Kombert; Reed, interview, June 23, 1998.

The battle of teacher salary equalization reinforced the World War II activists' belief that in order to effect change African Americans needed to be a part of the political process. In *Black Ballots*, Steven Lawson noted that African Americans believed that once they attained the vote they could assert influence on elected officials. "Once Negroes experienced their vote, they could help elect sheriffs who would be less likely to brutalize them," Lawson wrote. "They would select officials who would see to it that ghetto streets were paved and cleaned and ultimately they would use their ballots to dismantle the entire Jim Crow caste system." Yet only a handful of black Baton Rougeans could vote. In 1940, the city's voting rolls included only 144 blacks. World War II veteran Willis Reed was one of them. Reed, who quit school in the fourth grade to help support his family, worked for a grocery wholesaler in Baton Rouge before the war. As a trusted employee, he made daily trips to the downtown Post Office to pick up the owner's mail. Always interested in politics and current events, he loitered around the Post Office's garbage can and read the newspapers and magazines that customers threw away. In the 1930s, Reed, then a teenager, became fascinated with Huey Long and established the city's only black Share-Our-Wealth club. For his interest in politics, African Americans chastised him and told him that he should keep his nose out of white people's business. Before the war, Reed decided to register to vote and encountered no resistance when he asked to sign up. He simply filled out the forms, and Registrar of Voters Jodie Smith declared him a registered Republican. Smith offered Reed no choice of party affiliation. Dupuy Anderson experienced similar treatment. When he reached the age of majority in 1939, he also decided to register to vote. After meeting all requirements, he wrote on his application that he wanted to be a

member of the Democratic Party. "They immediately stamped Republican [on my form]," he recalled. Both men became enfranchised before the 1944 Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright*, which declared Texas's white primary unconstitutional. Since the Democratic Party dominated politics in the South, the outcome of the primary election, in which Republicans could not vote, determined which candidate won the office. Republicans in Louisiana and in Baton Rouge rarely ran a candidate of their own in the general election. Since black Republicans could only vote in presidential elections, a few African-American Republicans posed no threat to the white-dominated Democratic party and its domination over the city's politics.²⁶

Even after the April 1944 Supreme Court ruling in *Smith*, East Baton Rouge Parish Registrar of Voters Jodie Smith ignored the ruling and refused to allow African Americans to register as Democrats. Until someone complained or threatened to sue, Smith and other white leaders in Baton Rouge saw no reason to change their policy. The chairman of the Louisiana Democratic Committee, Fred Odom, spoke for white Baton Rouge when he noted that a ruling against Texas's white Democratic primary did not affect the Louisiana primary system. "Even if it does apply," he added, "I doubt that

²⁶Howard, "Voting Behavior," *The Proceedings of the Louisiana Academy of Sciences*, XV (August 5, 1952): 88; Reed, interview, June 24, 1998; Anderson, interview Maxine Crump, December 8, 1993, 3; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 103; Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 108-109; Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 13-15.

it will change the set up in Louisiana until, or unless, the colored Democrats are invited to participate in party primaries by white Democrats.”²⁷

In 1942, the Baton Rouge chapter of the NAACP, at the time dominated by racial diplomats, established a registration committee, but instead of encouraging African Americans to become voters, its members wanted to call the attention of their “liberal-minded white friends” to the problem of black disenfranchisement. This strategy added few names to the rolls. Before the end of the war, a few activists, led by Gardner Taylor, tried to increase black registration, but they received little support from the racial diplomats. Taylor and his supporters decided that stressing the importance of registration to members of their communities, establishing a voter education program, and filing suit would be the only ways to insure black enfranchisement. The same group met a month later to raise money to fund a voter registration suit. Very little came of their meetings. The activists, whose numbers were small, failed to garner enough support in their communities for their voter education program or their suit.²⁸

World War II veterans returned home determined to register to vote and to convince others to do the same. They believed that the only way to secure and protect their civil rights was through the ballot. Although many African Americans remained

²⁷“Southerners Consider Plan to Offset Ruling Allowing Negro Voting,” *State-Times*, April 4, 1944, 5A.

²⁸Baton Rouge Branch News Bulletin, April 20, 1942, Branch Files, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Group II, box C69, folder 1, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers); “Leaders Discuss Right to Vote,” *Louisiana Weekly*, December 11, 1943, 2; “Second Statewide Ballot Conference Endorses \$10,000 Vote Campaign Fund,” *Louisiana Weekly*, January 15, 1944, 1.

loyal to the Republican Party, most World War II activists wanted to register as Democrats. Many blacks idealized Franklin D. Roosevelt and believed that his New Deal policies improved conditions for them during the Depression. Because the party dominated city and state politics, they knew that registering as Republicans would accomplish little. Voting in Democratic primaries would give them a voice in the electoral process and allow them some power over office holders.²⁹

Although they could tolerate a few black Republicans, white leaders did not want large numbers of African Americans voting, so they made the registration process difficult and demeaning for black Baton Rougeans. Yet, unlike their counterparts in Mississippi, whites in Baton Rouge never used violence or threats of violence to prevent black enfranchisement. To register, African Americans had to take time off work, go downtown, and stand in line. Most blacks worked for white employers and would have to explain why they needed time off. At best, they would lose a few hours pay; at worse, they would lose their jobs for wanting to register to vote. To keep their employers from knowing what they were doing, some African Americans would slip away from work without telling anyone where they were going. Even if willing to brave the wrath of their employers, blacks still had no guarantee of becoming a registered voter. Those who made it to the courthouse faced a difficult and degrading registration process. The registrar of voters required that applicants calculate their ages in days.

²⁹David Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 27-45; Patricia Sullivan, "Southern Reformers, the New Deal, and the Movement's Foundation," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, Armstead Robinson and Patricia Sullivan, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 82-87.

This requirement prevented many who wanted to vote from even attempting to register. If an applicant passed this math portion of the test, filling out the registration form provided the next obstacle. The registrar searched for any error on the form, and if he found one, even a minor one, he denied the application. If that happened, the rejected petitioner could not reapply for thirty days. The applications of African Americans who wanted to join the Democratic Party received the most scrutiny. The registrar rejected most of their forms by declaring that the applicants spelled the name of the party incorrectly. If an African American indicated that he wanted to register as a "Democrat," the registrar would tell him that the proper spelling was "Democratic." If he indicated that he wanted to be a member of the "Democratic" Party, the registrar would deny his application saying that "Democrat" was the name of the party. Usually, if an African American wanted to join the Republican Party, Smith simply added his or her name to the rolls.³⁰

To counter these obstacles, in 1945, World War II activists quietly set up voter registration schools throughout the parish. Johnnie Jones opened one in the North Baton Rouge community of Scotlandville. Dupuy Anderson and Raymond Scott set one up in South Baton Rouge, and Willis Reed created one in the city's First Ward. To encourage African Americans to attend the schools, the NAACP formed a speakers bureau to travel from church to church announcing times and locations of registration classes. Although they acted independently from one another, these schools shared many

³⁰Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 21; Payne, *I've Got that Light of Freedom*, 23-28, 47-55; Corinne Maybuce, interview by Jacqueline Holmes, tape recording, December 31, 1982, YWCA Oral History Series, Centroplex Branch, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 22-23.

common characteristics. Volunteers, most of them women, ran these schools and taught their students how to calculate their ages in days and showed them how to properly fill out a registration form. The “teachers” worked with potential voters until they memorized the answers to all of the questions. Registrar Smith would not allow African Americans to bring in slips of paper with this information written on them. To insure that their students actually went down to the courthouse to register, Jones or one of the other activists gave them free rides downtown or put them on buses and paid their fares.³¹

Even though all of the new applicants could properly fill out the forms, Jodie Smith continued to reject their applications because of “mistakes” on their registration forms. Jones knew this would happen and sent several groups of applicants to the courthouse before he attempted to register because he wanted to challenge Smith on his refusal to allow African Americans to register as Democrats. Knowing that Smith rejected applicants for “misspelling” the party’s name, Jones decided to abbreviate it. Smith declared that Jones failed because he did not spelled the word and informed him that he could not attempt to register again for thirty days. Jones ignored this order and returned the next day. “I was looking for trouble,” he recalled. He got none. While Smith wanted to intimidate African Americans to keep them from registering as Democrats, he did not want a direct confrontation with black applicants. He and other white leaders feared that if such a confrontation occurred that the city’s peaceful race

³¹Mrs. D. J. Dupuy to Lucille Baker, April 14, 1945, NAACP Papers, Group II, box C69, folder 1; Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 23; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 15, 1993, 46-48.

relations might be disrupted and thereby tarnish Baton Rouge's image of being a stable and progressive community.³²

In the late 1940s, Smith began allowing greater numbers of African Americans to register as Democrats. Although the reasons for his change in attitude remain unclear, in all probability, white leaders trusted in their relationships with racial diplomats and believed that they could control their ballots and, through the diplomats, the ballots of the black community. White leaders also knew that Smith could easily limit the number of African Americans registered. By 1952, nearly 6,000 blacks could vote in East Baton Rouge Parish, with most of them registering between 1948 and 1952. Although the number of registered blacks increased by over 5000 percent from 1940 to 1952, only 10 percent of the city's 60,000 plus African-American population could vote. World War II activists continued to encourage black Baton Rougeans to register, but the number of applicants declined rapidly in the early 1950s. Clay Williams, the assistant secretary of the NAACP and member of the East End Civic Club, which worked for increased voter registration, lamented that African Americans simply were not interested in voting. Willis Reed believed that blacks refusal to register grew out of psychological impact of segregation. African Americans in Baton Rouge were convinced that politics rested in the white domain and that they had no right to take part in the process.³³

³² Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 23-26.

³³Letter from the Executive Board of the Baton Rouge NAACP to A. P. Tureaud, December 22, 1947, APT; Reed, interview, June 23, 1998; Clay Williams to Lucille Black, November 29, 1948, NAACP Papers, box C69, folder 2.

Disappointed that only seventy new black names had been added to the rolls between January and June 1952, the city's activist African-American newspaper, the *Weekly Leader*, launched a voter registration campaign for the July 1952 city-parish elections. The paper stressed that the laws passed by the city-parish council and rulings by the School Board affected all citizens, including African Americans, and claimed that by voting they would have a voice in city-parish government. The paper even attempted to comfort its readers and informed them that the registration process was easy and that "the people in the [registrar's] office are very congenial and cordial." Several civic groups accepted the *Weekly Leader's* challenge and began urging African Americans to register. The Baton Rouge Women's Civic and Political Organization sent 15,000 letters to black women throughout the parish urging them to register and set up a voter education program to teach others how to fill out the form. The *Weekly Leader* even held a voter registration rally but reported sadly that attendance was sparse. In the end, the *Weekly's* voter registration campaign added only a few name to the rolls.³⁴

Despite the disappointing registration drives, the 1952 city-parish election marked the entrance of African Americans into the political arena and revealed the strength and solidarity of the black vote. In that election, two African Americans announced their candidacies for the School Board. Although one immediately dropped out of the race, the other, Carrie Taylor — a native Baton Rougean, owner of Carrie's

³⁴Howard, "Voting Behavior," 88; Perry Howard, *Political Tendencies in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 286; "Delirium," *Weekly Leader*, June 5, 1952, 4; "WPCO Registration School is Set for Friday Evening," *Weekly Leader*, June 14, 1952, 1; "A Last Moment Plea," *Weekly Leader*, June 28, 1952, 4; Clay Williams to Lucille Black, November 29, 1948, NAACP Papers; Reed, interview, June 23, 1998.

Beauty School, and member of the Negro Chamber of Commerce and the NAACP — remained in the race and received 1,815 votes in the primary election. Although she did not make the run-off, she received more votes than two white candidates. Even with her unprecedented candidacy, the issue of race played no role in either the campaigns or in the outcome of the election. Race baiting in Baton Rouge did not begin until after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.³⁵

In addition to trying to secure equality through voter registration, World War II activists also filed suit in federal courts to obtain full citizenship. One of the first inequities they attacked was the segregation of graduate and professional schools at Louisiana State University. Although battle to desegregate higher education was a statewide one, the city's white leadership led the fight against integration, and desegregation orders had a direct impact on race relations in Baton Rouge.

The first attack against the state's segregated system of higher education came in 1943 when the LCTA demanded that the state provide graduate education for black Louisianians. J. K. Haynes organized a committee on graduate and professional education, asked racial diplomat and president emeritus of Southern University, J. S. Clark, to serve as chairman, but named several activists to the committee. The activist dean of Southern's College of Education, W. W. Stewart, declared that he was tired of paying taxes to support a university that African Americans could not attend and suggested filing a suit to integrate the graduate programs at white Louisiana State

³⁵“Two Negroes Qualify for Office in City-Parish Race,” *Louisiana Weekly*, June 7, 1952, 1; “How East Baton Rouge Voted in Yesterday's Primary,” *State-Times*, July 30, 1952, 7A; “Jesse Webb, Jr.,” *Morning Advocate*, July 3, 1952, 11A; “Join the Fight,” *Morning Advocate*, August 22, 1952, 9B.

University. Stewart's proposal prompted Clark, who had cultivated a relationship with the state's board of education, to speak out. If a committee upon which he sat advocated integrating LSU, Clark warned, white leaders would vent their wrath upon Southern University and slash its funding.³⁶

After conducting a study, the committee decided not to sue for admission to LSU but instead to ask the state to pay the tuition of black students who went to graduate schools in other states, a practice that other southern states also adopted in the 1940s. Josh Gibson, head of the board of education, fearing that African Americans would attempt to desegregate LSU if other arrangements were not made, approved the plan and asked the legislature to appropriate \$100,000 to pay for the program. The bill breezed through both houses only to have Governor Jimmie Davis veto it. As a result, in August 1944, Kermit Parker, an African-American pharmacist from New Orleans, applied to LSU's Medical School. The university rejected his application because of his race. When the legislature met again, a bill funding out-of-state graduate study once again sailed through and this time, received the governor's signature. Haynes later admitted that the decision to request funds for out-of-state graduate study disappointed him, but he acknowledged its contribution. "Many of our teachers and doctors and lawyers and others who did their graduate work, did it at the expense of the state with out-of-state aid. It might have been a compromise, but at that time, I think it was the best that we could do." World War II activists, in an attempt to make the program as

³⁶Haynes, interview by Miranda Kombert.

costly as possible, immediately began flooding the state with requests for out-of-state tuition waivers.³⁷

State officials did not allocate funds for out-of-state tuition because they wanted to provide educational opportunities for African Americans. Rather, their so-called “generosity” grew out of the fear that black applicants would take the state to court and be granted admission to the state’s white colleges and universities. Their fear was not unfounded. In 1938, the U. S. Supreme Court had ordered the University of Missouri to admit Lloyd Gaines to its law school because the state failed to furnish a separate but equal one for African Americans. Louisiana officials also realized that to prevent the courts from ordering them to admit black students to LSU’s law, medical, and graduate schools they needed to establish these divisions at Southern, but they decided to wait until the situation warranted their creation.³⁸

After Parker’s fight to enter the Medical School ended with the rejection of his application, the next applicant to LSU, Charles Hatfield, proved more persistent and forced officials to devise a plan to keep him out of the university. On January 10, 1946, Hatfield wrote to LSU’s registrar expressing his desire to enroll in the Law School. He clearly stated that he had received his undergraduate degree from Xavier University in New Orleans, an all-black private school, and that he wanted to enroll that summer. Fourteen days later, Law School Dean Paul Hebert informed him, “LSU does not admit

³⁷“Louisiana Board Asks \$100,000 for Negro Study,” *Louisiana Weekly*, May 20, 1944, 1; “State has Authorized S. U. to Set Up Medical School,” *Louisiana Weekly*, October 28, 1944, 1; Haynes, interview by Miranda Kombert.

³⁸George Lynn Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges: Oklahoma’s Landmark Cases* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), ix.

colored students” but added that the state of Louisiana had recently authorized the creation of a law school at Southern. When Hatfield wrote to Southern’s president, Felton Clark, asking about the new division, Clark replied that his university did not have a law school.³⁹

Telling Hatfield to apply to a nonexistent law school was just one of many delaying tactics university officials used to prevent him from filing a suit. In the summer of 1946, Hatfield resubmitted his application, this time directly to LSU’s Board of Supervisors. Realizing that he would not easily give up, a special joint committee of the Board of Supervisors and the State Board of Education convened to discuss the problem of black applicants. The committee agreed that Hatfield met all requirements for admission, “except for his race,” and that the only way to get around the *Gaines* decision would be to create a law school at Southern. Yet until the school opened, the courts could force LSU to admit Hatfield, so officials devised an ingenious method to delay the inevitable suit. The university’s attorney, B. B. Taylor, advised Board of Supervisors President James McLemore and Dean Hebert to make themselves scarce. In an August 12 letter to McLemore, he wrote, “We might get a little time from these colored students by telling them that you are out of the state and will not return for some weeks.” Hebert and McLemore followed Taylor’s advice. When Hatfield’s attorney, A. P. Tureaud, wrote to Hebert on August 22 asking for a clarification of LSU’s position on the admission of black students, Taylor replied, five days later,

³⁹Charles Hatfield to Registrar, January 10, 1946, APT, box 66, folder 22; Paul Hebert to Charles Hatfield, January 24, 1946, *ibid.*; Felton Clark to Charles Hatfield, February 15, 1946, *ibid.*

saying that both Hebert and McLemore were out of state but assured him that LSU was studying the question. On September 5, 1946, the joint committee met and voted unanimously to establish a law school at Southern beginning in the 1947-1948 school year. Days later, Taylor met with Tureaud and attempted to persuade him "to defer taking legal action against the University." He also suggested that Hatfield attend an out-of-state law school until the one at Southern opened. Far from being dissuaded, Tureaud informed Taylor that a suit would be filed within days.⁴⁰

Tureaud faced a dilemma. In July 1946, NAACP Legal Defense Fund Attorney, Robert Carter warned him, "Hatfield will definitely go to some other law school in September if we do not file suit." Yet Tureaud and LDF attorneys delayed for nearly two months because they could not decide whether to file the suit in state or federal court. On this issue, Tureaud received conflicting advice. Thurgood Marshall, head of the LDF team, wanted to follow existing NAACP policy and file in state court while Robert Carter urged breaking with tradition and going directly to a federal district court. Following Marshall's advice, Tureaud chose to file both Hatfield's suit and one to desegregate LSU's Medical School in a state court. In April 1947, a state judge refused to admit Hatfield and Viola Johnson, the Medical School applicant, saying that the

⁴⁰Report of the Meeting of the Representatives of LSU and Representatives of the State Board of Education, August 12, 1946, Board of Supervisors Records, Record Group #A0003, drawer 4, box 1, folder 294, University Archives, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; B. B. Taylor to McLemore, *ibid.*; B. B. Taylor to Tureaud, August 27, 1946, APT, box 66, folder 22; A. P. Tureaud to Paul Hebert, August 22, 1946, *ibid.*; Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Committee on Higher Education for Negroes in Louisiana, September 5, 1946, Board of Supervisors Records, drawer 4, box 1, folder 294; B. B. Taylor to James McLemore, September 18, 1946, *ibid.*; B. B. Taylor to A. P. Tureaud, September 17, 1946, *ibid.*

Board of Education had taken steps to open both a law school and a medical school at Southern. The decision to file in state court puzzled and disappointed some black leaders. In a 1995 interview J. K. Haynes said, "I've never understood why Tureaud filed it in state court." Yet, he conceded, "They gave us the Southern University Law School which was a blessing. When I started out, we had one black lawyer and that was A. P. Tureaud."⁴¹

In the remaining years of the 1940s, several other African Americans applied to LSU only to be turned down. In light of these rejections and countless others in schools throughout the South, the LDF reevaluated its strategy. After losing case after case in state courts, its attorneys decided to go directly to the federal courts with their school desegregation suits. Employing their new strategy, in 1950 LDF lawyers filed suit on behalf of Hermann Sweatt against the University of Texas's Law School and in it attacked the constitutionality of "separate but equal." They argued that segregation automatically meant inequality and pointed out the huge disparities between Texas' black and white institutions of higher education. They also compared the University of Texas' Law School with the state's black law school and showed that tangible inequalities existed, such as the lack of a law library and a faculty at the black school. On June 5, 1950, the United States Supreme Court found the separate law school inferior and ordered the University of Texas to admit Sweatt.⁴²

⁴¹Robert Carter to A. P. Tureaud, July 10, 1946, APT, box 66, folder 22; Robert Carter to A. P. Tureaud, September 4, 1946, *ibid.*; Haynes, interview by Miranda Kombert.

⁴²Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 65 -78.

Heartened by the *Sweatt* decision, African Americans in Baton Rouge and in Louisiana once again prepared to attack segregation at LSU. With the support of the Louisiana Education Association (LEA), formerly the LCTA, a group of black applicants from Baton Rouge decided to march to the campus and to fill out applications for various graduate and undergraduate programs. Yet once again black leaders were divided. After hearing about the proposed march, Tureaud attempted to dissuade the organizers from holding it. Previously the NAACP's lawyers conference had agreed to conduct a fight against school segregation at all levels, but had decided not to begin filing suits until the national office had drafted and approved a plan of action. Refusing to wait for permission to proceed, on July 6, nine African Americans, six of whom were veterans, marched to LSU to apply for admission.⁴³

LSU's president, Harold Stoke, a northerner, immediately contacted the university's attorneys for advice. They told him to allow the men to submit their applications and to turn them over to the Board of Supervisors for review. When Stoke gave them to the board, he noted that all nine men met "formal requirements for admission." He added that before the recent Supreme Court decision, the university could have simply turned them down, but the *Sweatt* ruling raised "serious questions as to the validity of the University's basis for the rejection of these applicants." Refusing to admit African Americans before directly ordered to by the courts, the board ignored his advice.⁴⁴

⁴³A. P. Tureaud to J. B. Moore, June 29, 1950, APT, box 70, folder 1.

⁴⁴Administrative Council Meeting, July 11, 1950, Office of the President Records, Record Group #A0001, drawer 6, box 2, folder 1127, University Archives,

At this point, NAACP attorneys sprang into action. Thurgood Marshall urged A. P. Tureaud “to push all of these cases as hard as possible.” Within days, Tureaud wrote J. K. Haynes, whose organization funded the LSU desegregation suit, and asked him to get the applicants together. African-American leaders decided not to pursue all of these cases but rather chose to focus all resources and attention on desegregating the Law School. This decision brought with it a dilemma — whom to select as the plaintiff. The choice came down to two, brothers, Roy and Henry Wilson from Ruston, Louisiana. Haynes wanted Henry to be the plaintiff. Although he had not graduated from college, Henry had completed one year of law school in Texas and met the necessary requirements for enrollment at LSU. Haynes stated that something about Roy made him feel uneasy, but Tureaud and LDF lawyers believed Roy’s chances for admission were better than Henry’s because he had a college degree. In a rush to file a class action suit before the semester began, they did not investigate Roy Wilson’s past.⁴⁵

At Wilson’s hearing, NAACP attorneys called several witnesses, including the presidents and the Law School deans of both Southern and LSU. Their testimony showed that the quality of LSU’s Law School facilities, library, and faculty far exceeded those at Southern, which had been established only three years before. While LSU could not deny the disparity that existed between the two schools, its attorneys

Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Harold Stoke to LSU Board of Supervisors, July 18, 1950, Board of Supervisors Records, drawer 9, box 1, folder 698.

⁴⁵Thurgood Marshall to A. P. Tureaud, July 12, 1950, APT, box 73, folder 1; A. P. Tureaud to U. Simpson Tate, July 31, 1950, *ibid.*; J. K. Haynes to A. P. Tureaud, September 9, 1950, APT, box 73, folder 2; A. P. Tureaud to Thurgood Marshall, September 11, 1950, *ibid.*

attacked the suit itself, claiming it did not meet the criteria for a class action suit. Its attorney, Lawrence Brooks, claimed that “the numbers of Negro citizens in Louisiana seeking admittance to LSU are not numerous.” Of course, the university’s refusal to even consider black applicants probably helped to keep that number down. The court denied Brooks’ request and ordered the University to admit Wilson immediately. It ruled that “the Law School at Southern University does not afford the plaintiff educational advantages equal or substantially equal to those that he would receive if admitted to the Department of Law of the Louisiana State University. . . .” With the semester already underway, Wilson, accompanied by J. K. Haynes, enrolled at LSU in late October 1950 and began taking classes.⁴⁶

Although the officials complied with the ruling and admitted Wilson, they immediately appealed the judges’ decision and began investigating Wilson’s past. Within days, Hebert’s successor, Law School Dean Henry McMahan, phoned Tureaud and began asking questions about Wilson’s character. In a letter to Thurgood Marshall, Tureaud said that Wilson had recently told him that he and his wife were separated, but Tureaud added that he did not think this would be serious enough to keep Wilson out of LSU. Unbeknownst to Tureaud, problems with Wilson’s character went far beyond his separation. In a matter of weeks, school officials learned about Wilson’s long history of violent behavior. Grambling University had suspended him for six months for fighting. He briefly attended Southern and left after an altercation with his roommate. He lost

⁴⁶“Asks Admission Suit Dismissal,” *State-Times*, September 29, 1950, 1; *Wilson v. Board of Supervisors*, October 7, 1950, Board of Supervisors Records, drawer 4, box 2, folder 299.

three defense jobs for disputes with other workers, received a dishonorable discharge from the army, and was arrested and jailed for perjury in connection with his divorce. Of course none of this information appeared on his application to LSU, and neither Haynes nor Tureaud knew about Wilson's previous problems. But Wilson's past gave LSU, which required its students to have good character, legitimate grounds to expel him.⁴⁷

Wilson's expulsion threw Tureaud and LDF attorneys into a tailspin. Thurgood Marshall told Tureaud, "There is no doubt in my mind that Wilson will be bounced out with as much ceremony and with much publicity and we will get bad press on it." He went on to say that the case took precedence and that they should immediately substitute another plaintiff. He also advised Tureaud not to defend Wilson and added, "If we had known of his past background and his character, we would not have represented him in the first place." He also urged Tureaud to make this clear to LSU, its attorneys, and the judges and advised him to make careful background checks of future plaintiffs. In the end, Wilson's expulsion did not destroy the case. Tureaud found a new plaintiff, Robert Collins, and the next year, he and another student, Ernest N. Morial, began their studies and eventually graduated from the LSU.⁴⁸

⁴⁷A. P. Tureaud to Thurgood Marshall, November 8, 1950, APT, box 73, folder 2; Deposition of Roy Wilson, January 3, 1951, Board of Supervisors Records, drawer 4, box 1, folder 299, 4 - 38; A. P. Tureaud to Thurgood Marshall, January 4, 1951, APT, box 73, folder 8.

⁴⁸Thurgood Marshall to A. P. Tureaud, November 15, 1950, APT, box 73, folder 2; Thurgood Marshall to A. P. Tureaud, January 10, 1951, *ibid.*

With the desegregation of the Law School underway, black leaders turned their attention to the Graduate School. In June 1951, Lutrill Payne submitted an application for admission to the master's program in agriculture. LSU's new president, General Troy Middleton, a native Mississippian and a veteran of both world wars, immediately rejected it. The state, he explained, "maintained LSU for white students." But the university could do nothing to keep him out. Lutrill Payne was not another Roy Wilson. He had an exemplary past and enjoyed the wholehearted support of the LEA and the NAACP. In fact, the forty-year-old Payne served on the executive committee of the NAACP. Before taking a job as a vocational agricultural instructor who taught farmers better production methods, he had worked as a teacher and a principal in his home parish of Natchitoches. His wife of ten years also taught school and served as a principal. Although accepted by Cornell University, Payne decided to sue for admission to LSU because he wanted to attend graduate school in Louisiana. On June 13, federal Judge Herbert Christenberry issued an injunction ordering Payne's admission. The following day, he registered for the summer session and moved into a dorm. At the end of the summer, Payne reported to Tureaud, "I had the most enjoyable summer at LSU. I am pleased to tell you that everyone at LSU treated me most royal [*sic*]. . . . You may be assured that my conduct was, and will be [,] of such a nature that you will never regret your effort."⁴⁹

⁴⁹"Negro Seeks to Enter LSU," *State-Times*, June 2, 1951, 1; "Teacher Files Suit Against LSU," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 9, 1951, 1; Lutrill Payne to A. P. Tureaud, May 20, 1951, APT, box 69, folder 15; E. A. Johnson to Tureaud, May 16, 1951, *ibid.*; "LSU Graduate School Ordered to Admit Negro Applicant," *Morning Advocate*, June 13, 1951, 1; "Negro Enters Graduate School," *Daily Reveille*, June 14, 1951, 1; Lutrill Payne to A. P. Tureaud, August 21, 1951, APT, box 69, folder 15.

Although it is doubtful that LSU treated Payne royally, he and the several hundred graduate students who followed him in the 1950s were not segregated on campus. They lived in the same dormitories, sat in the same classrooms, and ate in the same dining halls as white graduate students. For the most part, the university community did not welcome them. James Reddoch, special assistant to Troy Middleton, taught one of the first black graduate students. "I had one of them in class," he recalled, "There were a few students who told me that they wanted a seat where they would be in front of and not near the black student. When he came into class, he chose to sit on the back row." The reaction of Reddoch's students was mild compared to several other incidents on campus: two cross burnings; one near-riot at a football game; rocks thrown through the window of a black married couple's campus apartment; and a shooting that injured two black graduate students outside of their dormitory. University officials even apologized for the presence of black graduate and law students. On one occasion Board of Supervisors member Stewart Slack stated, "Louisiana State University has repeatedly made it clear it does not want Negro students. . . . It admits them under court order. They attend LSU through no fault of the University."⁵⁰

Although they attempted to achieve equality through legal means, World War II activists also challenged the system of segregation whenever the opportunity arose. In

⁵⁰James Reddoch, interview by author, tape recording, February 17, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 28 ; Affidavit of Troy Middleton, *Board of Supervisors et al. v. A. P. Tureaud*, 15540, U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, APT, box 7, folder 19; Vertical File - Segregation - Education Higher, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

1949, for example, they refused to march in a segregated American Legion parade being held as part of the organization's state convention. As a black member of the arrangement's committee, Willis Reed helped to plan the convention but knew nothing about the segregated parade. When he learned that white veterans would march in the front half of the parade and black veterans would bring up the rear, Reed demanded that the parade be integrated. In a meeting with the commander of his post, Fred Piper, who served as a captain in the army and worked as a teacher at McKinley High School, the two agreed that Reed should continue to oppose the segregated parade. Because he feared for his job, Piper could not make his views public. Reed worked for the black-owned Keystone Insurance Company and had a degree of job security. When the white legionnaires discovered that Reed's post intended to pull out of the parade if it remained segregated, they demanded a meeting to discuss the situation. Representatives of the white Nicholson Post and the Legion's state officers met in Reed's office. The whites, who felt uncomfortable negotiating with the activist Reed, asked that racial diplomat W. K. Brooks to attend the meeting. Reed refused because he feared that Brooks would agree that the parade should remain segregated. "Reverend Brooks was well liked by both whites and blacks," according to Reed, "but mostly by the white people, and they [the whites] believed Reverend Brooks could persuade us to get back in the parade."⁵¹

Instead, he called his new pastor, Reverend Theodore Judson Jemison of Mount Zion Baptist Church. Born in 1919 in Selma, Alabama, Jemison replaced Gardner Taylor as the church's pastor in 1949. The son of D. V. Jemison, president of the

⁵¹Reed, interview, June 23, 1998; Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg.

National Baptist Convention (NBC), he belonged to one of the nation's premier black Baptist families. Initially, Jemison occupied the middle ground between the racial diplomats and World War II activists, and until the early 1960s could not decide to which group he belonged. He supported many of the goals of the activists, but his ambition to succeed his father as president of the NBC prevented him from offering them his full support. Jemison realized that the conservative members of the convention would never elect a radical as their president. Reed knew very little about the newcomer Jemison but hoped he would side with him. After tracking Jemison down at a local prayer meeting, Reed asked him to attend the meeting with the white legionnaires, and the young pastor agreed. Initially, Reed regretted his decision to invite Jemison because he seemed to be siding with the whites. He told them, "We're all in this thing together, and we're going to have to try to live together." Jemison's comments startled Reed, who feared Jemison would give in. Instead, Jemison told the white Legionnaires, "If we went into the foxholes together and we fought battles together, we can march down the street together." The whites disagreed and refused to allow the black veterans to march alongside them; Reed's post pulled out of the parade.⁵²

While Jemison's stand on the parade seemed to challenge white authority, it actually followed the city's traditional pattern of race relations. Initially, Jemison used

⁵²Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg; Sternberg, "Perpetuation, Accommodation, and Confrontation," 34; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 145, 336; T. J. Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, tape recording, March 15, 1995, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Reed by Marc Sternberg; Reed, interview, June 23, 1998.

conciliatory language when dealing with the whites at the meeting. He assured them that he did not want to challenge the system of segregation. Only when whites refused to negotiate a compromise on the parade's line-up did he decide that the black participants should pull out of the parade. Jemison's stand delighted World War II activists who believed that he would follow in the footsteps of his predecessor Gardner Taylor.

By the end of the 1940s, the World War II activists had started to challenge the racial diplomats for the leadership of the black community. They attracted the attention of the black masses by denouncing the construction of Brooks Park pool, reviving the teacher salary equalization suit, establishing voter education programs, and supporting the NAACP's efforts to integrate LSU's Law and Graduate Schools. To preserve their standing in the black community, the racial diplomats were forced to adopt some of the activists' programs, such as voter registration. The initiatives of World War II activists also caused white leaders to agree to some changes in the system of segregation. To preserve racial stability, white leaders accepted teacher salary equalization and allowed increased voter registration. But they refused to make any sweeping changes to the system of segregation. By employing the tactics of delay and diplomacy, white leaders successfully stalled most of the activists' initiatives. Surprisingly, segregationists offered little opposition to these changes in the system of Jim Crow, and white leaders held out hope that race relations in this booming industrial center would remain peaceful. They soon discovered that the World War II activists wanted more than token changes in the system of segregation and would defy both the racial diplomats and the white leaders to achieve them.

Chapter 2

The Bus Boycott, 1953

As the 1940s ended, racial diplomats remained firmly entrenched as leaders of the black community, but the status of World War II activists had risen. Their commitment to obtaining equality for African Americans had attracted the attention of the black masses, but their following remained small. Many blacks refused to take part in the activists' initiatives, especially voter registration, because they feared white reprisals. In 1953 when the city-parish council voted to raise fares on the city's buses, it unintentionally raised the status of World War II activists. The fare increase angered black bus passengers who made up more than 80 percent of the system's riders. Although they paid full fare, the African-American men and women who used public transportation were forced to sit or stand in the backs of buses while the front ten seats, reserved for whites, remained empty. Following the traditional pattern of race relations, the black passengers asked the racial diplomats to intercede with white officials for them. After hearing their request, white leaders quickly enacted legislation that ended reserved seating but preserved segregation on the city's buses. Both black and white leaders believed the new ordinance was logical, and neither expected any adverse reaction to it. Although the new law did not challenge the system of segregation, it set off a series of protests that began in June 1953 with a bus drivers' strike and ended with an African-American boycott of the public transportation system. The boycott, which initially united Baton Rouge's black community, shattered the fragile coalition that existed between racial diplomats and World War II activists and perpetuated the pattern of protest, compromise, and anger that characterized the city's civil rights movement.

The fight over reserved seating began quietly on February 11, 1953, when Reverend T. J. Jemison, who usually tried to be an activist and a racial diplomat simultaneously, denounced the fare increase at a meeting of the city-parish council and asked its members "to take some action to have the bus company allow negro [sic] passengers to occupy seats [usually reserved for whites] on buses where there were no white passengers." Although the thirty-two-year-old Jemison was a relative newcomer to Baton Rouge, his position as pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the city's largest and most prosperous black church, made white leaders take notice. At its February 25 meeting, the council voted to amend the city's seating code to allow African Americans to sit in the front seats of the buses if they did not occupy the same seat as or sit in front of a white passenger. It abolished reserved seating but required African Americans to board the buses from back to front and white passengers from front to back. The race with the majority of riders determined where the line of segregation began. The proposed ordinance would also allow bus drivers to order black or white riders to sit in their own sections when seats there became available. The council decided to hold a public hearing before taking a final vote but did not advertise it in any of the city's newspapers. At the sparsely attended hearing, Jemison spoke again. He told the council that "the negroes [sic] did not want to raise an issue but that they mainly wanted to request that when they pay fifteen cents to ride a bus that they be given a seat." The council passed the new seating law, Ordinance 222, without a dissenting vote and ordered it to go into effect on March 19.¹

¹Minutes, February 11, 1953, February 25, 1953, March 11, 1953, all in East Baton Rouge City-Parish Council Minute Book, Administrative Building, Baton Rouge,

White office holders agreed to end reserved seating for several reasons. First, allowing the buses to run with vacant seats was simply uneconomical and impractical. Buses could carry more passengers on routes running through black neighborhoods if African Americans could sit in seats previously reserved for white passengers. Second, the existing relationship between racial diplomats and white leaders contributed to the enactment of the new law because it allowed white leaders to grant special favors to their African-American "friends." Jemison described his relationship with white leaders and their reaction to the proposed ordinance: "I had developed a fine rapport with several members of the city council and also the mayor. They were all fair-minded people. From the city government, from the mayor, from the city council, we had no opposition. We had no opposition in high places." The dramatic increase in the number of black voters from 144 in 1940 to nearly 6,000 in 1952 also gave African-American leaders enough political clout to influence the city's political leaders. In fact, black voters had provided the margin of victory for Mayor-President Jesse Webb, Jr., in the 1952 election, and although he later denied it, he probably backed Ordinance 222 as a favor to his black supporters. Finally, the city-parish council believed that since the ordinance affected very few whites that there would be no outcry against it.

Although those in "high places" did not object to the new law, they did not enforce it. Nor did racial diplomats, who were satisfied with the concession granted to them by the white power structure, ask for it to be implemented. For nearly three months, the front ten bus seats remained reserved for white passengers, even on routes

Louisiana; "Bus Drivers Strike Over Race Issue," *State-Times*, June 15, 1953, 6.

going through black neighborhoods. In early June, World War II activists brought an end to the apathy of the white leaders and racial diplomats. Although little is known about the incident, several World War II activists remember that they demanded action after a bus driver manhandled an unknown African-American woman who attempted to occupy one of the front seats. For them, merely having a law on the books was not enough. They wanted it enforced. Postal carrier Gus Williams recalled, "the young military veterans were incensed." Willis Reed, the president of the First Ward Voters' League, became the spokesman for the World War II activists. He contacted the parish's political boss and the mayor's father, Jesse Webb, Sr., and asked for a meeting to discuss the lack of enforcement of Ordinance 222. Webb, Sr. had served as the parish's tax assessor for over a decade and held immense power in the parish. Although his son occupied the office of mayor, many believed that he controlled the office. Although Webb, Sr. agreed to meet with Reed, he made him wait for more than thirty minutes in an outer office while he laughed and joked with some of his cronies in the inner one. Webb, Sr. finally called him into the inner office, and he made the chief of police, Joe Green, listen to Reed's complaint. The World War II activist told the men about the problems on the buses and outlined the drivers' brutal treatment of black passengers, especially black women. After listening to his plea, Webb, Sr. turned to the chief and told him, "Go up to the [bus] barn and tell those boys, the bus drivers, that they['re] not [officers]. They don't have any business arresting nobody on the buses." He added that Green's officers should not arrest anyone unless a fight broke out, and if that happened, they should bring in both parties, white and black. Reed believed that Webb, Sr. agreed to enforce the ordinance as repayment for the support the First Ward

Voters League gave his son in the previous year's mayoral election. The bus company officials heeded Webb, Sr.'s, order because in early June, H. Flynn Cauthern, its manager, issued a directive requiring the drivers to comply with Ordinance 222.²

Racial diplomats immediately told the black community about Reed's successful meeting with Webb and the bus company's directive. They even printed a flier describing the ordinance and advising black passengers not to give up their seats when ordered to by the drivers. If the police tried to intervene or arrest them, the flier told them, "Do not resist arrest . . . take the officer's badge number so it can be reported to the proper authorities." Jemison decided to test the bus company's directive himself. "To show the people," he recalled, "I immediately went downtown and sat on the front seat to ride back" to my church. When the driver ordered him to move, Jemison replied, "If you're talking to me driver, this seat seems strong enough to hold me, so I'm going to sit here." At that point, the driver drove the bus directly to the police station, and an officer boarded the bus. The policeman told Jemison, "You can do one of three things. You can get your money and get off; you can get up and go to the back [with] the rest of the colored folks; or you can go [to jail]." Jemison refused to do any of the three. Instead he showed the officer a copy of the ordinance, and when the policeman said he had never heard of it, Jemison replied, "One of the first lessons I learned in civics was

²Gus Williams, interview by Betty Morse, tape recording, August 11, 1983, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 30; Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg.

that ignorance [of the law] is no excuse. . . . The fact that you don't know it, doesn't mean it's not a law." The officer backed down, and Jemison retained his seat.³

Challenges like Jemison's to their authority angered the drivers. Before the ordinance, they controlled seating on the buses. When police officers sided with black passengers, the drivers became incensed. They believed that white leaders had compromised the principles of white supremacy by enacting Ordinance 222, and they wanted to reclaim what their leaders had given away. They knew that if they complied with the law, they would lose one of the things that set them apart from their black passengers, white superiority. Under the system of segregation, even the lowest classes of whites, including the bus drivers, ranked higher in society than the wealthiest, well-educated African Americans. When ordered to comply with Ordinance 222, the drivers appealed, through their union, to Mayor Jesse Webb, Jr. He claimed that he did not have a vote on the council and could not repeal the law. The mayor advised them to talk to the city council. Believing that the ordinance made sense financially and quieted the World War activists and their supporters who wanted to end segregation on the buses, the council refused either to rescind or to amend the law.⁴

For the drivers, the final insult came on June 13 when Jemison intervened in an argument between a driver and an African-American woman who refused to move to

³Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg; Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, March 15, 1994, 2; Jemison, interview by Roderick Jones, Derrek Vaughn and Michelle Johnson, tape recording, June 15, 1995, Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 6.

⁴"Bus Drivers Strike Over Race Issues," *State-Times*, June 15, 1953, 1.

the back of the bus. In an attempt to get her to give up her front seat, the driver summoned a police officer and demanded that he arrest her. When the policeman tried to force her to move, Jemison stepped in and told her to remain seated. He assured her that the police officer and the bus driver were the ones breaking the law, not her. The officer then attempted to arrest Jemison for interfering, but his desk sergeant, fearing the reaction of Webb, Sr., ordered him not to detain the young pastor. During the confrontation, Cauthern arrived. Jemison told him, "If I was manager of the bus company, I would suspend him [the driver] or fire him." Cauthern, knowing that his driver had indeed violated Ordinance 222, took Jemison's advice and suspended him.⁵

The drivers viewed the suspension as the ultimate indignity. Siding with a black man, even a well-educated one who served as pastor of the city's largest and most prosperous African-American church, over a white man was not acceptable under the Jim Crow system. The drivers took action. In the early hours of June 15, 1953, all ninety-five of them went on strike to protest the suspension of the driver. "The first and only issue in the strike is racial segregation," Roy Finley, secretary-treasurer of the drivers' union told a reporter. "The bus drivers of Baton Rouge are not striking for any personal gain or benefit but are on strike to protect the white bus riders of Baton Rouge from being denied transportation in accordance with state law." The drivers demanded that the city council reinstate reserved seating for white passengers.⁶

⁵Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, March 15, 1994, 2-3.

⁶"Bus Drivers Strike Over Race Issue," *State-Times*, June 15, 1953, 1; "City Bus Strike Will Continue, Talks Planned," *State-Times*, June 16, 1953, 1.

The strike angered white leaders because it left approximately 20,000 Baton Rougeans, black and white, without any transportation to and from work. Some employers provided rides for their employees, especially their housekeepers. Other bus riders took taxis or car pooled, but those without access to alternate transportation simply missed work. White leaders knew that if the strike continued Baton Rouge's economy would suffer. They wanted to get the buses rolling again as quickly as possible and, at the same time, sought to preserve peaceful race relations. The city council's president pro tem, Frank McConnell, told the drivers that the city would not make any concessions to them because "all of the pressure we're getting is from the strikers. . . . There have been no complaints from the public." Unlike the drivers, white leaders did not see the ordinance as a challenge to white supremacy. Rather, they viewed it as a practical solution to a simple problem. As Dr. James Wood, Jr., a white liberal who later served as a member of the American Friends Service Committee's local advisory board, pointed out in a letter to the editor of the *State-Times*, ending reserved seating provided "maximum utilization of the seats and assure[d] that no special privileges pertain[ed] to passengers of either race." Other moderates believed the strike would damage the city's progressive image. LSU student Peter Balinas pronounced Louisiana "a progressive state" and demanded that the bus company fire the striking drivers unless they complied with the law. White moderates did not understand the drivers' anger. Because of their social and economic standing, they could make concessions to African Americans without threatening the racial balance of power in their world, but working class whites could not tolerate any challenges to that

balance. Any chinks in the armor of white superiority lowered their status and placed them on the same level as African Americans.⁷

Because the drivers had questioned the validity of the ordinance, City-Parish Attorney Gordon Kean asked the state's attorney general, Fred LeBlanc, to give his opinion on its constitutionality. LeBlanc, a Baton Rougean, ruled that it did indeed violate the state's segregation laws, which required "separate seats and compartments" for black and white passengers. His decision convinced the drivers to end their four-day strike. Speaking through their attorney, Robert Williams, they declared victory. The city council accepted LeBlanc's opinion and graciously admitted defeat. Councilwoman Mildred DuBois conceded, "We are happy to abide by the attorney general's opinion. Anytime that we pass an ordinance that is invalid, we are the first to want to make a correction." Councilman Jack Christian concurred and promised that the council would work for "an amicable settlement" that would satisfy all parties. White leaders did not want to force the issue or draw too much negative publicity, especially from outside the state because they felt any hint of racial disorder would drive prospective industries away from Baton Rouge.⁸

The attorney general's ruling and the city council's acceptance of it angered African Americans. On the night LeBlanc issued his opinion, more than two hundred

⁷"Bus Drivers Strike Over Race Issue," *State-Times*, June 18, 1953, 1; "Editorial," *State-Times*, June 17, 1953, 11; "When People Speak," *State-Times*, June 19, 1953, 5A; "When People Speak," *State-Times*, June 18, 1953, 2D.

⁸"Bus Strike Will Continue, Talks Planned," *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1953, 8A; "City Bus Strike Slated to End at Dawn Today," *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1953, 1.

people from around the city met and formed the United Defense League (UDL). Although few of its members rode the buses, the new organization refused to accept a return to the degrading system of reserved seating and decided to stage a bus strike of their own. UDL members knew that for a boycott against the bus system to be successful they had to have the support of the working-class African Americans who depended on public transportation to get to and from work. The black working class occupied a precarious position in Baton Rouge society. Because, for the most part, they depended on whites for employment and credit, any challenge to the system of segregation would render them the most vulnerable to white reprisals. According to Dupuy Anderson, reserved seating, denied working-class blacks "the privilege of riding that bus comfortably after a hard day's work, even after coming out of the white kitchen, tired and sweaty." The working-class riders wanted to do whatever it took to obtain seats on the buses. UDL members knew that for the boycott to be successful they needed to provide an alternate form of transportation for the black bus riders. During the meeting, Anderson recalled, a "little woman from Georgia asked to speak. She got up and gave a very stirring speech." She said that "she had an old raggedy car, and she would run it until it couldn't run anymore." Accepting her suggestion, the UDL quickly organized a free ride system for black bus passengers. That evening, they secured more than one hundred volunteer drivers and cars and arranged with Horatio Thompson, the black gas station owner, to purchase fuel at wholesale prices for the free ride automobiles.⁹

⁹Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 22, 1993, 39; "Negroes Here Continue Bus Boycott," *Morning Advocate*, June 20, 1953, 1.

With the plans for the boycott in place, the UDL faced the problem of getting word of the protest out to the African-American community. Early in the evening of June 19, the organization asked a local radio station, WLCS, to reserve some air time for a special announcement. Between 10:30 and 11:00 p.m., several UDL members arrived at the station, and local tailor and World War II veteran, Raymond Scott went on air and announced that a bus boycott would begin the following morning. He urged all African Americans to stay off the buses. The *Morning Advocate* reported that he “appealed to all Negroes to refuse to ride city buses under the present seating ordinance, which he described as unfair to Negroes.” Scott then promised free rides for all boycotting black passengers. Fearing white reprisals, UDL members hastily left the radio station after Scott’s announcement. “Everybody got into their cars like a bat out of hell and went home,” UDL board member Willis Reed recalled. “Well, I didn’t go [straight] home. I had to go by my sister’s to borrow a shotgun from my brother-in-law. I had that shotgun right by my bed. Fortunately, nothing happened.” Fear of white retaliation weighed heavily on the minds of UDL leaders. Advocating a mass protest abandoned the accepted framework of traditional race relations and opened the racial diplomats up to the fury of segregationists. UDL attorney Johnnie Jones received death threats from angry whites and offers of money in exchange for dropping out of the boycott. Jemison’s fear of white retaliation grew so intense that he hired armed guards to protect him, his family, and his church.¹⁰

¹⁰Reed, interview by Marc Sternberg, 7; “City Bus Strike Will Continue, Talks Planned,” *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1953, 1; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 66-69; Jemison, interview by Jones, et al., 16-17; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 19.

Despite the threats, both physical and economic, African Americans pulled together to support the boycott. On June 19, 1953, the bus boycott began. That morning, several African Americans who went to bed before Scott made his announcement rode the buses, but by that afternoon, the boycott was 100 percent effective. Rather than riding the buses, boycotting passengers piled into 115 free ride vehicles. This system guaranteed the success of the boycott. It provided a steady stream of vehicles to pick up and deposit passengers with dispatchers controlling their movement across the city. On his way to work, postal worker Gus Williams gave rides to people waiting by the side of the road. "It was a time when you saw the black community pull together like I have never seen before or since," he recalled. "Even the thugs on the corner [joined in]. If they saw a black get on a bus, they would pull him off."¹¹

The sense of community created by the boycott grew stronger as thousands attended the nightly meetings sponsored by the UDL and held in various locations, first in churches and, as the crowds grew larger, in larger venues. Those attending heard reports on the status of the boycott given by various UDL officers. Each night, Jemison gave the final impassioned speech, prayed with the crowd, and urged members of the black community to donate money to support the free rides. Donations totaled at least \$1,000 per meeting and once topped \$4,000. Jemison always assured those attending that the boycott would continue until black passengers could "sit down when we have paid our fares." Although he never advocated desegregating the buses, many of those

¹¹Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 19; "Negroes Here Continue Bus Boycott," *Morning Advocate*, June 20, 1953, 1; Williams, interview by Betty Morse, 30-31.

attending the meetings nevertheless believed that integration was the ultimate goal of the boycott, and they wanted to continue their protest until they attained it.¹²

The solidarity of the UDL began to crumble even before the boycott ended. Racial diplomats never intended to push for the integration of the buses, while World War II activists and many bus passengers wanted to end the practice of segregated seating. "It was not necessarily a federal crime for buses to be segregated." Jemison later recalled. "I didn't want to forget my original purpose, to get seats and not necessarily end segregation." He even suggested that the city council create a separate bus company for African Americans or charge black passengers who stood a reduced fare. When the boycott began, the racial diplomats, along with Jemison, initiated talks with members of the city council and representatives of the bus company to work out an end to the boycott. Moderation characterized the boycott and the talks that ended it. Racial diplomats wanted the boycott to be peaceful and did not want to alienate white leaders. They therefore urged the African Americans to conduct themselves with pride and dignity and enforced their vision of proper behavior by creating their own "police force" to patrol black neighborhoods. The racial diplomats also asked owners of the city's black saloons to close every evening at six p.m., and "the drunks and winos of the black community were not allowed to do their customary drinking in the streets" because black leaders feared that drunk boycotters might cause trouble and make white leaders pull out of compromise talks. The bar owners willingly complied. At one mass

¹²"Over \$1,000 Is Contributed to Boycott Fund," *Morning Advocate*, June 22, 1953, 1; "BR Negroes May Petition for Separate Bus System," *Morning Advocate*, June 21, 1953, 8A; "New Ordinance on Bus Seating is Kept Secret," *Morning Advocate*, June 23, 1953, 6A.

meeting, Jemison told the free ride volunteers, "We can't have liquor on your breath. If you do, you'll have trouble, not with the police but with me!" He also warned African Americans not to make spectacles of themselves but to behave "as gentlemen and ladies." He promised these well-behaved ladies and gentlemen that "through trade schools, through colleges, through skilled hands, the Negro is arriving!" Wanting to remain on good terms with white leaders and ease their fears about the ultimate goals of the African-American protesters, Jemison declared, "We're not worried about social equality; first live with people and social equality will take care of itself." World War II activists disagreed with Jemison and the racial diplomats. They knew that social equality would not just happen. They wanted to enjoy the benefits of American citizenship and were prepared to defy both the racial diplomats and the white leaders to achieve that goal. These activists saw ending segregation on the buses as a step toward achieving first class citizenship and took part in the boycott with that goal in mind.¹³

Of course, white leaders never intended to establish integrated seating on the buses. But they did want to bring a quick end to the boycott, so they met with the racial diplomats in secret to hammer out an acceptable compromise. After several days of meetings, the two groups of leaders reached an agreement that preserved the spirit of Ordinance 222 by requiring African Americans to load the buses from back to front and whites from front to back but prohibiting blacks from sitting with or in front of white passengers. In a nod to the bus drivers, they agreed to reserve the front two seats for

¹³Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, October 24, 1994, 16; "Baton Rouge Negroes May Petition for a Separate Bus System," *Morning Advocate*, June 21, 1953, 1; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 19; "New Ordinance on Bus Seating is Kept Secret," *Morning Advocate*, June 23, 1953, 6A.

white passengers and the long back seat for African Americans. This agreement also gave the bus drivers the power to order passengers to give up their seats, and if the rider refused, he or she faced criminal charges and could be sentenced to jail for up to sixty days. Fearing both the white and the African-American response to the compromise, the leaders decided to keep their deal a secret until members of the city council could outline it on the city's radio stations. The announcement went out over the airwaves while several thousand African Americans were gathered at Memorial Stadium for a mass meeting. Jemison broke the news of the compromise to them.¹⁴

Before telling the black community about the deal, Jemison brought it before the UDL executive board to obtain its approval. The *Morning Advocate* reported that the board, "under strong protest," voted five to three to accept the compromise only if the UDL sued the city and the bus company over reserved seating. Although the paper did not list the board members, World War II activists, Dupuy Anderson, Raymond Scott, and Willis Reed, probably cast the dissenting votes. Jemison received a similar reception when he announced the terms of the compromise to the black community at a mass meeting. Some accepted it and viewed it as improving conditions on the buses and guaranteeing seats for African Americans. The fact that the compromise reserved the two front seats for whites and prohibited them from sitting in rows in front of or in seats with white passengers did not bother them. They believed that the compromise marked a victory for the African-American community. Others responded with anger when Jemison described the compromise. The *Morning Advocate* reported that "an echoing

¹⁴"Bus Fight Settlement is Possible," *Morning Advocate*, June 24, 1953, 1; "Bus Case to be Aired on Radio," *State-Times*, June 23, 1953, 1.

oration of voices shouting 'Stay off! Stay off!' rose up from the Memorial Stadium," and that others shouted, "Walk! Walk!" Jemison told the crowd that he would not force anyone to ride the buses but declared the boycott over and disbanded the free ride system. He also ordered African Americans not to attend the next day's city council meeting at which the compromise ordinance would be voted on to "avoid friction or incidents which might introduce violence into the touchy dispute."¹⁵

The sudden compromise took many by surprise. Dupuy Anderson, a UDL member, heard about it as he ferried boycotters in downtown Baton Rouge. Believing desegregation to be the goal of the boycott, the news surprised him. He remembered:

I had been working since early that morning. I had two cars carrying people backwards and forwards. At twelve noon, I was on the corner of North Boulevard and Third Street, where the buses usually make [their] exchange. . . . We received word that there had been a compromise. I can't tell you how I felt. We were totally in disagreement [with it, and we asked,] "Who compromised?" We knew we had the boycott in control, and we were quite disappointed at the compromise.¹⁶

Similarly, UDL attorney Johnnie Jones read about it in his morning newspaper. Just as with Anderson, Jemison's actions angered him. Both men knew that the boycott was effective and could be sustained indefinitely. Jones recalled:

Jemison . . . went down and entered into a compromise with the mayor and the city council [agreeing] that they wouldn't desegregate the buses. They were operating within the framework of the law, separate but equal. Jemison thought that was right because that was the law. I said, "No. That's still not the law." Now, I am his lawyer, and we're all [in this] together, and there wasn't any animosity between us. It was just that I didn't agree. And I couldn't come to

¹⁵"Bus Fight Settlement is Possible," *Morning Advocate*, June 24, 1953, 1;
"Negroes End Bus Boycott," *Morning Advocate*, June 26, 1953, 1.

¹⁶Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, January 5, 1994, 11.

that. I wasn't going to come to that because, to me, separate but equal was wrong.¹⁷

Wanting to express their displeasure about the continued segregation of the city's buses, Jones and his law partner Bruce Bell decided to disobey Jemison's directive and attend the city council meeting.

When they arrived at the meeting, they attempted to write their names on the speakers' list, but white officials refused to allow them to do so. The two men decided to speak anyway and muscled their way to the podium. When the councilmen saw them, Jones remembered, "Somebody said, 'They're out of order. They've got no business here. They're not supposed to be here. Arrest them!'" The call for their arrest galled Jones. He thought, "This is a public meeting, and we don't have no business there?" The police went after the two men. Jones, a short, wiry man, managed to escape by weaving through the crowd, but the police detained Bell.

Fear of violence permeated the city council meeting. On the night of the compromise vote, three hundred whites, including many segregationists, gathered to watch the proceedings. Sheriff Bryan Clemmons and Police Chief Joe Green dispatched seventy armed deputies and officers to the Municipal Building to keep the peace. The show of force proved unnecessary. The council quickly approved the compromise, Ordinance 251, and turned to other business. For the most part, the white community, including segregationists, accepted the compromise. The new law, despite a concession to African Americans, still preserved Jim Crow seating on the buses and allowed the drivers to control where black passengers sat. But the compromise marked the last time

¹⁷ Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 66

segregationists quietly accepted a change in the city's Jim Crow laws. In the years following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, they adopted a hard line and refused to grant any concessions to African Americans.¹⁸

The boycott had crippled the Baton Rouge Bus Company, and the compromise did not alleviate the situation. Large numbers of working-class blacks refused to return to the buses. Rather than face the indignity of continued segregation, they made other arrangements to get to and from their jobs. Those who could car pooled, others walked, some obtained rides from their neighbors or employers, and a few purchased their own automobiles. In the days following the boycott, a bus company official lamented, "It's very slow. . . . We haven't retrieved half of our old customers. Nearly empty buses still operate." For the next decade, ridership remained low, forcing the company to increase fares and abolish some routes. Even the riders who returned showed their displeasure with the compromise. In October 1953, a forty-one-year-old black man, Joe Howard, boarded a city bus, sat next to a white man on one of the two front seats reserved for white passengers, and refused to move to the back of the bus when ordered to by the bus driver. A policeman arrested him, and City Judge Cecil Bankston fined him twenty dollars or ten days in jail for violating the bus ordinance.¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid., 64-66; "City Council Passes New Bus Ordinance," *Morning Advocate*, June 25, 1953, 1; "Council Enacts Emergency Ordinance," *State-Times*, June 25, 1953, 1.

¹⁹"Bus Boycott is Lifted, Traffic is Subnormal," *State-Times*, June 26, 1953, 1; "Bus Business is Off as Negroes Resume Riding," *Morning Advocate*, June 27, 1953, 1; "Negro Sentenced for Bus Violation," *State-Times*, October 16, 1953, 3B.

True to the agreement that they made on June 23, the UDL board members sued the city and the bus company for continuing the practice of reserved seating, but instead of pursuing the goals of the racial diplomats, the UDL's attorneys, Jones and Bruce Bell, filed a suit that challenged not reserved seats but segregated city buses. They claimed that the separation of races on the buses violated the United States Constitution and the United Nations' Charter. The men also charged the attorney general with exceeding his powers and the city council with illegally enacting Ordinance 251 by not reading it publicly at two consecutive meetings before voting on it. Because they defied the racial diplomats and attacked segregated seating, Jones and Bell were punished. When the racial diplomats discovered the content of the suit, they accused the two men of being insubordinate. Jemison told Jones that he was supposed to follow his leadership without asking questions. Angered, Jones told Jemison, "You are wasting your time telling me what not to do. . . . I know that this is wrong." Under the Fourteenth Amendment, "you can't have separate but equal," he added. John G. Lewis, grandmaster of the Prince Hall Masons and a powerful racial diplomat, also scolded the men for their defiance. He upbraided the young lawyers for not listening to the advice of the community's traditional leaders and for being too radical. Because Jones and Bell refused to back down, Lewis ordered their senior partner, Leonard Avery, to evict them from his office, which was located in the Masonic Temple Building. Avery complied. The racial diplomats also removed the men from the boycott case and turned it over to Avery and another black attorney, Alex Pitcher, who consulted with the NAACP's attorney for Louisiana, A. P. Tureaud, Sr. In September 1953, State District Judge

Charles Holcombe dismissed the bus seating case, and Jemison and the other racial diplomats listed as plaintiffs refused to appeal.²⁰

Following the Supreme Court's 1956 ruling in the Montgomery bus boycott case, Cauthern assured white Baton Rougeans that segregation would prevail on the city's buses, and Mayor Jesse Webb, Jr. vowed to the public that the Supreme Court's ruling did not apply to Baton Rouge. Webb died in a plane crash a few days later. Because of intense segregationist sentiment in Baton Rouge, his successor, Jack Christian, refused to make any changes to the bus seating ordinance without a court order. In a speech before the recently-formed local chapter of the Citizens' Council, he even declared that most African Americans in Baton Rouge did not want bus integration and claimed that those who did made up a small minority of the population. Most blacks, he explained, "would not desire to have a change in their way of living here." He even boasted of the city's good race relations and attributed it to the make-up of the black community. "A majority of Baton Rouge Negroes are older, Southern [sic] Negroes," he explained. To a point, Christian's description was correct. Most of the African Americans with whom he and other white leaders dealt did indeed belong to the traditional group of black leaders, but by 1957, the power of racial diplomats was beginning to decline while the influence of the activists was on the rise.²¹

²⁰ Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 68-69, 59-61; Alex Pitcher to A. P. Tureaud, July 8, 1953, APT, box 10, folder 23; "Rule on Phase of Transit Suit," *State-Times*, September 22, 1953, 1.

²¹"Halt Intrastate Bias, City Not Affected," *News Leader*, 28 April 1956, 1; "Council Appoints Liaison Group on Bus Question," *Morning Advocate*, January 3, 1957, 1; "Says Small Group of Negroes Push Bus Integration," *Morning Advocate*, February 27, 1957, 9A.

Racial diplomats recognized the increasing popularity of World War II activists and feared that they would become leaders of the black community and convince the black masses to take action against segregation on the buses, thus undercutting the diplomat's own leadership within the community. Jemison and several other racial diplomats quickly retained an attorney, Alex Pitcher. They sued Christian, the city, and the bus company and demanded an end to the segregation of public transportation. Their suit meandered its way through the court system and withstood constant attacks from the city's attorneys. Only in 1962 did a federal court finally overturn Ordinance 251 and end segregated seating on the city's buses.²²

The specter of the successful Montgomery bus boycott and Martin Luther King, Jr. weighed heavily on the minds of African Americans in Baton Rouge. Realizing that their boycott could have brought an end to segregated seating on buses throughout the South if their leaders had not reached a compromise with white leaders, black Baton Rougeans, in the decades after the more famous boycott, attempted to intertwine their boycott with Montgomery's to enhance their role in the civil rights movement. Jemison equated his decision to sit in the front seat of a bus with Rosa Parks' actions. He even called himself the father of the bus boycott, with Parks as the mother. The fact that the compromise he reached with white leaders helped to preserve segregation on the city's

²²"Negroes Take BR Bus Seating Fight to Courts," *Morning Advocate*, February 5, 1957, 1; "City is Seeking Bus Segregation Suit's Dismissal," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1957, 1; "Baton Rouge Bus Segregation Case is Continued," *Morning Advocate*, March 28, 1958, 7C; T. J. Jemison to A. P. Tureaud, February 28, 1960, APT, box 31, folder 2; "Bus Integration Suit Comes Up Here on Monday," *Morning Advocate*, October 13, 1960, 1; "Bus Segregation Law Overturned," *Morning Advocate*, April 26, 1962, 1.

buses for nearly a decade after the boycott did not, in his mind, diminish the importance of his role in the movement. Black Baton Rougeans also claimed that they played a large role in the planning of the Montgomery boycott. In a 1996 *Advocate* article, Jemison, Jones, and Anderson recalled a visit King paid to Baton Rouge before the Montgomery boycott even began. All three remembered meeting with King to discuss strategy for his city's impending protest. Jones even described the Plymouth King drove and the hat he wore. "It was just the three of us, Reverend Jemison, King, and I," Jones recalled, "We talked about how to organize a boycott. It was before [Rosa] Parks sat." In his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, King did acknowledge the help he received from Jemison in setting up his community's free ride system. According to King, he and Jemison exchanged ideas in a long distance phone call; King admitted that Jemison's "painstaking description of the Baton Rouge experience was invaluable." King could not have visited Baton Rouge before the Montgomery bus boycott began because the civil rights leader played no part in the early stages of that protest. In fact, black leaders drafted him to head the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) after Rosa Parks' arrest. He could not possibly have been in Baton Rouge before the Montgomery protest began, but by rearranging the chronology of King's involvement in the boycott, African Americans in Baton Rouge carved a place for themselves in the civil rights movement and connected their boycott to the more successful one in Montgomery.²³

²³"King's Legacy," *Advocate*, January 15, 1996, 1; Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, March 14, 1994, 9; Jones, interview, November 13, 1993, 2; Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper, 1958) 75; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 136; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 51.

While African Americans created a legend out of the Baton Rouge boycott, whites barely remembered it and took no pride in the event. Lasting only a week and ending in a peaceful compromise, it affected few white Baton Rougeans. White moderate, Carlos Spaht, a native Missourian and candidate for governor in 1952, remembered the boycott but claimed that it affected neither him nor his law practice. Marian Reynard Baun, a native of Illinois and the wife of liberal LSU Law School Professor Charles Reynard, echoed Spaht. In a 1998 interview, she recalled the protest but added that neither she nor her husband paid much attention to the boycott.²⁴

August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, in *Along the Color Line*, claimed that the Baton Rouge boycott was an isolated incident that had no impact on the boycotts that followed, especially on the Montgomery movement. These scholars failed to recognize the impact of this protest on communities throughout the South. While the leaders of the Montgomery movement did not consult Jemison before their boycott, they undoubtedly knew about events in Louisiana's capital city. The national black press and some major white newspapers carried stories about the Baton Rouge protest, and as Aldon Morris pointed out in *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, the news of the boycott quickly spread through the black ministerial networks, most notably the National Baptist Congress. Jemison's father served as president of that organization. Morris noted that Jemison brought a blueprint of the boycott to the organization's 1956

²⁴Carlos Spaht, interview by author, tape recording, July 27, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 48-49; Marian Baun, interview by author, tape recording, June 6, 1998, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

convention and shared it with interested ministers and consulted with boycott leaders in several southern cities including Tallahassee, Florida and New Orleans.²⁵

In addition to playing an important role in launching the use of direct action to challenge segregation, the week-long boycott marked the first time African Americans from all segments of the community united to demand changes to Baton Rouge's Jim Crow laws. This cooperation crippled the city's public transportation system and revealed the power that a cohesive black community wielded. Fearing that such unity would bring with it racial unrest and violence, white leaders adopted a strategy of using the politics of moderation, granting small concessions to racial diplomats to end activists' protests and to drive a wedge between racial diplomats and the activists. With each compromise, the chasm between the two groups grew larger, and racial diplomats began to lose respect. In 1953, they were the leaders of the black community, but a decade later, many African Americans viewed them as sellouts and denounced the deals they reached with whites. Each compromise not only diminished the leadership abilities of the racial diplomats but increased the discontent of the black community and led the city closer to the racial violence that white leaders wanted to avoid.

²⁵August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Along the Color Line, Explorations in the Black Experience: Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 366; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 25.

Chapter 3

From Boycott to *Brown*, 1953-1954

The brief period between the June 1953 bus boycott and the Supreme Court's May 1954 *Brown* decision, which called for school desegregation, marked a dynamic period in Baton Rouge's civil rights movement. From June 1953 through September 1954, World War II activists launched a series of direct attacks against the system of segregation. They demanded the integration of the city's public parks and supported an attempt to desegregate LSU's undergraduate programs. After *Brown*, a group of activist parents allowed Johnnie Jones and another black attorney to take their children to a white school and to ask the principal to admit them. White leaders feared that these unprecedented demands would lead to racial unrest in the city and parish, and they turned to the traditional black leaders for help in quieting the activists. Working with the racial diplomats, white leaders adopted an outwardly moderate approach but wanted to stifle civil rights sentiment in the black community. Although their tactics impeded integration, they failed to silence the World War II activists. The activists only redoubled their efforts when racial diplomats and white leaders attempted to placate them with agreements that fell short of their demands. However the white leaders' strategy proved successful. Using legal maneuvers, they successfully delayed the integration of the parks, LSU's undergraduate program, and the public school system for a decade.

In the first of these three desegregation efforts, World War II activists petitioned the Recreation and Parks Commission, in May 1953, to desegregate the parish's public parks. Although separate facilities existed for black and white residents, parks

designated for whites contained tennis courts, swimming pools, softball fields, and golf courses. Brooks Park, which was built in 1947 and paid for, in part, by donations from the black community, was the only black park with a swimming pool. Other black parks possessed none of the amenities of white ones. In their petition, the activists argued that since tax dollars financed the parks, African Americans should be allowed to use all of them. After receiving the petition, Ralph Hileman, chairman of the Recreation and Parks Commission, announced that his organization had initiated a study into the feasibility of building a nine-hole golf course for African Americans at Harding Field, located near Southern University in the northern part of the parish. To avoid white outcry against the study, the commission also promised to look into building another 18-hole course for white golfers.¹

World War II activists refused to be appeased by the promise to investigate the possibility of a golf course, and on September 17, 1953, six activists including Malcolm Legarde, who filed the salary equalization suit in the mid 1940s, went to the City Park and tried to use the links. Breaking with the traditional pattern of race relations, they did not meet with white leaders to discuss their grievances before taking action nor did they ask racial diplomats to intercede for them. Instead, when the park operator refused to allow them to use the course, they contacted attorneys Bell and Jones and asked them to sue to desegregate City Park.

¹“Negroes Ask Use of Park,” *State-Times*, September 18, 1953, 1; “Confab. on Demand of Negroes for Park Use Slated,” *State-Times*, September 22, 1953, 6A; “Committee Study Started on Issue of Golf Dispute,” *State-Times*, September 23, 1953, 1.

In a letter to both the commissioners and to the City-Parish Council, the two lawyers stated that their clients paid taxes to support City Park and should not be denied use of it simply because of their race. Shocked, the Recreation and Parks Commission demanded a meeting with African-American leaders "to come to an agreement" about the park situation. Commission members never met with the six activists who sought entry to City Park. Instead, they created a special interracial committee consisting of commission members and African Americans to study the issue. They named a group of racial diplomats, including Jemison and Baranco, and a few World War II activists to the committee and asked the attorney for the six men, Johnnie Jones, to serve on it.² Jemison and Baranco announced that the black activists would drop demands to use City Park if white leaders agreed to construct a separate golf course for African Americans. The handful of World War II activists who attended the meeting, including Raymond Scott, Bell, and Jones, balked at the men's offer. "We want these facilities now, not tomorrow or the next day or the day after that," Jones told the white leadership. "We want to play now in order to enjoy the money we spend for taxes." He added that his clients would agree to drop their suit only if the commission adopted a plan similar to the one established in New Orleans in 1952 that designated alternating days for black and white golfers to use public courses.³

²Although Jemison often acted as an activist, on this issue, he sided with the racial diplomats and will be characterized one of them.

³"Negroes Ask Use of Park," *State-Times*, September 18, 1953, 1; Jones, interview, November 13, 1993, 60; "United Defense League to Back Move on Parks," *State-Times*, September 19, 1953, 1; "Name Committee on Dispute Over City Golf Course," *State-Times*, September 26, 1953, 1; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 106.

Whites attending the meeting refused to consider Jones' suggestion.

Commission member Frank "Tickie" Saia, the general manager of Sachse Electronics, claimed that white golfers would abandon the City Park course if African Americans used it, and, without white golfers, the entire facility would close. Commissioner V. L. Roy added that any change in the racial status of the parks would disrupt the city's long-term plans for expansion and improvement. White leaders also tried to discredit the activists. According to Johnnie Jones, District Attorney J. St. Clair Favrot, who also attended the meeting, told the audience, "Johnnie comes up with all of these hare-brained ideas." John Easterly, a contractor who would later become the leader of the Southern Gentlemen, a local segregationist organization formed shortly after *Brown*, condemned the World War II activists and claimed that they wanted to destroy "the peace of our community." Jones recalled that when he outlined his clients' demands, Easterly jumped out of his seat and shouted,

Listen to that damned nigger. That damned nigger ain't going to be satisfied until they get the whole damned thing. I don't care what you give them damned niggers, they ain't going to ever be satisfied. . . . Go outside and look at their cars. They've got cars finer than ours. Follow them niggers home, them niggers got finer houses than we got. . . . What them damned niggers want now is our wives, our daughters. That's what them damned niggers want because they've got every thing else we got.⁴

The reaction of white leaders to the City Park issue stood in direct contrast to their response to Jemison's request that they end reserved seating on the city's buses. Instead of quietly agreeing to set up a plan for African Americans to use the white golf course, they refused even to discuss the possibility of designating a day or two a week

⁴"Committee Study Started on Issue of Golf Dispute," *State-Times*, September 23, 1953, 1; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 97, 104-105.

for black golfers to use the course. Several factors influenced this decision. First, the activists had abandoned the traditional pattern of race relations. Instead of going to the white leadership and asking for them to help finance a golf course for African Americans, the activists attempted to use facilities at City Park, and, when turned away, they contacted a lawyer and threatened to sue to desegregate them. Second, allowing African Americans to use the City Park links affected a larger number of upper- and middle-class whites than ending reserved seating on the buses had, and white leaders knew that this group did not want to share their golf courses with African Americans. Finally, even after white leaders agreed to allocate \$20,000 to finance and construct a course at one of the city's black parks, Jones's clients decided to proceed with their suit. As the suit made its way through the federal courts, the Recreation and Parks Commission and the parish's district attorney used every legal means at their disposal to delay the case and hoped that by dragging it out, the plaintiffs would become discouraged and drop it. In 1956, the commission even voted to close all parks if a court ordered integration because integration "would seriously retard the social, moral, and economic advancement of the state." The commission's strategy of legal delays proved effective. Nearly a decade passed before a federal judge finally heard the case and ordered Baton Rouge's public parks to integrate.⁵

⁵"Name Committee on Dispute Over City Golf Course," *State-Times*, September 26, 1953, 1; "Park Use Suit Filed By Negroes," *State-Times*, November 18, 1953, 1; "New Deadlines Set for Answers in Park Suit," *Morning Advocate*, November 8, 1955, 1; "East Baton Rouge Facilities to Stay Segregated," *Morning Advocate*, December 2, 1955, 1; "Rec. Facility Desegregation Efforts Planned," *Morning Advocate*, August 6, 1963, 8A; "West to Deliberate on Park Integration," *Morning Advocate*, April 18, 1964, 11A.

Meanwhile, the Recreation and Parks Commission went ahead with their promise to improve separate facilities. On December 22, 1954, the commission opened a nine-hole golf course for African Americans in North Baton Rouge, named the J. S. Clark Memorial Park. At the dedication ceremony, T. J. Jemison declared, "This is progress. We are headed in the right direction, and it can be progress for the whole community if we continue to work together in the spirit of brotherhood and love." Of course, the World War II activists viewed the park as a setback to the cause of civil rights. Although Jones applauded building a golf course in North Baton Rouge, he continued to denounce the fact that it was segregated. He believed that the city's publicly funded parks should be open to all citizens, black and white. "I wanted it [Clark Memorial Park] to be for the people of East Baton Rouge Parish," Jones recalled, not just black people. Dupuy Anderson expressed a similar opinion. "They hurriedly built a black golf course, nine holes. I objected to that. I was invited to the dedication of that, but I did not go. It was a long time before I played golf."⁶

Although their agreement with white leaders delayed the integration of the city's parks, the racial diplomats realized that if they challenged their white counterparts on this issue, the black community would receive nothing. Jemison, acting as an activist, experienced the wrath of white leaders on June 18, 1953 when he demanded that the Louisiana Building Authority (LBA) construct a swimming pool at Southern University. He complained that Southern went without a pool while LSU had one of the

⁶"Dedication of New Negro Golf Course, Recreation Center is Marked Here," *Morning Advocate*, December 22, 1954, 16B; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 106; Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 22, 1994, 25.

largest in the nation. Members of the LBA claimed that having a pool at Southern would be “too luxurious for Negroes.” Southern President Felton Clark bore the brunt of white displeasure for Jemison’s demand. Charles Tooke, a member of the Senate Finance Committee, warned Clark, “In my opinion, if we build the swimming pool, your chances of getting other funds from the next legislature are zero.” He also reprimanded Jemison. “You are showing a great deal of ingratitude,” Tooke said. “You are doing a disservice to your people.” Although he conceded that Southern needed a pool, Clark quickly disassociated himself from Jemison and claimed that he knew nothing of the minister’s activism. Clark realized that if he sided with Jemison, the legislature would cut off Southern’s funding, and he refused to ask the LBA to construct a swimming pool because the university could survive without one. It could not get by without state money. The board rejected Jemison’s request, and he never again directly challenged the white power structure.⁷

The second major desegregation battle fought during the period between the boycott and *Brown* was over the admission of African Americans to LSU’s undergraduate programs. Even after black graduate and law students gained admission to LSU, in 1950 and 1951, the university’s undergraduate divisions remained segregated. Few Baton Rouge activists played a part in the suit to integrate LSU, but the reaction to this desegregation attempt by LSU’s administration, most notably its president Troy Middleton, reflected the determination of Baton Rouge’s white leadership to maintain peaceful race relations while using the court system to delay the

⁷“Board Rebukes Negro Leader,” *State-Times*, June 19, 1953, 1.

admission of black students. In the summer of 1953, seventeen-year-old New Orleans high school student, Alexander P. "Alex" Tureaud, Jr., decided that he wanted to attend LSU. The son of the state's leading civil rights attorney, he knew that LSU was the best college closest to his home in New Orleans. Although his father did not directly recruit him as a plaintiff, he made several trips to the campus, and on one visit, the elder Tureaud told his son, "LSU is a wonderful school. Look at these buildings. Look at the faculty. We should have some of this. We should be here."⁸

In his letter of application, Alex Tureaud stated that he wanted to major in liberal arts law, an accelerated course of study that allowed a student to obtain both a bachelor's degree and a law degree in six years. Although a similar major existed at Southern University, no students majored in it. In a letter to A. P. Tureaud, Sr., Southern Law School Dean A. A. Lenoir stated that LSU's liberal arts law degree was far superior to the one at his school and urged the civil rights attorney to stress the differences between the two programs. In early August, the Board of Supervisors rejected Tureaud's application declaring that LSU only admitted black students when ordered to by the courts. After this rejection, Tureaud sued on his son's behalf saying, "There is no other institution maintained by the state where the plaintiff can obtain the advantages involved in the combination course here nor combine his college and law

⁸A. P. Tureaud, Jr., interview by Rachel Emanuel-Wallace, tape recording, April 25, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2.

school work to the same extent and on equal level of scholarship and intensity as in the school of LSU.”⁹

Although university officials reluctantly accepted the fact that the courts required them to admit black law and graduate students, they were determined to prevent any black undergraduates from enrolling. They believed that white Louisianians would either react violently or pull their children out of LSU’s undergraduate programs.

Troy Middleton expressed the feelings of the majority of whites when he said:

Peaceful behavior is threatened far less by the admission of Negro students to the graduate schools than would be the case in undergraduate schools [because graduate students are mature]. They have established patterns of behavior and spend most of their time studying and do not participate in university activities. Undergraduate students are establishing friendships, developing interests in extracurricular activities as well as engaging in their studies.

A segregationist attorney W. Scott Wilkinson expressed a similar concern. In a letter to Board of Supervisors member Lewis Gottleib, he wrote,

It will come to pass that instead of having mature negroes [*sic*] in the law and graduate schools, you will also have a horde of teenage negroes [*sic*] in the undergraduate courses. When that happens, you will find the better people of Louisiana sending their boys and girls to Tulane, Newcomb, Centenary, and other privately endowed institutions.

Indeed, Tureaud wanted to take part in the social life of LSU. He wanted to make friends, join a study group, and pledge a fraternity.¹⁰

⁹A. A. Lenoir to A. P. Tureaud, July 1953, APT, box 71, folder 15; A. A. Lenoir to A. P. Tureaud, August 6, 1953, *ibid.*; Tureaud, interview by Rachel-Emanuel Wallace, 2; “Negro Student Seeks Admission to LSU College,” *State-Times*, August 3, 1953, 5B; “Rejected Student Sues LSU,” *State-Times*, August 24, 1953, 1.

¹⁰Affidavit of Troy Middleton, APT, box 7, folder 19; W. Scott Wilkinson to Lewis Gottleib, November 10, 1955, Robert Kennon Papers, box 4, folder 92, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Kennon Papers).

In early September, federal judge Skelly Wright began hearing Tureaud's case. Represented by ten lawyers, including ultra-segregationist Leander Perez, LSU launched an all-out attack against Tureaud. At times, that attack became personal. Alex Tureaud recalled one incident involving Perez:

He was dressed in a plantation beige outfit with a string tie. He was very dramatic and also could be very cruel and biting and sarcastic. . . . One statement that he made that I'll never forget. He pointed to me, and walked in my direction, and looked right dead at me, and said, "There sits the only ungrateful nigra in the state of Louisiana because we have gone through great expense and trouble to build fine black universities in this state. Why is Mr. Tureaud not willing to avail himself of this opportunity?" He said it with such sarcasm and with such belief it was just very intimidating, and it made me angry.

Perez's arguments held little sway over the judge. On September 11, Wright ruled against LSU and ordered Tureaud's admission saying that although "Louisiana has made a bonafide effort to maintain and operate an adequate institution in the Arts and Sciences level at Southern University," it is not equal to LSU. He added that denying Alex Tureaud's admission solely because of his race also violated the Fourteenth Amendment.¹¹

Although LSU fought Tureaud's admission, James Reddoch, President Middleton's assistant, noted that school officials "took the position, that if this is the law of the land, then we're going to operate the university in a way that is consistent with the law of the land." Of course, university officials chose to meet only the minimum requirements of the law of the land, and they immediately appealed Wright's

¹¹Tureaud, interview by Rachel Emanuel-Wallace, 39; "LSU Ordered to Admit Negro Undergraduate," *State-Times*, September 11, 1953, 1.

ruling, saying that Alex Tureaud's case should have been heard by a three-judge panel. In the meantime, he enrolled at LSU and began attending classes.¹²

To young Tureaud's dismay, the university community adopted an unofficial policy for dealing with him — everyone shunned him. "It was like I didn't exist," he recalled. "People talked about me as though I was an inanimate object. Nobody sat near me. The kids sat all around me. If I sat in the corner, they would move to the opposite side of the room. If I sat in the middle, they would move to the sides."¹³

In early November 1953, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Skelly Wright had indeed exceeded his jurisdiction in ordering Tureaud's admission. Days later, without the court's permission, LSU canceled his enrollment. His father and LDF attorneys asked the Supreme Court to order his readmission. The justices condemned the hasty dismissal, but took no action to force the university to reinstate him. In May 1956, the Supreme Court finally ruled in Tureaud's case and ordered LSU to admit him to the liberal arts law program. Tureaud did not want to return to LSU. At the time, he was attending Xavier and majoring in education. University officials refused to allow other black undergraduates to enroll. Saying that the court's decision applied only to Tureaud, they simply chose to ignore the fact that *Tureaud v. LSU* was a class action suit and successfully maintained its segregated undergraduate program until the summer of 1964.¹⁴

¹²Reddoch, interview, January 20, 1993, 28.

¹³Tureaud, interview by Rachel Emanuel-Wallace, 9-12.

¹⁴"U.S. Appeals Court Reverse Louisiana State University Decision," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 7, 1953, 5; "LSU Appeal is Upheld in Negro Case,"

Because Tureaud's admission occurred before *Brown*, white reaction to his enrollment differed sharply from the responses of whites in other southern states to the admission of black undergraduates into their universities. White leaders in states such as Alabama used delaying tactics similar to LSU's, but when the federal courts ordered them to integrate, they responded with direct defiance. In 1952, a year before Tureaud applied for admission to LSU, two women, Autherine Lucy and Pollie Ann Myers applied for admission to the University of Alabama as undergraduates. For four years, the university's attorneys used legal maneuvers to delay the court's decision, but in early 1956, a federal judge ordered the admission of the two women. After investigating the lives of Lucy and Myers, the university discovered that Myers, who married and gave birth to a child during the intervening four years, had conceived her child before the nuptials and refused to admit her because she failed to meet the university's moral standards. They could find no reason to reject Autherine Lucy's application, and she enrolled under a court order February 3, 1956. Lucy attended classes for two days, and that night, a riot broke out on the Tuscaloosa campus. When she arrived for class the following day, a jeering crowd of approximately 3,000 people met her and threw gravel, eggs, and rotting produce at her. University officials attempted to protect her from the mob and hid her in the library until the crowd dissipated. That evening, the university's

State-Times, October 29, 1953, 1; "High Court Says LSU Must Accept A. P. Tureaud, Jr.," *Morning Advocate*, May 8, 1956, 1.

board of trustees voted to suspend Lucy to prevent further violence. Her lawyers sued for her readmission, but she never returned.¹⁵

Less than a year after Tureaud's suit against LSU, the Supreme Court issued its landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and World War II activists quickly launched a direct attack against the system of segregation. On September 3, 1954, attorneys Alex Pitcher and Johnnie Jones, at the request of a group of black parents, led thirty-nine children to Gilmer Wright Elementary, the former Rosenwald school that blacks helped to build but the board designated as white, and attempted to enroll them. When Pitcher and Jones arrived with the students, the school's principal, Lily Taylor, immediately turned them away saying that the school was for whites only. The willingness of the parents to allow their children to play a role in this protest reflected the desire of black parents to secure equality in education for their children. In the early 1950s, these parents formed the North Baton Rouge Civic Association to lobby the School Board to switch the designation of the school from white to black. The board ignored their pleas, so they hired Pitcher to represent them. Jones became involved in the case by chance. One day, he and his father were on the way to his office when Pitcher flagged him down and asked for his help in preparing a suit against the School Board. The two men met with a large number of parents at a black church in the Gilmer Wright neighborhood. Jones remembered,

The church was packed wall-to-wall with blacks. It looked like every black in that area had come. . . . We talked at that meeting, and we roused up everybody. All those people were waiting for somebody who was going to stand up for

¹⁵E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 54-90.

them. Alex and I gave them that confidence. We were there, and there wasn't going to be any backing down. Both of us had been to the service and had war experience. When we gave that speech all of them said, "Let's march on the white school."¹⁶

Shortly after *Brown*, the NAACP had issued a statement calling for the school desegregation and had urged parents from around the state to sue to end the dual school system. The organization wanted to coordinate and rank the cases and expected African Americans to contact them before proceeding with their suits. Parents in the area surrounding Gilmer Wright refused to wait for an outside organization, the NAACP, to give them the go-ahead. After the registration attempt at Gilmer Wright, NAACP State Secretary Daniel Byrd noted, "East Baton Rouge Parish is way down on the list in desegregation attempts." He added that black parents in the parish had not even filed a petition with the NAACP asking for the organization's assistance. Although Jones and Pitcher both belonged to the organization, they had acted independently and did not even consult the local NAACP chapter before making the desegregation attempt. Their reason for bypassing the organization was simple. Racial diplomats controlled the Baton Rouge chapter and would, at the very least, have discouraged them from taking such a defiant step. After the incident, Jemison informed white leaders that he played no role in the protest and promised that African Americans would not try to enroll at any other white schools.¹⁷

¹⁶Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 26-30; "Negro Group Asks Admission to White School," *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1954, 1.

¹⁷"Negro Group Asks Admission to White School," *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1954, 1; "Negro Attorney Issues Statement on Registration," *Morning Advocate*, September 26, 1954, 13A.

For openly challenging the parish's separate school system, Jones and Pitcher incurred the wrath of both white leaders and segregationists. The School Board, after consulting with the state's Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation and the parish's district attorney, J. St. Clair Favrot, filed an ethics complaint against the two attorneys with the Louisiana Bar Association. The board refused to believe that the black parents in this working class neighborhood had hired the attorneys and agreed to allow them to lead their children to Gilmer Wright. In its complaint, the board charged the lawyers with violating the bar association's rules against barratry and with fomenting strife. The bar association launched a probe into the allegations and called the two men to appear before its ethics board.¹⁸

The probe into the charges against Jones and Pitcher was little more than an attempt to discredit the two men and to bring an end to their outspoken activism. The School Board's attorneys levied inconsistent charges against the black lawyers. They accused Jones and Pitcher of approaching the parents in the area surrounding Gilmer Wright and convincing them to file a suit to integrate the school. The board's lawyers also claimed that the men took the children to the school without first obtaining parental permission. Defense witnesses countered these assertions. They testified that the North Baton Rouge Civic League had indeed hired Alex Pitcher and asked him to sue the School Board. Ellis Robinson, the guardian of one of the children, testified that he gave his nephew permission to take part in the protest. Jones claimed that members of the bar association, led by Baton Rouge native and Citizens' Council member Sargent Pitcher,

¹⁸ "Negro Attorney Issues Statement on Registration," *Morning Advocate*, September 26, 1954, 13A.

tried to intimidate him. Sargent Pitcher and others in the organization promised that if he admitted to the charges and apologized for his actions that he would receive a token reprimand. If he refused, they would disbar him. Jones refused to accept the offer but suspected that Alex Pitcher bowed to their pressure and confessed to the charges. Members of the association continued to badger Jones and to try to wrest a confession from him. They told him that they believed he had made a mistake by leading the children to the school and that he had not considered the implications of the protest before acting. Jones viewed their offer as anything but charitable. The committee members wanted him to confess to violations that he had not committed. Their offer infuriated him, he recalled. "You call yourselves charitable?" Jones told his accusers. "What I would consider charitable would be not to have brought these charges in the first place. What I consider charitable would have been to recommend to the School Board to turn this school back over to these people." After he rejected their offer, the members of the committee accused him of being an "arrogant nigger." Some of them even claimed that he came from the North and was simply faking his southern accent. They refused to believe that an African American from Louisiana would openly defy them. The segregationist members of the ethics board did everything in their power to discredit Jones. They even hired a black man to impersonate him and to ask African Americans to take part in a school desegregation suit. One woman whom this man approached testified at the hearing. When the prosecuting attorney asked her to look around the room and point to Jones, she could not identify him; they then asked her to describe him. She claimed that the man who visited her had dark skin and was six feet tall and heavysset. Jones, a light-skinned black man, stood approximately five feet five

inches tall and weighed one hundred twenty-nine pounds. The room burst into laughter when the woman completed her description. Even after this embarrassment, Jones' accusers refused to back down. They pointed to him and asked her if the young civil rights attorney was the man who had spoken to her. She declared that he was definitely not her visitor. In the end, the ethics board had no choice but to exonerate Jones. His accusers could produce no evidence against him. Alex Pitcher, because he signed the confession, received a reprimand and was placed on probation for six months. He retained his license to practice law, however.¹⁹

Although the World War II activists dominated the civil rights movement in the post-*Brown* years, the racial diplomats tried desperately to maintain their position of leadership in the black community. Seizing upon the success of the World War II activists' voter registration drives of the 1940s, they decided that they could curry favor with the city's black community if they launched a program of their own. In fact, when Jemison announced the end of the bus boycott, he promised that the United Defense League would work to enfranchise African Americans. Racial diplomats promoted voter registration because they believed that would help them to maintain their position of leadership within the black community. Voter registration symbolized citizenship for African Americans. The quiet acceptance of increased black registration by white leaders in the late 1940s convinced the racial diplomats that they could advocate enfranchisement without alienating their white patrons. They could also use their

¹⁹"Attorney Says He was Retained by Civic Group," *Morning Advocate*, December 3, 1954, 1; "Disbarment Case is Taken Under Advisement Here," *Morning Advocate*, December 4, 1954, 1; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 34-39; "The Need for Voters," *News Leader*, July 23, 1955, 4B.

influence as leaders of the black community to direct blocs of voters to candidates their patrons supported. Although activists supported black voter registration, they denounced the fact that racial diplomats used the votes of enfranchised African Americans to curry favor with the white leadership. A July 1955 editorial in the *News Leader*, the city's activist African-American newspaper, denounced the practice. "The Negro has grown tired of self-appointed so-called politicians meeting behind closed doors telling candidates [about] the votes he can send," It proclaimed. "Negroes have grown tired of some Negro leaders selling them down the river."²⁰

To encourage African Americans to register, racial diplomats established voter registration schools in several neighborhoods, and several of the city's ladies' clubs set up schools in churches throughout the city and donated a cash prize to the congregation with the largest percentage of registered voters. Racial diplomats also urged teachers to register to vote, claiming that it was their duty as leaders of the black community. The involvement of racial diplomats in the voter registration process proved successful. The number of black voters increased from 6,700 in 1952 to 8,125 in January 1956, giving Baton Rouge one of the highest number of enfranchised African Americans in the state.²¹

²⁰"If We had More Votes," *News Leader*, December 3, 1955, 1; "Mt. Calvary B. C. Wins in Delta's Voters Drive," *News Leader*, January 7, 1956; Reed, interview, July 14, 1998; "Uncle Toms Must Go," *Weekly Leader*, July 12, 1952, 4; "Voter Registration Picking Up," *News Leader*, November 19, 1955, 1.

²¹"More Energy for Voters," *News Leader*, July 30, 1955, 4B; "Negro Voters Up 50 Percent in Four Years," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1956, 1; "Negro Voters Increase for Governor's Race," *News Leader*, November 3, 1956, 1; "Record 70,000 Now Registered to Voter in EBR," *Morning Advocate*, October 23, 1959, 1D.

When segregationists launched a statewide purge of black voters in 1956, East Baton Rouge Parish did not participate. Their concern for continued industrial development guided the white leaders. They feared that if they took part in the purges the city would receive negative attention from the national media. For the community to continue to prosper, they needed to uphold the city's image of peaceful and progressive race relations. Throughout the 1950s, white business leaders worked diligently to encourage industrial expansion and described the city as "the hub of a comparatively lucrative metropolitan market." Chamber of Commerce President S. G. Henry told the citizens of Baton Rouge, "Industry is interested in locating a plant where workers will be happy to live." Workers did not want to reside in communities rife with racial strife. U. S. Senator Russell Long, a Baton Rouge resident and son of former Governor Huey Long, lauded his community's record of allowing black registration in a speech opposing the Civil Rights Act of 1957. He contended that, without federal interference, large numbers of blacks registered to vote in East Baton Rouge Parish because white leaders allowed them to and added that this enfranchisement led to improved conditions for the African Americans.²²

The period from the end of the bus boycott to the *Brown* decision marked the ascendancy of World War II activists as leaders in Baton Rouge's black community. While white leaders still turned to racial diplomats to settle conflicts, African

²²Advertisement, *Morning Advocate*, October 13, 1954, 1B; "Attracting Industry," *Morning Advocate*, December 9, 1955, 8A; Speech Opposing the Civil Rights Bill, ca. 1957, Russell Long Collection, box 556, folder 9, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Americans, such as the parents of children in North Baton Rouge, turned away from these traditional leaders and began looking to the World War II activists when they needed help. As Jones said, black people knew that the activists would stand up for them and not back down. The six men who filed suit against City Park refused to drop their case when the white leaders built Clark Memorial Park. After LSU expelled A. P. Tureaud, Jr., black activists continued to demand admission to the university's undergraduate programs. Even an ethics probe into the law practices of Jones and Pitcher could not convince the men to abandon their clients and drop their school desegregation suit. Although World War II activists viewed *Brown* as a victory in their fight for equality, the decision almost destroyed the city's burgeoning civil rights movement as it galvanized both the state's and the city's segregationist population, which quickly seized control of the state government and enacted a series of prohibitive state laws aimed at destroying the civil rights movement.

Chapter 4

Rise of Segregationist Sentiment, 1954-1958

While the *Brown* decision delighted the World War II activists, it served as a catalyst for uniting the city's ultra-segregationists.¹ Before *Brown*, Mayor Jesse Webb, the city-parish council, and racial diplomats such as Jemison, Baranco, and the Butler brothers, could meet and hammer out compromises to undercut the rising popularity of the activists and to prevent protests. After *Brown*, making any changes to the system of segregation, no matter how small, became nearly impossible. In the weeks following the ruling, the city's segregationist population, which lacked cohesion before the decision, united and publicly denounced anyone who supported even small changes to the system of segregation. They devoted special attention to the issue of school desegregation and believed that if the schools integrated, Baton Rouge as they knew it would be destroyed. Baton Rouge attorney Paul G. Borron expressed the segregationists' position on *Brown* in a letter to Governor Robert F. Kennon. He compared the decision to Reconstruction and proclaimed that whites needed to fight it with all of their might to preserve the "southern way of life." He expressed the fear of many whites when he claimed that integration would eventually bring mixed classes headed by black teachers and warned that white children would learn the "low moral standards of the Negro" from black teachers and students. To prevent integration from happening, segregationists in Baton Rouge formed three organizations — the Southern

¹As noted in the introduction, most white Baton Rougeans wanted to maintain the system of Jim Crow, but the white leaders and the accommodationists refused to sacrifice the city's economic well-being to protect it. Segregationists, on the other hand, wanted to preserve the status quo at all costs.

Gentlemen, the White Citizens' Council, and the Ku Klux Klan — and launched an all-out attack on the civil rights movement.²

Segregationists saw *Brown* as an attack against both the Constitution of the United States and the southern way of life and believed that *Brown* and other federally-imposed desegregation orders represented a usurpation of states' rights. The Jim Crow supporters advocated using the doctrine of interposition to block federal court decisions. In a decade that saw the escalation of the Cold War and the red-baiting of McCarthyism, the civil rights movement seemed to the segregationists to be a communist plot that threatened the very core of southern society. Segregationists believed that if the system of Jim Crow ended, chaos would ensue, and civilization as they knew it would be destroyed. They viewed blacks as morally, biologically, and culturally inferior and thought that integration would bring miscegenation. In their minds, racial mixing would mongrelize the white race. The only way to preserve racial purity was by keeping the races completely separate. Although their main goal was to prevent school integration, segregationists also worked to stop all forms of social interaction between blacks and whites.³

²P. G. Borron, Sr. to Robert F. Kennon, 31 May 1954, Kennon Papers, box 4, folder 91; McCarrick, "Louisiana's Official Resistance," 3, 14-16; Michael Karlman, "How *Brown* changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History*, 81(June 1994): 82-84.

³David Goldfield, *Black, White & Southern*, 84; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1992*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1991), 25; Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 86-87; Bartley, *The New South*, 199-204; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 135.

On July 22, 1954, a group of middle class segregationists in East Baton Rouge Parish filed articles of incorporation for the Southern Gentlemen, which became the only segregationist organization to operate in Baton Rouge for nearly two years.⁴ Although chapters quickly sprang up around the state, the Baton Rouge chapter directed their activities, and John Easterly, a resident of the capital city and a concrete manufacturer, organized the Baton Rouge chapter and served as the group's state president. The goals of the Southern Gentlemen were simple. It wanted "to maintain segregation in public schools, parks, playgrounds, etc.," and to insure "the continuation of the Southern [*sic*] traditions and customs of our noble forefathers." Initially, the group eschewed violence, but by 1956, Easterly warned that when they exhausted all legal means to prevent integration, they would "use other means" to maintain segregation and prevent the "mongrelization" of the white race.⁵

The Southern Gentlemen set up an elaborate initiation process for new members. It required anyone interested in joining to submit an application, including references, and to list his reasons for wanting to join the organization. A membership committee screened all applicants and only admitted the most committed segregationists. Although it kept its membership list secret, the Southern Gentlemen's officers and board of directors quickly became public. While not a part of the city's elite, most belonged to the middle or upper middle class. Out of thirteen identified

⁴In July 1954, the first chapter of the White Citizens' Council was formed in Indianola, Mississippi.

⁵SAC, NO to Director, July 6, 1955, Southern Gentlemen, Federal Bureau of Investigation, File 105-38567, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Freedom of Information Act Division, Washington, D. C., (hereafter cited as FBI).

members of the Southern Gentlemen, seven held white collar jobs. Two, L. Norman Day and Frank McLavy, served as principals of schools in East Baton Rouge Parish. Two others owned their own businesses. ESSO employed the final two — one as an operator and the other as a meter man.⁶

In 1956, segregationists in Baton Rouge formed a chapter of the Citizens' Council. Organized on May 25, the Baton Rouge Citizens' Council, with its ties to other chapters across the state and the South, subsumed the Southern Gentlemen by the end of the decade. The two organizations shared similar goals. Both wanted to maintain segregated schools, to preserve white supremacy, and to prevent social interactions between blacks and whites. Although, they too, believed in the inferiority of African Americans, the Citizens' Council made greater use of the states' rights argument than the Southern Gentlemen. However, like the Southern Gentlemen, the Citizens' Council attracted "respectable segregationists" and often recruited their members from civic organizations, such as the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Clubs and the American Legion. In fact, most Council members belonged to a higher social class than the Gentlemen. The social make-up of the Council can be inferred from its officers and board of

⁶Charter, July 26, 1954, Southern Gentlemen, FBI, File 105-38567; Bartley, *The New South*, 204. Identifiable members of the Southern Gentlemen included: John Easterly, owner of Easterly Concrete; Guy Cobb, building contractor; L. Norman Day, principal Prescott Junior High School; Frank McLavy, principal Hollywood School and commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars; Easterly's sons, John Easterly, Jr., supervisor, American National Insurance Company; Mark Easterly, office manager, Easterly Concrete; and Ed Easterly, clerk, Ethyl Corporation; William Lee Lawrence, agent, American National Insurance Company; Odis J. Lea, collector, *State-Times*; Arno Easterly, accountant, State Auditing Department; Godwin P. Raleigh, claim director, Retail Credit; Harold Smith, meter man, Esso; William D. Falconer, operator, ESSO. Employment information obtained from: *Polk's Greater Baton Rouge City Directory*, 1956.

directors. At its first meeting, attorney Jared Y. Sanders, Jr. presided. Sanders belonged to the city's aristocracy and, in 1929, led the impeachment attempt against Huey Long. Seventeen worked in professional or white collar positions. Eight held white collar or supervisory jobs at either ESSO or Ethyl, six were business owners, and one was a student. The occupations of eight could not be determined.⁷ From its inception, the Baton Rouge chapter operated openly and made its meetings and membership lists public. To them, the secrecy of the Southern Gentlemen resembled that of the Ku Klux Klan. The Council also opened its membership to all like-minded whites and did not require them to apply for admission into the group or to submit a list of references.⁸

⁷Although the Citizens' Council submitted its membership list to the Secretary of State's Office, that document could not be located by the author. Members of the Citizens' Council's Executive Board included: J. Y. Sanders, attorney; Carl Blunck, physician; R. O. McCraine, owner, McCraine-McElyea Insurance Agency; Sargent Pitcher, attorney; Chester Achord, operator, ESSO; D. H. Alessi, owner, Alessi's Drive Inn; J. B. Alexander, owner of insurance agency and mortgage company; Steve Alford, attorney; O. H. Bacon, chief engineer, United Gas Pipeline; R. N. Ball, salesman; Paul G. Borron, Sr., attorney; James E. Broome, owner, Broome's Victoria Drug Store; G. Norman David, unknown; L. N. Day, principal Prescott Junior High; W. H. Dickerson, foreman, Ethyl; Henry Dimattia, pipe fitter; John M. Foote, unknown; Steve Hester, unknown; Dr. W. Kernan Irwin, physician, ESSO Medical Association; Thomas Carroll Jeter, electrician, Kaiser Aluminum; Dr. Jack R. Jones, owner, Jones and Miller; Lawson Lott, president, Independent Industrial Workers Association; Dan McDonald, supervisor, Ethyl; Leon M. McGraw, operator, ESSO; Charles McKay, supervisor, Copolymer Corporation; Frank McLavy, principal, Hollywood School; Tom Moreland, student; Russell Nettles, clerk, ESSO; E. C. Newman, unknown; E. H. Noland, unknown; Alton W. Odom, unknown; Dr. Ashton Robins, physician; Robert R. Sanchez, Jr., attorney; Lenton Saratain, attorney; Merritt Shilz, pharmacist; and Sam Terito, owner, Samdot Insulations. Employment information obtained from: *Polk's Greater Baton Rouge City Directory*, 1956.

⁸Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 10-11, 60, 161; Bartley, *The New South*, 197-204; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 191-194; T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 354; "Citizens' Council Hold Board Meet, Elect Officers," *Morning Advocate*, May 25, 1956, 10D.

The Ku Klux Klan, the third organization, made a brief appearance in Baton Rouge, but it proved short-lived. On May 31, 1956, twenty-three men from the Ku Klux Klan of metropolitan Baton Rouge and the rural areas of East Baton Rouge Parish announced the organization of a local chapter. Unlike the Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Council, the Klan drew its membership from the parish's lower classes. Of the twenty-three members, ten worked as plant laborers. Seven of these worked for Ethyl. One Klansman owned his own business and another was a meat cutter. Remaining members lived in the rural areas of the parish, and their occupations could not be ascertained.⁹ The organization proved unpopular in the parish and even the Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Council denounced it. In early December 1956, a spokesman for the Klan announced that it planned to dissolve because the members discovered that they had "used a name 'extremely distasteful' to the public." A month later, six officers and board members officially resigned. While a segment of the group may have remained active, Klan activity played only a minor role in Baton Rouge's civil rights movement.¹⁰

⁹Dave Clark, parish resident; M. W. Brown, parish resident; Raymond Dyer, meat cutter, Community Cash Grocery; Melvin Cupstid, Kaiser Aluminum; Lonnie Cain, parish; Earl Edward Huff, welder, Ethyl; Henry Harless, welder, Ethyl; Alex Harrison, helper, Gulf States Utilities; Oscar Land, parish resident; Finnon D. Lewis, owner, Lewis Café and Service Station; Ralph Martin, pump operator, Ethyl; Herbert Moss, parish resident; Larry Oneillion, parish resident; Julian Robinson, mechanic, Ethyl; Perry Strickland, parish resident; Eugene Starkey, parish resident; Aubrey Rogers, parish resident; Thomas Stogner, guard, Ethyl; Paul Stogner, guard, Ethyl; Robert Whittington, operator, Ethyl; Joe R. White, parish resident; Edgar Taylor, parish resident. Employment information obtained from *Polk's Greater Baton Rouge City Directory*, 1956.

¹⁰"Local KKK Group Files Organizational Charter; Denies Burning Cross," *Morning Advocate*, June 1, 1956, 1; "Ku Klux Klan Files List of Members Here,"

The Southern Gentlemen, which in the early years after *Brown* remained the most important of the three, focused most of their attention on preventing the integration of the public school system. Representatives attended School Board meetings to watch for signs that board members, who belonged to the leadership class, were “soft” on segregation. In late August 1955, the organization urged the School Board to stop “pussyfooting” around and take a stand against integration. On August 25, the board had passed a resolution declaring that it would comply with the state’s segregation laws but refused to promise that it would continue to maintain separate facilities if a federal court ordered the desegregation of the East Baton Rouge Parish school system. Promising to uphold existing segregation laws was not enough for the Southern Gentlemen because they knew that the federal courts could declare these ordinances unconstitutional and force integration. The state secretary-treasurer of the Southern Gentlemen, William Lawrence, told the board, “We want you to take a stand so Negro children won’t show up at white schools.”¹¹

In addition to their preoccupation with the School Board’s commitment to segregation, the organization also wanted to insure that the city’s and the state’s elected officials firmly opposed integration. The Southern Gentlemen’s interest in the records of elected officials became paramount in late 1955 and early 1956 as Louisianians prepared for state and local elections. The organization sent questionnaires to all candidates running for office asking if they believed in states’ rights, supported

Morning Advocate, December 5, 1956, 1; “Six Officials of Ku Klux Klan Resign from Unit,” *Morning Advocate*, January 3, 1957, 1.

¹¹Report, November 11, 1955, Southern Gentlemen, FBI, File 105-38567.

segregation, and wanted to maintain separate schools, parks, and public facilities. The group then publicized the candidates' answers. Easterly urged whites to vote against any candidate who received the majority of black votes in primary elections and claimed that these office seekers "promised in some way to let down segregation" to attain African-American support. In previous elections, few Baton Rougeans had cared about which candidates blacks supported. In fact, white candidates, such as Jesse Webb, had courted black voters.¹²

Besides targeting white office holders, the Southern Gentlemen also launched an attack against the NAACP. In 1955, it reprimanded the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board for allowing the NAACP to meet at McKinley High School. Claiming that both black and white Baton Rougeans wanted the races to remain segregated, the Southern Gentlemen accused the civil rights organization of fomenting discord by trying to convince local blacks to push for integration. In fact, racial diplomats controlled the Baton Rouge chapter, and it did not publicly participate in any attempts to overthrow the system of segregation.¹³ The School Board refused to give in to the Southern Gentlemen's demands and allowed the NAACP to meet at McKinley, but the Gentlemen succeeded in publicizing their view of outside agitators coming into Baton Rouge and stirring up the "contented" black masses. In an October 1955 speech, Easterly declared that the NAACP wanted racial mixing and miscegenation. He

¹²Report, January 20, 1956, *ibid.*

¹³The local chapter had provided some assistance to A. P. Tureaud, Sr. in his suits against LSU and worked behind the scenes to secure plaintiffs for the Graduate and Law School desegregation suits.

promised that the Southern Gentlemen would fight to maintain segregation at all costs and warned politicians not to solicit black votes. He promised, "We are going all out to eliminate low white trash who desire the Negro vote" and claimed that those candidates for office who solicited black support ranked lower on the despicable scale than "the bushwhackers and carpetbaggers who plagued our grandfathers." Easterly added, "Louisiana is a white man's state," but expressed a desire to treat African Americans fairly. Of course, his definition of fair treatment required that blacks remain segregated.¹⁴

Initially, white leaders viewed the actions of the Southern Gentlemen with disdain and refused to comply with the group's demands. When the organization asked the city-parish council and the mayor to bar black soldiers taking part in army maneuvers near Baton Rouge from entering the city, they declined. Easterly and his followers also wrote to army officials and requested that they keep black troops out of the city. Angered by this unreasonable request, military officials immediately contacted Mayor Jesse Webb, Jr. and demanded an explanation. Knowing that any banishment of black troops would bring the wrath of the federal government down upon his city,

¹⁴"Continuance of Segregation Aim of Local Group," *Morning Advocate*, August 24, 1954, 6B; "Set Southern Gentlemen State Meeting in City," *Morning Advocate*, October 13, 1955, 1; "Group to Protest NAACP Meeting in Public School," *Morning Advocate*, March 20, 1955, 1; "Suggests City be Placed Off Limits to Negro Troops," *Morning Advocate*, October 24, 1955, 1; "Keep Negro Troops Away From Capital, Is Demand," *Times-Picayune*, October 24, 1955, 22.

Webb refused to prevent the soldiers from spending their leave in Baton Rouge but warned that these troops would be required to comply with the city's segregation laws.¹⁵

While white leaders in Baton Rouge ignored the demands of segregationists, the state legislature embraced them. Unlike other southern states, the Louisiana legislature was in session when the Supreme Court issued its ruling in *Brown*, and both houses began frantically to pass bills and propose constitutional amendments in an attempt to circumvent the ruling. Governor Robert Kennon called for calm and speculated that *Brown* would have little impact on Louisiana because "the races work together in harmony." The legislature refused to listen to him. On May 21, the House of Representatives passed by a margin of eighty-four to three a resolution calling for legislative action in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision. Baton Rouge's delegation voted with the majority. Three days later, the Senate concurred. Senator Willie Rainach of Claiborne Parish, a state segregationist leader, spoke out in favor of the resolution, declaring that Louisiana needed to express its displeasure over *Brown*. Quoting two African Americans from his parish, he declared that black Louisianians also disapproved of the ruling and wanted to maintain segregation.¹⁶

¹⁵"Suggests City be Placed Off Limits to Negro Troops," *Morning Advocate*, October 24, 1955, 1; Unknown to H. A. Belmont, October 26, 1955, Southern Gentlemen, FBI, File 105-38567; CG ARMYFOUR to TAG DEPTAR, October 27, 1955, Southern Gentlemen, Department of the Army, File 105-38567-9, Department of the Army, Freedom of Information Act Division, Fort Meade, Maryland; "Ask Negro GI Ban for La. Towns," *Item*, October 24, 1955, 4.

¹⁶"Governor Kennon Says State Has Time to Work on Answers to Decision," *Morning Advocate*, May 18, 1954, 1; "Positive Action on Segregation Asked by House," *Morning Advocate*, May 21, 1954, 1; "Education Committee Gives Unanimous Approval to House-Passed Resolution on Segregation," *State-Times*, May 24, 1954, 1.

The legislature did not wait long before taking “positive” action against *Brown*. Within a month of the decision, both houses passed three acts aimed at preserving school segregation and established the Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation to study integrationist sentiment in the state. The first act proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow the legislature to call itself into a special session any time a federal court attempted to force Louisiana schools to desegregate. Another bill required that the state maintain separate school systems to preserve “peace and good order in the state” and denied free textbooks and state-financed free lunches to any schools ordered to integrate. Finally, in an attempt to prevent the courts from assigning black students to white schools, the legislature placed the responsibility of pupil placement on each parish’s school superintendent. The state’s governing body knew that none of the state’s sixty-four school superintendents would assign black students to white schools. Rainach declared, “A vote for these bills is a vote to preserve our southern way of life. A vote against these bills is an open invitation to the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to integrate our schools.” Segregationists thought that the NAACP solicited local support for suits against segregation. Of course, recent historical studies show that local people actually pushed the NAACP and other civil rights organizations into action. In November 1954, the state’s white electorate approved the constitutional amendment by a margin of four-to-one, but Baton Rouge officials, including Jesse

Webb, Jr. refused to endorse it. Governor Kennon signed the other two bills into law. Two years later, the Supreme Court declared all three unconstitutional.¹⁷

Segregationists in Baton Rouge and around the state also developed an obsession with ending integration at LSU, and the legislature devoted much of its time conjuring up laws aimed at removing black students from the state's flagship university and preventing any social or athletic interaction between the races on campus. This placed university officials in a precarious position. Although they opposed integration, LSU President Troy Middleton, members of the Board of Supervisors, and high-ranking university administrators refused to defy the authority of the federal government by restricting the admission of black law and graduate students. But, as members of the white leadership class, they wanted to maintain peace and stability within the community, so they could not simply ignore the vocal segregationist segment of the population. They realized that angry mobs of segregationists staged protests, similar to those that occurred at the University of Alabama in 1956. Such a protest would garner negative publicity for both the university and the city and could hurt the progressive image that white leaders tried to maintain. Also, if it wanted, the segregationist-controlled legislature could destroy the university by stripping its funding. Therefore, school officials devised a plan for dealing with the segregationists. When a potentially

¹⁷"Three Measures on Segregation Passed by House," *Morning Advocate*, June 29, 1954, 1; "Bills on Segregation Win Final Approval," *Morning Advocate*, July 1, 1954, p. 1; "Light Vote Set in State Today on Amendments," *Morning Advocate*, November 2, 1954, 1; "NAACP Asks Suit be Removed to Federal Court," *Morning Advocate*, 29 March 1954, 1; Carroll Joseph Dugas, "Dismantling De Jure Segregation in Louisiana, 1954-1974" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1989), 184-186; McCarrick, "Louisiana's Official Resistance," 24.

controversial racial issue arose, LSU's administration asked segregationists for their advice but usually ignored it. This strategy made the segregationists think that they played a role in determining the university's racial policies.

In August 1954, LSU officials implemented their strategy when a black male graduate student asked for permission to swim in the university's pool. After examining the request, the university's attorneys determined that under the terms of the federal injunction LSU must allow the student to use the pool, but to quiet the inevitable protest, they wrote to segregationist lawyers from around the state asking for their legal opinions. Each of these attorneys said that the school should prohibit black students from using the swimming pool, even if it meant defying the injunction. W. Scott Wilkinson, a Shreveport lawyer, warned that if they allowed African-American students to swim, blacks would eventually ask for interracial dances and social functions. He also suggested that LSU find unofficial ways to preserve segregation on campus by assigning black students to the same dorm rooms and requiring them to eat in designated cafeterias. He warned that indiscriminate interaction between African-American and white students would earn the contempt of the alumni and whites throughout the state. Leander Perez, one of the state's most outspoken segregationists, offered one of the more imaginative solutions to the swimming pool problem. He suggested that if a federal court ordered its integration that the university should fill it in with concrete and put up a plaque proclaiming "another victory for communist infiltration." After receiving replies from various attorneys, Fuller wrote to them and informed them that the university would allow black students to use the swimming pool because refusing to do so would be a direct violation of the terms of the federal

injunction. Although they did not agree with Fuller's decision, the fact that he asked their opinions placated the segregationists, who blamed the federal government for the racial mixing and not university officials.¹⁸

The Southern Gentlemen and other Jim Crow supporters believed that the NAACP was responsible for the desegregation of LSU. They held that the organization had infiltrated Baton Rouge and stirred up anti-white sentiment in a formerly happy and content black population. The NAACP therefore became the prime target of the segregationists. On March 1, 1956, Louisiana's Attorney General Fred LeBlanc, a Baton Rouge segregationist, with Rainach's support, filed suit against the civil rights organization claiming that it violated the state's 1924 Fuqua Law that required all organizations to file their membership lists with the Secretary of State's Office. This law, which was originally designed to destroy the Ku Klux Klan, had not been enforced since the 1920s. The Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Councils immediately submitted their lists before the attorney general took action.¹⁹ Knowing that segregationists would use its rolls to intimidate and persecute its members, the NAACP refused to comply with LeBlanc's order. In response, State Judge Coleman Lindsey of Baton Rouge's Nineteenth Judicial District ordered the organization to submit its membership list by the end of 1956. The NAACP immediately appealed Lindsey's

¹⁸W. Scott Wilkinson to James Fuller, August 19, 1954, Board of Supervisors Records, drawer 4, box 2, folder 302; Henry Sevier to Taylor, Porter, Brooks, et al., 17 September 1954, *ibid.*; Leander Perez to Taylor, Porter, Brooks, et al., September 17, 1954, *ibid.*; James Fuller to W. Scott Wilkinson, n. d., *ibid.*; James Fuller to Robert Chandler, August 17, 1954, *ibid.*

¹⁹Unfortunately, copies of those lists could not be located in the records of the secretary of state.

ruling to the Louisiana Supreme Court. The high court upheld the lower court judge's decision, and in late April 1956, the Baton Rouge judge issued a permanent injunction against the NAACP prohibiting any branch from meeting until it filed a membership list with the secretary of state. Refusing to capitulate to the segregationists' terror tactics, NAACP leaders filed an appeal in the federal courts but announced that the organization would cease operation in Louisiana until that court issued a ruling. Several branches, including those in New Orleans and Lake Charles, filed their membership lists before the December 31, 1956 deadline. Baton Rouge's branch, which was headed by racial diplomats, did not submit its membership list. Its president, Dr. C. J. Gilliam, an optometrist, stated, "I doubt very much that we will file." With that, the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP ceased operations and remained inactive for nearly four years. However many black Baton Rougeans continued to pay dues to the national organization and retained their memberships. Some business, professional, fraternal and social organizations even collected NAACP dues and sent the money to the national office.²⁰

²⁰“Ask Ban Against the NAACP,” *Morning Advocate*, March 2, 1956, 1; Clarence Laws to Branch Officers, March 30, 1956, NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch, box 68, Archives Division, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 196-197; “Says Louisiana High Court Must Rule on NAACP,” *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1956, 1; “Nullification of Injunction is Asked by NAACP,” *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1956, 13A; “Supreme Court Refuses to Lift Ban on NAACP,” *Morning Advocate*, April 10, 1956, 1; “NAACP Permanently Halted from Holding Meetings,” *Morning Advocate*, April 24, 1956, 1; Clarence Laws to Branch Heads, May 3, 1956, NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch; box 68; “Appellate Court Puts NAACP Case in Federal Court,” *Morning Advocate*, November 27, 1956, 1; “NAACP Warned Criminal Charge May Be Filed,” *Morning Advocate*, December 20, 1956, 1; “First List of Members Filed by NAACP,” *Morning Advocate*, January 1, 1957, 1; “State Officers of NAACP Filed with Martin Here,” *Morning Advocate*, January 5, 1957, 1; Clarence Laws to Branch Leaders, April 5,

White leaders in Baton Rouge viewed the enforcement of the Fuqua Law with consternation. In a letter to Attorney General LeBlanc, Baton Rouge attorney Fred Benton expressed his dismay. He told LeBlanc that he regretted the attorney general's decision to sue the NAACP and claimed that suing the group would only serve to stir up ill will between the races. White leaders believed that the open attack against the NAACP would strengthen the position of World War II activists within the black community and lead to increased demands for integration. They feared that if the activists gained control of the black community, peaceful race relations would be destroyed. With racial diplomats in control, white leaders knew that they could forestall desegregation. "In the final analysis," Benton wrote LeBlanc, "integration does not depend either on enactment of a law or the enforcement of a law. . . . There will be no real integration of the races except by mutual consent." He added that if the state handled the issue properly and did not antagonize the black masses, it could prevent integration for years. Of course, segregationists refused to listen to Benton and other white leaders.²¹

When the Louisiana legislature convened in 1956, Willie Rainach again seized control and passed a variety of acts aimed at circumventing *Brown* and asserting the supremacy of state over federal authority. One amendment to the state's constitution blocked integration suits by withdrawing the state's consent to any lawsuits, except those involving contract disputes, against any city, parish, or state agency. The

1956, NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch, box 68.

²¹Fred Benton to Fred LeBlanc, n. d., Attorney General's Papers, box 11, State Archives, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

legislature also passed a law placing all public parks under state authority and voted to end compulsory school attendance for school systems ordered to integrate. Emmitt Erwin, president of the New Orleans chapter of the Citizens' Council, applauded the segregationist legislative package. He charged that integration grew out of a communist plot to overthrow the United States government. John Easterly echoed Erwin's statement, "We want to do this [maintain segregation] in a peaceful way, but we are going to stay segregated in Louisiana come hell or high water."²²

Within days, Rainach's bills breezed through the House and Senate, and Senator J. D. DeBlieux of East Baton Rouge Parish provided the only opposition to the segregationist legislation. DeBlieux grew up Ouachita Parish, in the northeastern portion of Louisiana. The son of a sharecropper, he moved to Baton Rouge in the mid 1930s to attend LSU's Law School. His decision to oppose the segregationist legislative package grew out of two things, he later explained: his upbringing and his belief in the sanctity of the United States Constitution. As a child his parents taught him to respect all people, including African Americans, and even required him to address the black sharecroppers who lived nearby as "Miss" or "Mister," a courtesy almost unheard of at that time. Segregationists angrily denounced DeBlieux's refusal to vote for the legislation. Other members of Baton Rouge's delegation to the state legislature voted for the bills, but none of them proposed any segregationist legislation or sat on any of the committees controlled by Rainach. The Southern Gentlemen issued a press release

²²James McClean, "7-Point Plan on Segregation Due this Week," *Morning Advocate*, May 20, 1956, 1; "Delay Vote on Bill to Prohibit Mixed Sports," *Morning Advocate*, June 27, 1956, 1.

accusing DeBlieux of ignoring the wishes of his constituents. Other segregationists made threatening phone calls to the Baton Rouge senator, and a group of them burned a cross on his front lawn. White leaders and liberals, however, sent him letters of support and encouragement.²³

Although it passed a variety of segregationist laws, including one that banned television programs that depicted black and white characters as social equals, the 1956 legislature focused most of its attention on preventing school desegregation and ending the court-ordered integration of LSU's Law and Graduate Schools. In February, the Southern Gentlemen and segregationist members of the Board of Supervisors attempted to convince the entire board to ban athletic competition between the LSU and schools with black athletes on their teams. The board refused to agree to the self-imposed ban. The Southern Gentlemen also asked that LSU tighten its entrance requirements to exclude African-American students. President Troy Middleton denounced changing the university's entrance requirements stating, "LSU has repeatedly made it clear it does not want Negro students but will at no time resort to subterfuge in the application of policies." He added that black students enrolled under a federal injunction and that he and university officials believed in law and order and could not in good conscience violate the law. Angered by the board's refusal to alter its admission policies and to adopt a color ban for athletic competitions, the Southern Gentlemen demanded that its

²³J. D. DeBlieux, interview by author, tape recording, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; "Interposition Move Approved by Senate," *Morning Advocate*, May 29, 1956, 1; "DeBlieux Blasted by Southern Gentleman," *Morning Advocate*, June 3, 1956, 13C.

members resign. The organization claimed that their resignation would be “the decent thing to do” and would allow the governor to select a new board that would “fulfill the wishes of the citizens of the state.” Southern Gentlemen president John Easterly accused African Americans who enrolled at LSU of wanting to cause racial mixing rather than obtain an education. He advocated “educating Negroes well enough so that they can be sent back to Africa to run their own governments.” Easterly also suggested that if LSU continued to admit black students it would be unworthy of the support of white Louisianians.²⁴

Frustrated by Middleton and the board, the segregationists remained determined to remove African-American students from LSU, even if it meant defying the federal injunction. Therefore, they turned to the legislature, which gladly took up the cause. The House and Senate immediately passed a law banning athletic contests between teams with players of different races. Opponents of the measure claimed that the law would prevent LSU from competing against universities from areas outside of South and would ruin the school’s chances for winning a national championship in football. Some segregationists, including Willie Rainach, feared that a law that hurt LSU’s chances of being invited to one of the major bowl games would prevent passage of the legislation because, for many Louisianians, Tiger football took precedence over

²⁴“Segregation Bills Hold Legislature’s Interest,” *Morning Advocate*, June 13, 1956, 1; “LSU Board Rejects ‘Color’ Clause, Makes No Change in Entrance Requirements,” *Morning Advocate*, February 19, 1956, 1; “Move to Revive Color Ban on Athletics at LSU Killed by Board,” *Morning Advocate*, April 8, 1956, 1; “Segregationists Ask LSU Board for Resignation,” *Morning Advocate*, February 23, 1956, 1; “Easterly Scores LSU Stand on Negro Question,” *Morning Advocate*, April 11, 1956, 6A.

everything, even segregation. One supporter of the bill, Stewart Slack, a Shreveport native and member of the Board of Supervisors, claimed that African Americans would not be satisfied with the integration of athletic competitions. If the state gave in, he believed, blacks, who were never satisfied with just a little, would push for integration of the grandstands. In the end, the segregationists won, the law passed, and Governor Earl Long reluctantly signed it. Long, though, predicted that the Supreme Court would overturn it, which it did in May 1959.²⁵

While some segregationists hesitated to ban mixed athletic contests, they eagerly passed laws to tighten LSU's entrance requirements. One law required all students to obtain certificates of eligibility and good moral character signed by their high school principals and their parish superintendent of education in order to enroll at any of the state's colleges and universities. LSU, with its integrated Graduate and Law Schools, was the primary target of the new law. To prevent principals and superintendents from signing certificates for black students attempting to enroll in white schools, segregationist legislators passed the Teacher Tenure Act that called for the termination of any teacher or school official who advocated integration. In combination,

²⁵"Rainach to Study Bill Outlawing Mixed Athletics," *Morning Advocate*, June 17, 1956, 1; "Delay Vote on Bill to Prohibit Mixed Sports," *Morning Advocate*, June 27, 1956, 1; "Long Asks for Views on Athletic Segregation Bill," *Morning Advocate*, July 16, 1956, 1; "Long Signs Bill to Ban Mixed Athletic Contests in State," *Morning Advocate*, July 17, 1956, 1; "High Court Throws Out Law on Mixed Sports," *Morning Advocate*, May 26, 1959, 1.

these laws prevented African Americans who graduated from a Louisiana high school from gaining admission to LSU.²⁶

The university's administration realized the Supreme Court would overturn the law, but Middleton and his advisors complied with it because it applied to all students and did not directly violate the injunction requiring the admission of African-American graduate and professional students. Although Middleton agreed to ask for certificates of eligibility before admitting new students, he refused to demand that continuing students supply them. His decision angered segregationists. They wanted the immediate end to integration at LSU and asserted that the new law required all students to submit certificates. To insure enforcement of the law, Rainach and his supporters demanded that the district attorneys of the parishes that housed colleges and universities force colleges to comply with it. J. St. Clair Favrot, East Baton Rouge Parish's district attorney, refused to bow to segregationist pressure. He decided to let the university formulate its own admissions policy for continuing students because he feared that if LSU required continuing students to file certificates, the federal courts would overturn the law. Favrot supported the end to integration at LSU but wanted to achieve it in a way that would generate the least amount of negative publicity for Baton Rouge. Nevertheless, the segregationist onslaught against the university continued. Fearing that the legislature would slash the university's funding if it held out, Middleton and the Board of Supervisors changed the policy and decided to require continuing students to

²⁶“Segregation Bills Okayed by Senate Education Group,” *Morning Advocate*, June 7, 1956, 1; “Appropriation, Segregation Bills Are Signed,” *Morning Advocate*, July 11, 1956, 1; “Act 15 of 1956,” *Morning Advocate*, July 16, 1956, 2A.

submit certificates. Middleton defended the reversal and stated that until the courts ruled the law unconstitutional, LSU would comply with it beginning in the spring semester of 1957.²⁷

African-American graduate students and black activists immediately decided to test the constitutionality of the law. In November 1956, Arnease Ludley, an African-American graduate student at LSU, asked A. P. Tureaud to represent her in her fight against the certificate of eligibility requirement. Tureaud set out to prove that although the law applied to all students, it discriminated against blacks and prevented them from attending LSU because no teacher or school employee would dare sign a certificate for a black student for fear of losing his or her job. A graduate of Grambling High School, located near Ruston in North Louisiana, Ludley attempted to secure her certificate. First, she asked LSU's registrar's office for a copy of the eligibility form to send to her former principal and superintendent. The office refused to give her one, stating that only white students and black students who attended out of state high schools could obtain the forms. The only four African Americans attending LSU to file acceptable certificates graduated from out-of-state high schools. Undaunted, Ludley proceeded without an eligibility form. She wrote to her high school principal, Arthur Smith, and asked him to vouch for her good moral character. He replied that he had no eligibility

²⁷“Segregation Bills Okayed by Senate Education Group,” *Morning Advocate*, June 7, 1956, 10D; “Appropriation, Segregation Bills Are Signed,” *Morning Advocate*, July 11, 1956, 1; “DAs Plan Stricter Enforcement of Law School Eligibility,” *Morning Advocate*, October 2, 1956, 11A; “Favrot Differs from Rainach on Meaning of Law,” *Morning Advocate*, October 12, 1956, 1; “LSU to Demand Certificates of All Students,” *Morning Advocate*, October 14, 1956, 1; Dugas, “Dismantling De Jure Segregation,” 146-148.

forms and added that even if he had one he would not sign it because "under state law, I would lose my job." He apologized, "I assure you my refusal to sign the certificate is not intended to cast an unfavorable reflection against your character. I just cannot take the risk of losing my job." With this evidence in hand, Tureaud filed suit, and in January 1957, Federal Judge Herbert Christenberry issued a temporary restraining order preventing LSU from requiring the certificates until a federal court ruled on the laws' constitutionality. He ordered the university to admit Ludley and all other black graduate students who met the school's other entrance requirements. Even after the judge's injunction, the number of black graduate students plummeted from eighty-five in the spring of 1956 to thirty-seven in the spring of 1957.²⁸

In January 1957, LSU suspended Ludley claiming that her grades had dropped below the required average, and the university's attorneys asked the judge to dismiss the suit because Ludley was the only plaintiff. The judge refused, and Tureaud quickly substituted two other plaintiffs, Ruth Mae Johnson of Natchitoches and Audrey Carr Robertson of New Orleans. Both women unsuccessfully attempted to obtain certificates of eligibility, and in April 1957, Judge J. Skelly Wright of New Orleans, who later earned the wrath of segregationists by ordering the integration of Orleans Parish schools, declared certificates of eligibility and the Teacher Tenure Act unconstitutional.

²⁸Arnease Ludley to A. P. Tureaud, November 15, 1956, APT, box 69, folder 1; Arthur Smith to Arnease Ludley, November 26, 1956, APT, box 69, folder 1; "Rule Out Eligibility Papers," *Morning Advocate*, June 18, 1957, 1; "Four Negroes Give Acceptable Papers at LSU," *Morning Advocate*, January 24, 1957, 11A; "LSU Policies on Segregation are Spelled Out," *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1956, 1.

Of course, the state's attorney general Jack Gremillion filed an appeal, but the Supreme Court upheld the ruling in June 1958.

University officials refused to enforce other segregation laws because they directly violated court orders. One required complete segregation on campus. Troy Middleton knew that under the court order requiring the admission of black law and graduate students the university could not implement this act, but he feared that direct defiance of it would bring the wrath of the Joint Committee down upon himself and the university. He turned to the Board of Supervisors for help. He sent its members a list of twenty-one questions asking in minute detail how the university should treat black students. Their answers became the official policy for desegregation at LSU. Among other things, Middleton asked if black students could live in the same dorms, use the same restrooms and water fountains, and eat in the same cafeterias as white students. The board answered yes. He asked if the silverware black students used should be kept separate from that of white students. The board answered no. It decided that all of the university's academic functions would be open to black students but that all social aspects of these functions must end. Organizations with black members could not serve refreshments at their meetings or hold banquets. When faced with the problem of African-American alumni attending homecoming events, the university's Administrative Council decided to inform them of the new policy by "designating someone to take . . . [them] into a separate room and explain the situation while serving refreshments." The answers to the questions placated the Joint Committee and allowed

the university to operate within the boundaries of the federal injunctions. The Supreme Court eventually declared all of these segregation laws unconstitutional.²⁹

Although LSU officials wanted to follow the court's rulings, they also wanted to make it clear to the segregationists that they abhorred integration. In September 1958, the Board of Supervisors issued a statement declaring, "This board wishes to point out that any Negro student whose enrollment is forced upon the university enters as an unwanted matriculant." It added that the presence of black students "served as a symbol of defiance of tradition and customs of this university" and created discord between the races "instead of the feeling of mutual respect which both races have had for each other, lo these many years." The university even advised black applicants to apply to Southern University's graduate programs. The State Board of Education had established a graduate school at Southern in 1957.³⁰

While the administration proclaimed its support for segregation, many of the university's professors, especially those from the North and West, did not. State legislators feared that these outsiders taught integration in their classrooms and attempted to convince young white students to abandon their traditional system of race relations. In July 1956, LSU's student newspaper, the *Reveille*, published an editorial

²⁹"LSU Policies on Segregation Spelled Out," *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1956, 1; Administrative Council Minutes, Office of the President Records, drawer 16, box 2, folder 1127.

³⁰"LSU Announces Stronger Stand on Segregation," *Morning Advocate*, September 14, 1958, 1; J. K. Haynes to Daniel Byrd, October 22, 1958, Daniel Byrd Papers, box 2, folder 13, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans (hereafter cited as the Byrd Papers), Louisiana; Arthur Chapital to J. K. Haynes, September 1958, NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch, box 69.

criticizing the legislature for passing the package of segregationist acts and immediately incurred the wrath of Willie Rainach and his supporters. He accused integrationist professors of brainwashing the members of the *Reveille* staff and urged parents to contact the university to ask if professors taught integration in their classrooms. Rainach also demanded that LSU's administration censor the student newspaper. Although some members of the Board of Supervisors wanted to change the paper's editorial policy, the majority believed that such action would violate the students' First Amendment rights. The board's firm stand on the issue silenced the segregationists, but their obsession with the infiltration of integrationist sentiment at LSU continued to grow.³¹

The rise of segregationist sentiment in East Baton Rouge Parish created problems for Troy Middleton and other white leaders. They wanted to continue to attract new business and industry into the area and believed the segregationists threatened the social, economic, and political stability of Baton Rouge. The Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Council tried to convince the white masses that any concessions on the issue of segregation would lead to the destruction of southern society, and they charged anyone who advocated changes to the system of Jim Crow with being integrationists. White leaders dealt with the segregationists much as they did the black activists; they granted minor concessions in an attempt to appease them. In 1955, the School Board used this policy when it passed the resolution declaring its

³¹"Rainach Hits Editorial in *Daily Reveille*," *Morning Advocate*, July 28, 1956, 1; "Rainach Urges *Reveille* Probe," *Morning Advocate*, August 2, 1956, 1; "Lake Charles Man Heads LSU Board," *Morning Advocate*, August 5, 1956, 1.

support for segregated schools but refusing to advocate closing facilities to prevent integration. LSU lawyers used a similar tactic when it polled segregationists about allowing an African American to swim in the campus's pool. While these concessions temporarily mollified them, the segregationists continued to demand that white leaders take stronger stands against integration and, to some degree, succeeded. Although Middleton wanted to apply the law requiring certificates of eligibility only to new students, segregationist pressure forced him to ask all students to submit them. The policy of appeasement did not destroy segregationist sentiment in Baton Rouge, nor did it silence organizations such as the Southern Gentlemen. But, it prevented violence, and as riots erupted in Tuscaloosa and federal troops marched in to Little Rock, Baton Rouge remained peaceful and continued to grow and prosper.

Chapter 5

Liberal Opposition to Segregation, 1955-1960

As the segregationists launched their attack on *Brown*, a new group arrived on the scene — the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). On February 1, 1955, the Philadelphia-based group opened a job opportunities office in Baton Rouge and launched its Employment on Merit (EOM) Program in the city. In the 1940s, the Friends had lobbied for improved working conditions abroad, especially in Asia, but had ignored the impact of segregation in the United States. After receiving criticism for overlooking the segregation of employees in the South and the wide disparity between wages earned by black and white Americans, they decided to create the EOM Program to address job discrimination “on the basis of race, religion, or ethnic origin” in the United States and opened offices in Chicago, Indianapolis, Dallas, and Greensboro. In each location, AFSC representatives met with businessmen and community leaders and urged them to end discriminatory hiring practices.

The Friends selected Baton Rouge as one of their target cities for several reasons. In the 1950s, the city of 160,000 had become one of the largest industrial centers in the Deep South. Besides the existing industries, between 1955 and 1958, several national corporations, including U.S. Rubber, Dow, Shell, and Dupont, built plants in the community, creating thousands of new jobs. The AFSC wanted the new and existing plants to desegregate their workforces, including their professional and office staffs. Because these companies operated at a national level but employed thousands of local people, both black and white, the Friends thought that they could integrate without suffering from segregationist reprisals. The AFSC also saw Baton

Rouge as an ideal place to challenge workforce segregation because, unlike other Deep South communities such as Birmingham, which boasted some industrial development but were dominated by rabid segregationists, moderate white leaders ran Baton Rouge. They had worked diligently for over a decade to attract business and industry to the city, and the Friends believed that officials would accept desegregation of these industries' workforces to keep them in the community.¹

In early 1955, the Friends' national office sent field representative Eugene Sutherland to Baton Rouge. Dedicated to the idea of teaching through example, the AFSC decided to operate an integrated office in Baton Rouge, although its local contacts advised against it. One of Sutherland's advisors, Milton Vigo, a New Orleanian who headed the Louisiana Council on Human Relations, advised him not to tell potential landlords of his plan because no one would rent to him if he or she knew about the interracial staff. Vigo also encouraged Sutherland to move slowly because the city's white leaders were not ready to make major changes in the system of segregation. Because few African Americans wanted to risk the wrath of the white community by accepting a clerical position in an integrated office, Sutherland searched for two months before he found a qualified black applicant willing to work as his secretary. On April 15, 1955, Myrtle Douglas, a Southern University graduate, accepted the job. Two days later, the manager of the AFSC's office building evicted the group. One of the other renters in the building, Glen Nordyke, director of the local Boy Scouts, informed

¹Report on Merit Employment Program, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, August 1957, AFSC, Community Relations Files, 1957; Baton Rouge Merit Employment Program, AFSC, Community Relations Files, 1955; Richard Bennett to Thelma Babbitt, October 28, 1955, AFSC, Community Relations Files, 1955.

Sutherland that the presence of a black secretary upset his two female clerical workers. One claimed that if her father learned of the conditions in the AFSC office, he would not allow her to work in the building. The other stated that her husband would make her quit her job if he found out about the black secretary. Forced to abandon their office, Sutherland and Douglas moved to a building on Government Street in a racially mixed neighborhood. Sutherland's landlord also evicted him from his apartment and told the Quaker representative that Baton Rouge was not ready to accept the employment of a black secretary in a white office. Sutherland believed that the Southern Gentlemen pressured his landlord into forcing him out.²

In fact, when Sutherland opened the Baton Rouge office, the Southern Gentlemen had targeted him and anyone who associated with him for harassment. On May 12, 1955, two members of the segregationist group appeared at the AFSC office and interrogated Sutherland. One identified himself as a supervisor at Gulf Utilities and the other claimed that he worked at ESSO. In his report to his supervisors, Sutherland did not name the men. He did relate that they had asked him if he was a southerner by birth — he was not — and accused him and the AFSC of trying to stir up trouble between the races. The two men quoted the Old Testament to prove that “the Negro race had a separate and lowly origin [and was] destined to fulfill the role of chore-boy for the white man.” After an hour, they left, but Sutherland encountered one of them three days later in the parking lot of the Unitarian Church where he was scheduled to

²Eugene Sutherland to the File, ca. February 1955, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955; Eugene Sutherland to the File, May 10, 1955, *ibid.*; Eugene Sutherland to the File, June 2, 1955, *ibid.*

give a speech about the EOM Program. Two members of the Southern Gentlemen, along with their president John Easterly, attended the service and asked Sutherland why he refused to interview white applicants to work as his secretary. The extent of the segregationists' hatred of the Friends manifested itself on July 20, 1955, when a gunman shot out the windows of their office. In a separate incident on the same night, gunmen also shot and injured two African-American graduate students on the LSU campus. The incidents so traumatized Douglas that she quit, but Sutherland refused to allow the segregationists to intimidate him. The police failed to arrest anyone in the shooting incidents, but Sutherland believed that the Southern Gentlemen were responsible.³

Determined to carry out the EOM Program, Sutherland began meeting with white liberals to plan its implementation. He first contacted Marjorie Longsdorf, one of the few Friends in Baton Rouge. Longsdorf was a vocational counselor at Baton Rouge High School; her husband Ford worked as an insurance agent and played an active role in community affairs. He belonged to the Kiwanis Club and worked with the Boy Scouts. Although not a Friend, he supported the EOM Program. The Longsdorfs encouraged Sutherland to take a "slow and gradual" approach to changing Baton Rouge's employment practices. They suggested that he contact other white liberals. When asked to recommend black leaders with whom the AFSC could work, the Longsdorfs urged him to talk to racial diplomats, including B. V. Baranco, Felton Clark, and Leo S. Butler. They told him to avoid contact with Jemison because the

³Eugene Sutherland to the File, May 16, 1955, *ibid*; Confidential Report on Visit to Baton Rouge and Austin, October 10 - October 21, 1955, *ibid*.

white community perceived him as a “troublemaker” who was actively involved in the NAACP and responsible for the 1953 bus boycott. Jemison, they argued, was “persona non grata in the community at large, and his participation in our program would deter many others from cooperating.” In reality, Jemison had acted like a racial diplomat during the last stages of the boycott and had negotiated an amicable settlement between black and white leaders. In the 1960s, the white power structure would turn to him when problems arose in the African-American community.⁴

Sutherland met with several other white liberals in an attempt to discover the state of race relations in the city, to determine the best course of action to follow in setting up the EOM Program, and to organize a biracial advisory committee to help him carry it out. He first met with Rabbi Walter Peiser, a native of Austin, Texas, and a twenty-eight year resident of Baton Rouge. Peiser offered advice similar to the Longsdorfs’ and told him that only by moving slowly could racial progress be made. Reverend William Trice of University Methodist Church showed little interest in the AFSC program but offered Sutherland some advice on how to proceed. He suggested approaching the large industries first because their top management came from out of state and were not bound by the local patterns of race relations. Other religious and business leaders echoed Trice’s suggestion. Reverend John Felton of the First Presbyterian Church urged Sutherland to contact the manager of the ESSO plant, Henry Voorhies. Felton described Voorhies as “exceptionally able and broad-minded” and added that the plant manager “has done more for Baton Rouge than any other single

⁴Eugene Sutherland to Fay K. Hutchens, February 10, 1955, *ibid.*

individual. . . . Once ESSO breaks through the color barrier, the First Presbyterian church will be in a position to follow suit.” Other white liberals agreed that ESSO or one of the other national corporations could best initiate racial changes. They blamed working-class whites who had moved into the area from rural Louisiana and Mississippi for most of the racism in Baton Rouge. Trice described the recent migrants as “backwards” and poorly educated. He added, “It will take time to weed out the prejudices that flourish in this milieu.” Felton declared this group lacked “a cultural background which would ameliorate emotional explosions.” With his interviews with liberals complete, Sutherland asked racial diplomat James Cook, Jr., an ESSO employee and owner of Cook’s Theater; Melvin Dakin, LSU Law School professor; Mary Epperson, wife of LSU Music Professor Gordon Epperson; Edwin Gaskill, a research engineer at Allied Chemical Company; Martin Harvey, Southern’s dean of students; Jane Rein’l, a community activist; and O. J. Wenzel, former coordinator of the Baton Rouge Trade and Industrial Schools, to join the AFSC’s biracial advisory committee. All agreed to serve on the committee.⁵

With the advisory group in place, Sutherland met with three groups of employers — white business leaders, plant managers, and owners and operators of department stores, restaurants, and other small businesses — to discuss implementation of the EOM Program. White business leaders declared that Baton Rouge’s economic condition far surpassed that of other southern cities. Many feared that the presence of

⁵Ibid.; Eugene Sutherland to the File, Re: Reverend William Trice, June 14, 1955, *ibid.*; Gene Sutherland to the File, Re: Reverend John Felton, June 14, 1955, *ibid.* The quotes attributed to Sutherland’s interviewees come from his written reports to his superiors.

the Friends would make conditions worse for black employees. Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce Opie Shelton claimed that he knew of "no particular discrimination practices in employment." He added that black Baton Rougeans earned more money than their counterparts in other parts of the country. He attributed much of the race's progress to ESSO and the other plants and refineries. White leaders also believed that African Americans were happy with the conditions of their employment because they had heard no complaints. Herman Moyse, the senior trust officer of City National Bank, told Sutherland that the EOM Program disgusted him and warned him not to disturb "the happy state of affairs" in Baton Rouge.⁶

Sutherland also met with representatives of the city's plants and refineries and discovered that plant officials, fearing that their white employees would strike, were reluctant to integrate their workforces. The AFSC representative visited ESSO first. As one of the city's largest employers, ESSO's workforce in 1955 numbered 7,300, of whom approximately 1,100 were black. The plant's manager, H. J. Voorhies, bragged that the local facility operated as an autonomous unit and that he and the other on-site administrators "ran the show." He told Sutherland that the plant's hiring practices had improved conditions for black Baton Rougeans and added that although the plant's black employees worked in unskilled positions, some operated machinery such as rubber packing machines and lawn mowers. A few African Americans even headed all-black work crews in the auxiliary department, which was made up of common laborers.

⁶Eugene Sutherland to Thelma Babbitt, March 2, 1955, AFSC, Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955; Eugene Sutherland to the File, April 13, 1955, *ibid.*

Although they accrued seniority within this department, they could not transfer it to other departments. Therefore, if ESSO lifted all racial barriers and allowed African Americans to work in skilled and professional positions, they would lose their seniority. When asked about carrying out the Employment on Merit Program, Voorhies stated that doing so would hurt the black workers and would lead to layoffs because white workers were inherently superior and would take jobs currently reserved for black workers. He believed that, with a few exceptions, African Americans "lacked native ability." The plant's director of Employee Relations echoed Voorhies. He told Sutherland that if white and black workers were forced to compete for common laborer positions, the African Americans simply would not make the grade. Both men boasted that ESSO paid its black workers well and added that they earned higher salaries than most African Americans.⁷

Unlike white liberals who believed that the integration of ESSO's workforce would lead to changes in the community, Voorhies claimed that local customs required that his plant maintain separate workforces. He told Sutherland that in Arabia, the corporation did not try to "make Americans out of Arabians." He added that if he changed the plant's hiring policies, he would offend whites and destroy the good relationship that existed between ESSO and the white community. More important, he knew that if he filled skilled positions with African Americans, then white workers would strike. In fact, when black workers took over the mowing of the plant's grounds

⁷Gene Sutherland to the File, May 2, 1955, *ibid.*; Gene Sutherland to the File, May 23, 1955, *ibid.*

from white workers, the white union threatened to strike if blacks continued to maintain the lawn.⁸

After Voorhies refused to integrate ESSO's workforce as part of the EOM Program, the Committee on Federal Contracts forced him to reconsider. The committee, created by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, required industries receiving government contracts to have integrated workforces. To retain his facility's government contracts, Voorhies initiated a series of secret meetings with plant officials and representatives of its white and black unions, the Independent Industrial Workers Association Sections One (white) and Two (black). After meeting more than twenty times, Voorhies and the unions agreed to desegregate portions of the plant's workforce. The plan allowed black workers to move into the helper pool, which had previously been reserved for whites, and to be paid \$2.26 per hour. At the time, African Americans starting in the auxiliary section earned a little over a dollar per hour. Plant officials promised that when black workers in the helper pool obtained enough experience, they could enter an apprentice program and eventually become skilled workers. This process would take at least four years and was limited to only thirty positions. The plan did not address the integration of the clerical, technical, or professional staffs. The Committee on Government Contracts nevertheless approved ESSO's hiring agreement in late 1955, but the company refused to make the policy change public.⁹

⁸Gene Sutherland to the File, June 24, 1955, *ibid.*

⁹Gene Sutherland to the File, October 11, 1955, AFSC, Visits with Placement Directors, South Central Regional Office, 1955.

According to James Cook, the vice president of the Independent Industrial Workers Second Section Two, the plant required African Americans applying for jobs in the helper pool to pass an aptitude test. He confidently proclaimed that enough blacks would pass the test to fill the thirty available positions. As a racial diplomat, Cook viewed the agreement as a victory for black workers even though it preserved segregated facilities, including the cafeteria and restrooms. He believed these barriers would “wither away” on their own as black workers proved their ability and reliability. He and other black union members refused to push the corporation for greater changes, and the World War II activists denounced Cook and the other union members for their timidity. The activists realized that ESSO officials would never willingly desegregate plant facilities or hire African Americans to fill professional positions.¹⁰

Although the EOM Program focused its attention on the city’s large corporations, it also pursued the desegregation of other Baton Rouge businesses. Sutherland visited several department stores to discuss employment on merit. Store managers listened with interest to his description of the program, but when he asked them to hire black store clerks and cashiers, they refused even to consider it. They believed that white shoppers would shun their businesses if they hired black salespeople. The manager of I. H. Rubenstein claimed that white Baton Rougeans “would literally see red at being served by Negroes.” John Stotler, the manager of J. C.

¹⁰Minutes of the Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program’s Advisory Committee Meeting, November 28, 1955, AFSC, Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955; Gene Sutherland to the File, October 19, 1955, AFSC, Visits With Placement Directors, South Central Regional Program, 1955.

Penney, said that whites “would refuse to trade with the employer who breaks the barrier.”¹¹

Despite its attempts to encourage businesses to integrate their workforces, the AFSC accomplished very little during its first year in Baton Rouge. Although ESSO agreed to start limited employment on merit, the federal government rather than the Friends was the driving force behind its change in hiring practices. Most white Baton Rougeans saw the Friends as outside agitators who wanted to convince African Americans to demand changes in the system of segregation and to create racial animosity in the community. Although white liberals agreed with the goals of the AFSC and pledged their support, many were too frightened to play an active role in the city’s only interracial organization. With a strong and capable leader, the Friends might have been able to serve as a unifying force for white liberals, but Eugene Sutherland possessed neither of these characteristics. He hailed from the North, and white Baton Rougeans immediately pegged him as an outsider. In addition, he was untidy in appearance, disorganized, argumentative, and unwilling to listen to the views of others. All of these factors lessened his ability to deal with the hostile environment that he encountered in Baton Rouge. Fearing that Sutherland would alienate potential supporters, the AFSC placed him on probation, and in 1956, he resigned and left Baton Rouge.¹²

¹¹Gene Sutherland to the File, September 30, 1955, AFSC, Visits with Placement Directors, South Central Regional Office, 1955; Gene Sutherland to the File, September 7, 1950, *ibid*; Gene Sutherland to the File, September 20, 1955, *ibid*.

¹²The AFSC records do not reveal the reasons for his departure. Richard Bennett to Thelma Babbitt, October 28, 1955, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit

Still convinced that the EOM program could succeed in Baton Rouge, the AFSC replaced Sutherland with Wade Mackie. A native of North Carolina, Mackie was committed to "the brotherhood of man and the dignity and worth of individuals." He believed that all men and women, regardless of race or creed, should be treated equally. He even treated those who held different opinions, the segregationists, with respect. Mackie possessed the personal and organizational skills necessary to unite white liberals, who before his arrival could not agree on a course of action, and to mastermind white resistance to segregation. Under his direction, the AFSC's Baton Rouge program flourished.¹³

Mackie and the Friends remained committed to the EOM program, and ESSO remained the key to the AFSC's plan. Like Sutherland, the Quaker leader met with Voorhies and encouraged him to increase the numbers of African Americans hired to fill non-traditional jobs. The plant manager, however, remained unmoved by — Mackie's pleas. Two years after the agreement between ESSO and the Committee on Government Contracts, the only non-traditional jobs open to African Americans were the thirty allocated in 1955. Other industries, including Kaiser Aluminum and Ethyl, had promised to begin the process of desegregating their workforces, but they promoted few blacks to positions usually held by whites. The plant managers defended their hiring practices and claimed that no African Americans had applied for "white" positions. Mackie believed that they were lying, so he devised a plan to reveal their

Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955.

¹³Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program Report, August 1956, AFSC, Community Relations Files, South Central Regional Office, 1956.

duplicity. He wanted to ask several of Southern University's top graduates to test the hiring practices at local plants. High ranking Southern graduates easily obtained jobs with national corporations in other parts of the country, and if the Baton Rouge-based plants were truly committed to the EOM program, they would also hire Southern's top scholars. But Mackie was never able to carry out his plan. When Mackie asked Southern's President Felton Clark for help in recruiting the top graduates, he refused. Clark feared that if he even associated with Mackie, segregationists in the state legislature would destroy the university.¹⁴

The responses of Baton Rouge's white plant and store managers to the EOM Program were not unique. In their other forays into the South, the Friends received similar reactions. From 1952 to 1956, the AFSC operated an EOM Program in Greensboro, North Carolina. There, just as in Baton Rouge, a representative contacted the managers of all of the major industries and department stores and asked them to hire black workers to fill non-traditional skilled and clerical positions. In every case, the managers refused and told the Friends that integration should start with the churches and not with the businesses. Despite the liberals' hopes for leadership from the national corporations, they usually conformed to southern racial practices.¹⁵

¹⁴Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program Report, August 1956, AFSC, Community Relations Files, South Central Regional Office, 1956; Report to the American Friends Service Committee's Regional Committee, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1957; Jean Fairfax to Barbara Moffitt, December 11, 1957, *ibid.*

¹⁵Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 34-35.

Unlike Sutherland who focused his attention almost exclusively on the EOM Program, Mackie wanted to attack segregation in other areas of the Baton Rouge community. He met with a variety of church groups to make contacts within the black and white communities and organized an interracial ministerial alliance to improve the relationship between the races. Mackie believed that the ministers who joined the group represented "a segment of the community, white and Negro, from whom a witness for brotherhood and the moral righteousness of integration must come." Approximately ten ministers joined the new group. In his reports to his superiors, Mackie never named the ten but described them as "liberals caught unprepared by the Supreme Court decision [*Brown*] and left confused and immobilized by the wave of [segregationist] reaction to it." The ministers who supported integration applauded the alliance, but without the AFSC, they would have continued to flounder because they feared the wrath of the segregationists. One unidentified minister told Mackie, "We need organization worse than any other professional group." Although their numbers remained small, these ministers used their pulpits to denounce segregation and call for social and economic equality. Of course, the majority of Baton Rouge's clergy refused to join the organization, and some would not meet with Mackie. The Quaker leader reported that one minister, who denied his request for a conference, "feels like a saint while maintaining the status quo" and described another as possessing "one of the worst attitudes I have encountered, accompanied by a sense of holiness." Other ministers

claimed to support integration but refused to join the alliance because of their fear of reprisals from their congregations and from segregationists.¹⁶

While they supported the work of the Friends, many white liberals in Baton Rouge sympathized with the plant and retail store managers and wanted the AFSC to go slowly. Reverend John Felton refused to consider hiring a black secretary because he believed that his congregation would fire him and that segregationists would desecrate his church. The General Secretary of the Baton Rouge YMCA, E. B. Davis, declared that he supported desegregation but added that he had to keep his feelings under wraps because if they became public, his standing in the community would be jeopardized. When he first arrived in Baton Rouge in 1945, he had suggested desegregating some of the organization's activities but received such a negative response from the white community that he abandoned the idea. In 1955, the Southern and LSU branches of the YMCA asked Davis to use the organization's Camp Singing Waters for an integrated meeting. He refused, saying that if white parents learned that African Americans had slept on the mattresses, they would refuse to send their children to the camp. Despite Davis's refusal, the integrated conference took place at another location, and three years later, segregationists forced President Troy Middleton to fire LSU's YMCA Director Hollis Hayward for hosting it. While the national organization of the YMCA supported

¹⁶Baton Rouge Merit Employee Program Report, August 1956, AFSC, Community Relations Files, 1956; Report of American Friends Service Committee's Regional Committee, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1957; Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Report, August 1956, AFSC, Community Relations Files, South Central Regional Office, 1956.

integration, Baton Rouge's branches, like those in other southern cities, maintained separate facilities until the late 1960s¹⁷.

Fear of segregationist reprisals forced many AFSC supporters to abandon the organization. Ford Longsdorf urged Sutherland not to move quickly on integration because a strong push in that direction would stir up segregationist activity and tarnish the images of AFSC supporters. In 1956, the head of the Friends' interracial advisory committee, Edwin Gaskill, resigned his post because he feared that he would lose his job as an engineer at Allied Chemical, that he would suffer an attack by segregationists, and that they would ostracize his children at school. A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Gaskill was a birthright Friend who had moved to Baton Rouge in 1949.¹⁸

Although many liberals, such as Gaskill, feared the segregationists, Wade Mackie found a core group of committed supporters who wanted to bring about integration, even if it meant a direct confrontation with the Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Council. As noted in the previous chapter, the forced integration of Little Rock, Arkansas' Central High School in September, 1957, and the progression of desegregation suits against several Louisiana school districts through the courts

¹⁷Gene Sutherland to the File, June 14, 1955, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955; Eugene Sutherland to Thelma Babbitt, March 1, 1955, *ibid.*

¹⁸Gene Sutherland to the File, October 18, 1955, *ibid.*; Eugene Sutherland to Thelma Babbitt, February 22, 1955, *ibid.*; Wade Mackie to the File, August 2, 1956, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1956; Richard Bennett to Thelma Babbitt, October 28, 1955, AFSC, Baton Rouge Employment on Merit Program, South Central Regional Office, 1955.

prompted the legislature to pass a series of laws to keep black students out of the state's white public schools. When the legislature convened in the spring of 1958, its members, led by Rainach, immediately began discussing ways to prevent the integration of Louisiana's schools and decided that if the courts ordered white schools to admit African Americans that it would follow Virginia's plan, which was enacted in 1956, for dealing with that situation — it would simply close the public school system and replace it with a private one.¹⁹

In February 1958, fearing that the legislature would close the public schools if the federal courts ordered them to integrate, Mackie turned to the Louisiana Civil Liberties Union (LCLU) for help. Although a state chapter had existed for several years, in January, 1958, liberals in Baton Rouge first formed a local chapter. Mackie contacted the Baton Rouge group's vice president, Waldo McNeir, an English professor at LSU and a longtime southern liberal, and asked him to convince the LCLU to lead the fight against the school closing legislation. A recent trip to Europe had bolstered McNeir's commitment to ending segregation. While there, Europeans constantly asked him to justify the system of segregation. He realized that he could not offer any reasons for maintaining it and returned to Baton Rouge determined to bring an end to Jim Crow. After discussing strategy, McNeir and Mackie invited local LCLU members to a planning session at the AFSC office. To keep the Quaker leader's involvement quiet,

¹⁹“Solons Talk Wiping Out Public Schools, Scourge Troop Use,” *Morning Advocate*, September 29, 1957, 1; Bartley, *The New South*, 194-196; Matthew Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited: Virginia's White Moderates and the Byrd Organization in Virginia,” in *The Moderates' Dilemma: Massive Resistance and School Desegregation in Virginia*, Matthew Lassiter and Andrew Lewis, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 6-7.

they sent the invitations on LCLU letterhead. Ten LCLU members attended the March 25, 1958, meeting and decided to circulate a petition expressing the organization's opposition to the proposed school closing law. They worded the petition in such a manner that people who wanted to integrate the schools as well as those who supported segregation but wanted to maintain the public school system, could sign. The LCLU members knew that the number of integrationists was small and wanted to obtain as large a number of signatures as possible. After circulating the petition for only fifteen days, the organization had gathered more than six hundred signatures, with one-third coming from LCLU members. Sixty-six of the signers taught at LSU.²⁰

On June 1, 1958, the LCLU presented its petition to the House Education Committee, and eight days later, at the committee's public hearing on the school closing bills, several liberal and the moderates spoke out against them, including Waldo McNeir and Law School Professor Charles Reynard. McNeir's testimony drew the committee's attention to the LCLU petition. He stressed that the school closing bills violated the United States Constitution and would harm all school children if enacted. Reynard, an Illinois native and constitutional law expert, was not a member of the LCLU but was committed to the cause of ending segregation. A longtime liberal, he had been an ardent supporter of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal and an advocate of improving conditions for the country's poor and working classes. He abhorred the anti-

²⁰Report and Evaluation of Recent Work on Desegregation, June 21, 1958, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1958; Louisiana Civil Liberties Union, "Analysis of Part I of the Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate LSU," May 28, 1959, Charles Reynard Papers in the possession of his widow Marian Reynard Baun, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2 (hereafter cited as Reynard Papers).

integration laws that the legislature passed after *Brown*, but the lack of white opposition before 1958 had kept him quiet. Reynard also feared that he would lose his job at LSU if he denounced the segregationist legislation, but he summoned the courage to speak out against closing the public schools to prevent integration. In a letter to his friend and colleague Douglas Maggs, a professor of constitutional law at Duke University, he explained, "After four years of sitting idly by and watching these measures steamroller through the legislature, I finally gathered my courage, threw caution into the wind, and appeared yesterday afternoon before the House Education Committee in opposition to the bills." In fact, he used, as the basis for his argument, a statement Maggs made before the North Carolina General Assembly when his state considered similar legislation in July 1956. In his testimony, Reynard said that the bills under consideration were clearly unconstitutional and that he had no doubt that the Supreme Court would overturn them. Apart from their unconstitutionality, if enacted, these laws would hurt white children more than African-American ones because only white schools would close. Since black schools would not be integrated, they would remain open.²⁴

In addition to McNeir and Reynard, several other LSU professors testified before the house committee, including Edward B. Robert, dean of the College of Education, and Irwin L. Forbes, professor of plant pathology. Unlike their liberal co-

²⁴Louisiana Civil Liberties Union, "Analysis of Part I of the Report of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate LSU," May 28, 1959, 2; Charles Reynard to Douglas Maggs, June 10, 1958; Statement by Douglas Maggs on Legislation Proposed by the North Carolina Advisory Committee on Education, July 24, 1956 with Charles Reynard's additions for his testimony before the Louisiana legislature on June 9, 1958. All in Reynard Papers.

workers, Robert and Forbes supported the proposed legislation. Roberts bragged that none of his professors signed the LCLU petition. Forbes declared that segregated schools were better than integrated ones and demanded that the state's dual system of public education be maintained. He added that Reynard and McNeir represented only a small portion of LSU's faculty. According to him, most professors wanted to maintain segregated schools at any cost. Forbes' assurances held little sway over the legislators. The House of Representatives immediately voted 70-0 to call President Middleton and the deans of the colleges whose faculty members had signed the petition to appear before the JLCS "to answer charges that some LSU faculty members are dispensing anti-segregation views in the classroom" and brainwashing students into supporting integration. In a letter to Maggs, Reynard joked that he could not be brainwashing his students into supporting desegregation because three members of the JLCS had taken his constitutional law course while they were in law school.²⁵

The JLCS met on June 10 to ferret out integrationist sentiment at LSU. Like Rainach, most of the committee's members came from the state's staunchly segregationist northern parishes. None came from East Baton Rouge Parish. In his opening statement, Rainach set the tone for the hearing. He claimed that the committee would seek out those professors who discussed subjects "contrary to the laws of the state of Louisiana and to the way of life of our people." He added that the LCLU and its parent organization were pawns of the Communist Party and that their members tricked the sixty-six LSU professors into signing the petition. Rainach then called Troy

²⁵"House Orders LSU Officials for Quizzing," *Morning Advocate*, June 10, 1958, 1; Charles Reynard to Douglas Maggs, June 10, 1958, Reynard Papers.

Middleton as the JLCS's first witness. In a prepared statement, Middleton, one of Baton Rouge's most powerful white leaders, declared that he and the university's administrators supported segregation and fought diligently to prevent the integration of LSU, but he added, "The university's position has been to obey the laws of the state and the country." When the federal courts ordered the school to admit black students, the administration complied. He acknowledged that some professors, including Reynard, discussed integration in their classes but did so only in courses where the topic had some relevancy, such as in constitutional law, political science, history, and sociology. Middleton held that few students or faculty members ever talked about integration until the JLCS began its hearing. He refused to punish Reynard and McNeir for expressing their opposition to the school closing bills because the two men appeared as private citizens and not representatives of the university. Reprimanding or firing them for expressing their opinions would be, according to him, a violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Middleton repeated that he and the Board of Supervisors believed in academic freedom and added that he would not seek out integrationist professors on campus.²⁶

Reynard and other LSU professors cheered Middleton's remarks. In a letter to Professor Clyde Summers of Yale's Law School, Reynard declared that Middleton "said just enough to handle the situation. . . . As an old Army man, he never lets the public forget that he once took an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution. While he

²⁶Marian Reynard's notes of the Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation Meeting, June 11, 1958, Reynard Papers, 1-2; "Committee Okays Bill Creating Super Board for Higher Education," *Morning Advocate*, June 12, 1958, 1; "Middleton Says No Reds Teaching Classes at LSU," *ibid.*

personally would prefer segregation, he is first and foremost for law and order and will serve to uphold the law of the land." Middleton's support for academic freedom helped to defuse the situation as did the reaction of LSU's alumni. Although many former students wanted to maintain segregation, they believed strongly in academic freedom and feared that any attempt to censor freedom of expression would hurt the university's national reputation. Theo Cangelosi, a Baton Rouge attorney and vice chairman of the Alumni Council, denounced the legislative probe even though he declared that his views differed from those of the sixty-six professors who signed the petition. The council urged its members to contact their legislators and the JLCS to express their displeasure with the probe. The professors who spoke out against the acts received only a couple of negative responses and nearly one hundred letters, phone calls, and telegrams of support.²⁷

McNeir's and Reynard's stand against the state legislature and the subsequent support from accommodationists and white leaders ushered in a new era in the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge. When they realized that speaking out would bring no significant reprisals, more liberals denounced the segregationist agenda put forth by the state legislature. As the legislation made its way to the Senate, Mackie once again worked behind the scenes to organize the opposition. This time, he asked several ministers to appear before the Senate Education Committee. Some longtime AFSC supporters, whose names do not appear in his reports to the national office, refused. He

²⁷Charles Reynard to Clyde Summers, June 23, 1958, Reynard Papers; ACLU Report, Reynard Papers, 3; "Alumni Council Calls on Members to Defend LSU," *Morning Advocate*, June 10, 1958, 1; ACLU Report, Reynard Papers, 8; Charles Reynard to Al and Les Harrison, June 13, 1958, Reynard Papers.

convinced Rabbi Walter Peiser and Methodist minister D. W. Poole to speak out. Several months earlier, the state's Methodist Conference had passed a resolution, which received little attention at the time, denouncing the school closing legislation. Following Mackie's advice, Poole sent copies of the resolution to all of the members of the state legislature. The Quaker leader also urged all of his media contacts, both local and national, to do stories on the resolution and called "influential people" to advise Senator J. D. DeBlieux to oppose the school closing laws. None of the liberals who spoke out against the bills expected them to be defeated. Rather, they wanted to send a message to the public that some Louisianians opposed segregation and hoped to convince like-minded people to join their cause. Although the state legislature passed the segregation bills and the governor signed them into law, Mackie's plan to unite the liberals and to encourage them publicly to denounce Jim Crow succeeded. By the early 1960s, the city possessed a significant and vocal liberal population that was, for the most part centered around LSU and several of the city's Protestant churches and Jewish synagogues.²⁸

In 1955, the AFSC had arrived in Baton Rouge determined to carry out its Employment on Merit Program. Convinced that the city, with its industrial-based economy, would provide the perfect testing-ground for the project, the Friends soon discovered that the segregation that characterized southern society was also ingrained in the community's plants and refineries. Managers of ESSO and the other facilities, like

²⁸Report and Evaluation of Recent Work on Desegregation, June 21, 1958, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1958; "Segregation Measures Okayed as Ministers Protest," *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1958, 1; "Segregation Legislation Finally Passes," *ibid.*

the white leadership, wanted to maintain a stable working environment in Baton Rouge and refused to upset the balance by forcing their workers to integrate. Only after federal intervention did they open traditionally "white" jobs to African Americans. In the late 1950s, the AFSC abandoned the EOM Program and focused its attention on ending segregation. The group believed that economic equality was not possible without social equality and directed its field workers in southern communities to focus their attention on combating the system of Jim Crow. In cities such as Atlanta, AFSC representatives joined white liberals in the fight to desegregate public schools, lunch counters, and public transportation. In Baton Rouge, Mackie used his organizational skills and charm to convince liberals to engage in a public battle against segregation. Without Mackie, the group would, in all probability, have continued to flounder. In the 1960s, under the direction of the Quaker leader, liberals became a powerful force in the fight to desegregate public facilities, to end police brutality, and to integrate the public schools.²⁹

²⁹Harmon, *Beneath the Image*, 107, 193.

Chapter 6

Sit-ins, 1960-1961

The 1950s ended with liberals in Baton Rouge and in Louisiana speaking out despite threats of violence and intimidation. Although World War II activists continued to support the civil rights movement, they took part in no public protests in the years following Johnnie Jones's and Alex Pitcher's attempt to enroll black students at Gilmer Wright. Instead, they used the federal courts to fight for racial equality and believed that the only way to obtain racial equality was by working through the framework of the United States Constitution. The 1960s ushered in a new era of the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge and in the South as a whole as a new group of activists, African-American college students, began to challenge the system of segregation through protests rather than in the courts.

The student activists came of age during the first stages of the civil rights movement and witnessed its pivotal moments, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the *Brown* decision, and the Little Rock school desegregation crisis. Most of their parents belonged to the upper and middle classes, and often with the support of their parents, teachers, and peer groups, they began challenging the system of segregation as teenagers. Nearly two decades younger than the World War II activists, the student activists soon grew impatient with the slow pace of desegregation. Refusing to wait for the federal courts to wipe out Jim Crow and disgusted by the state legislature's attempt to undermine federal authority, students at Southern University began using sit-ins, marches, and picketing to demand change. Inspired by the wave of lunch counter sit-ins that began in February, 1960, when a group of black students in Greensboro, North

Carolina, sat at a segregated lunch counter and demanded service, eight Southern University students followed suit on March 28. The following year, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) established a chapter at Southern University and sponsored a series of protests. Direct action frightened white Baton Rougeans. Convinced that racial unrest was imminent, white leaders turned to the racial diplomats to hammer out compromises to silence these young activists. When that failed, they attempted to prohibit the students from conducting protests by securing state and federal injunctions that forbade CORE from operating in East Baton Rouge Parish. Although white leaders managed to maintain peaceful race relations through diplomacy and legal intimidation, they failed to silence the student activists. Racial tension in Baton Rouge continued to rise.¹

On February 1, 1960, four North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College students walked into Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat at the lunch counter reserved for whites, and placed an order. When the waitresses refused to serve them, they remained seated. The next day, they, along with other students, returned and repeated the process. The sit-ins in Greensboro attracted thousands of black and white supporters, continued for more than five months, and spurred other black college students into action. By the end of 1960, sit-ins had occurred in approximately 104 communities throughout the South, and in many of these places, violence accompanied protests.²

¹Laue, *Direct Action and Desegregation*, 76-79.

²Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 61-85; Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 61-87; Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-in Movement of 1960*, Martin Luther

The prospect of a sit-in in Louisiana convinced the segregationists to take action. At a March 6, 1960, state meeting of the Louisiana Citizens' Council, Senator Willie Rainach warned that students at two private black colleges in New Orleans, Dillard and Xavier, were attending classes on how to conduct lunch counter sit-ins. Rainach told his fellow segregationists that in other states the demonstrations were handled locally, but if necessary to deter protesters, the legislature would strengthen the state's laws against trespassing and disturbing the peace. Nothing could stifle the sit-in movement, however. On March 8, approximately two hundred Dillard students picketed along a road near campus to protest against segregation, but none took part in lunch counter sit-ins. State officials knew that eventually Louisiana college students would follow the example of their contemporaries and stage their own protests. On March 15, 1960, the Louisiana State Board of Education ordered all college presidents under its authority to "take disciplinary action against any students involved in incidents that would discredit the institution or the state educational system."³ Because whites took part in demonstrations in other southern cities, the board stressed that the policy applied to both white and black students. Within days, President Felton Clark called a convocation of Southern's student body and told them that he would expel any student taking part in a demonstration. He held a similar meeting with faculty members and

King and the Civil Rights Movement Series, ed. David Garrow (New York: Carlson Publishing Company, 1989), xiii, 177-178.

³The State Board of Education oversaw all state-funded colleges and universities, vocational and technical schools, and public elementary, middle, and high schools. LSU had its own governing body and was not under the direct control of the Board of Education. Public Affairs Research Council, *Louisiana State Agencies Handbook, 1960* (Baton Rouge: Public Affairs Research Council, 1960), 49-51.

warned them against encouraging students to protest. If any faculty member collaborated, Clark added, he would demand their resignation. Rather than deter students, Clark's announcement strengthened their resolve to hold a sit-in of their own. They viewed his warning as a challenge that they could not ignore.⁴

During February, eight Southern University students began meeting in secret to discuss ways to support the Greensboro sit-ins. They discussed several options, including raising money to help finance the North Carolina protest and even traveling to Greensboro to take part in the sit-ins. Because they had little money, they decided to stage a sit-in of their own in Baton Rouge. The group included six men and two women. All belonged to the top academic and leadership ranks of the university. Three of them — John Johnson, twenty-five of Cullen, Louisiana; Kenneth Johnson, twenty-two of Columbia, Mississippi; and Donald Moss, twenty-two of Winnfield, Louisiana — were juniors in the Law School. The others were undergraduates. The only non-southerner in the group, Marvin Robinson, hailed from Gary, Indiana. Twenty-year-old Monroe, Louisiana, native Janette Hoston majored in psychology, and Jo Ann Morris, the only freshman in the group, was from Shreveport. Bacteriology major Felton Valdry was twenty-two and came from the small town of Bueche, Louisiana; and Major Johns, a theology major was from the Baton Rouge area.⁵

⁴"Negroes at Dillard in Protest," *State-Times*, March 8, 1960, 1; "State Board of Education Acts to Curb 'Sit-Downs,'" *Louisiana Weekly*, March 26, 1960, 3; "State College Heads Warned on 'Incidents,'" *Morning Advocate*, March 16, 1960, 1; Wade Mackie to Jean Fairfax, April 6, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1960.

⁵Janette Hoston Harris, interview by author, tape recording, January 9, 1994, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley

The eight students came together from a variety of backgrounds for the same reason — to bring an end to segregation. In March 1960, Student Government President Marvin Robinson was twenty-eight days away from graduating from Southern. An education major and a track star, he had a job lined up to work as a coach at his alma mater. When the Greensboro sit-ins began, he realized that he could no longer accept continued segregation. Other students, inspired by the lunch counter protests, turned to Robinson, as student body president, for advice and guidance, and he quickly became the leader of Southern's student activists. Major Johns was one of the most outspoken of the group. The theology student was a compelling speaker, a fiery preacher, and fully committed to ending segregation. He worked closely with Robinson and helped him plan the sit-in. Both Johns and Robinson later became field representatives for CORE. Felton Valdry became involved in the sit-in movement when he realized that, after graduation from the all-black Southern, where his academic achievements were recognized and applauded, he would be faced with the reality that his academic achievement meant little in the South's segregated society. He was black, and whites would treat him like a second-class citizen regardless of his intelligence or skills. "Suddenly, I had to deal with what I was being educated for, as opposed to real life," Valdry recalled. John Johnson planned to pursue a career as a country lawyer when he became involved in the civil rights movement, and Donald Moss was a married second year law student who worked as a graduate counselor on Southern's personnel staff. "I

Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 55-56; "Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1; "Sit-In Students' Motions Up Here Today," *Morning Advocate*, April 29, 1960, 4A.

wanted to be free without paying any dues," Moss said. Although in later years, the fact that he had to completely disrupt his life by being arrested and expelled to achieve his goal still angered him.⁶

Morris was a shy, quiet freshman, and the other student activists were puzzled by why she became involved in the sit-ins. However, she, too, was inspired by the Greensboro demonstrations, and although she rarely spoke, she possessed the strength of character to defy white authority and take her place at the lunch counter. The daughter of activists, Hoston grew up in Monroe, Louisiana. As a junior high school student, she helped her father with a voter registration drive in her hometown. She also regularly defied Monroe's bus segregation laws. "At least once a week during my junior and high school days, I was driven to jail by the bus driver because I wouldn't get in the back of the bus," she recalled. "Because we would not move, he would drive us to the courthouse, [and] call the principal. The principal would call my father, and my father would say, 'Again?'" Her activism continued after she graduated from high school and enrolled at Southern. Shortly after arriving on the Baton Rouge campus, Hoston led a student protest to improve the quality of food on campus. Kenneth Johnson was the nephew of Law School Dean A. A. Lenoir, who had supported Alex Tureaud's admission to LSU's undergraduate program. Unlike Hoston, he did not grow up in an activist home, but his parents encouraged him and his siblings to get a college

⁶"Reunion in D. C. Evokes Bittersweet Memories of Louisiana Sit-In," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1990, D1; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 108; "Expelled Student Named to NAACP Youth Council," *Louisiana Weekly*, May 28, 1960, 1.

education. "They thought it would lessen the impact of discrimination. The higher educated you were, the less impact that racism could have on you," Johnson said.⁷

Although events in Greensboro inspired Kenneth Johnson, John Johnson, and Donald Moss, the 1959 lynching of Mack Charles Parker had already convinced them to take action against segregation. Parker, a black man, was suspected of raping a pregnant white woman in Poplarville, Mississippi, located near the Louisiana border. Although the rape victim picked Parker out of a line-up, she conceded that his voice was different from that of the rapist, and Parker maintained his innocence. But while Parker was in jail awaiting trial, a mob of masked men stormed the prison and abducted him. Law enforcement authorities later recovered his savagely beaten body floating in the Pearl River and arrested the leaders of the mob. A local grand jury refused to indict them. At that point, the Justice Department entered the Parker case and brought the suspects before a federal grand jury in Mississippi. It too refused to indict them.⁸

In late February, the eight student activists began meeting to plan their protest. The students hosted a rally to show their support for the Greensboro sit-ins and "to get the students involved in understanding what the issues were." The student activists

⁷"Reunion in D. C. Evokes Bittersweet Memories of Louisiana Sit-In," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1990, D1; Harris, interview, 55-56; Kenneth Johnson, interview by author, tape recording, January 11, 1994, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 9.

⁸Johnson, interview, 26-27; "FBI Identifies the Body Found in Pearl River as Missing Negro," *Morning Advocate*, May 5, 1959; "Parker Jury to be Picked Monday," *Morning Advocate*, January 3, 1960, 10A; "No Indictments in Parker Case," *Morning Advocate*, January 15, 1960, 1. For a full account of the Mack Charles Parker case see: Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

asked civil rights attorney A. P. Tureaud to be the keynote speaker, telling him that they planned to conduct a nonviolent sit-in at a Baton Rouge lunch counter. We “believe it is our duty to show our resentment to segregation by actively participating in such a movement,” Major Johns explained on behalf of the group. Tureaud, however, refused to appear, so the students asked Jemison to speak. Although he usually sided with the racial diplomats, he agreed to appear at the rally. Felton Clark learned about the unauthorized meeting several days before it occurred and warned the students that if they staged a sit-in, he would expel them. He even phoned Harris’s father and asked him to “talk her out of doing anything foolish.” Her father rushed down to Baton Rouge, appeared at the rally, which was held in the university’s auditorium, and announced his support for the sit-in movement. The rally received no newspaper coverage, and little information is available about its scope or content.⁹

Before the unauthorized meeting, Major Johns wrote to CORE to inform the organization that he and several other students would stage a sit-in in Baton Rouge. “We are planning this demonstration in order to let the southland know that we too are impatient with its slow compliance with the Supreme Court’s decisions on segregation.” CORE played no role in the Baton Rouge demonstration.¹⁰

⁹Hoston, interview, 54-56; Major Johns to A. P. Tureaud, March 30, 1960, APT, box 11, folder 3; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 267; Sternberg, “Perpetuation, Accommodation, and Confrontation,” 92.

¹⁰Major Johns to CORE, March 15, 1960, Congress of Racial Equality Papers, Series V, reel 20, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (microfilm).

Although they told Tureaud and CORE that they would stage a sit-in, the organizers gave them no details, and the actual plans for the protest, including the date and location, remained secret. Sit-in organizers even refused to tell the other participants the date of the protest because they feared word would leak out. "We were determined to pull it off in secrecy," recalled Kenneth Johnson. The student leaders knew that if Felton Clark discovered the time and date of the protest, he would tell the white leaders and thwart the sit-in. As the day of the sit-in approached, Hoston and the other participants sensed that the time was near, and for two days, they dressed in their best clothes to be ready for the protest. Hoston remembered:

I was on my way to class. I was walking with a friend of mine, and they came to me and said, "We need you to come to the men's dormitory now." I knew. I said to my friend, "Take my books, and call my mother if anything happens. Let her know that I'm all right." She said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well I'm not sure yet, but you'll hear about it."¹¹

The leaders decided to target the lunch counter at Kress located in downtown Baton Rouge. On March 28, seven of the eight student activists went to the store and split into two groups. Fearing that the police would arrest them, the student activists selected the eloquent Johns as their spokesman, and he remained on campus while they sat-in. After making a purchase in the store, the students walked into the cafeteria. Store manager Reynolds Matthews sat at the counter eating his lunch, and Morris and Hoston took the seats next to him. The male students occupied seats at intervals along the counter. Matthews told them to move to the counter reserved for black customers, but

¹¹Johnson, interview, 24-25; Harris, interview, 28-29, 15-16; Report on Sit-Ins Continued, Negro Community, April 1960, AFSC, South Central Regional Office, 1960.

they refused. The waitress would not take their orders. She told Kenneth Johnson, "You know that your mother and your father didn't teach you-all to act like this, and you're causing trouble for everybody. You-all should leave." She even threatened to pour coffee on him. Johnson simply repeated his order. Some white patrons seated at the counter ignored the five students, but a crowd quickly gathered behind them. The students believed that the white crowd would attack them. "I remember white people coming up behind me with objects in their hands," said Johnson, "I remember sitting there with my hands on the back of my head, covered from behind, so that my skull wouldn't get busted from behind. I couldn't look back because that would have shown a sign of fear. I remember being completely wet, ringing wet from sweat. I was so frightened."¹²

Chief of Police Shirley Arrighi and Captain Robert Weiner of the Juvenile Division arrived within minutes of being called by Matthews. Arrighi asked the students either to move to the counter reserved for blacks or to leave the establishment. They politely refused, and the chief arrested them for disturbing the peace. A month earlier, the mayor, the district and parish attorneys, the sheriff and Arrighi had met and decided that any person who took part in a sit-in would be charged with that violation. When placed under arrest, the seven stood up and walked quietly to the paddy wagon.¹³

¹²Johnson, interview, 32-34; "Two Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1; Harris, interview, 33-35.

¹³Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 49, 43; "Negro Students Arrested Here After Sit-Down," *Morning Advocate*, March 29, 1961, 1.

Once in jail, the students contacted Johnnie Jones and asked him to represent them. The World War II activist agreed. Although they preferred to attack segregation by working within the legal system, the men and women of the World War II generation applauded the actions of the young college students and gave them financial and moral support after their arrests. In a meeting with Jones and his clients, racial diplomat Felton Clark, in contrast, castigated the students for their actions and told them, "When your lawyer [Johnnie Jones] graduated from here," he told them, "he was just as militant as you-all, but he didn't interrupt things." The student activists had selected Jones because of his record of fighting against segregation and because they believed that he truly supported their cause. Kenneth Johnson so admired Jones that he later became his law clerk. While the students wanted Jones to represent them, racial diplomats encouraged them to select another lawyer because he was too militant and too hotheaded. Jones recalled:

Now there were some blacks didn't want me to be their attorney on that case. What the white people call the black leaders, didn't want me on the case, but those . . . students had their mind made up. They liked what I had been doing. . . . I'd been up to Southern and talked on certain programs and they had been watching me all along. . . . They knew my record.

The judge presiding over the case, former Attorney General Fred LeBlanc, set the demonstrators' bond at \$1,500 apiece and ordered them to post it through a licensed bondsman who required 10 percent to be paid in cash up front. Because these young men and women represented the best and brightest of the black community and conducted themselves in a polite, dignified manner, black leaders and World War II activists, who had the most disposable income, secretly provided the bond money. In

less than six hours, black leaders raised the \$1,050 necessary to secure the release of the arrested students.¹⁴

The following day, 3,500 Southern students rallied on behalf of the arrested students and vowed to repay the community leaders and to raise additional money to pay the protesters' legal fees. The spokesman for the seven jailed activists, Major Johns, proclaimed, "No longer can we endure the back door of public places, the denial of equal job opportunities, the right to vote or any privilege granted to a full-time citizen."¹⁵

As the rally took place, police arrested nine more Southern students for staging sit-ins. Two Baton Rougeans, John Garner and Vernon Jordan, attempted to desegregate the lunch counter at the downtown Sitman's Drugstore, and seven political science majors, including Eddie Charles Brown, the brother of H. Rap Brown who later became the president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), tried to eat at the lunch counter at the Greyhound Bus Station.¹⁶ The seven well-dressed students entered the station in the late afternoon, walked to the white lunch counter, and placed their orders. Whites eating at the counter immediately abandoned their seats, but approximately fifteen of them milled around and watched the black students. Just as

¹⁴Report on the Sit-Ins Continued, April 1960, AFSC, South Central Regional Office, 1960; "Negro Students Arrested Here After Sit-Down," *Morning Advocate*, March 29, 1960, 1.

¹⁵"Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1.

¹⁶The students included Eddie C. Brown, Mack H. Jones, Larry L. Nichols, Charles Peabody, Lawrence Hurst, Sandra Ann Jones, and Mary Enola Briscoe. Mack Jones came from Fort Worth, Texas, but others were from Baton Rouge.

they had done the previous day, Police Chief Shirley Arrighi and Captain Robert Werner of the Juvenile Division arrived within minutes of being called by management and ordered the students either to use the black counter or to leave the premises. The students refused, and Werner arrested them. He claimed that their presence in the white section of the counter constituted a disturbance of the peace. A spokesman for the group, Mack H. Jones, a twenty-seven-year-old from Fort Worth, Texas, addressed reporters as he was being led to the paddy wagons. "We want some human dignity," he said, "You have to do something to let people know you are a man."¹⁷

The nine students arrested on March 29 also asked Johnnie Jones to represent them. On the night of their arrest, Jones, Jemison, and an unidentified man went to the jail to meet with the students. As they entered the facility, Jemison told the press, "We weren't aware of this at all." When they departed, Jemison, who usually relished the attention, refused to address the media. His reasons for eschewing media attention were simple. In addition to wanting to remain in the good graces of Baton Rouge's white leadership and to maintain his position as a leader of the black community, Jemison also aspired to become president of the National Baptist Convention. Earlier that year, Martin Luther King, Jr. and several other activist ministers had formulated a plan to overthrow NBC President J. H. Jackson. The pastor of Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago, the conservative Jackson had succeeded Jemison's father, D. V. Jemison, as president of the organization in 1953 and refused to use the NBC to advance the cause

¹⁷"Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1; *Louisiana v. Mary Briscoe, et al.*, No. 35,566, 19th District Court, Baton Rouge, Division A; "Seven More Students Arrested Here," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1960, 1; "Jail 16 in La. 'Sit-Downs,'" *Louisiana Weekly*, April 2, 1960, 1.

of civil rights. King wanted the organization to bolster the movement and believed an activist should serve as president. He selected as his candidate Gardner Taylor, who preceded T. J. Jemison as pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Baton Rouge and was the pastor of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. For nearly nine months, King and his supporters plotted Jackson's overthrow and even asked Jemison, who had served as secretary of the NBC since 1953, to take part in the coup. Jemison refused because he believed that his ambition to head of the organization would be best served by supporting Jackson, who ran the NBC with an iron fist and had purged state presidents from the organization for disloyalty. The same goal led him to take a less visible role in the Baton Rouge movement. "I felt that my future was not in civil rights but in the church," Jemison later explained.¹⁸

The response of the students to their meeting with Jemison, Jones, and the third man may have led to the Baptist minister's silence. Unlike the first group to hold sit-ins, these students told the men that they wanted to remain in jail to protest the continuation of segregation. Racial diplomats disregarded the wishes of the nine protesters and scrambled to raise bail money. Even after the funds became available, the nine refused to accept it and chose to remain in jail. On March 31, Thurgood Marshall told the *Morning Advocate* that the NAACP had offered to bail the students out of jail, but they refused to accept the money. The students said that "they would not come out until this

¹⁸Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 335-339; Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, March 15, 1994, 20; "Third Street Boycott by Negroes," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1960, 1; "Negroes March Downtown," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1; Resolution, Citizens Committee for Cooperative Action, March 31, 1960, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 20; Jemison, interview by Marc Sternberg, October 24, 1994, 9.

is settled," Marshall explained; "I do not encourage this, but if they want to do it on their own, I'm going to support them." Marshall and the NAACP took an interest in all of the sit-in cases, and the Legal Defense Fund helped local attorneys plan the defenses of the student activists. The same could not be said of the racial diplomats. They were exasperated to learn the last nine, early advocates of the "jail-over-bail" strategy that characterized the sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the summer of 1960, wanted to remain in the parish prison. "It seems fairly certain that the nine preferred to remain in jail even when they were finally released on bond," Wade Mackie claimed.¹⁹

On March 30, approximately 2,000 Southern students staged another rally in support of the sit-in participants. It began on campus but ended in a march to downtown Baton Rouge, where the group briefly picketed Kress, Sitman's, and the Greyhound Bus Station. The march then culminated on the steps of the State Capitol. Johns addressed them. He recited the Preamble of the Constitution and told those gathered that they should work to obtain equality for African Americans. Echoing Abraham Lincoln, he proclaimed, "Our nation can't stand half free and half slave." After singing several hymns, the students quietly made their way back to the campus to attend another mass

¹⁹Five sit-in participants in Tallahassee, Florida, first used jail-over-bail in February 1960. All members of CORE, their goal was to remain in jail to draw attention to the freedom struggle and to convince the black community to become involved in the civil rights movement. The Tallahassee jail-in led to a community-wide boycott of downtown department stores. "Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1; "Seven More Arrested Students Arrested Here," *Morning Advocate*, March 30 1960, 1; "Jail 16 in La. 'Sit-Downs,'" *Louisiana Weekly*, April 2, 1960, 1; "Dr. Clark Warns of Arrests," *Morning Advocate*, April 3, 1960, 1; Report on Sit-Ins (Continued), Negro Community, ca. April 11, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1960; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 102-107.

meeting. Robinson and Moss, both of whom took part in the Kress sit-in, headed the second gathering and urged the student body to boycott classes for the rest of the day.²⁰

Unlike other university presidents whose students participated in sit-ins, Felton Clark refused to back the protesters. On March 28, Clark was in Washington, D. C., attending a conference, and the Dean of Men Ulysses S. Jones served as the acting president. In defiance of the State Board of Education's automatic expulsion rule, Jones even allowed the Kress students to return to class until the administration conducted an inquiry. "We've got to satisfy the board of education, the students, and the community. We don't want to hurt anyone," he told the *Morning Advocate*. Jones hedged on expelling the Kress protesters because they were the university's top students and all came from "fine backgrounds."²¹

When Clark returned from Washington, he abandoned Jones' moderate position. Concerned about the white reaction to the protests, he issued a statement promising to take disciplinary action against "all students who fail to attend classes or who violate university regulations, ordinances of the city and parish, or the laws of the state of Louisiana." On March 30, Clark met with the demonstrators and black leaders, including Louisiana Education Association President and longtime activist J. K. Haynes, for about five hours, and then expelled the student leaders. Haynes recalled:

²⁰"Negroes March Downtown; Grand Jury Begins Inquiry," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1.

²¹"Negro Students Arrested Here After Sit-Down," *Morning Advocate*, March 29, 1960, 1; "Seven More Students Arrested Here," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1960, 1; "Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1.

They must have had three thousand students on the grounds in front of that building waiting. . . . Water came out of my eyes to see these brilliant students leave. When they announced it to the students out on the yard, there was crying, and when the nine students left in A. A. Lenior's station wagon, these students were hanging on to the station wagon and crying. It was quite an emotional thing.

The expulsion of the protest leaders outraged many African Americans. On March 31, about half of the school's 4,900 students attempted to resign in protest, but the dean of students refused to let any of them withdraw without parental approval. The administration knew that only a few parents would allow their children to drop out of school and abandon their education. Clark also asked supportive members of Southern's alumni to intercede. On April 2, the alumni association met with the student body. The group's secretary, Corrine Maybuce, the daughter of an ESSO employee, had driven an automobile for the free ride system during the bus boycott. She urged the students to remain in school and told them that Clark was simply complying with the State Board of Education's order. She told the students that they had placed Clark "in a tough spot." She added that because of Clark's willingness to comply with the board, the university would carry on despite the demonstrations.²²

At a mass meeting held on the outskirts of campus, the expelled protesters encouraged the 4,000 students present to resign for the university. They could not meet on campus because the administration barred the sit-in leaders from the school's

²²"Negroes March Downtown; Grand Jury Begins Inquiry," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1; Haynes, interview by Miranda Kombert; "Mass Resignation Begun at Southern After Suspensions," *State-Times*, March 31, 1960, 1; "Leader Asks Southern U. Student Body to Quit School," *Morning Advocate*, April 1, 1960, 1; "Fed-Up Students Abandon SU in Drovers," *Louisiana Weekly*, April 9, 1960, 1; "Dr. Clark Warns of Arrests," *Morning Advocate*, April 3, 1960, 1; Maybuce, interview by Jacqueline Holmes.

grounds. Major Johns urged the students to leave Southern University until Clark rescinded the expulsions and permitted students to take part in boycotts, sit-ins, and picketing. Robinson encouraged those attending to embrace the principles of passive resistance to combat segregation. He chided the older members of the black community, especially the racial diplomats, for not taking any action against segregation even though they wanted equality. He claimed that they failed to act for three reasons, "One, they are either too scared or they haven't got enough sense, or two they're making more profit from segregation than they would from integration . . . or three, they're lying."²³

In an attempt to ease tensions on campus, Clark and other members of the administration met with the Kress protesters to discuss ways to prevent a full-scale walkout. For six and a half hours, 3,000 students waited outside while their leaders and Clark hammered out a deal. The details of their six-hour meeting remain sketchy, but the student activists agreed to leave Baton Rouge in exchange from a promise by the administration not to expel any other students. The leaders then called a meeting of the student body and encouraged them to remain in school "to carry on the fight for our cause." Donald Moss pleaded with the students to keep fighting and added that their display of solidarity in the walkouts would always be a threat "to anything that doesn't stand for democracy and human rights."²⁴

²³"Leader Asks Whole Southern U. Student Body to Quit School," *Morning Advocate*, April 1, 1960, 1.

²⁴"Leaders Ask Students to Leave Southern U.," *State-Times*, April 2, 1960, 1; Major Johns, "Baton Rouge: Higher Education Southern Style," copy of article provided by Janette Harris, place of publication unknown.

The reaction of the black community, especially the racial diplomats, to the sit-ins, the marches, and the mass meetings ranged from lukewarm to hostile. Racial diplomats gave the students very little support. Although they wanted to end segregation, they believed that the best way to do so was by negotiating with white leaders for change. Racial diplomats feared that the militancy of the student activists would alienate the white leadership and upset their efforts to end segregation. Leading diplomat Leo Butler refused to become involved with the student protests because he "did not agree with the students and did not identify with their cause." Wade Mackie claimed that these members of the black community were "poorly prepared" for the sit-ins. In fact, when Clark expelled the leaders, none of the racial diplomats offered to take them in. Some rented rooms at the Lincoln Hotel, but as large numbers of students left the university in protest, the rooms quickly filled up. CORE representative James McCain, who was sent to observe the Baton Rouge sit-ins, feared that the "chaotic conditions" at the hotel would lead to violence and asked Mackie to persuade some black leaders to help find housing for the students or provide money for them to return home. Mackie turned to a well-respected activist, J. K. Haynes, and a racial diplomat, John G. Lewis, for help. Before this, Lewis had no involvement with the student activists, but he feared that if large numbers of angry students were allowed to remain in Baton Rouge, violence would erupt and the peace and stability of the community would be shattered. Haynes and Lewis, both revered in the black community, found lodging for the students.²⁵

²⁵Report on Sit-ins (Continued), ca. April 11, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1960; Buell, "The Politics of

Most blacks shared the racial diplomats' belief that student activism would lead to violence. They thought that if they publicly supported the students they would suffer white reprisals. Nevertheless, on March 29, Jemison called for a boycott of downtown stores during the upcoming Easter season but did little to promote it. The following day, few African Americans complied, and the boycott died. Jemison even tried to form a Citizens' Committee for Cooperative Action (CCCA) to support the sit-ins, but the organization did little to help the students or perpetuate the protests.²⁶

A few members of the black community, however, denounced Clark's actions. A group of Southern alumni from across the country claimed that expulsion was too harsh a punishment and called for the readmission of the students. Other African Americans castigated Clark for not backing the students and claimed that college presidents throughout the South had stood up to the white power structure and refused to expel sit-in participants. The state's largest African-American newspaper, the *Louisiana Weekly*, declared that Clark should have resigned rather than comply with the Board of Education's expulsion decree.²⁷

In the end, approximately 5 percent of Southern's 4,900 students resigned, and the expelled demonstrators transferred to other universities. Calm returned to the campus. A state district court convicted the protesters of disturbing the peace and

Frustration," 134.

²⁶"Third Street Boycott by Negroes," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1960, 1; "Negroes March Downtown," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1.

²⁷"Reinstatement for 18 SU Expelled Students Sought," *Louisiana Weekly*, April 16, 1960, 1; "Penalty for Students Too Severe," *Louisiana Weekly*, April 23, 1960.

sentenced each of them to four months in jail. Refusing to accept the jail term, the students' lawyer Johnnie Jones, assisted by Tureaud and LDF attorneys Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg, appealed the case to the U. S. Supreme Court. In December 1961, the justices issued their decision in *Garner v. Louisiana*. Speaking for the majority, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that the records of the case "contain no evidence to support a finding that these petitioners disturbed the peace." He added that their convictions violated their right to due process guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. Although civil rights leaders viewed *Garner* as a victory, it changed very little in Baton Rouge.²⁸

The white community's reaction to the sit-ins followed the pattern that developed in the 1950s. White leaders wanted to maintain peaceful race relations. Unlike white officials in Nashville who, on March 15, allowed segregationists to attack protesters with "rocks, fists, and lighted cigarettes," Baton Rouge's white leaders preferred to adopt a peaceful approach for dealing with the student activists. The response of Mayor-President Christian, District Attorney Favrot, and Chief Arrighi foreshadowed the white response to massive civil rights protests in Albany, Georgia, that began in November 1961. White leaders in both communities did not arrest sit-in participants for violating segregation laws, which were subject to legal attack, but instead jailed them for violating laws aimed at maintaining public order, i.e., disturbing the peace and trespassing. Police officers in both communities also refrained from using

²⁸"High Court Gets Sit-In Appeals," *State-Times*, January 4, 1961, 1; "First Sit-In Appeals Reach Supreme Court from BR Negro Cases," *Morning Advocate*, January 4, 1961, 1; *Garner et al. v Louisiana*, 368 S. Ct. 157 (United States Supreme Court, 1961).

violence against the protesters and protected them from segregationists bent on doing harm to them. Immediately following the Kress sit-ins, Favrot, after consulting with Mayor-President Jack Christian, announced, "Those jeering crowds and fighting back and so forth in several cities . . . we won't put up with that for one minute." He added that city officials would not tolerate violence from either whites or blacks. When the Southern students marched to the State Capitol on March 30, Christian urged all Baton Rougeans to stay away from the area and let law enforcement officials handle the situation. Both men knew that if segregationists showed up at the rally, violence would ensue, so they allowed the students to meet on the steps of the State Capitol but surrounded them with officers. If any trouble occurred, they could immediately step in and quash it. The white leaders allowed the students to march and hold rallies because they believed that if they cracked down on them, the black community, which for the most part did not support the students, would be drawn into the movement. Therefore, the city's politicians and business leaders wanted to bring a quick end to protests but without allowing violence to erupt.²⁹

White leaders decided that the only way to stop the sit-ins was to expel the student activists. "As far as the state board is concerned, we have some very firm, strict rules about people who get mixed up in affairs with the police," said State Board of Education President Joseph Davies of Arabi, Louisiana, a small town located near New

²⁹"Two More Arrested in Second 'Sit-Down' Incident," *State-Times*, March 29, 1960, 1; "Negroes March Downtown; Grand Jury Begins Inquiry," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 279, 527-561; "Let's Keep Our Heads," *Morning Advocate*, March 31, 1960, 1; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 217; "Negroes March Downtown; Grand Jury Begins Inquiry," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1.

Orleans. Clark wanted to protect Southern, so he complied with the board's orders. He feared that the university would suffer if he defied the Board of Education's directive. In addition to ridding Baton Rouge of the student activists, this strategy also diverted the attention of the Southern student body away from the sit-ins and toward their student leaders. The activists hoped that the sit-in movement in Baton Rouge would continue beyond their arrests. But their punishment at the hands of the administration shifted student anger away from the system of segregation and toward Felton Clark. The expelled activists lamented this change in focus but were powerless to stop it.³⁰

While white leaders wanted to end the protests quickly, the city's liberals tried to help the demonstrators. As always, Wade Mackie stood at the forefront of this group. Although he knew nothing of the students' sit-in plans beforehand, he immediately took up their cause when the demonstrations began. He also served as a liaison between CORE representative James McCain and the city's black community. When Southern expelled the eighteen students, Mackie, who knew Clark quite well, rebuked him for putting Louisiana's segregation laws above the basic human rights guaranteed by the Constitution. He asked Clark if there was a limit on what the Board of Education could get him to do. In addition to working with the black community during the sit-ins, Mackie also collected \$150 from LSU faculty members and students who supported the sit-ins but feared segregationist reprisals if they spoke out.³¹

³⁰“Resume Classes at Southern U.,” *State-Times*, April 5, 1960, 1; Report on Baton Rouge, La., Sit-in Demonstrations, ca. April 11, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1960.

³¹Wade Mackie to Felton Clark, April 19, 1960, AFSC, Employment on Merit, South Central Regional Office, 1960; Final Report of Sit-In Effects, May 9, 1960, *ibid.*

Segregationists, unwilling to accept the possibility that Baton Rouge blacks were unhappy with the reigning racial order, accused outside agitators of fomenting the protests. After the Kress demonstration, Louisiana Governor Earl Long expressed confusion. "I don't think that the colored people of this state have anything fundamentally to complain about," he told the press. He claimed that the "good colored people" were obtaining bad advice from the NAACP and other groups and urged dissatisfied African Americans to go back to Africa. Other segregationists believed that outside forces convinced the Southern students to demonstrate but described them in more nefarious terms. At an April 1 meeting of the Citizens' Council, its executive council declared that communist front groups such as the NAACP, the ACLU, and CORE brainwashed the students and used them as part of their "well organized and carefully laid out plan to harass and intimidate the officials and white citizens of our city." It also claimed that the student demonstrators came from other parts of the country when, in fact, only a couple of them, Marvin Robinson and Kenneth Johnson, were from other states. "There had been no previous incidents of provocation to explain their actions," said the executive council. "Their alleged grievances are the same old shopworn complaints of the professional Negro agitators." On March 29, an unidentified group of segregationists burned a cross in the front yard of a home in Southern Heights, an upperclass African-American neighborhood located near the black campus. The same night university officials found an effigy of a Southern University student hanging from a lamp post on LSU's campus. In addition to these two incidents, a group of white youths picketed outside of the Greyhound Bus Station on March 30

and carried signed declaring, "If you don't like it here, go back to Africa" and "Go Home, Sambo."³²

Although the March 1960 sit-ins failed to end lunch counter segregation in Baton Rouge, they had a lasting impact on the city's civil rights movement. The fact that Clark and the racial diplomats acceded to the white leaders' demand that the student activists be expelled intensified the feeling of distrust between the student activists and the racial diplomats. The young students saw the older leaders as pawns of whites. Racial diplomats viewed the students as hotheaded troublemakers who, if allowed to continue their protests, would destroy their own hard-earned relationship with white leaders. They believed that white leaders would never capitulate to the demands of the marchers or demonstrators but would agree to make gradual changes to the system of segregation if approached through the traditional lines of communication. Their fears proved well-founded. Concerned about the police department's long tradition of brutality against black suspects, racial diplomats, in March 1960, asked the city-parish council to hire black policemen. They approached Frank McConnell, president pro tem of the council and asked him to bring the proposal up for a vote. On March 23, McConnell introduced the measure, and council members agreed to consider it at a special meeting to be held on March 30, two days after the sit-ins. Five racial diplomats, including Acie Belton and Fred Levy, who had served as a United Defense League officer in 1953, went to the meeting and claimed that the city needed black

³²"Long Suggests That Dissatisfied Negroes Leave," *Morning Advocate*, March 29, 1960, 1; "2 Councils Say Youth's Brainwashed," *State-Times*, April 1, 1960, 1; "Negroes March Downtown; Grand Jury Begins Inquiry," *State-Times*, March 30, 1960, 1.

officers because they could enforce the law better in African-American neighborhoods than white officers. They added that cities throughout the South and in neighboring parishes employed black policemen with great success. Mayor Christian told the racial diplomats, "I have heard nothing tonight that makes me feel that we need Negro policemen and certainly not in light of what is happening in Baton Rouge." Councilman Robert Breazeale made it even clearer that the student activists' actions directly affected the council's decision to vote against hiring black officers. He claimed that through their actions, the students showed that they had no concern for doing what was best for the black community and displayed "a lack of awareness of civil responsibility." Black Baton Rougeans "must earn the rights they are now demanding," Breazeale added.³³

For a year and a half following the 1960 sit-ins, Southern's student body staged no protests; racial diplomats and the white leaders concluded that the demonstrations were over. During that time crucial changes occurred in Baton Rouge. In the summer of 1960, the city-parish held elections for mayor-president, council members and district attorney, and several African Americans entered the race. Most of them were World War II activists, including Dupuy Anderson who ran for mayor-president and Johnnie Jones who campaigned for district attorney. The incumbent district attorney, J. St. Clair Favrot, decided not to seek reelection. In 1960, East Baton Rouge Parish had 64, 215 white voters and 10,288 black voters, and although they did not win, African-American

³³"Council Conducts Hush-Hush Meeting on Sewer Program," *Morning Advocate*, March 24, 1960, 1; "Negro Policemen Request Goes to Council Today," *Morning Advocate*, March 30, 1960, 1; "Policeman Plan by Negroes is Rejected," *State-Times*, March 31, 1960, 1.

candidates did well in the primary election. Dupuy Anderson finished fourth in a field of seven and garnered 5,751 votes. Christian, the front runner, received 19,365 votes. Johnnie Jones came in sixth in a field of seven, but 6,556 African Americans cast their ballots for him. The frontrunner Lawrence Uter, with 12,358, made it into a runoff with Sargent Pitcher, one of the founding members of the Citizens' Council. Pitcher used race to defeat Uter. He bragged about his support for segregation and urged white citizens to vote en masse because the "NAACP bloc vote" would surely go to his opponent. In the August 27 runoff election, Pitcher's race-baiting paid off. He soundly defeated his opponent. Race-baiting played no part in the mayoral election, however; all candidates, except for Anderson, announced their support for segregation. Jack Christian, whose campaign focused on maintaining the city-parish system of government, handily defeated his opponent, A. T. "Apple" Sanders. Because white leaders continued to control the police and sheriff's departments, law enforcement's reaction to civil rights protests remained virtually unchanged. Maintaining the peace remained foremost in their minds. Pitcher, however, handled the cases of demonstrators who had been arrested. He always asked for exorbitant bails for civil rights activists, often increased the charges against them after they were jailed, and asked judges to impose long prison sentences for the men and women who challenged the system of segregation. Because Pitcher's actions were not violent and attracted very little negative national publicity, white leaders embraced his methods for dealing with jailed activists.³⁴

³⁴"65% of Demos Go to Polls in EBR Vote," *Morning Advocate*, July 27, 1960, 1; "Christian, Sanders to Run Off; Uter, Pitcher in Race for D.A.," *Morning Advocate*,

Undaunted by the city's new segregationist district attorney, student activists regrouped in October 1961 and formed the Baton Rouge chapter of CORE.³⁵ Led by Southern undergraduates, Ronnie Moore, Weldon Rougeau, and Patricia Tate, the organization planned an attack against segregated facilities and discriminatory hiring practices in downtown department stores. Wanting to forge alliances with World War II activists and other like-minded adults, the local CORE organizers met with African-American ministers and leaders of several black organizations. They garnered some support from FOCUS, a new organization dedicated to increasing voter registration. Both racial diplomats and World War II activists, including Raymond Scott, Johnnie Jones, and Dupuy Anderson, initially joined FOCUS, but the activists quickly became frustrated by the conservatism of the racial diplomats and abandoned it in early 1962 to reorganize the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP.³⁶

July 24, 1960, 1; "Pitcher Pledges Stiff Handling of Gaming Cases," *Morning Advocate*, August 8, 1960, 8A; "Pitcher Gives Campaign Talks to Two Groups," *Morning Advocate*, August 28, 1960, 2A; "Pitcher Issues Statement Here for D.A. Runoff," *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1960, 5B.

³⁵Although CORE played an important role in the civil rights movement, few studies are devoted to the organization. *CORE*, by August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, was one of the first studies of the organization and is still the only book-length treatment of the organization. In it, the authors discuss CORE's involvement in Baton Rouge. James Farmer, who was one of the founding members of CORE and served as its director during the civil rights movement, in his autobiography *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985) provides a first-hand account of the formation of the organization and of its role in the freedom struggle. Other works, Fairclough's *Race and Democracy*, and Kim Lacy Rogers's, *Righteous Lives: Narratives of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) discuss CORE in Louisiana.

³⁶Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 166; Dave Dennis to Marvin Rich, November 25, 1961, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 20.

With support from some black adults in hand, CORE held high hopes for its Baton Rouge chapter and assigned field secretary David Dennis to work with the newly formed group. A veteran of the 1960 Freedom Rides, Dennis came from the Shreveport area where his father worked as a sharecropper. As a student at Dillard University in New Orleans, he joined the New Orleans chapter of CORE in early 1960. In November 1961, Dennis told the national office, "The Baton Rouge CORE group [with a membership of sixty-five] looks very good at the present time."³⁷

Under the direction of Dennis and Moore, the organization decided to begin its protests in December 1961 by staging a series of hit-and-run lunch counter sit-ins. Before the protests began, white leaders — especially downtown business owners and operators, the Chamber of Commerce, and city officials who supported industrialization and economic expansion — decided to ignore these sit-ins. White leaders believed that if the protesters remained free, the marches and mass meetings of the previous year could be prevented. To preserve the peace, store managers instructed their employees to ignore the protesters when they sat-in. Managers refused to call the police. Without being asked to intervene, law enforcement officials could not arrest the sit-in participants. The city's newspapers, which were owned by the Manship family, relegated all accounts of the protests to the back pages. Charles and Douglas Manship owned one television station, one radio station, and the city's two newspapers. Both men belonged to the white leadership class and worked for Baton Rouge's economic growth. In 1963, Doug Manship served as the president of the Chamber of Commerce.

³⁷Ibid.

The practice of ignoring or burying news of protest was not unique to Baton Rouge. Other southern industrial and business centers used similar tactics to prevent racial violence or avoid unfavorable national attention. In June 1960, white newspapers and merchants in Houston adopted a similar media blackout to avoid racial conflict over an attempt to desegregate lunch counters. On December 5, Baton Rouge CORE members staged the first of their sit-ins at Kress and McCrory's. Much to their disappointment, their protests received very little publicity. Waiters at both counters ignored them, and the police were not called. The students left after a few minutes.³⁸

In addition to conducting the hit-and-run sit-ins, Ronnie Moore phoned store managers to ask them to desegregate their lunch counters and to hire black salespeople, but failed to reach them. Their secretaries told Moore that the managers were either out of town or too busy to take his calls. At that point, he sent letters to twelve downtown department stores warning them that unless they desegregated their lunch counters and hired African Americans to work as sales clerks and cashiers, the organization would conduct more sit-ins and also picket and boycott their businesses.³⁹

³⁸Weldon Rougeau to Gordon R. Carey, December 4, 1961, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 20; "Baton Rouge is Named CORE 'Mix' Target," *Morning Advocate*, December 3, 1961, 6B; "Negroes Test Two Downtown Lunch Counters," *State-Times*, December 5, 1961, 8A; "CORE Claims Two 'Eat-Run' Minus Success," *Morning Advocate*, December 10, 1961, 8G; "7 Negro Sit-In Demonstrators Ignored Here," *Morning Advocate*, December 6, 1961, 8B; Thomas Cole, *No Color is My Kind: The Life of Eldrewey Sterns and the Integration of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 36-57.

³⁹The stores included: Kress, Goudchaux's, Woolworth, Welch & Levy, McCrory's, Sears, Holmes, Three Sisters, J. C. Penney, Rosenfield's, Shopper's Fair, and Montgomery Ward. "CORE Gives Notice on 12 BR Merchants," *State-Times*, December 7, 1961, 7F; "CORE Issues Ultimatum to 12 BR Stores," *Morning Advocate*, December 8, 1961, 12C.

In addition to CORE's protests, the managers faced the possibility of a white boycott of their businesses. The city's segregationist population promised to retaliate against any store that capitulated to CORE's demands. Some segregationists urged the managers to "fire all Negroes" if a picket line formed outside of their businesses or if student activists followed through with their threatened boycott. W. H. Rutledge of Shreveport, the executive director of the Citizens' Councils of Louisiana, issued a warning to Baton Rouge merchants. If they caved into CORE's demands, then whites would boycott their businesses. Unsure how to respond to the threatened boycotts, the store managers met with city officials and decided that in order to avoid possible segregationist-inspired violence they would ignore CORE's demands.⁴⁰

On December 11, the same day the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Garner*, CORE staged a series of sit-ins at the businesses to which Moore had written. Two groups of Southern students held separate sit-ins at Kress's lunch counter. The first group, made up of two men and two women, sat at the counter for thirty minutes, and following the prescribed rules for dealing with such protests, the waitresses ignored them. In the afternoon, fifteen student activists, ten women and five men, tried a different approach. They filled all of the stools at the black lunch counter. Each ordered a drink and remained seated for two hours, effectively shutting down the counter. Still, the management refused to call the police. In addition to sending the nineteen students to Kress, CORE deployed twelve members to McCrory's and ten to Woolworth's to sit in at their lunch counters. Employees at both stores ignored them. When questioned by

⁴⁰Ibid.

reporters about his inaction, Police Chief Wingate White replied that the city-parish attorney advised him that he had no authority to arrest the protestors unless they refused to leave when asked to by store managers. Even then, he could arrest the demonstrators only if the businesses requested assistance. The only way he could arrest the students was if they took their protests out of the businesses and into the streets.⁴¹

The refusal of store managers to call the police frustrated CORE leaders. They needed publicity for their cause, and the best way to garner the attention of the press, especially the national press, was through mass arrests. CORE realized that white leaders would never agree to end segregation without being forced to do so by the federal government. The organization knew from experience that protests and arrests galvanized the black communities, as well as white liberals, and spurred many of its members into action.

To achieve mass participation and to attract media attention, CORE stepped up its protests. On December 10, members of the organization began handing out fliers calling for African Americans to boycott the twelve downtown stores. The broadsides pleaded, "Use your dollar as a weapon against segregation," and told the black population, "Freedom is not a gift, but freedom is a merit that is acquired only through determination and sacrifice. . . . The evil of segregation can be conquered through SELECTIVE BUYING." In addition to asking the black community to take part in the boycott, on December 13, approximately one hundred student activists picketed the

⁴¹"Four Negroes Ignored at Kress Counter," *Morning Advocate*, December 12, 1961, 11B; "New Sit-Ins Ignored at BR Lunch Counters," *State-Times*, December 12, 1961, 10A.

downtown stores. The police ordered the protesters to disperse but arrested no one. Once again, the newspapers kept the story off the front pages. By moving their protests out of privately-owned businesses onto the public streets and sidewalks, the student activists made white leaders uneasy. The leaders feared that segregationists would attack protesters if they allowed African Americans to continue their picketing. When sit-ins occurred inside buildings, the participants were afforded some protection from potential attacks. However, outside, they would attract the public's attention and would draw crowds of angry white onlookers, leaving them vulnerable to attack. After the December 13 picketing, Pitcher, Kean, White, and Sheriff Bryan Clemmons issued a statement warning that anyone blocking a street or sidewalk while taking part in a demonstration would be arrested and prosecuted for violating a state statute against disturbing the peace and for criminal mischief. They also encouraged all citizens, black and white, to "ignore the agitation advocated by CORE."⁴²

The following day, a group of student activists tested the resolve of city officials by picketing the twelve downtown stores. Twenty-five student activists marched outside of these businesses for about a minute and a half before police officers arrested them. District Judge Fred A. Blanche, Jr. set their bonds at \$1,500 each. Adopting the tactics of remaining in jail in lieu of bail that John Garner and the others who participated in the second wave of sit-ins in March 1960 had employed and that

⁴²Summary of Testimony of Ronnie Moore, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; CORE Fliers, Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee Papers, reel 17, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (microfilm); "CORE Pickets Dispersed by Police Request," *State-Times*, December 13, 1961, 12A; "EBR Officials Warn Against Demonstrations," *Morning Advocate*, December 14, 1961, 1.

Freedom Riders had used the previous summer to fill the jails in Mississippi, the activists refused to post bail and remained in jail.⁴³

On December 15, Ronnie Moore drove a sound truck around Southern's campus urging the students to take part in a march to downtown Baton Rouge. Moore rented the same equipment used by politicians and kept the volume on medium. Nevertheless, sheriff's deputy arrested him for illegal use of a sound truck and for violating the city's anti-noise ordinance.⁴⁴

Approximately 4,000 young African Americans crowded into the streets outside of the parish prison to show their support for the jailed students. Since Moore was in jail, Reverend B. Elton Cox, a CORE field secretary from High Point, North Carolina, led the demonstration. He told Chief White and Sheriff Clemmons that he planned to lead the crowd in singing and prayer and then give a brief address. He promised that the program would take less than half an hour. Chief White told Cox that he would allow him to speak for seven minutes but no longer. At that point, 350 city policemen and sheriff's deputies surrounded the courthouse. This massive force included the entire police department armed with revolvers, riot guns, submachine guns, and tear gas. The city's two police dogs were also on hand.⁴⁵

⁴³Summary of Testimony of Weldon Rougeau, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; "23 Negroes Arrested for Demonstration," *State-Times*, December 14, 1961, 1; "Negro Pickets of Stores Sill Held in Jail," December 15, 1961, 1.

⁴⁴Moore Testimony, CORE Inquiry, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17.

⁴⁵Statement of Facts, *Cox v. Louisiana*, Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee Papers, reel 17; "Tear Gas is Used as Negro Groups March Downtown," *State-Times*, December 15, 1961, 1.

The demonstration started peacefully with the crowd reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord's Prayer. Cox denounced the arrest of the twenty-three young men and women and told the rally's participants that the Bill of Rights guaranteed the right of every American, black or white, to take part in peaceful protests. He urged the marchers to be brave in the face of white opposition. "If we go to jail, we will go without bail," he proclaimed. "If they give us tear gas, we will take it and fall honorably." Cox concluded his speech by asking the marchers to disperse and to conduct an hour-long sit-in at the twelve department stores. During his speech, a group of approximately 200 whites heckled him. As the rally started to break up, the jailed picketers sang, "Oh students, don't you weep. Don't you mourn," and the crowd of students cheered.

At that point, Clemmons panicked. Using a bull horn, he ordered the students to disperse. The *State-Times* reported that the sheriff told the students, "We have given you the opportunity to demonstrate here, but now you are creating a disturbance. This is all — now break it up." Without warning, the officers fired tear gas into the crowd. The students scattered but attempted to reassemble. The officers fired another volley of tear gas and used their night sticks and police dogs to prevent them from regrouping. The next day, Police Inspector Rufus S. Trigg tried to ease the racial tension that erupted after the melee by denying that law enforcement officers used physical force to subdue the crowd. He told the *Morning Advocate*, "Never was anybody touched by a hand, fist, nightstick or any other instrument at the disposal of the police." Cox told a different story. He said that police unleashed their dogs on some of the fleeing students and beat others with night sticks. Although the reaction of Clemmons and his deputies ran

counter to the white leaders' desire to maintain peace, the sheriff apparently feared that the jeering crowd of segregationists would attack the marchers and cause a full-scale riot in the heart of downtown Baton Rouge.

Despite Clemmons' efforts, a group of marchers escaped the tear gas and crowded onto the sidewalks of Third Street, the hub of downtown commerce, and began to picket the stores that lined the street. Some even tried to stage sit-ins at McCrory's, Kress, and Rosenfield's, but the stores closed their lunch counters to prevent protests. Two hours after the march, the protest ended, and the students returned to campus. The police did not immediately arrest any of the protesters. Perhaps they feared that the wholesale arrest of march participants would lead to more demonstrations.⁴⁶

Instead, they waited several hours before making any arrests. In the early evening of December 15, Cox, unable to walk because a tear gas shell had injured his ankle, was scheduled to meet with students at a North Baton Rouge church to discuss further action. When he arrived, several deputies were on hand to arrest him. They charged him with conspiring to riot and inciting a riot. Judge LeBlanc set his bond at \$1,500. When CORE's main office offered to pay Cox's bail, the judge raised it to \$4,000, then to \$6,000, and finally to \$8,000. However, he eventually dropped it back down to \$6,000. With help from CORE's national office, Cox bonded out of jail on December 27, 1961. The same day, law enforcement officials arrested fifty others,

⁴⁶"Tear Gas is Used as Negro Groups March Downtown," *State-Times*, December 15, 1961, 1; "50 Negroes Jailed as Tear Gas is Used," *Morning Advocate*, December 14, 1961, 1; Statement of Facts, *Cox v. Louisiana*, Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee, reel 17; Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; "Police 'Tear Gas' Non-Violent Students," *Louisiana Weekly*, December 23, 1961, 1.

mostly Southern students, in connection with the march. They charged the four students who were in the sound truck with Moore with illegal use of a loud speaker. Sixteen others were charged with simple obstruction of a highway. Five went to jail for vagrancy and another eighteen for illegal picketing.⁴⁷

The jailed activists received harsh treatment in prison. Cox spent his entire ten days in solitary confinement and was not given his mail. Clemmons justified this isolation by claiming that "he [Cox] had the company of another nearby." The sheriff added that he separated the CORE leader from the other black prisoners for his own safety because some of them did not share Cox's "sentiments." He did admit that he believed Cox would stir up the other jailed demonstrators. The sheriff refused to give the North Carolina minister his mail because most of it came from CORE. Weldon Rougeau spent twenty-one days in jail before posting bond, as did Ronnie Moore. Moore, along with Jerome Smith and Dave Dennis, who was jailed on the first day of picketing, claimed that their jailers beat them. "[The] jail atmosphere was hostile," said Moore, "I was denied consultation with ministers, mail, and use of the telephone. After making three requests in one day to see a doctor, I was slapped and choked." Smith was beaten for asking a guard to retrieve a receipt that he had forgotten in the pocket of his pants. His injuries were so severe that the prison sent him to Charity Hospital in New

⁴⁷"Board of Education Issues Warning to Negro Students," *State-Times*, December 16, 1961, 1; "Open Letter to the Citizens of Baton Rouge," *Morning Advocate*, December 20, 1961, 3C; "Board of Education Issues Warning to Negro Student," *State-Times*, December 16, 1961, 1; "Calm Returns to City Mall in Wake of Demonstrations," *Morning Advocate*, December 17, 1961, 1.

Orleans for treatment. Dennis received a beating when he asked to meet with the warden to discuss the brutal treatment of the other two men.⁴⁸

In addition to using the criminal justice system to silence the jailed CORE members, white leaders took steps to destroy student activism at Southern. On December 16, the State Board of Education issued a directive ordering the immediate suspension of any student arrested or jailed and forbade students who lived on campus from taking part in demonstrations not sanctioned by the university. Board of Education President Robert Curry of Shreveport declared that any student disobeying the rule would be expelled. To prevent the type of mass rallies that followed the March 1960 sit-ins, Felton Clark closed the campus for the Christmas holidays three days early. He also postponed taking any action against the jailed students until after the holiday.⁴⁹

On December 20, FOCUS took out an advertisement in the city's white papers in support of the students. More than fifty African Americans, including World War II activists and racial diplomats, signed the ad which proclaimed, "We are interested in Baton Rouge, its growth and development, concerned with our youth, and disturbed and embarrassed about the image that Baton Rouge has created and communicated to the world." The organization added that the arrest of students for taking part in a peaceful assembly violated their constitutional rights. The signers added that all African

⁴⁸"CORE Official to Continue Protest Fast," *Morning Advocate*, December 28, 1961, 10C; "FBI Probing BR Beatings," *Louisiana Weekly*, June 13, 1962, 1; Testimony of B. Elton Cox, Weldon Rougeau, & Ronnie Moore, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17.

⁴⁹"Board of Education Issues Warning to Negro Students," *State-Times*, December 16, 1961, 1.

Americans wanted segregation to end. Although they disagreed with the methods employed by the student activists, the racial diplomats shared their goal of ending segregation; they continued to think that the best way to accomplish this goal was through negotiations with white leaders. And, in fact, the ad called for Mayor-President Christian to marshal the city-parish's resources, including LSU and Southern, business and industry leaders, and "people of sufficient foresight, forethought, goodwill and integrity to take immediate steps toward progress." They called for "people with pride and dignity" to step forward to form a biracial committee that would "be entrusted with the duty of proposing a solution to the problems of our community." Putting their names on this advertisement allowed the racial diplomats to maintain their image as leaders of the black community to both African Americans and to white leaders. Notably absent from the list of signers and silent throughout the crisis was T. J. Jemison.⁵⁰

After failing to prevent mass demonstrations, white leaders immediately called for calm, blamed the unrest on outside agitators, and instructed Pitcher to ask district, state, and federal judges to issue a restraining order against CORE that banned the organization from East Baton Rouge Parish. The previous year, a judge took a similar action against the group's New Orleans branch after it launched a series of lunch counter sit-ins. Pitcher's petition claimed that CORE represented a threat to public peace and security by "sponsoring, financing, and encouraging people to foment violence, to promote breaches of the peace, and other violations of the law." Three state

⁵⁰"An Open Letter to the Citizens of Baton Rouge," *Morning Advocate*, December 20, 1961, 3C.

judges C. A. Barnett, Fred Blanche, and Fred LeBlanc readily agreed to the ban. Federal Judge E. Gordon West, one of President John F. Kennedy's appointees, also approved the petition.⁵¹ These injunctions crippled CORE and forced the national office to direct its attention away from Baton Rouge and toward the rural parishes surrounding the city. Local CORE leaders reluctantly complied. Their spokesman, D'Army Bailey had announced, "We feel it is our duty as law-abiding American students to adhere to the specifications set forth in the injunction." Bailey attended Southern and majored in political science. He added that suspension of protests did not signal a retreat but reaffirmed CORE's belief in the federal system of justice.⁵²

In addition to the CORE ban, white leaders took other steps to keep outside agitators out of Baton Rouge. At the December 16 meeting of the Louisiana Board of Education, Louis Doherty, a member of the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, presented a petition signed by a dozen local residents asking the board to screen applications submitted by out-of-state students to tax-supported colleges and universities. Obviously, Doherty and the petition's signers believed that students from other states stirred up Southern's otherwise "happy" student body and convinced them to protest. Yet of the seventy Southern students arrested in December 1961, eight came from other parts of the country, and only two of them were from the North — one from Kansas and the other from Illinois. The other six were from South Carolina, Texas, and

⁵¹Kennedy named West, a Baton Rougean and an ardent segregationist, to the post to curry favor with Louisiana Senator Russell Long.

⁵²"Federal, State Judiciary Sign Orders to Ban Demonstrations," *Morning Advocate*, December 16, 1961, 1; "Calm Returns to City Mall in Wake of Demonstrations," *Morning Advocate*, December 17, 1961, 1.

Arkansas. Although the vast majority of the protesters were from Louisiana, only eight were Baton Rouge natives. The small number of local students among the activists can be attributed to several factors. Most of them lived at home with their parents and not on campus, the stronghold of the student activists. Few parents, most of whom worked for white employers and relied on white bankers and businessmen for credit, would allow their children to take part in these types of public protests.⁵³

Segregationists believed that outside agitators were behind the CORE demonstrations. In a letter to the editor of the *Morning Advocate*, one segregationist accused CORE representatives of being "paid agitators . . . [with] no intentions of trying to improve any situation. Their only motive is exploitative for either financial gain or political motives." He also charged FOCUS with using "pressure tactics" to force the mayor and other white leaders to form a biracial committee. Another writer declared that the police should "use more tear gas, more police dogs, larger night sticks, and whatever arms are required to protect the rights of our citizens to use the sidewalks and streets and to shop and carry on business in peace." He added, "Our community has always enjoyed wonderful race relations until outside agitators came into this area and created problems of tension."⁵⁴

Although a few segregationists wrote hostile letters to the city's newspapers, none resorted to violence, cross burnings, or bombings. Instead, they allowed Pitcher to

⁵³"Board of Education Issues Warning to Negro Students," *State-Times*, December 16, 1961, 1; "Negro Pickets of Stores Still Held in Jail," *Morning Advocate*, December 15, 1961, 1.

⁵⁴"When Readers Speak," *Morning Advocate*, December 23, 1961, 12A.

use the power of his office to silence the demands of the civil rights activists and to prevent further demonstrations. Perhaps their strategy would have worked if the Baton Rouge civil rights movement had been stirred up by outside agitators, but in reality, the discontent of local people drove the movement. After the banishment of CORE, local activists continued to picket, march, and to demand an end to segregation.

As the students returned to Southern in January 1962, Felton Clark met with Pitcher and convinced him to drop the charges against sixty-six of the jailed student protesters. Charges remained against seven student leaders. The sixty-six were released from prison in time to take their final examinations. The rules governing state colleges stated that no student "involved in a case of police action, which has not been resolved in an acceptable legal form" could remain in school, but Clark declared that he allowed the sixty-six to return school because they were "no longer embroiled in legal proceedings." Clark added that the seven leaders did not fall into this category because they still had charges pending against them. When the fall semester resumed in mid-January, Southern's disciplinary board expelled the seven leaders, including Ronnie Moore, Patricia Tate, and Weldon Rougeau. While Clark could expel a small number of "agitators" with impunity, he could not eject seventy-three without incurring the wrath of parents, alumni, and Baton Rouge's black community, especially the World War II activists. Like all racial diplomats, he needed to appease both the black and white communities, and he believed that securing the release of sixty-six followers and

allowing them to take their finals while expelling the seven leaders satisfied both sides.⁵⁵

For Southern's student body, seven expulsions were too many. To show their support for Moore and the others, approximately one thousand students held a prayer vigil outside of Clark's home. The following day, Clark expelled an eighth student, D'Army Bailey, who organized the vigil. Citing a "continuous disturbance by a segment of students," he closed Southern on January 18 and ordered all students off the campus by 5 p.m. He believed that his action would prevent the type of mass rallies that had followed expulsion of the student activists in 1960. Clark also announced that all students would have to apply for admission for the spring semester. While he could not suspend all of the student activists, the process of reapplying would allow the administration to weed out anyone suspected of being an agitator.⁵⁶

As the 5:00 p.m. deadline approached, few students remained on campus. Ronnie Moore, who spent most of January 18 in downtown Baton Rouge preparing for his arraignment, returned to Southern at 4:50 to pack up his belongings. He quickly gathered his property and met with Weldon Rougeau in front of the gymnasium at 5:20. As the two prepared to leave, they stopped to talk to six students who were about to do the same. Before they could depart, a university official spotted them, alerted a sheriff's

⁵⁵"Southern University Plans to Resume Classes Jan. 29," *State-Times*, January 20, 1962, 1; "Southern Bars Seven Student Demonstrators," *Morning Advocate*, January 18, 1962, 1.

⁵⁶"Southern University Plans to Resume Classes Jan. 29," *State-Times*, January 20, 1962, 1; "Southern to 'Purge' the Entire Student Body," *Louisiana Weekly*, January 27, 1962, 1; "Southern Bars Seven Student Demonstrators," *Morning Advocate*, January 18, 1962, 1.

deputy who had been cruising the campus, and asked him to arrest the CORE leaders. The deputy charged them with criminal trespass and disturbing the peace.⁵⁷

Moore's and Rougeau's arrest and imprisonment reflected Pitcher's zero-tolerance approach for dealing with civil rights activists. He requested and received exorbitantly high bonds, \$31,000 for each. While in parish prison, their jailors attempted to break their resolve by isolating the CORE activists from the general prison population and holding them in a seven feet by seven feet cell, where they remained for forty-eight days. For much of that time, the warden refused to give them mail or let them make phone calls and allowed them to shower only twice a week. Pitcher cracked down so heavily on CORE leaders because he and the majority of white Baton Rougeans believed that these "outsiders" were responsible for all civil rights activity in the city. They reasoned that this harsh treatment would convince other activists to leave the city, and then the movement would die.⁵⁸

CORE immediately denounced the closure of Southern and the expulsion of the eight activists. On January 19, the organization's national director James Farmer telegraphed Clark and urged him to reconsider his decision to expel the student leaders and to require all students to submit applications for readmission. Farmer stated,

⁵⁷"Southern Closed as Anti-Segregation Protests Continue," *Morning Advocate*, January 19, 1962, 1; "No Word Given on Re-Opening of Southern University," *State-Times*, January 19, 1962, 1; Testimony of Moore and Rougeau, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; "Harassment, Vandalism Cited in SU Closure," *Morning Advocate*, January 21, 1962, 1.

⁵⁸Testimony of Moore and Rougeau, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17.

Public funds supporting Southern University come from Negro as well as white citizens and must not be used to compel acquiescence to Jim Crow. A state university may not be free to support the current fight for equality but it is unopposed only at the price of rejection by an enraged people whom it purports to serve.

In addition to writing to Clark, Farmer also sent a telegram to President John F. Kennedy telling him about the situation at Southern and urging him to cut off federal funds for higher education in Louisiana because the State Board of Education appropriated federal funds on a segregated basis with white universities receiving approximately \$110.90 per student and black universities receiving \$5.80 per student. In addition to the telegrams sent by Farmer, Patricia Tate, the Baton Rouge chapter's secretary, and Cox sent a letter to all of Southern's faculty and administrators asking them to support the student activists and their demands for ending segregation. While Farmer's pleas to Clark and Kennedy fell upon deaf ears, the letter to the faculty garnered some support for the students. On January 24, 1962, history professor Adolph Reed wrote to Clark and denounced his actions. Reed told Clark that the university "must learn to live with sit-ins." He likened the Southern president to Nazi Adolph Eichmann and stated that both contended "that there is no administrative alternative to carrying out the evil designs of perpetrators . . . of an evil social system." He added that if Clark stood up to the Board of Education, the faculty would support him. Reed called the police patrols on campus a "disgusting spectacle" and told Clark, "These students are not criminals for protesting globally accepted concepts of injustice and human degradation." In late January, 102 of Southern's 300 faculty members signed a petition expressing their support for the student demonstrators. It stated, "We are opposed to racial segregation and discrimination and feel there is a need for constructive

reappraisal of the present policy regarding student participation in such protests," the signers declared. Clark refused to comment on the faculty petition or to readmit expelled students.⁵⁹

When registration opened on January 25, three of the eight expelled CORE leaders, Thomas Peete and Willie Bradford of Shreveport and D'Army Bailey of Memphis, Tennessee, attempted to enroll, but officials rejected their applications. Dean of Men Ulysses Jones charged them with trespassing and asked security guards to escort them off the campus. In addition to denying entry to the three, Southern rejected the applications of forty others who took part in the December demonstrations. Fearing more protests because of the rejections, Clark warned the student body, "The university is not an organization for social action like other similar institutions, its primary function is formal education." He added that any student who disrupted that function would be punished. Clark's statement failed to silence the protesters. On Saturday, January 27, approximately three hundred students gathered on the outskirts of campus to listen to Bailey and several other speakers. Bailey urged the crowd to boycott classes the following Monday to protest the expulsion of the student leaders. He told the crowd, "We failed in '60, we're at that same point now. It's an issue as to whether this movement shall fail or whether it shall succeed. If it means closing Southern

⁵⁹James Farmer to Felton Clark, January 19, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 20; James Farmer to John F. Kennedy, January 19, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; Patricia Tate and B. Elton Cox to Administration and Faculty Members, January 22, 1962, CORE papers, Series V, reel 20; Adolph Reed to Felton Clark, January 24, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box E7, folder 3; "Southern Profs Ask Reappraisal of Policy Here," *Morning Advocate*, January 29, 1962, 1; "Classes are Normal at Southern University," *State-Times*, January 29, 1962, 1.

University, then, hell, let's close it." To drive the point home, Bailey introduced Marvin Robinson, one of the leaders of the 1960 sit-ins. Robinson told the crowd, "We left off at this point in 1960 . . . and we made a drastic mistake. We began to listen and to adhere to . . . the rules of an evil system." He urged the students to stand firm in their support of their banished leaders. Bailey's and Robinson's pleas had little impact. When the university reopened on January 29, the majority of students returned to class.⁶⁰

Those who continued to call for a boycott received harsh treatment from university officials. Dion Diamond, a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a native of Petersburg, Virginia, claimed that he wanted to transfer to Southern and urged the students to walk out of their classes to support the cause. Clark asked police officers to arrest Diamond. They complied and charged him with interfering with a lawful assembly, unlawful assembly, and vagrancy. Judge LeBlanc set his bail at \$6,000. Diamond's attorney, Johnnie Jones, asked him to lower it, but the judge refused. The SNCC member remained in jail, and on March 8, Pitcher added the charge of criminal anarchy to the counts against him. He claimed that Diamond encouraged Southern students "to hold unruly and unauthorized demonstration which would foreseeably alarm and disturb the public." Criminal anarchy quickly became Pitcher's favorite charge to levy against civil rights activists. On February 12, he added it to the counts against the jailed Ronnie Moore, claiming

⁶⁰"Mass Meet Staged near Southern U," *State-Times*, January 27, 1962, 1; "Negroes Ousted from Southern Urge Boycott," *Morning Advocate*, January 28, 1962, 1; "Classes are Normal at Southern U," *State-Times*, January 29, 1962, 1.

that the CORE leader “advocated opposition to the government in Louisiana by unlawful means.” Because of this new charge, Moore’s bond increased to \$12,500.⁶¹

Whites’ fears of outside agitators stirring up the local black population became so intense in early 1962 that law enforcement officers targeted all civil rights activists as potential troublemakers. On February 17, two SNCC leaders, Charles McDew and Robert Zellner, who were passing through Baton Rouge, tried to visit Diamond in jail. When they arrived, the pair asked to see their friend, but a guard denied their request saying that black prisoners could not receive visitors that day. The men then asked if they could leave books and cigarettes for Diamond, and the guard assured the two men that they could. McDew and Zellner, who were waiting for a bus, rushed out to purchase some items for Diamond. When they returned to the parish prison to drop them off, a deputy arrested them on suspicion of vagrancy even though the two had bus tickets and two hundred dollars in cash. Four days later, Pitcher charged them with criminal anarchy, and a judge set their bond at \$7,000 each. While in Baton Rouge, neither man urged the local population to protest. In fact, they had little contact with the black community. In the eyes of the Baton Rouge police, however, their membership in SNCC and the fact that the white Zellner traveled with the African-American McDew meant that they advocated, practiced, and taught “opposition to the government of the state of Louisiana by unlawful means.” Until SNCC bailed them out, the men spent

⁶¹“Southern Campus Quiet After Trespassing,” *Morning Advocate*, February 2, 1962, 12A; “Sixth Charge Against Negro is Filed Here,” *Morning Advocate*, March 9, 1962, 4A; “Habeas Corpus Hearing Delayed in Diamond Case,” *Morning Advocate*, March 10, 1962, 2A.

thirteen days in solitary confinement for traveling to Baton Rouge and attempting to visit a friend in jail.⁶²

White leaders and segregationists applauded the arrest of Zellner and McDew and supported closing the university, expelling the activists, and requiring all students to reapply for admission. A *Morning Advocate* editorial called Clark's actions "unusual and dramatic" but added "practically all Baton Rougeans of both races" backed him in his efforts "to get the student body back on track, eliminate disturbing influences, and protect the institution, the greatest of its kind in the country, from the damage it might suffer through continued agitation and confusion." Calling them "extremists," the paper claimed that the students cared little about whether they destroyed "valuable institutions" in their efforts to "force conformity with their opinions and attitudes on others."⁶³

White liberals, on the other hand, opposed Clark's actions. On January 21, the ACLU's Executive Director Patrick Malin of New York and LCLU President David Dover of New Orleans sent telegrams to Clark, Governor Jimmie Davis, and State Board of Education President William Dodd and told them "students who demonstrate against segregation merit no discipline." Wade Mackie and the AFSC also tried to help

⁶²"Sixth Charge Against Negro is Filed Here," *Morning Advocate*, March 9, 1962, 4A; "Habeas Corpus Hearing Delayed in Diamond Case," *Morning Advocate*, March 10, 1962, 2A; Summary of Testimony of Charles McDew, Committee of Inquiry, May 25, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17; "Reverend B. E. Cox Gains Freedom on \$7,125 Bond," *Morning Advocate*, February 13, 1962, 1; "March 9 Trial Set for Negro Boycott Leader," *Morning Advocate*, February 14, 1962, 14B.

⁶³"Pressure on Southern University," *Morning Advocate*, January 23, 1962, 4A; "Civil Liberties Protests SU Closure," *Morning Advocate*, January 22, 1962, 10A.

the student activists. He told his superiors, "I could have helped some . . . if I had been asked," but no one asked. When the police arrested Zellner and McDew, Mackie arranged for a Methodist minister to visit Zellner, whose father was a Methodist minister. He also tried to convince the two men to work with the LCLU's legal team, but both refused. They preferred to retain a black attorney.⁶⁴

The direct action phase of the civil rights movement in which protesters consciously broke the city's segregation laws, picketed, marched, and proudly went to jail and refused bail confounded racial diplomats. The student activists failed to abide by the rules of traditional race relations and, unlike the World War II activists, refused to work within the state's and the nation's legal systems. While racial diplomats wanted to end segregation, their methods were in direct contrast to the students. They believed that the only way whites would agree to grant African Americans equality was if blacks approached them with deference and asked for small changes to the system of segregation. Although they did not directly take part in the protests, World War II activists supported the student activists. On January 27, 1962, Dupuy Anderson urged Southern students to boycott classes until university officials readmitted the expelled leaders. Johnnie Jones also backed the arrested CORE members and served as their attorney.⁶⁵

When B. Elton Cox's trial began in January 1962, Jones demanded that Judge Fred LeBlanc desegregate the courtroom and stated, "This case is one where the

⁶⁴Wade Mackie to Jean Fairfax, Report on Arrests of Representatives, April 16, 1962, AFSC, Baton Rouge Correspondence, South Central Regional Office, 1963.

⁶⁵"Negroes Ousted from Southern," *Morning Advocate*, January 28, 1962, 1.

defendant is being charged for the protest of racial segregation and within the courthouse itself segregation is being practiced.” Interest in Cox’s trial ran high in the African-American community, and 127 people quickly filled the seats in the black section of the courtroom, and more than 200 waited in the hallway to hear news about the trial. Captain Herman Thompson of the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff’s Office testified that the crowd remained in the hallway and grew so thick that he and his colleagues could not clear a pathway. At that point, he called the fire marshals and dispersed the crowd. Only eight white spectators attended the trial. In light of this, Jones asked Judge LeBlanc to allow interested African Americans to sit in the vacant seats reserved for whites. District Attorney Pitcher strongly objected to this proposal, and Judge LeBlanc concurred, saying that segregation “has been the practice and custom in the East Baton Rouge Parish Courthouse for many, many years.” He bragged that several years earlier he had generously ordered half of the seats reserved for whites to be assigned to African-American spectators. LeBlanc called Jones’ desegregation demand “self-serving” and ordered the trial to continue. Just as it had done during the December sit-ins, the press ignored Jones’ calls to integrate the courtroom. LeBlanc found Cox guilty of disturbing the peace, obstructing a public sidewalk, and demonstrating near a public building and sentenced him to a one year and nine months in jail and fined him \$5,700. A month after Cox’s conviction, Jones resigned from the case because CORE failed to pay the \$7,180 it owed him in attorney’s fees and expenditures that he incurred while representing Cox and the other jailed protesters.

Within months, the tiff between Jones and CORE blew over, and he resumed his representation of the jailed activist.⁶⁶

Cox's conviction ended CORE's involvement in Baton Rouge. Although individual members remained in the city and continued to work to fight segregation, the expulsion of the student activists and law enforcement's zero-tolerance policy for agitators paralyzed the local CORE chapter, and the organization shifted its attention away from Baton Rouge toward the rural parishes surrounding the city. Clark's harsh treatment of protesters destroyed not just CORE but student activism at Southern for the next six years. Yet the sit-ins of March, 1960, and December, 1961, had a lasting impact on the civil rights movement both nationally and locally. Cox's case made its way to the Supreme Court and led to a ruling that protected the right of protesters to stage peaceful public demonstrations. Locally, CORE's activities compelled other civil rights activists to take action, most notably a group of working-class men and women who wanted to bring an immediate end to segregation and were willing to risk their economic well-being and physical safety to achieve their goals.

⁶⁶"Negroes Ousted from Southern," *Morning Advocate*, January 28, 1962, 1; *Cox v. Louisiana*, 41, 199- 42,202, Criminal Section, 19th Judicial District Court, Parish of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana (1962); "CORE Official Found Guilty," *Morning Advocate*, February 1, 1962, 1; Johnnie Jones to Lois Elie, March 1, 1962, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17.

Chapter 7

Desegregating the Public Schools, 1956-1969

In 1956, two years after Johnnie Jones and Alex Pitcher attempted to register black students at Gilmer Wright in 1954, black parents filed a school desegregation suit for East Baton Rouge Parish — *Davis v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board*. In the face of threatened integration, the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board adopted a policy of using the court system to delay a decision on *Davis*. After four years of continuances and appeals, A. P. Tureaud, the parents' attorney, asked the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to issue a ruling in the case, but Judge J. Skelly Wright refused to rule on *Davis* until the Orleans Parish school desegregation suit had been settled. The integration of New Orleans's schools created a segregationist backlash that threatened to destroy public education in Louisiana. In Baton Rouge, the fight over school desegregation pitted white leaders and accommodationists against the Citizens' Council and its supporters. Segregationists wanted to close the public schools if ordered to desegregate, and white leaders and their supporters wanted to keep them open. From 1960 to 1963, white Baton Rougeans struggled to agree on integration. Throughout the period, black parents wanted one thing — to obtain a good education for their children.

White leaders realized that the federal courts would eventually order them to integrate the East Baton Rouge Parish public school system but wanted to delay the inevitable as long as possible. The nervous School Board sought to appease African Americans and to convince them to withdraw the suit. In 1959, its members considered changing the designation of Gilmer Wright, the elementary school that black parents had raised money to build but was designated for whites, from white to black.

Superintendent Robert Aerteker proposed the conversion to the board and claimed that the white population in the neighborhood surrounding the school had declined significantly in the 1950s while the number of African Americans had risen. As a result, approximately 160 black children had to attend a facility three miles away while Gilmer Wright went underutilized. Aerteker warned the board that integration would cause tremendous problems and might lead to a mass exodus of black students to white schools. He implied that giving Gilmer Wright back to the black community might appease the black parents. "Unless we take constructive steps now," he warned the board, "you will come to us later asking why we didn't let you know of possible changes in the area." White parents, however, appeared before the board and strongly denounced Aerteker's proposal. They claimed that a change in designation would lower their property values and charged that "the NAACP and communists" were behind the proposal. Because of the white outcry against the plan, the board postponed taking action on the proposal for over a year. In light of white opposition, School Board members could not support a move that favored African Americans for fear that the Southern Gentlemen and the Citizens' Council would label them segregationists and ruin their political careers.¹

When Tureaud made his arguments before Federal Judge J. Skelly Wright in early 1960, he claimed that his clients originally sought legal redress after the School Board took Gilmer Wright away from them. Tureaud also announced that African-

¹Minutes, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, December 17, 1959; "Gilmer Wright Patrons Protest Possible Change," *Morning Advocate*, December 17, 1959, 1; "Tempers Fly at Meet of EBR School on Possible Change," *Morning Advocate*, December 18, 1959, 1.

American parents from the neighborhood surrounding Gilmer Wright initially retained an attorney, Pitcher, to get their school back. Attorney General Jack Gremillion asked Tureaud if his clients would drop their case if the School Board changed the designation. The civil rights attorney replied that they would not. Gremillion claimed that NAACP attorneys came to Baton Rouge and convinced black parents to sue. Whites throughout the South levied similar charges against all school desegregation suits because they believed that their black populations would not take such action on their own. Tureaud countered that the plaintiffs contacted an attorney and not vice versa.²

In 1956, a large number of activists in East Baton Rouge Parish wanted to be a party to the suit. Working with J. K. Haynes, Tureaud carefully selected the most committed ones. The two men refused to allow several of the parents to act as plaintiffs, one because he could easily be intimidated, another for being untrustworthy, still another because the man's wife was "consumed by fear," and a final man for being an alcoholic and receiving treatment in a mental institution. Tureaud and Haynes wanted the plaintiffs to be upstanding citizens because they knew that the School Board's attorneys would investigate their backgrounds and use any flaws that they found as ammunition against them. Seven individuals made the final cut: Clifford Davis, Sr., Richard Payne, Frank White, Louis Moncliffe, Mrs. Bernice Williams, Walter Williams, and M. F. Moss. Their children ranged from elementary to high school age.³

²"Federal Court Hears Suit on BR Integration," *State-Times*, March 14, 1960, 1; "EBR Area Integration Suits Argued," *Morning Advocate*, March 15, 1960, 1.

³J. K. Haynes to A. P. Tureaud, March 30, 1960, APT Papers, box 29, folder 23.

On April 29, 1960, Wright ruled in favor of Davis, et al. Following the “all deliberate speed” clause of *Brown*, he ordered the School Board to submit a desegregation plan but refused to set a date for compliance, thus allowing the board to drag out the process for several years. Instead of working on the desegregation plan, the School Board decided to fight the ruling “all the way to the Supreme Court.” East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney J. St. Clair Favrot told the *Morning Advocate*, “I intend to exhaust every legal remedy available to the School Board.”⁴

Nineteen sixty marked the watershed in the Louisiana school desegregation process. On May 16, Judge Wright ordered racial mixing to begin in New Orleans at the beginning of the 1960-1961 school year. That ruling set off an unprecedented wave of segregationist sentiment both in the state and in Baton Rouge. In the summer of 1960, Governor Jimmie Davis, who had run for election the previous year on a segregationist platform, created a sovereignty commission to direct the state’s official segregation policy. He appointed as its chairman arch-segregationist Willie Rainach, who had run for governor in 1960, but after his loss in the primary supported Davis. Along with the state legislature and Attorney General Gremillion, the Louisiana Sovereignty Commission searched for ways to avoid school desegregation. The legislature even gave Davis the authority to close all state schools if the courts ordered any of them to

⁴“EBR, St. Helena Schools Ordered to Desegregate by Federal Judge Wright,” *State-Times*, April 30, 1960, 1; “Judgement Favors Negroes in EBR, St. Helena Suits for School Desegregation,” *Morning Advocate*, April 30, 1960, 1; “Fight to Highest Court is Vowed on Desegregation,” *Morning Advocate*, May 1, 1960, 12A.

admit black students, but the governor promised to keep the schools open and segregated.⁵

The prospect of destroying the public school system produced opposition in Baton Rouge from a group of moderate white businessmen and professionals who supported segregation but refused either to defy the federal courts or to destroy the public school system to preserve it. They counseled submission to federal authority not defiance. These accommodationists shared many characteristics with Baton Rouge's white leaders. They belonged to the city's upper and middle classes, held professional positions, and were, for the most part, well educated, but for accommodationists, school desegregation was the only issue that prompted them to speak out. The accommodationists initially lacked an organization through which to take a firm stand against the segregationists. In the summer of 1960, Wade Mackie learned that several women who either worked at LSU or were married to LSU professors wanted to organize and to lobby the legislature and the School Board to comply with the federal court's desegregation order. "Their goal is a strictly defensive one — save the schools," Mackie told his supervisors. He helped them form a new group, the Organization for Public Education (OPEN). Although the women accepted Mackie's help, they wanted to avoid any public association with the AFSC. Its members believed that being tied to the liberal organization would imply that they supported integration and would hurt their standing in the community. As a liberal, Mackie wanted complete integration, but he was also practical. He realized liberals and black activists alone could not achieve

⁵Fariclough, *Race and Democracy*, 235-236.

this goal; white resistance to total desegregation was simply too strong. Mackie believed that by cultivating allies, even those who supported segregation but balked at dismantling the public system to maintain it, the liberals' and activists' dream of an integrated school system would be realized. Without Mackie, the eight women who formed the foundation for OPEN would probably have remained unorganized. Under the Quaker leader's direction, OPEN's membership grew from 8 to approximately 175 in a few months. It drew its membership, consisting of both men and women, from the ranks of business owners, professionals, and LSU faculty and staff members.⁶

Even as he helped accommodationists form OPEN, Mackie worked with liberals in their fight to attain complete integration. He encouraged liberal rabbis and ministers publicly to condemn segregation. The city's two rabbis Marvin Reznikoff and Walter Peiser and several liberal Protestant ministers also denounced school closing from the pulpit. On September 4, J. P. Woodland, a minister at Broadmoor Methodist Church, preached a sermon in which he declared that closing the schools would be disastrous for the state of Louisiana. In an October 2, 1960, sermon at University Baptist Church, J. Bruce Evans declared that segregation created hate in the human heart and proclaimed that the only way to end this hatred and heal the hearts of countless southerners was through integration. He realized that his stance would not be well-received by his congregation and told them that he feared their rejection. Nevertheless, his conscience

⁶Annual Report, October 17, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1960; Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, August 10, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program School Desegregation Correspondence, South Central Regional Office, 1960; "Ad Contends School Group not Spontaneous," *Morning Advocate*, August 16, 1960, 13A.

would not allow him to remain silent on the issue. Declaring their support for integration placed these ministers in a precarious position because they served at the pleasure of their congregations and could be removed.⁷ Despite the threat of a loss of their pulpits, a group of liberal Baton Rouge ministers issued a statement urging Governor Davis “not to interrupt, restrict, or abandon public education in Louisiana.” They also asked like-minded individuals to contact the governor and voice their support for maintaining the public school system.⁸

As the deadline for integration of the Orleans Parish public school system approached, the state legislature, called into a special session by Davis, passed a series of acts aimed at preventing desegregation. As soon as the governor signed them into law, Wright declared them unconstitutional. With the threat of school closings a probability, OPEN began lobbying Davis and the legislature and asking them to comply with Wright’s desegregation order. On November 4, Leslie M. Addison, the organization’s chairman, sent a letter to Davis urging him to allow the Orleans Parish Schools to desegregate under the terms of the state’s pupil placement law, which

⁷Methodist ministers were not as vulnerable as those from other Protestant denominations because they were appointed by a bishop rather than hired directly by the congregation.

⁸Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, August 10, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1960; “BR Minister Warns Against School Closing,” *Morning Advocate*, September 5, 1960, 8A; Bruce Evans, “Christianity and Segregation,” October 2, 1960, J. Bruce Evans Collection, folder Civil Rights in Baton Rouge 1957-1960, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; “BR Clergymen Group Urges School Closure,” *Morning Advocate*, August 21, 1960, 1 (The headline refers to a segregationist group formed in opposition to the liberal ministers, but the article also discusses the ministers’ declaration.).

required blacks to apply for transfer to white schools and set up seventeen criteria for school boards to follow in approving their requests. He told the governor that several states including North and South Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, Florida, and Tennessee used similar laws to "integrate" their schools without incurring the wrath of the federal government. Addision pointed out that the number of African-American children admitted to white schools could be limited through legal means, such as creating a set of criteria that would prevent most black students from transferring to integrated schools. On November 5, OPEN members, along with two dozen like-minded men and women from New Orleans, held a demonstration at the State Capitol to urge Davis and the legislature not to close the public schools. The same day, a *Morning Advocate* editorial claimed that life would go on if the schools closed, but progress would come to a halt:

Even a temporary closing in the schools in one of our larger cities, to say nothing of throughout the state, would mean a year but to thousands of students, a year of progress, a year of learning that could never be recaptured. The loss of this inevitable time, the shock to business and industry, the strain on parents and children, would be a very high price to pay for a victory which would in fact be a defeat.

In short, closing the public schools would not only be bad for business, it would also hurt both black and white children in East Baton Rouge Parish.⁹

Although they wanted to preserve segregation if possible, white leaders in East Baton Rouge Parish also supported maintaining the public school system. In a

⁹Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 237-241; "OPEN Letter to Governor Davis Hits School Closure Plan," *Morning Advocate*, November 4, 1960, 4F; Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 239; "Groups Opposing Closure," *Morning Advocate*, November 4, 1960, 1; "The Schools Must Be Kept Open," *Morning Advocate*, November 6, 1960, 4B.

November 1960 poll, the majority of School Board members declared that they wanted open schools, even if it meant allowing integration. One member, John Sheppard stated, "I am absolutely opposed to closing schools. I would prefer them open and segregated, naturally." Ben Peabody also expressed support for maintaining segregation but added, "I would not want to see the schools closed. It would hurt too many people." Mrs. John E. Coxe echoed the two men and declared that closing the schools would hurt the children and deprive them of educational opportunities.¹⁰

While white leaders and accommodationists expressed their support for the public school system, segregationists adamantly demanded that the schools be closed. The Citizens' Council supported Davis's and the legislature's stand against integration, and letters from Baton Rouge segregationists flooded the office of Senator Russell Long. A World War II veteran declared that in a democracy, the majority ruled but added that minority rule in the form of school desegregation was turning the country into a dictatorship. One constituent railed against the Supreme Court and demanded that Long do something to reestablish Louisiana's sovereignty. Another urged him to "use every effort possible to prevent the great tragedy of integration that is being forced upon us by the dictators that we have in government." A fourth voter wrote, "You surely know the majority of the people do not want their children to go to school with negroes

¹⁰"Members of the Board Favor Open Schools," *Morning Advocate*, November 11, 1960, 1.

[sic].” Dozens more constituents echoed these four and pleaded with Long to do everything in his power to restore Louisiana’s sovereignty.¹¹

Yet Long and other elected officials could do nothing to prevent the integration of the Orleans Parish school system. The reaction of white New Orleanians to desegregation appalled white leaders, accommodationists, and white liberals in Baton Rouge. On November 14, as the four little African-American girls made their way to the New Orleans elementary schools for the first time, white crowds gathered to jeer at them. The mob became violent on November 15 when a group of angry whites went on a rampage in downtown New Orleans, throwing rocks and bottles at African Americans riding in buses and cars. The police used fire hoses to disperse the crowd. In an appeal for an end to the violence, Mayor deLesseps Morrison told New Orleanians that this type of unrest could damage the city’s image “as a thriving center of commerce and industry.” His appeal fell on deaf ears, and, every morning, huge crowds of segregationists gathered outside the two elementary schools “to taunt, shove, heckle, threaten, [and] spit at” the young black students and the small number of white ones who remained enrolled in these schools. Most white parents had withdrawn their children from the integrated schools immediately following the desegregation order. Throughout the crisis, photographs and newsreels of angry whites shouting at the young black girls made their way into the national press, and many compared New Orleans’

¹¹Wesley Stewart, Jr. to Russell Long, November 15, 1960; J. D. Passons to Russell Long, November 16, 1960; Clyde Wilson to Russell Long, November 16, 1960; Robert Weble to Russell Long, November 16, 1960; Ed Armistead to Russell Long, November 18, 1960; Milner Michel to Russell Long, November 23, 1960; James Ware to Russell Long, December 1, 1960. All in Long Papers, box 357, folder 12.

integration battle with Little Rock's. White leaders and accommodationists in Baton Rouge wanted to avoid this type of negative publicity when their schools integrated. In the late 1950s, the city had suffered an economic downturn when the nation entered a recession, and new plant construction and the expansion of existing facilities had stopped. Business leaders feared that if school desegregation in East Baton Rouge Parish mimicked that in New Orleans or Little Rock, then the city would suffer permanent economic damage.¹²

Fearing that school desegregation in East Baton Rouge Parish was imminent, in December 1960 the School Board voted five to two to make Gilmer Wright a black school. Although white property owners in the neighborhood complained about the conversion, board members refused to reconsider their decision. Longtime board member, Mrs. John Coxe, the wife of the former state superintendent of education, argued that with the school desegregation suit pending, the board could not defend busing African-American children out of the neighborhood to a substandard black school miles away from their homes. Throughout the desegregation process, Coxe allied with the white leaders and always chose compromise and compliance with federal court rulings over conflict and open defiance.¹³

¹²Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 245-247; Morton Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City: The New Orleans School Desegregation Crisis of 1960* (Madison: Center for Urban Education, 1969), 51-53; Garnet Guild to Steve Cary and Barbara Moffitt, June 13, 1960, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Correspondence, South Central Regional Office, 1960.

¹³Minutes, December 15, 1960, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board. "Gilmer Wright to Become Negro School Next Fall," *Morning Advocate*, December 16, 1960, 1.

While segregationists in New Orleans protested against integration, their counterparts in Baton Rouge turned their attention to silencing Baton Rouge's white liberals. In December 1960, ardent segregationist Senator Wendell Harris, who had earlier that year defeated liberal J. D. DeBlieux to become Baton Rouge's state senator, as well as East Baton Rouge Parish State Representatives A. T. "Apple" Sanders and Eugene McGehee, received a letter from LSU English Professor Waldo McNeir, who in 1958 had testified before the House Education Committee against shutting down the public school system to prevent integration. In it, he denounced the legislature's actions during the New Orleans School desegregation crisis and called the marathon special sessions "a disgrace and national scandal." On January 13, 1961, the House Education Committee passed a resolution condemning McNeir and launching a probe into un-American activities at LSU. The resolution charged that the professor made "scurrilous, unwarranted, and unproven statements which constitutes an attack on the character, integrity, and good intentions of the legislature." The committee also threatened to strip twenty-five million dollars from the university's budget "until such time as the legislature shall be assured that all due and proper action as is necessary has been taken by the proper authorities at Louisiana State University to insure its operation and administration in accordance with the policies enunciated in the Constitution and the laws of the state."¹⁴

¹⁴Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities, *The Case of Dr. Waldo McNeir* (Baton Rouge: State of Louisiana, 1961), "Un-American Activities Probe at LSU Approved by Solons in Vote Today," *State-Times*, December 15, 1960, 1.

The threat of a huge budget cut and an investigation into un-American activities threw university officials into a panic. LSU supporters in the legislature abandoned the budget cut before it made its way out of the committee, but segregation leaders overrode opposition and rammed through legislation to allow the Joint Commission on Un-American Activities to conduct a search for "subversive elements" at LSU. Members of the legislature with strong ties to LSU wanted to spare the university the bad publicity of the probe and allow Troy Middleton to handle the situation internally. Ultra-segregationists in the legislature, such as Representatives Welborn Jack and Frank Falco from Caddo Parish, publicly declared that because McNeir advocated integration that he also espoused communism. They even claimed that the English professor used his position to brainwash his students. Senator Harris, a member of the Sovereignty Committee and father of an LSU student who was in one of McNeir's classes, shouted during the debate that the professor was a threat and that the Sovereignty Commission possessed information about subversive elements at LSU "that would turn your hair." He added that LSU would be derelict if it failed to remove McNeir.¹⁵

The un-American activities probe left LSU's administration little choice but to ask McNeir to leave. Citing the fact that the English professor had written his letter upon university stationary, on December 20, Dean of Arts and Sciences Cecil Taylor asked him to resign for "the good of the university." McNeir refused, but in a meeting

¹⁵"\$60,000 Sought for LSU Probe," *State-Times*, December 16, 1960, 1; "Solons Approve Un-American Probe at LSU," *Morning Advocate*, December 16, 1960, 1. Unfortunately, a gap from the mid 1950s through the mid 1960s exists in the Office of the President's Papers, so no archival sources of Middleton's response to the charges against McNeir could be located.

with Middleton, he learned that the president planned to charge him with bringing discredit to the university and teaching integration in his classes if he remained at LSU. Although many faculty members supported him, McNeir ultimately left the university because of "certain outside threats and inside pressures that seemed to me to endanger the welfare of LSU."¹⁶

Accommodationists supported McNeir. In a letter to the state legislature, Addison, the president of OPEN, denounced the legislature's actions and added that although his organization did not agree with McNeir's position on segregation, it backed McNeir's First Amendment right to freedom of speech. In addition to OPEN's support, more than 700 LSU students signed a petition declaring their belief in freedom of speech and their displeasure with the legislative probe. Wade Mackie, a close friend of McNeir, wanted the faculty to issue a statement condemning the legislation and supporting the principles of both academic freedom and freedom of speech. The Quaker leader met with several faculty members and circulated a petition condemning the "atmosphere of fear" created by the un-American activities probe and obtained 152 signatures. Fearing that they would suffer retribution if the petition became public, the signers wanted to keep its existence quiet. Mackie disregarded them and leaked the petition to the press. He bragged, "It hit the front page." Although the petition did little to stop the probe, it forced the LSU Board of Supervisors to pass a resolution supporting academic freedom and stating that the university could not punish a faculty

¹⁶December 1960-1961 Report, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1960; "McNeir Quits Post; Charges Pressure," *State-Times*, January 4, 1961, 1; "McNeir Resigns, Cites Pressure, Outside Threats," *Morning Advocate*, January 5, 1961, 1.

member acting as an individual and not as a university employee from exercising his or her freedom of speech. In the end, the Un-American Activities Committee reported that although his views were "repugnant," McNeir was not a communist.¹⁷

While the battle over the desegregation of the Orleans Parish school system marked the high point of segregationist power in Louisiana, the McNeir probe ushered in the beginning of its decline. During the frenzied fight to prevent integration, white moderates realized that segregationists were fanatical and would sacrifice the state's educational and economic well-being to preserve the system of Jim Crow. When the Un-American Activities Committee finally released its report in May 1961, moderate members of the state legislature denounced it, something that would have brought immediate ostracism and meant political death only two years earlier.¹⁸

Segregationists were far from broken, however. After the McNeir incident, they launched an attack against white liberals, especially ministers, who called for desegregation. In January 1961, Wade Mackie began receiving phone calls every fifteen to twenty minutes. The caller would always hang up. When the AFSC held meetings,

¹⁷"Un-American Activities Probe at LSU Approved by Solons in Vote Today," *State-Times*, December 15, 1960, 1; "LSU Students Hit Probe," *State-Times*, December 21, 1960, 1; December 1960 - January 1961 Report, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1960; "117 LSU Faculty Members Protest 'Free Atmosphere,'" *Morning Advocate*, January 7, 1961, 1; "117 Faculty Members Rap 'Atmosphere of Fear,'" *State-Times*, January 7, 1961, 1; "LSU Board States Academic Freedom Policy at Meeting," *Morning Advocate*, January 8, 1961, 1; "Board Restates Policy on Academic Freedom," *State-Times*, January 9, 1961, 7B; "More LSU Faculty Hit Probe," *State-Times*, January 11, 1961, 6B; "35 More Faculty Petition La. Legislature," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1961, 1.

¹⁸"Legislative Probers Say McNeir is Not Involved in Un-American Activities," *Morning Advocate*, May 9, 1961, 1.

segregationists made their way through the parking lot writing down license plate numbers and snapping photographs of people attending the meetings. A day or two after the gatherings, investigators from the district attorney's office and the chief of police went to the AFSC office and asked Mackie's secretary to identify the people in the snapshots. She refused. When Mackie asked District Attorney Pitcher about the request, he claimed that he wanted to identify the people in the pictures to protect them.¹⁹

In late February, Mackie began to suspect that segregationists had tapped his phones when they began quoting his private conversations back to him, and in May 1961, he received confirmation that segregationists had placed wire taps on his home and office phones. They had also tapped Rabbi Marvin Reznikoff's line. On May 29, Garnet Guild of the AFSC South Central Regional Office established guidelines for phoning Mackie. "There is no good reason for tipping the DA off to everything we might want to plan," he told AFSC members. In July 1961, Mackie and Rabbi Reznikoff contacted United States Attorney M. Hepburn Many and reported the suspected tapping. Many directed the men to Chandler Josey, "Southern Bell super sleuth," who sent a team of investigators to check Mackie's lines. They found a tap on the AFSC office phone and traced it to an empty apartment nearby. When the phone company discovered the tap on the AFSC line, the FBI joined the investigation. On August 23, Mackie discovered a bug on his home phone and traced it to the home of his neighbor, Jack Rogers, a Baton Rouge attorney and a segregationist who represented both the legislature's Un-American Activities Committee and the American Legion's

¹⁹Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, September 19, 1961, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1961.

Un-American Activity Committee. Charles Reynard, who, in 1958, had testified against school closing before the House Education Committee, and his wife lived near Mackie and Rogers and saw the crude wire connecting their homes. Mackie even joked about "the extra 'togetherness' " of his immediate neighborhood. In December 1961, the Justice Department charged three prominent Baton Rougeans, Senator Wendell Harris, businessman Leon Patterson, and private detective Lawrence Hall, with wiretapping and disseminating information garnered from the taps. Although their motives for the taps never became public, Mackie suspected that Harris, Patterson, and Hall wanted to harass and intimidate white liberals and force them to abandon the cause of school desegregation.²⁰

In addition to their war on white liberals, segregationists in state government also aimed their sights on the white leaders. Fearing that the School Board would refuse to close the parish's schools if ordered by the federal courts to integrate, the legislature devised a plan to pack the board with segregationist members. On January 30, 1961, the *State-Times* asked board members if they would support closing the schools to avoid desegregation. Two members, Ben Peabody and Wally Wells, stated that they wanted to keep the schools open. "I would say the majority of people want to keep schools open, even if it means token integration," Wells said. "I want to abide by the wishes of the majority of my people." Peabody vowed that the board would develop a desegregation plan that would satisfy the federal courts. The other five members refused to answer the

²⁰Garnet Guild to Jean Fairfax, May 29, 1961, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1961; Wade Mackie to M. Hepburn Many, July 19, 1961, *ibid.*; Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, September 19, 1961, *ibid.*; "Three BR Men Plead Innocent of Wiretapping," *Morning Advocate*, January 18, 1962, 1.

paper's questions, but from their voting records, the *State-Times* concluded that two members, Winston McVea and T. H. Harris, would vote to close the schools. Two others, Pat Collier and Mrs. John Coxe, would oppose closure. The final member, John White, Jr., had taken office only several weeks earlier, and the paper refused to speculate on how he would vote.²¹

In early February, the court of appeals upheld Wright's ruling in the East Baton Rouge Parish desegregation case, and segregationists in the legislature sprang into action. As Attorney General Jack Gremillion and District Attorney Sargent Pitcher planned a further appeal, one of Baton Rouge's segregationist representatives, "Apple" Sanders, introduced an emergency bill to add four additional members, to be appointed by Governor Davis, to the Baton Rouge School Board. Their appointment would insure a segregationist majority on the board and a vote to close the schools. The parish's moderate representative, Eugene McGehee, refused to cosponsor the bill and declared, "I know nothing that the School Board of the parish of East Baton Rouge has done which would justify action as drastic as 'packing' of the School Board." He added that if the legislature wanted to add members to the board, then it should allow the voters to select them. Of course, polls showed that most East Baton Rougeans wanted open schools even if it meant integrating them. On February 17, the House voted seventy-nine to fourteen to add four members to the board. Although segregationists won by a large margin, the fact that fourteen members voted against the bill was significant. From 1956 until the *McNeir* case in late 1960, nearly every piece of segregationist

²¹"Believes School Board in EBR Against Any School Closure," *State-Times*, January 30, 1961.

legislation passed with a unanimous vote, and any member who voted against the majority was described as "soft" on segregation. On February 20, Davis, after consulting with Sanders and Harris, chose the four new members: Lewis Doherty II, a fifty-five-year-old businessman and Citizens' Council member; I. M. Shelton, the thirty-nine-year-old president of Shel-Boze, Inc.; forty-year-old Levy Chaney, a patrolman for Ethyl's security department; and Charles S. Davis, a lab technician at Humble Oil (ESSO).²²

The five existing board members passed a resolution denouncing the packing scheme, and three of them incurred the wrath of the segregationists. Coxe received threatening phone calls warning her that she would die before the next School Board meeting. Klansmen made appearances at the homes of Peabody and Collier, and segregationists phoned Peabody's home and harassed his thirteen-year-old son. The angry board member challenged the man who phoned his son to meet him face-to-face. "Our only crime was voting that resolution opposing packing our board with people the voters had no chance to elect," Peabody told the *Morning Advocate*, "We've reached

²²"Seek Rehearing in Integration Ruling in EBR," *State-Times*, February 10, 1961, 1; "State to Seek Rehearing in EBR, St. Helena," *Morning Advocate*, February 11, 1961; "Court of Appeals Upholds Integration Order in EBR," *Morning Advocate*, February 10, 1961, 1; "Plan Would Let Governor Davis 'Pack' EBR School Board," *Morning Advocate*, February 16, 1961, 1; "House to Vote Today on Bill to 'Pack' School Board Here," *Morning Advocate*, February 17, 1961, 1; "Local Option School Plan Voted in House," *State-Times*, February 17, 1961, 1; "BR Board Bill," *State-Times*, February 18, 1961, 1; "Davis Names Four to Serve on EBR Board," *Morning Advocate*, February 21, 1961, 1; Minutes, February 17, 1960, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board.

the point that if you dare question anything this legislature does your family stands to suffer.”²³

The new board members wasted no time in asserting their dominance. At the March 9 meeting, they rammed through a resolution to send two board members, two staff members, and a representative from the district attorney’s office to Virginia to study that state’s pupil placement law and its private school cooperatives.²⁴ On the trip, the group visited Prince Edward County, which in 1959 had closed its public school rather than submit to court-ordered integration and created a network of private schools for white students. The county also closed all black schools but refused to create a private school system for them. After touring Prince Edward County’s private schools, White remarked, “The key to the whole situation is the determination of the citizens of the county to have a private school system.” In response to the trip, accommodationists and liberals denounced the plan and pointed out that the “private” schools in Virginia operated under substandard conditions.²⁵

²³“EBR Board Hits Bill,” *State-Times*, February 18, 1961, 1; “BR School Trio Become Target of Abuse, Threat,” *Morning Advocate*, February 24, 1961, 1.

²⁴Baton Rouge’s delegation included Sargent Pitcher, Assistant School Superintendent Robert Aerteker, Assistant Secondary Schools Supervisor John Fitzpatrick, and board members White and Doherty.

²⁵Minutes, March 9, 1961, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; “EBR Delegation Begins Virginia Schools Tour,” *Morning Advocate*, April 11, 1961, 1; “EBR Delegation Continues Tour of Va. Schools,” *Morning Advocate*, April 12, 1961, 1; “OPEN Criticizes Virginia Private Program,” *ibid.*; “EBR Officials Get Data from Va.,” *Morning Advocate*, April 13, 1961, 1; “Pitcher Praises Citizens’ Stand in Virginia,” *Morning Advocate*, April 14, 1961, 1; “Doherty Inspects Front Royal, Va., Private School,” *ibid.*; Jean Fairfax to Wade Mackie, April 24, 1961, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, Southern Program, 1961.

While segregationists supported dismantling the public school system to prevent integration, white parents in East Baton Rouge Parish were split on the issue. In 1961, several Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) discussed and voted on resolutions either to oppose or to support school closure. The PTA of Highland School, in a sprawling middle- to upper-class neighborhood near the LSU campus, was the first to vote on the issue. Native Baton Rougean Mary Benton Kenyon was one of the most outspoken advocates for keeping the schools open. The wife of an attorney and a former public school teacher, Kenyon had ties to Baton Rouge society. She grew up in the city and graduated from Baton Rouge High School. As a student at LSU, she played an active role in student government and served as president of her sorority, Chi Omega. In the late 1950s, Kenyon taught school, and when the board began improving conditions at black facilities, she recalled, "Some of my colleagues were objecting to the fact that 85 percent of the funds that year were going to the black schools." Kenyon added, "I, of course, was very proud that the black schools were beginning to be brought to the level of the white schools." When the state legislature threatened to close the public schools to avoid integration, Kenyon took action. On March 1, 1961, she and other members of the Highland School PTA debated a resolution to support open schools. After more than three hours of debate, which included two unsuccessful attempts to table the resolution and the departure of fifty members, the organization voted by secret ballot 112 to 8 in favor of the declaration. Kenyon recalled:

I observed in my PTA that those people [who supported the resolution] had some awareness of what they said and did impacting how people might think in the future in the state or how people might think in the future in town. Some of them knew that this was a moment for them to stand up and speak and be

counted. At that time, that was considered a very way out statement . . . by the anti-Negro forces.

The fifty members of the Highland School PTA who walked out of the March 1 meeting declared that votes that occurred after they left were invalid, and in a meeting of their own, voted to rescind the resolution and named twenty delegates to the upcoming state PTA meeting. They asked the supporters of open schools to withdraw their delegates. On April 19, the two factions met and hammered out a compromise that technically rescinded the resolution and replaced it with one that declared the group's support for maintaining the school system. The resolution fell short of advocating open schools. Kenyon described the second vote:

Apparently, it was considered important enough so that the forces on the other side really got to steam-rolling and a recall was called for in our PTA. On the night of the vote, we lost a few votes. The opposition called for an open ballot and I thought, "How undemocratic." They knew that many of the people in that room would not be able to [publicly vote for open schools]. The guy that sold gasoline and the druggist, all these people couldn't possibly vote their conscience in an open ballot. That was the kind of tactics that were considered okay to keep our voice from being heard. I was disappointed, but, at the same time, I felt that we maybe lost that battle but we won the war, and I think that we did.

Kenyon believed that others voted against the resolution "because they really couldn't see the PTA moving out of the cookie making role."²⁶

²⁶"Highland PTA Favors Open Schools After Teachers, Opponents Stage Walkout," *Morning Advocate*, March 2, 1961, 1; "Highland PTA Faction Selects 20 Delegates for State Convention," *Morning Advocate*, April 18, 1961, 6B; "Highland PTA Reverses on Resolution to Urge Keeping Public Education," *Morning Advocate*, April 20, 1961, 1; Martha Mikell, interview by author, tape recording, May 25, 1996, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Mary Benton Kenyon, interview by Shirley Marvin, tape recording, December 10, 1982, YWCA Oral History Collection, East Baton Rouge Parish Library, Centroplex Branch, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The PTAs in lower class neighborhoods encountered no dissension. All of their members denounced integration. The Glen Oaks High School PTA voted, without debate, to support segregation even if it meant dismantling the public school system. Nearly three hundred parents at Belfair School invited Representative Welborn Jack of Caddo Parish, one of the state's leading segregationists, to attend their meeting. Jack warned the parents to begin organizing cooperative schools because "you're gonna be next to receive an integration order." A resolution by the parents of children attending White Hills Elementary School read, God "in his infinite wisdom created white and Negro races with different traits, characteristics, and abilities" and when whites and blacks were "forced to mix disastrous results followed." They urged Davis, the legislature, and the School Board to adopt any means necessary to prevent integration.²⁷

The Davis board members agreed with the segregationist parents and attempted to remove white leaders from positions of power within the school system. In June 1961, Superintendent of East Baton Rouge Public School System Lloyd Funchess incurred the wrath of the Davis faction by denouncing the addition of the new board members. A native Louisianian, Funchess moved to Baton Rouge in 1925 to attend LSU where he eventually earned three degrees. In 1955, the School Board appointed him superintendent. The segregationist board members charged that Funchess refused to cooperate with them on "budget matters and segregationist questions" and asked him to resign. When he refused, the segregationist majority voted to oust him and named

²⁷"Glen Oaks High PTA Reaffirms for Segregation," *Morning Advocate*, March 14, 1961, 5A; "Segregation Resolution Wins Unanimous Approval at Belfair School Meet," *Morning Advocate*, March 17, 1961, 10C; "White Hills School Group Opposes Mixing of Races," *Morning Advocate*, March 28, 1961, 5A.

former school principal Lloyd Lindsey as his replacement. An angry Funchess sued to retain his position. Supporting his segregationist friends, District Attorney Pitcher filed a motion saying that Funchess had illegally occupied the position since 1957, when the board renewed his contract, because he failed to take the oath of office. In response, Funchess's attorney administered the oath of office to his client on June 30 and, to prevent Lindsey from taking over, Funchess locked himself into his office and refused to leave. Pitcher warned the School Board staff that if they helped Funchess, he would charge them with "adhesion to a usurper." Despite the order to leave the position, Funchess continued to operate as superintendent and on July 3 sent out notices and an agenda for the upcoming board meeting. Pitcher promised to arrest him if he attended. The board canceled the meeting, and when it met on July 13, it voted six to five to bar Funchess's pay checks. The vote reflected the influence of the Davis members. Without them, the board would have voted to pay Funchess. In late July, Judge Fred Blanche ruled in Funchess's favor and ordered the board and Lindsey to allow him to fulfill his duties. Days later, a state court of appeals ruled in his favor. The board gave up and allowed Funchess to retain his job.²⁸

²⁸Minutes, June 8, 1961, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; "School Head Under Pressure to Quit," *State-Times*, June 1, 1961, 1; "School Board Gives No Hint of Ouster Move," *Morning Advocate*, June 2, 1961, 1; "Funchess Denies Charge That He Has Held Up Budget," *Morning Advocate*, June 3, 1961; "Say BR School Case Worries Governor; Statement Issued," *State-Times*, June 5, 1961, 1; "Board Expected to Oust Funchess," *State-Times*, June 7, 1961, 1; "Criticism Continues Here Against EBR School Head," *Morning Advocate*, June 8, 1961, 1; "School Board Drops Funchess," *State-Times*, June 9, 1961, 1; "Board Decided as Expected to Oust Funchess," *Morning Advocate*, June 9, 1961, 1; "Lloyd Lindsey Named School Superintendent," *State-Times*, June 13, 1961, 1; "Board Picks Lindsey a Superintendent, Complications Seen," *Morning Advocate*, June 14, 1961, 1; Minutes, June 13, 1961, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; "Funchess Enters Lawsuit on Ouster," *Morning Advocate*, June 17,

In March 1961, Wade Mackie, along with Rabbi Reznikoff, Reverend Irvin Cheney of Broadmoor Baptist and other members of the Baton Rouge Ministerial Association, began working on an affirmation of religious principles and obtained the signatures of fifty-three ministers of various faiths. On April 10, they published their statement in the city's newspapers. It denounced discrimination and proclaimed that God created "all men in his own image with equal dignity and worth, giving no superiority to any one race or group of people." The ministers also announced their support for freedom of speech and an end to prejudice, character assassination, verbal threats, and violence. They called for maintaining the public school system equally for all under the law and an end to racial discrimination.²⁹

Segregationists immediately denounced the resolution and launched an attack against the fifty-three ministers. In letters to the editor of the *Morning Advocate*, they urged the ministers to stay out of secular affairs and claimed that the Bible supported segregation and not integration. One writer declared that the ministers wanted to destroy both Louisiana and the South. "The Negro has not required sufficient self-control to warrant the removal of all restraint," he proclaimed. He also charged that

1961, 1; "Funchess Defies DA, Board; Slate Hearing," *State-Times*, July 1, 1961, 1; "Dr. Funchess Takes Oath," *Morning Advocate*, July 1, 1961, 1; "Funchess and Staff Spend Day at Office," *State-Times*, July 3, 1961, 1; "Funchess Will Attend Meet as Superintendent," *Morning Advocate*, July 4, 1961, 1; "School Board Lacking Agenda, Cancels Meet," *Morning Advocate*, July 7, 1961, 1; "School Board Acts to Bar Any Checks to Funchess," *Morning Advocate*, July 14, 1961, 1; "Court Rules for Funchess," *Morning Advocate*, July 27, 1961, 1; "Appeal Court Upholds Rule for Funchess," *Morning Advocate*, August 8, 1961, 1.

²⁹"53 Local Ministers Hit Discrimination, Affirm Basic Religious Tenets," *Morning Advocate*, May 7, 1961, 1.

African Americans were indolent, lacked inhibitions, and could not support themselves. Another reader called the fifty-three ministers confused. Not content merely to denounce the signers in the newspapers, segregationists formed the East Baton Rouge Parish Laymen's Association. The new organization called the ministers "agitators" and endorsed the segregationists' policy of maintaining separate schools even if it meant destroying the public school system. When the group held its first public meeting, nearly five hundred people from various religious backgrounds attended.³⁰

Several of the fifty-three ministers suffered severe reprisals from segregationists and their own congregations. Reverend Irvin Cheney, whose phone conversations with Mackie had been taped and played back to "ultraconservative, white segregationists in the Southern Baptist churches," was questioned by the board of deacons of his church after the affirmation appeared. He wrote a cryptic letter to Mackie on June 22 resigning his membership in the Ministerial Fellowship and asking to be removed from the AFSC mailing list. He noted, "The whole thing has hurt me greatly. . . . Some of the conversations on tape indicate very strongly an attempt by you to manipulate the feelings of some of the ministers." Mackie tried to contact him but discovered that he resigned his post at Broadmoor Baptist Church. Before leaving, Cheney denounced the AFSC. "I do not consider myself an integrationist in the usual sense," he told his congregation, "I deplore agitation, the force and the effort for total, forced integration just for the sake of integration. I cannot really identify myself with either group of

³⁰"Letters to Editor," *Morning Advocate*, May 11, 1961, 12B, May 12, 1961, 12A; "Laymen's Group Organizing Here, Opposes Ministers' Move to Racial Question," *Morning Advocate*, May 23, 1961, 1; "500 OK Laymen's Unit Here to Uphold Racial Segregation in Churches," *Morning Advocate*, May 23, 1961, 10A.

extremists and especially do I resent those from outside who come into our midst and force the issue." Bruce Evans's wife, Ann, who worked as a math teacher at Baton Rouge High School, lost her job because of his activism. Undaunted by the firing, Bruce Evans continued to denounce segregation from the pulpit, and in April 1963, he resigned from the staff of University Baptist Church under duress and founded Fellowship Baptist Church, the city's first ecumenical and racially integrated church.³¹

The school desegregation hysteria that led to the packing of the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, the wiretapping of liberals, and the flurry of PTA resolutions was premature. A year after Wright's battle with Governor Davis and the state legislature, President John F. Kennedy appointed the beleaguered judge to the U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., as a reward for his unfaltering support for *Brown*. The Baton Rouge school desegregation case then fell to Kennedy appointee and segregationist, E. Gordon West, Russell Long's law partner. A polar opposite of Wright, West adopted a policy of delaying school desegregation as long as possible. So committed was West to maintaining segregated schools that at one point the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reprimanded him for delaying implementation of *Brown*. In

³¹Wade Mackie to Jean Fairfax, July 31, 1961, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1961; Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, September 19, 1961, *ibid.*; Read by the Minister to the Membership of the Broadmoor Baptist Church, June 18, 1961, J. Bruce Evans Collection, folder Civil Rights 1961-A; "School Board Refuses to Hire Wife of Pastor," *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1961, 1; "Minister's Wife Gives Reaction to the Board," *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1961; Summary of Civil Rights Involvement, J. Bruce Evans Papers, folder Civil Rights 1961-A.

the East Baton Rouge case, West nevertheless successfully stalled integration for nearly two years.³²

Although the delay prevented the immediate desegregation of East Baton Rouge Parish's public school system, it also gave the community a cooling-off period after the tension-filled months of the New Orleans school desegregation crisis. Eleven accommodationist lawyers, including former judge and candidate for governor Carlos Spaht, Victor Sachse, and H. Payne Breazle, even filed a brief with Judge West in March 1962 asking that he delay any discussion on *Davis* until after the July 28 School Board election. West granted their request. These lawyers knew that if the segregationist-packed School Board received a desegregation order trouble would follow and that, in all probability, the city would be dragged into a New Orleans-like confrontation between state and federal authority.³³

In the primary elections held in the summer of 1962, the issues of school desegregation and the packing of the School Board by Governor Jimmie Davis dominated the campaign. In a crowded field of eighteen, three of the four Davis appointees, I. M. Shelton, Chaney Calmes, and Charles Davis, ran for their seats on the School Board. The final member Lewis Doherty did not seek election. Shelton, Calmes, and Davis were the most outspoken supporters of maintaining the dual system of education in the field of eighteen candidates. Running for a four-year term from Ward

³²Rogers, *Righteous Lives*, 100; Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 250; Frank T. Reed and Lucy McGough, *Let Them Be Judged: The Judicial Integration of the Deep South* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1978), 162-167.

³³"Attorneys Seek School Mixing Decision Delay," *Morning Advocate*, March 10, 1962, 1.

One, Shelton pledged his undying support for segregation and promised to resist court-ordered integration.³⁴ “For me to tell you that I advocate or would willingly accept integration, would, in my opinion, tell you that I believe in retarding our school growth and degrading our entire system,” stated Benny Brannon, who was seeking a two-year term from the Ward One. The Baton Rouge native worked as an instrument technician at Humble Oil (ESSO) and promised that the only way he would submit to integration was at gunpoint. “I am unalterably opposed to any sort of integration of the races and will do everything in my power to oppose it,” said Calmes. Charles Davis denounced federal intervention in local affairs and promised to resist even token desegregation.³⁵

Other candidates took a more moderate approach to the issue. A longtime board member from the first ward, Ben Peabody, promised to act in the best interest of the community. “I do not favor closing the schools,” he stated. “My primary interest is in the best education possible for all children of East Baton Rouge Parish.” The community-minded Peabody held positions of leadership in several civic organizations including the Chamber of Commerce and the United Givers Fund. Most other candidates shared Peabody’s concern for the well-being of the community, but because

³⁴Members of the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board were elected to staggered terms ranging from two to six years. Candidates for the board ran in three wards. Ward One included the city of Baton Rouge. African Americans held the majority in six of its fifty-three precincts. Ward Two encompassed the suburban areas in the northern part of the parish, including Scotlandville, Baker and Zachary. Out of the sixteen precincts, two held black majorities. Whites dominated the rural Ward Three, and African Americans made up a tiny portion of the voters. “Rockhold, Furr Win Local Races,” *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1962, 1.

³⁵“Vote for #40,” *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1962, 12B; “School Board Candidate In Statement,” *Morning Advocate*, June 19, 1962, 3A; “23 Candidates Seek Judgeship,” *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1962, 10A.

they did not possess his constituency, they proclaimed their support for segregation. But unlike the Davis appointees, they did not promise to support it at all costs. W. Harry Perkins, another candidate from the first ward, came out in favor of separate but equal facilities but added that he possessed the ability to "cooperate with others." By stressing his willingness to "cooperate with others," this active member of various civic organizations implied that he was moderate on the issue of segregation and would not vote openly to defy federal authority. Irving Boudreaux, a car salesman running for a seat from the suburban Ward Two, also advocated moderation. "I am for equal but separate school facilities and further convinced that at the present time the mixing of the races can only produce ill-feeling and bitterness between the two groups and that for the peace and harmony of our community the schools should be operated on their present segregated basis," stated Boudreaux. Like Perkins, however, he refused to advocate closing the schools to preserve segregation.³⁶

Two African-American candidates, Dupuy Anderson and Acie Belton, also sought seats on the board. Calling the schools "an integral part of socially desirable change," Anderson, a World War II activist, said he wanted to use the schools to erase bigotry. Racial diplomat Acie Belton issued a more moderate statement. "I am certain that due to my training and experience in working with people, when elected to the School Board, I will be able to work with other members to the best interest of our system." Unlike Anderson, he did not call for the integration of the schools or ask that

³⁶"23 Candidates Seek Judgeship," *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1962, 10A; "Ben Peabody Gives Statement for Re-Election," *Morning Advocate*, July 15, 1962, 4A; "I. R. Boudreaux Seeks Election," *Morning Advocate*, May 27, 1962, 12A.

they be used to eliminate bigotry. Instead he informed voters, both black and white, of his history of working "others," i.e., whites, and his willingness to continue the practice. Belton would not demand; he would negotiate.³⁷

While the issue of school desegregation dominated the rhetoric of the candidates, the local papers denounced the Davis board members and urged Baton Rougeans to vote them out of office. "Some candidates may try to make it appear that segregation is the chief issue. It is not," proclaimed a *Morning Advocate* editorial. "There is not an integrationist on the Baton Rouge board, and there is no chance of one being elected this time. The issue is not integration. It is another no less important issue, home rule." The paper went on to suggest a slate of candidates, which included Peabody and the other more moderate candidates.³⁸

Baton Rouge voters followed the *Morning Advocate's* advice and ousted two of the three Davis board members, Calmes and Davis, in the primary. Calmes lost his seat to Boudreaux; James Randall Goodwin, a staunch segregationist, defeated Davis for the Ward Three seat. In Ward One, Shelton ran second to civil engineer Lloyd Rockhold, who favored segregation but would not vote to close the public schools. Because neither received a majority, the two men made it to the run-off election where Rockhold received 12,632 votes and Shelton 9,184. The other seats in Ward One went to moderate candidates. Brannon lost to Naylor Cragin, an officer at a Baton Rouge

³⁷"D. H. Anderson Gives Statement on Candidacy," *Morning Advocate*, July 19, 1962, 5D.

³⁸"Unpack the School Board," *Morning Advocate*, July 22, 1962, 4B; "Recommendations for School Board," *Morning Advocate*, July 24, 1962, 2A; "For Local Government," *Morning Advocate*, July 27, 1962, 2A.

savings and loan company, and Peabody and Perkins won the two six-year seats. In Ward Two, Acie Belton received enough votes to make it into the runoff election, marking the first time an African-American candidate enjoyed such success. In the September 2 election, however, he lost to the moderate A. T. Furr, 2,441 votes to 5,696 votes. The School Board election demonstrated the support of the majority of whites for moderation and indicated their desire to maintain the peace and stability of their community even if it meant desegregating the public school system.³⁹

Several months before the School Board election, the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP, which had been dormant since 1956, reorganized, and its members elected Reverend Arthur Jelks as their president. An African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) minister, Jelks moved to Baton Rouge from Elkhart, Indiana, in late 1961; before that, he had lived in several cities in the Midwest. In these communities, including Baton Rouge, he quickly became a civil rights leader.⁴⁰ On August 8, 1962, Jelks presented a resolution to the School Board requesting immediate integration. He warned that if he received no response, the NAACP would launch a series of demonstrations to demand the admission of black students to white schools. When the board failed to act, Jelks went to the school system's office and tried to enroll his daughter, Patricia, in the white

³⁹"23 Candidates Seek Judgeship," *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1962, 10A; "School Posts at Stake in Area Voting," *State-Times*, July 28, 1962, 1; "Five School Board Places Filled," *Morning Advocate*, July 29, 1962, 1; "How East Baton Rouge Voted," *Morning Advocate*, July 29, 1962, 6A; "5 Win EBR School Posts; Factors in Race are Viewed," *State-Times*, July 30, 1962, 1; "Rockhold, Furr Win Local Races," *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1962, 1; "Lear, Furr, Rockhold Win in EBR," *State-Times*, September 3, 1962, 1.

⁴⁰The reorganization of the NAACP will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Baton Rouge Junior High School. Assistant Superintendent Aerteker gave Jelks the transfer form and promised that the minister's request would be forwarded to the board for consideration. As he left the office, Jelks told Aerteker that other African-American parents would follow suit. Segregationists immediately labeled Jelks as an outside agitator and a troublemaker. Assistant District Attorney John Ward told the *Morning Advocate* that Jelks moved to Louisiana from Indiana, "where he promoted the same kind of activity by harassing the city government and starting sit-in movements in taverns, restaurants, etc." Ward added, "Perhaps we should not refer to the Reverend Jelks as merely an outside agitator, but instead should more properly refer to him as a roving outside agitator." He charged that Jelks came to Baton Rouge with the sole purpose of reorganizing the local branch of the NAACP "on a more militant basis along the lines adopted by the Congress of Racial Equality."⁴¹

In late August, the board rejected Jelks' transfer request. In response, the civil rights leader and his daughter went to Baton Rouge Junior High and attempted to register. The school's principal, Robert L. Smith, met them at the door and refused to let them enter. Jelks warned the white community that the NAACP would sponsor demonstrations and sit-ins until the school system integrated. When classes began on September 3, a group of black parents, including Jelks, went to several schools and attempted to enroll their children. The police department dispatched several officers to

⁴¹"School Board Indicates 'Wait' in Integration," *Morning Advocate*, August 9, 1962; Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, et al., August 9, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; "Negro Seeking to Enroll Girl in White School," *Morning Advocate*, August 10, 1963, 8A; "Any School Integration Move Termed Premature, Improper," *Morning Advocate*, August 11, 1962, 3A.

Baton Rouge Junior High as a crowd of angry white women gathered to watch the integration attempt. The women shouted at Jelks' party and followed the group to its next stop, Fairfields Elementary. As it moved to the second school on Jelks' list, the white crowd grew to more than one hundred, but police held the shouting crowd at bay. From Fairfields, the African Americans went to Baton Rouge High School where school officials turned them away. The same day, NAACP members began staging sit-ins at downtown lunch counters.⁴²

Along with demonstrations, Jelks and the local branch of the NAACP pursued legal action against the board. The failure of the courts to force the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board to submit a desegregation plan angered NAACP members, and they demanded that their attorneys push the case forward. In January 1963, the Baton Rouge branch of the NAACP sent a resolution to the national office demanding action by LDF lawyers, especially A. P. Tureaud. Field Director for Louisiana Gloster Current warned NAACP chairman Roy Wilkins, "Reverend Jelks has led a continuing crusade for freedom. Such a fearless fighter and the good people of Baton Rouge who are

⁴²"BR Negro Girl Denied Entry in White School," *Morning Advocate*, August 31, 1962, 5B; "Local NAACP Head Claims He'll Sue Board," *Morning Advocate*, September 1, 1962, 1; Gloster Current to Jesse DeVore, September 6, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; "New School Year Opens for 60,000," *State-Times*, September 4, 1962, 1; Johnnie Jones to Norman Amaker, September 11, 1962, APT, box 29, folder 24; "Crowd Jeers at Mixing Try by Negroes," *Morning Advocate*, September 5, 1962, 1; "Sit-In Flurries Follow Attempt at Enrollment," *State-Times*, September 5, 1962, 2C; Clarence Laws to NAACP Leaders, September 18, 1962, NAACP Papers, New Orleans Branch, box 73.

backing him should have action.” Heeding Current’s warning, Tureaud filed a motion in February asking Judge West to order the School Board to submit a desegregation plan.⁴³

Because the desegregation of East Baton Rouge Parish’s public schools began nearly a decade after *Brown*, white leaders and accommodationists could draw on the integration experiences of other southern cities. They knew that they wanted to avoid the types of confrontation and defiance that occurred in Little Rock and New Orleans. Although the Davis-packed School Board had flirted with implementing the Virginia Plan in 1961, all of those board members had been defeated in the 1962 election, and in 1963 the new board members refused to dismantle the school system to preserve segregation.⁴⁴ For the accommodationists and white leaders in Baton Rouge, dismantling the school system was unacceptable because it would harm the city’s economy. With the defeat of the Davis members in the 1962 elections, white leaders again controlled the School Board and began looking to other southern cities for a desegregation model and after careful examination decided that they wanted to emulate Atlanta. Calling itself “the city too busy to hate,” Atlanta was the embodiment of a New South city. Its residents embraced progress and economic expansion and viewed themselves as progressive and unfettered by the region’s prejudices. By the 1960s, Atlanta was the South’s leading transportation and business center. Just as in Baton

⁴³Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, January 17, 1963, NAACP Papers, Group III, box A102, folder 4.

⁴⁴The Virginia Plan dismantled the public school system and replaced it with a series of publicly funded private schools for white children. The state and school districts provided grants for white children to attend these “private” schools. With the closure, no public schools existed for black children.

Rouge, white leaders wanted to avoid racial violence because of the economic damage that it might cause. In 1957, citizens of Atlanta elected William Hartsfield as their mayor, and after the election, he proclaimed, "The people of Atlanta don't want Atlanta's growth and prosperity stopped by racial controversy." He added, "Our aim in life is to make no business, no industry, no educational or social organization ashamed of the dateline 'Atlanta.'" Like Atlanta residents, Baton Rougeans want to avoid racial violence because of the economic damage that it might cause.⁴⁵

In late 1962, a group of prominent white leaders and accommodationists, mostly wealthy businessmen and attorneys, created an unofficial, behind-the-scenes biracial committee to discuss ways to desegregate the school system peacefully. Wade Mackie and the AFSC asked Doug Manship, who besides owning WBRZ, a local television station, also served as president of the Chamber of Commerce, to meet with a group of African Americans to discuss desegregation. Manship agreed to meet with them if Mackie allowed him to approve the list of attendees. Again, the traditional pattern of race relations took over. Manship wanted to insure that the African Americans with whom he met were community "leaders," i.e. racial diplomats. Knowing that Manship would refuse to meet with "troublemakers," Mackie selected a group of prominent racial diplomats and World War II activists to serve on the committee. "All of these people are college graduates and have demonstrated their own leadership in the community," Mackie reported. They included J. K. Haynes, John G. Lewis, Leon

⁴⁵Bayor, *Race and the Shaping*, 223, xv, 30-31; Alton Hornsby, Jr., "Black Public Education in Atlanta," 22; Lassiter and Lewis, "Massive Resistance Revisited," in *The Moderates' Dilemma*, 1-10; Harmon, *Beneath the Image*, vii-viii, 45-47.

Netterville, B. V. Baranco, Horatio Thompson, Acie Belton, Dupuy Anderson, Johnnie Jones, James Cook, and the Reverend W. T. Handy. Manship agreed to meet with the men on February 10, 1963, and after the meeting, invited other prominent white leaders and accommodationists to join the group. This unofficial biracial committee wanted its existence to remain secret, but some African-American members, most notably Johnnie Jones, criticized this approach and wanted the group to go public. After a few months of secret meetings, Jones could no longer tolerate the secrecy and leaked information about the group and its discussions to Reverend Jelks. Because he broke the vow of silence, the committee expelled Jones.⁴⁶

None of the white members on the committee wanted integration, Mackie reported, "They were just opposed to disintegration." The unofficial biracial committee asked Judge West for a meeting, and because it boasted so many prominent members, he complied.⁴⁷ Committee members and the judge discussed the East Baton Rouge school desegregation plan, and West promised to approve a plan that would drag out integration but would be acceptable to the Supreme Court.⁴⁸

⁴⁶"Manship Assumes President's Office at Chamber of Commerce," *Morning Advocate*, October 12, 1962, 1; Notes on Advisory Committee Meeting, November 13, 1962, AFSC, Civil Rights Division — Baton Rouge Office, South Central Regional Program, 1962; Wade Mackie and Yvonne Coleman to Garnet Guild and Peter Lippman, February 20, 1963, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program — Reports, South Central Regional Program, 1963; Comprehensive Report, November 4, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division Baton Rouge Office, South Central Regional Program, 1964.

⁴⁷Although the date of the meeting is unclear, it probably took place in March or April 1963.

⁴⁸Comprehensive Report, November 4, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division — Baton Rouge Office, Southern Program, 1963; Wade Mackie to Barbara Moffett, January 28, 1963, *ibid.*; Wade Mackie and Yvonne Coleman to Garnet Guild and Peter

On March 5, 1963, West reluctantly ordered the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board to submit a desegregation plan and told the spectators that he viewed *Brown* "as one of the truly regrettable decisions of all time." He also claimed that school desegregation brought "discontent and chaos to previously peaceful communities." West added that the black leaders, i.e., racial diplomats, helped to insure the long delay in the *Davis* case because they "exercised restraint despite the proddings and agitation of outside elements." Finally, West lamented the fact that *Brown* required him to order the desegregation of the East Baton Rouge Parish public schools and claimed that he resisted issuing the order "as long as feasibly possible."⁴⁹

To prevent segregationists from influencing the white masses, Manship and other members of the biracial committee drafted a petition in support of open schools and peaceful desegregation. Prominent attorney B. B. Taylor circulated it among his friends, which included the most prominent Baton Rouge residents. Mackie noted that Taylor obtained signatures from people who had played no role in the desegregation debate and added that most of the signers were "pretty strong segregationists." Taylor refused to allow OPEN members, liberal ministers, or African Americans to sign. The committee believed that by getting the signatures of prominent citizens, they would

Lippman, May 7, 1963, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1963; Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild and Jean Fairfax, April 10, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division Baton Rouge Office, Southern Program, 1963.

⁴⁹"Desegregation Plan Deadline Set for July 5," *Morning Advocate*, March 6, 1962, 1; *Davis v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board*, U. S. District Court Eastern District of La., No. 1662; "Desegregation Plan for EBR Schools Asked," *Morning Advocate*, March 2, 1963, 1; E. Gordon West to Russell Long, March 6, 1963, Long Papers, box 558, folder 8.

diffuse the segregationist threat. "We believed they would either be overwhelmed or attack hardest those that were known to be segregationists and had deserted their ranks to sign the declaration for financial reasons. This would likely backfire on the segregationists." On April 4, one month after West ordered the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board to submit a desegregation plan by July, the committee made its petition public. It urged compliance with the court order and warned that if the School Board failed to present an acceptable desegregation plan, then the federal government would impose a far more comprehensive one on the people of East Baton Rouge Parish. "We believe that an acceptable plan, prepared by our own well-informed School Board, would be less disturbing to our community than a plan provided by the court." The social prominence of the signers silenced the segregationists, and the School Board faced no white opposition as it formulated and submitted a plan to West.⁵⁰

With Manship at its helm, the Chamber of Commerce also issued a public statement calling for peaceful desegregation. Citing its commitment to maintaining the community's welfare and economic prosperity, the chamber warned that both could be "seriously damaged by incidents, disorder, and violence." Manship's *Morning Advocate* echoed the warning. "In the nation's financial center, talk once again is being heard of a new wave of plant expansion by large industries that brought about the industrial growth in the Baton Rouge area . . . after World War II." This expansion could "help Baton Rouge achieve its apparent destiny as one of the South's major industrial cities,"

⁵⁰Minutes, March 7, 1963, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; "School Integration 'Declaration' Goes Into Board Records," *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1963, 1.

the editorial added. "Those who will decide on the location of new plants, or as it may be on the expansion of existing plants will be guided by many factors. But not the least important factor will be the wisdom and efficiency with which Baton Rouge handles its current problems." The threat of economic reprisals convinced all but the staunchest of segregationists that peaceful desegregation was the best option.⁵¹

Unwilling to take on the Chamber of Commerce, the petition's signers turned on African-Americans. They charged that outside agitators, most notably Arthur Jelks, had forced the judge to issue the ruling. School Board member A. T. Furr complained, "a vast majority of the local negroes [*sic*] have only passing interest and some are as opposed to integration as the white people." In reality, the so-called outside agitators played almost no role in pushing for school desegregation. Jelks had moved to Baton Rouge from Indiana, but local people sued and served as the plaintiffs.⁵²

Although the School Board agreed to submit a desegregation plan by July, it wanted to delay its implementation for another year. To insure that black students would continue to attend segregated schools in the fall of 1963, the board sent out student-assignment cards for the 1963-1964 school year in May and gave parents only until the end of the month to submit their transfer requests. The board would not consider any request after this deadline. Because the board had yet to present its

⁵¹"Chamber Chiefs Ask Integration Be Peaceful," *Morning Advocate*, March 21, 1963, 1; "Baton Rouge at a Turning Point," *Morning Advocate*, April 4, 1963, 2A; Ralph Dreger, interview by Betty Morse, tape recording, July 12, 1983, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 22.

⁵²A. T. Furr to Russell Long, March 12, 1963, Long Papers, box 558, folder 8.

desegregation plan to West, African-American parents did not know which grade the board would integrate first and therefore could not submit transfer requests to integrated schools. Jelks urged parents not to sign the assignment cards because their signatures would indicate that they accepted the segregated school assignments. On May 9, a group of black leaders, including racial diplomats Jemison and Leo Butler, World War II activists Scott and Anderson, and Jelks sent a letter to the School Board members asking them to rescind the transfer request deadline. Claiming that the assignment letters "had a near explosive force in the Negro community," Mackie contacted Manship, warned him of the danger of violence, and urged him to convince the School Board to withdraw the assignments until after the desegregation plan was made public. He gave Manship the choice of either convincing the board to reconsider the assignment deadline or spending time building a bomb shelter because without a reversal, violence was imminent. Although Manship's role in the process is undocumented, the School Board postponed the assignment deadline.⁵³

On June 27, 1963, the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board finally presented its plan to the public and promised to comply with the court order beginning in September 1964. Based on Atlanta's plan, Baton Rouge's desegregation plan called for integration to begin in the twelfth grade and to add an additional grade level each year. It also set up sixteen rules for placement, including intelligence, a good home environment, and good morals. Whites applauded the plan, but the NAACP denounced

⁵³"Negroes Urged Not to Sign School Forms," *Morning Advocate*, May 7, 1963, 10C; Community Relations Program, School Desegregation Emphasis, ca. May 1963, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1963.

it and filed an official protest with West. It argued that desegregation should begin immediately and should proceed faster than one grade per year. The NAACP's lawyers also denounced the sixteen rules for transfer saying that the board would use them to keep the number of black students in white schools to a minimum. They also asked West to begin the desegregation process with the first grade rather than the twelfth since young students would have fewer problems with integration than older ones. Younger children would be more accepting of each other because their racial prejudices had not yet become set. In addition, school pride and friendships tied seniors to their schools, and the NAACP feared that few of these well-established teenagers would want to move to white schools. Despite the NAACP's protest, on July 18, West accepted the Baton Rouge plan with one exception. He ordered the board to implement it immediately.⁵⁴

With the plan in place, African Americans scrambled to find seniors willing to transfer to white schools. A student at Southern Laboratory School, Freya Anderson, Dupuy's daughter, recognized the board's ploy:

I knew that Baton Rouge was going to start with the senior year because they knew that if they started with the senior year they'd have fewer kids wanting to go. They wouldn't get any athletes because they couldn't come in and get on the teams. It was just planned that way. I knew all along that they were going to start with the twelfth grade year, I was just hoping and praying they wouldn't. Then when they made the decision, I knew I had to go. It wasn't any if, ands, or

⁵⁴Minutes, June 27, 1963, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; "School Board Would Start Mixing in 1964," *Morning Advocate*, February 28, 1963, 1; "NAACP is Protesting Mixing Plan," *Morning Advocate*, July 9, 1963, 1; "EBR School Mixing Plan is Defended," *Morning Advocate*, July 17, 1963, 1; "Judge Orders EBR School Mix in Fall," *Morning Advocate*, July 18, 1963, 1; Comprehensive Report, November 4, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division Baton Rouge Office, South Central Regional Office, 1964.

but about it, I just had to go. After I made my decision, I figured the best thing to do was to get some more black students to come with me, so I wouldn't be out there alone.

Lending his support to the NAACP, Mackie and a group of World War II activists, including Johnnie Jones, Raymond Scott, and Dupuy Anderson, quickly contacted the parish's black high schools and asked the principals to provide lists of students who fit the board's criteria.⁵⁵ One principal quickly complied. Others took much longer, and some never submitted their lists. The head of one school even went on an unscheduled vacation when he discovered that the men were looking for potential transfers, and his assistant principal, when pressured, provided a phony list. Mackie and the black leaders sent students on the list and their parents letters asking them to consider applying for a transfer. Freya Anderson recalled:

Most of them [the students] wanted to do it. Their parents were apprehensive; they were afraid, which was natural. "How were they going to get to school? How were they going to be protected on the campuses? What would they be able to do in the schools as far as participation activities and those kinds of things?" We had meetings with Daddy and Raymond and Johnnie Jones and a white guy who was a Quaker named Wade Mackie. Wade was real nice and worked with us. They all helped us get through it, and they talked to the parents and convinced them to let their kids go. We all wanted to go.

Anderson, Jones, Mackie, and Scott even asked local ministers to encourage high school seniors in their congregations to consider transferring. "The ministers were never in our minds as a major resource for the kind of work that we were required to do," Mackie noted, "but we had hopefully expected they would be able to give us a much needed assist." When the recruiters approached the black ministers to ask for help, "miraculously, all of the leading ministers were out of town." Even without the help of

⁵⁵Mackie was the only white person involved in the transfer process.

the ministers, Mackie and the black leaders convinced thirty-eight students to apply for transfer. Thirteen more students filled out applications, but their parents refused to sign them.¹

On August 8, Superintendent Lloyd Lindsey, who, in 1962, had succeeded Superintendent Funchess when he willingly resigned from his position, began reviewing the applications and assessing the students' qualifications. Two weeks later, he accepted twenty-eight requests. The rejected applicants, according to him, failed to meet the educational requirements for transfer. A student rejected for not meeting these standards, Oliver Mack, was the top student in his class at McKinley High School. Mack's parents, along with those of eight others, Lindsey rejected appealed, but the superintendent refused to reconsider. Mackie noted that the number of qualified applicants angered the superintendent because he intended to allow only three or four black students to enroll in white schools. Because so many qualified candidates applied, however, he could not justify rejecting most of them. Lindsey later lambasted the black principals who gave Mackie and the other men lists of students. Yet the number of African Americans allowed to enroll in white schools was minuscule when compared to the entire school enrollment. In 1963, the East Baton Rouge Parish school system contained approximately 52,600 students. Twenty-one thousand of them were black.

¹Comprehensive Report, November 4, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division Baton Rouge Office, Southern Program, 1964; Freya Anderson Rivers, interview by Maxine Crump, tape recording, July 16, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 29-30.

More than 2,300 students parish-wide were seniors, but only twenty-eight blacks would go to white schools. No whites would attend black schools.⁵³

As the African Americans students prepared to enter the four designated high schools — Baton Rouge, Lee, Istrouma, and Glen Oaks — white leaders, accommodationists, and segregationists called for calm. Lindsey even asked white parents and citizens to stay away from the four campuses for the first week of classes to prevent large, angry crowds from gathering outside the schools. On September 2, Catholic and Protestant clergymen urged their congregations to help maintain “peace and tranquility” in both the city and the parish.⁵⁴

Remarkably, arch-segregationists in Baton Rouge heeded the warnings of Baton Rouge businessmen and quietly, albeit grudgingly, accepted integration. In a public statement, Citizens’ Council member and District Attorney Sargent Pitcher claimed, that if the board refused to comply with West’s order, “we would have forced integration at the point of bayonets.” He called for his fellow segregationists to remain

⁵³Minutes, January 20, 1962, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board; Minutes, February 22, 1962, *ibid.*; “Lindsey to Assign Negroes to Schools,” *Morning Advocate*, August 9, 1963, 1; “28 Negroes Pass Screening Tests to EBR Schools,” *Morning Advocate*, August 20, 1963, 1; “Negro Pupils Accept Transfers to White Schools,” *Morning Advocate*, August 24, 1963, 1; “28 Negro Transferees Registered,” *Morning Advocate*, August 29, 1963, 1; Oliver Mack, interview by author, tape recording, July 29, 1993, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1-7; Comprehensive Report, November 4, 1963, AFSC, Civil Rights Division, Southern Program, 1964; Johnnie Jones to A. P. Tureaud, August 28, 1963, APT, box 29, folder 24; “EBR Schools Desegregate Today,” *Morning Advocate*, September 3, 1963, 1.

⁵⁴“Lindsey Appeals for Orderly EBR School Opening,” *Morning Advocate*, August 31, 1963, 1.

calm because the whole community would suffer if Baton Rouge became another Little Rock. "Our forefathers lived through and defeated Reconstruction," he told his supporters and added that they could do the same with school desegregation. The Citizens' Council did urge high school teachers to treat their black students like interlopers — "Do not call on him to recite, answer his questions briefly, discourage him from participating in extracurricular events." The organization also warned the teachers that African Americans would select the friendliest, most personable students for transfer and told them to resist their charm because, "If a Negro integrationist is welcomed, then he has gone far towards winning the school integration battle. As long as he is a willing tool of evil forces, he should be treated in such a manner." But, like Pitcher, the Citizens' Council never advocated violence or staged protests outside the city's schools to prevent integration.⁵⁵

On September 3, 1963, East Baton Rouge Parish's public schools desegregated peacefully. As television cameras rolled and newspaper photographers made snapshots, the twenty-eight black students arrived at their new schools by taxi and entered the buildings without the intervention of the law enforcement officers and FBI agents who stood outside the buildings waiting to protect them. The principals of the four high schools reported that the white students ignored the African Americans, but the day passed without incident. White Baton Rougeans congratulated themselves on their restraint. The incident-free desegregation caught the nation's attention and brought

⁵⁵"Integration Plan Given Board Bow," *Morning Advocate*, July 19, 1963, 1; Baton Rouge Citizens' Council to High School Teachers, n.d., APT, box 30, folder 5.

praise to the city and parish. On September 17, the "Huntley-Brinkley Report" devoted seven minutes of air-time to the parish's peaceful desegregation.⁵⁶

Although the process of school desegregation occurred peacefully, conditions in the schools for the pioneering students were horrid. Taking the Citizens' Council's advice, teachers ignored their black pupils. Some white students followed their teachers' examples. At Lee High, white students even formed a club, Don't Admit They Exist (DATE). By the end of the school year, African-American students showed the strain of the abuse. On April 22, 1964, Velma Hunter, a Baton Rouge High student, snapped. As she and five of her African-American classmates ate lunch near the teachers' table, a white male student walked up to her, accused her of bad-mouthing him, and dumped his food on her. In response, she threw a plate at him, and it broke over his head. School officials suspended the male student for throwing his food on her and suspended Hunter for cursing the boy.⁵⁷

Many members of the black community supported the students, and some even donated money to ease the financial burden on the parents of the twenty-eight transferees. Despite their misery at the integrated high schools, several of these students, including Freya Anderson and Murphy F. Bell, sued and won admission to

⁵⁶"EBR Schools Open on Tuesday," *State-Times*, September 2, 1962, 1; "BR Schools Admit Negroes Without Incident," *State-Times*, September 3, 1963; "No Major Incidents As Negroes Attend BR High Schools," *Morning Advocate*, September 4, 1963, 1; "Trouble Free School Mixing Draws Praise," *Morning Advocate*, September 5, 1963, 1; "TV Program Praises BR's Peaceful Mixing," *Morning Advocate*, September 18, 1963, 7B.

⁵⁷Walt Barton, "Around the Capitol," Fall 1963, Russell Long Collection, box 360, folder 28; Wade Mackie to Seymour Samet, AFSC, Civil Rights Division — Baton Rouge, South Central Regional Office, 1964.

LSU's undergraduate program and began taking classes there in the summer of 1964. The university's administration realized that opposition to the suit was fruitless and, when Judge West ordered the school to admit the black students, LSU did not appeal his decision.⁵⁸

The second group of African Americans to attend integrated high schools fared worse than the first twenty-eight. Fearing that even more qualified black students would want to move to white schools, the School Board limited the time for their parents to apply for transfer to five days. Although the superintendent required parents to submit the forms in person at the School Board office, some black principals and teachers told them to bring the forms to them. Fearing for their jobs, African-American teachers even discouraged their students from transferring to white schools.⁵⁹

Fifty-seven black students enrolled in white schools for the 1964-1965 school year. The reaction of white students and school officials to the increased number of African Americans became more severe. One white student tried to run down three black ones as they walked home from school. He barely missed them. The police refused to charge the teenager although he admitted intentionally trying to hit the black youths. At another school, a white boy tossed his food in the face of an African-American girl. The principal expelled the young woman even though she did not

⁵⁸Program Evaluations, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program — Reports, South Central Regional Office, 1964.

⁵⁹Wade Mackie to Garnet Guild, April 24, 1964, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1964.

retaliate. School officials at Glen Oaks High School singled out the black students at student assemblies by requiring them to sit together on the front row.⁶⁰

The tokenism that characterized the desegregation of East Baton Rouge Parish's public school system and the abuse of the students disturbed the city's black population. In 1964, African-American parents petitioned the School Board and asked for immediate and complete desegregation. The board refused, so the parents asked Judge West to order full integration. He sided with the board, and for the rest of the decade, the parish's public schools remained virtually segregated. Although East Baton Rouge Parish allowed a few black students to transfer to white schools, it maintained a dual system of education. The School Board began discussing the creation of a unified one only in 1969 when the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals began ordering neighboring parishes to dismantle their dual systems. In an attempt to control the conversion to a single school system without making any real changes to the existing one, the School Board appointed a biracial committee to find a way to "preserve the school system and at the same time convert public schools to a unitary system." In 1969, NAACP President D'Orsay Bryant and Regional Vice President Alphonso Potter sued seeking immediate integration of the entire school system. Members of this biracial committee urged Johnnie Jones, attorney for the two NAACP officers, not to pursue the suit and to allow them to reach a desegregation agreement among themselves. Jones, who had always been an opponent of these types of biracial committees, refused and proceeded

⁶⁰"School Integration is Reported Quiet," *Morning Advocate*, August 29, 1964, 13A; Wade Mackie to Norman Amaker, December 11 1964, AFSC, Baton Rouge Program, South Central Regional Office, 1964.

with the suit. On January 16, 1970, Judge West ruled the unification of East Baton Rouge Parish's public schools to be complete by August 31. Although it ordered the creation of a unitary school system, West's decision did not bring completely integrated schools to East Baton Rouge Parish. In the three decades following West's ruling, most of the parish's schools remained racially segregated. Through a series of court orders and consent decrees, the School Board attempted to force integration but only succeeded in creating white flight and the founding of private and parochial schools throughout the parish. The board tried to lure white students back into the public school system and, at the same time, advance integration by placing magnet schools in black neighborhoods, but failed to convince large numbers of white parents to send their children to these inner city schools. In the end the 1962 compromise was a victory for the white leaders and accommodationists. It preserved peaceful race relations in the parish, prevented the segregationists from closing the city's schools to prevent integration, and, for all intents and purposes, maintained a publicly-funded dual system of education. Forty-three years after it was filed, *Davis v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board* remains active, and school desegregation remains incomplete.⁶¹

⁶¹Daniel Byrd to Norman Amaker, October 13, 1964, APT, box 29, folder 25; "HEW Ruling to Increase BR Students," *Morning Advocate*, August 3, 1969, 1; "EBR Biracial Group Gingerly Airs Goals," *Morning Advocate*, January 6, 1970, 1; "EBR School Mixing May be Sought in Motion File Today," *Morning Advocate*, January 16, 1970, 6C; "Desegregation is Ordered for EBR by Next August 31," *Morning Advocate*, January 17, 1970, 1.

Chapter 8

Working-class Activists, 1962-1964

The protests over school desegregation in 1962 marked the emergence of a new group of civil rights protesters — working-class activists. Led by Arthur Jelks, the NAACP pushed the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board into implementing a school desegregation plan. The working-class activists rose to the forefront of the movement just as the World War II and student activists were being persecuted by District Attorney Pitcher and CORE was being banned from the city. In early 1962, they launched a series of protests against segregation and because of their efforts, the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge escalated. Unlike the student and World War II activists who were well educated and, for the most part, came from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, few working-class activists possessed more than a high school education; most worked in menial jobs and had very little disposable income. Also unlike earlier activists and especially CORE members, working-class activists abandoned the principles of nonviolence and fought back when faced with police brutality and threats from segregationists. Their goals also differed from the student and World War II activists in that they sought economic equality in addition to social equality. The working-class activists had very little in common with the middle- and upper-class racial diplomats and clashed not only with white leaders and segregationists but also with the black leadership. The radicalism of the working class activists created an atmosphere of racial discord and led to a series of violent clashes between protesters, their opponents, and the police.

Both World War II and student activists attempted to reorganize the Baton Rouge chapter of the NAACP following a Supreme Court ruling in February, 1960, that overturned the 1956 state ban on the organization, but they could not meet the national office's minimum of fifty members required to reactivate the chapter. Racial diplomats, who had controlled the NAACP in the 1940s and 1950s, refused to take part in bringing the chapter back because white leaders and segregationists believed that the organization was attempting to foment discontent within Baton Rouge's black population. The savvy negotiators knew that, in order to maintain their relationships with white leaders and continue to work to improve conditions for African Americans, they could not reactivate the local chapter. Instead, they joined FOCUS. Unlike civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and CORE, FOCUS refused to take part in protests and worked to increase voter registration, lobbied white leaders to employ African Americans in public agencies, and attempted to convince local hospitals to admit black doctors to their staffs.¹

In early 1962, NAACP officials finally succeeded in reactivating the local branch. On February 27, more than one hundred African Americans gathered at Green Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church to elect officers for the new group. To the surprise of the racial diplomats, who, to maintain their stature in the community attended the first meetings of the newly organized branch and were accustomed to serving as officers of organizations, the members elected Reverend

¹Donald T. Moss to Herbert Wright, May 30, 1960, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; Lucille Black to C. J. Gilliam, October 25, 1961, *ibid.*; A. P. Tureaud to Dorothea Combre, April 4, 1962, APT, box 11, folder 7.

Arthur Jelks as president. Unlike past presidents of the Baton Rouge branch, such as Benjamin Stanley and T. J. Jemison, he was not well-educated and served as pastor of a church with a predominately working-class congregation. Jelks and the working-class members of the NAACP shared many of the goals of the student activists. Both groups wanted an immediate end to segregated public facilities and increased employment opportunities for African Americans, and neither wanted to spend decades fighting for equal rights in the federal court system. Yet the two groups differed significantly. Working-class activists were, for the most part, older than the student activists and were not well-educated. Most had families, lived paycheck to paycheck, and worked for white employers. The reprisals that they faced for taking part in the protests were harsher than those faced by the students. For example, Leo Hamilton, a machinist, lost several jobs because of his activism. His son, Leo Charles Hamilton recalled, "He marched and did that kind of stuff, as much as he could and keep jobs. You know, you hack people off, you lose your job." Although Southern expelled student activists, many continued their education at northern colleges and universities. Another difference proved especially important. Although both groups used the methods of protest, sit-ins, marches, and picketing, the working-class activists were not bound by the principles of nonviolence. When confronted by segregationists and hostile police officers, they often fought back.²

²Gloster Current to Mr. Moon, February 28, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; "NAACP Organizational Meeting Slated Here," *Morning Advocate*, February 27, 1962, 13A; "Reverend A. Jelks Will Head BR NAACP Chapter," *Morning Advocate*, March 1, 1962, 4A.

The differences between the working-class activists and the racial diplomats were even more striking. Initially, the racial diplomats tried to appease the working-class activists in the organization by proclaiming their support for "the welfare of the underprivileged" but did little to help working-class blacks. At the organization's April 3 meeting, Jemison called for white officials to hire African-American policemen in order to help curb juvenile delinquency in the black community. Even when talking to members of his own race, Jemison spoke in the language of racial diplomats. He addressed the white fear of black youths and reasoned that black police officers would be better able to control these young troublemakers than white officers. By taking such action, Jemison added, white leaders would be following the example of the nearby communities of Port Allen and Hammond. In contrast, at the same meeting, Jelks announced that he had sent telegrams to Governor Davis and Mayor-President Christian and asked for a meeting to discuss an end to segregation. Unlike Jemison who rationally pointed out to whites the benefits to integration, Jelks warned them, "We can have peace and tranquility, or we can have the battle of Baton Rouge." Jelks' ultimatum angered racial diplomats, who complained to the NAACP's national office. The national leaders urged the fiery minister to clear all correspondence with his branch's executive committee, upon which several racial diplomats sat. Jelks ignored the advice and continued to press white officials to bring an immediate end to segregation. In early May, he told white leaders that "the 'new Negro' is here to stay."³

³"Local NAACP Meet Stresses Negro's Rights," *Morning Advocate*, April 4, 1962, 14A; Gloster Current to Arthur Jelks, April 16, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; "Local NAACP Meeting Set Tuesday Night," *Morning Advocate*, May 1, 1962, 7A.

Under Jelks' leadership the Baton Rouge branch became the driving force behind the city's civil rights movement. In August 1962, the NAACP launched the campaign, discussed in the previous chapter, to integrate the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. On August 2, Jelks announced that the organization would hold a rally in support of school desegregation and planned to invite Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak. The threat of King's visiting the community frightened white leaders because they knew that a demonstration would accompany his visit and that national attention would be focused on the city. Attorney General Jack Gremillion warned, "Anyone who seeks to stir up the emotions of our people by mass demonstrations, the purpose of which is to induce violence, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."⁴

While Gremillion threatened to prosecute agitators, District Attorney Sargent Pitcher adopted a more direct approach. Fearing that Jelks would mobilize the black community in the same way CORE Field Secretary B. Elton Cox had done in leading 1961 march to downtown Baton Rouge, and the student activists had done in organizing the Southern University demonstrations, Pitcher placed Jelks and several other NAACP members under surveillance and targeted them for arrest. Jelks believed that Pitcher tapped his phones and placed him under twenty-four hour police surveillance.⁵

Pitcher's fears became a reality when a group of working-class activists staged sit-ins at several downtown lunch counters. One group of eight young women entered

⁴"Local NAACP Will Discuss Desegregation," *Morning Advocate*, August 7, 1962, 14B; "NAACP Slates Mass Meeting Here Sunday," *Morning Advocate*, August 11, 1962, 2A.

⁵"Negro Seeking to Enroll Girl in White School," *Morning Advocate*, August 10, 1962, 8A.

McCrary's lunch counter, sat in the white section, and waited to be served. In response, the food department's manager, F. J. Bertrand, closed the area. The eight remained seated even after he turned off the lights. At Montgomery Ward's counter, another group of African Americans placed a take-out order, but instead of leaving, they sat in an area reserved for white customers. Fearing that the incident would harm her business, the manager, Dorothy Bush, told the press that the black customers tricked her and added, "We didn't feed them deliberately." Jelks promised that these sit-ins marked the beginning of a larger campaign for desegregation push and claimed that the NAACP would pick up where the banned CORE left off.⁶

District Attorney Pitcher and white leaders feared that he might be right and decided that the best way to prevent larger demonstrations was by silencing Jelks. The district attorney thought that with Jelks out of the picture, the local movement would crumble. When the NAACP met on the evening of September 4, Pitcher sent several informants to the meeting to gather "evidence" against Jelks and Cox, who was free on bond from his 1961 arrest and speaking at the meeting. Using the information gleaned from these spies, Pitcher accused the two men of slandering him and several local judges. In their speeches, the two men had accused the district attorney of encouraging several judges to hand down rulings that favored the prosecution in civil rights cases. Cox had also informed the crowd that one of his fellow prisoners in the East Baton Rouge Parish jail told him that Pitcher accepted \$3,000 from a prisoner in exchange for

⁶"Crowd Jeers in Mixing Try by Negroes," *Morning Advocate*, September 5, 1962, 1; "Hit-and-Run Negro Sit-Ins Reported Here," *State-Times*, September 4, 1962, 10A; "Sit-In Flurries Follow Attempts at Enrollment," *State-Times*, September 5, 1962, 2C.

a lenient sentence. Within days, a grand jury convened and indicted Jelks and Cox on charges of defamation of character. The indictment claimed that the two men had exposed the district attorney "to hatred, contempt, and ridicule" and deprived him "of the benefit of public confidence and social intercourse." Ironically, Pitcher committed the very same offenses in his public statements about Cox, Jelks, and other civil rights leaders.⁷

Judge Fred LeBlanc immediately issued bench warrants for both men and set their bonds at \$10,000 each. Ronnie Moore and Patricia Tate, two CORE officers who remained in Baton Rouge and both of whom attended the September 4 meeting, offered to testify for Jelks and Cox. Pitcher and the grand jury refused to hear them. At that point, Moore and Tate issued a public statement denouncing both the district attorney and the grand jury. They claimed that East Baton Rouge Parish officials "have used every un-American and unethical tactic to maintain segregation, whereas civil rights leaders are intimidated by parish officials through criminal prosecutions, incarcerations, and violent cross burnings." Moore and Tate continued, "Members of the White Citizens' Councils, KKK, and other similar organizations are not prosecuted." Within days, the grand jury indicted Moore and Tate, too, on the charge of defamation of character. Judge LeBlanc set their bonds at \$5,000 each.⁸

⁷B. Elton Cox's Speech, September 4, 1962, Lawyer's Constitutional Defense League Papers, box 17; Indictment, B. Elton Cox and Arthur Jelks, CORE Papers, Series V, reel 17.

⁸"Grand Jurors to Probe BR Meet Comments," *Morning Advocate*, September 7, 1962, 8B; "Negro Ministers are Indicted in Defamations," *Morning Advocate*, September 8, 1962, 1; "Defamation and Kidnaping Indictments Filed by Jury," *State-Times*, September 8, 1962, 1; Injunction, Patricia Tate and Ronnie Moore, Lawyers

Johnnie Jones represented Jelks and asked a prominent, but unnamed, black businessman to post bond for his client. The man, a racial diplomat, refused because he believed that Jelks and the three others were militant troublemakers who were actually hurting the advancement of African Americans. Unable to raise the bond locally, Jones asked the NAACP's national office for help. The civil rights attorney wanted to secure the bail money before Jelks surrendered to the police because he believed that his client would suffer abuse at the hands of his jailers if allowed to remain in prison. Jones hoped to keep this plan a secret, but Jelks leaked it to members of the press to gain media attention for the cause. When police officials learned of the plan, they decided to make the activist's arrest a media event. As Jelks, Jones, and Clarence Laws, the NAACP's field secretary for Louisiana, walked into the bondsman's office, policemen arrested the minister. Laws later complained that the police treated Jelks like a common criminal and added that "newsreels [and] pictures were made of the entire proceeding as the sheriff, district attorney, and senior law enforcement [*sic*] officers tried to get into the act." Even though he suffered the humiliation of a public arrest, Jelks was released on bond, which was paid for by the NAACP, and succeeded in calling attention to continued segregation in East Baton Rouge Parish.⁹

Constitutional Defense League Papers, box 17; "Pair Indicted in Defaming of Grand Jury," *Morning Advocate*, September 15, 1962, 1; "Book Pair Indicted in Defamation," *State-Times*, September 15, 1962, 1; "Negro Woman Indicted Turns Self In," *Morning Advocate*, September 16, 1962, 1.

⁹Telephone Report by Clarence Laws, September 12, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; Roy Wilkins to Richard McClain, September 11, 1962, *ibid.*; "Jelks is Free After Posting \$10,000 Bond," *Morning Advocate*, September 11, 1962, 1; "Jelks Free on Bond in Defamation," *State-Times*, September 11, 1962, 1.

Instead of destroying the movement, the arrests of the four civil rights activists actually strengthened it. When Cox went on trial in November 1962, Jelks and the NAACP demanded the desegregation of all public facilities in the courthouse, including the courtroom, restrooms, lunch counters, and water fountains. Acting as Cox's attorney, Johnnie Jones asked Judge LeBlanc to end segregated seating in the courtroom. LeBlanc denied the request and twice ordered Jelks to move when he sat in the white section of the room. Jelks complied when LeBlanc threatened him with contempt of court. The following day, November 29, two members of the NAACP's Youth Council, McArthur Triplett and Joe Lewis Smith staged a sit-in in the courthouse's lunch room. Police quickly arrested them. The same day, three women Pearl George, Willie Lee Harris, and Laura Harris took even more drastic action. They entered the courtroom and found no empty seats in the black section, so they sat on the front row of the nearly vacant white section. The bailiff ordered them to move, the women refused, and LeBlanc asked them to leave the courtroom or be charged with contempt. George recalled:

We said we were going to leave. When I walked to go out that door, something struck me . . . I was thinking about the things that I had been deprived of for being black, and I thought about my child, who I knew was going to be deprived. I remembered that song "I Ain't Going to Let Nobody Turn Me Around," and I went back. The three of us went back and we sit down. The bailiff came back again. He said, "I'm going to have to ask you-all to leave again." I told him I wasn't leaving.

George's response shocked the African Americans who had gathered for Cox's trial.

According to her:

At this time, blacks were standing up on their feet because this is the first time that a black woman had ever talked up to a white judge. This was something unusual. Because, if a black man tried to speak up for himself, you know, they would beat him; they would humiliate him. I says, "Well, if I'm going to die, let me die for something. That black folks would enjoy some of the things that I couldn't enjoy." I stood there, and I told him that if he would let me go back again, I'd sit on the side that was all white. I said, "Judge LeBlanc, you're talking about justice in the courtroom, and you're telling me just because my skin is black that I have a certain side to sit on." I said, "There's no vacant seats to sit over there." He say, "Stand up against the wall like the rest of them." I told him, "Not on your life." He says, "You're telling me, that if I let you go, that you wouldn't leave the courtroom." I say, "I'm telling you, if you let me go, I'll sit on the white side."

LeBlanc immediately charged George and the other women with contempt of court and asked the bailiff to arrest them. When questioned by the judge, all three claimed that they took this action to make life better for their children. "I was thinking about my little girl at home," George recalled, "She had been deprived, and I was tired of it." Laura Harris testified, "I know it wouldn't help myself, but I know it would help my children some day. That's why I sit there." LeBlanc found all three women guilty of contempt of court, fined each \$100, and sentenced them to ten days in jail. When they refused to pay their fines, he increased their jail time to thirty days. Arresting these three mothers heightened racial tension in Baton Rouge and strengthened the resolve of the working-class activists to fight segregation. At the same time, it widened the gulf between them and the racial diplomats. No black leader spoke out in support of the women or used his or her influence with white leaders to secure their release. Instead, they allowed the women to remain in jail.¹⁰

¹⁰Gloster Current to Robert Carter, November 29, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; *George v. Clemmons*, December 3, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group 5, box 53; *Opposition to Application for Bail*, *ibid.*; Pearl George, interview by unknown, tape recording, January 7, 1983, YWCA Collection, East Baton Rouge Public

All three women came from working-class families and all were mothers. Willie Lee Harris, the mother of six children ranging from five to sixteen, belonged to the NAACP. Laura Harris had five children ranging in age from fourteen to three and lived a few blocks away from George. She also belonged to the NAACP. In the years following this incident, Pearl George became one of the city's most outspoken working-class activists and headed the local NAACP Youth Council. A widow and the mother of one child, the twenty-six-year-old George grew up without a father. As the second of four children, she and her older sister took care of their younger siblings while their mother worked two jobs. Although their mother encouraged them to get an education, George and her sister had to stay at home with the younger children, so they divided their school days. One attended classes in the morning and the other in the afternoon. George and her husband married shortly before he left for the Korean conflict where he was killed, leaving her to raise their daughter alone. As a child, George recognized the inequalities that existed between the races but did not become involved in the civil rights movement until her daughter was five or six years old and began asking questions about the existence of segregated facilities. Around that same time, the CORE sit-ins began and Reverend Jelks moved to Baton Rouge. Realizing that Jelks was a civil rights activist, she began attending services at his church and asked him how she could become involved in the movement. "At that time, you couldn't get black ministers" to take part in civil rights demonstrations, she recalled. "I don't know if they was afraid at

Library, Centroplex Branch, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

that time or they just wasn't concerned." Jelks invited her to an NAACP meeting, and she soon became an active member of the organization.¹¹

The actions of Pearl George, Willie Harris, and Laura Harris confounded white leaders. Until this point, the majority of activists belonged to the black middle class and the intelligentsia. White leaders believed that these two groups represented a small portion of the city's black community and did not reflect the views of the black working class — the men and women who mowed their lawns, cleaned their homes, and cooked their meals. They convinced themselves that the black masses were content with the system of segregation and would never strike out against it unless duped into it by outside agitators. Initially, white leaders tried to paint the three working-class women as patsies of the NAACP. During the trial of George and the Harrises, Sargent Pitcher implied that their attorney, Johnnie Jones, and Jelks conned the women into sitting in the white section of the courtroom. According to the district attorney, Jones and the NAACP wanted to use their arrest as a test case that they would appeal to the Supreme Court. Pitcher also questioned the honesty of the women and claimed that Jones told them to use their children to gain sympathy from the court and the public. By describing these working-class women as pawns, white leaders underestimated their commitment to ending segregation. They also erred in believing that by arresting a few of these lower-class protesters, imposing astronomically high bails and fines, and jailing them

¹¹La. NAACP Leader Fights Jim Crow in Courthouse, November 30, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 10; *George v. Clemmons*, November 29, 1962 - December 3, 1962, NAACP Papers, Group V, box 53; Pearl George, interview by unknown.

when they could not pay the fines, that they could discourage others from taking part in the civil rights movement.¹²

After the arrest of the three women, Cox's trial began. The following day, a jury found him guilty, and LeBlanc offered to release him on a \$5,000 bond pending his sentencing. Cox declined the bail and chose to remain in jail to draw attention to the racial injustice that existed in Baton Rouge. But after the violent clash over the desegregation of the University of Mississippi that had occurred two months earlier and the previous year's mass arrests in Albany, Georgia, the imprisonment of one man attracted very little attention outside of Baton Rouge.¹³ CORE officials in Louisiana urged the national office to use a "total saturation" campaign to get word of Cox's imprisonment out. They called the case a "true horror story" that needed to be brought to the attention of the press, but the national office did little to publicize the young minister's plight. Cox, who suffered from chronic health problems, grew ill in jail while his sacrifice went unnoticed.¹⁴

The arrests of George, Jelks, and the others in the fall of 1962 invigorated the working-class activists, however. "The white folks would put these types of charges on you so you could stay in jail, so they could try and discourage you from participating again," said George, "but the more that they would try to make it hard or discourage

¹²*George v. Clemmons*, NAACP Papers, Group V, box 53.

¹³Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters* provides a good description for both events.

¹⁴Robert Collins, et al. to Marvin Rich, January 25, 1963, Lawyers Constitutional Defense League Papers, box 17; Jones, interview, October 2, 1993, 87-90.

me, the more determination I had. It got to be something good. I needed to have a white man trying to discourage me.” On October 2, five African-American women staged sit-ins in the cafeterias of two local hospitals — the Baton Rouge General and Our Lady of the Lake. Cafeteria workers refused to serve them at both locations, but at the Lake, the activists refused to leave when they were denied service. The women purchased food and drinks from vending machines, brought them into the cafeteria, and ate at a table reserved for whites. In response, hospital officials closed the cafeteria and sent its white customers to a dining facility used by student nurses.¹⁵

In addition to bringing their own meals into the cafeteria, this new breed of activists also lengthened their sit-ins. Whereas the previous year Southern students affiliated with CORE had staged a series of hit-and-run sit-ins that lasted only a few minutes, NAACP members occupied seats at white lunch counters for hours at a time. On October 5, for example, seven young African Americans occupied two booths in the white section of McCrory’s lunch counter for two hours and twenty minutes after employees refused to serve them.¹⁶

The division within the black community grew as the working-class activists intensified their protests and became more confrontational, and by early 1963, only a few racial diplomats remained in the NAACP. Like the white leaders and the segregationists, the director of branches, Gloster Current, reported to National NAACP

¹⁵Pearl George, interview by unknown; “Sit-In Attempts at Hospital Apparently Fail,” *Morning Advocate*, October 3, 1962, 9A.

¹⁶“Negroes Try Sit-In But Aren’t Served,” *Morning Advocate*, October 6, 1962, 6B.

President Roy Wilkins, the racial diplomats viewed Jelks as “an outside agitator, a militant Negro, and not socially acceptable.” Yet this “socially unacceptable” minister quickly rose to a position of prominence in the black community. Current recognized the animosity that the racial diplomats had toward Jelks and the working-class activists. “These groups [including FOCUS], it would appear, do attempt to minimize the NAACP’s effectiveness,” he stated, and “have opposed the reorganization of the branch.” Current believed that the rift between the elite and working-class African Americans could not be repaired. Although he admitted that Jelks was “a loose-tongued individual, impetuous, overly sensitive, and difficult,” Current told Wilkins that they could not remove him because “he has the support of the common people in Baton Rouge, and they are the only ones apparently concerned with effecting fundamental change in the status quo.” Current claimed that the racial diplomats openly thwarted what they viewed as “militant activity” to “maintain the peace and tranquility of the community.”¹⁷

White leaders shared the racial diplomats’ low opinion of Jelks and wanted to prevent him and his followers from engaging in “militant” activities. They believed that if Jelks abandoned his civil rights activities or left Baton Rouge, the resolve of the working-class activists would crumble and peaceful race relations would return. When Jelks and the NAACP initiated a voter registration drive in early 1963, white leaders saw an opportunity to oust the civil rights leader. Although white officials in East Baton Rouge Parish allowed African Americans who could pass a literacy test to register, the

¹⁷Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, April 25, 1963, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11.

test prevented the majority of working-class blacks, who were for the most part poorly educated, from voting. Many African Americans who could read and write refused to register because they believed they would suffer economic retribution from whites. A black domestic told Jelks that her employer would fire her if she took part in a registration drive because "voting was white folks' business." The principal of one of the city's black schools also discouraged teachers from voting. When the NAACP president asked black ministers to announce the drive and to solicit volunteers for the registration school, he received no cooperation from them. To advertise the drive, Jelks decided to hold a voter registration rally on April 5 and invited James Meredith to speak. White leaders feared that the controversial Ole Miss student would radicalize the city's black population, which would lead to increased protests. They also worried that Meredith's presence would antagonize the segregationists, already up in arms over the African Americans' demands for school desegregation, which might lead to white violence.¹⁸

To the relief of white leaders and racial diplomats, Meredith did not appear at the rally. Jelks and other activists, including Willis Reed, claimed that racial diplomats working with white leaders phoned the Ole Miss student and canceled his appearance. Jelks told Jack Minnis of the Southern Regional Conference (SRC) that:

"One of the big Baptist preachers" [undoubtedly Jemison] got in touch with "a big mason" [John G. Lewis] who, in turn, contacted "a big NAACP lawyer in New Orleans" [Tureaud]. The purpose of all of this maneuvering was to get the lawyer to use the influence he had with Meredith (this influence being based

¹⁸"Meredith Says Impersonators Taking Calls," *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1963, 1; Jack Minnis to Wiley Branton, August 23, 1963, Southern Regional Conference Papers, Series VI, reel 176, file 153 (microfilm).

upon the fact that the lawyer had met Meredith through Mrs. Motley¹⁹) to persuade Meredith not to appear at April 5 mass meeting.

The preacher added that racial diplomats such as Jemison and Lewis had “a vested interest in things remaining as they are, because of business and professional interests.” He also hinted that white leaders used dossiers of improper behavior to blackmail the racial diplomats into compliance. While Jelks and other activists charged that the racial diplomats canceled Meredith’s appearance, the city’s white newspapers claimed that the young activist never received the invitation because white students in his dormitory intercepted Jelks’ call, impersonated Meredith, and accepted the speaking invitation. Although neither the activists nor the white leaders mentioned it, Meredith may have canceled the speaking engagement himself. The Ole Miss student could have withdrawn for any of these reasons, but of paramount importance is the fact that working-class activists were convinced that racial diplomats in conjunction with white leaders sabotaged the rally. Their belief in the duplicity of black leaders created further animosity and distrust between the two groups.²⁰

In the end, Meredith did not attend the rally but sent Mississippi NAACP leader Medgar Evers as a replacement. To white leaders, Evers was no better than Meredith, and they remained firm in their resolve to prevent the rally from taking place. On the evening of the rally, police officers stopped Evers for a traffic violation as he entered East Baton Rouge Parish and detained him for several hours, making him extremely late

¹⁹NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorney Constance Baker Motley.

²⁰“Meredith Says Impersonators Taking Calls,” *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1963, 1; Reed, interview, July 14, 1998; Jack Minnis to Wiley Branton, August 23, 1963, Southern Regional Conference Papers, Series VI, reel 176, file 153.

for the meeting. By the time he arrived, only a few of the most committed NAACP members remained. White leaders also prevented Jelks from making an appearance. When he left his home that evening, police arrested him on a bench warrant for failure to answer a summons to appear in court earlier that day for a hearing on a traffic citation that he received in March²¹. Jelks spent the night in jail and was released on a \$500 bond the next morning. On the April 6, he received his summons in the mail. The NAACP and Jelks believed that local police and the postal service had orchestrated the delay in delivery. They charged that mail carriers held the summons, which bore an April 1 postmark. In a letter to Postmaster General J. Edward Day, Roy Wilkins claimed that Jelks' mail had been interfered with several times and asked him to conduct an investigation into the incident. After an investigation, a postal inspector ruled that the summons had been accidentally misdirected.²²

Segregationists shared the racial diplomats' and white leaders' belief that Jelks was an outside agitator, and they also wanted to drive him out of Baton Rouge. Their methods were more violent and more overt than those of the black and white leaders. On April 14, an arsonist burned down Jelks' church. Initially, the fire marshal intimated that he believed that the minister set the fire to attract sympathy to his cause, but a

²¹On March 18, a Baton Rouge police officer ticketed Jelks for passing a vehicle in an intersection. He pled innocent on March 29, and the judge told him to await a summons to appear in court.

²²Medgar Evers was assassinated two months after his appearance in Baton Rouge. "Baton Rouge Integration Chief Arrested Before Meeting," *Morning Advocate*, April 6, 1963, 7A; Arthur Jelks to Roy Wilkins, April 11, 1963, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11; Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, April 25, 1963, *ibid.*; H. B. Montague to Roy Wilkins, May 3, 1963, *ibid.*; Jack Minnis to Wiley Branton, August 23, 1963, Southern Regional Conference Papers, Series VI, reel 176, file 153.

thorough investigation proved this theory wrong. The culprit, most likely a segregationist, was never caught. The fire destroyed Green's Chapel, and the working-class congregation could not raise enough money to rebuild their church. Jelks and the church's officers asked local lending agencies for loans only to be turned down by each one. Loan officers told them that the Citizens' Council and the Ku Klux Klan threatened to boycott any institution that aided Jelks and his congregation.²³

Just as with the other attempts to destroy the movement, the fire only strengthened it. In late April, Gloster Current urged the Baton Rouge chapter to intensify its attack on the segregation of lunch counters, public facilities, and public transportation. He also urged the working-class activists to invite the racial diplomats to take part in the protests but added that they should not trust these black leaders or allow them to take over their program. Current claimed that, if united, the black community could successfully wipe out segregation. In May 1963, the activists, following the national officer's advice, stepped up their protests. White leaders realized that Jelks and the working-class activists would not back down in the face of intimidation.²⁴

When Jelks demanded that Mayor-President Jack Christian create a biracial committee composed of working-class activists and white leaders and give it the responsibility of bringing a quick end to segregation, the mayor and council complied but named racial diplomats and a couple of World War II activists to serve on it. White

²³Arthur Jelks to Roy Wilkins, April 19, 1963, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11; Arthur Jelks to Robert F. Kennedy, April 19, 1963, *ibid.*; Gloster Current to Roy Wilkins, April 25 1963, *ibid.*; Delors Green to National Office, n.d., *ibid.*

²⁴Gloster Current to Arthur Jelks, April 29, 1963, *ibid.*

leaders considered these African Americans safe. For years, all of them had worked with the white elite to maintain peace and stability in Baton Rouge²⁵. The committee consisted of fifteen white members and fifteen black ones. All of the appointees belonged to the city's middle and upper classes and most were businessmen, plant employees, ministers, or professionals. Established by a decree of the city-parish council, the Committee on Community Relations met in secret and reported directly to the mayor-president. The NAACP denounced the composition of the committee and claimed that most of the black members were Uncle Toms. Jelks even released a public statement declaring that, other than Dupuy Anderson, the members of the committee "did not represent any real Negro leadership." Fearing that the composition of the biracial committee would further divide the black community, Clarence Laws, the NAACP field secretary for Louisiana, called a meeting of the Baton Rouge chapter's officers and convinced them to refrain from "public criticism or derogatory statements against Negro leaders or the Mayor." The group also promised as a good faith gesture to

²⁵Black members of the Biracial Committee included: Leon Netterville, vice president of Southern; Horatio Thompson, owner of Horatio's Auto Parts; Raymond Scott, owner of Scott the Tailor's; Joseph Dyer, a dentist; Dr. B. V. Baranco; John G. Lewis, owner of the Fraternal Press; James C. Cook, Humble (ESSO) Oil employee and owner of Cook's Theater; T. J. Jemison, Reverend W. T. Handy of St. Mark's Episcopal Church; Dupuy Anderson; Acie Belton, Humble Oil employee; John Hatcher, a dray contractor; Reverend L. L. Haynes, pastor of Wesley Methodist Church; Calvin Washington, Humble Oil employee; and Reverend E. D. Billoups, pastor of Second Baptist Church. White members included: James L. Winfree, an executive with Gulf Oil Company; Charles Thibaut, Jr., Tom Collins, Frank Craig, and Carlos Spaht, all attorneys; William J. Hughes, Jr, an architect; Reverend Sam Rushing of Istrouma Baptist Church; Joe Kavanaugh, counsel in the Attorney General's office; A. A. Breeden, owner of Breeden's Tractor Company; Dr. Henry Jolly; Millard Jackson and Thompson Cannon, Humble Oil employees; Melvin Stephens, Solvay Chemicals employee; Dr. Sherman Slaughter; and Fred Frey, former LSU dean of students.

refrain from any protests for thirty days. If the biracial committee made no progress, then the demonstrations would resume.²⁶

When Jelks went to trial for the March 1963 traffic violation in early June, the NAACP again demanded that the judge completely desegregate the Municipal Building, including lunch counters, courtrooms, restrooms, and water fountains. When the judge refused to do so, they staged a sit-in at the courthouse's lunch counter. In response to their demands and the sit-ins that followed, Mayor Christian, taking the advice of the biracial committee, ordered the desegregation of the Municipal Building's water fountains and restrooms and of the courtrooms. To keep blacks and whites from actually drinking from the same fountains, the city mounted paper cup dispensers beside them. The committee also urged the mayor and the council to hire black police officers; they complied but allowed African-American officers to patrol only in black neighborhoods and arrest black suspects. This legal action did not stop the demonstrations.²⁷

The operator of the courthouse's coffee shop, Sam Passaro, who happened to be blind, shared Pitcher's opposition to the mayor's desegregation order. He claimed that the presence of black customers upset his white patrons and added that he would continue to deny services to all African Americans. Passaro contended that he had the

²⁶Minutes of Special Meeting, March 28, 1963, East Baton Rouge Parish City-Parish Council; "Chairmen of Bi-Racial Body Named," *Morning Advocate*, June 1, 1963, 1; Buell, "The Politics of Frustration," 136-137; Clarence Laws to Gloster Current, May 31, 1963, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11.

²⁷"Jelks, NAACP Ask Injunction Go, Payment," *Morning Advocate*, June 3, 1963, 9D; "2 BR Buildings Mark First Day of Integration," *Morning Advocate*, June 8, 1963, 10A.

right "to refuse service to anyone whose tone of voice indicated . . . [that] they might cause his business trouble." He asked Judge Coleman Lindsey to issue a temporary restraining order against the NAACP and to order Jelks and the NAACP to pay him \$5,000 for humiliating him by staging a sit-in at his counter. At 2:30 p.m. on July 22, Judge Lindsey complied and issued a restraining order forbidding Jelks and the NAACP from holding sit-ins or demonstrations at Passaro's counter. Thirty minutes later, Pearl George and two men entered the shop and sat at a table. The men left after a couple of minutes but George remained. She recalled:

I was sitting in the coffee shop, reading a paper, first time a black had ever tried to enter into the coffee shop. You could stand at the door and order what you wanted, and somebody would bring it to you. But you could not go in and sit down and eat like white folks could. There was a black lady [working] there then, I guess I could understand her. It was her job to tell the white man that I was there, that I had bought a paper and a Hershey Bar candy. I was sitting at one of the tables eating it. When I walked in the coffee shop was full, he [Passaro] waited on me. She whispered and told him that I was black. He said, "If there's any colored people in here sitting to the tables, I will have to ask you to leave." I didn't answer. So, he buzzed for the deputies. The deputies came in. He [the deputy] told the proprietor, "You will have to ask her to leave in my presence." The proprietor told me, "I told you colored people ain't allowed to eat in here. You will have to leave."

Police arrested her for disturbing the peace and LeBlanc set her bond at \$1,500. The same day, an unidentified woman staged a sit-in at a coffee shop in the Municipal Building. Police did not arrest her, but the manager immediately closed for the day.²⁸

The sit-ins at the courthouse and the Municipal Building marked the beginning of a series of protests. On July 23, thirty African Americans, including Pearl George, attempted to use the swimming pool at City Park. Thirty minutes before the protesters

²⁸"Negroes Seek Service at BR Coffee Shops," *Morning Advocate*, July 23, 1963, 12C; Pearl George, interview by unknown.

arrived, the police received an anonymous call telling them of the pending desegregation attempt. Police Chief Wingate White immediately notified the Recreation and Parks Commission and went, along with a contingency of policemen, to the scene. Pearl George believed that an informant who attended a planning session the previous evening called authorities. "When we got to the City Park, there were sheriff's department, city police, state police," she recalled, "They was there with their guns and billy clubs waiting to receive us and ask where we were going as we walked into the City Park, and I told them that we was going to swim." The group of African Americans, including George's daughter and several other children, rushed Robert Clanton, a lifeguard posted at the entrance of the pool house, and went into the locker area. Chief White and Captain Leslie Font arrested two of the men who had pushed passed Clanton, twenty-one-year-old Sam Green and twenty-one-year-old Richard Thompson. They charged both with disturbing the peace and simple battery. Then, the officers moved the protesters out of the building. Once outside, the activists became unruly. When the paddy wagon arrived to take Green and Thompson to jail, the activists rushed it and pulled the doors open. Green attempted to escape, and the officers pushed him back inside. At that point, White engaged in a shouting match with the protesters. White told George, "You better be glad that it was I who came to arrest you-all because if it was [anyone else], Gilbert's [the black funeral home] would have picked you up." She replied, "I'll tell you one damned thing. You know Rabenhorst [the white funeral home] is riding too." Unlike the student activists, George refused to be bound by the principal of nonviolence. "I believed an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," she said, "I believed that if I turned my left cheek, you were going to slap me on the right one."

Either you was going to die, or I was going to die.” The officers arrested three more demonstrators, including George, and charged them with disturbing the peace, simple battery, and resisting arrest. Their bonds ranged from \$3,000 to \$6,000. The biracial committee met on July 23 but did not discuss the battle at the swimming pool. The following day, Jelks and a small group of NAACP members picketed outside the City Park Clubhouse. Several of them carried signs that read, “The Biracial Committee is Sleeping on Our Rights.”²⁹

Six months later, the five arrested at the pool stood trial in a state district court. Their attorney Johnnie Jones tried to argue that they were protesting against the continued segregation of the city’s publicly funded parks and recreation system. Judge Jess Johnson refused to listen to the argument and told Jones, “No one objects to a demonstration, . . . but to walk into a place where admission is charged and manhandle an attendant is not a demonstration.” Chief White testified that if the five had purchased tickets to use the pool, he and Font would not have prevented them from entering the facility. Of course, the city’s segregation laws prevented George and the others from paying for their admissions. Johnson found the five guilty and sentenced them to jail terms ranging from ninety days to six months and ordered them to pay fines ranging from \$100 to \$250. George received the six-month sentence.³⁰

²⁹“Negro Group Tries to Mix Pool in Park,” *Morning Advocate*, July 24, 1963, 1; Pearl George, interview by unknown; “Mayor, Law Officers Pledge Action on any Mob Violence,” *State-Times*, July 24, 1963, 1; “Pickets Appear at City Park Again Thursday,” *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1963, 6C.

³⁰“Five Negroes at Swim-In Convicted,” *Morning Advocate*, January 8, 1964, 1; “Supreme Court Holds Negroes’ Sentences Valid,” *Morning Advocate*, May 2, 1964, 1; Pearl George, interview by unknown; Johnnie Jones to Robert Carter, July 24, 1963,

In response to the biracial committee's refusal to take any action after the swimming pool incident, the NAACP asked U. S. District Judge E. Gordon West for a hearing on the 1953 park desegregation suit. The renewed interest in the park suit stemmed not only from the swimming pool arrests but also from a federal court ruling the previous week that desegregated New Orleans's public parks. Jelks promised that picketing of the park would continue until either the court or the biracial committee allowed all people to use these publicly funded facilities. In February 1964, the Supreme Court overturned a Louisiana law requiring segregation of public park facilities. As a segregationist, West delayed his decision as long as possible because he knew that legal precedents required him to desegregate these facilities. In April 1964, the attorney handling the case, Johnnie Jones, complained about the delay and filed a renewal motion for a summary judgement. West chastised him, "As soon as I can get to it, I will get to it."³¹

On May 7, the Recreation and Parks Commission, knowing that West would eventually order the desegregation of the public pool at City Park, decided to close it rather than allow black and white children to swim together. The commission wanted to prevent more demonstrations and claimed that the decision to close the pool was a financial one. According to Eugene Young, superintendent of the parks, it never made a profit and, in fact, usually ran a deficit. Yet the anticipated loss for 1964 was in line

NAACP Papers, Group V, box B3, folder Correspondence: Carter, Robert (Joh-Joy), 1957-1963.

³¹"Rec. Facility Desegregation Efforts Planned," *Morning Advocate*, August 6, 1963, 8A; "West to Deliberate on Park Integration," *Morning Advocate*, April 18, 1964, 11A.

with those of previous years. Commission Chairman William McGehee promised that the group would look into leasing the pool out to a private company, which would have removed it from public control and would have allowed African Americans to be excluded even if West issued a desegregation order. On May 18, West ordered the Recreation Commission to integrate its facilities but added that there was "no legal obligation or duty on the part of the city or parish to provide or operate recreational facilities." Following the judge's advice, the commission decided to fill in the pool at City Park rather than allow black and white children to swim together.³²

The day after West's ruling, three African Americans attempted to play golf at one of the city's white courses. Park employees refused to allow them to do so and stated that until the commission received official notification of West's decision, the facilities would remain segregated. Six days later, park officials turned away four black golfers at another course, again pending receipt of the court order. Although West suggested that the city-parish abolish its public park system, the commission decided to comply with his ruling. On May 27, park facilities, except for the swimming pools, desegregated without incident when several black golfers used two white courses.³³

³²"BR Swim Pools To Stay Closed," *State-Times*, May 7, 1964, 1; "EBR Plans to Keep Public Pools Closed," *Morning Advocate*, May 8, 1964, 1; "EBR Parish Pool Closing Is Confirmed," *Morning Advocate*, May 10, 1964, 1; "Recreational Area in City Desegregated," *Morning Advocate*, May 19, 1964, 1.

³³"Three Negroes Apply to Play at City Park," *Morning Advocate*, May 20, 1964, 14B; "Four Negroes Turned Away at Webb Park," *Morning Advocate*, May 26, 1964, 12C; "Anti-Mixing Move Killed by BREC," *Morning Advocate*, May 23, 1964, 1; "Park Facilities Here Integrate Without Alarm," *Morning Advocate*, May 28, 1964, 1.

Although the biracial committee played little role in bringing about park desegregation, it successfully negotiated the end to segregation at other facilities. With the intervention of committee members, twelve downtown stores desegregated their lunch counters without any fanfare. When Pearl George and several others attempted to take part in the first integration attempt, they discovered that in the deal worked out between the committee and the managers, Southern students were the only African Americans allowed to participate in the initial desegregation of the counters. George was indignant, so the manager told her to call her leader, Reverend Jemison. She told the manager, "Reverend Jemison do not lead me. I lead myself." George believed that the biracial committee selected the Southern students to desegregate the counters because they belonged to the black elite. Although George bristled at the involvement of the biracial committee in lunch counter desegregation, without its intervention, these businesses would have remained segregated.³⁴

With lunch counter desegregation achieved, working-class activists turned their attention to obtaining economic equality. They wanted to open up jobs traditionally reserved for whites, such as cashiers and store clerks, and to obtain higher wages for black workers. In October 1963, Pearl George and a group of African Americans demanded that white-owned grocery stores in black neighborhoods hire black workers. When the owners refused, George and her supporters picketed these businesses. Their protests often ended in violence. On October 3, a group of young picketers threw rocks

³⁴"Lunch Counters at 12 Major BR Sites Integrated," *Morning Advocate*, August 7, 1963, 7A; "Negroes Picket Downtown BR Wednesday," *Morning Advocate*, August 8, 1963, 10C; Pearl George, interview by unknown.

and bottles at a city bus. Three weeks later, protesters fought with segregationists who taunted them as they marched.³⁵

In February 1964, the biracial committee attacked another vestige of segregation when members reached an agreement with local hospitals to allow black doctors to have hospital privileges, but stipulated that they could only treat black patients. This change did little for working-class African Americans who could not afford to pay for health care and relied on the state's charity hospital system to meet their medical needs.³⁶

Through its efforts, the biracial committee achieved not only desegregation of downtown lunch counters and hospital privileges for black doctors but also convinced the mayor to hire black police officers and to desegregate restrooms, lunch counters, and water fountains in the Municipal Building. Yet, the biracial committee and its composition concerned World War II activists. Although some, such as Dupuy Anderson and Raymond Scott, served on the committee, others wanted to abolish it. Johnnie Jones denounced the committee's secrecy and declared that if voters elected a black man to the city-parish council "the necessity of a biracial committee that meets behind closed doors, not responsible to the people, will be eliminated."³⁷

³⁵"Negroes Throw Bricks Through Bus Windows," *Morning Advocate*, October 3, 1963, 11F; "Negroes Picket White-Operated Grocery Stores," *Morning Advocate*, October 10, 1963, 8C; "Negroes Create Ugly Scene in Front of BR Food Store," *Morning Advocate*, October 20, 1963, 5C.

³⁶"Plan to Admit Negro Doctors," *Morning Advocate*, February 24, 1964, 1.

³⁷"Jones Gives Statement in Council Race," *Morning Advocate*, June 28, 1964, 11A.

Segregationists also denounced the biracial committee and resented the secrecy surrounding it. The committee met in private and reported directly to Mayor Christian, who kept its recommendations, even those he implemented, confidential. When the committee negotiated the admission of black doctors to the staffs of white hospitals, for example, it made no public statement. In fact, the city's newspapers discovered the existence of the changes only when unnamed committee members leaked the information to the press. This shroud of secrecy may have made the interaction between committee members easier, but it also allowed segregationists to engage in wild speculation about its activities. Segregationists circulated a rumor that the committee created the August 1963 school integration plan when, in reality, it played no role in the process. In February 1964, a frustrated city-parish council demanded that the mayor report on the body's activities. Christian outlined the group's accomplishments and commended its members for their work in "maintaining the 'proper image' for Baton Rouge." Two months later, the biracial committee met in an executive session with the mayor and the council for nearly two hours and convinced a majority of council members that it should remain active.³⁸

Controversy surrounding the committee did not end with the council's vote. In fact, Councilman Robert T. "Bobby" Clegg issued a statement following the meeting to express his opposition to the committee. He noted that he had voted against the formation of the group and continued to oppose it because he believed it violated the

³⁸"Council Looks at Biracial Responsibility," *Morning Advocate*, February 24, 1964, 1; "Council Backs Its Bi-Racial Group's Work," *Morning Advocate*, April 2, 1964, 1.

constitutional rights of white Baton Rougeans and created a "knife at the throat atmosphere."³⁹

The biracial committee became a dominant issue in the 1964 mayoral election. Four candidates challenged Jack Christian for mayor: Woodrow W. "Woody" Dumas, a twelve-year member of the city-parish council and salesman for Commercial Steel Building & Metal Company; L. W. "Puna" Eaton, owner of L. W. Eaton Construction Company; Mike Safer, owner of Mike Safer Scrap Metals, Co.; and Ossie Brown, an attorney. Christian, Dumas and Eaton supported the biracial committee and believed that it helped to maintain peace. "For fourteen months this community has been without racial conflict largely through the efforts of those individuals serving on this committee," Christian said. "The committee has served as a medium of communication so essential to peaceful relations in the community." Dumas also congratulated the group for maintaining peaceful race relations in Baton Rouge and stated, "I believe that recent occurrences of racial violence in neighboring states have manifested the wisdom of maintaining the lines of communication between the races on a local basis, thus blocking the pressures of foreign irritant sources." Dumas believed that before the creation of the committee "the responsible Negro leaders in this community were losing their following to a certain Reverend Jelks." Although he recognized the effectiveness of the committee, he denounced the secrecy surrounding it and promised that, unlike Christian, he would issue full reports on the biracial group's activities. Eaton also called for the activities of the committee to be made public but vowed to maintain the group in

³⁹"Councilman Clegg Still Against Bi-Racial Group," *Morning Advocate*, April 8, 1964, 11A.

order "to prevent violence, bloodshed, or any discord in our community." Mike Safer denounced the committee and claimed that race relations in Baton Rouge remained peaceful because the mayor and the council "gave our rights away in May 1963" when they created the biracial body. Brown denounced the secrecy surrounding the committee but refused to take a stand on the issue.⁴⁰

Although segregationists denounced the biracial body, the voters of East Baton Rouge Parish supported it, and, in the July 26 primary, gave the most votes to the group's most ardent supporters Dumas and Christian. The councilman received 15,101 votes to the mayor's 13,841. In fact, the role played by Christian in creating the committee and his willingness to carry out the group's recommendation pleased the majority of black voters, and their 3,143 votes secured him a spot in the runoff. The four other candidates combined garnered only 1,886 African-American votes. However, the support of blacks did little to help Christian in the August 29 election and, in fact, probably helped to secure Dumas' victory.⁴¹

The new mayor encountered a racial situation that differed from that of his predecessor. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. It removed the legal basis for segregation in most public accommodations and

⁴⁰"Candidates for Mayor-President Answer Questions," *Morning Advocate*, July 17, 1964, 5B; "Christian, Dumas Defend Formation of Biracial Group," *Morning Advocate*, August 4, 1964, 10A; "Mayor's Race Quickens; Talks by Candidates Heighten Pace," *Morning Advocate*, July 10, 1964, 5B.

⁴¹"Primary Election to Attract EBR Voters Tomorrow," *State-Times*, July 24, 1964, 1; "State, City Go to Polls Today, See Normal Vote," *State-Times*, July 25, 1964, 1; "Dumas and Christian in Runoff," *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1964, 1; "Christian, Dumas Get Ready for Second Primary Struggle," *State-Times*, July 27, 1964, 1; "Dumas Defeats Christian," *Morning Advocate*, August 30, 1964, 1.

proved to be a turning point for the movement in Baton Rouge and in other southern cities. In New Orleans, black patrons received service at one of the French Quarter's most famous landmarks, the Café du Monde. In Birmingham, African Americans quietly desegregated white theaters, restaurants, and lunch counters. Baton Rouge was no different. Several restaurants served black diners, and a local hotel even allowed an African-American man to have a drink in its lounge. Yet, in Baton Rouge as in all these communities, resistance to integration remained strong. Segregationists viewed the Civil Rights Act as a violation of the sovereignty of the states as outlined in the Constitution and believed that a business owner had the right to select his or her clientele. Several Baton Rouge restaurant owners defied the new law and continued refusing to serve black customers.⁴²

On July 6, Jelks led one of the successful integration attempts. He and two women, Betty Wilson and Cordelia Antoine, went to the State Capitol's segregated cafeteria to test the Civil Rights Act. Fearing the reaction of segregationists, the civil rights activist phoned local FBI Agent Elmer Litchfield, who later became sheriff of East Baton Rouge Parish, the cafeteria's manager, and Superintendent of State Police Thomas Burbank to advise them of his plans. Knowing that African-American patrons were on the way, the manager told his employees to treat Jelks and the women like their white customers. The three activists entered the establishment, selected and paid for their food without incident, and made their way into the dining area. When they sat, all but one of the sixty white patrons in the dining room stood up and left. Ultra

⁴²"Negroes Try Rights Law in Louisiana," *Morning Advocate*, July 4, 1964, 1; "Atlanta Negroes Meet in Opposition," *ibid.*

segregationist Leander Perez happened to be eating lunch when the three African Americans arrived, and led the white exodus, stood in the doorway and shouted, "Paging Texas Turncoat Lyndon Johnson's federal marshals. Paging Batface Bobby Kennedy's federal marshals — you know damned well they are here." Jelks and his dining companions ate their meals while the white crowd of mostly state government employees taunted them from the doorway. When they finished, the three walked out of the restaurant and through the crowd single file to avoid contact with anyone. As they left, an unidentified white man punched Jelks, but with the help of State Police Superintendent Burbank, the three walked to their car with no further incidents.⁴³

Believing that Perez stirred up the crowd and egged on the man who attacked him, Jelks sued the segregationist leader. The suit accomplished something that three years of police harassment had not — it forced Jelks to leave Baton Rouge. Perez refused to let Jelks go unpunished for being so "uppity" and began a six-month undocumented campaign of terror against the civil rights leader. In February 1965, a frazzled Jelks abruptly left Baton Rouge because of "pressure from the whites" and because his superiors in the A.M.E. church feared that Perez would have him killed. He later dropped his suit against Perez.⁴⁴

⁴³Thomas Burbank's Statement, NAACP Papers, Group V, box 53, folder *Jelks v. Perez*, General Case Material; Arthur Jelks' affidavit, *ibid.*; Peter Teachout to Robert Carter, July 17, 1964, *ibid.*; Lydia Venton's Statement, *ibid.*; "Negro Mixing Cafeteria Gets Socked in Jaws," *Morning Advocate*, July 7, 1964, 11A.

⁴⁴Gloster Current to Reverend Bishop Joseph Gomez, February 4, 1965, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11; Arthur Jelks to Barbara Morris, April 2, 1965, NAACP Papers, Group V, box 53, folder *Jelks v. Perez* General Material.

Jelks' departure left the working-class activists without a powerful leader and for the next three years, the group floundered. Many of these civil rights advocates, including Pearl George, left the NAACP when the organization's national office refused to finance the defenses of the five arrested in the swimming pool protest of 1963. Others abandoned the group because they suspected that an informant had infiltrated it and was passing on protest information to white leaders. In addition, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 changed the nature of the movement. The two acts accomplished the primary goals of civil rights activists — the desegregation of public accommodations and the ability to register to vote. Although pockets of resistance to both laws remained in Baton Rouge, the acts allowed the working-class activists to shift their attention away from the legal barriers that preserved segregation and to focus on the economic barriers that prevented them from attaining full citizenship.⁴⁵

From 1962 until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, working class activists dominated the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge. While they failed to achieve their goal of complete equality, their unrelenting protests and refusal to back down forced white leaders to address their demands. Fearing that the working-class activists would convince the black masses to rise up in protest and thereby shatter the stability of the Baton Rouge community, white leaders tried to undercut their authority in the African-American community. When Jelks asked Mayor Christian to create a biracial committee, he complied but appointed racial diplomats to it. Although working-

⁴⁵Arthur Jelks to Lucille Black, August 21, 1964, NAACP Papers, Group III, box C52, folder 11.

class activists denounced it, the committee made some concrete changes to the system of segregation in Baton Rouge. In 1963, it secured the hiring of black police officers, something blacks had been asking for since the mid 1950s. Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the biracial committee also negotiated the desegregation of downtown lunch counters and convinced the mayor to desegregate facilities in the Municipal Building. Although these gains seemed small to the working-class activists, they mollified the majority African Americans and prevented the types of mass demonstrations and violence that occurred in 1963 in Birmingham.

Chapter 9

Black Power and the End of the Movement, 1965-1972

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 granted African Americans in the South full citizenship and improved conditions for black Baton Rougeans, these laws could not end racism or eliminate the economic disparity that existed between the black and white populations. They did change the nature of the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge, however. In the late-1960s, for many African Americans, especially the World War II activists, the movement was over. Although they realized that serious problems remained in their community, they believed that working within the system could solve the remaining racial problems. At the same time, two new groups of activists appeared. One consisted of angry, young working-class African Americans from inner-city neighborhoods and the other was composed of Black Power activists who attended Southern University. Like the older working-class activists, the young members of this group were poorly educated and lacked the skills to find well-paying jobs. United in frustration over the continuing racism that plagued Baton Rouge, they responded to racially-charged situations, such as the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., with violence. Preaching racial separatism and pride, the Black Power activists from Southern also advocated using violence to empower African-Americans. Often the rhetoric of the Black Power advocates influenced the young working-class activists and led to violent confrontations between them and the white community.

White leaders feared both groups of young African Americans and believed that they would cause race riots and shatter the community's peace and stability if allowed

to go unchecked. After more than three decades of using compromise and arresting activists to defuse civil rights demonstrations, white leaders discovered that their time-proven strategy no longer worked.¹ The divisions within the black community and the inability of whites to deal with the new groups of activists became apparent in the late 1960s when, on several occasions, white police officers, who were known for their racism and brutality, shot and killed black suspects. While all African Americans condemned the use of deadly force, they reacted differently. Black leaders turned to traditional methods of protest. They staged marches, rallies, and picketing and negotiated with white leaders to change police practices. The young activists took part in the leaders' mass protests, but afterward, mobs of them ran through the streets attacking whites and burning down buildings. White leaders responded to the violence with massive force and sent in large contingents of policemen, sheriffs' deputies, and the National Guard to subdue the violence. By the early 1970s, this combination of rioting answered by massive force so heightened racial tension within the city that large-scale rioting became all but inevitable.

The divisions within the black community that characterized the civil rights movement grew deeper in the years following the Civil and Voting Rights Acts. With Jelks's departure, the Baton Rouge chapter of the NAACP collapsed. From 1964 until

¹Other New South cities that, like Baton Rouge, worked diligently to avoid confrontation and violence during the 1950s and 1960s experienced similar increases in Black Power activism and racial discord in the late-1960s and early-1970s. In Tampa, Florida, frustration and anger over job discrimination and poverty led to a riot in a black neighborhood near the downtown business district. It began when a white police officer shot an unarmed black robbery suspect. For more on the Tampa riot see: Steven F. Lawson, "From Sit-In to Race Riot: Businessmen, Blacks and the Pursuit of Moderation," in *Southern Businessmen*, Jacoway and Colburn, eds., 257-281.

1967, very little organized civil rights activity occurred in Baton Rouge. In April 1966, the NAACP's State Conference declared the Baton Rouge branch dormant. Gloster Current even came to the city to discuss reorganization with black leaders but found no one interested. Racial diplomats refused to join the organization because of the reputation for activism the branch had earned under Jelks' leadership, and working class activists distrusted the national office, which, in 1963, had refused to pay for the defenses of Pearl George and the other activists arrested in their attempt to desegregate City Park's pool. In 1967, NAACP Field Director for Louisiana Harvey Britton tried again to reorganize the Baton Rouge chapter and like Current failed. He discovered that many African Americans in the city were happy with the status quo, especially the racial diplomats and the World War II activists, and refused to join the revived NAACP chapter. "Baton Rouge, like any other capital city, tends to offer more opportunities for employment, recreation, and other social events which fastens a false sense of accomplishments among its Negro citizenry," Britton explained. In late 1967, though, he finally convinced nineteen people to join the organization. They launched a membership drive and, optimistically, set their goal at 5,000. The drive added only a few new members, and Britton blamed the insurmountable division between the "Negro leadership," meaning the racial diplomats, and the "grass-roots leadership," meaning working-class activists, along with the subterfuge of white leaders for the failure. When Britton tried to open an office in Baton Rouge, the local utility and telephone companies doubled their security deposits. In the end, only a little more than one hundred African Americans joined the NAACP. The field director held out little hope for the branch's sustained success. Britton's fears were unfounded. When Pearl George

decided to return to her role as Youth Chapter advisor, other working-class activists renewed their memberships.²

In the late 1960s, working-class activism was centered in the Eden Park area of Baton Rouge. One of the poorest sections of the city, the neighborhood suffered from high crime, drainage and sewerage problems, and rampant unemployment. Frustrated by these conditions, a group of residents in the summer of 1968 presented Mayor Woody Dumas with a list of grievances.³ Unlike his predecessor Jack Christian, who allowed the biracial committee to study the problems of the black community before he took a public stand on them, Dumas examined the complaints himself. After looking them over, the mayor commented, "It is unfortunate we let some of these things continue until someone tries to make a fuss." He forwarded the petition to the biracial committee and demanded that it submit its recommendations for improving conditions in Eden Park the following week. After receiving the committee's report, Dumas gave it

²Gloster Current to Murphy Bell, April 1, 1966, Papers of the NAACP Field Director, hereafter cited as Field Director's Papers, box 1, folder 3, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Monthly Report, March 20, 1967, Field Director's Papers, box 2, folder 3; Harvey Britton to Members of the Executive Board, March 22, 1967, *ibid.*; Harvey Britton to Emmitt Douglas, March 27, 1967, *ibid.*; Monthly Report, March 27, 1967, Field Director's Papers, box 2, folder 4; Monthly Report, June 14, 1967, Field Director's Papers, box 2, folder 7; Supplementary Monthly Report, July 2, 1967, Field Director's Papers, box 2, folder 9.

³Having witnessed the devastating riots in northern and western cities, Dumas wanted to prevent this type of violence from erupting in Baton Rouge. The mayor knew that such an incident would devastate the city's economy and would discourage large industries from building plants and refineries in their area. Dumas adopted a pragmatic approach in dealing with the demands for racial equality. For information on riots in large industrial cities see: Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995) and Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989).

to the city-parish council for consideration. The body promised to discuss improving drainage, housing, recreational facilities, street lights, and sidewalks and to attempt to provide more jobs for Eden Park residents. Dumas immediately increased the police patrols in the crime-riddled neighborhood and ordered the Department of Public Works to hire black workers. The council also contacted the Recreation and Parks Commission and asked that body to improve the recreational facilities in the poverty-stricken neighborhood. Dumas did not take these actions because he sympathized with the residents of Eden Park or because he wanted to improve conditions in a poor neighborhood. Rather, he acted to prevent a racial uprising in a ghetto. He told the City-Parish Council, "We're not going to make the same mistake they made in Detroit." Dumas believed that maintaining peace and harmony required that white and black leaders deal with the complaints of civil rights activists at a conference table rather than on the streets.⁴

In the summer of 1967, young working-class activists tested Dumas' resolve to use negotiations to deal with the racial problems when African Americans from Bogalusa staged a march from their community to Baton Rouge. Sponsored by the Bogalusa Civic and Voters' League, marchers demanded improved education and increased voter education. The group also announced that Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Chairman H. Rap Brown, one of the nation's most outspoken Black Power activists, would appear at its rally on the steps of the State Capitol at the culmination of the march. Born and raised in Baton Rouge, Brown was

⁴"Council Meets Monday Over Negro Grievances," *State-Times*, August 5, 1967, 4B; "Negro Grips Laid on Line," *State-Times*, August 8, 1967, 1.

the son of a refinery worker and attended Southern University before becoming involved in the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. He became a full-time SNCC worker in 1966 and soon after became chairman of the organization. Brown recognized the plight of working-class African Americans and told them that the only way to seize power was by force. Brown's and SNCC's pro-working class rhetoric proved popular in Baton Rouge's poor neighborhoods, as it did in communities across the country. On July 24, police in Maryland arrested Brown for inciting a riot in Cambridge in which protesters burned a school. The day before, he had told African Americans attending the Maryland rally, "If this town don't come around, this town should be burned down!" Fearing that he would express a similar sentiment at the State Capitol rally, Governor John McKeithen threatened to arrest the young activist if he used incendiary language in his speech. Refusing to be intimidated by McKeithen, Brown replied, "I didn't make the laws, neither did black people in this country. If the laws defeat my purpose, why should I conform to them?" Justice Department officials, fearing that Brown's arrest in Baton Rouge would lead to a riot, arrested him in New York a couple of days before the Baton Rouge rally and charged him with carrying a weapon on a flight from New York to New Orleans.⁵ A federal judge set his bond at \$25,000. Because he could not raise bail, Brown missed the rally.⁶

⁵Federal law prohibited anyone under indictment from transporting a weapon across state lines.

⁶Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 412-414; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 252-257; "H. Rap Brown Arrives for Sunday Rally," *State-Times*, August 17, 1967, 4A; "Brown Held, Can't Post High Bond," *State-Times*, August 19, 1967, 1, "March Nears City Limits After 'Hot' Friday Walk," *Morning Advocate*, August 19,

Even without Brown there, white leaders feared that the Bogalusa to Baton Rouge march would heighten racial tensions in the city and urged all residents to stay home on the day of the rally. Dumas told his constituents, "Ignore any marchers or similar intruders in our community. If we are to continue to run our community, then we must do so with proper responsibility." The mayor promised that police officers would arrest anyone, regardless of race, who violated the law. Committed to preserving the peace, he also promised that violence would not be tolerated, and in the hours following the civil rights rally and the Ku Klux Klan meeting that followed it, policemen confiscated weapons from whites traveling into or driving near Eden Park. They detained one man for possession of an M-16 semiautomatic rifle, several pistols, and approximately nine boxes of ammunition. Because Louisiana law allowed citizens to carry unconcealed weapons in their cars, officers did not charge any of the armed men, and the police department returned the weapons the next day. The fact that officers prevented them from entering Eden Park remained significant. In southern cities dominated by segregationists, law enforcement officials took few, if any, precautions, to prevent violence and sometimes even encouraged it.⁷

Despite their best efforts, white leaders in Baton Rouge could not prevent violence from erupting in Eden Park. After the rally, a dozen fires broke out, six of them started by fire bombs. White-owned businesses were the primary targets for those who started the fires, but none caused major damage. Although they failed to capture

1967, 1.

⁷"Police Integration Order Withdrawn," *State-Times*, August 15, 1967, 1.

the arsonists, police arrested eleven young black men ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-three: seven for vagrancy, one for obscenity, another for carrying a concealed weapon, and two for disorderly conduct. One of those arrested was Walter Leon Jenkins, also known as "Big Black Billy Brooks," a twenty-six-year-old Houston native. The young activist attracted the attention of law enforcement officers when he disrupted the rally at the Capitol by shouting Black Power slogans. Later, when violence erupted in Eden Park, he grabbed a black policeman and prevented him from calling headquarters when a group of young African Americans smashed the windows of a white-owned grocery store. Police arrested him and charged him with inciting arson, simple battery of a police officer, and intimidating a police officer. After his arrest, the city's newspapers reported that Jenkins came to Louisiana in 1965 as a field worker for CORE and took part in demonstrations in the Baton Rouge area.⁸ Despite the fires, the following day, white leaders applauded the law-abiding citizens of Baton Rouge for their restraint and sense of civic responsibility. The city's peaceful facade, however, hid the anger and discontent that young African Americans felt.⁹

The working-class activism, inspired by the Black Power activism of SNCC and CORE, that led to the fire bombing of Eden Park businesses created division and distrust within the black community. Fearing that the violent tactics of the young

⁸In the mid 1960s, CORE abandoned the principles of passive resistance and nonviolence and embraced Black Power. Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 374.

⁹"Tense Weekend Ends with Fire Bombs in City," *State-Times*, August 21, 1967, 1; "Fire Bombs Fly in the City After Racially Hot Day," *Morning Advocate*, August 21, 1967, 1; "Interracial Help Invited by Dumas," *Morning Advocate*, July 22, 1967, 1; "City Quiet in Wake of Incidents," *State-Times*, August 22, 1967, 1; "Walter Jenkins Pleads Innocent to 3 Counts," *State-Times*, August 23, 1977, 12A.

protesters would alienate the white leadership and make further racial progress impossible, the racial diplomats attempted to unite the black community by creating a coalition of various organizations from around the city and parish. On February 19, 1968, representatives from twenty churches and organizations met at Mount Zion Baptist Church to "disseminate information relative to employment, civic activities, and political action." The chairman of the meeting, Acie Belton, claimed that until the black community united nothing could be accomplished. Suspicious of the racial diplomats' motives, the Black Power activists questioned their sincerity. One claimed that for the new organization to truly represent the community, it would have to include young people and not just "respected" people. Another asked what the new group would do for the black community other than coordinate. At a March 4 meeting, the new organization crumbled. Nearly one hundred African Americans attended, but the divisions within the black community were so deep that they could not even agree on a name for their group.¹⁰

As the split between older African Americans and the young working-class activists widened, segregationist sentiment in the city intensified. On March 8, three off-duty police officers brandished their weapons at a group of NAACP picketers outside Ancona's Grocery Store, a white-owned business in a predominately black neighborhood. The three off-duty policemen, who were not in their uniforms, went into the store to purchase beer; on their way out, they flashed their weapons after

¹⁰"Negro Church Leaders, Delegates Meet to Form Parish-wide Organization," *Morning Advocate*, February 20, 1968, 11C; "Meet to Organize BR Negroes is Bugged Down in Bickering," *Morning Advocate*, March 5, 1968, 8C.

exchanging a few angry words with the leader of the protesters, Pearl George. Ten minutes later, the three drove by, jeered at the picketers, and made insulting gestures. George immediately called the sheriff's department to report the incident, and while the deputies were taking the African Americans' statements, the men returned. Deputies pulled them over, took their guns, and drove off with the men in the back of their squad car. George and the others later discovered that their tormenters were policemen. The sheriff's department refused to give the activists their names. Sheriff Clemmons referred the activists to Chief Bauer, and he sent them to Pitcher. The district attorney would not allow George and the demonstrators to press charges against the men. To ease racial tension, Bauer did suspend the officers but then allowed them to return to work after a few days¹¹.

Angered by the racism of the police officers and the failure of white officials to respond to their complaints, Pearl George and other NAACP officials demanded a meeting with the mayor, the chief of police, and several councilmen to submit a list of complaints. In a two-and-a-half hour meeting, the African Americans charged that policemen harassed members of the black community, used derogatory language when talking to them, searched all African Americans near crime scenes, even if they were not suspects, and unsnapped their holsters and rested their hands on their guns while questioning black suspects. Chief of Police Eddie Bauer defended his officers and said that unsnapping the holster was standard operating procedure for his policemen.

¹¹"Local Grocery is Picketed by City NAACP," *Morning Advocate*, March 8, 1968, 6A; "Baton Rouge Officers Get Suspension," *Morning Advocate*, March 18, 1968, 1.

Although he defended his officers, Bauer recognized that segregationist sentiment within the police department heightened racial tension. He told the NAACP representatives that a newly implemented community relations program taught officers how to deal with the city's minority population and added that he had transferred the more racist officers out of black neighborhoods.¹²

On April 4, 1968, the discontent of African Americans rose to a fever-pitch following Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, and his death led to a rise in Black Power sentiment at Southern. On April 6, approximately 1,500 black students marched from Southern University to the State Capitol. When they reached the ESSO refinery, they turned their thumbs down and demanded that the company set up an equal opportunity hiring program. Although they claimed to be advocates of nonviolence several students warned that if whites continued to oppress African Americans, a race riot was inevitable. "We are moving from nonviolence and civil disobedience to guerilla warfare and civil rebellion," warned student leader Jodie Bibbens. "If Lester Maddox could get to be governor of Georgia by waving an ax handle I should be able to get to be governor of Louisiana by beating up some honkies." He promised that if white policemen shot and killed protesters in Baton Rouge, like they did in Orangeburg, South Carolina, then the students would respond with "10 Detroits." An unidentified student tore up his draft card claiming, "I refuse to fight for this society . . . where private property is worth more than human life." Another student leader, Sam Mims,

¹²"Negro Leaders List Problems, Warn that Violence Could Come," *Morning Advocate*, March 15, 1968, 11D.

claimed that the marchers went to the Capitol to express their “dissatisfaction with the white government structure and especially over the death of Martin Luther King.”¹³

In the months and years following the assassination, the black university became a stronghold for Black Power activism. The students abandoned King’s principles of nonviolence and passive resistance and advocated the use of force to express their discontent with the current state of race relations. They also gave up the idea of an integrated society that earlier student activists had advocated and touted black nationalism. Black Power activists wanted “cultural and political autonomy for black communities” and urged African Americans to reclaim their history and cultural identity. They also refused to work with whites who, to them, were the enemy. For older African Americans, Black Power separatism rejected the civil rights movement, and many of them denounced the young activists and their tactics.¹⁴

In response to the April 6 march and rising Black Power sentiment on campus, President Felton Clark attempted to follow the precedents that he set during the student protests of the early 1960s; he closed the campus and ordered the students to clear out. His tactics had worked earlier in the decade because the student body feared the consequences of continued defiance. They witnessed the arrest and expulsion of their leaders and refused to risk the consequences of taking part in protests after the “cooling off periods” created by Clark. However, the student activists of the late 1960s refused to allow Southern’s administration to destroy their movement. Although they left campus

¹³“Capitol Rally Climaxes Day of Marching in BR,” *Morning Advocate*, April 6, 1968, 1.

¹⁴Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 382; Carson, *In Struggle*, 215-220.

as ordered, the student activists returned to school poised to carry on their fight for equality.¹⁵

Besides intensifying Black Power sentiment at Southern, King's death also angered the young working-class activists, who responded to the assassination with violence. On April 7, in separate incidents, several of them threw six fire bombs at buildings in Scotlandville and tossed bricks and Molotov cocktails at white-owned businesses in Baton Rouge. On April 8, city officials received reports that African Americans were planning a riot, so Dumas ordered a "voluntary" curfew to go into effect at dusk. Chief Bauer and Sheriff Clemmons sent patrols to black neighborhoods to insure that all businesses, especially bars and liquor stores, complied with the mayor's order. Bauer even asked his officers to give him a list of any businesses that refused to close. When he received it, the chief immediately phoned the proprietors and convinced them to shut down voluntarily. Despite the curfew, several protesters threw fire bombs, but no large scale rioting occurred.¹⁶

Segregationist sentiment also manifested itself following King's assassination. Racist whites threatened George, and on April 11, someone fired shots into her home.

¹⁵"Capitol Rally Climaxes in Day of Marching," *Morning Advocate*, April 6, 1968, 1.

¹⁶"BR March Sparked by King's Death," *State-Times*, April 5, 1968, 1; "Louisiana Negroes React," *Morning Advocate*, April 5, 1968, 1; "Memorial Rites Slated for King at St. Joseph's," *Morning Advocate*, April 6, 1968, 1; "Service Here Fills Cathedral," *Morning Advocate*, April 8, 1968, 1; "M. L. King Ecumenical Rites Held," *State-Times*, April 8, 1968, 1; "Parish in Curfew, Peaceful Monday," *Morning Advocate*, April 9, 1968, 1; "Fires Quenched; Rains Come," *ibid.*; "Semi-Curfew Makes City Quiet," *Morning Advocate*, April 10, 1968, 1.

Fearing that a segregationist's bullet would injure or kill George, Chief Bauer gave her twenty-four-hour police protection.¹⁷

Just as King's death escalated racial tension in Baton Rouge, it also increased interracial cooperation. On April 6, an integrated group of LSU students staged a peaceful march from the campus to the Capitol, and religious leaders held an interracial, ecumenical service at St. Joseph's Catholic Cathedral. Following the assassination, white liberals began to play a more active role in the civil rights movement. On the day after King's murder, white students at LSU attempted to lower to half mast the flag flying over the Parade Ground, only to be thwarted by the school's administration. They also formed an interracial organization — the Martin Luther King Action Movement (MLKAM) — to work for increased integration both on and off campus. Its members took part in voter registration drives and lobbied LSU officials to recruit black athletes, especially football and basketball players. A month after King's death, the MLKAM sent interracial groups to desegregate several bars near the campus that students frequented. All of the businesses refused to serve them.¹⁸

Perhaps the most substantial instance of interracial cooperation came in the summer of 1968, when black businessman Joe Delpit ran for a seat on the City-Parish

¹⁷“4 Shots Fired at Home of NAACP Official,” *Morning Advocate*, April 12, 1968, 9A; Monthly Report, April 15, 1968, Field Director's Papers.

¹⁸“LA Flags Fly at Half Mast, But Not Without Controversy,” *Morning Advocate*, April 6, 1968, 1; “Mixed LSU Student Units Denied Service in 8 Bars,” *Morning Advocate*, May 15 1968, 5A; John McNeese, interview by author, July 15, 1992, tape recording, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 38-50; Leo Hamilton, interview, August 21, 1993, 43-48.

Council. Liberals, accommodationists, and white leaders supported him and publicly urged whites to vote for him. In an August 14, 1968, advertisement, his white supporters declared that since blacks made up one-third of the city's population, they deserved representation on the council.¹⁹

Delpit was a candidate whom both whites and blacks could support. As a member of the biracial committee, a business owner, a civic leader, and "a voice of progress within the framework of law and order," he fit the white community's definition of a black leader and, at the same time, actively campaigned for the white vote. Yet Delpit attracted support from the black community as well. He spoke out for improved conditions and increased job opportunities for residents of Baton Rouge's inner city neighborhoods. He described himself as a logical choice for councilman. "As a businessman and a lifelong resident of Baton Rouge," Delpit declared, "I have a personal investment in the city, and I have established a reputation of fiscal integrity and civic consciousness." He told potential voters that he could serve as a liaison between the black and white communities and advocated maintaining continuous industrial expansion. He stated:

Large industries are increasingly concerned with the manner in which local governments deal with the problems of race and urbanization. . . . As a businessman, I am familiar with the interests of commercial enterprise. I know if we are to "sell" industry on the potential of our city, then we must be united in our efforts to improve the environment of Baton Rouge.

¹⁹"White Voters Support a Negro Candidate," *Morning Advocate*, August 14, 1968, 13A; "75,000 People Need One Voice," *State-Times*, August 16, 1968, 17A (advertisement).

Delpit's message of stability and harmony proved attractive to whites, who had been saying the same thing for two decades, and in the primary, he received 12,230 votes, running second in a field of seven. Although segregationists described Delpit's success as a testament to the power of the "Negro Bloc Vote," whites cast 8,149 of the votes that made him a close second in the race. He easily won a spot on the council in the September runoff.²⁰

Delpit's election brought with it advances for black Baton Rougeans and convinced many World War II activists to abandon the movement because these advances marked the fulfillment of the last of the goals that they had established in 1945. After Delpit's election, white officials began appointing African Americans to jobs in city-parish government. In February 1969, the Recreation and Parks Commission named Willie Spooner as its first black member. A racial diplomat, Spooner worked as a school teacher and a coach in East Baton Rouge Parish and held a bachelor's degree from Southern and a master's from the University of Wisconsin. He belonged to the Prince Hall Masons and the Negro Chamber of Commerce and had played an active role in the recreation commission's youth programs. White leaders also received praise from African Americans for another appointment. In early 1969, the City-Parish Council hired Johnnie Jones as an assistant city-parish attorney. By making

²⁰Ibid.; "Council Candidates Release Formal Campaign Statements," *Morning Advocate*, July 18, 1968, 7C; "50-60% BR Voter Turnout Expected," *State-Times*, August 17, 1968, 1; "Council Seats Garnered," *Morning Advocate*, August 18, 1968, 1; "Dumas Wins Demo Mayor Race Easily," *State-Times*, August 19, 1968, 1; "BR Negroes Utilize Vote-Splitting Techniques to Make Power Effective," *Morning Advocate*, August 21, 1968, 6C; "Councilmen in Runoff Lose," *Morning Advocate*, September 29, 1968, 1; "Over 12,000 Voters Support Negro Candidate," *Morning Advocate*, September 27, 1968, 9B.

him a public employee, however, white leaders consciously and effectively silenced one of the community's most vocal and well-respected civil rights activists. Nevertheless, after Delpit's election and Jones's appointment, most African Americans believed that they now had a voice in city-parish government and abandoned marches and demonstrations to work within the system for change.²¹

As white and black leaders formed alliances, the harassment of civil rights activists by segregationists intensified in early 1969 when the NAACP, still under the control of the working-class activists, launched a "total community action program." The organization called for boycotts and picketing of all businesses that refused to hire black employees. In February, NAACP President Joseph Melanson announced that African Americans would boycott Schlitz Beer, the Beer Industry League, and A. & P. Supermarkets for discriminating against African-American distributors. Because of the threat of economic reprisals, George F. Brown of the League phoned NAACP Executive Board Member J. J. Sims, a local bar owner with a criminal record, to ask for a meeting. Sims and Melanson met with Brown once. Melanson, Sims recalled, told him that the encounter seemed like a setup and refused to meet with Brown again. However, the beer industry representative badgered the NAACP president and Sims into getting together another time. At that meeting, Brown handed Sims a paper bag filled with \$12,000 and told him to use the money to buy enough votes on the NAACP executive board to cancel the boycott. Shortly after the exchange, the police arrested

²¹"Willie Spooner Named to Recreation and Park Commission by Council," *News Leader*, March 2, 1969, 1; "Council to Meet Saturday to Choose Parish Attorney," *Morning Advocate* March 1, 1969, 9C; "Keogh is Given Job as Parish Attorney," *Morning Advocate*, March 2, 1969, 1.

Sims and Melanson and charged them with extortion. The warrants for their arrest had been written before Sims even received the money. Several days later, a grand jury also indicted Pearl George for taking part in the scheme.²²

Although Sims did indeed accept the \$12,000, members of the Baton Rouge NAACP immediately suspected a set up. Emmitt Douglas believed that Pitcher and the police department used Sims to entrap Melanson and to discredit the NAACP. Gloster Current hypothesized that Pitcher pressured Sims into taking part in the extortion scheme. Showing his disdain for the working-class activists who dominated the Baton Rouge branch, Current added that he doubted George played any role in the plot because of "her militancy and limited intelligence."²³

The arrests of the NAACP officials divided the activists and moderate black leaders, which included racial diplomats and World War II activists. The executive board, which was more conservative than Melanson, named Dr. D'Orsay Bryant, a local gynecologist, as his replacement. Over Current's objection, the board obtained evidence in the extortion case from District Attorney Pitcher before voting seven to six not to pay for Melanson's legal representation but to fund George's defense if she used an attorney

²²Harvey Britton to Joseph Melanson, February 3, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 5, folder 7; "NAACP Working to Help Get Jobs in Local Area," *News Leader*, February 9, 1969, 1.

²³Chronological Report of Events Leading to the Baton Rouge Grand Jury's Indictment of Three Officers of the Baton Rouge NAACP for Extortion, Field Director's Papers, box 34, folder 7; Minutes of the Baton Rouge Branch, February 28, 1969, *ibid.*; "NAACP Officials in BR Arrested on Extortion Charge, Released on Bond," *News Leader*, March 2, 1969, 1; Minutes of the Baton Rouge Chapter, March 13, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 34, folder 7; Monthly Report, March 13, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 35, folder 8.

of its choice. She refused. The board believed that, although the ousted president probably did not take part in the plan, he knew about it beforehand.²⁴

Days after the NAACP extortion scandal, Black Power activists and racial diplomats clashed on the campus of Southern University. On April 1, students staged a sit-in in the office of the Dean of Student Affairs Martin Harvey. They presented him with a list of demands that included, besides his own resignation, repairing campus streets and naming them after African Americans, improving the physical plant, and ending compulsory ROTC. Unlike LSU, which operated under the direction of an autonomous board of supervisors made up of members who, for the most part, possessed strong ties to the university, the State Board of Education, composed entirely of white political appointees, controlled Southern. It rarely had the best interest of the university at heart. For the Black Power activists, having a white-controlled body in charge of an African-American institution was unacceptable, and they demanded that blacks, preferably those who agreed with their ideology, should govern the university. Southern's President Leon Netterville, who had replaced Felton Clark after his retirement in 1968, attributed the tension on his campus to a combination of anti-Vietnam War sentiment and a frustration with the current state of race relations in Baton Rouge.²⁵

²⁴"NAACP Officers Held in Jail in BR Following Extortion Indictment," March 16, 1969, *News Leader*, 1; Gloster Current to Emmitt Douglas, March 25, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 35, folder 8.

²⁵Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 429-431; "SU Students Abandon Sit-In With Naming of Interim Group," *Morning Advocate*, April 2, 1969, 9A.

The anger of the students rose to the surface on May 12 when two false rumors about white violence against African Americans circulated around campus. One claimed that police officers had arrested an African-American picketer for firing a gun into the air. The second rumor alleged that a white man had assaulted a black girl in a local café. Although false, both rumors sent Southern's student body into an uproar. They seized control of the campus and built a barricade across its entrance. Netterville called the sheriff's department and asked it to remove the barricade. Fearing that violence would erupt, the sheriff immediately dispatched deputies to Southern. When they arrived, the furious students hurled rocks at the deputies. In response, the officers threw tear gas canisters into the crowd. Following this show of force, the students agreed to meet with sheriff's officials to discuss a peaceful end to the confrontation. During the meeting, deputies removed the barricades, but the conference did little to ease racial tensions on campus. In fact, while Black Power leaders and the deputies met, three hundred students and law enforcement officers engaged in a face-off at the campus' entrance. Fearing that a full-scale riot might break out, Governor John McKeithen sent in the National Guard and called the state legislature into a special session to allocate \$100,000 to reinforce security at Southern.²⁶

McKeithen even went to Southern to talk to students and promised to address their concerns. While there he also warned them that he would not allow Southern's

²⁶“Southern Univ. Students Demonstrate on Campus, Prexy Gives Statement,” *News Leader*, May 18, 1969, 1; Monthly Report, May 19, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 6, folder 5; John Morris, “Students Barricade SU Campus,” *Morning Advocate*, May 12, 1969, 4A; “SU Unrest Blamed on Untrue Rumors,” *Morning Advocate*, May 13, 1969, 1.

students to imitate their counterparts at Cornell, where black students had seized control of a campus building. Because of the massive force amassed against them, the students called off their protests and returned to classes. McKeithen made some token improvements to Southern's campus, including resurfacing some streets on campus and erecting highway signs directing motorists to the university. State officials, however, continued to ignore the real needs of the university, which included faculty pay raises and funds for the repair and construction of buildings on campus. The governor's interest in Southern soon waned, but the anger and frustration of the Black Power activists remained.²⁷

In the summer of 1969, the fury of the young activists resurfaced when police officers shot and killed two young black crime suspects. Even African Americans who usually opposed the activists were incensed by the deaths of the young suspects, and their deaths united the black community. Baton Rouge's police department had a long history of racism and brutality, and white officers had harassed most African Americans, even racial diplomats. As noted in chapter one, during World War II, policemen chased a suspect into a drugstore owned by black leaders, Leo and George Butler, and beat and arrested several people. World War II activist, Dupuy Anderson was a frequent target of policemen. Because his wife looked white, officers frequently

²⁷Anderson, interview by Maxine Crump, December 8, 1993, 16-18; Jones, interview, December 4, 1993, 110-115; "Calm is Restored on Campus of SU," *Morning Advocate*, May 15, 1969, 1; "Calm Prevails at SU After Governor Meet," *Morning Advocate*, May 15, 1969, 1; Cushing Strout and David I. Grossvogel, eds., *Divided We Stand: Reflections on the Crisis at Cornell* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970), 15-41; "Governor McKeithen Tours Southern University," *Morning Advocate*, May 20, 1969, 10A.

stopped the two of them when they traveled together. Once, a member of the force even arrested Anderson for talking to her. Law enforcement officials also harassed other activists. They frequently stopped Johnnie Jones for traffic violations that he did not commit and used the same ploy against Jelks. In the late 1960s, the brutality of the city's white police officers had increased dramatically. No longer were officers merely harassing African Americans; they were also killing them. Beginning in 1967, officers shot and killed at least one young black male suspect each year. This increase in violence marked the last stand for organized segregation in Baton Rouge. The police force was the final area in which white leaders had made no concessions to African Americans. Although in 1963 they agreed to hire black officers, the mayor and the city-parish council required that the police force be internally segregated. Whites had white partners, and blacks had black ones. In addition, city officials prohibited African Americans from patrolling in white neighborhoods and from arresting white suspects. Moreover, the police force was one of the few remaining areas within the white establishment dominated by segregationists. The presence of racist officers in the department undercut the interracial cooperation that was developing in Baton Rouge.²⁸

Following the first incident of deadly force in 1967, Mayor-President Woody Dumas attempted to appease African Americans who were angered by the fact that the officer shot an unarmed suspect in the back. He consulted with the biracial committee and then ordered the integration of patrol cars and promised to transfer black officers to the motorcycle squad. Dumas feared that the types of riots that occurred in Detroit and

²⁸Supplementary Monthly Report, July 2, 1967, Field Director's Papers, box 2, folder 9; Harvey Britton to Gloster Current, July 26, 1967, *ibid.*;

Newark earlier that year would take place in Baton Rouge, if the police force remained segregated. By having integrated patrols, "there will be less chance for inflammatory situations and charges of police brutality," he contended. Dumas hoped that the integration of the patrol cars and the motorcycle units would "give some of the [black] members of the biracial committee more stature with their people" and would keep "the leadership of that community in responsible hands." In 1967, the police force employed 12 African-American officers and 259 whites. Therefore, the desegregation order would only affect a few white policemen, and Dumas promised that the pairing of blacks and whites would be voluntary.²⁹

White officers immediately denounced the mayor's decree and threatened to resign if ordered to partner with African Americans. "We are already integrated," one white policeman complained. "What more do they want? Where will this stop?" Another argued that if patrols were integrated, recruiting new officers would be difficult. Segregationist reaction paralleled that of the officers; a group of segregationists formed the Baton Rouge Support Your Local Police Committee. The organization's chairman, M. A. "Mike" Tassin, claimed that Dumas's order grew out of the demands of a "prejudiced, illegally constituted, appointed biracial committee." He accused the mayor of ordering police officers not to arrest African-American protesters because he feared their arrests might incite a riot. Segregationists also flooded city council members with angry phone calls. In response, Councilman Robert T. Clegg issued a statement declaring that the mayor's order was an administrative decision and

²⁹"Mixing Moves Bared," *State-Times*, August 12, 1967.

had not received the council's approval. Faced with police and segregationist opposition, Dumas rescinded his decree.³⁰

The mayor's refusal to follow through with the police desegregation order naturally angered the black community, but it also drew a negative response from white liberals. Two organizations, the Council on Human Relations and the Louisiana Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (LCLU) stepped in to fill the void left by departure of the AFSC. After the passage of the Civil and Voting Right Act, the American Friends Service Committee shifted its attention away from the civil rights movement and launched an anti-Vietnam war protest. First organized in the mid 1950s, the Baton Rouge chapter of the Council on Human Relations worked behind the scenes until the mid 1960s, when its members accompanied African Americans as they attempted to desegregate several local restaurants. After taking a stand on the school desegregation issue in the late 1950s, the LCLU had floundered after the departure of McNeir. In the mid 1960s, the organization elected LSU English Professor Herbert Rothschild as its president, and he revitalized the group. Under him, the LCLU took part not only in civil rights activities but also pushed for an end to the war in Vietnam. In early 1968, Rothschild warned Dumas that if he failed to end police brutality and racism within the police department racial violence would erupt in the city. He complained that white officers used "widespread, undisguised racial prejudice" in

³⁰"Mayor Restudying Integration Order," *State-Times*, August 14, 1967, 1; "Police Mixing Moves Bared," *State-Times*, August 12, 1967, 1; "Chairman Calls Special Meet of BR Police," *State-Times*, August 16, 1967, 11F; "Mayor Restudying Integration Order," *State-Times*, August 14, 1967, 1.

dealing with black citizens and addressed them as “nigger” and “boy.” He warned the mayor that this continued humiliation would lead to violence.³¹

The possibility of a race riot in Baton Rouge intensified in early 1968 when police officers shot A. C. Scott in the head for resisting arrest. Scott happened to be kneeling on his front porch and surrendering when the policeman shot him. A grand jury cleared the officer of all wrongdoing, and he returned to active duty. In another incident, police stopped John Lee Jackson, forced him out of his car, handcuffed him, and sprayed him with mace for being “drunk and wild.” Yet the police report stated that Jackson was sober at the time of his arrest. The LCLU urged Dumas to investigate these incidents, to hire more black officers, and to establish a zero-tolerance policy regarding the use of derogatory terms when addressing African Americans. The NAACP also complained to the mayor and the city council about police practices and described Baton Rouge as “one of the most segregated cities in the state.” Its members held that the community’s racist police force targeted African Americans for brutal treatment and arrest even if there was no proof that they had committed a crime.³²

The LCLU’s charges brought no changes in police policy, and, in the summer of 1969, the NAACP asked Police Chief Eddie Bauer to remove white officers from beats in black neighborhoods until African Americans could either patrol white areas of the

³¹Williams, interview by Glenda Stevens; Herbert Rothschild to W. W. Dumas, ca. February 1968, American Civil Liberties Union Papers, box 3, Louisiana Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (hereafter cited as ACLU Papers).

³²Herbert Rothschild to Eddie Bauer, February 15, 1968, *ibid.*; Press Release, n.d., Field Director’s Papers, box 42, folder 8.

city or partner with whites. Bauer ignored its demand. On June 30, the organization again asked Dumas and Bauer to end "lily white" patrols. Again, the city dismissed the request. The refusal of white leaders to address the racism of white officers and the internal segregation of the police force coincided with another fatal shooting of a young black burglary suspect by white officers. The policeman who fired the shots claimed Lionel Hughes, a twenty-year-old, ran when they ordered him to stop. One officer shot him twice in the back. After the shooting, they discovered that he held a knife in his hand. Hughes was about fifty feet from the officers when he fell, but the policemen claimed that they feared the suspect would throw the knife at them if they failed to act. Bauer refused to suspend the officer who shot Hughes despite Councilman Delpit's warning that the incident created unrest in the black community. On July 23, an all-white grand jury failed to indict the shooter. The verdict angered the black community and heightened racial tensions in the city.³³

Most African Americans, regardless of social class, had, at some time, been harassed by the police, and they wanted city officials to reform the force. On July 25, two days after the grand jury ruling, a police officer shot and killed still another black burglary suspect, seventeen-year-old James Oliney, as he attempted to flee. As in the Hughes incident, officers shot the young suspect in the back. Chief of Detectives J. O.

³³Harvey Britton to Joseph Melanson, February 3, 1969, *ibid.*; "NAACP Leader Requests Change by City Police," *News Leader*, July 4, 1969, 1; "NAACP Asks Integration of Police Force," *Morning Advocate*, July 8, 1969, 4A; "BR Suspect Fatally Shot by Police," *Morning Advocate*, July 7, 1969, 1; "Police, Doctor Agree on Shot," *State-Times*, July 8, 1969, 1; "Delpit Asks Council Study of Shooting," *Morning Advocate*, July 10, 1969, 1; "Officer Unable to Give Answer," *State-Times*, July 9, 1969, 1; "Jury Doesn't Indict Here in Slaying," *Morning Advocate*, July 24, 1969, 1.

Dunigan claimed that Oliney, who had a knife in his hand, made an 180-degree turn as he attempted to slash the officer who shot him.³⁴ The day after Oliney's death, a group of young African Americans picketed the police station, while older members of the community, including racial diplomats and World War II activists, planned to take part in a NAACP-sponsored protest march to the city hall. Fearing that violence would erupt, Woody Dumas immediately met with the biracial committee and Emmitt Douglas, the NAACP's State Conference president, to discuss the situation. The mayor urged all Baton Rougeans to remain calm and promised to keep the police away from the march that would go from the grounds of McKinley High School, the site of the shooting, to the Municipal Building for a rally. When the marchers reached the city hall, Douglas addressed them. He called for equal justice for African Americans and urged the black citizens of Baton Rouge to protect themselves against police attacks. D'Orsay Bryant told the crowd that the NAACP eschewed violence, but the next speaker, twenty-two-year-old Jerry Johnson, voiced a different opinion. "It's hot today," Johnson told the crowd, "but tonight it's gonna be a little hotter. . . . I'm sure gonna fill my coke bottle with gasoline." Bryant later admitted that he asked Johnson to speak to show Dumas and Bauer the extent of the anger and frustration among young blacks.³⁵

³⁴"Officer Kills Young Negro During Chase," *Morning Advocate*, July 26, 1969, 1.

³⁵"Negroes Hold Protest Rally, Picket Police," *State-Times*, July 27, 1969, 1; "Negroes Picket BR Police," *Morning Advocate*, July 27, 1969, 1.

The impassioned speeches fueled the already considerable anger of the young working-class activists over the police shootings. As the meeting broke up, a group of them headed to the downtown business district and began attacking the white people that they encountered. One group even fired shots at a car carrying five whites. Another small mob pulled a delivery man out of his truck when he stopped to let them cross the street. They kicked and punched him and stole \$25 from his wallet. Others beat two pedestrians on Third Street, sending both men to the hospital. After dark, three major fires broke out. One destroyed a department store in the heart of a black neighborhood.³⁶

Dumas, in an attempt to forestall full-scale rioting, declared a state of emergency and ordered a strict curfew to begin at dusk. Governor McKeithen mobilized the National Guard and sent more than seven hundred guardsmen with bayonet-tipped rifles to patrol the streets of Baton Rouge. The mayor also turned to black and white leaders for help. He asked Pat Collier, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and T. J. Jemison to appear on television to appeal for calm. Collier begged the white community to remain calm and enjoyed some success. He assured businessmen and plant managers that city and state officials would protect their properties and quickly reestablish law and order. Dumas believed that Jemison could convince the angry youths to stop rioting, but the Black Power activists viewed Jemison as an Uncle Tom and refused to listen to him. When the spots began running, some activists made

³⁶Ibid.

threatening phone calls to him. Fearing that the callers would harm the minister, Dumas stopped running the advertisements.³⁷

Young African Americans not only refused to listen to Jemison's pleas; they ignored the curfew. A crowd of several hundred gathered near the burning department store at 9 p.m., hours after the curfew began, but scattered when police arrived. That evening, officers arrested fifty curfew violators ranging in age from seventeen to thirty-two. They also arrested Jerry Johnson and charged him with inciting a riot.³⁸

The next day, Douglas blamed Dumas for the violence. He claimed that the mayor promised to suspend the policeman but then backed down. The NAACP state president added that in his July 29 meeting with Dumas and the two other black leaders, he agreed to attempt to quiet the black community in exchange for a promise that Bauer would suspend the officer. By backing away from his vow, Douglas added, Dumas proved to African-American activists that white leaders could not be trusted to keep their word and that the police had free rein to kill black suspects.³⁹

After two nights of curfew and unrest, calm returned to the city, and McKeithen sent the National Guard home. Racial tension remained high, however. In a statement to

³⁷"Whites Beaten on Third Street," *Morning Advocate*, July 31, 1969, 1; "Guard, Lawmen Patrol City in Strict Curfew," *Morning Advocate*, August 1, 1969, 1; "Curfew is Continued by Dumas," *State-Times*, August 1, 1969, 1; "Curfew is Lifted, Guard Go Home," *State-Times*, August 2, 1969, 1; "BR Returns to Normal Saturday," *Morning Advocate*, August 3, 1969, 1.

³⁸*Ibid.*; "City is Quieter as Second Night of Curfew Ends," *Morning Advocate*, August 2, 1969, 1.

³⁹"Curfew is Lifted, Guard Go Home," *State-Times*, August 2, 1969, 1; "City is Quieter As Second Night of Curfew Ends," *Morning Advocate*, August 2, 1969, 1.

the *Morning Advocate*, Joe Delpit blamed Dumas and the police for the unrest. He claimed that much of the anger arose from the wholesale arrest of African Americans for violating the curfew and told the paper that officers even arrested blacks who were sitting on their front porches or standing in their own yards for being out after dark. During the state of emergency, the councilman had created a citizens' patrol, and he bragged that his group helped to keep the number of arrests down by convincing policemen to release some detainees.⁴⁰

While African Americans condemned the actions of the police officers, many whites, especially segregationists, supported them. More than eight hundred whites signed a petition that claimed pandemonium would prevail if the officers were not allowed to do their jobs. "We believe that local police officers are our first and last line of defense against crime, anarchy, and insurrection," the petition read. "A strong, armed, and independent local police force is an impassible barrier to the advance of communism."⁴¹

The refusal of white leaders to address the police force's problems bolstered the view of the black community. On August 5, the NAACP threatened to launch a selective buying campaign aimed at white-owned businesses throughout the city unless Bauer and white leaders immediately suspended the officer who shot Oliney, dropped the charges against Johnson, and transferred segregationist officers out of black

⁴⁰"BR Returns to Normal Saturday," *Morning Advocate*, August 3, 1969.

⁴¹"Criminals Must be Punished or Anarchy Will Prevail," *Morning Advocate*, September 2, 1969, 18A.

neighborhoods.⁴² The NAACP also called for an end to police brutality and better training of officers. Its president D'Orsay Bryant urged African Americans to purchase only the bare necessities from white merchants. He promised that young blacks would patrol business districts to "remind" African Americans to comply with the campaign. He warned whites that, "The embers of unrest still smolder here, awaiting only another slaying incident or similarly provocative catalyst to ignite them."⁴³

Dumas condemned the selective buying campaign. "I was rather disappointed in the NAACP move. I felt people were working rather closely together. The progress of race relations in this city has been terrific," he told his constituents. He cited Delpit's election and Jones' appointment as examples of this progress and added that during his term the city parish had employed 451 black workers — 103 as garbage men. Dumas condemned the NAACP for placing economic pressure on the city's merchants when he and Chief Bauer were responsible for the police force. Dumas apparently did not understand that appointing a few upper- and middle-class blacks to civil boards and hiring a few hundred black workers meant little to a community terrorized by racist policemen. The continued refusal of Dumas and Bauer to take any action against the

⁴²The NAACP named one of the police officers that they wanted removed from patrols in black neighborhoods — Uniform Patrol Division head Major R. S. Trigg, Jr. Bryant referred to Trigg as the "catalyst which fires the seed of racism within the police department."

⁴³"Negro Group is Launching 'Selective Buying' Here," *Morning Advocate*, August 6, 1969, 1; "NAACP Asks Negroes to Cut Buying," *State-Times*, August 6, 1969, 1; D'Orsay Bryant to Friend, August 8, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 34, folder 7.

offending officers kept the racial tension in the city high and the black community united.⁴⁴

The selective buying campaign and the grand jury investigation into Oliney's death both began on August 6. Approximately 150 picketers gathered outside Church's Fried Chicken in an African-American neighborhood near the LSU campus. When officers tried to break it up, picketers responded with violence. One picketer hit a policeman and others threw rocks and a piece of lumber at his partners. To prevent a riot, Bauer ordered his officers to leave the area without arresting their attackers, but later he sent a large, heavily armed group into the area to break up the protest. The NAACP's selective buying campaign was incredibly effective. Within a week, the economic pressure forced two white-owned grocery stores in black neighborhoods to close. "I've had it. I haven't done a penny's worth of business in two days," declared Edward Haley, the owner of one of the businesses. The other owner claimed that black militants intimidated his customers and kept them away from his store.⁴⁵

Because of the selective buying campaign and its threat to the city's economy, accommodationists again stepped into the civil rights melee. On August 7, more than one hundred business and professional leaders represented by banker Charles McCoy met with Dumas to discuss ways to end the campaign and to ease racial tension. They also issued a public statement calling for the return of law and order. The

⁴⁴"Negro Group is Launching 'Selective' Buying Here," *Morning Advocate*, August 6, 1969, 1.

⁴⁵"No Arrests Follow Confrontation Here," *Morning Advocate*, August 7, 1969, 1; "Racial Difficulties Still Simmer in BR," *State-Times*, August 7, 1969, 1; "Boycott Closes White-Owned Groceries Here," *Morning Advocate*, August 10, 1969, 8A.

accommodationists declared their support for the police department but denounced the racism and police brutality perpetrated by some of its officers. "Every man who is on a police force has the duty to comply with the law and respect the rights of every person with whom he deals without regard of race or color," the statement read.⁴⁶

White liberals soundly condemned the actions of the police and called for sweeping reforms. They wanted African Americans to enjoy the same treatment and opportunities enjoyed by white citizens. In a statement issued on the same day as that of the accommodationists, the Council on Human Relations, with its one hundred fifty members, proclaimed, "We wish to express our deep convictions that the lives of black persons are sacred, and that we cannot endorse the unnecessary taking of life in the defense of property." The statement added that the police could enforce the law without using deadly force. The Council also circulated a petition that declared, "The safety of our city depends not only on the presence of the police, but also upon their self-discipline and sense of justice. It is our conviction that the city government must recognize in a public and official way the common humanity of our citizens." Five hundred black and white Baton Rougeans signed the statement, and an integrated group, which included LSU professor and Council on Human Relations member Paul Burns and African-American minister Charles Smith, presented the petition to Dumas.⁴⁷

⁴⁶"BR Leaders Cite Rights of Citizens," *State-Times*, August 7, 1969, 1; "Picketing Now Shows Slowdown," *Morning Advocate*, August 8, 1969, 1.

⁴⁷Dreger, interview by Betty Morse, 13; "Citizens File an Open Letter," *Morning Advocate*, August 9, 1969, 9A.

Segregationists, in contrast, again expressed their unwavering support for the police department. On August 11, twenty members of Citizens for Law and Order met with Dumas. Its president, Charles Macmurdo, told the mayor that his group wanted the police to enforce the law and to be given complete authority to carry out their duties. He claimed that a "communist-inspired plan to disarm the police" and to demoralize police officers existed in Baton Rouge. He added that the so-called communist plan used charges of police brutality to undermine the authority of the city's law enforcement agencies.⁴⁸

On August 12, the grand jury hearing the case against Oliney's killer refused to indict the officer. Instead, at District Attorney Pitcher's request, it handed down an indictment against Emmitt Douglas for inciting a riot. Douglas' indictment harkened back to the district attorney's early 1960s policy of using the legal system to persecute activists. D'Orsay Bryant called the charge, "a cold, calculated political move on the part of Sargent Pitcher." In fact, the district attorney did carefully craft the charge against Douglas and in it claimed that the activist's speech at the July 31 rally set off a chain of events that culminated in rioting, arson, the selective buying campaign, and the death of a picketer.⁴⁹ To support the charges against Douglas, Pitcher alleged that the

⁴⁸"Law, Order To Be First, Says Dumas," *Morning Advocate*, August 12, 1969, 1; "BR: Lawmen Agree to Remain on Duty," *State-Times*, August 11, 1969, 1.

⁴⁹On August 9, a group of young picketers attacked a sixty-seven-year-old black man, Louis Mosely, for refusing to take part in the selective buying campaign. During the attack, Mosely fired a round from his .22 caliber pistol and killed one of his attackers. "Facility Here is Connected to Picketing," *Morning Advocate*, August 10, 1969, 1; "21-Year-Old Youth Shot to Death in Picketing," *News Leader*, August 17, 1969, 1.

NAACP leader told the crowd, "I have been preaching peace for eleven years. I no longer preach peace. We want an eye for an eye, a life for a life. Go out and do your thing." At the time of the rally, none of the city's newspapers reported this incendiary statement. Douglas condemned the grand jury and Pitcher: "I believe the indictment coming from an all-white jury is not worth the paper its written on." He added that the July 31 rally was peaceful and recalled that to help prevent violence, he had confiscated nineteen knives and four pistols from participants. In 1971, a state court convicted Douglas, despite testimony by white and black witnesses who declared that the civil rights leader worked for peace and not violence. In the end, Judge Donovan Parker fined him \$350 and gave him a three month-suspended sentence. Jerry Johnson, who had called for violence at the July 31 rally, received a six-month jail term.⁵⁰

Pitcher's prosecution of Douglas further antagonized the city's black population but also strengthened the ties between moderate blacks and white liberals. In 1969 moderate activists and white liberals circulated a recall petition to remove Pitcher from office. "This has been a wonderful experience for me. This is the first time we have been able to get the white community concerned about the role it should play," Douglas said. "More intelligent whites are expressing themselves." These "intelligent" whites for the most part belonged to the Council on Human Relations and the LCLU. The

⁵⁰"Officers Freed in BR Killing; Negro Indicted," *Morning Advocate*, August 19, 1969, 1; "NAACP President Indicted by BR Grand Jury, Denies Charge of Inciting Riot," *News Leader*, August 24, 1969, 1; Summer Report, June 14 - September 15, 1969, Field Director's Papers, box 7, folder 2; "Sentencing of NAACP Head Douglas Delayed by Judge," *News Leader*, June 13, 1971, 1; "State NAACP President if Given a Suspended Sentence," *News Leader*, June 20, 1971, 1.

recall petition failed to garner enough signatures to oust the district attorney, but it succeeded in strengthening the alliance between moderate blacks and liberals.⁵¹

After the grand jury ruling against Douglas in August 1969, Dumas took an even harder line against the Black Power activists. "Police officers no longer will take abuse and vilification from anyone. If there are any doubts in your mind that I don't mean what I say, just try me," he announced. The city's only African-American newspaper, the *News Leader*, reported that Dumas threatened to shoot anyone caught looting. On the night of the grand jury ruling, police officers stopped a black doctor on his way to the hospital to answer an emergency call. They aimed their guns at the physician and "subjected him to a humiliating search on a public street causing a crowd to gather." The next evening officers forcefully removed a college student from a downtown movie theater and searched him in the lobby without showing proper cause.⁵²

These incidents infuriated African Americans and their white supporters, and several of them appeared before the September City-Parish Council meeting to express their displeasure with the police force. Numerous speakers described the police officers as racist, discourteous, and brutal and asked the council to take steps to rectify the situation. World War II activists Raymond Scott and Dupuy Anderson told the council that the black community supported law and order as much as the white community but

⁵¹"NAACP Set to Attempt D. A. Recall," *Morning Advocate*, August 17, 1969, 1; "Recall of EBR Parish DA to be Sought by NAACP," *News Leader*, August 24, 1969, 1; "Human Relations Council Seeks Federal Marshals," *ibid.*

⁵²"Officer Freed in BR Killing; Negro Indicted," *Morning Advocate*, August 13, 1969, 1; "Grand Jury Indicts State NAACP Leader," *State-Times*, August 13, 1969, 1; "Human Relations Council Seeks Federal Marshals," *News Leader*, August 24, 1969, 1.

added that they also wanted justice. Working-class activist Jerry Johnson complained, "The major problem with the city police department is it seems that they treat us like we are some type of beast." LSU professor and Council on Human Relations President Ralph Dreger echoed Johnson: "There are many white people who feel a black life is not worth as much as a white life is." The city-parish council still refused to take action against the police force.⁵³

Three days after the September 1969 city-parish council meeting, a Baton Rouge police officer killed yet another black suspect. The officer shot eighteen-year-old John David Reed in the back as he ran from the scene of a crime but claimed that he aimed for the young man's legs. After Reed's death, white officials realized that racial tension in the city remained incredibly high and feared that large-scale rioting would erupt in the city if they failed to take action against the officer. Dumas and police officials decided to change police policy to prevent more rioting. Although he believed that Bryant and Douglas brainwashed "respectable and responsible Negro leaders," Sargent Pitcher urged the mayor and the chief to take some action to preserve the standing of the racial diplomats within the black community. He accused the NAACP leaders of instilling the idea in the minds of the black masses that police officers were racists who used unnecessary force in the apprehension of suspects. Pitcher also claimed that the "reputable" African-American leaders supported Bryant and Douglas in order to defend "their right to be classified as leaders with the rank-and-file Negro

⁵³"Police Relations With Negroes Termed Good by Chief of City," *Morning Advocate*, August 23, 1969, 8B; "Negroes Vent Their Feelings Here at Meet with City-Parish Council," *Morning Advocate*, September 10, 1969, 15C.

community.”⁵⁴ He urged Bauer to tell his officers to deploy their weapons only in extreme emergencies and not to use them to apprehend individuals suspected of committing misdemeanors unless attacked or threatened. Heeding Pitcher’s advice and fearing a repeat of the demonstration that followed Oliney’s death, Bauer, Dumas, and Sheriff Clemmons adopted a new policy that required the immediate suspension of any officer who used deadly force and applied it to the officer who shot Reed.⁵⁵

The revised rules appeased the racial diplomats and World War II activists but did little to ease the anger of Black Power activists. At a NAACP-sponsored rally following Reed’s death, several activists walked out when Douglas and Bryant invited white reporters to attend. Ironically, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss black unity. It ended when a Black Power activist tried to hit a white reporter. To insure the reporters’ safety, Douglas and the other organizers escorted them to their automobiles. The militancy and proclivity toward violence of the young men and women of the Black Power movement frightened the older activists. After events in Watts, Detroit,

⁵⁴Pitcher listed Leon Netterville, T. J. Jemison, and Horatio Thompson as “respectable leaders.”

⁵⁵Sargent Pitcher to Eddie Bauer, September 16, 1969, Field Director’s Papers, box 34, folder 8; “BR Policeman Shoots, Kills Fleeing Suspect,” *Morning Advocate*, September 14, 1969, 1; “BR Policeman Shoots, Kills Fleeing Suspect,” *State-Times*, September 14, 1969, 1; “Chief Relieves Policeman,” *State-Times*, September 15, 1969, 1; “Officer is Relieved of Duty,” *Morning Advocate*, September 15, 1969, 1; “Racial Situation Calm, Report Police Agencies,” *Morning Advocate*, September 16, 1969, 14A.

and Newark, they realized that destroying white-owned businesses in the black community actually hurt African Americans because whites would not rebuild.⁵⁶

The reaction of Black Power activists to white reporters and their denunciation of the new police policy on deadly force renewed the split between the young activists and the more moderate black majority. This division became apparent in 1972 when two more blatant incidents of lethal force by police officers against African Americans occurred. The first grew out of a visit to Baton Rouge by a group of Black Muslims. Not associated with the local chapter of the Nation of Islam, the outside group held a rally at the Masonic Temple Building on January 7 and promised to "deliver the city back to the black people." Several local African Americans told them, "We never lost it." Robert Williams, a Black Power activist and the law partner of civil rights attorney Murphy Bell, attended the meeting but left before it ended because the Muslims "appeared to be talking rhetoric with no real desire to 'deal with honkies.'" In fact, their message attracted only young African Americans mostly teenagers who later staged protests at their high schools.⁵⁷

On January 10 the Muslims assembled outside the Masonic Temple Building and a crowd of more than two hundred young African Americans gathered to listen to

⁵⁶"NAACP Leaders Request Unity, Announce Plan," *Morning Advocate*, September 18, 1969, 1; "NAACP Branch Issues Call for Unity, Announces Plan," *News Leader*, September 28, 1969, 1.

⁵⁷Harvey Britton to Nathaniel Jones, February 28, 1972, Field Director's Papers, box 13, folder 2; "Eight Downed in BR Flareup," *State-Times*, January 10, 1972, 1; "Relation Seen with Unrest at McKinley," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1972, 1; "School Troubles, Local Violence Connection Denied," *State-Times*, January 11, 1972, 1; "2 Teachers Attacked at BR School," *Morning Advocate*, January 12, 1972, 1; "Black Says Muslims Met by Disbelief," *Morning Advocate*, January 14, 1972, 1.

their message. According to bystanders and businessmen in the area, the Muslims stirred up the crowd. Averill Aucoin, the white owner of Owl Drug Store, which was located near the rally, reported that black teenagers entered his store shortly after the speeches ended and began throwing merchandise on the floor and breaking items. When they left, he called police and locked his shop. However, the youths returned, jimmed the lock, and threatened him. He called the police again and waited half an hour for the officers to arrive and escort him to his car. While the angry mob ransacked Aucoin's store, the Muslims began talking about killing whites and ordered all white journalists to leave. As the reporters turned to walk away, the crowd attacked them. One newspaper photographer, Bob Johnson, suffered severe brain damage, and two others also required hospitalization. Throughout the ordeal, no police presence could be detected.

When officers finally arrived, they ordered the crowd to disperse, but the Muslims refused to leave. Instead, they formed a line on one side of the street and policemen lined up on the other side. The two lines slowly advanced toward each other, and when they met, the African Americans began throwing bottles and rocks. Someone fired a shot, and a gun battle ensued. The officers claimed that the Muslims fired first, but they later found no weapons on them besides the ones that the African Americans had snatched from the hands of officers. In the end, two sheriff's deputies and two Black Muslims died and thirty-one others suffered injuries.⁵⁸

⁵⁸“Law Officials Blast Claim of Negligence,” *Morning Advocate*, January 14, 1972, 1; “Eyewitness Story of Violence Given,” *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1972, 1; “Two Detectives Lose Lives in Shootout,” *ibid.*; “Lawmen Die, Newsman Critical,” *State-Times*, January 11, 1972, 9A; “Bob Johnson Still in Critical After Beating,”

White leaders reacted as they had after the 1969 protests. Mayor Dumas immediately declared a curfew and sent police officers and sheriff's deputies, heavily armed and dressed in riot gear, to patrol the city. Governor John McKeithen activated seven hundred members of the National Guard and dispatched them to Baton Rouge. Both political leaders feared a repeat of the attacks on whites and the arson that followed the 1969 protests. Even the civil rights leaders supported the curfew and called for calm. Emmitt Douglas issued a statement asking all Baton Rougeans, regardless of race, to cooperate with the police. Harvey Britton urged African Americans to be on their best behavior because police were "very scared and tense." Although a few minor incidents occurred, no violence erupted in Baton Rouge, and no large-scale marches or picketing followed the shootings.⁵⁹

Although Baton Rouge's African-American community deplored the deaths of the Black Muslims, they also condemned the separatists' use of violence against the white reporters and police officers. In November 1972, the split between the two factions became apparent when Southern students and the police clashed on campus. The violence at the city's black university grew out of the students' longstanding

Morning Advocate, January 12, 1972, 1; Account of 6 p.m. News Broadcast, January 26, 1972, Field Director's Papers, box 13, folder 2; Report, Baton Rouge Confrontation, February 28, 1972, *ibid*.

⁵⁹"Pleas for Calm Voiced," *State-Times*, January 11, 1972, 1; "The Monday Incident: A Senseless Tragedy," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1972, 14A; Report on the Baton Rouge Confrontation, February 28, 1972, Field Director's Papers, box 13, folder 7; "Law Officials Brace to Meet Emergency," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1972, 1; "Curfew Again in the City," *State-Times*, January 11, 1972, 1; "National Guard Troopers Help to Maintain Order in the City," *Morning Advocate*, January 11, 1972, 2A; "Curfew is Lifted Here; Guard Troops Go Home," *State-Times*, January 13, 1972, 1.

dissatisfaction with the operation of the school. Throughout the 1960s, Southern's student body had accused the administrators of Uncle Tomism and demanded that they stand up to state officials to secure more funding for the university. Calling the administration corrupt, the Black Power activists, in October 1972, demanded the resignation of President Leon Netterville. They also asked for the creation of an advisory council made up of students and faculty, for the inclusion of student members on the University Senate, for improvement of facilities and equipment, and for student input on the Food Service Committee. On October 23, several students presented these grievances to Netterville. The following day, the university called for the students to follow existing channels for filing complaints and refused to review those presented directly to the president. In response, about two thousand students marched to the downtown office of the State Board of Education to present their demands and then went to the State Capitol to give them to Governor Edwin Edwards. As marchers met with officials of the Superintendent of Education's office, police dressed in riot gear and armed with night sticks, tear gas, pepper fogger, semiautomatic rifles, and shotguns waited outside the building.⁶⁰

Angered by the lack of response from university and state officials, the students decided to boycott classes until their complaints were addressed. Wanting to get the university running again, Southern's administration and the State Board of Education

⁶⁰“SU Students Stage March to Protest Life at Southern,” *Morning Advocate*, October 25, 1972, 1; “Minor Tiff Seen Triggering March,” *State-Times*, October 25, 1972, 1; William Guste, Jr., *Report of the Attorney General's Special Commission of Inquiry on the Southern University Tragedy of November 16, 1972* (Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana, 1973), 3; “SU March Brings Out Heavy Force,” *Morning Advocate*, October 24, 1972, 1.

met with student representatives on October 26 and attempted to work out a compromise. At this meeting student leader Fred Prejean of Lafayette, Louisiana, demanded that a ratio of two students to one faculty member be established on department councils and that students be give a voice in hiring new faculty members. Prejean promised that once students gained a voice in the university the unrest would end. The Board of Education members agreed to review the students' demands but stated that they saw no problems with the Southern administration. At that point, Prejean and his supporters walked out.⁶¹

After their departure, the Board of Education set up a seven-member committee to study the students' grievances, and Netterville established several faculty and student committees. Unimpressed by these gestures, the students continued to boycott classes, and on October 31, a large group of them marched to the Administration Building and demanded a meeting with Netterville. Fearing that violence would erupt, the president called the sheriff's department to ask for assistance. In an attempt to defuse the situation, Netterville followed the precedent set by his predecessor and closed the university. Hoping that the tempers of the students had cooled, he then reopened the campus on November 6. The majority of students, though, continued to boycott classes. Netterville asked Sheriff Al Amiss to send a contingent of deputies to the campus to maintain peace.⁶²

⁶¹"SU Group is Heard by Board," *State-Times*, October 26, 1972, 1; "SU Students Stage Walkout at Meeting," *Morning Advocate*, October 27, 1972, 1.

⁶²"SU Problems Probe Committee Named," *State-Times*, October 27, 1972, 1; "Head of SU Pledges Action on Protests," *Morning Advocate*, October 28, 1972, 1; "Southern University Students Continue in Boycott of Classes to Get Demands," *News*

The unrest concerned state and local officials and drew the attention of Governor Edwin Edwards. On November 7, he met with the Board of Education and agreed to appoint a committee to investigate conditions at Southern. The governor's interest, however, came too late to prevent violence on the campus. The same day, explosions occurred in two building on campus, and officials found six Molotov cocktails near the Horticulture Barn. Police issued arrest warrants for eight students.

In the week that followed, tension continued to mount on campus. On November 10, Netterville promised amnesty to all students in exchange for an end to the protests. The Black Power activists declined the offer, and the following day, several students disrupted a football game. On the fourteenth, the boycott of classes resumed. The next day, Netterville withdrew the amnesty offer. November 16 marked the culmination of the protests. That morning, sheriff's deputies arrested several students in connection with warrants issued on November 8. Director of Administration Services James Hunt had charged the four with interfering with the operation of an educational institution. At 8 a.m., crowds of students gathered at various points on campus. The students converged on the Administrative Building and demanded to see the president. He agreed to meet with five of them, but the crowd pushed its way in. The students demanded the release of the four arrested students. Netterville refused to discuss the matter and left the office. To prevent the students from following him, his aides barricaded the door. Netterville then ordered Hunt to call the sheriff. Before the deputies arrived, campus security convinced the students to leave the Administrative

Leader, November 5, 1972, 1.

Building. After their departure, the guards found Netterville and escorted him to his car. He left the campus to attend a Board of Education meeting. Meanwhile, a crowd of students gathered outside the Administrative Building but never occupied it.

Sheriff's deputies finally arrived an hour after Netterville's departure. A misunderstanding between them and campus security occurred, and the deputies assumed that the students actually occupied the Administrative Building and were holding a security guard hostage. Under the direction of Sheriff Al Amiss, units surrounded the building and prepared to use tear gas to disperse the crowd of students. All deputies were heavily armed. When Amiss ordered the students to leave the area, most complied, but about fifty refused. They shouted, "Come and get us!" Without an order from the sheriff, one deputy launched three tear gas canisters into the crowd. The students picked two of them up and tossed them back at the officers, creating confusion among the law enforcement units. Simultaneously, the third canister went off, and the students scattered. Two students, Leonard Brown and Dennis Smith, brought up the rear, and as they ran past the officers, shots from a deputy's rifle mortally wounded both. Netterville immediately closed the campus to prevent further violence.⁶³

In the days following the incident, both white and black Baton Rougeans attempted to make sense out of the events at Southern. Unlike the aftermath of the 1969 police shootings, peace prevailed. National Guardsmen and heavily-armed police officers did not patrol the city's streets. The mayor did not impose a curfew and no arson occurred. The only hint of trouble came when an integrated group of LSU

⁶³Guste, *Attorney General's Report*, 5-20.

students staged a march from their campus to the State Capitol. Harambe, a Black Power organization from LSU, sponsored the march. The organization's president, Leo Hamilton, worked out an acceptable route with city officials, but whites participating in the march, mostly antiwar activists, urged the African Americans to stray from the agreed-upon a route to attract media attention. Hamilton refused to allow his group to be diverted because he knew that if they followed the prescribed route, the press would cover their protest. Governor Edwards greeted them when they arrived at the Capitol and told them that the Southern students were responsible for the two deaths. The LSU students booed him, but the crowd remained peaceful.⁶⁴

Unlike the earlier incidents of violence that ended with no discussion or examinations of events by whites, the Southern riots led to the formation of the Special Commission of Inquiry by the state's attorney general. Made up of black and white leaders from around the state, the commission blamed the students and the sheriff's department for the violent outcome. While acknowledging the "intensity and scope" of the students' anger and frustration, the commission charged that they went beyond their First Amendment rights by creating disorder on campus and disrupting classes. But the blue ribbon panel decided that the sheriff's department bore some blame for the deaths. Its officers had arrived heavily armed and, in the heat of the moment, one unidentified

⁶⁴Leo Hamilton interview, August 21, 1993, 97-100; "Southern U Closes in Aftermath of Killings," *News Leader*, December 3, 1972, 1.

sheriff's deputy had fired the fatal shots. The students, the report concluded, had done nothing to justify the use of deadly force.⁶⁵

Because the commission laid the blame on both the students and the deputies, most African Americans in Baton Rouge applauded the panel's report as fair and balanced. The refusal to support the students grew out of the division within the black community that had developed during the late 1960s. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans achieved the rights that activists had fought for since 1945. De jure segregation was dead, and race relations were improving. Joe Delpit won a seat on the city-parish council with white support. With their calls for black pride and separatism, Black Power activists attracted a committed following among young African Americans who denounced the gains of the civil rights movement as negligible because, for the most part, blacks remained powerless. For these young activists, the only way to attain power was through force. To older activists, who adhered to the principles of nonviolent protest and the ideal of an integrated society, the goals of the supporters of Black Power would mean reviving segregation albeit self-imposed and the loss of progress. Although the issue of police brutality temporarily united the black community, longstanding divisions remained. Because of the split, participants in the Black Muslim and Southern riots garnered support from only a small segment of the black population. For white leaders, the events of 1972 marked the realization of their greatest fear — that black protests would end in violence. Yet the reaction of the African-American majority defused the

⁶⁵Guste, *Attorney General's Report*, 25-25; "Southern U Closes in Aftermath of Killings," *News Leader*, December 3, 1972, 1.

situation. Rather than staging marches, rallies, and boycotts, it simply allowed law enforcement to handle the situation. Peace and stability quickly returned. In addition the nation's attention had shifted away from the civil rights movement and toward the war in Vietnam and the student protest movement. Because the Black Muslim and Southern riots ended quickly and produced very little national response, peace and stability quickly returned to Baton Rouge and business continued to flourish.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Bartley, *The New South*, 343.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Divided by social class, generations, and educational levels, few racial groups are monolithic, but scholars often depict the civil rights movement as a battle between united groups of blacks and whites over the issue of segregation. In fact, the interactions among different racial groups shaped the speed and nature of racial change. In places dominated by segregationists, whites who staunchly refused to accept integration met demands for integration with massive resistance. The violence that often accompanied civil rights protests in these areas attracted the attention of the national media and government and led to federal intervention, including the use of federal troops, to ensure the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock and to protect James Meredith at Ole Miss. In communities controlled by moderate whites, peace and stability prevailed. Away from the national spotlight that violence brought, change occurred with little fanfare. Baton Rouge belonged to the latter type of southern community. Although all African Americans wanted to end segregation, the city's black community was divided along generational and class lines. The resulting groups never agreed on the best method of obtaining equality. Similarly, most white Baton Rougeans wanted to maintain segregation but also disagreed about how to preserve it.¹

Because the relationship between and among the various groups of African Americans and whites in Baton Rouge was multifaceted, the desegregation process was complex and change was spurred by a combination of local initiatives, federal

¹White liberals disagreed with the majority and advocated dismantling Jim Crow and granting African Americans racial equality.

intervention, and the possibility of violent confrontations. Civil rights activism, with its threat of sustained protests and violence, prompted white leaders to make some changes to the system to maintain peace. The small alterations that they made in the system of Jim Crow appeased most African Americans, especially the racial diplomats, who viewed changes as signs of racial progress. In addition, the compromises convinced blacks who supported the civil rights movement, but were not activists, that they could do little to facilitate greater change. During the 1953 bus boycott, a large number of African Americans had advocated pushing for an end to segregation on public transportation, but the racial diplomats and white leaders negotiated a compromise and ended the boycott without consulting them. White leaders also discouraged many black Baton Rougeans from becoming involved in the movement by their harsh treatment of activists. Few ordinary black citizens were willing to risk arrest, high bails, and long jail terms to take part in demonstrations. While the compromises and arrests prevented sustained protests from occurring in Baton Rouge, they did not render the activists completely ineffective. As the civil rights movement intensified in the early to mid 1960s, the increased militancy of the activists and the threat of violence pushed white leaders into granting more substantial concessions. The formation of the biracial committee in May 1963, for example, followed an increase in protests by working-class activists and a series of large-scale and violent demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama. White leaders feared that the same thing would happen in their community if they failed to address some of the activists' demands. Out of the committee came compromises that brought some changes to the existing system without completely dismantling it. While white hospitals agreed to admit black doctors to their staffs, for

example, they refused to allow African Americans to treat white patients. In a similar fashion, the agreement that allowed blacks to join the police force relegated them to segregated patrol cars and prohibited them from patrolling white neighborhoods.

Federal intervention helped to bring integration to areas that required blacks and whites to interact on a daily basis, most notably schools. Whites simply did not want their children to attend the same schools as blacks, and many shared the arch-segregationists' belief that allowing African-American children to enroll in white schools would lead to the lowering of academic standards. While they did not want their children attending the same schools as blacks, white leaders refused to defy federal authority, which would attract negative national publicity and might lead to the deployment of troops to force integration. Therefore, accommodationists and white leaders decided to meet the minimum requirements for compliance. In 1963, they created a twelve-year plan for school desegregation designed to prevent the vast majority of black students from enrolling in white schools. White leaders in Baton Rouge successfully manipulated the courts and continued to maintain a racially divided school system more than three decades later.

The federal laws also helped to destroy Jim Crow in Baton Rouge. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 led to the desegregation of public facilities, including restaurants, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed all barriers to registration. Yet in these areas, activists had already forced white leaders to make concessions. Downtown lunch counters and facilities in the Municipal Building removed racial barriers in 1963, and, in the years following World War II, more than ten thousand African Americans in the

city and parish had registered to vote. Therefore, federal law merely accelerated a process that local activism had already begun.

Violence brought few changes to the system of segregation. In late July 1969, rioting erupted in the black community following the shooting death of burglary suspect James Oliney by white policemen; white leaders responded with massive force and refused to punish the officers who killed the young African American or to address the racial problems that existed within the department. Instead, they charged activists Emmitt Douglas and Jerry Johnson with inciting a riot. Even the selective buying campaign and the picketing that followed the riots could not convince white leaders to address police brutality. However, when an officer shot and killed another black suspect a month later, the threat of further rioting forced white officials to alter its policy on the use of deadly force.

Changes in race relations in Baton Rouge were shaped by the divisions within the racial groups and the interactions among the different factions. The presence of the activists pushed white leaders into granting concessions to the racial diplomats and led to greater changes than either they or the diplomats could have achieved on their own. Although activists and racial diplomats saw themselves as working at cross purposes, the presence of both groups served as a conduit for change that did not exist in communities dominated by segregationists and plagued by violence. However, most studies focus on the areas where violence accompanied desegregation. To understand more fully the civil rights movement and the nature of race relations in the decades following it, scholars must turn their attention away from the areas plagued by violence and massive resistance and look at community development and relationships between

blacks and whites in areas where integration occurred peacefully. They must also look at how divisions within these areas affected the movement. Baton Rouge, with its many factions, was not unique. In fact, similar splits existed in cities throughout the South, even those plagued by violence. Yet historians have too often depicted the freedom struggle as a battle between activists and segregationists and have paid little attention to the other groups that shaped the course of events.

Although several violent incidents marred the last years of the civil rights movement in Baton Rouge, white leaders working with racial diplomats managed to preserve the peace and stability of the community by responding to protests with moderate concessions, and the city's economy continued to flourish. The civil rights movement in Baton Rouge ended segregation, led to African American participation in government, and opened jobs to blacks. Yet racial problems continued to plague the city after the 1972 riots and persist in 1999. Poverty and high crime still afflict the black community. Schools remain, for the most part, either predominately white or predominately black, and African Americans still face racial discrimination. To solve these problems, Baton Rougeans must once again go beyond black and white and form new groups to address the issues that threaten the peace and stability of the community.

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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Mary Jacqueline Hebert

Major Field: History

Title of Dissertation: BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, 1945-1972

Approved:

Haines M Foster

Major Professor and Chairman

John M. ...

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Date of Examination:

20 July 1999