

Spring 2021

“It Seemed Like Reaching for the Moon:” Southside Virginia’s Civil Rights Struggle Against The Virginia Way, 1951-1964

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“IT SEEMED LIKE REACHING FOR THE MOON:”
SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA’S CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE AGAINST
THE VIRGINIA WAY, 1951-1964

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

History

College of Arts and Sciences

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2021

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DEDICATION

To the memory of Barbara Johns and the student activists of Prince Edward County, Danville, and the rest of Southside Virginia who broke down barriers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I am now finishing the twenty-third year of my formal education, there are so many teachers and mentors I would like to thank for giving me the skills to finally reach this point. I won't be able to name them all, but I'll do my best: Karen Snead, Brenda Conner, Lisa Long, Sharon Humbles, Carolyn Krempl, Lorene Womble, Diane Holmes, Margaret Covington, Karen Smith, Patty Davis, Marsha Barker, Matthew Richardson, Bedford Clements, Cassie Prevett, Sandra Bagbey, Leslie Bohanon, Bonnie Bowen, Essie Richardson, Domonic Stephens, Becky Donner, Matt Fisher, Debbie Griles, Albert Randolph, Jennifer Cole, Melvin Ely, Jer Bryant, Adam Dean, Nichole Sanders, Brian Crim, Michael Santos, Lindsay Michie, Clifton Potter, and Dorothy Potter.

At the University of South Carolina, I am grateful to the department and to my committee, Patricia Sullivan, Kent Germany, Tom Lekan, and Brian Daugherty of Virginia Commonwealth University, for guiding this work to completion. Thanks also to Bobby Donaldson, Heather Bacon-Rogers of Historic Columbia, and all of my graduate student colleagues. The research for this dissertation was possible due the William Elwood Civil Rights Fellowship at the University of Virginia. I am grateful to Emma Edmunds and Dr. James Hershman for their work on the Danville Movement and to Dr. Brian Lee for his help on the Prince Edward Movement.

Finally, thank you to my family for supporting me through the last seven years of graduate school, especially my parents, Bert and Kathy Martin, and my husband, Garner Cochran; without your support, I would not be where I am today.

ABSTRACT

During the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and in the historiography, Virginia held a racially moderate reputation. Scholarship on civil rights in Virginia typically credits racial moderation with implementing integration in the state while avoiding major violence and protest. In Southside Virginia, the rural south-central area of the state dominated by tobacco and textile mills with a substantial black population, two towns became the sites of significant civil rights activity. Both Farmville and Danville had direct-action movements spearheaded by local African American students and activists, but these movements drew limited national attention despite extreme reaction and retaliation by local whites. Farmville (the county seat of Prince Edward County) was the locale where one of *Brown v. Board of Education* suits originated; in response to the ruling to integrate, the county closed all public schools for five years. The Danville movement saw enormous police brutality in response to marches and sit-ins, but it did not sustain national media attention despite support from national activist organizations, so it seemingly failed. Analysis of these two local movements reveals that in Southside Virginia, it was not that racial “moderation” prevented major demonstrations. Instead there was a coordinated effort among the white social and political elite, motivated by an ideology heavily influenced by southern paternalism, honor, and Confederate memory, to undermine and suppress the direct-action tactics attempted by local black activists. The local movements found some progress when they attacked structural discrimination at the environmental and economic levels.

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INTRODUCTION

In modern memory of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, names of cities like Montgomery, Nashville, Anniston, Birmingham, Selma, and Jackson all evoke mental pictures of mass demonstrations and protests by African Americans for their civil rights and violent white retaliation. However, Farmville and Danville, both small cities in the southern piedmont region of Virginia known as Southside, do not evoke the same memories, even for locals, although both of these towns were centers of civil rights activism and spawned harsh reprisals.

Nationally significant Black protest in Virginia began in 1951 when high school students in a Farmville, Virginia, walked out of their high school in protest of the terrible conditions of segregated Black schools. Prince Edward County, where Farmville is located, would become notorious for closing all public schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as Virginia emerged center of “massive resistance,” often overshadowing the courageous protest by the students. In the wake of the walk out, many meetings between the students and the local and state National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) followed, and ultimately a lawsuit came that would join the *Brown v. Board of Education* suit. Following the Brown decision, Prince Edward County refused to integrate their schools and responded by closing all public schools in the county and raising money to send white students to a private school. In 1963, the situation finally came to a head as students and local activists began direct-

action protests in the county seat of Farmville, mirroring the protests in Danville, located several counties away.

During the summer of 1963, students and members of the Danville Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) chapter staged a protest after a delegation of students led by two local ministers were arrested at city hall for demanding equality in municipality employment. This protest, which the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) helped organize, triggered a violent reaction from the Danville police, who turned fire hoses on the marchers and beat them with clubs. The protesters continued to protest the next day and were attacked again by the police, who chased them into their own neighborhood. The police later set up machine guns and tanks around one of the local churches that held a mass meeting that night. The violence stopped after that night, but the battle for civil rights in Danville would continue in the courts and through a boycott of one of Danville's major industries (textiles) through the fall. As with the Farmville movement, protests in Danville dropped off dramatically after the summer of 1963. Apparently, the violence and extreme measures were successful. The local white elite used effective tactics to break up, separate, and suppress the movements, and would largely determine the narratives of these events.

Why have historians and public memory largely ignored these pivotal centers of civil rights activism in Virginia and their broader significance? Why in historical scholarship does Virginia hold a "moderate" reputation for civil rights when there were major instances of violence as well as massive resistance campaigns to integration? This dissertation argues that in Southside Virginia, racial "moderation" did not prevent major demonstrations. Instead the white social and political elite crafted a well-coordinated

effort and narrative, motivated by an ideology heavily influenced by southern paternalism, honor, and Confederate memory, to undermine and suppress African Americans' efforts during the peak years of the Civil Rights movement to topple Jim Crow and secure racial equality and justice.

Methodologies

The historical narrative of the Farmville and Danville movements provide an opportunity to examine several historiographical questions, including questions on where and how social change originated. Did momentum come from grassroots organizing (below) or from institutions with legal and social power (above)? Other questions pertain to the geographic region. Southside has several distinctive factors including a sizable (almost fifty percent) Black population, a hegemonic white culture that glorified the former Confederacy, and an economic structure built on tobacco farming and textile production. This profile of the region also raises questions about how race, gender, class, and environment intersect in this history.

As the cultural turn in historiography shows, ideology and culture are factors in prompting protest as well as the backlash to protest. White supremacy was the hegemonic culture in the region, and white elites built up this culture through the public memorialization of the final events of the Civil War. This link to Confederate memorialization brings up questions about the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the role of elite white women in suppressing the local movements. Because of the region's environment, I am also interested in the effect of material factors on civil rights activity. In Southside Virginia, tobacco and textiles dominated not only the economy but social relations among white and Black citizens. African American activists recognized

how central tobacco and textiles were to the racialized societal structures and found some progress when targeting them. How did the production of tobacco interact with racial ideology and create structural discrimination?

In understanding the historical landscape of Southside Virginia, frameworks set forth by Antonio Gramsci, Barbara Fields, Donald Worster, Michael Omi, and Howard Winant offer tools to analyze the connections between the ideological and material histories of civil rights in Southside Virginia. To analyze the culture and ideology of the region, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony provides an explanation of the dominance of white supremacy and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. According to Gramsci, a ruling group uses dominant ideology to maintain politically, socially, and economically social norms and the status quo. This dominant ideology is framed in sacred terms, usually, and used to justify the status quo as natural, traditional, and normal. Gramsci also calls historical actors who mediate or resist hegemony "intellectuals;" traditional intellectuals maintain the status quo while organic intellectuals come from the working class and develop class consciousness to create a mass movement. As Barbara Ransby notes in her biography of civil rights leader, Ella Baker, Baker was a "Gramscian organic intellectual;" Baker believed change came from within communities. This style of leadership was true for both Danville and Prince Edward County.¹

Barbara Fields's framework on race is also helpful in understanding how white supremacy became embedded in Southside Virginia's culture. She argues that race is a

1. David Forgacs, ed., *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

“notion that is profoundly and in its very essence ideological.” She is careful to note, however, that while race is an ideological notion, it is something that is very real, as it is the “embodiment of thought of real social relations.” Fields also notes that race “becomes the ideological medium through which Americans confronted questions of sovereignty and power” and that race holds power over historical narratives because of deep scars left on society from the unravelling of slavery.² This is reflected in how the “Virginia Way” institutionalized white supremacy in Southside.

To analyze how the material world affected the Southside civil rights movement, environmental historian Donald Worster’s concept of an agro-ecosystem as well as a geographic theory of “territorial racial formation” are two useful frameworks. Worster describes the concept of an “agro-ecosystem” as an ecosystem reorganized for agricultural purposes or a domesticated ecosystem and argues that it encapsulates the three levels of environment history.³ Like a natural ecosystem, this system must achieve balance between exports and imports, or it will decline. Southside Virginia was certainly an agro-ecosystem with a complex economy of tobacco and textiles that was rather fragile. Tracing the history of soil degradation by tobacco farming practices and the simultaneous rise of the textile industry reveal interconnections between these environmental industries and ideological concepts of race. It offers a way to understand

2. Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology in Race in American History,” in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 144, 151, 168.

3. Donald Worster, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History,” *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990): 1087, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2936586>. Worster argues that there are three levels of environmental history: the most basic level of the condition of nature at historical moments, the study of how production reshapes nature and people, and how ideology becomes inscribed on nature.

how technology restructured human ecological relations and then how people restructured themselves and their social relations. In this way, Jim Crow segregation acts as a technology meant to separate rather than connect.⁴

The concept of “territorial racial formation,” also termed “racialized landscape,” which builds on theorists Omi and Winant’s work on racial formation, also scaffold this argument. Omi and Winant define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed.”⁵ Several geographers have incorporated Omi and Winant’s theory of racial formation into interpretations of land and the environment in what is called “territorial racial formation.” This adds a socio-ecological component to analyses of racial formation. Dean Hardy suggest that because racial identities are always in formation, then too, are the relationships that certain identities have to the physical environment.⁶ In this framework, there is a clear connection of the ideological and the material. As mentioned earlier, the

4. Conor Harrison, “Race, Space, and Electric Power: Jim Crow and the 1934 North Carolina Rural Electrification Survey,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 909–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2016.1151335>. Harrison, drawing on Michel Foucault, sees Jim Crow as a technology in his discussion of biopower: “a form of governing populations and producing particular subjectivities. Although Foucault’s concept of biopower, and its related technologies such as state racism, has been extraordinarily useful to understanding the governance of modern life, recent scholarship has considered the energetic basis of biopower, also engaging with the more-than-human origins of social power.” P. 910.

5. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (Routledge, 2014), 109.

6. R. Dean Hardy, Richard A. Milligan, and Nik Heynen, “Racial Coastal Formation: The Environmental Injustice of Colorblind Adaptation Planning for Sea-Level Rise,” *Geoforum* 87 (December 2017): 62–72, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.10.005>.

economies of Southside Virginia were racialized and connected to the political institution of white supremacy. This was the major obstacle civil rights activists faced in Southside.

Review of Literature

The historical literature on the civil rights movement has grown exponentially in the last few decades, but little scholarship exists on the whole of the movement in Virginia. The peak decades of the civil rights movement in Virginia can be categorized into three stages: school integration and the white pushback termed "massive resistance" of the 1950s, the sit-in movement of the early 1960s, and incorporation into the national civil rights movement in the mid-1960s. Most historical scholarship on the civil rights movement in Virginia begins with massive resistance and emphasizes the white response to school integration and focuses on the conservative politics of civil rights. Historical literature on the last two stages of the movement in Virginia is still emerging, but there are many personal accounts and monographs that deal with the movement from a national standpoint; these accounts mention Virginia briefly. The most recent works focus on the closure of Prince Edward County Public Schools and the role of the NAACP in Virginia, but do not consider the Danville movement in the same amount of depth.

Most of the historiography of the Virginia Civil Rights Movements focuses on the period of Massive Resistance, the white refusal to integrate schools after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision led by the political machine of Governor Harry Byrd. The earliest works (starting in the 1960s) on massive resistance use narrative to describe the birth of massive resistance as instituted by the politicians tied to the Byrd political machine, whom most historians depict as white supremacists. Other scholars during this period also argued that white moderates were mostly silent on the matter of

desegregation. More recent books have expanded the focus on white moderate responses to massive resistance. Alexander Leidholdt argues that moderates brought down massive resistance, which in turn brought down the Byrd machine. Matthew Lassiter argues that moderates were successful in bringing integration to Virginia due to shifting political representation to more urban areas, a move to more progressive policies in the Democratic Party, and the emergence of a Republican Party unencumbered by the Byrd machine.

While the historiography of Virginia's massive resistance covers white responses to civil rights activity thoroughly, the most recent scholarship provides a well-developed Black perspective. Brian Daugherty's work, *Keep on Keeping On: The NAACP and the Implementation of Brown v. Board of Education in Virginia*, argues that the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP was instrumental in implementing integration amidst the white-led massive resistance because of its hierarchical structure as well as its proximity to the NAACP's national headquarters in New York and Howard University in Washington, D.C, a training ground for Black lawyers.⁷ Other scholars of the closing of Prince Edward County schools, including Christopher Bonastia and Jill Titus, also argue that the local Farmville movement was unique in many ways, but not incomprehensible in the broader scholarship, and therefore deserves a closer look.⁸ Another useful work is

7. Brian J. Daugherty, *Keep on Keeping on: The NAACP and the Implementation of Brown v. Board of Education in Virginia*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

8. Christopher Bonastia, *Southern Stalemate: Five Years Without Public Education in Prince Edward County, Virginia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); Jill Oglie Titus, *Brown's Battleground: Students, Segregationists, and the Struggle for Justice in Prince Edward County, Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), <http://delphi.tcl.sc.edu/library/catalog/off>

Larissa Smith Ferguson's dissertation, "Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930-1951." Ferguson's dissertation does provide historical context for Black activism in Virginia and the grassroots organizing that let the movement explode in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹

The next wave of activism in Virginia was the sit-in movements led by high school and college students across the Commonwealth. There are no monographs that specifically deal with the Virginia sit-ins, but there are several books about the nationwide movement, which argue that local student activism was indicative of a grassroots movement. Several important monographs in this area include Harvard Sitkoff's and Clayborne Carson's respective works. Sitkoff focuses on the young college students who led the sit-ins and formed SNCC, arguing that the students' impatience motivated Black leaders to carefully plan demonstrations that prompted reaction from the federal government. Carson presents the development and evolution of SNCC from the sit-in movement in three stages, beginning with forming community but its struggle with Black Power brought its demise. This student activism also serves as evidence for characterizing the civil rights movement as a grassroots movement, led by local people; this argument is best represented in the works of John Dittmer and Charles Payne.¹⁰

campus.html?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=365287.

9. Larissa M. Smith, "Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930-1951," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Emory University, 2001), ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (304758087), <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/304758087?accountid=13965>.

10. Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: Sncc and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994);

By 1963, the Virginia movements (including the movements in Southside) became part of the national movement led by the national organizations, including the SCLC and SNCC, incorporating them into their own projects. Broader scholarship makes arguments on the effectiveness of each group's tactics. However, scholarly work on this period of Virginia's civil rights movement is only just emerging. Both Simon Hall and Brian Lee (along with Brian Daugherty) argue that many Black Virginians found the NAACP's tactics too conservative and wanted to adopt the more radical techniques of SNCC and SCLC. Brian Lee's dissertation also sheds light on how the federal government intervened in civil rights activity in Virginia by tracing the Kennedy administration's involvement.¹¹ However, SCLC prioritized the Deep South movement over Virginia, because Virginia was considered more "moderate" than the Deep South states, where white resistance was seemingly more vicious. Amidst the lack of scholarship, these pieces provide a starting point for further research in this area.¹²

The Farmville and Danville movements do not fit neatly into the standard narrative that the Virginia civil rights movement was moderate, focusing mainly on massive resistance. Historians began documenting and crafting the story of the direct-action protest in Farmville and Danville, which is not well-known even in local history,

Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle: With a New Preface* (Berkeley [etc.: University of California press, 2007).

11. Brian E. Lee, "A Matter of National Concern: The Kennedy Administration's Campaign to Restore Public Education to Prince Edward County, Virginia" (Dissertation, Greensboro, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2015).

12. Simon Hall, "Civil Rights Activism in 1960s Virginia," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007): 251–67; BRIAN E. LEE and BRIAN J. DAUGHERITY, "Program of Action: The Rev. L. Francis Griffin and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Farmville, 1963," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 121, no. 3 (2013): 250–87.

within the last ten years. Recent efforts to collect oral histories from Black student participants and local leaders resulted in a rich narrative of events of the movement. During the movement, these events were originally documented by the local and federal court case files and local media reports, which only gave the white perspective of the events. These additional sources, when combined with memoirs and records from movement leaders and organizations, tell a story of Black student-initiated protest supported by local Black professionals that used legal means and direct-action protest to advocate for equality. They help make a case that, while the Southside movements may have had a reputation of failure, there was progress. Blair Kelley argues in her book on the early twentieth century boycotts in Richmond, Virginia, that progress can be a measure of success as later movements built on the work of the streetcar boycotts.¹³ By documenting Black activism and recovering the thoughts and perspectives of African American who led and participated in the Southside movements , this work argues that the Southside movements created real change and brought progress, which challenges the traditional interpretation that they “failed.”

How the “Virginia Way” and a Racialized Economy Affected the Civil Rights Movement in Southside Virginia

This dissertation contributes to the historical scholarship in several ways. First, it connects the stories of Danville and Prince Edward County. The civil rights movements and the white backlash to them in both Danville and Prince Edward cannot be fully understood without the context of the other due to the interconnections between the two

13. Blair L. Murphy Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010).

locales. Both locales share similar demographics, politicians, and economies. Secondly, it reveals how institutionalization of white supremacy in the postbellum era in Virginia shaped not only politics but also the developing economies of tobacco and textiles for the next century. In the twentieth-century, Southside Virginia was a racially repressive place. White elites maintained segregation and discrimination through the “Virginia Way” (patronage at the highest level of politics in the state and also the genteel way of dealing with political and class conflict). The fruit of this mindset is evident in Southside Virginia in how white segregationist politicians responded to labor organizing and civil rights activities. The white political elite used tradition, public memory, and history as a weapon to keep Black citizens of Southside “in their place,” but elites were did not hesitate to use violence to suppress organizing.

Thirdly, this dissertation focuses on the connections between the environment, economy, and racial ideologies in Southside Virginia. Southside Virginia’s agricultural and textile economy was racialized – tobacco labor was mainly Black, and textile labor was mainly white. Virginia’s elite preferred this system because it offered a form of social control. Excluding Black laborers from the textile mills allowed white elites to maintain their political control over the state as they could keep working-class white and Black citizens from organizing together to advocate for more equality.

Fourthly, this dissertation argues that grassroots activism defined the Virginia movements, but the assistance from national civil rights organization and goal of federal interventions helped galvanize momentum at the local level. Initial challenges to the Virginia Way came from Black students’ grassroots activism, but in working with the state level and national level civil rights organizations, they pooled resources to keep the

local movements alive in the face of repression. Black citizens faced an uphill battle against the Virginia Way, but found some success in targeting economic discrimination and drawing on the labor movement that had been long suppressed and feared by these white elites. Both movements also recognized the power of the federal government to intervene on their behalf.

Also, I argue in this dissertation that the backlash to civil rights activity in Southside cannot be perceived as “moderate.” The Virginia Way only had a veneer of gentility because when Black students challenged the norms of Southside, whites used police repression, violence, and other methods to keep norms of segregation firmly in place. Closing public schools for everyone for five years and responding to peaceful protest with billy clubs is not moderate.

Lastly, this dissertation shows the power of networks within the civil right movement and the resistance to it. The two local movements in Southside demonstrate the power of the Byrd machine’s orchestrated network. They also show the communication of Black activists across the region and the development of tactics that would help liberate other locales across the Deep South – constantly learning from other movements. The Virginia Way was often characterized as less overt and extreme than tactics used in the Deep South, but the politicians and propagators of the way communicated with groups across the Deep South to resist desegregation in all forms.

The story of civil rights in Southside Virginia belongs in large part to the Black students of the region. In 1951, students led by sixteen-year-old Barbara Johns decided they had enough of segregated and inferior schools. A younger generation rose up - discontent with the status quo of Virginia. Their initiative galvanized progressive Black

leaders in the county to organize to make a formal challenge to the unequal conditions of schools. The white leadership of Prince Edward County dug in their heels and took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. But once the Supreme Court told them they had to integrate schools and change their “way of life,” all bets were off. Rather than comply with the Supreme Court ruling, Prince Edward closed down their public-school system in 1959.

Sixty miles away, students in Danville, Virginia, in 1960 were watching the sit-in movement spring up all around them, beginning in neighboring Greensboro, NC, spreading to the more urban parts of Virginia. They decided to attempt their own sit-in but they decided to challenge a public facility due to the precedent of the *Brown* decision. They chose the white-only branch of the Danville Public Library (housed in the former Sutherlin Mansion, the “last Capitol of the Confederacy”), and the last public library to remain segregated in Virginia. Their efforts resulted in immediate closure of the library. The City of Danville then attempted to utilize Prince Edward’s method of closing public facilities, but a local judge ordered the library integrated after a lengthy court battle. After these initial battles for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960, it seemed that the white elite managed to maintain the Virginia Way, but Black activists across Southside began organizing in earnest. As they strategized, so did the white elite, creating cabals that coordinated with their counterparts across the South. The tensions came to a head in the summer of 1963.

Progressive leaders in Danville formed their own chapter of the SCLC in 1961 and began directly challenging the vestiges of segregation in the city. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King’s work in Albany, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama, leaders and

students began sitting-in and marching to city offices to demand integration in municipal employment. Afraid of this organization, Danville officials violently put down these protests by turning fire hoses on demonstrators and severely beating them. White leaders, afraid of the narrative that might come out of the city, crafted elaborate plans to sequester the media, sabotage the movement through legal charges, and disperse the movement. The national organizations of the NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC all flocked to Danville to bring in reinforcements.

North in Farmville, students took note of Danville and began their own demonstrations, which was a new tactic for the Prince Edward movement as the local NAACP branch focused most of its attention on the school case. However, the leader of the Prince Edward movement, Reverend L. Francis Griffin recognized that it was time to try a new method and coordinated with the State NAACP conference and SNCC. These demonstrations severely frightened the white segregationists of Prince Edward, so they adopted the “Danville method” to suppress these demonstrations. While the “Danville method” worked to stop the demonstrations, the local movements switched tactics to target economic discrimination in the racialized industries of tobacco and textiles and made progress in the realm of equality. Progress came slowly, but Southside’s civil rights movements succeeded in cracking the culture of white supremacy in the region and helped shape the trajectory of the larger American civil rights movement.

Overall, the examination of two local movements in this dissertation broadens the analytical lens of the civil rights era in American history because this microhistory reveals the deep structures of inequality. For Southside Virginia, Black civil rights activity targeted discrimination in every aspect of life – the economy, education, social

life, cultural life, and religious life. This activism exposed how deeply entrenched these structural inequalities were in the region, and the sacrifices that Black citizens made to expose them. There is still vast opportunity to explore these facets within the civil rights historiography, and more localized studies are important to expanding this area of history. The work of fighting racial discrimination in the civil rights movement was not just limited to politics. As John Lewis of SNCC wrote in his original draft of his speech at the 1963 March on Washington:

we all recognize the fact that if any radical social, political, and economic changes are to take place in our society, the people, the masses, must bring them about. In the struggle, we must seek more than civil rights; we must work for the community of love, peace, and true brotherhood. Our minds, souls and hearts cannot rest until freedom and justice exist for all people.¹⁴

14. John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 220.

CHAPTER 1

WHITE SUPREMACY AS THE “VIRGINIA WAY” IN SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA, 1883-1951

In April 1948, Virginia governor William M. Tuck made a speech in response to President Harry Truman’s civil rights program, which was announced in February, as part of a series of radio broadcasts by Southern lawmakers to denounce Truman’s Committee on Civil Rights. In his remarks, Tuck said:

...[V]ote-chasing liberals who arouse feelings of discontent, distrust and antagonism are the greatest enemies of the Negro. They care nothing for the Negro, North or South, except to use him as a vehicle for their own political preferment. There is a vast difference between segregation and discrimination. The South contends that segregation promotes racial integrity, not discrimination. I have stated often and I want to repeat now that the individual states are fully competent to solve these matters. Outside interference and dictation will serve to only jeopardize the good relationships that now exist and to make more difficult the solution of the few remaining problems between the races.¹

While Tuck’s remarks, a conservative white Southerner, are hardly surprising, his words reflect his anxieties that the system of managing race relations in Virginia was under attack from the federal government and other entities. Governor Tuck was a native of the Southside region, located in the south central part of the state that was home to the Virginia Piedmont and overwhelmingly rural. For Tuck, Southside Virginia had managed race relations just fine using a genteel tradition; in fact, it was the “Virginia Way.”

1. “Truman Civil Rights Program Assailed by Tuck, Caldwell.” *Richmond Times Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), April 7, 1948: 5.

However, the development of the Virginia Way after the Civil War reenforced the structure of white supremacy in Southside Virginia. After the Civil War, the white political elite used tradition and legal means along with the racialized economy of textiles and tobacco as a weapon to keep Black citizens of Southside “in their place.” However, they would not hesitate to use violence when they felt the situation warranted it, and Black resistance tested the limits of the Virginia Way.

The Political Institution of White Supremacy in Postbellum Virginia

After the Civil War, Virginia with the rest of the former Confederacy undertook a vast reshaping of politics, social relations, and economic development. Congress required all former Confederate states to rewrite their state constitutions in order to be readmitted to the United States. Congress also required that African Americans be allowed to participate in the election of delegates to these state conventions for writing the new constitutions. In Virginia, twenty-two African Americans were elected to the 1867-1868 convention, led by Radical Republican John Underwood. The new constitution the Underwood Convention approved initially provided suffrage for Black men but disenfranchised former Confederates, meaning many white male Virginians were excluded from ever governing under that constitution.²

White Virginians saw the new constitution and the convention itself as a sham. Nine self-appointed conservatives formed their own committee to advocate with Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant for the enfranchisement and amnesty of former

2. Brent Tarter and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, "John C. Underwood (1809–1873)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, 13 Dec. 2015. https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Underwood_John_C_1809-1873

Confederates. One of the members of the “Committee of Nine” was William T. Sutherlin of Danville, the most successful tobacco man in town and the host of Jefferson Davis when he fled Richmond at the end of the Civil War. These nine men were willing to concede the issue of Black male suffrage in exchange for former Confederates’ enfranchisement. The committee’s negotiations with Congress were successful, and the new constitution of 1868 provided the right to vote to Black men but also gave amnesty to former Confederates. The constitution also provided for a free public-school system. Black Virginians participated in the political process and gained social status. Alexander Stuart, a member of the “Committee of Nine,” organized other former Confederates as a “Conservative” political party. This group eventually adopted “Democrat” as their name. Disenfranchisement of Black voters began in 1876 by adding a poll tax to the requirement for voting in addition to making those guilty of petty larceny ineligible to vote. The restrictions on the franchise allowed only those whom elite white Virginians deemed worthy to participate in governing.³

Despite these restrictions, Black Virginians gained in political and social standing after Reconstruction officially ended, and white Virginians who wanted to “readjust” the state debt, repeal the poll tax, and also promote the funding of public schools for Virginia aligned with Black Republicans to form the Readjuster Party. African American Virginians had participated in biracial politics at the state and local level since the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 during Reconstruction, the period

3. Scott Hampton Harris and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, "Alexander H. H. Stuart (1807–1891)," *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, 22 Jun. 2017. Web. 26 Sept. 2020.
https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Stuart_Alexander_H_H_1807-1891

following the Civil War in which the South rebuilt its politics, physical spaces, society, and economy. After the U.S. government withdrew the remaining federal troops from Southern states, marking the “official” end of Reconstruction across the South in 1876, biracial political cooperation still existed in Virginia. However, white conservative Democrats began making moves toward “redemption” of the South due to fear of biracial politics, especially in Southside.

During the period from 1872-1887 as the biracial Republican and Readjuster parties won political power across Virginia, several members of the Readjuster Party won a majority on the Danville City Council, including four African Americans, along with four white members of the Readjuster Party. With the Readjuster majority on the council, the council focused heavily on the concerns of Danville’s African American population. In response in October 1883, twenty-eight white Danville business owners as well as members of the local Democratic party leadership issued a statement known as “the Danville Circular,” which was essentially a diatribe bemoaning the social and political takeover by the African American majority of the city. On November 2, the chairman of the local Readjuster party read the statement aloud and denounced it in public to a large group of African Americans. According to the whites who issued the Circular, this action caused a riot the next day when a white man struck a Black man who spoke in an insolent manner. The ensuing street fight left four men, both white and Black, dead, and in the aftermath, the white Democrats surged politically when they painted the event as a riot against white people.⁴

4. Jane Dailey, “Deference and Violence in the Postbellum Urban South: Manners and Massacres in Danville, Virginia,” *The Journal of Southern History* 63, no. 3 (1997):

Several scholars interpret the 1883 Danville Massacre as representing the conflict between whites and Blacks over an essential part of citizenship – the right to occupy a particular space. In *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia*, Jane Dailey argues that an essential part of freedom and civil rights for Southern African Americans was in patterns of speech and conduct in public; being truly free meant no longer having to show deference. She describes this freedom as “a primary location for the establishment of the autonomous individual,” and thus a defining characteristic of freedom.⁵ Other scholars agree with this assertion, especially in the Southside Virginia region. Melvin Patrick Ely in his work on free African Americans in Prince Edward County, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War*, notes that whites in Prince Edward were willing to allow African Americans some freedoms including some autonomous movement in spaces, but they only did so because they felt secure in their control of society. Ely explains, “Paradoxically, the very loopholes, the myriad personal and institutional exceptions, that permeated the system of white domination reveal how entrenched that hegemony was. *Had whites not felt secure in their control of society, they would not have behaved so flexibly*” [emphasis added].⁶

Prior to the massacre, there was biracial rule in Danville, but any flexibility that whites in Danville may have shown toward allowing Black political autonomy ended when they felt socially threatened by African Americans no longer showing deference in

553–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2211650>; Jane Elizabeth Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000), 113.

5. Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 109.

6. Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War* (Vintage Books, 2005), 343.

public. Dailey argues that the absence of deference created white anxiety about social control and led to the full institution of Jim Crow segregation. Reports of the massacre as a riot spread fear among whites, who overwhelmingly voted for former confederates in the 1883 election. White conservatives held power for the rest of the century across the state, and what would later become the political machine led by Harry Byrd emerged from this election.

As white conservatives held on to power in state politics, they sought to ensure they remained in power. The easiest way for them to achieve this goal was to drastically limit the electorate in Virginia. In 1894, they passed the Walton Act, which made all voting through a secret ballot, but effectively disenfranchised those who were illiterate as political parties were not allowed to put a symbol on the ballot to aid illiterate voters, which included fifty percent of African Americans in Virginia.⁷ White conservatives fully accomplished their goal when in 1901, the commonwealth held a new constitutional convention for the express purpose of disenfranchising Black voters. Conservative Democrats had held political power in the state for the previous twenty years. As Carter Glass said at the time, there was no mistaking the motives for calling a new constitutional convention: “Discrimination! Why that is exactly what we propose. That exactly, is why this Convention was elected – to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution with the view to the elimination of every Negro who can be gotten rid of legally, without materially impairing the strength of the

7. J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 24.

white electorate.”⁸ John Mitchell, editor of the Black newspaper, *The Richmond Planet*, condemned the convention and its blatant racism: “The avowed purpose of this body was to disenfranchise all of the colored citizens without taking from any white man his right to vote.” Specifically, this convention assuaged the concerns of the Southside delegates; since they resided in the majority Black areas of the state, eliminating the African American vote ensured white conservatives could hold on to political power even if they were in the minority.⁹

After the disenfranchisement of Black voters, Jim Crow segregation laws became codified in Virginia law code in the early twentieth century. Unlike other areas in the Deep South where violence ruled, Virginians relied on the legal system to manage white supremacy. Invoking what white elites called the Virginia Way, conservatives appealed to “paternalism, civility, and paeans to traditions” along with legislation to ensure “harmonious” race relations.¹⁰ However, Virginia elites still remained fearful that this system would break down and sought to codify white supremacy through legislation like the 1924 Racial Integrity Act and the 1926 Massenburg Bill, that segregated all public facilities (but was originally aimed at Hampton Institute). As conservatives maintained their political power, they also kept public institutions barely functioning and gave paltry

8. Larissa M. Smith, “Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930–1951,” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Ann Arbor, Emory University, 2001), 19, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (304758087), <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/docview/304758087?accountid=13965>.

9. Smith, 29.

10. Smith, 19.

sums to the segregated Black schools in addition to cutting the minimum number of days of school for Black children.¹¹

The Racialization of the Southside Economy: The Development of Tobacco and Textiles

In Southside Virginia after the Civil War, as white conservatives reasserted their hold on political power, the development of the region's industries also reflected the racial divisions of society. Tobacco, the colonial and antebellum staple of Virginia, flourished in Southside Virginia with the cultivation and processing of brightleaf tobacco, relying on African American knowledge and labor. The postwar development of the textile industries excluded African American labor and developed exclusively to employ poorer whites in the region. Virginia's elites saw this economic system as favorable for managing race relations in a proper and genteel way.

From the founding of Jamestown in 1607, tobacco was the cash crop of the Virginia colony and its production caused further westward settlement into the Southside region, but it was not until the late eighteenth century that Danville would formally incorporate and the early nineteenth century that the town would see major development.¹² The city formally incorporated so that local tobacco planters could build a tobacco warehouse where they could have their crops inspected for export instead of traveling to Lynchburg or Petersburg. The site they chose for the warehouse was

11. Smith, *Managing White Supremacy Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, 117; Smith, "Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930–1951," 31.

12. Frederick F. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 29.

conveniently located on the Dan River at a point above Wynne's Falls that was already connected to Washington D.C. and other southern cities.¹³ The warehouse did a booming business, leading to tobacco manufacturing factories and the construction of a rail line to Richmond, until an economic bust in 1837. Danville survived the bust through expanding its tobacco manufacturing and cultivating a more popular strain known as "brightleaf" tobacco.¹⁴

Danville also developed its own system for selling tobacco, known as the "Danville System." This system required farmers to bring their tobacco to the warehouse for auction in loose leaves rather than packed in hogshead barrels. Buyers could more closely examine the crop, and this system gave rise to the fast-talking auctioneer's chant.¹⁵ Prince Edward County was also a bastion of tobacco plantations, and the town of Farmville formed in 1798 as a port on the Appomattox River canal for tobacco to be shipped to Petersburg and Richmond. The town became the economic center of the county as stores and tobacco warehouses developed in the nineteenth century. By the 1830s, Farmville had five tobacco processing factories that employed mostly enslaved Black workers who had been hired out. Tobacco set both of these towns on their course of racially-mediated economic development.¹⁶

13. Siegel, 27.

14. Siegel, 58, 100.

15. "The Danville System," Danville Historical Society, accessed September 26, 2020, <http://danvillehistory.org/the-danville-system.html>; "A Very Brief History on the Fast-Talking Style," accessed September 26, 2020, <https://www.thevoe.com/anecdotes/a-very-brief-history-on-the-fast-talking-style/>.

16. Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 76, 210.

The environment of Danville and the rest of the Southside region readily explains the dominance of the tobacco industry. Initially in the development of the city of Danville and the surrounding Pittsylvania County, the conditions of the soil and climate precluded the success of any crop other than tobacco, and specifically only one type of tobacco. As historian Drew Swanson notes, the environment of Southside was conducive to producing brightleaf tobacco, and once Southside planters discovered this, how they managed cultivation, labor, and even race relations was tied to agriculture, building a social culture and social relations on top of this crop.¹⁷ However, over time, brightleaf exhausted the Southside soil to the point that the federal government would have to bail out the farmers in the New Deal, but tobacco culture remained the dominant influence to manage race relations in Southside.

Tobacco required much from its planters, including time, labor, and resources. Thomas Jefferson characterized it as “a culture of productive and infinite wretchedness. Those employed in it are in a continual state of exertion beyond the power of nature to support. Little food of any kind is raised by them: so men and animals on these farms are ill fed, and the earth is readily impoverished.”¹⁸ Raising this crop demands intense labor as it requires eighteen months to raise tobacco from seed to its final product, which includes the processes of hanging, striking, stripping, stemming, and prizing just to cure the freshly pulled leaves. In addition to requiring much time, tobacco required a huge labor demand, which some scholars point to as one reason for the development of slavery

17. Drew A. Swanson, *A Golden Weed: Tobacco and Environment in the Piedmont South*, Yale Agrarian Series (New Haven [Connecticut]: Yale University Press, 2014).

18. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness*, 62–63.

in the Virginia colony. The crop is an exhaustive one, too. Tobacco removes nutrients from soil very quickly, which led to the development of more virgin land for agricultural production. This phenomenon created Virginia's dependence on tobacco because the depleted soil could not support any other crops without major improvements to the exhausted soil. Frederick Siegel argues that diversification of crops helped cities grow economically, and Danville (and Southside) suffered from delayed growth due to their initial reliance on tobacco.¹⁹

However, Danville's unique soil conditions led to the domination of one particular strain of tobacco – brightleaf. In Danville and the surrounding area (known as Southside), the soil is very sandy and infertile, composed of mostly hard red clay and sand. The area also suffers from very high levels of topsoil erosion, which makes the ground unsuitable for many crops. In particular, Danville is located in the Piedmont region of Virginia and the soil tends to be deficient in lime, making it very acidic. Because of the acidity of the soil, the ground could not sustain grasses needed for cattle, which in turn could help improve the soil through fertilization.²⁰ With these limitations of the soil, even the dark tobacco strain of the colonial and federal periods struggled in Southside; while the soil could sustain tobacco practiced with eighteenth-century methods, Swanson notes that it was not suitable for long-term tobacco production.²¹ In the nineteenth century as the region's population grew and the tobacco culture of the region grew, planters experimented with seeds, soil, and cultivation methods to find a

19. Siegel, 62.

20. Siegel, 69–71.

21. Swanson, *A Golden Weed*, 32; Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness*, 101.

strain of tobacco that would thrive. They eventually found brightleaf tobacco, which has a lighter color and a milder and sweeter taste, which appealed to consumers.²² With the success of this tobacco, Danville experienced a boom before the Civil War.

Prior to the Civil War, Southside tobacco planters not only depended on enslaved labor to meet the crop's labor demands, but enslaved African Americans played a pivotal role in the cultivation of the brightleaf strain. While local legend holds that Abisha Slade's young enslaved worker, Stephen, accidentally discovered the curing method by falling asleep, enslaved workers did the experimentation using the agricultural knowledge that often their owners took credit for.²³ As the popularity of brightleaf took off, planters began experimenting with seed, soil types and curing methods. Swanson notes that planters' success in raising bright tobacco quickly became a value judgement about the farmer, but these tobacco planters relied on the labor and expertise and essential knowledge of their enslaved workers. This was not uncommon to the plantation system in the South as noted by Judith Carney and others. While the historiography focused heavily on white planters' innovation in developing staple crops in the Southern colonies, recent scholarship notes that African slaves not only did the work but also held unique knowledge in growing these crops.²⁴ While masters may have given instructions in cultivation methods, the enslaved workers executed these instructions and even offered input into the process of planting and harvesting. Some primary sources suggest that white planters realized that their enslaved workers were essential in the process of raising

22. Swanson, 49.

23. Swanson, *A Golden Weed*, 48.

24. Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

bright tobacco, but acknowledging that awareness for these white planters was antithetical to their paternalistic views of African Americans.²⁵ Anthropologist Julie Maldonado notes that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) often gets co-opted by Western frameworks.²⁶ White landowners' paternalism used their enslaved workers' TEK to increase their profits in the bright tobacco industry, but they painted this TEK as accidental (in the case of Stephen and Abisha Slade). This co-option not only dehumanized enslaved workers but also used their knowledge to perpetuate a cash-crop system that only oppressed these workers. This hierarchy of knowledge perpetuated by the cultivation of tobacco helped shape race relations in the city of Danville and the surrounding areas in Southside and reinforced social inequalities between white citizens and African Americans.

Tobacco not only helped found the city of Danville and formed the culture of Southside, but it also brought major developments in its economics, demographics, and society. These developments instituted and cemented the economic situation and the culture of twentieth-century Southside. With the rise of tobacco manufacturing, local politicians lobbied to bring the railroad from Richmond to Danville, and it continued on to Greensboro, North Carolina.²⁷ This railroad also ran through the tobacco town of Farmville, the county seat of Prince Edward County. Other businesses in Danville also benefited from the railroad, including foundries and mills, which used the power of the Dan River. With these developing industries in Danville, there was an influx of slaves

25. Swanson, 59-61.

26. Julie Maldonado, "A multiple knowledge approach for adaptation to environmental change: Lessons learned from coastal Louisiana's tribal communities," (*Journal of Political Ecology*, 21, 2014), 61-82.

27. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness*, 107.

and free Blacks into the city during the antebellum period.²⁸ The majority of labor working in the tobacco factories in Danville and Farmville were enslaved workers, valued for their knowledge of tobacco.²⁹

With this growth in the African American population, slave and free, the white government of Danville passed laws to codify social control of Black residents. One of these laws, in addition to the John Brown statute (illegal to “incite negroes to riot”) that made an appearance again in the 1960s, created “slave patrols,” and required all white males ages eighteen to forty-five to serve on them at some point. These patrols had the authority to enter homes and ascertain if a person had the right to be in town and also to apprehend any disorderly or drunk whites and Blacks. Still, social and political control remained in the hands of the white elite, mainly the tobacconists like William T. Sutherlin, the owner of the largest tobacco warehouse in Danville. Sutherlin’s home became a capitol of the Confederacy as Jefferson Davis stayed there after his flight from Richmond in April 1865 and his convening a cabinet meeting there. Sutherlin went on to politics after the war, and he was instrumental in the Redemption of white supremacy in Virginia.³⁰

Prince Edward County also feared the influx of Black workers to Farmville, especially with the free Black community of Israel Hill being only a half mile away from the town. Leading Prince Edward County planters and tobacco factory owners, including Col. James Madison, were quite concerned about the free status of many of their workers.

28. Siegel, 121, 136.

29. Swanson, *A Golden Weed*, 63; Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 210.

30. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness*, 136–37.

Madison published in the local paper a diatribe about the degeneracy of Israel Hill's residents while at the same time he resented that their wages cut into his bottom line at the tobacco factories, since he had to pay them more than hired-out enslaved workers.³¹ As in Danville and across Virginia, Prince Edward's white elites also grew more fearful after John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Just a few weeks after the raid, a grand jury in Prince Edward County indicted three free Black people for not leaving the state within one year of manumission and two white people for "unlawfully associating with slaves and playing cards with them." These laws had not been enforced prior to John Brown's raid, yet white attitudes changed drastically when they realized that something similar could happen even in Southside.³² Overall prior to the Civil War, as tobacco began booming in Southside, the tobacco economy was the best mechanism to regulate race relations between white planters, enslaved workers, and the small free Black community, and the onset of the Civil War and emancipation did little to change that system.

On the advent of the war, Danville was very prosperous due to the railroad and benefited greatly from the war. The tobacco market grew even more as the conflict made brightleaf tobacco more popular and as society adopted it as a smoking tobacco. Because Danville held a monopoly on this corner of the market, the city committed many resources to ensure Confederate independence. If the Confederacy won the war, Danville could maintain its economic status as an industrial power and not have to compete with Northern cities. As evidence of their commitment, many Danville whites were in favor of

31. Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 210.

32. Ely, 393–94.

freeing and arming their slaves to send them to fight for the Confederacy.³³ However, Danville's lasting legacy from Civil War was its status as the last capitol, which Jefferson Davis bestowed on the city:

“In Danville, Davis would use his power – which by then was largely symbolic – in the only way left to him: he would create another symbol. He would make Danville “the last capital of the Confederacy,” so that the town came to exemplify the “lost cause” and willingness to resist Yankeedom in the face of overwhelming odds.”³⁴

After the Civil War, Danville did indeed have to compete with other cities as an industrial power, but it managed to retain its dominance in tobacco as the marketing of brightleaf tobacco boasted that the Southside soil gave it superior qualities. Barbara Hahn argues that institutional shifts to the production of tobacco led to the definition of tobacco types, yet they were based on not any biological qualities of the crop but social constructions of tobacco; brightleaf became the choice for cigarette manufacturing based on its perceived superior quality from being grown in Southside soil. Thus, tobacco society and culture continued to dominate through the twentieth century in the region.³⁵

After the end of the Civil War, emancipation remade race relations and this played out in the tobacco industry, and as prior to the war, race relations were connected to the environment through tobacco. Violent white reactions to African Americans with newfound freedoms marked the period of Reconstruction in Danville and Southside with

33. Siegel, *The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness*, 149, 156–58.

34. Siegel, 146.

35. Barbara Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617-1937* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), <http://delphi.tcl.sc.edu/library/catalog/offcampus.html?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=601031>; Jean Gottmann, *Virginia in Our Century*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969).

clashes over labor in the tobacco fields. As Swanson notes, the high profits earned by bright tobacco motivated large landowners to use violence to coerce their newly-freed labor force into complying with their demands. However, African American workers now had a certain level of agency in exercising their autonomy; to white planters, their free labor seemed too unstable for the demands of the tobacco growing season. During particular portions of the growing season when labor was essential to saving the crop, African American workers had the most power to act autonomously. Consequently, this season was when violence against these workers spiked during the year. This violence was possible because of the physical landscape of the region; African American workers were still scattered on far-flung tobacco farms, which kept African Americans from organizing to defend themselves against night rides and other forms of violence. Reconstruction represents a paradox as newly-freed African Americans wanted to gain their own land to raise tobacco themselves but were also seemingly trapped on a landscape of oppression.³⁶

In this way, the legislated racial oppression that followed Reconstruction worked as a form of technology or a way to control social relations between Black and white citizens, as Conor Harrison also argues. Harrison, drawing on Michel Foucault, sees Jim Crow as a technology in his discussion of biopower: "... [biopower is] a form of governing populations and producing particular subjectivities. Although Foucault's concept of biopower, and its related technologies such as state racism, has been extraordinarily useful to understanding the governance of modern life, recent scholarship has considered the energetic basis of biopower, also engaging with the more-than-human

36. Swanson, *A Golden Weed*, 149.

origins of social power.”³⁷ Harrison argues that the social relations of Jim Crow are more connected to the environment, especially through agriculture, than previously thought. The white landowners’ need for legislated racial oppression mirrored environmentally-based relations between newly-freed Black tobacco workers and themselves. To create order in their labor force needed to sustain the tobacco industry, Danville landowners soon turned to legislated social control, i.e. Jim Crow laws, especially after a spate of violence in the 1880s, including the Danville Massacre.

After the period of Reconstruction and the remaking of race relations, Southside elites turned to the economy again to regulate race relations. Cotton manufacturing became attractive to many Southern cities as it did not require much capital or technical skill to start up, and it was fairly easy for the city of Danville to develop three cotton mills in the 1880s that harnessed the power of the Dan River. The city was already a tobacco hub, and the further development of the railroad made it an important economic anchor in Southside. William T. Sutherlin had urged the city as far back as 1867 to take advantage of the water power to create industry in Danville. However, a more ulterior motive emerged as one of the dominant reasons Danville developed its textile mills. According to Dan River Mills’ (originally the Riverside Cotton Mill) own history, the development of the textile industry was an opportunity to employ poor whites in the area, thus improving race relations as Black workers held employment in the tobacco factories. Robert Smith in his history of the Riverside Cotton Mill writes: “Tobacco warehouses

37. Conor Harrison, “Race, Space, and Electric Power: Jim Crow and the 1934 North Carolina Rural Electrification Survey,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 909–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2016.1151335> P. 910.

and factories furnished employment for colored workers, but ‘there was nothing open for the white working man’ and ‘race conflicts were constantly brewing.’ Since white and colored laborers generally were noncompeting groups, the promoters of the cotton mills ‘started a development for the express purpose of affording work to the poor [white] families of the community who were having a hard time.’”³⁸ President of the mill in 1928, H.R. Fitzgerald said, “the mill immediately became a center to which all these unfortunate people would flock, and instead of the mill being responsible for the conditions among them, it proved to be a godsend in offering them an opportunity for employment, which was the first and most important step and what they needed more than anything else to obtain food and clothes and a reasonable measure of independence.”³⁹ While the mill provided jobs for the white laborer in Danville, it remained closed to Black workers outside of the most menial jobs. Black workers across Southside remained in the tobacco industry, woefully underpaid.

From the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century the system of tobacco farming in Southside remained in the control of white elites. W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes in *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, that Southside Virginia quite resembled the Deep South cotton plantations: “By the late 1860s, they, too, had turned to a system of tenancy, sharecropping, and the crop lien to organize land and labor. The large Black population of the Southside suffered the same hardships – crippling poverty, poor or nonexistent schools, few occupational alternatives to

38. Robert S. Smith, “Mill on the Dan: Riverside Cotton Mills, 1882-1901,” *The Journal of Southern History* 21, no. 1 (February 1955): 41–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2954826>.

39. Smith, 41 footnote 16.

agriculture – as Blacks endured elsewhere in the plantation South.”⁴⁰ However, Brundage notes the labor relations between white planters and Black workers shifted after the Civil War into more casual labor arrangements known as “patron-client” relationships, which also shifted social relationships. Elsewhere in Virginia, agriculture diversified, but tobacco remained the dominant crop in the Southside, as well as high rates of tenancy and tenant labor among both white and Black laborers.⁴¹

While tobacco culture remained dominant in Southside, cultivation of brightleaf began eroding and degrading the soil, which became a crisis by the Great Depression. The cultivation methods of brightleaf tobacco made the land erode and lose soil nutrients at a breakneck speed as farmers deforested and planted new land without regard to sustainability practices. Complicating this, few farmers in Southside Virginia wanted to give up planting tobacco because it was so profitable. However, as competition from other localities growing brightleaf increased, Southside farmers realized they were struggling to compete and would no longer command top dollar for their crops at auction.⁴² Prices bottomed out with the onset of the Great Depression, so the federal government took action by introducing a program known as “stabilization.” It worked as a form of crop insurance for tobacco planters. If tobacco companies would not buy a farmer’s tobacco at auction, the stabilization program bought the tobacco, processed it, and stored it, usually at a much lower price. If a tobacco company later wanted a particular grade of tobacco that was not available, the companies bought it from the

40. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, Blacks in the New World (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 145.

41. Smith, “Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930–1951,” 25–26.

42. Swanson, 184, 218, 225.

stabilization program with the money going back to the farmer. Typically, the federal government would recoup all of their losses through resale of tobacco as well as charging the tobacco company for the processing and storing of the tobacco.⁴³ While this program propped up the bright tobacco industry in Southside, African American laborers still rarely saw the proceeds of their labor, as the stabilization program supported landowners only and the quota system also set into place meant reduced need for laborers, who were predominantly African American. Due to racial hierarchies in the area, African Americans lagged behind in landownership through the twentieth century.⁴⁴ While they provided much of the labor, they were excluded from the profits of the largest industry in the region. Moving into the civil rights era, local African Americans recognized that civil rights for a rural region meant challenging the discrimination that grew out of the tobacco system.

Tobacco remained an ingrained part of Southside culture as it was one of the predominant industries in the area. During the 1930s, in the neighboring town of South Boston, Virginia, citizens of Danville took part in the National Tobacco Festivals, held from 1936 to 1941.⁴⁵ These festivals hosted parades, concerts, grand balls, political dignitaries, and Hollywood celebrities, including Mary Pickford, and drew crowds of 25,000 people.⁴⁶ The festival also hosted a pageant each year and commissioned playwrights and directors from New York City to produce the show in South Boston.

43. Kaye Tuck, in discussion with the author, April 4, 2019.

44. Swanson, 252.

45. Barbara Bass, *The Golden Leaf: A Brief History of Tobacco in Halifax County, Virginia, and the National Tobacco Festivals, 1935-1941*, (Halifax County Historical Society, September 2008), 34.

46. Bass, 34.

Several of pageant titles speak to how much the area revered “the golden weed” – “The Miracle of Tobacco,” “Tobacco Triumph – Story of the Sovereign Herb,” and “The Culture of Tobacco.”⁴⁷ This culture permeated Black society in Southside as well. All of the festivals were segregated, but members of the Black community formed a committee for their own celebration, including a grand ball with a swing band for entertainment. Thousands attended these festivities as well.⁴⁸ Although the festivals ended due to America’s involvement in World War II, tobacco remained dominant in the region as both an economic and cultural force for Black and white Southsiders.⁴⁹

The Virginia Way as the Last Defense Against Liberalism

By the onset of the Great Depression, politics in Virginia were completely unified around one man’s views – Harry Flood Byrd. Byrd had inherited the Democratic political organization begun by John Barbour and Thomas Staples Martin who oversaw the institutionalization of Jim Crow into the Virginia law code. In 1921, Byrd’s uncle Hal Flood, the chairman of the state Democratic party and high up in the Martin machine, passed away, and Byrd took his place, which set him up for a successful bid to be governor in 1925.⁵⁰ Byrd strongly favored fiscal conservatism and became well-known for the “pay-as-you-go” philosophy, but he is most remembered for making Virginia politics a one-party system for much of the twentieth century, which he defended as necessary for maintaining white supremacy: “The supremacy of the Democratic party in the South is in a measure due to our peculiar racial conditions, and is the extreme

47. Bass, 34, 53, 59.

48. Bass, 44-45.

49. Bass, 34; Gottsman, 509.

50. William Bryan Crawley, *Bill Tuck, a Political Life in Harry Byrd’s Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 4.

expression of that instinct of self-preservation, which does not desert any people until it is ready to perish.”⁵¹ Political scientist V.O. Key famously noted that “Virginia can lay claim to the most thorough control by oligarchy”, referring to Byrd’s dominance of politics and appeals as the Virginia Way, typified by aristocratic values of gentility, respectability, and moderation.⁵² This form of governing allowed the machine to underfund public services, especially segregated Black schools, and ensure they maintained hegemony through local politics. Not only did Harry Byrd personally approve every politician who ran for office at the state level, he also made sure that the members of his organization chose the “courthouse rings” or constitutional offices at the county level – commonwealth’s attorney, treasurer, commissioner of revenue, clerk of circuit court, and sheriff. Often, these officeholders held long tenures and would pass the seat down through families. The largest operation of the machine, however, was controlling voter turnout and how people voted. Keeping the turnout low ensured their tenure in office, so the Byrd machine was especially threatened by anything that could be perceived as “liberalism,” mainly labor and racial equality. By the 1930s, even with strident segregation laws in place, the old paternalistic values of the Virginia Way began to waver as African Americans and white laborers started pushing for their own rights.⁵³

One of the largest concerns for the Byrd machine and its supporters was organized labor, and one of the most bitter strikes of 1930-31 gave them pause. As the

51. Smith, *Managing White Supremacy Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, 131.

52. Smith, “Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930–1951,” 7.

53. Smith, *Managing White Supremacy Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, 217.

depression began hitting in full force, workers at the Dan River Cotton Mills in Danville experienced wage cuts. On September 29, 1930, over three thousand workers joined the United Textile Workers of America on strike for better wages. This walkout shut down the mill. The local media and Byrd machine blamed outside agitators (i.e. union organizers) for the outbreaks of violence, forcing the governor to send in the state militia. The five-month strike ended in defeat for the laborers as the union was unable to provide funds to feed the strikers. This strike made politicians especially wary of “Communist” influence on Virginia’s labor force.

In 1946, by the time native Southsider and member of the Byrd machine, William M. Tuck, became governor, Virginia opinions on labor were so low that Gov. Tuck’s proposed anti-labor legislation for public employees passed quickly. Tuck also gained the moniker of Harry Byrd’s best strikebreaker when he put down a strike by the Virginia Electric and Power Company (Vepco) by calling out the Virginia State Guard to draft Vepco employees into the guard: “You are hereby notified that you have been drafted by the commander-in-chief of the land and naval forces of Virginia to execute the law which requires the Virginia Electric and Power Company to provide electric service to the people of Virginia customarily served by it.” If they went on strike, the workers would be court martialed. Union leader of the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers, Jack McIntosh condemned Tuck’s actions and comments that the IBEW was led by evil people: “So the Governor presumes to call his own people evil-doers while he assumes a righteous and paternalistic attitude toward Vepco whose vast profits are pooled into the

monumental accumulation of wealth now controlled by the financial tycoons of Wall Street...” However, many Virginians along with Harry Byrd loved Tuck’s actions.⁵⁴

In the wake of the CIO’s “Operation Dixie” campaign in 1946, Tuck led the way in turning Virginia into a “right to work” state that made it incredibly difficult for workers, Black and white, to organize for better rights. In 1944, the CIO announced an effort to organize labor in the South in a way that would work to eliminate racial discrimination, too. Even though the CIO moderated its ideals of racial equality for Operation Dixie by the time it launched in 1946, white Virginians saw it as a Communist plot meant to undermine the social order established by the Virginia Way.⁵⁵ Their view was summed up in this equation by W. J. Cash - “labor unions + strikers = Communists + atheism + social equality with the Negro.”⁵⁶ Pressure from the public caused Tuck to put forth a labor program in 1947 that culminated with the “right to work” law that undercut the funds for unions; it passed the General Assembly overwhelmingly.⁵⁷ Virginia now had in place an official way to manage their labor force, keep them docile and underpaid, and most importantly, circumvent people who sought to help African Americans. By barring labor unions, white Conservatives felt they could prevent the dominos of liberalism, social equality, and their worst fear, miscegenation, from falling in Virginia.⁵⁸

54. Crawley, 95, 93, 103.

55. Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 208.

56. Crawley, *Bill Tuck, a Political Life in Harry Byrd’s Virginia*, 111.

57. Crawley, 117–20.

58. Michael Honey, “Operation Dixie: Labor and Civil Rights in the Postwar South,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 1–2.

However, cracks began forming in the walls of white supremacy and the state of managed race relations by the end of the 1940s. The NAACP inroads even in Southside and rising numbers of African Americans voting set the stage for a new generation to administer heavy blows to segregation, putting white elites, like Bill Tuck, on the defense. A few years later in 1955, Bill Tuck spoke at a white segregationist rally, and his tone had changed from 1948:

“We have met here tonight because of our interest in preserving the purity of our race, as well as our liberty and freedom... I intend to resist with all the might I have this effort to distort the minds, to pollute the education, and to defile and make putrid the pure Anglo-Saxon blood that courses through the innocent veins of our helpless children... In this matter there is no middle ground. There is no compromise. We are for integration or we are against it...”⁵⁹

For white Southsiders who were adamant that white supremacy should remain the bedrock of their society, they seemed cornered, and like a cornered animal, they would start biting back. The Virginia Way of gentility would soon be giving way to extreme reactions and repression of civil rights.

59. Crawley, *Bill Tuck, a Political Life in Harry Byrd's Virginia*, 227–28.

CHAPTER 2

“WHY DON’T YOU DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?”: BARBARA JOHNS AND R.R. MOTON HIGH STUDENTS CHALLENGING THE “VIRGINIA WAY” IN PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Prince Edward County today is the home of Longwood University, originally founded as the State Normal Institute. Many of Virginia’s teachers received their pedagogical training there. Thus, the county has long held a reputation for being a bastion of education. It is ironic that this center of education did little to provide adequate public schools for its Black population. In 1951, students at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville decided they should do something about the substandard facilities. Led by a sixteen-year-old student, Barbara Johns, the entire school went on strike for a better school. The strike inspired progressive Black leaders in the county to help the students bring a lawsuit to integrate their school. The white leadership of Prince Edward County fought this case to the highest level, but these students made history when the Supreme Court ruled in their favor as part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on May 17, 1954.

Origins of Public Education in Prince Edward County

In Prince Edward County, Virginia, Farmville was the county seat and the commercial center of the county as well as several adjoining counties. By the turn of the twentieth century, it was becoming a booming market town, thriving on tobacco in addition to other industries. It was also becoming known as an educational leader in the

Commonwealth, with the public schools touted across the state in addition to being the home of the State Normal School for women (now Longwood University). Yet, the educational system in Prince Edward County was segregated, as mandated by the constitution, and education for the Black children of Prince Edward, the majority of school-aged children, was paltry at best. The low tax rates that the county boasted of went mainly toward the white schools of the county, and this inequity remained through the lead up to World War II.

In 1897, sociologist and later founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), W.E.B. DuBois spent the months of July and August in Prince Edward County conducting a sociological study of the Black population of Farmville and county. His findings, published in 1898, reveal the limits that African Americans of Prince Edward faced at the turn of the twentieth century even when Farmville was “progressing” and modernizing for the white population, as illustrated by local sentiments toward Black education printed in the *Farmville Herald*.¹

DuBois explained his reasoning for choosing Prince Edward County. The county, he observed, offered a unique perspective on the development of Black people after the Civil War as Prince Edward saw the plantation system collapse, the last battles of the Civil War, and an economic revolution surrounding tobacco. His time in Prince Edward not only revealed deep inequities between the white and Black populations but also the internal class structure within the Black community that stratified life. Appearing a year before DuBois’s more famous study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, he made similar arguments

1. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study*, A Bulletin of the Department of Labor, No. 14: Washington, D.C., 1898, 1.

that the economic inequality and lack of opportunity for Prince Edward County Black residents were to blame for the poverty rate and other social problems rather than an innate Black sociopathy, pushing back against other (white) sociologists of the time who blamed the structural inequalities of urban spaces on Black criminality.² One of the main focuses of DuBois's study was education and the conditions of the county schools; in that study, he found that the lack of education contributed heavily to the social problems of the Black community.³

In 1898, Farmville and Prince Edward County operated a segregated public school system, as mandated by the 1868 Virginia constitution, and while by 1908, Farmville would be known as a “centre of education,” the county did little to provide education to its majority Black population. Dubois noted that in 1898, the county received \$4,794 from local taxes and \$8,343 from the state for a total school budget of \$13,565. Twenty percent of the local tax revenue for the county went to schools (not including what the state provided). That budget included \$10,894 for teachers' salaries, \$770 for the construction and maintenance of school buildings, \$10 for the libraries, and \$1891 for miscellaneous expenses.⁴ The remaining local tax revenue went to the state, the county government, and the town governments. However, the educational facilities available for Black children in 1897 were barely sufficient. First, Farmville (the largest town in the county) had no school for Black children; they had to go outside of the town limits to their schoolhouse, which had five rooms. This school had one principal and one

2. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

3. DuBois, *The Negroes of Farmville*.

4. DuBois, *The Negroes of Farmville*, 6.

male and three female assistants. This schoolhouse was ungraded and poorly equipped. The school term was for only six months as children were often required in the farms and tobacco factories as labor. Roughly eighty to ninety percent of the children enrolled attended school on a regular basis, but only 55.9 percent of the school-aged population was enrolled. Overall in the Black community, forty percent of the population was illiterate, but that number decreased in the generations further removed from slavery. DuBois did note that Black students were able to attend high school and college outside of Prince Edward County with many students going to Virginia Seminary in Lynchburg (now Virginia University of Lynchburg), the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University), Hartshorn Memorial College in Richmond, Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), and Ingleside Seminary in Burkeville.⁵

White attitudes toward Black education at the time of DuBois's study show a recalcitrance on their part to properly fund schools and even an antipathy toward education for the Black children of Prince Edward. An editorial appearing in the *Farmville Herald* in July 1900 complains that Black education and male suffrage were a "dismal failure – failure alike to white and colored." The editorial goes on to say that while education benefitted Booker T. Washington, for "Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, going to school has been a waste of time and money." For this author, Black education resulted in increased laziness "behind the hoe" and no "mental muscle" despite "hours spent in the school room." This author claimed the editorial was not written in malice, but regret for the problem, and pointed to the call for a new constitutional convention to rewrite the electoral laws of the state and hoped that "the voters of Virginia will be given

5. DuBois, *The Negroes of Farmville*, 12-14.

an opportunity to make answer. That they may have the good sense and the courage to make the just and proper one is the earnest wish and hope of all good citizens.”⁶

In 1901, these sentiments became more pointed as several editorials opined on having taxes paying for the Black schools in the county without a perceived return on the white taxpayers’ investment. One editorial in February 1901 complained of African Americans taking free education, leaving Prince Edward, and then coming back to be a burden upon society along with “new ideas to promulgate and make dissatisfied those who might have become valuable citizens.” This author claimed that “the negro takes \$400,000 of the school fund [most likely the state school fund]. As long as he constituted the labor of the country and aided in producing taxes, if he did not pay them, there might have been some justice in giving him an equal chance of education, but in more recent years he has practically refused to perform labor in the country...”⁷ Richard McElwaine, who would serve as Prince Edward’s representative to the constitutional convention, made clear his intentions for the convention when he wrote that he had “always thought the enfranchisement of the negro en mass was a crime.” He was less sure on education for Black children, but felt sure that the “negroes [should] have a larger relative share of the burdens of their schools.”⁸

By the end of the summer of 1901, a large contingent of Prince Edward County citizens felt strongly that African Americans should not be teachers even in the segregated schools. The *Herald* reported that at the Board of Education meeting for August that there was a full attendance to discuss “the feasibility of displacing colored

6. *Farmville Herald*. July 27, 1900. Farmville, Virginia, 2.

7. *Farmville Herald* February 8, 1901, pg. 3

8. Richard McElwaine, *Farmville Herald*, March 22, 1901, pg. 3.

teachers and substituting white male teachers.” Major A.R. Venable, Jr., led this contingent and spoke on its behalf before the board. The board tabled the idea, but only because it would prove to be impractical to do so “before first ascertaining that white teachers can be got to do the work.” After the meeting, Major Venable convened an unofficial body that “adopted a resolution to employ only white teachers for colored schools where suitable persons could be obtained at the regular salaries.” These events plus the comments from others suggest that the white citizens of Prince Edward County feared an educated Black population (which was the majority population) and took many steps to prevent Black citizens from getting out of their place in the tradition of the Virginia Way.

At the same time, Farmville grew in renown as a “progressive” educational center due to its State Normal College (now Longwood University). Many white teachers across the Southside and Commonwealth trained at this institution. Yet, these young women held the same regressive views on race. They subscribed to the Dunning School interpretation of the Reconstruction era, which painted the era of Black political achievement as tragic and celebrated the triumph of white supremacy through “Redemption.” These young teachers sought to replicate this interpretation in their own classrooms. The April 10, 1903, edition of the *Farmville Herald* was edited entirely by students from the Normal College, and their editorials reveal that despite their focus on education and abiding by the best practices, these trainee teachers were complicit in maintaining subpar education for Black Virginians. The first editorial printed defended the 1902 constitution that disenfranchised Black citizens and impoverished citizens who could not afford to pay a poll tax. This editorial claimed that ignorant Blacks and whites

were voting before and a beneficial effect of the new constitution would be widespread temperance as “it is chiefly the negroes who are upholding the saloons in their evil and disastrous work, and if the negro vote is cut down, perhaps it will not be long before these dens of misery will be overcome and abolished from the state.” The authors also accused Northern Republicans of trying to challenge the new constitution because they only wanted the Black votes of the state.⁹

The young women also bemoaned the fact that the President, Theodore Roosevelt, had invited Booker T. Washington to the White House to dine in October 1901, nearly two years prior to writing. They defended the Virginia Way of “proper social relations,” describing how the only acceptable Black person to them embodied the “mammy” and “darkey” stereotypes of slavery: “We people of the Old Sunny South do not hate the negro; on the other hand we all love our old Black ‘mammies,’ but they were brought over here from Africa not to be our equals socially nor in any other way, but to be our slaves. The old time Virginia darkey knows his place, he loves his ‘marster’ and his ‘missus,’ and his delight is to be their servant and to go and come at their command.” The authors go on to rebuke the notion that Black people held equal worth and dignity to white people and that emancipation was a moral good for society:

...is it not a pity that the children and grandchildren of such as these [the old stereotypes] should be spoiled by being taught that they are as good as the white man and capable of being his peer in every way? What is our country coming to? Surely the North must be nursing some false idea, but we are proud that the spirit of the old South, in this respect, unchanged and unchangeable. We hope that our countrymen will soon see their mistake and realize as we do, that the negro, though good, loyal, and often devoted to the white man, is still his inferior and not his equal.¹⁰

9. *Farmville Herald*, April 10, 1902, pg. 2

10. *Farmville Herald*, April 10, 1902, pg. 2

This lack of regard for the Black citizens of Prince Edward County is especially disheartening as it came from the students who were supposedly “modern and progressive” in education and did much to improve education in the rural parts of the state.

The subject on which the aspiring teachers spilled the most ink was the teaching of Southern history in public schools. The Normal College students argued that the use of “Northern” histories was biased in the telling of the Civil War and its causes, and therefore students should also have the Southern version to at least compare the two or they would not “learn to love and honor the noble Confederacy, which rose and fell without one blot upon its fair honor.”¹¹ This notion that Northern historians were biased is ironic as in just a few years, William Dunning at Columbia University would publish his history of Reconstruction that rested on the same white supremacist framework of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy that these young women would have been familiar with through the work of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.¹² A major concern regarding the historical record was the cause of the Civil War, as evident in column entitled “An Error that Should not be Made in the Teaching of History.” Besides bemoaning the fact that history is not taught correctly in schools anymore (a perennial complaint by many), these young women worried that students gave “slavery” as the answer to the question of what caused the civil war. To correct the record, they argued, “It is true slavery was an occasion of the war, but the true cause was State Sovereignty. If every teacher were correctly informed upon this historical point, and would instruct her

11. *Farmville Herald*, April 10, 1902, pg. 2

12. Eric Foner and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), xx.

pupils accordingly, it would do much to correct this erroneous idea among our people. The question may be asked why the error has been taught for so many years and has not been corrected. For the simple reason that the teachers have not investigated the historical facts thoroughly.”¹³ State sovereignty as the cause of the Civil War was the historical interpretation that graduates of the Normal College taught to thousands of children across the Southside. Thus, in the 1950s when these children had grown up and were opposing integration of public schools, it is hardly surprising that they specifically chose to name their resistance organization the “Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties.”

By 1905, it seemed that Prince Edward County as well as the rest of Virginia had come to terms with segregated education, but the white citizens of Virginia who espoused conservative values continued resisting efforts to allocate funds for Black schools. Senator Carter Glass wrote in 1905 in the *Lynchburg News* (that the *Farmville Herald* reprinted) excoriating Republicans for proposing that the state should cover the cost of textbooks for the white schools and Black schools. Glass saw it as an affront to white children to ask their parents to pay for better books for Black children. He stated that Black Virginians only paid four percent of the taxes of the state, with white people paying ninety-six percent. Glass also felt that it was too much of an imposition on white taxpayers for them to pay for so many state-funded endeavors for Blacks considering how much they had done since the Civil War:

With this record of what the white people of the state are doing for the colored race and what they have been doing out of their poverty for that race ever since the war is it right that the white people be made to pay \$100,000 of taxes every year to furnish the Blacks with free books? Should not the negro at least pay for

13. *Farmville Herald*, April 10, 1902, pg. 2

his school books? With white children throughout the country districts needing better schools, better teachers, and longer terms, must they still wait in order that the Blacks shall have free books furnished at the expense of the parents whose children need better schools?¹⁴

The *Herald* added its own comment, focusing on how the provision of textbooks for Black children would lead to resentment among white people: “An attempt to provide the colored children with free books at the expense of the white people will deepen and intensify this feeling and will cause the colored people to lose many of its best friends among the whites.” The editorial closed with this sentiment, that if the “respectable element of our colored citizens” wanted to preserve the “good feeling,” they would oppose the free books, meaning that respectable Black citizens, should again, know and stay in their place. However, by 1907, there seemed to be an established set of norms for Black education – it existed, but completely segregated from white education. The county made some efforts to make improvements to the curricula; a notice in the November 8, 1907 *Herald* advertised a “great educational rally... in the interests of the colored public schools.” The county provided the Black teachers with a day off for this professional development to hear Robert Russa Moton (born in Prince Edward County) of Hampton Normal School speak on education and “the welfare and betterment of the public schools.”¹⁵

By the end of the decade, Prince Edward citizens were perfectly content with public spending for infrastructure and improvements in the town. The town boasted of one of the lowest tax rates in the state – 85 cents on one hundred dollars – but they also boasted of all the public works funded by that money, making the town attractive –

14. Carter Glass, *Lynchburg News*, reprinted in the *Farmville Herald*, Farmville, VA, October 20, 1905, pg. 2.

15. *Farmville Herald*, Farmville, VA, November 8, 1907, pg. 3.

electric street lights, opera house, town hall, armory, fire department, water works and sewage system, two railroads, and two telegraph offices. A profile in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* described the town as “rich and enlightened” due to the younger “more progressive” generations as well as an educational center bolstered by the flourishing tobacco market. In 1909, the town had mainly produced dark tobacco, but were planning to “branch out next season and make a claim of the brights that are raised in convenient distance but now go to other markets and one of the four houses [the Planters, the Farmville, the Star, and the Randolph] will be devoted to the handling of brights. The movement will probably increase the sales a million pounds or more.”¹⁶ In addition to the tobacco warehouses, buyers from the largest tobacco companies in America held offices in Farmville – American Tobacco Company, Imperial Tobacco Company, RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company – as did agents from other countries. Farmville also had nine tobacco processing factories in the town. Certainly, the town and county were thriving from tobacco.¹⁷

W.E.B. DuBois also noted in his earlier study that much of the Black community lived above poverty. Most found employment in the tobacco factories or as laborers, but there were a good number of Black owned businesses such as grocery stores, masonry, barber shops, restaurants, and carpentry shops. Of the 262 families he surveyed, only 29 of them lived in poverty without their basic needs met. Describing a typical market day on Saturday, DuBois stated, “the town population swells to nearly twice its normal size

16. Frank Woodson, “Farmville Town in Prince Edward,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, September 3, 1911.

17. “Farmville is Full of Life,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, July 1, 1906.

from the influx of country people – mostly Negroes – some in carriages, wagons, and ox carts, and some on foot, and a large amount of trading is done.”¹⁸ Yet the disparities between the schools in Prince Edward County and the attitudes toward Black education from the white elite show that overall, the white people in Prince Edward were not interested at all in providing equal education as a civil right to Black people.

Early Challenges to Discrimination

From the 1920s to the 1950s, the disparities in education in the county only increased in Prince Edward. First, very few African American students advanced past the elementary grade levels in Virginia, especially in the rural areas. White Virginians were very reluctant to add high grades for African Americans, seeing it as an undue burden on the taxpayer. In the 1920s, many African American educators and local leaders pushed to establish high schools. In 1923, Black principals from across the state met in Petersburg at Virginia Normal Industrial Institute (now Virginia State University) to discuss high schools. Dr. George Phenix of Hampton Institute argued for the need for high school, and “his interest in colored schools was because colored people are citizens, not because they are colored; and that it is beside the point to discuss whether Negroes pay sufficient taxes to support them - the schools should be established and maintained by public funds.” He further stated that “since the Negro was a large factor in the production of the wealth of the state, and a comparatively small consumer of its wealth that he indirectly was a heavy taxpayer.”¹⁹ From the Southside, Halifax County School Superintendent E.J. Watkins

18. DuBois, *The Negroes of Farmville*, 15-16, quote, 5.

19. *Richmond Planet*. [volume] (Richmond, Va.), 13 Jan. 1923. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress.
<<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84025841/1923-01-13/ed-1/seq-2/>>

supported Black high schools, but framed it in the most paternalistic of words, in a spiritual appeal to white people to “[stir] the hearts of those in authority so that they will be led to feel their responsibility to a race who has always been faithful even under the most trying of circumstances.” Watkins did note that over the last decade Black school attendance had more than doubled. Another Hampton Institute leader, Dr. James Gregg noted that Virginia lagged behind North Carolina and Kentucky in providing educational opportunities to Black students and argued that “Negro boys and girls have the thirst and ambition for this higher training; second, certain professions require this fuller training.”²⁰ Sentiment among educators across the state did seem to agree it was necessary for counties to build more schools to educate African American students at the high school level.

In Prince Edward County, Black schools remained solely elementary schools until 1923. The county then decided to add seventh grade to the 1st-6th grade elementary schools, but only after petitions from the parents of Black students. The elementary buildings remained in terrible shape.²¹ The county made a little progress when they built the first Robert Russa Moton School in 1927. The building hosted mainly elementary grades for students in Farmville proper, but the upper level of the school held high school grades for all Black students in Prince Edward County, provided their parents could get them there. John Stokes wrote in his memoir that high school students quickly filled the

20. *Richmond Planet*. (Richmond, Va.), 13 Jan. 1923. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress.
<<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84025841/1923-01-13/ed-1/seq-2/>>

21. John Stokes (with Lois Wolfe and Herman J. Viola), *Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown and Me: A Memoir*, Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2008, 44.

building because they were so hungry for knowledge, and it was local legend that a passerby walked past the school and commented, “They are coming out of the windows!”²²

Moton School remained vastly overcrowded until local groups led by the Farmville Council of Colored Women successfully petitioned the school board to build a separate high school building in 1939. One of the 1951 strike leaders noted in his memoir that Martha E. Forrester, a retired public-school teacher from Richmond, led the efforts to secure a high school for Black students in Prince Edward County. She founded the Council of Colored Women in 1920 as an activist group for education. Williams remembered her as “a tall towering figure, quite stately and elegant in her stride as she rocked from side to side. Her physique symbolized strength and readiness. Whenever one was graced by her presence, one knew that he or she was in the company of a seriously sincere sister, sanctified in truth and the educational development of our people.”²³ The original purposes of the Council were laid out in their by-laws: (1) “To furnish systematic help for the uplift of the Negroes in our community; (2) To improve educational advantages for the Negroes of this community; (3) To secure harmony of action and cooperation among the people of Farmville; (4) To improve the home life, the morals and civic life of our people; (5) To administer to the less fortunate.”²⁴ Many of the founding members of the council were involved in education or were raising future student leaders, including Ida Allen, Nannie Harvey, Addie Holmes, Annie Miller, Margaret Ward, and

22. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 44-48.

23. J. Samuel Williams, Jr., *Exilic Existence: Contributions of Black Christians in Prince Edward County in the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2011, 37.

24. Williams, *Exilic Existence*, 38.

Katie Wiley. Williams' grandmother, Lena Scott Johnson, and his mother, Nannie Johnson Butler, became members. The council was affiliated with the National Council of Negro Women organized by Mary McLeod Bethune.

Other groups that advocated for a new high school included local churches and a local benevolent society. First Baptist Church, the largest and oldest Black church in the county, made education a priority with the development of its Sunday School and youth departments. The community was successful in persuading the county to use funding from the Public Works Administration to build a new high school for African American students in 1939; this high school was also named for Robert Russa Moton, and the former school that bore his name became an elementary school. At the same time, the county used the WPA fund to refurbish all-white Farmville High School, which had burned in 1938 and consolidated some of the smaller rural high schools. The county also provided school buses for white students to attend. In doing this, the schools remained unequal as Farmville High received science labs, a gymnasium, and a cafeteria, none of which were built at Moton.²⁵

Despite this triumph, the conditions at Moton High School deteriorated quickly due to overcrowding and substandard facilities. The school quickly became overcrowded – it was originally built for 180 students, but by 1950, the enrollment was 477. To compensate for the overcrowding issues, the school held three classes simultaneously in the auditorium and one class on a school bus. In 1948, the school board erected “tar paper shacks” as a “temporary measure,” one on the front lawn of the school and two in the

25. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

back. These shacks were only expected to last five years, and they left much to be desired aesthetically as “drivers passing by thought they were looking at chicken coops, instead of school buildings.”²⁶ The Moton PTA pressed the school board to do something to make the facilities better, but to little avail. John Lancaster, leader in the PTA, remembered that in “1944, ’45, ’46, ’47, ’48, we were going through this process [of trying to build a new school]. We even went so far as to go to the board with a three-point plan. And I remember very specifically one board member looked at it and said if we build a school like that, every Tom, Dick, and Harry will be going to school. And that was the first time it dawned on me that there wasn’t any intention for us to go to school.” The situation came to a point that the school board asked the Moton PTA to stop attending the school board meetings in 1951.²⁷

Students also recalled the terrible conditions of the school. The tar paper shacks were the worst of the indignities:

They built those God-awful tar paper shacks around the main building. And to make it even worse, on a bad day, when it rained too much, it rained in those classrooms you were sitting in...and on a cold day it was too cold for you. They had these pot-bellied stoves – if you weren’t close enough to the pot-bellied stove, you were just too cold... if you were too close... you were too warm. How are you going to study in a room like that?²⁸

Transportation was another area where the schools were unequal. John and Carrie Stokes recalled that simply getting to school was a hardship, and because of no bus transportation for Moton students, John and Carrie did not start school until they were old

26. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

27. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

28. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

enough to walk the four miles up the very busy US 15 highway to Farmville to get to school. They walked with their older brothers, Howard and Leslie, but it was a miserable trek when the weather was bad and when the bus carrying white students passed by them since its occupants would heckle and spit at them.²⁹ However, the Stokes siblings had a better situation than most of the Black children who lived in the rural parts of Prince Edward County. All of the Black elementary schools outside of Farmville were only one or two rooms that housed all of the elementary grades. These schools only had wood stoves for heat and no running water; thus, the students had to use outhouses that were poorly kept up. Comparatively, these schools were no better than the one built in the 1880s.³⁰

Despite the poor facilities, the Black community still relished the quality of their education because of the efforts of the teachers at the schools. Kennell Jackson, a Moton student, remembered that “the Black community in Farmville in the ‘40s was an ambitious community. The public-school system was a great engine of achievement and ambition on the part of the students.”³¹ The faculty of Moton school did what they could to press the board on the poor facilities. John Stokes recalled these efforts:

the “principal of our high school, Mr. M. Boyd Jones, had a running battle with the school superintendent, Mr. Thomas McIlwaine. Mr. Jones would ask, ‘When are you going to do something about these tar-paper structures? They’re leaking. They are inadequately insulated. There are no toilet facilities in them. We have an enrollment of more than 450 students in a school that was set up for 180 students.’ The Prince Edward County school board always had the same answer: ‘Oh, we’re working on it. We can’t find the land for a new facility.’” John Lancaster, the

29. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 18-19.

30. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 20.

31. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

county farm agent, and Rev. Griffin scouted land, but the school board made excuses for not purchasing the land.³²

The faculty of Moton school still impressed their students with the importance of education. Samuel Williams remembered that “even with our limitation, our teachers were driving people. They drove us in academia...They taught us to be creative thinkers, innovative, analytical...”³³ One of these teachers was a living example. Mrs. Dorothy Vaughan taught math at Moton. She came to teach in Farmville in 1931, but in 1943, she applied to work at Langley Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory and became a mathematician at NASA as documented in Margot Lee Shetterly’s *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. Mrs. Vaughan was a member of the PTA and a founding member of the Farmville NAACP chapter. As a teacher, she held high standards, did extra tutoring, and led the school choir. When the opportunity at Langley came, she took it.³⁴ Strike leader Barbara Johns credited teacher Inez Davenport Jones with inspiring her to do something about the conditions at Moton. Barbara talked to Davenport, the music teacher, about the conditions of Moton, and she asked Barbara, “Well, why don’t you do something about it?”³⁵ With the values that these teachers instilled, a new generation of Black students in Farmville soon would put a plan into motion that would challenge the culture, laws, and social values of the Virginia Way.

32. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 51.

33. “Living Separate But Unequal,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

34. Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*, New York: William Morrow, 2016, 10-17.

35. “A Call to Action,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

Barbara Johns and the 1951 Student Strike

By the 1950-1951 school year, the conditions at Moton High School reached the nadir of school conditions in Farmville, mainly due to overcrowding. Sadly, tragedy struck in March 1951, casting the inequalities between the white and Black schools into even more stark relief. By 1951, the county began providing more transportation for Black students to Moton High School, but on March 19, a school bus traveling in the western part of the county, near Elam and Pamplin, stopped when it crossed the railroad tracks due to mechanical problems. A train hit the rear of the bus, tearing it off. Twenty-three Moton students were on board -- ten were hospitalized and five died. The five students who died were Hettie Dungee, age fourteen, described as “friendly honor student”; Christine Hendricks, age seventeen, “outgoing, pleasant”; Dodson Hendricks, age eighteen, “quiet, sincere”; Naomi Hendricks, age eighteen, “cheerful, conscientious”; and Winfield Paige, age fifteen; “eager, ambitious.” This tragedy, combined with leader Barbara Johns’s own awakening to discrimination, triggered the student walkout.³⁶

Barbara Johns, while born in New York City, had strong family roots in Prince Edward County. Her parents moved around quite a bit, following good-paying jobs, but Barbara and her siblings lived with her grandparents on the family farm in Prince Edward County. She worked in the tobacco fields, which she remembered as a “vicious crop,” and also was responsible for taking care of her siblings while her mother worked a government job in Washington, D.C. Her mother described her as “sort of strange, sort of – deep. I don’t know. Anyway she would play for a while and then she would stop just as

36. “A Call to Action,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

abruptly, I guess you could say that she was selfish...She liked to be by herself quite a bit and thought that a lot of the things other kids were interested in were silly..." She was also a voracious reader, and many considered her to be similar in temperament to her uncle Vernon Johns, pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama (later the pastorate of Martin Luther King, Jr.). Barbara had worked at her father's general store in the county, which had a racially mixed clientele, and she recalled her father being on "good terms" with the white folks, but she realized the white folks wouldn't acknowledge her in town [Farmville] in public. She gained leadership experience through school and took opportunities to travel outside of the county, seeing what life was like outside of Farmville.³⁷

The precipitating incident for Barbara to do something about the conditions at Moton High School came from something that happens to many high schoolers – she woke up late and missed her own bus after getting her siblings ready. Her only option then to get to school was to wait to hitchhike with someone. About an hour after waiting for a potential ride, the bus for white Farmville High drove by half-empty. Seeing this half-empty bus that had a much later start time for white children in the area of the county where she lived made her angry, and this is what clinched her belief that something had to be done. That night, she devised a plan for a strike; she felt that her plan was divinely inspired when it came to her that night in a dream.³⁸ Samuel Williams

37. Bob Smith, "A Little Child Shall Lead Them," in *They Closed Their Schools: Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1951-1964*, excerpted in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them: A Documentary Account of the Struggle for School Desegregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia*, 35-37.

38. Barbara Johns, "Recollections," in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, 45-46.

described her from that point as that “serene fire and ‘prophetess Deborah’ of our movement.”³⁹ Once the plan hatched in her mind, she set about gathering a group of leaders from the Moton High School student body.

One student Barbara initially sought out was John Stokes who also came from a prominent family in Prince Edward. His siblings had all left the county and done well for themselves – they were major influences on him. Barbara recruited five student leaders from Moton, and they held a private meeting under the bleachers in the fall of 1950; they began planning for a strike in the spring of 1951, not waiting on the PTA to press for better facilities with the school board. The student leaders included Joy Cabaniss, Joan Johns, Carrie Stokes, John Stokes (president of the senior class), John Watson, and Samuel Williams. John Stokes was also a leader in debate and in New Farmers of America (the Black counterpart of FFA). He recalled that something about Barbara was different in calling for a strike – “There was something unique about her demeanor that commanded my respect. It made me not only trust her, but also have faith in her ability to take us to this Promised Land – a new school building.”⁴⁰ The group named the planned strike “The Manhattan Project”⁴¹ and carried it out in strict secrecy. Barbara Johns was General Groves, and the rest of the committee was J. Robert Oppenheimer. Moton’s code name became “Trinity” after the test site in New Mexico.⁴²

Stokes recalled that the original planners formed a committee of about twenty students who were leaders and trustworthy enough to keep the plans under wraps. They

39. Williams, *Exilic Existence*, 44.

40. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 55.

41. Williams, *Exilic Existence*, 43.

42. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 58-59.

also picked students from various parts of the county as well as students whose parents would not prevent them from participating.⁴³ Irene Taylor was the representative from the Leigh Mountain area, one of the most agricultural regions of the county. Stokes recalled that “people’s livelihoods there depended on being able to buy supplies and sell their crops, things that were controlled by the white power structure. Without a leader from this district, it would have been easy for our opponents to intimidate students there into returning to school before the strike had achieved its goal.”⁴⁴ There was concern about parents and the faculty of the school finding out the plan and stopping them, but also if the school board thought that the faculty knew, they would place blame on them. Stokes did recall that Mr. Jones did catch wind of the strike, but they fed the suspected informer false information to throw the principal off. The night before the strike, the Manhattan Project met at the Stokes family farm in Kingsville. They wondered if they might go to jail because of it although John Stokes’s older brother, Leslie, reminded them that 450 students couldn’t fit in the Farmville jail. They checked to make sure the weather would be favorable the next day and reviewed everyone’s responsibilities.⁴⁵

The Manhattan Project detonated on April 23, 1951. The students got the principal out of the building by calling the school from different points in Farmville to report that students were out of school and causing trouble in the public places downtown: “Just as we knew he would, Mr. Jones left the campus in a huff to check things out.”⁴⁶ After Mr. Jones left the building, students circulated a note to each

43. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 57.

44. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 58.

45. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 59.

46. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 63.

classroom announcing an emergency assembly in the auditorium. Barbara Johns initialed those notes as B.J., which the teachers interpreted as Boyd Jones, who was prone to calling emergency assemblies for things as mundane as “someone littering in the school yard. He was a gung-ho stickler for following rules.”⁴⁷ As the students entered the assembly, the committee was on the stage; Johns got the students to settle down and had everyone say the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord’s Prayer along with a song, and then the committee asked the teachers to leave. They did so for fear of the teachers losing their jobs, and all but one teacher left. This one was escorted out by some football players, who then stood guard. Stokes recalled that this particular teacher was a “stooge of the power structure.”⁴⁸ Johns gave a speech to the students: “I do know that I related with heated emphasis the fact they knew to be the truth. We mapped out for those students...our wish that they not accept the conditions of our school and that they would do something about it.” Her sister, Joan Johns Cobb, also recalled that moment: “Barbara stood up there and addressed the school. She seemed to have everyone’s attention... at one point, she took off her shoe and she banged on the podium and said that we were going to go out on strike and would everyone please cooperate and don’t be afraid, just follow us out. So we did. The entire student body followed her out...”⁴⁹

John Stokes recalled how vibrant the atmosphere was in the auditorium:

When I saw those quiet, doubting, innocent-acting students shouting, ‘two bits--four bits—six bits—a dollar—all for this strike stand up and holler,’ I knew we were on a roll. We had gotten the principal and almost all the teachers to leave, and we had won over the pessimists and the quiet ones to our side. I felt nothing could stop our strike now. Man, you talk about rocking. No one was seated. It was

47. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 64.

48. Stokes, 64.

49. “A Call to Action,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

like a heavy thunderstorm in full force. I thought to myself, all we need now is for lightning to strike. And lightning did strike. It came in the form of my mother. Right in the middle of one of my cheers, I happened to glance at the entrance door.⁵⁰

Stokes's mother showed up with her friend, Mrs. Daisy Anderson, at the school after hearing a student who left the assembly and ran up Route 25 screaming "there was a riot at the high school." She asked John, "Son, are you all alright?" Once she realized that everything was fine, she turned to her friend and they left, which signaled to the Stokes that they would have their parents' support through this.⁵¹ Parents kept showing up as news started spreading downtown to check on their children. However, none of the parents took their children home. When Mr. Jones returned, he was surprised to find an orderly demonstration – as Stokes said, "we had been taught to respect authority. We knew that the only path to accomplishing our goal of gaining a new school had to be a peaceful one."⁵²

Students made picket signs and started moving outside with them, but a message came from the superintendent that if they would not go to class, they had to leave or they would be arrested for trespassing on school property. The leaders of the committee told Mr. Jones and their parents that they would not go back to class until something was done about the condition of the schools. They attempted to meet with the superintendent, but he refused to see them.⁵³

However, one adult in Farmville who was enthusiastically willing to help the students achieve their goal was Reverend Leslie Francis Griffin. Reverend Griffin was

50. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 64-65.

51. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 64-65.

52. Stokes, 66.

53. Stokes, 66.

the pastor of First Baptist Church – he had succeeded his father as pastor. The pastor was also a veteran of World War II, and after returning from four years of service in Europe, Griffin studied at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, joining the NAACP there.⁵⁴ Samuel Williams of the strike committee remembered that Reverend Griffin was different from other pastors they encountered, especially with his emphasis on Social Gospel – “applying the Social and Ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth to social problems in society. Thus, he gave us, as it were, a ‘New Jesus!’”⁵⁵ Reverend Griffin was deeply invested in Prince Edward’s Black community, working in the NAACP and serving as the President of the Moton PTA. So when Reverend Griffin and John Lancaster, the county extension agent, heard the news of the walkout, they along with other parents headed down to the school to see what was going on. Rev. Griffin offered First Baptist Church as a meeting place to continue organizing and suggested the students contact the NAACP’s Richmond office. Carrie Stokes and Barbara Johns wrote the letter that day to Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson:

Gentleman: We hate to impose as we are doing, but under the circumstances that we are facing, we have to ask for your help. Due to the fact that the facilities and building in that name of Robert R. Moton High School are inadequate, we understand that your help is available to us. This morning, April 23, 1951, the students refused to attend classes under the circumstances. You know that this is a very serious matter because we are out of school, there are seniors to be graduated and it can’t be done by staying at home. Please we beg you to come down at the first of this week. If possible Wednesday, April 25th between nine a.m. and three p.m. We will provide a place for you to stay. We will go into detail when you arrive.⁵⁶

54. Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*, ebook edition chapter 19.

55. Williams, 54.

56. “A Call to Action,” Exhibit, Robert Russa Moton Museum, Farmville, Virginia, Visited September 19, 2015.

The next day, April 24, several members of the strike committee worked to intercept students who had been absent on the day of the walkout and convince them to go back home. The committee borrowed cars from local Black businessmen to take these students back to their homes.⁵⁷ Nineteen members of the strike committee secured a meeting with Superintendent Thomas McIlwaine (distant relative of the 1901 Constitutional representative Richard McIlwaine, Hampden Sydney graduate, and member of Pi Kappa Alpha),⁵⁸ but the superintendent moved this meeting from his office at the school board offices to the county courthouse. McIlwaine was waiting for them in the courtroom and sitting in the judge's seat. The committee presented a list of demands that included a date for when construction would begin on a new high school for Black students, which had been on the county's improvement plan for several years at this point. In his response, McIlwaine trotted out the similar rhetoric from the earlier part of the century on why the school was taking so long to build. Not only would a new school be expensive, McIlwaine argued, but the county only had one-third of what the cost of the new school saved, and that the amount of taxes Black people paid was ten percent of the taxes collected in the county. He then went on to tell the students that the cost of students striking was about \$100 per day, and that money was taking away from a new school.⁵⁹ The students became increasingly frustrated as the superintendent kept telling them that the facilities were in good shape, and that they should instead be grateful as "the only money that has been spent since 1937 has been spent for Negro schools."

57. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 72.

58. Hampden Sydney College, *Kaleidoscope 1925 Yearbook* (Hampden-Sydney, Virginia, 1925), Ancestry.com.

59. Stokes, *Student on Strike*, 75-76.

However, records from the time showed that the county school system spent about \$817 per white student in the county compared to the \$194 spent per Black student. McIlwaine also warned that the students should “take things as they come instead of by force,” which would “lead to hatred among the people.”

NAACP lawyers Hill and Robinson did not waste any time in arranging to meet with the students. They had planned a trip to Blacksburg but detoured to stop in Farmville to meet with students who were leading the school strike. While the students had the goal in mind for a better school that was still segregated, Hill and Robinson made clear that the NAACP could only help them if they changed their goal to integration of the public schools in Prince Edward County. The Moton PTA held a meeting the evening of April 26, and more than 950 people attended, including the Executive Secretary of the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP, Lester Banks. Barbara Johns addressed the assembly and announced that the student strike committee wanted the assistance of the NAACP and would support petitioning to end segregation in the Prince Edward County Public Schools. The parents of the students felt apprehension at supporting total desegregation due to possible reprisals from the white power structure of Prince Edward County, yet the assembly voted to continue pressing forward in pursuit of their new goal.⁶⁰

Following this meeting, the strike committee worked in the next several days to create a petition that could form the basis of a lawsuit against the county school board. May 3 was the deadline for community members to sign this petition, and the committee spent the week encouraging the community to retain the initial support witnessed at the meeting. In the meantime, the *Farmville Herald* published an article and editorial that

60. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 82-84.

condemned the strike as a “mass hookie,” and the *Richmond Times Dispatch* also printed an editorial condemning the strike as unreasonable as there was a plan to build a new high school.⁶¹ Following this, Principal Jones received orders from the school board to send a letter to all parents requiring students to return to school or face “grave consequences which must be suffered by those who persist in violating the compulsory attendance laws.” In response, Reverend Griffin and John Lancaster wrote their own letter to the parents emphasizing that the leadership of the church and PTA supported the student strike. The committee took copies of this letter to every Black home in Prince Edward County, and the strike continued with parents keeping their children home.⁶²

On May 3, the Moton PTA called another emergency meeting, in which the strike committee, Reverend Griffin and John Lancaster planned to finalize a petition to the school board for total integration. Reverend Griffin spent the week between meetings driving all over the county to get signatures for the petition and to buck up morale and support for the students. The strike committee also held their own meetings with the adult leadership that week, and the local press tried to crash several of their meetings. When they could not gain entry, the paper published an article about the nerve of the students not allowing white journalists into their meetings, throwing out the label of communist on the students for the first but definitely not the last time.⁶³

On May 3, the strike committee, their adult advisers and the NAACP held a meeting at First Baptist Church in downtown to formally sign the petition to present to

61. “Negroes Pupils at Farmville Go On Strike,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, April 25, 1961 in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, 48; Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 88.

62. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 88.

63. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 90.

the county school board. John Stokes recalled that the church sanctuary was packed with people, over five hundred, and the work done by the strike committee and adult leaders to turn out the community paid off. Several leaders of the movement spoke, including Barbara Johns and Reverend Griffin, but the mood of the meeting shifted when the former principal of Moton High School, stood up to speak. Stokes called him a stooge of T.J. McIwaine, and the former principal criticized the strike and accused the NAACP lawyers of being outside agitators. Barbara Johns responded to his comments, and as Stokes recalled, she “really lit into the stooge-” and took him to task to a thunderous standing ovation. By the end of the meeting, the committee collected almost two hundred signatures on the petitions, over four pages worth. The lawyers and the strike committee announced that the students would return to school that Monday, May 7, now that the students had registered a formal complaint with the schools.⁶⁴

However, beginning the next week, the white backlash to the petition began with the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross on the Moton school grounds on Sunday, May 6. The local police refused to investigate it seriously, dismissing it as a prank.⁶⁵ The *Farmville Herald* printed an editorial entitled “A Problem Becomes an Issue,” as Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson had filed the petition with the school board on May 3. J. Barrye Wall, editor of the *Farmville Herald*, ran his first editorial condemning the actions of the students:

Instead of a local effort to improve school conditions, the movement has become a movement to eliminate racial segregation from the Virginia Constitution... The progress of the South, of Virginia, of any section or community where two races must live together depends upon the principles of segregation. Early in the Reconstruction Period it was seen as a necessity by leaders of both races.

64. Stokes, *Students on Strike*, 95-99.

65. Stokes, 101-102.

Readjustments have been accomplished and progress has been made through an understanding between the white people and the colored people of the South. Until this incident, the leaders of the races in Prince Edward County have worked together for the benefit of each...⁶⁶

Wall became one of the spearheads for the massive resistance movement in Farmville and later the Southside as his newspaper chronicled all of his segregationist views.

More retaliations came down as in less than a month, Boyd Jones lost his job as principal, and John Lancaster lost his job as the county farm agent. Once the petition became a lawsuit, listing 117 students and 67 parents, Black families became targets for the white power structure. Wall published the full list of names in the *Farmville Herald* on May 4. Many farmers lost their lines of credit at stores and the banks. Others weren't allowed to sell their crops within the county.⁶⁷ Despite the immediate retaliation of the white power structure, the Moton students and their families were not deterred. Dorothy Davis and her family became the namesake of the lawsuit, *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board*. However, the students did not realize at the time that their efforts to obtain a better school would have national ramifications three years later and bring even more of a struggle for desegregation as their lawsuit joined four others from around the country under the name, *Brown v. Board of Education*.

66. J. Barrye Wall, "A Problem Becomes an Issue, *Farmville Herald*, Farmville, Virginia, May 8, 1951 in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, 49-50.

67. Stokes, 107.

CHAPTER 3

“NINE REPREHENSIBLE INDIVIDUALS GASCONADING IN JUDICIAL ERMINE”: SOUTHSIDE SEGREGATIONISTS’ REACTION TO *BROWN* AND THEIR PLAN FOR MASSIVE RESISTANCE

Etta Neal, a Prince Edward County, Virginia, native, recalled about her school days in 1959:

My mother will tell you, I was the biggest crybaby about [not] going to school. She will tell you she had the hardest time getting it in my head why I could not wake up every morning and go to school...I’d wake up every morning and say “I want to go to school.” I’ll never forget one day she brought me to the school here, when they had the chains on the doors, and you know, she touched the chains to say, “See, you can’t go to school because the doors are locked,” and it had to sink into me that, you know, I can’t go in there, into the schools.¹

Ms. Neal was one of 1700 Black students in Prince Edward County who were shut out of their education for five years due to the white county Board of Supervisors closing all public schools rather than integrate them in 1959. After the 1951 Moton High School student walkout caught white segregationists by surprise, the white segregationist school officials, county officials, politicians, press, and clergy of Southside Virginia mounted a widespread and far-reaching campaign to prevent the U.S. Supreme Court from ordering integration of schools. This effort became known as “massive resistance,” and it was a model for how segregationists across the South could resist civil rights legislation and court orders. With the Byrd Organization leading the way, these segregationists fought

1. Monica Vrooman, “The Doors Were Locked,” in *10 Stories, 50 Years Later*, Longwood University, Spring 2014. Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

tooth and nail to preserve their tradition of segregation and the Virginia Way through every legal strategy, legislative tactic, and means of propaganda they could. What they could not do, however, was break the spirit from the student strike, which remained strong for eight years.

Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board and the Road to Brown

The 1951 student walkout at Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia, galvanized the local African American community to make a legal challenge to the blatant discrimination in the public county schools. The students, with assistance from the NAACP, rallied their parents to file a lawsuit asking for the desegregation of the county schools. While their initial goal was equalization of school facilities, they recognized that the NAACP would be most helpful if they became a test case for K-12 integration. The students and parents bravely signed a petition to the county asking for desegregation knowing the risks of retaliation the white community and their white employers might take. When the school board refused to act, the petition officially became the lawsuit *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board*. This case wound its way through the United States District Court, the United States Court of Appeals, and finally to the Supreme Court, and after two years, became part of the combined school integration suit, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Joining four other integration suits from around the country, *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board* set a new course for the nascent Civil Rights Movement nationally and also triggered one of the strongest instances of white backlash to civil rights in the twentieth century, exemplified by the actions of the white power structure and at-large white community in Southside Virginia.

While the progression from planning the student walkout in April 1951 to filing the suit for integration in May 1951 happened at lightning speed, the progression of *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board* took three years before the Supreme Court made its final ruling – many of the students who led the walkout and strike graduated from Moton before the case finished. From the filing of *Davis* on May 21, 1951, to opening arguments in February 1952, very little happened in Prince Edward County to indicate that its African American community was leading an effort to overthrow Jim Crow segregation. However, the white leaders of Prince Edward began their campaign of intimidation to punish the adults who assisted the community in filing the suit in July 1951. The county school board voted to not renew the contract of M. Boyd Jones, principal of Moton High School, and Rev. L. Francis Griffin faced efforts to remove him from the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Farmville. In response to this effort, which came from outside of his congregation, he delivered a sermon on July 28 entitled “The Prophecy of Equalization,” based upon the scriptures of Isaiah 40:4-5: “Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill will be leveled; the uneven ground will become smooth and the rough places, a plain. And the glory of the Lord will appear, and all humanity together will see it, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Reverend Griffin boldly declared from the pulpit that their cause of desegregation was just and no matter the cost, they would stay the course:

...but we all may rest assured whatever else might be said, God does not believe in segregation...The majority of us Christians believe in a safe Christianity that does not attack our status quo. No man can be a Christian who does not resist injustice regardless of the hazardous and dangerous risks involved. “For this cause,” Jesus said, “came I into the world.” Realizing the hazards involved in taking a stand against His contemporaries, Jesus nevertheless moved forward with faith because faith for Him was the courage that acts by understanding...When is it that every Southern church and clergymen will proclaim the “accepted year of

the Lord?” When shall men clamor for brotherhood and there shall be no man bound to the chains of circumstances? When can every citizen look to his leadership with veneration and respect? How long, Lord, how long?...Of course, there are those who will cry that if you do not like the South, MOVE! How silly! There is no record which says you can solve a problem by running away from it...²

Reverend Griffin and the Black community of Prince Edward County had no intention of running from those who would try to intimidate them, but they would have to wait for some time to see movement on their case.

Arguments for *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* opened in United States District Court on February 25, 1952. NAACP lawyers Oliver Hill, Spottswood Robinson, and Robert Carter represented the plaintiffs, while T. Justin Moore, Archibald Robertson, and T. Justin Moore, Jr. represented Prince Edward County; and J. Lindsay Almond, the Virginia Attorney General, and Henry Wickham, the assistant Attorney General, represented the Commonwealth of Virginia in aid to the defense. A three-judge panel made up of Judges Archibald Dobie, Sterling Hutcheson, and Albert Vickers Bryan heard the case. In US District Court, the plaintiffs laid out the disparities of the Black and white schools of Prince Edward County, arguing that the disparities were a violation of the equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment. The plaintiffs did request if the court did not rule to eliminate segregation, that the court require the county to equalize the schools. In the suit, the plaintiffs specifically challenged section 140 of the Constitution of Virginia that stated “White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school” as a breach of the Fourteenth

2. L. Francis Griffin, “The Prophecy of Equalization,” Sermon delivered July 28, 1951, in Brian J Daugherty and Brian Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them: A Documentary Account of the Struggle for School Desegregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia*, 2019, 52–53.

Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1876. Throughout the hearings, expert witnesses testified to the degree that segregation damaged Black children's development and educational attainment. The defense also called expert witnesses to counter the plaintiffs' evidence, including the president of the University of Virginia, Colgate Darden. From the trial transcripts, the counsels for the defense and even Judge Dobie were hostile, condescending, and down-right rude to the witnesses for the plaintiffs and plaintiffs' counsel. Moore Sr., Robertson, and Judge Dobie were all considered paragons of Virginia's genteel society, but their actions in the trial revealed how defensive that gentility was of its segregated society and norms.³

Not surprisingly, the panel ruled against the plaintiffs, stating in the opinion:

It indisputably appears from the evidence that the separation provision rests neither upon prejudice, nor caprice, nor upon any other measureless foundation. Rather the proof is that it declares one of the ways of life in Virginia. Separation of white and colored "children" in the public schools of Virginia has for generations been a part of the mores of her people. To have separate schools has been their use and wont.⁴

The panel did rule that the public school facilities were unequal and ordered the county immediately "to pursue with diligence and dispatch their present program, now afoot and progressing, to replace the Moton buildings and facilities with a new building and new equipment, or otherwise remove the inequality in them."⁵

The Prince Edward County officials redoubled their efforts to move quickly on a new Moton High School, which they began in response to the filing of the suit in June

3. Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, First Vintage books ed (New York, NY: Vintage, 2004) Chapter 20, ebook.

4. *Davis v. County School Board*, 103 F. Supp. 337 (E.D. Va. 1952), No. 103 F. Supp. 337 (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia March 7, 1952).

5. *Davis v. County School Board*, 103 F. Supp. 337 (E.D. Va. 1952).

1951. They borrowed the strategy of segregationists in South Carolina, who moved quickly to pre-empt any court orders to desegregate in response to the *Briggs v. Elliott* school desegregation case from Clarendon County, South Carolina. A similar case in many regards to *Davis, Briggs* came one year before the Prince Edward suit. NAACP lawyers who worked on the *Davis* suit, including Robert Carter and Spottswood Robinson, along with Thurgood Marshall argued that the Clarendon County Black schools were inferior to the white schools. Surprising the NAACP lawyers, the counsel for the defense, Robert Figg, conceded in court that the schools were unequal and pledged that Clarendon County would equalize the schools. That panel ruled 2-1, and the dissenting judge, J. Waties Waring, wrote the first dissent against segregation, stating that “segregation is per se inequality.” While the *Briggs* plaintiffs also appealed their case to the Supreme Court, the Clarendon County school officials moved quickly to work with South Carolina governor James Byrnes and the General Assembly to pass legislation to fund a “equalization” program in South Carolina through levying a three-percent sales tax that yielded \$75 million. As construction began on Black schools in South Carolina, these politicians made clear that they would not yield to the courts. Speaking in March 1951 to the South Carolina Educational Association at the same time the *Davis* case was in the US District Court, Governor Byrnes stated:

Should the Supreme Court decide this case against our position, we will face a serious problem. Of only one thing we can be certain. South Carolina will not, now nor for some years to come, mix white and colored children in our schools. If the court changes what is now the law of the land, we will, if it is possible, live within the law, preserve the public school system, and at the same time maintain segregation. If that is not possible, we will abandon the public school system. To do that would be choosing the lesser of two great evils.⁶

6. “November 26, 1952 – School Desegregation Cases,” *Papers of the NAACP*, ProQuest.

While the Commonwealth of Virginia did not take up a building plan like that of South Carolina across the state, the officials of Prince Edward County moved swiftly to complete a new Moton High School. The “equalized” Moton opened in September 1953, while the *Davis* case continued in the courts.

The NAACP appealed *Davis* to the Supreme Court in July 1952, and its lawyers began making plans to argue it along with concurring school integration cases, including *Briggs v. Elliott*, *Brown v. Board of Education* out of Kansas, *Bolling v. Sharpe* from Washington, D.C., and *Gebhart v. Belton* from Delaware. While *Briggs* reached the Supreme Court first, it was remanded to district court in January 1952 for a hearing on the progress of equalizing schools in Clarendon County. The District Court ruled just a few days after the *Davis* case that the equalization attempts would suffice. This decision left *Brown* the only case on the Supreme Court’s docket in 1952, so when the appeals from *Davis*, *Briggs*, *Bolling*, and *Gebhart* also made it to the Supreme Court in the summer and fall of 1952, the Supreme Court justices voted to combine the cases for a hearing on December 9, 1952.⁷ The Supreme Court then waited another year for a second round of arguments in December 1953 that focused on the question of the intent of the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause. In this hearing, Thurgood Marshall and Spottswood Robinson argued the Southern cases of *Briggs* and *Davis*, facing off against prior opponents, T. Justin Moore and J. Lindsay Almond, and lawyer John W. Davis, retained by the states of South Carolina and Virginia to argue the appellants’ case.⁸ The Court deliberated for several more months, but on May 17, 1954, it unanimously

7. Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 540–42.

8. School Segregation Cases — Order of Argument Record Group 267: Records of the Supreme Court National Archives and Records Administration.

overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in its ruling that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

Initial responses to the Warren court's opinion in Virginia ranged from jubilation to despair. The NAACP lawyers rejoiced at the decision and the language in the opinion that struck a major blow to the entire system of Jim Crow in the South; Moton student leader John Stokes recounted with pride that of the five cases in the decision, the *Davis* suit was the only one that was student-led, and that case was "only the first step in overturning segregation in America."⁹ Virginia's segregationist politicians were less thrilled to severely understate it. In the initial statements from Harry Byrd, Governor Thomas Stanley, and former governor Bill Tuck, we see the seeds of massive resistance already fomenting in their minds. Senator Byrd's statement from the same day as the ruling recognized gravity of the situation as this ruling threatened to upend the Virginia Way:

The unanimous decision of the Supreme Court to abolish segregation in public education is not only surprising but will bring implications and dangers of the greatest consequence. It is the most serious blow that has yet been struck against the rights of the states in a matter vitally affecting their authority and welfare. The Supreme Court reversed its previous decision directing 'separate but equal' facilities for the education of both races.¹⁰

Byrd immediately positioned the South as victim in this ruling, implying that the federal government was imposing a hardship on the South when Southern governments had complied with what the law of the land said:

Nothing now remains for the Supreme Court to do except to determine the effective date and the method of the application of its decision. One of the cruel results arising out of this 'about-face' of the Supreme Court is that the Southern

9. Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 420; Stokes, 111.

10. Senator Harry F. Byrd, "Statement by Senator Harry F. Byrd, May 17, 1954," in *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

states, accepting the validity of the previous decision, in recent years have expended hundreds of millions of dollars for the construction of new Negro school facilities to conform with the policy previously laid down by the Court. Great progress has been made at tremendous cost throughout the Southern states to carry out that which our Southern State Governments had the right to believe was the law of the land. This reversal by the Supreme Court from its 'separate but equal' policy to complete abolition of segregation will create problems such as have never confronted us before.¹¹

Finally, Byrd predicted that Southerners would not accept this ruling, and that it would be deleterious to the education of children:

The decision will be deplored by millions of Americans, and, instead of promoting the education of our children, it is my belief that it will have the opposite effect in many areas of the country. In Virginia we are facing now a crisis of the first magnitude. Those in authority, and the parents directly affected in the education of their children, should exercise the greatest wisdom in shaping our future course.¹²

Freshman Congressman Bill Tuck of Virginia's Fifth District agreed with Byrd, stating that "The decision imposes on the good people of America a way of life not envisioned in our Constitution and to which many are unalterably unopposed... The abolishment of segregation in our schools will lower the standards of public education, and will tend to mar the cordial and understanding race relations which have existed for so long."¹³ Tuck was much more colorful in his description of the Warren Court in private letters, calling them "nine reprehensible individuals gasconading in judicial ermine."¹⁴ The Governor of Virginia, Thomas Stanley, called for "cooler heads to prevail," and announced he would form a biracial commission to study the issue, but this statement was really a stopgap while the segregationists planned a response to the *Brown*

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. William Bryan Crawley, *Bill Tuck, a Political Life in Harry Byrd's Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 220.

14. Crawley, 223.

ruling. Politicians across Southside, including now Congressman Tuck, began hatching plans to resist this order as long as they could.

White Backlash to the *Brown* Decision and the Creation of Massive Resistance

As the state politicians recovered from the shock of the *Brown* decision, Southside segregationists began organizing to do all that they could to stop integration of schools. Leading figures in Southside, namely Prince Edward County and neighboring counties, began meeting at a firehouse in Petersburg to create an organization that would function like the NAACP on the behalf of the segregationists of Southside. *Farmville Herald* editor, J. Barrye Wall, and Congressman Watkins Abbitt of Virginia's Fourth District, which included Nottoway, Appomattox, and much of the Black belt counties in the Tidewater region, were among this leadership. Congressman Bill Tuck also participated in these organizational meetings. The group they officially organized on October 26, 1954, became known as the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. The name was suggested by Wall, who drew the name from a Confederate memorial close to his newspaper's office.¹⁵ While on the surface their purpose seemed respectable, they were in many ways the Virginian counterpart of the White Citizens' Councils, founded in Mississippi on July 11, 1954. From the stated purpose of the group, the organization pledged to "employ every lawful means to defend and perpetuate them [the right to determine segregation of the races], to the end that this Republic may continue and prosper."¹⁶ The group elected Farmville natives to leadership positions,

15. Daugherty and Grogan, 99.

16. "For State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties: The Defenders," Pamphlet, August 1955, *Norfolk Public Schools Desegregation Collection, MG92*, Special Collections and University Archives, Perry Library, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

including Robert Crawford as the president of the organization.¹⁷ The Defenders quickly went to work to influence the commission that Governor Stanley organized in August 1954. This commission led by state senator Garland Gray, a founding member of the Defenders, set out to study the *Brown* decision and make recommendations for education policy. The Defenders set out to make a “Plan for Virginia,” and when the Gray Commission released its findings in November 1955, the recommendations were the ones the Defenders had approved.

The other priority of the Defenders at the time was to recruit as many as possible into their membership. The eighteen founding members quickly established chapters all over Virginia. Bill Tuck’s home county of Halifax created the largest chapter.¹⁸ As the chapters grew, the Defenders became more extreme in their rhetoric. Tuck and Defenders legal counsel, Collins Denny, Jr., spoke at a rally packed into the Halifax County High School gymnasium in November 1955 and declared the white supremacist beliefs of the Defenders as previously mentioned. Denny went on to also laud the resistance that Prince Edward County and Clarendon County, South Carolina, mounted: “Prince Edward was under the gun but Prince Edward rose on her hind feet and said she would appropriate no money for integrated schools. If it had not been for Prince Edward County and Clarendon County, S.C. standing alone at the moment we would have court decrees all over Virginia and the South ordering school integration.”¹⁹ This reference to South Carolina in Denny’s

17. “For State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties: The Defenders.”

18. Crawley, *Bill Tuck, a Political Life in Harry Byrd’s Virginia*, 227.

19. “South Boston Rally Draws 2,300 Crowd: Throng Hears Tuck, Denny,” Reprinted and Distributed by the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, *Norfolk Public Schools Desegregation Collection, MG92*, Special Collections and University Archives, Perry Library, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

speech was not just a rhetorical device, but the Defenders were coordinating with the White Citizens' Councils of South Carolina, Mississippi, and other Deep South states. A report on the "New Ku Klux Klan" by the national NAACP office and a report from Herbert Mitchell of the National Agricultural Workers Union to the AFL and CIO characterized the Defenders' activity as part of the white backlash and terrorism happening across the South.²⁰

A month later, in December 1955, there was a mass meeting of segregationists and white supremacist organizations in Memphis, Tennessee, albeit it was organized in secret. Delegates from twelve Southern states went to Memphis to organize a national effort to "to fight racial integration and other efforts to destroy the Constitution." Leading Southern politicians were in attendance, including Senator James Eastland, Senator Strom Thurmond, Governor Marvin Griffin of Georgia, future Senator Herman Talmadge of Georgia, Fielding Wright of Mississippi, who ran as Thurmond's vice presidential choice on the 1948 States' Rights ticket, and Southside Virginia's own Bill Tuck, Watkins Abbitt, attorney James S. Easley of South Boston, and J. Segar Gravatt of Blackstone, who was also the legal counsel for the Prince Edward County School Board. Also of note, South Carolina sent S.E. Rogers of Summerton as part of their delegation to represent the interest of Clarendon County. Naming themselves the "Federation for Constitutional Government," this group would serve as a channel of communication among the state groups, including the Defenders and the White Citizens Councils. While at the Memphis meeting, the Federation participants swapped tactics in resisting the court

20. Elizabeth Geyer, "The New Ku Klux Klan," Report in *Papers of the NAACP*; Herbert Mitchell, "A Report on the Rise of the White Citizens Councils in the South," December 1, 1955, in *Papers of the NAACP*.

order, including economic boycott and reprisals and adopting the doctrine of interposition to “nullify and void Supreme Court decision in the racial area,” an idea from the Defenders in Virginia. In the keynote address, James Eastland of Mississippi said the purpose of this Federation would be to “mobilize and organize public opinion... We are about to embark on a great crusade, a crusade to restore Americanism and return the control of our Government to our people. In addition our organization will carry on its banner the slogan of free enterprise, and we will fight those organizations who attempt with much success to socialize industry and the great medical profession of this country.” Chairman of the executive committee of the Federation John Barr of Louisiana raised the stakes further in his comments: “Defeat means death, the death of Southern culture and our aspirations as an Anglo-Saxon people. Generations of Southerners yet unborn will cherish our memory because they will realize that the fight we now wage will have preserved for them their untainted racial heritage, their culture, and the institutions of the Anglo-Saxon race.”²¹ After this meeting, the Defenders continued to work to grow their chapters, exert their influences on state policy, and to coordinate with groups across the Deep South.

After the 1954 *Brown* decision, Virginia’s state officials began laying the groundwork for what would become its policy of “Massive Resistance.” First, Governor Stanley issued a public statement that “admonished citizens to receive the decision with cool heads and sane minds,” and he also considered creating a biracial commission made

21. Anthony Lewis. "Segregation Group Confers in Secret: SEGREGATION UNIT MEETS SECRETLY." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Dec 30, 1955. ProQuest.

up of educational leaders from across the Commonwealth.²² But on June 25, 1954, the governor took a hard line against the ruling and stated that he would use all legal means to continue segregated schools in Virginia. He turned the reins of the legal implementation over to Virginia's attorney general, J. Lindsay Almond, who helped the Southside counties pass resolutions that vowed to maintain segregated schools. Tuck's home county of Halifax was the first to do so on June 8, and fifty-five counties passed similar resolutions.²³ At the end of the summer on August 30, Governor Stanley appointed the Gray Commission made up of representatives from Southside. With these actions, the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP noted that the opposition to the Supreme Court ruling mainly stemmed from three interrelated areas – the Gray Commission itself, members of the General Assembly and county Boards of Supervisors, and the Defenders. What the NAACP did not note was that these groups were one and the same, so making this coordinated effort against desegregation was relatively easy and showed how much of a grip the Southside segregationists held over the state government.²⁴

From the summer of 1954 through the end of 1956, the segregationist politicians, government officials, lawyers, newspaper editors, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and Sons of Confederate Veterans all communicated with each other and other like-minded individuals across the South to put into place a plan to legally resist the *Brown* ruling. Senator Harry Byrd held the highest political influence of the group, and just about every Southside official, state official, and newspaper editor of the region

22. "Virginia since May 17, 1954," in *Papers of the NAACP*.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

sought out his opinion in every decision. Senator Byrd remained focused on what he could do in Congress, but people like Congressman Bill Tuck kept him apprised of who was running for political office in these districts because Byrd was still the giant in The Organization – his approval guaranteed election. Byrd also coordinated the most with state officials, including Lindsay Almond, but Richmond newspaper editor, James Kilpatrick, editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, cast the widest net of influence as he corresponded with newspaper editors across the South, the Citizens Councils of Mississippi, the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s national office, and other officials, including judges from all over Virginia. He often wrote to J. Segar Gravatt, and they together hammered out the proposals that the Defenders offered the Gray Commission. Most of the correspondence Kilpatrick, Gravatt, and Byrd wrote dealt with major themes of 1) calling a Constitutional Convention to amend the state Constitution’s requirement of public schools, 2) the doctrine of interposition, and 3) the creation and funding of a private school system.²⁵

With the founding of the Gray Commission in 1954, Virginia’s state legislators set out to find a way to keep segregated schools legally. In their January 1955 progress report, it was clear that the commission was not interested in finding an alternative to massive resistance: “After careful consideration, our conclusions indicate that the vast majority of Virginia Citizens (both white and colored) favor the retention of racially segregated public education.”²⁶ The Commission issued its final report on November 11, 1955 with the following recommendations: “1) Some integration be permitted in some

25. *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd; Papers of James Kilpatrick, Papers of J. Segar Gravatt*, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

26. “Virginia since May 17, 1954,” *Papers of NAACP*.

areas, 2) no student (white or colored) will be forced to attend an integrated school, 3) a special session of the General Assembly to be called to (a) authorize enabling legislation to hold Constitutional Convention (b) Enact the recommendations of the Gray report, 4) Section 141 of State Constitution be deleted by Constitutional Convention action, 5) adoption of pupil assignment plan, and 6) payment of tuition grants to those parents who are not willing to send their children to integrated schools or where public schools have been abolished.”²⁷ Of the six recommendations, the Defenders had proposed two of them – the revising of the State Constitution through a Constitutional Convention to eliminate public schools and the authorization of tuition grants.²⁸

The Commonwealth moved quickly to start the process through the calling of a referendum vote that would call for a constitutional convention. Bill Tuck and Watkins Abbitt proposed the referendum before the Gray Commission made their recommendations public, but the proposal received a hearty endorsement from Senator Byrd: “I am very much interested in the Tuck-Abbitt proposal for the referendum in the localities on the question of enforced integration in our public schools...Such referendums on the local level would in no way conflict with the Supreme Court decision.”²⁹ A few weeks later, Governor Stanley called for a special session of the General Assembly on November 30, and the body authorized a referendum vote for January 9, 1956. The Byrd Organization, the Defenders, and white segregationists

27. Ibid.

28. Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, “A Plan for Virginia Presented to the People of the Commonwealth,” pamphlet in the Norfolk Public Schools Desegregation Collections, Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

29. “Statement by Senator Harry Flood Byrd for release in morning papers of Tuesday, November 1, 1955.” *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*.

immediately began their campaign to stump for voting “yes” for the convention. Senator Byrd compared the situation to a serious crisis, “like that of the War Between the States.” He encouraged the General Assembly to act “with wisdom and high patriotism.”³⁰

Conversely, the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP also moved swiftly to oppose the referendum vote. E.B. Henderson, president of the Virginia State Conference issued a statement denouncing the vote as an attempt to weaken the public-school system:

I fear that Virginia’s illiteracy will increase if the Constitution is amended and the plans outlined by the Gray Commission are put into effect...Not only will Virginia suffer but as an integral part of the union of state the entire nation is weakened...In closing, I would suggest you not be influenced by the phony fears many of the less literate and the prejudiced use to advocate a change in our system of public education. There will be no more danger to the society of Virginia through the integration of public schools than exists elsewhere in these United States where schools have been integrated.³¹

The official wording of the referendum vote made it clear that the Commonwealth intended to abolish public education. The vote explained that the convention’s stated purpose was:

...to change Section 141 of the present Constitution, so that state and local funds may be used in the future for tuition grants to children who elect to attend private non-sectarian schools. The declared purpose of this amendment is to permit localities to substitute private education for public, if they so decide, and/or to require communities that integrate their schools to divide their financial resources between public education and grants to children who prefer to enroll in private schools.³²

While the Black community tried to convince voters to vote against it through its own ad campaign, the referendum had the support of the Governor, the Byrd Organization, and

30. Statement by Senator Harry F. Byrd on the Referendum to be held on January 9, 1956,” December 18, 1955, *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*.

31. E.B. Henderson, “Statement on Referendum Vote,” in *Papers of the NAACP*.

32. “Statement by the Northern Virginia Unit of the Washington Ethical Society,” 1956, in *Papers of the NAACP*.

the majority of the state legislature.³³ The vote passed 2-1. Roy Wilkins of the national NAACP released a statement after the vote that the NAACP was prepared to meet any move that the state made to evade integration.³⁴

While Virginia made plans to implement the convention, the General Assembly took up legislation in its regular session to further delay action on integration in schools, including the doctrine of state sovereignty and interposition. Interposition is a legal theory that dates back to the nullification crisis of the antebellum period, in which a state could interpose its sovereignty between the people and the federal government. Virginia's brand of interposition was an attempt to "nullify" the Supreme Court decision through forcing a constitutional amendment through Congress that would make segregated schools illegal; when the amendment went to the states for ratification, it would fail to meet the threshold required for ratification, and in the segregationists' view, this failure would then render the *Brown* decision void as the American public had rejected it through the process of amending the Constitution. This scheme was first proposed by James Kilpatrick and discussed and championed at the December 1955 Memphis meeting of segregationists. It gained hearty approval there and led to other Southern states introducing similar proposals although several of these states implied in their resolutions that interposition gave the states the right to nullify certain laws.³⁵ Legal scholars of the

33. "The Gray Amendment and the Public School System of Virginia", Address Prepared for Telecast over WTAR-TV, January 6, 1956, in *Papers of the NAACP*.

34. "NAACP is Prepared to Test Bid to Evade Court Ruling, Wilkins Assures Virginians" Press Release, January 12, 1955, *Papers of the NAACP*.

35. Anthony Lewis. "Segregation Group Confers in Secret: SEGREGATION UNIT MEETS SECRETLY." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Dec 30, 1955. ProQuest.; Herbert O. Reid, "The Supreme Court Decision and Interposition," *The Journal of Negro Education* 25, no. 2 (1956): 111, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2293569>.

time agreed that the doctrine of interposition (and the doctrines of nullification and secession) held no legal basis because of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment and that the Civil War repudiated secession, nullification, and interposition.³⁶ However, the interposition resolutions offered a political stand on which to build massive resistance. Along with the interposition resolution, the General Assembly passed in the same session a bill that penalized Arlington County for announcing their gradual integration plan by abolishing the method of a popularly-elected school board. Other bills included one that withheld all state monies from counties that integrated schools and one that barred federal employees from serving in local municipal jobs (targeting Arlington County). The General Assembly also passed a resolution that declared that Virginia would operate segregated public schools during 1956-1957.³⁷

Coming on the heels of this action from the General Assembly, Harry Byrd took Virginia's nascent massive resistance plan national in an interview on February 26, 1956. In a statement from his office to the press, Senator Byrd said, "If we can organize the Southern States for massive resistance to this order I think that in time the rest of the country will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South...In interposition, the South has a perfectly legal means of appeal from the Supreme Court's order." This statement also foreshadowed the forthcoming "Southern Manifesto" that eighteen senators sponsored.³⁸ Two weeks later on March 12, Senator Walter George of

36. Reid, 116.

37. "Virginia Since 1954" *Papers of the NAACP*.

38. "Byrd Calls on South to Challenge Court," *New York Times*, February 26, 1956 in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, 84.

Georgia and Rep. Howard W. Smith of Virginia presented the “Southern Manifesto” to Congress.

Officially titled “Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” Southern members of Congress pledged to “use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.” Ten members of the House representing Virginia signed it along with Senators Byrd and A. Willis Robertson. The House members included Edward J. Robeson, Jr. Porter Hardy, Jr., J. Vaughan Gary, Watkins M. Abbitt, William M. Tuck, Richard H. Poff, Burr P. Harrison, Howard W. Smith, W. Pat Jennings, and Joel T. Broyhill, representing all of Virginia’s congressional districts.³⁹ Virginia led the way for the South to take its stand against integration, and through the spring and summer of 1956, the General Assembly rolled out even more legislation to prevent the integration of schools across the state.

In July 1956, Governor Stanley wrote the Gray Commission’s executive committee to announce his program of massive resistance. He agreed largely with the November 1955 report, but would not endorse the pupil assignment plan as that would “accept the principles of integration of the races in public schools.”⁴⁰ Stanley also intended to introduce legislation that would give the Governor power to withhold money from schools on his discretion. One month later, Stanley announced his package of legislation to the general public, along with a proposal to amend the state’s statute on a prohibition against solicitation, running, and capping, and a revisal to the provisions for

39. “Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” in *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*.

40. Governor Thomas Stanley, “Statement to the Gray Commission Executive Committee,” July 23, 1956, in *Papers of the NAACP*.

disbarment of attorneys, both aimed at crippling the NAACP's legal efforts in Virginia.⁴¹ In September 1956, the General Assembly passed a law requiring any public school under a court order to desegregate to close. This law came to fruition two years later in September 1958 when the localities of Norfolk, Charlottesville, and Warren County closed their schools, leaving nearly thirteen thousand children out of school. These districts were under court-ordered integration, and the newly elected Governor J. Lindsay Almond closed those schools. The courts, both the Virginia Supreme Court and U.S. District Court, struck down the laws that required the closing in January 1959, and in February 1959, the schools in Norfolk began reopening, and Arlington began desegregating schools.⁴² This attempt of closing schools by Governor Almond was the only state-wide attempt to shut down public schools, but it gave a model for Prince Edward County, whose officials kept searching for ways to stave off integration.

After the ruling on May 17, 1954, Prince Edward County moved quickly to formulate a plan to keep the federal courts at bay and defend segregation. On May 21, the *Farmville Herald* published an editorial calling for the county to solve this problem before the court made them:

Since Prince Edward County is one of the principals in this decision, it is to be expected that more attention will be focused upon it. As we have pointed out before, some national organizations, the press, and possibly other phases of communication seeking the sensational may attempt to find 'grist for the mill' in our community. The problem is ours, we must solve it! Unfortunately, our county was made a principal in this momentous suit. It came about because we failed to seek a solution of our own...Future relations and a solution to the grave problem confronting us depends on our ability to think clearly and logically. This newspaper continues its firm belief in the principles of segregation in public schools in Southside Virginia, and hopes that a plan can be formulated to continue

41. "Virginia since May 17, 1954," *Papers of the NAACP*.

42. Eskridge, Sara K. "J. Lindsay Almond Jr. (1898–1986)." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Humanities, 24. Jan. 2020. Web. 2 Feb. 2021.

development of the schools on a segregated basis, within the framework of the decision.⁴³

The first plan the county implemented originated in South Carolina — equalization. Hoping to show that the schools were equal in the course of the *Briggs v. Elliott* suit, South Carolinian segregationists passed a building campaign in the South Carolina legislature that raised revenue to equalize schools across the state. The school in question in *Briggs*, Scott’s Branch High School in Summerton, South Carolina, was one of the first schools to receive these upgrades.⁴⁴ As *Davis* moved through the courts, Prince Edward County School officials moved immediately on securing a location for a new Moton High School, and by September 1953, classes began at the new location.⁴⁵ After the *Brown* decision, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors, like other Southside counties, passed a resolution that it would never operate integrated schools. This five-point resolution stated that 1) Prince Edward County was “unalterably opposed” to integration, 2) integration would be impossible, 3) the Board was willing to use its powers to continue segregated schools, 4) all officials of the Commonwealth should do likewise, and 5) a copy of this resolution was to go to the Governor, Attorney General, State Senators, and Delegates in the House.⁴⁶ Around the same time, future members of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties began organizing in Farmville, including Robert Crawford and J. Barrye Wall.⁴⁷

43. Editorial, *Farmville Herald*, May 21, 1954

44. Rebecca Dobrasko, “Equalization Schools in South Carolina, 1951-1959,” February 2008, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, <http://nationalregister.sc.gov/SurveyReports/EqualizationSchoolsHistoricContext.pdf>

45. Daugherity and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, xvii

46. Resolution, Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors, July 12, 1954, in Daugherity and Grogan

47. Daugherity and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, xvii

For one year, it seemed as if ignoring the court decision would be enough, but when the Supreme Court handed down a second ruling, known as the *Brown II* decision, the white segregationists in Prince Edward County sprang into action. Led by Robert Crawford, parents and school officials organized the Prince Edward School Foundation to lay the groundwork for developing a private school on June 7, 1955, at a mass meeting sponsored by the Defenders. Held at Longwood College, this meeting resulted in the formal creation of the school foundation to raise money for the private school system. The organizers presented a motion to guarantee the salaries of current white teachers in the public schools; this motion passed with an overwhelming majority. A second motion was introduced to pay for the salaries of all current Black teachers in the public schools; this motion was vehemently opposed. With these marching orders, white segregationist politicians began a massive fundraising campaign for the potential private school system in Prince Edward County if they were forced to close schools. One month later, a federal three-judge panel ruled that the county could have one more year of grace to desegregate schools.⁴⁸ With this deadline, county officials began taking more extreme stances.

Closing Public Schools in Prince Edward County

In May 1956, Prince Edward's Board of Supervisors began going down the road of school closures. On May 3, the Board of Supervisors stated it would not appropriate any money for desegregated schools. That summer, the Stanley plan for massive resistance passed, buying the county a little more time while the NAACP filed another suit, *Allen v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, to challenge the extra

48. James Rorty, "Desegregation: Prince Edward County, Virginia," *Commentary*, May 1956, in Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*

delay. The case was argued in U.S. District Court in July 1958. Coming a year after the violent desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, Judge Sterling Hutcheson ruled in this case that due to witnesses' testimonies, integration should be delayed for seven more years. These witnesses were Sheriff James T. Clark, School Board members Lester E. Andrews, B. Calvin Bass, Commissioner of Revenue D.C. Womack, and School Superintendent T.J. McIlwaine. According to Judge Hutchinson, the witnesses testified that "racial relations in the County have deteriorated to a marked degree since 1954. They believe that the effectiveness of the entire educational system in the County is suffering as a result of the atmosphere in which the schools are being operated. They express apprehension with respect to both violence and closing of the schools if the motion of the plaintiffs should be granted. The Sheriff pointed to the necessity of maintaining order in the County having an area of 354 square miles, bisected by highways over which school buses travel. It is his opinion that the local enforcement officers, reinforced by the entire state constabulary or highway patrol, would not be sufficient to maintain order if violence should erupt."⁴⁹ Hutcheson also ordered a study done on the state of Prince Edward County schools by the school board; the board recruited UVA professor George Zehmer to conduct the study. The NAACP issued a scathing rebuke of the judge's orders to wait.⁵⁰ Ironically in his ruling Judge Hutcheson

49. *Allen v. COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE EDWARD CTY., VA.*, 164 F. Supp. 786 (E.D. Va. 1958) US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, August 4, 1958.

50. Letter from Roy Wilkins to the *NY Times*, August 5, 1958; *Papers of the NAACP*; Telegram to *Los Angeles Sentinel* from Roy Wilkins, August 6, 1958, *Papers of the NAACP*.

quoted Claude Bowers's *The Tragic Era*, a Dunning School account of Reconstruction, comparing the Supreme Court's ruling on desegregation to the period of Reconstruction:

This sad epoch in our history was fomented in no small part, by well-intentioned men in too much of a hurry. The basic lesson wise men have learned from its excesses and its tragedies is that civil rights can be insured and protected only by local government administered by men with a sympathetic understanding of the many facets of the problems involved; men who approach their task in a spirit of friendship and local obligation. Government can succeed only when its mandates deserve and command the respect and the consent of the governed.⁵¹

Meanwhile, by April 1958, the Prince Edward School Foundation raised enough money to operate a private school system in churches for at least a year if schools integrated. People from across all of the Southside counties donated large sums of money to the school foundation, including politicians, business leaders, civic leaders, and church leaders. Governor Almond and company also began formulating legislation that would create tuition vouchers that allowed white parents to use tax dollars to pay tuition to newly-created private schools, now known as segregation academies.⁵²

At the beginning of 1959, *Allen v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* went on the docket for the U.S. Court of Appeals in the Fourth Circuit, and the hearing was scheduled for the April term. On May 9, the Court's ruling ordered Prince Edward County to desegregate public schools by September 1, 1959. Later that month, James Kilpatrick gave the commencement address at Farmville High's graduation, and he gave the call to the white community that the time to abandon the public schools was now:

"That the resolute and courageous action of Prince Edward County, taken quietly and

51. *Allen v. COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE EDWARD CTY., VA.*, 164 F. Supp. 786 (E.D. Va. 1958) US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, August 4, 1958.

52. Lists of donors and thank you letters to donors in *Papers of William Munford Tuck*, Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

unflinchingly after years of patient endurance, and when no other tolerable alternative could be discovered, is in the finest tradition of American political independence. Yours is a small voice, crying boldly to a suddenly and soberly attentive land, that here in Prince Edward, free men survive who face an oligarchy unafraid.”⁵³ The county heeded his call; on June 26, 1959, the Board of Supervisors refused to appropriate funds for public schools for the 1959-1960 academic year. This action effectively closed all Prince Edward County Public Schools after eight years of court cases and delays.

The shutting down of public schools by Prince Edward county officials was a radical response to *Brown*, one that defies Virginia’s reputation as moderate in relation to the Civil Movement. In late August 1959, Harry Byrd at his annual picnic in Berryville revealed how entrenched the beliefs of white supremacy were in Virginia and that these Virginians were willing to go to extremes to protect this way of life. Stating that the situation “was a tragedy for everyone” and that “the NAACP deliberately and maliciously forced this action upon Prince Edward,” Byrd resolved that “Prince Edward has taken the only action it could take. The county had sought by every honorable means to avoid this step. It was faced with massive integration...The action that Prince Edward has taken is courageous, and it was thoughtfully and well considered. They remained true to the faith of their fathers.”⁵⁴ Byrd concluded his speech by stating the NAACP and the Warren Court’s goals were to force mass integration and therefore enforce mass miscegenation.⁵⁵

53. James J. Kilpatrick, Commencement address to Farmville High School, May 1959, *James J. Kilpatrick Papers*, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

54. Harry Byrd, “Excerpts from Speech by Senator Harry F. Byrd (D. Va.) at his 37th Annual Orchard Picnic, Berryville, Virginia,” August 29, 1959, *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*.

55. *Ibid.*

Thus with the same mentality, the white segregationists of Prince Edward closed the public schools and opened Prince Edward Academy on September 10, 1959.

Prince Edward Academy for the first several years operated out of multiple white churches in Farmville, but several scholars of the time noted that the education was hardly suitable for the white children who attended. The Dean of Longwood College, Dr. Gordon Moss stated for the press that “I wouldn't let my son go to it [Prince Edward Academy] for anything in the world. Maybe the kids are doing all right in French and math and English--after all, they have the same teachers they had in the public schools--but they are learning principles that are far from what I would call proper education. How, in a government class, can they teach democracy in such an undemocratic school?”⁵⁶ In a report for the NAACP on segregation academies, Mary Ellen Goodman noted that the whites in the community who disagreed with the segregationists had little recourse to change the school situation: “And it is extremely difficult or hazardous, psychologically and even socially and economically, for natives to break with or even question native leadership. Breaking with tradition is not a comfortable business at best, and it can become extremely painful when "everybody" who means something to you, "always" has and presumably always will, turns his back--or does worse--the moment your dedication to tradition is observed to waver.” She also noted that the Defenders held a strong grip on the operation of the private school, and their beliefs were certainly influencing the education the students received.⁵⁷

56. Mary Ellen Goodman, “Sanctuaries for Tradition: Virginia’s New Private Schools,” Report in *Papers of the NAACP*.

57. Ibid.

For Prince Edward's Black community, the closing of schools was a major blow to the morale of the community. For a few months, the local community did their best to place students in schools in neighboring counties, and in November 1959, formed a group to implement an education program, but it took the state conference of the NAACP time to come up with a plan for educating the Black students and white students who could not afford the private schools. In December 1959, the NAACP made plans to host a Christmas party for all the students who had been shut out of school as a morale boost. Chapters of the NAACP from around the country sent funds, toys, and candy to Prince Edward for these students. The national office coordinated star entertainment for the children, including commissioning a special album recorded by Mahalia Jackson for them.⁵⁸ This party raised the ire of J. Barrye Wall, as he thought it was the NAACP trying to buy off the Black community to not participate in the private school system a few segregationists had set up for the Black students of Prince Edward County. That same month, Wall and associates established the corporation known as a Southside Schools, Inc. to form private Black schools, explaining that "we're anxious to provide an education for the Negroes of the county...the Negroes were making no effort to do it so we decided to go ahead."⁵⁹ Wall wrote in an editorial that week in the *Farmville Herald* that the Christmas party was a "propaganda meeting" for the NAACP and tried in vain to convince the Black community of Prince Edward to register for the Black schools, but

58. "Press release," December 2, 1959, *Papers of the NAACP*.

59. "Negro Schools Planned," December 15, 1959, Richmond News-Leader, clipping in *Papers of the NAACP*.

only one student applied.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund geared up to challenge the closure of public schools in the county, and the national office in coordination with the Virginia State Conference of the NAACP made emergency plans to bring relief to the students in Prince Edward.

After the 1954 *Brown* decision, NAACP branches across Virginia prepared to challenge all of the massive resistance efforts across the state, but none compared to the dire situation in Prince Edward County. The national office of the NAACP paid for field workers in Farmville to do community work, focusing on “educating, reeducating, and building self-confidence and reassurance among the parents and children affected that their cause is just and right and must be pursued without faltering.” Other NAACP chapters and chapters of Delta Sigma Theta held fundraisers to support this work in addition to providing for educational opportunities outside of the community.⁶¹ These funds were instrumental in providing educational relief after the schools closed in 1959.

In December 1959, the Virginia State Conference took emergency action to set up a temporary form of education for the students left without schools. The conference placed Prince Edward County under the direction of a local coordinator, Rev. Francis Griffin. Rev. Griffin divided the county into ten areas, and in each of the ten areas, the Prince Edward County Christian Association, under the direction of Rev. Griffin, would set up training centers. The state conference gave \$16,500 to supervise and educate students for the remainder of the school year. It also paid \$8,500 for sixty-one high

60. J. Barrye Wall, “Let’s Look at the Record” Editorial in *Farmville Herald*, December 29, 1959, *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*; “Negro School Opening Delayed Until September,” *Farmville Herald*, January 19, 1960, *Papers of Harry Flood Byrd*.

61. “Memo re: Conference of Virginia Schools,” June 17, 1958 in *Papers of the NAACP*.

schoolers to enroll in Kittrell College, an AME college in North Carolina with a high school program. The conference also allotted \$1,000 to pay for students enrolled at other schools.⁶² Reverend Griffin immediately got to work setting up the training centers that enrolled 650 children.⁶³ These training centers were not intended to be private schools for the children but a temporary relief until the case settled in court. The students at the training centers were under the care of a supervisor and an assistant supervisor at each center. The staff would plan learning programs to engage the students, but each center had students of every grade, so it was difficult to provide the needed differentiation in instruction. However, the centers planned a curriculum that covered health, music, music appreciation, Black history, reading comprehension, English (grammar and writing), arithmetic and applied math, arts, science, social studies, civics, handicrafts, and recreation. With the support of the community, all of the training centers were open by the beginning of April 1960.⁶⁴

The training centers were meant to be temporary for the 1959-1960 school year. However, when the whole Prince Edward County School Board resigned at the end of April, it seemed that these training centers would have to become more permanent.⁶⁵ Thus, in June 1960, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund filed another lawsuit on behalf of the Black community in Prince Edward, *Griffin v. County School Board*. This suit contested the Board of Supervisors' action to not fund public schools. The Board of

62. Robert D. Robertson, W. Lester Banks, Vivian Carter Mason, "A Proposal for Temporary and Remedial Relief for the Out-of-School Negro Youth of Prince Edward County," Virginia State Conference in *Papers of NAACP*.

63. L. Francis Griffin, "Report and Overview of Prince Edward County Training Centers" in *Papers of NAACP*.

64. Ibid.

65. Daugherty and Grogan, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*, xvii.

Supervisors' action had tried to make the court orders against the school board to integrate unenforceable. The plaintiffs argued that this was a violation of Virginia's constitution to provide public school and a violation of the due process and equal protection clause in the Fourteenth Amendment. The lawsuit also noted that the Board was attempting to lease the public-school buildings to Prince Edward Academy, which would be in contradiction to the prior court rulings.⁶⁶ Even after the closing of the public schools, Prince Edward County would go back to court.

While the closing of schools demoralized the African American community of Prince Edward, the spring of 1960 brought some encouraging winds of change, even in Southside Virginia. The student sit-in movement swept across the South beginning in February, and in Danville, Virginia, just ninety miles away, Black students sat-in at the local library to protest its segregation. As 1960 rolled on, Rev. A.I. Dunlap, an AME minister who had led a church in Prince Edward and was a founding member of the Prince Edward County Christian Association, received assignment to a church in Danville. He would go on to help Danville ministers set up the Danville Christian Progressive Association, a civil rights group that sought to press the city on these issues through direct action. Rev. Dunlap brought his organizing skills from Prince Edward and helped the Danville group learn as much as they could about building their own movement.⁶⁷ As 1961-1962 passed, Prince Edward and Danville activists would lay the foundation and groundwork to set the stage for massive direct action protests that burst

66. Letter to A. Willis Robertson from J. Segar Gravatt, May 8, 1964, *Papers of J. Segar Gravatt*, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

67. Len Holt, *An Act of Conscience*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 20, 61.

forth in the summer of 1963. It appeared that the white elite had managed to maintain the Virginia way as they countered the initial battles for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960, but Black activists across Southside persisted, determined to break the grip of white supremacy. As they strategized, so did the white elite, coordinating with their counterparts across the South.

CHAPTER 4

“THEY INVADED THE CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL MANSION”: DANVILLE’S CIVIL RIGHTS BEGINNINGS AT THE LAST CAPITOL OF THE CONFEDERACY

On April 2, 1960, when sixteen African American students walked up the front steps of the white-only branch of the Danville Public Library, many thoughts must have been racing through their minds. Maybe they reflected on the atmosphere of the tobacco and textile dominated city of Danville, Virginia, and what the potential repercussions of their actions could be. Jim Crow segregation seemed nearly impenetrable in the city. Schools, public facilities, churches, employment, and recreational areas were all segregated. Most of the African American community worked in low-income jobs in the tobacco warehouses or factories or in lower rank jobs at the textile mills. As young African Americans, opportunities for their futures looked disheartening.

Maybe though, the students recognized glimmers of hope. There was a small Black professional class in Danville that headed up the community through churches and a branch of the NAACP with a well-established youth chapter. Forty-five miles to the south of Danville, North Carolina A&T University students had set off a broad, grassroots movement by sitting-in at the lunch counter at the Greensboro, North Carolina, Woolworth’s earlier in February. Maybe these Danville students had friends or relatives who participated in the sit-ins by Hampton University, Virginia Union University, and Virginia State University students across the Commonwealth. Maybe they thought of the students ninety miles away in Prince Edward County who were denied their education by

the county school board who had shut down all public schools in 1959 rather than integrate them after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. Maybe they took some inspiration from the students who started the student movement in Virginia by walking out of Moton High School in 1951. Maybe they worried that they would face similar repercussions because there were active massive resistance groups operating in Danville at that time.

Surely though, the thought that weighed the most on their minds was that they were about to take a stand and make a statement about history and public memory. The day they walked into the Danville Public Library at the Sutherlin Mansion was the ninety-fifth anniversary of Jefferson Davis's arrival in the city and the beginning of his stay at that very building. The Danville Public Library occupied an antebellum mansion that the local United Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans dubbed the "Last Capitol of the Confederacy." The library at that time was the best preserved and most revered relic from the Civil War in Danville. By asserting their presence in the library, these students were not only challenging the Jim Crow laws of the city but also the cultural hegemony of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, namely how the public in Danville understood and remembered their history. Predictably, the city closed the library immediately, but this sit-in became an instigating event for a larger local civil rights movement that developed over the next three years, peaking in 1963. For decades, the Sutherlin Mansion represented history as a weapon of white supremacy, and the sit-in fundamentally challenged it. The refusal to integrate the library and to be the last segregated library in the state represented Danville's white elite's dogged commitment to white supremacy as instituted through Jim Crow segregation.

Likewise, the racial struggles of the post-Reconstruction, Readjuster period still resonated almost a century later in local politics but also in the social dynamics of Danville. The 1883 Danville Massacre that left four Black men dead foreshadowed the same tension over the issue of integrating the public library in 1960. A large part of the backlash to the integration of the library was grounded in the Confederate memory of the space, institutionalized by the women of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This surely parallels white concerns of the 1890s that white women could be under attack from Black people if they were allowed in close proximity. As historians of Jim Crow agree, Jim Crow was not a preordained condition in the South, but white supremacist beliefs surrounding white womanhood and societal manners of deference helped create this system. This fear prompted a severe backlash in 1960 as it did in the nineteenth century.¹

To understand the cultural and physical landscape of Danville, Virginia, in the 1960s, one must understand that the collective memory of the culture was an historical actor in the story of the movement. W. Fitzhugh Brundage in his 2005 work, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*, argues that historical memory can create power within a culture: “Collective remembering forges identity, justifies privilege, and sustains cultural norms...groups secure broad recognition of their identities by colonizing public spaces with their version of the past.”² Virginia has a long tradition of glorifying

1. Jane Elizabeth Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996); Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, 1st ed (New York: Knopf, 1998).

2. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 4–5, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10313898>.

the Civil War and the Confederacy. It dominated white culture (and thus mainstream culture) during the Civil Rights era.³

Fighting for Civil Rights at the Last Capitol of the Confederacy

Forty years later, one of the Danville students who participated in the library sit-in, Robert Williams, recalled that the sit-in movement that began in Greensboro in 1960 lit a fire in the hearts and minds of Danville high school students: “That [the Woolworth’s sit-ins], of course, affected most Black youth across the country. We began to discuss what we could do in Danville.”⁴ These students’ discussion and plans kickstarted the grassroots civil rights efforts in the city. The momentum behind the civil rights struggle in Danville was the enthusiasm and hope of local Black students, who sought to bring change to the city beginning in 1960. They gained support from local chapters of the NAACP and SCLC and won some legal battles initially, but they encountered more resistance as their movement grew over the course of the year, as was the case for most student-led movement across the South, sparked by the sit-ins of the spring of 1960. Waves of student sit-ins across the South secured some token integration of businesses. The 1961 Freedom Rides pressed integration further, securing the

3. See Adam Wesley Dean, “‘Who Controls the Past Controls the Future’: The Virginia History Textbook Controversy,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 117, no. 4 (2009): 318–55. Dean speaks to the pervasiveness of the Lost Cause in culture in his investigation of Virginia history textbooks during the civil rights movement. White elites wanted only the Confederate-glorifying narrative taught in schools – any other interpretation was an affront to their honor. This mindset of venerating Southern pride based on the Confederacy pervaded Danville in its culture and public history and left little room for Black interpretations of history, let alone Black expression of freedom.

4. Robert A. Williams, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*, interview by Emma C. Edmunds, Gladys Hairston, and Laurie Ripper, March 25, 2008, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_williams.html.

enforcement of an ICC ruling mandating desegregation of interstate travel, while at the same time exposing the grip of white supremacy on the South through the violent reprisals. However, by the beginning of 1963, momentum across the South had stalled out, including in Danville.

As mentioned, the Danville students took inspiration from the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina (less than an hour away from Danville), and in Petersburg, Virginia.⁵ On February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College (NC A&T) staged the first “sit-in” of the 1960s at Woolworth’s lunch counter. The four male students hatched the plan to ask for service at the lunch counter and then planned to sit on the stools at the counter until they were served or forcibly removed. By the end of the week, over three hundred students had joined them in “sitting-in.”⁶ African American students at historically Black colleges and universities across the South caught inspiration from the Greensboro students and began their own protests at lunch counters in towns and cities. By April of 1960, there had been over sixty sit-ins across the South.⁷

Local high school students in Danville tapped into this fervor when planning their own protest against Jim Crow segregation. The Danville students also took note of another nearby sit-in against segregated libraries unfolding in Petersburg, Virginia. Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, who later became a staff member of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, entered the segregated Petersburg City Library and

5. Williams.

6. Iwan W. Morgan and Philip Davies, *From Sit-Ins to SNCC: The Student Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s* (University Press of Florida, 2012).

7. “Sit-Ins in Greensboro,” *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed January 16, 2020, <https://snccdigital.org/events/sit-ins-greensboro/>.

requested Douglas Southall Freeman’s biography of Robert E. Lee in 1959. The library refused Wyatt, and the local chapter of the NAACP (of which Wyatt was president) petitioned city council to integrate the library. The matter stalled for almost a year until in late February 1960 when Petersburg’s Black students began attempting sit-ins at the library following unsuccessful sit-ins at the local lunch counters. On February 27, groups of young students (totaling over 140) entered the Petersburg Library, resulting in the city manager immediately closing the library.⁸ Petersburg’s Black community continued to fight a battle to desegregate the library for the rest of 1960.

The organizers of the first protests in 1960 in Danville were older high school students. They included Chalmers Mebane, who became involved with NAACP meetings after school, and Williams, who was a member of the NAACP Youth Division and son of an NAACP lawyer. Mebane was also a veteran of the armed forces and twenty-three at the time of the sit-in although he had returned to school to finish his high school education.⁹ Mebane and others wanted to protest segregated lunch counters like the other sit-in demonstrations, but Williams pushed them to take on public services and amenities due to the NAACP’s influence in his life and understanding of the law:

Because of my history and familiarity with the law, and based on dinner conversations with my father and his conversations with other friends about what was possible and what we could accomplish through law, I was able to convince the other students who were in the Youth Division of the NAACP and our adviser that the first attack we should have [should be] against the public parks and the public library, because those were publicly funded. There was precedent that if you had institutions that were publicly funded, that we’d have a greater chance of

8. Wayne A. Wiegand and Shirley A. Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South: Civil Rights and Local Activism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 83.

9. “City to Fight Library Suit Before Court,” *Danville Bee*, April 14, 1960, 2.

integrating those than lunch counters, which were owned by private corporations or individuals. ...¹⁰

Williams had also followed the news out of Petersburg and the struggle to desegregate the public facility there.¹¹ The other youth followed Williams's lead and decided to take on Ballou Park, an all-white public park, and the Danville Public Library also known as the Confederate Memorial Library located at the time in the Sutherlin Mansion. There was an African-American branch of the library, but it only had three rooms compared to the mansion that housed the white branch; the branches were definitely separate and unequal. The Danville Public Library was the last segregated public library in Virginia at this point. By the time the city created the Danville Public Library in 1928, Southern libraries had begun creating separate (yet unequal branches). The Danville Library created an African American branch in 1950 "at the request of Negroes."¹²

The students conducted many planning meetings and welcomed adult leaders into their planning, including the then current president of the local NAACP chapter, Rev. Doyle J. Thomas, Sr., minister of Loyal Baptist Church. Many of their meetings discussed the legal ramifications of their plans and what assistance they could receive from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund if they decided to take this issue to court.

The first sit-in took place April 2, 1960, which was the ninety-fifth anniversary of Jefferson Davis's flight from the city of Richmond at the end of the Civil War. The students began at Ballou Park on the western, more affluent end of Danville's Main

10. Williams, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*.

11. Wiegand and Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, 90.

12. Wiegand and Wiegand, 91.

Street, anticipating that the city police would close the park, which they did. There were no arrests, but the students felt sure that provisions had been made if they needed bail money. They continued on to the white branch of the library, the Confederate Memorial Library, located on Main Street. After going in and requesting to check out books, the librarian informed the group that the library was closed. The students sat down briefly but then left after they realized they would not be served. The next day, April 3, Danville City Council held an emergency session and passed an ordinance to limit the Confederate Memorial Library's use to its cardholders only.¹³ The following week, the library and the park were closed to everyone, which the students counted as a victory.

The *Danville Register*, a white-run newspaper, published an editorial that condemned the students:

The young Negroes went to these places for white people only rather than to the library and parks provided for them by the city. Obviously, it was not reading matter or recreation the group sought. They wanted to show the NAACP that they could and would participate in the campaign to end racial distinction. They were prodded into action by the NAACP and they were promised legal aid in event they were arrested.¹⁴

As the white editors of the *Register* assumed, the Danville NAACP did play a supporting role in the sit-ins, but the students took the lead. The editors of the *Register* also complained that the students entered the library on the anniversary of Jefferson Davis's arrival in the city and his occupation of the Sutherlin Mansion and use of it as an executive mansion. The editors saw the students' sit-in as "an invasion of the Confederate Memorial Mansion," and then accused the students of breaking the "racial calm" that had

13. Wiegand and Wiegand, 91.

14. "Legality Clashes with Reality," *The Register*, April 3, 1960, Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/legality_clashes.html.

existed in the city since November 1883 (referring to the year of the Danville Massacre that left four Black men dead).¹⁵

In the following week, the Black students and the NAACP experienced white retaliation for their actions. On the night of April 9, crosses burned on the front lawns of Loyal Baptist Church and Rev. Doyle J. Thomas's house. The next day, one of the local papers published the names and addresses of the students who were involved in the sit-ins, despite the participants being juveniles. However, the Black community of Danville was committed to this fight; a mass meeting at Loyal Baptist Church that evening drew over 350 attendees. On April 11, the city escalated the sit-in case to a full-blown legal struggle by voting to close the library rather than integrate. Two days later on April 13, the NAACP sought a federal injunction against all segregated public facilities in Danville. The plaintiffs in the case were Chalmers Mebane, Gladys Giles, Wayne Louis Dallas, Robert Williams, and Jerry Williams, all students who participated in the sit-in. The defendants in the case were the city of Danville, the Library Advisory Committee, city manager T.E. Temple, and librarian Florence Robertson.¹⁶ The NAACP was deeply involved in this demonstration, offering legal advice and wisdom to the young students. Robert Williams was certain that his father and other local lawyers laid the framework for this prior to the demonstration, yet the students themselves planned the actual sit-in. According to Williams, "it was clearly an effort where there was planning in a sense. They knew about it. They knew which ones [suits] they were going to support and which they weren't going to support, because resources were very scarce at the time."¹⁷ The suit,

15. "Legality Clashes with Reality."

16. "City to Fight Library Suit Before Court."

17. Williams, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*.

presented by lawyers Jerry Williams, Andrew Muse, Harry Wood, and Ruth Harvey, to integrate the Danville Public Library was ultimately successful after a months-long fight.¹⁸ Yet, Danville's white citizens remained highly motivated to resist integration.

On May 5, local federal judge Roby Thompson heard arguments in the case that the NAACP had filed against the city. Several of the witnesses for the plaintiffs included sit-in participants Chalmers Mebane and William Redd, Mrs. Beatrice Hairston, an African American teacher who had written a history on Danville, and Maxine Martin, an African American student who had previously been turned away from using the white branch of the library. City manager T.E. Temple testified for the defense and described the sit-in as a mass entrance that defied the good order that some African Americans had practiced in using the library. He claimed that because African American citizens had used the white branch before the April 2 incident (mainly African American employees of white patrons) there was no discrimination in the city's policy of maintaining two segregated branches. Judge Thompson ruled in the favor of the plaintiffs and ordered that the library be open to African Americans but delayed the implementation of the injunction until May 20 to give the city time to appeal to a higher court.¹⁹ While the students and African American community jubilantly celebrated their court victory, the white citizens of Danville scrambled to devise a solution that would keep the Confederate Memorial Library white-only.

18. Len Holt, *An Act of Conscience*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 58.

19. "Council Faces Library Decisions After City Loses Round in Court," *Danville Bee*, May 6, 1960; Wiegand and Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, 92.

As the summer of 1960 progressed, the white citizens of Danville dug in their heels at every turn in complying with the court order, including openly defying the judge's injunction, holding a city-wide referendum on the status of the library, and eventually removing all tables and chairs from the library when forced to reopen. Before Judge Thompson's injunction to integrate the library went into effect, a local judge set a date for a city-wide referendum where Danville voters would decide if the city would continue to have a public library; the referendum was set for June 14. On May 19, the Danville city council made a last-minute attempt to stop the injunction by voting to close all Danville libraries and book mobiles. The *Danville Bee* reported that "word of the closing action spread rapidly during the afternoon and there was a rush on the main library last evening by persons desiring books, many of them getting stacks of volumes ranging up to between 15 and 20 in some instances."²⁰ The following day, all public libraries in the city were closed.²¹

As the referendum vote drew closer, there was an outpouring of criticism from across the state, yet local Danville citizens remained divided on the issue. William Faulkner condemned Danville and Petersburg in his commencement address at the University of Virginia; the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* also criticized Danville in an editorial, noting that libraries across Virginia integrated successfully. Competing white interests in Danville also fought to sway public opinion on the matter. The Committee for the Public Library, made up of white Danville citizens who wanted to see the libraries

20. "Article Number 6," *Danville Bee*, May 20, 1960.

21. Wiegand and Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, 94.

remain open, sent mailers to voters, as did the Danville Library Foundation, which formed to create a private, white-only library.²²

June 14 not only brought an historic turnout but also cemented white Danvillites' commitment to segregation and preservation of white supremacy and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. Overwhelmingly, Danville citizens voted for the library to remain closed. The electorate was predominantly white, as fewer than ten percent of Danville's Black population were registered to vote. The *Danville Bee* touted that the vote was a record one, and perhaps a kerfuffle with sample ballots drew more voters out. A committee that was a subgroup of the local NAACP, the "Danville Committee on Negro Affairs," created and distributed pink sample ballots at polling stations across the city. These ballots listed candidates whom the African American community supported as well as encouraging voters to vote no on the referendum. According to the *Bee*, the committee handed them out to African American voters, and the sample ballots endorsed the following candidates: George R. Daniels, Charles A. Prescott, Alfred W. Haraway, James T. Catlin, III, and Austin E. Jones. However, those five candidates all vehemently disavowed the sample ballot and stated they had no prior knowledge of being on it. One of the candidates, Catlin, called it a "low-blow" and sought to take legal action. As news of this sample ballot spread, these candidates decided to vote for closing the library as protest against the Danville Committee's action. The *Bee* also stated that, "they [Danville pollsters] pointed out, however, that the library referendum was responsible for many

22. Wiegand and Wiegand, 95.

voting who otherwise would have stayed home. The Council campaign had been relatively dull until today's 'pink ballot' activity."²³

In response to the referendum, the *Danville Bee* published an editorial trumpeting victory for the white segregationists of the city with many references to the Confederacy and Danville's history in the Confederacy. Their interpretation of the overwhelming vote to close the library was that the majority of Danville citizens wanted to hold firmly to Jim Crow and that the NAACP and the federal judiciary were akin to the federal troops of the Civil War:

But the library issue does not end the matter because we shall soon find the NAACP seeking to retrieve its lost prestige in Danville and will be advancing again with a new approach. The ramparts must still be watched. The solidarity of Danville in this matter may have caused some acid remarks by the neo-liberals in coalition with the Negro voters, but it has at least reflected the truth that there are still a lot of unreconstructed rebels in Virginia not disposed to accept lightly an invasion of state rights by the federal judiciary, not the vindictive purpose of alien reformers who hoped by the referendum, to trumpet the claim that the onetime seat of the Confederate government had struck its colors...²⁴

With many of Danville's white citizens thinking the matter resolved, Danville's city officials recognized that the NAACP suit against the city still stood; thus, they continued to seek a solution that would require the smallest number of interactions between whites and African Americans. Over the course of the summer, city officials created a plan of "vertical integration," meaning that the library would be open to both races, but it would be open for "check-out only," allowing for little social contact

23. "'Pink Ballots' Back-Firing on Advocates: Five Candidates Did Not Permit Use of Names on Negro Ticket," *Danville Bee*, June 14, 1960; "Record Vote Being Cast in City Today: Totals Run Above Average," *Danville Bee*, June 14, 1960.

24. "Vox Populi," Editorial from the *Danville Bee*, June 15, 1960.

between the races.²⁵ Ultimately, the persistence of the local NAACP and its lawyers would make the city fully integrate the library, but Danville officials did their best to slow the process with the vertical integration plan and trial periods of integrated use.

In September 1960, officials began rolling out the plan of vertical integration but also implemented new policies that would further restrict African American visitation to the main branch in the Confederate Memorial Mansion. On September 13, 1960, the Danville City Council voted to reopen the library on a “standby” basis for ninety days, ordered that all library cards would expire on October 1, and decreed all patrons would have to reapply for cards. The new application would be four pages long and include character and credit references. The new cards would also cost \$2.50, which is equivalent to over twenty dollars today. In addition, the deciding votes were only cast by council members who threatened to revoke their votes if the NAACP did not drop their initial lawsuit from May.²⁶

With the reopening of the libraries on September 14, Danville citizens flocked to the main branch, but reports indicated that many would prefer to only pay fifty cents to use the city’s bookmobiles. City Manager Temple promoted the use of the bookmobiles, too, as that would ensure fewer African American citizens visiting the Confederate Memorial Mansion. The *Bee* reported that no African Americans went to the main library that day, but several went to the Grasty branch [the segregated branch] and picked up applications for new cards. In regards to the new applications, Temple claimed the applications would provide vital information to the librarians rather than discriminate

25. Wiegand and Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, 96.

26. Wiegand and Wiegand, 98.

against patrons: “Temple explained that the application forms will provide the library staff with information it has needed for a long time, such as data on reading habits, hours most preferred to make calls, the number of books expected to be used, and such. This will permit future planning...”²⁷ In any case, when Danville citizens entered the library in September 1960, they saw that the tables and chairs were gone.

On September 15, 1960, Judge Ted Dalton dismissed the NAACP suit against the city as the library was now “integrated.” Lawyers for the NAACP disputed that claim due to the applications and new fees as well as city council’s ultimatum, but Dalton ruled against them. The NAACP then decided to file a new suit against the city asking for an injunction against the applications. However, Dalton would dismiss that suit, too. While the dismissal of the injunction was a blow to the effort to fully desegregate the library, the possibility of integration still remained in December when the ninety-day trial period was set to expire. With no disruptions during the trial period, Temple announced on December 9, that tables and chairs would return to the library and the library would operate under normal conditions, fully integrated.²⁸

Despite the city finally capitulating to the march of progress in regard to the library, there was no formal announcement in the local press of the library officially returning to normal operations fully integrated. In fact, the day after the library integrated, the headline in the *Danville Bee* suggested that the successful attempt to integrate the library was but one blow against the institution of Jim Crow in the city. The

27. “Many Favor Bookmobile at Low Rate: Demand Is Seen Swinging Over,” *Danville Bee*, September 14, 1960.

28. Wiegand and Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South*, 98–100.

local court fined an African American young woman for knocking a white woman off the sidewalk where there was not room for both women to pass.²⁹ Clearly, the progress made by the Danville NAACP, the members of the Youth Chapter, and the NAACP lawyers had not broken through the bedrock of white supremacy that still demanded deference from African Americans in the city. Later civil rights activist Evans Hopkins recalled how the spitefulness of white Danvillites and the city council spurred African Americans in the city to no longer accept the status quo. Hopkins recalled that he was eager to use the new integrated library but was shocked to find the tables and chairs removed from the library: “When I recall the shock of seeing the spitefulness of whites evidenced by the bare floors of that library, I begin to understand how anger turns into rage.”³⁰ While the sit-in at the library was part of the wave of mass student sit-ins that spread across the South in the spring of 1960, this sit-in also challenged norms dictated by the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, too.

Public Memory as a Weapon of Jim Crow

Throughout the fight to integrate the public library in 1960, Danville’s white-controlled media and city officials kept referring to the sit-in as a breach of racial calm that had existed since the nineteenth century; racial calm in their minds meant the presence of cultural norms and laws structuring and enforcing segregation. The implementation of segregation and institutional disenfranchisement in Danville began with an incident in 1883 involving street etiquette that left four men, white and Black, dead. Known as the “Danville Riot” to white citizens, this event according to Danville’s

29 “Girl Fined for Incident on Sidewalk,” *Danville Bee*, December 12, 1960.
30. Evans D. Hopkins, *Life After Life: A Story of Rage and Redemption* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), 14–15.

white citizens set race relations between white and Black citizens in their proper place, but to Danville's African Americans, it ended any hope they had for being full participants in politics and society for nearly seventy years.

As described in chapter one, in October 1883, twenty-eight white Danville business owners as well as members of the local Democratic party leadership wrote and released "the Danville Circular," an inflammatory pamphlet that used racist rhetoric and stereotypes to vilify Danville's Black population; the contents of the circular were thought to have set off a "riot" in the streets on November 3.³¹ This incident foreshadows the circumstances that would lead to the creation of the Danville Public Library as a sacred shrine to the Confederacy for whites only.

Prior to the massacre, there was biracial rule in Danville, but any flexibility that whites in Danville may have shown toward allowing Black political autonomy ended when they felt socially threatened by African Americans no longer showing deference in public. Jane Dailey argues that the absence of deference created white anxiety about social control and led to the full institution of Jim Crow segregation. Revisiting the Danville Circular, reading it closely, and seeing the inevitable political fallout creates a framework to understand why the integration of the Danville Public Library came so late in Virginia's history.

Expressions of white supremacy found language in the Danville Circular. The rhetoric and the white reports of the event painted the Blacks of the city as degenerate

31. Jane Dailey, "Deference and Violence in the Postbellum Urban South: Manners and Massacres in Danville, Virginia," *The Journal of Southern History* 63, no. 3 (1997): 553–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2211650>; Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 113.

and dishonest as well as occupying places they should not despite these places being part of the public:

...the scenes about this important and attractive institution [a public market] (attractive in all cities) will give any person visiting the town a fair idea of the general state of the government under the negro rule. The market once occupied in all its stalls by polite white gentlemen, with their clean white aprons, and the most enticing [sic] meats and vegetables upon their boards, is now the scene of filth, stench, crowds of loitering and idle negroes, drunkenness, obscene language, and petit [sic] thieves. The white men have been driven out and forced to take up private places for vending their meats and vegetables, and the public market, erected by the money of the white people and intended to be occupied by men at least courteous and cleanly, has been converted to the use of squalid negro hucksters, and presents a spectacle of loathsomeness positively repulsive to any person who has the least idea of how a market should be kept....³²

According to the white Democrats of Danville, not only were the Black people of the city unfit to conduct business because they were “hucksters,” but they also had no authority over white people in a political and social manner. The circular complained of the appointment of African American policemen, magistrates, and justices:

White men are arrested for the most frivolous acts by negro policemen and borne along to the Mayor’s office followed by swarms of jeering and hooting and mocking negroes, and tried, fined and lectured and imprisoned by a *negro* justice, and then followed to the jail by the same insulting rabble....³³

The largest complaint from the circular dealt with African Americans no longer showing the deference required by slavery. Danville whites were also repulsed at having to share social spaces with people whom they considered as inherently inferior and thought the Black people of the city as “uppity.” They complained of a large influx of “idle and filthy negroes” from the surrounding counties to the city and that these African Americans

32. W.T. Clark, et. al., “Coalition Rule in Danville - the Danville Circular, October 1883” (Broadside1882.S89 FF, Special Collections, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia), accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/_Coalition_Rule_in_Danville_October_1883.

33. W.T. Clark, et. al.

“infested” the streets and sidewalks and other public spaces. Their largest complaint was that white women “were forced from the sidewalk to the street” and that Black women were calling themselves ladies, done solely to “irritate and throw contempt on the white race.”³⁴

In the Readjuster period, while painting the Black citizens of Danville as inferior, the white elite of Danville portrayed themselves as victims of Black rule and the only responsible citizens of the city:

...do you think it is just that we should contribute *every cent* to the maintenance of our town, pay our town *debt*, and *appropriate not only what the negro pays in the way of tax, but much more besides*, of our own money, to the *education of his children, whom he raises upon our money to be our bitterest enemies*, and then let him have possession of our town government too? Is it right that the negro should have all this given him then be allowed to control our offices and plunder our treasury besides?³⁵

This anxiety and frustration expressed by the white people of Danville reveal deep insecurities about their position in this new society. They remained committed to a paternalistic idea that white people had to bear the burden of taking care of those inferior to them and in return retain control and power.

Following the publication of the circular, racial tensions became especially inflamed the weekend prior to the statewide election in November 1883. An incident that began as a street tussle over manners on November 3, 1883, turned into a massacre leaving five people dead. The events began when two young Black men (Hense Lawson and Davis Lewellyn) bumped into a young white man (Charles D. Noel) around lunchtime that day. Noel claimed that Lewellyn said that Lawson did not need to

34. W.T. Clark, et. al.

35. W.T. Clark, et. al.

apologize for bumping into Noel. Noel turned around and struck Lewellyn. Lewellyn fought back, but the fight ended when Noel landed down in the gutter. All of the men left the scene. Noel then went to the Opera House in Danville where Danville Democrats were meeting to reaffirm the Danville Circular after Readjuster leader William Sims denounced it the night before. He met friends there, and then decided to go confront Lewellyn with them.³⁶

A second street fight broke out, this time with more people involved and with a crowd gathering. An African American police officer broke up the fight, but then a Black man with no relation to the fight tackled one of the white friends of Noel's, attempting to take away his pistol. When he failed to do so, the white man fired his pistol. The shot drew more police officers, Black and white, as well as a swelling crowd. There was a conflict between the two groups, white and Black. The white crowd wanted the Black crowd off the street, while the Black crowd was calling for the arrest of the man who had fired the shot for carrying a concealed weapon. As the clamor grew, the white men raised their weapons and fired on the crowd. Three Black men died there along with one white man. A fourth Black man died later. With the shots, the crowd began fleeing and some of the white men pursued the fleeing Black crowd and continued to attack them. Dailey states that these targets were prominent Black citizens.³⁷

As Black citizens fled, the white men of Danville organized patrols and paraded around with weapons. The election followed that Tuesday and the Democratic Party swept major victories. Newspapers from across the state reported the massacre (termed as

36. Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 119–21.

37. Dailey, 121–25.

a “riot”) the following Monday before the election, surely swaying the election. The *Alexandria Gazette* wrote: “Can white men be expected to live on friendly terms with negroes who stone white speakers, as they did at Richmond; who cry down white speakers as they did at Madison; who murder white men for not giving them free riders, as they did at Danville...General Mahone is responsible for every drop of blood shed at Danville, and for the rivers of blood that will flow if his noxious influence be not destroyed at once. He is a worse man than John Brown, for Brown was insane and acted in behalf of the negroes, while Mahone is sane and acts only and solely for himself.”³⁸ The white controlled media in Virginia ignored the deaths of the Black men and used the violence to induce fear into the white electorate.

The Readjuster leader embroiled in this, William Mahone, called for an investigation into the massacre on the grounds of election fraud and intimidation. The Democrats claimed their actions as self-defense while the Readjusters claimed the Democrats created a strategy to overthrow the Readjuster government through violence, mirroring Wade Hampton and his Red Shirts in South Carolina’s own coup in 1876. Local Democrats, including George Cabell, the congressional representative, and William T. Sutherlin, claimed the “riot” was a result of the misrule of the coalition government and the poor behavior of Danville’s African Americans. Dailey does call the Danville riot a “coup,” similar to the 1898 Wilmington Massacre. While the violence was not planned like the Wilmington Massacre, the Danville riot created a similar political outcome.

38. Dailey, 121–25; National Endowment for the Humanities, “*Alexandria Gazette*. [Volume] (Alexandria, D.C.) 1834-1974, November 05, 1883, Image 2,” November 5, 1883, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85025007/1883-11-05/ed-1/seq-2/>.

African Americans began losing political offices across the state. The Danville massacre was the beginning of Virginia's redemption - the takeover of politics and society by white conservatives with the goal of disenfranchising and excluding African Americans from public life. Eventually, this disagreement over acceptable behavior in public spaces gave way to Jim Crow laws – “public behavior [was] a zero-sum game where one person's gain was another's clear loss.”³⁹

It is in this atmosphere that white citizens began institutionalizing and formally preserving Confederate memory and the Lost Cause as a racial project of white supremacy and using the preservation of Confederate memorials to further buttress Jim Crow segregation. In Danville, the Ladies Memorial Association was founded in 1872 and became a forerunner of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which organized in 1896. The Ladies Memorial Association was active in preserving Confederate memory in the time of the Danville Massacre; the group placed a Confederate Soldiers Monument in the Green Hill Cemetery in September of 1878. When the UDC chapter officially organized, they turned their attention specifically to the preservation of the “Last Capitol of the Confederacy” – the Sutherlin Mansion.

The current chapter of the UDC in Danville, the Anne Eliza Johns chapter, keeps a website, and on it, a list of their past projects. By far, their proudest accomplishment was saving the “Last Capitol of the Confederacy” through raising \$20,000 (over half a million dollars today). In 1912, the two chapters of the UDC located in Danville, which would later merge, began working together to buy and preserve the Sutherlin Mansion. Community-wide support among Danville's white citizens arose to preserve the mansion

39. Dailey, *Before Jim Crow*, 125.

when the property was at risk for being partitioned and sold off when the last Sutherlin descendant died.⁴⁰ Most of the money to purchase the property came from the Ladies' Memorial Association and the UDC, as well as a group set up to preserve the mansion.⁴¹ The chapter reports from 1912 in the Virginia United Daughters of the Confederacy Annual Meeting proceedings illustrates this; the "Danville" Chapter wrote that "our chapters took the initiative in endeavoring to get a movement started whereby the Sutherlin Mansion, known as the "Last Capitol of the Confederacy," might be purchased and retained for a Museum, Library, or Chapter House. So far our wishes have not materialized..." But by the next year, the "Anne Eliza Johns" chapter reported that in 1912 "the Daughters have worked hard over funds towards the purchase of the Last Capitol of the Confederacy, so have been unable to contribute as largely as usual to other causes."⁴² According to the UDC, The Daughters were successful in their bid to save the mansion. They raised \$20,000 and the City of Danville matched their contribution. In return, the city deeded two rooms in the mansion where Jefferson Davis slept and signed declarations for use as club rooms.⁴³ For the remainder of the twentieth century, the city retained ownership of the mansion save for those two rooms.

40. Anne Eliza Johns Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, "About The Chapter," accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.aejohnsudc.com/index_files/Page400.htm.

41. "Memorial Mansion Movement History," *Danville Bee*, January 20, 1922.

42. United Daughters of the Confederacy, "Minutes of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy" (Harrisonburg, VA, 1912), 159, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009793430>; United Daughters of the Confederacy, "Minutes of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy" (Richmond, VA, 1913), 115, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uva.x001478621&view=1up&seq=7>.

43. Anne Eliza Johns Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, "About The Chapter," accessed September 20, 2016, http://www.aejohnsudc.com/index_files/Page400.htm.

In the 1920s, when the city began plans to build a public library (white-only), there was controversy on how to use the former Sutherlin property. As the idea of the Sutherlin mansion becoming a public building was being debated, the city considered charging rent for all the groups that wanted to use the building. That suggestion sparked an outcry from the Daughters as well as the broader community, who argued that the city would be reneging on the property deed that the Daughters would have use of the two club rooms in perpetuity.⁴⁴ The city backed down, but later in 1923, controversy arose again when deciding how to use the Sutherlin Mansion property as a public library. The city had received a large gift of money to build a library and was making a plan to build a new structure on the Sutherlin property. This prompted greater outrage from the Confederate groups. Speaking at a city council meeting, the presidents of the “Danville” chapter, the “Anne Eliza Johns” chapter, the Ladies’ Memorial Association, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans all decried any action that would alter, impede the view, or diminish in any way the mansion. All of these Confederate defenders painted this issue as a moral one, claiming the mansion property was “semi-sacred and that the building of the library there would be a ‘crime.’” Harry Wooding, Jr., the leader of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, (and also the son of prominent Danville mayor, Harry Wooding, Sr.) stated that “the library would destroy the sentiment and beauty of a place that the council was under a moral obligation to maintain the historic atmosphere and that if it came to a choice to putting the library there and doing without a library at all, he would rather see the present property remain intact...”⁴⁵ Both chapters of the UDC released a

44. “Memorial Mansion Movement History,” *Danville Bee*, January 20, 1922.
45. “Realization of Free Public Library Is In Doubt - Deadlock Reached,” *Danville Bee*, May 31, 1923.

joint statement to the press that advocated for a library but not in a way that would mar the Sutherlin Mansion in any shape or form.⁴⁶

Ultimately, the city came to a decision to place the library inside the mansion, yet the Daughters had to approve all changes to the structure of the building. There were several major structural changes done to the first floor to make the residential mansion suitable for a library.⁴⁷ The Danville Public Library opened in 1928 and held several names, including the “Confederate Memorial Mansion,” “Confederate Memorial Library,” as well as the “Last Capitol of the Confederacy,” which it was “officially” dubbed in 1939, when the Daughters erected a marker in front of the mansion even though there was raging debate if it truly was the last Capitol.⁴⁸

Within decades, it was evident that the preservation of the mansion and its use by the Daughters was grounded in memory, not history, as well as white supremacy. Memory is a murky term that is not easy to define, but it has much power in shaping and creating identity. Often conflated with “history,” public memory is distinctive because it tends to be something that is owned by a group, is sacred with absolute meaning that is emotional, is used by groups for creating identity, and coalesces in objects and monuments. History, as defined by David Blight is the “reasoned reconstructions of the past rooted in research,” and is secular, shared by everyone, often revised, and has an intellectual tone. How the Daughters spoke of the Sutherlin Mansion in their preservation

46. “U.D.C. Chapters Make Clear Views On Library Question,” *Danville Bee*, July 24, 1923.

47. Edward P. Alexander, “National Register of Historic Properties Nomination Form - Danville Public Library,” National Register of Historic Properties Nomination (Danville, VA: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, May 13, 1969).

48. “Memorial Marker Is Unveiled,” *Danville Bee*, December 18, 1939.

efforts reveal an emotional tone and a view of anything Confederate as sacred. Karen Cox in *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* argues that Southern women in the UDC pushed forward the Lost Cause and made it about vindication, not remembrance. This is evident through Cassye Young's (a member of the Anne Eliza Johns UDC chapter) pamphlet on the history of the Sutherlin mansion. Young wrote this paper in 1955, and the Daughters had it published and sold 350 copies in that year; this was also the same year of the nascent massive resistance movement to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on school integration.⁴⁹ Much of the paper is about the furnishings of the mansion and an account of Jefferson Davis's time there, but Young specifically spends time describing the mansion's owner, William T. Sutherlin, as an ardent defender of the white race during the Reconstruction period of Virginia:

During the Reconstruction period, he [Sutherlin] rendered Virginia a service which should never be forgotten. The Underwood Constitution, full of atrocious features and test oaths, would have turned the whole State over to scalawags and carpet-baggers. It had passed the US House and Representatives and was in the hands of the Senate Judiciary Committee. The situation was alarming. A meeting of representative men from over the state was called in Richmond and Major Sutherlin represented Danville. From this gathering a committee of nine was chosen to go to Washington in an effort to prevent the passage of this bill, and our representative was one of the nine. By sheer force of ability and the justice of their argument, the bill was killed in Committee and Virginia was saved from this humiliating experience.⁵⁰

Sutherlin participated in a lobbying effort to halt the constitution that had been passed by the Underwood Convention led by radical Republican John Underwood. Radical

49. United Daughters of the Confederacy, "Minutes of the Sixtieth Annual Convention of the Virginia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy," 1955, University of Virginia.

50. Cassye Young, "The Memorial Mansion as Jefferson Davis Saw It" (Pamphlet, Danville, VA, 1955), Small Special Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

Republican representatives, including twenty-four African American delegates, made up a majority of the convention. The most objected-to clause in this constitution was the disenfranchisement of former Confederates, which is what Sutherlin's group was able to kill at the federal level; the constitution still passed but without the clause that would disenfranchise many Virginians.⁵¹ Young drew a direct comparison of Sutherlin to the massive resistance movement in fighting for vindication against federal interference in the South's ways.

The glorification of Sutherlin as a defender of the Old South is not surprising, but the Daughters continued to make many references to the Reconstruction period and their triumphs in preserving the moments where white Southerners "redeemed" the South. In 1947, the Virginia UDC committed massive amounts of money to the building of the "Red Shirt Shrine" in Edgefield, South Carolina. This shrine is in reference to Wade Hampton's Red Shirts, the paramilitary terrorist group that overthrew the Republican government of South Carolina in 1876. The celebration and honoring of events like these reveal that for the Daughters, "history" was about being vindicated in their cause. As Young notes: "We know that the dream of the confederacy was dead; but the story of confederacy will never die, and we are proud that it is our privilege to tell this story to another generation and to teach them to honor the confederate flag with 'affection, reverence, and undying remembrance.'"⁵² Historian of the Virginia Division of the UDC, Essie Butler Smith, agreed with Young's assertion: "A clever woman once divided all

51. Library of Virginia, "Constitutional Convention · Remaking Virginia: Transformation Through Emancipation · Online Exhibitions," Remaking Virginia: Transformation Through Emancipation, 2015, <http://www.virginiamemory.com/online-exhibitions/exhibits/show/remaking-virginia/voting/constitutional-convention>.

52. Young, "The Memorial Mansion as Jefferson Davis Saw It."

Virginia women into three parts. First, those who wanted to be Daughters of the Confederacy, and could not; she was sorry for them. Second, those who could be Daughters of the Confederacy and would not; she was ashamed of them. Third, those who were Daughters of the Confederacy and were helping with organized strength to carry forward the great purpose of their existence; she was proud of them, and felt that in their hands the Old Dominion was safe forever.”⁵³ Clearly, the control of Civil War history in the hands of white Virginians would mean the maintenance of white supremacy and white control of racial relations. Expressing the same sentiments of the young women of Farmville’s State Normal College, the Danville UDC women took it upon themselves to maintain the “true” history of the war. This virulent defense of white redemption tracks with the resistance to early efforts of nonviolent protest by civil rights activists.

While the Danville Daughters had made the Confederate culture surrounding the public library seemingly impenetrable, the 1960 sit-in by the students shocked Danville’s white community. They saw it as not only an affront to the ordained social order but also termed it “an invasion” of the Confederate Memorial Mansion.⁵⁴ This inflammatory rhetoric was shared by city leaders, including T.E. Temple, the city manager. This reaction seems extreme, but to white southerners, it was a necessary response as dictated by the norms of Jim Crow. As Glenda Gilmore argues in *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, one of the tenets of white supremacy ideology was the “Black beast” myth and fear of Black violence against

53. Essie Wade Butler Smith, *Forty Years with the Virginia Division, United Daughters of the Confederacy*. ([n.p., 1935).

54. “Legality Clashes with Reality,” *The Register*, April 3, 1960, Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/legality_clashes.html.

white womanhood. Perhaps the close association of the Sutherlin Mansion with the UDC and their ownership of two rooms in the Mansion represented the pinnacle of white womanhood to these people, making the students in their eyes the embodiment of the “Black beast.” This white supremacist belief notwithstanding, it is evident that by asserting their presence in the all-white library that also served as a shrine to the Lost Cause of the Confederacy, the students made a statement that they, too, should have a voice in how the history of this shared civic space should be told.

In Spring 1960, as the civil rights movement was heating up and as Congress considered civil rights legislation, Southside and Virginia politicians had a vested interest in keeping the Memorial Mansion sacred as the Civil War centennial was quickly approaching. Virginia’s senior senator, Harry F. Byrd, was the most prominent Virginia spokesmen against civil rights, and five days after the students sat-in, he released a statement denouncing the civil rights bill the Senate had just passed, calling it “a determined effort to enact punitive legislation, most of which was unconstitutional and punitive to the South.”⁵⁵ One of his a key member in the Byrd political machine was William M. “Bill” Tuck, who was the Southside representative in the House. Tuck saw this as an opportunity to fight against civil rights with commemoration. His motivations are clearly reflected in how Danville and Southside Virginians prepared for and celebrated the Civil War centennial. For these Virginians, the centennial represented the

55. Harry F. Byrd, “Statement by Senator Harry F. Byrd (D, VA) for release immediately upon passage of the Civil Rights Bill in the Senate,” April 7, 1960, *Papers of Harry F. Byrd*, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

opportunity to reinforce the cause of Jim Crow in propping up massive resistance to integration.

Bill Tuck of South Boston, Virginia, also happened to be the most prominent Southsider involved in the Civil War centennial on a national level. A member of the Byrd Democratic machine, Tuck's career in politics became synonymous with conservatism, anti-communism, and states' rights. Supportive of Strom Thurmond's 1948 Dixiecrat campaign and a founding member of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, Bill Tuck also was one of several congressmen to lobby heavily for a national Civil War centennial. His bill to create a national Civil War centennial commission passed Congress in 1957. President Eisenhower signed it into law in September 1957. Two weeks later when Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to enforce court-ordered school desegregation, Tuck criticized Eisenhower. At the same time, Tuck revealed what his intentions for the centennial were: "It [the centennial] could only serve to solidify our people in opposition to the Court decision and the tyranny to which we are now being subjected."⁵⁶

Tuck's sentiments expressed themselves in the name of the anti-integration group he helped form at the beginning of the massive resistance period, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. The Defenders' main purpose was to prevent the integration of schools in Virginia, but they shared the values and operated like the White Citizens Councils of the Deep South. There were many active chapters across Southside Virginia, including one in Danville. Tuck saw how the evocation of the Lost Cause of the

56. Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961–1965* (LSU Press, 2011), 30.

Confederacy could bolstered massive resistance feeling and sentiment in rural Southside Virginia.⁵⁷

Tuck and other like-minded segregationists in Virginia formed a state commission to celebrate the centennial. The commonwealth appropriated 1.75 million dollars for its own commission.⁵⁸ Bill Tuck and segregationist newspaper editor James Kilpatrick agreed that the national and state commissions should be stacked with individuals who agreed with Tuck's interpretation of the "War Between the States" and that one of the centennial's main purposes was to defend the cause of states' rights and massive resistance.⁵⁹ Virginia politicians and their mouthpieces saw a clear correlation between celebrating and defending the Lost Cause as a major line of defense against federal civil rights legislation and directives. This played out at the Sutherlin Mansion in 1965 when the city hosted the celebration of Jefferson Davis's arrival to Danville. The celebration included a parade, reenactments, dances, and commemorative speeches. In one of these speeches, Virginia's Senator A. Willis Robertson compared the South's opposition to the Voting Rights Act to "states' rights" struggles in the nineteenth century. Robertson, along with Tuck, state delegate Dan Daniel, state senator Landon Wyatt, and the Virginia attorney general Robert Button, dressed up as Confederate officers and posed at the Confederate Memorial Mansion during the celebration. The local chapters of the NAACP

57. "Report from the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties," September 30, 1957, *Norfolk Public Schools Desegregation Papers (1922-2008)*, Special Collections and University Archives, Old Dominion University Perry Library, Norfolk, Virginia.

58. Cook, 65.

59. Cook, 32; "Letter from James J. Geary to James J. Kilpatrick," May 4, 1959, James J. Kilpatrick Papers, Small Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference issued statements denouncing the celebrations, as they were blatantly white supremacist.⁶⁰ However, by 1965, the last commemorations of the Civil War were coming to a close, and many Southern politicians recognized that the particular weapon of public memory was not proving effective to stem the tide of integration.

Although Danville had finally integrated its public library by 1965, the city's white citizenry remained committed to preserving the narratives of white supremacy. The attitudes apparent in Danville's white citizens in 1883 still lingered in 1965. Black presence in public space and public narratives were still unwelcome among Danville's white citizens. In the city's struggle to stop the "Last Capitol of the Confederacy" from integrating, they believed they might have an effective weapon in the Lost Cause to preserve Jim Crow segregation. It had certainly worked in the earlier part of the century to use the Danville Massacre as an example of what would happen if African Americans were allowed to participate as full citizens politically and socially, and Danville's white elite did an excellent job in enshrining the city with Confederate memory. However, that Confederate memory lost much of its power by the 1960s – it was no match for the Fourteenth Amendment, Civil Rights Acts of 1964, Voting Rights Acts of 1965, and the local, grassroots social movement brought to Danville by African American young people.

Robert Williams, one of the students who helped integrate the Last Capitol of the Confederacy, noted in an interview that he does not have specific recollections about that

60. "Photograph of A. Willis Robertson, Dan Daniel, William Tuck, Landon Wyatt, and Robert Button," *Danville Register*, April 2, 1965.

day, but he did note that the students were absolutely aware of what they were doing: “the main library building was a seminal place and had a great deal of significance... we felt on that day, very, very triumphant – that we had accomplished what we wanted – that was that if we could not use the park and the library, then they would be closed to all.”⁶¹ Of course, a struggle followed to fully integrate the library, but it also served to propel the formation of more civil rights organizing in Danville, which would grow over the next several years and culminate with a mass demonstration in the summer of 1963, as violence in Birmingham ignited protests in cities and towns across the country. By cracking the Virginia way of race relations in 1960, students had helped set the stage for the broader movement in Danville that exploded in 1963.

61. Robert A. Williams, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*, interview by Emma C. Edmunds, Gladys Hairston, and Laurie Ripper, March 25, 2008, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_williams.html.

CHAPTER 5

“A DISPLAY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE”:

BLOODY MONDAY AND THE 1963 DANVILLE MOVEMENT

On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered a major civil rights address to the nation in a televised prime-time speech. During the previous month, the SCLC-led campaign to desegregate stores in Birmingham was met with a massive police assault on young protesters with dogs and fire hoses – images that were flashed across the nation and around the world. Pressured by events and by the Kennedy administration, business leaders and movement leaders reached a fragile agreement to begin desegregating downtown stores. That same night, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the home of Rev. A. D. King and the motel where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had stayed, setting off massive street protests and battles between African Americans and the police. The events in Birmingham ignited a wave of Black protests across the country, signaling that America’s racial crisis had reached a breaking point.

The day Kennedy made his speech, Governor George Wallace of Alabama made his infamous “stand in the schoolhouse door,” an attempt to intimidate James Hood and Vivian Malone, who desegregated the University of Alabama. Although Wallace ultimately yielded to the federal government in this instance, and Hood and Malone

registered for classes, Wallace emerged as the symbol of white resistance to integration and to federal power not only in the South, but nationally.¹

In his speech, Kennedy focused on the racial crisis not only in the South, but across the country:

Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or State or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them. The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, North and South, where legal remedies are not at hand. Redress is sought in the streets, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives. We face, therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves or talk. It is time to act in the Congress, in your State and local legislative body and, above all, in all of our daily lives.²

A few hours after this address, Klansman Byron de la Beckwith, shot NAACP field worker, Medgar Evers, dead in Evers's driveway in Jackson, Mississippi.³ In all of these events, the "fires of frustration and discord" were burning brightly in the city of Danville, Virginia. At that time, Danville was a microcosm for the conditions that Kennedy described in his address. The day before Kennedy's address, June 10, is known as "Bloody Monday" in the city because on that day in 1963, Danville city police brutalized hundreds of civil rights demonstrators throughout the day using clubs and firehoses. King

1. Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013); Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*.

2. John F. Kennedy, "Excerpt from a Report to the American People on Civil Rights, 11 June 1963," in *Historic Speeches*, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/televised-address-to-the-nation-on-civil-rights>.

3. Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*, 199.

later noted that the violence in Danville represented the worst police brutality he had seen across South.⁴

Like the Birmingham movement, the local Danville movement in 1963 grew out of demands for an end to discrimination in municipal and business hiring, and students turned out en masse to demonstrate. Also, like Birmingham, city forces violently suppressed this activity, drawing national attention. With the help of SNCC and SCLC, this local movement grew in national prominence as they faced down Jim Crow segregation. However, at the end of 1963, the local movement's momentum of direct-action protests and marches waned in Danville, and today these events no longer hold a significant place in the local public's memory. Why did the Danville movement lose momentum? Did their efforts produce any progress?

Despite local enthusiasm from Black students, involvement from national Civil Rights organizations and even violent reactions from the white police force and fire department, the local white elites in power managed to suppress the movement through legal tactics and controlling media narratives. The Danville, Virginia, civil rights movement failed in sustaining momentum for direct action protests during the summer of 1963 due to the calculated method of suppression by Southside's white segregationists.

Preparing for a Mass Movement: Inspiration from the Deep South

Prior to the large scale-movement in 1963, students in 1960 initiated the direct-action protests for civil rights in Danville, inspired by the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the local NAACP and SCLC chapters. They staged sit-ins at Ballou Park,

4. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Speech, July 11, 1963," High Street Baptist Church, Danville, VA, broadcast over WDBJ Television, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/wdbj/segments/WDBJ04_25.html.

an all-white public park, and the Danville Public Library, located at the time in the Sutherlin Mansion, the building that served as the last capitol of the Confederate States of America. These initial efforts were successful, and Danville's Black citizens began working toward integrating the city with a focus on municipal services and facilities. Between 1960 and 1963, local ministers and other leaders created the Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA), an affiliate branch of the SCLC, to continue moving direct action protest forward in Danville. Several local ministers, including Rev. Lawrence Campbell and Rev. Alexander Dunlap, a veteran of the Prince Edward County Christian Association, who had a new church placement in Danville, sought to steer the Danville movement towards more radical action, breaking with the leadership of the local NAACP branch.

Through 1961 to early 1963, both the NAACP and DCPA organized locally and also participated in civil rights activity across the South. With the split in leadership between the DCPA and NAACP, the movement spent much of 1961 and 1962 organizing into these new camps, but the DCPA began making plans for more specific attacks against Jim Crow. The 1961 Freedom Rides and 1961-1962 Albany, Georgia movement provided opportunities to evaluate tactics. In 1961, the Freedom Riders, in their effort to integrate interstate travel, passed through two Virginia cities, Lynchburg and Danville. On May 7, 1961, the Freedom Riders came to Danville and faced open hostility and resistance when white riders insisted on being served at the "colored" counter at the Greyhound station downtown.⁵ While the first wave of riders made it through Danville

5. Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 113, 118.

without a violent reaction, the FBI monitored a female activist associated with the Freedom Riders who moved to Danville for the summer in June 1961. According to the FBI file, she became interested in the Freedom Rides after talking to an activist who was a divinity student at Virginia Union University, and she also attended the original organizing meeting of the Freedom Riders sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Washington, D.C.⁶ Despite the FBI's concerns, there was no conflict over the Freedom Rides in Danville unlike further south in Anniston, Alabama and Birmingham.

By 1962, the leaders of the DCPA became much more active in their protests against Jim Crow in Danville. Several ministers and local businessmen formed the leadership of the group: Rev. Lawrence Campbell, Rev. Alexander I. Dunlap, Julius Adams, and Rev. Lendell Chase. These men began appearing before the Danville City Council to make demands, including representation of Blacks on various boards running city agencies, school integration, desegregation of facilities at city hall, better recreational facilities, and integration of eating establishments.⁷ While they made these demands, Reverend A.I. Dunlap researched civil rights struggles in other places to learn tactics, as he knew they certainly would face hostility in Danville. When observing the Lynchburg omnibus integration suit in 1962, Dunlap stated, "Man they don't want any trouble in Danville. If we ask them to integrate something and show that it's a serious concern,

6. "Memo regarding Congress of Racial Equality," Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richmond Virginia, June 22, 1961, in "Freedom Riders – Part 5 of 22," *FBI Records: The Vault*, <https://vault.fbi.gov/freedom-riders/freedom-riders-part-05-of-22/view> [accessed September 24, 2015], 122, 189; Memo regarding Congress of Racial Equality," Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richmond Virginia, in "Freedom Riders – Part 4 of 22," *FBI Records: The Vault*, <https://vault.fbi.gov/freedom-riders/freedom-riders-part-04-of-22/view> [accessed September 24, 2015], 87-89.

7. Holt, 69.

they'll do it. They don't want any trouble. During the lunch counter sit-ins of 1960 they wouldn't even arrest anyone."⁸ Dunlap knew that direct action was their best strategy in Danville at that time having faced the extremes of massive resistance in Prince Edward County.

Dunlap and Julius Adams also went to Albany, Georgia, in August 1962 to observe and participate in the SCLC movement there after Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a call for people to come support the struggling movement. The Albany campaign was one of the first major tests for the national civil rights movement, and it is often considered a defeat as the Albany police chief learned how to counter the non-violent methods of the movement handily. While SNCC and SCLC worked together in the Albany campaign, they struggled with organization, mass jailings that were dispersed over South Georgia, and restrictive city ordinances meant to stop demonstrations. By August 1962, SCLC had to pull out of the city, but the local people, described as the "motherload of the Black community" by Bernice Johnson Reagon of SNCC, continued to push forward with demonstrations.⁹ This experience motivated Dunlap and Adams to bring more protests in Danville; they felt if they could motivate the Black community of Danville in the way Albany had, progress was possible. On their way back to Virginia, Dunlap needed to charge his car battery, and he stopped a service station where the operator told him, "N-----, get that car out of here," and drew a gun on him. Dunlap and Adams started pushing the car out of the lot, but the operator kicked both of them

8. Ibid., 61.

9. Callie Crossley and James A. DeVinney, *No Easy Walk: 1961-1963, Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Movement* (Blackside Productions, 1986).

repeatedly. After that humiliating experience, Dunlap called civil rights attorney Len Holt and asked him to file the Danville omnibus suit.¹⁰

Len Holt filed the suit in federal court and Dunlap and the other leaders of the DCPA were the plaintiffs in the case. The demands of the suit were hefty: integration of Danville Memorial Hospital, Danville Technical Institute, cemeteries, city armory, nursing homes, public housing projects, teacher assignments, and all city employment. According to Holt, the city of Danville did not want to stir up a battle over this suit and made some small concessions, including removal of segregation signs in the courtroom and the city recreation system, including the city armory. Julius Adams also applied for a plot in the all-white cemetery and received it. However, even though the city granted these concessions, it also stopped holding events that could now be integrated such as public dances for teenagers.¹¹ The local media also criticized the plaintiffs in the case, which Holt remembered as causing white attitudes to shift:

... [after the lawsuit emerged] a new note of seriousness entered into Danville's racial picture. Local Danville papers began to pour on the criticism of the four plaintiffs in the suit as Councilman John W. Carter began to get a better audience from his colleagues: "I told you so," he began saying... Of the same mind were Mayor Julian Stinson of Danville and the other city councilmen. If there was difference, it was over how the ideas should be expressed; let them be expressed with finesse, keeping up the good front of the tolerant and understanding Virginia gentleman.¹²

From Holt's recollections, it is evident that white leadership was reluctant to show an incendiary reaction toward Black citizens striving for their rights; they wanted to maintain a façade of paternalism, which allowed them to justify their white supremacist

10. Ibid., 70-71.

11. Ibid., 62.

12. Ibid., 72.

views. However, as Danville's Black citizens intensified their efforts in 1963, the local whites could not suppress their determined defense of racial segregation.

By 1963, the local efforts in Danville began to align with the strategies of the national organizations, as SCLC and SNCC sent organizers and their top leaders to Danville to assist with the local movement. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited Danville on March 26, 1963, and his visit became a catalyst for Danville to become a movement of national prominence.¹³ The DCPA sponsored this event at the city armory, which had been previously integrated, and 2,500 people attended this event. King's words that "justice will flow over Danville like a stream from a mighty water," inspired the Black citizens of Danville to begin mass meetings in their churches that spring, setting the stage for an eventful summer. At the King meeting, other leaders, including Carl and Anne Braden, field secretaries for the Southern Conference Education Fund, committed their support to the Danville cause.¹⁴ With this momentum, the DCPA began preparing for a mass movement in early 1963.¹⁵ This event came right when the civil rights movement reached a pivotal point. After defeats in Albany and concern that civil rights would fade from national attention, King noted that momentum for a widespread movement was waning, and he was concerned the Kennedy administration would not press further. King

13. Ibid., 62.

14. Ibid., 63-64.

15 Robert A. Williams, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*, interview by Emma C. Edmunds, Gladys Hairston, and Laurie Ripper, March 25, 2008, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_williams.html; "Legality Clashes with Reality," *The Register*, April 3, 1960, *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/legality_clashes.html; Len Holt, *An Act of Conscience*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 58, 61.

knew that the upcoming April campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, needed to succeed to maintain the health of the overall movement.¹⁶

“This is Birmingham All Over:” Beginnings of the 1963 Summer Movement

May 31, 1963 was the beginning of the large-scale movement that involved both the SCLC and SNCC, but the local students and civil rights organizations initiated these protests that quickly garnered national attention. In the weeks prior, the Birmingham movement had captivated national audiences on the nightly news. The SCLC-led campaign was one of the most dramatic civil rights moments in the twentieth century. Images of thousands of children marching and filling the jails and the brutality shown by city commissioner of public safety, Eugene “Bull” Connor, stunned the nation, but motivated Black communities across the North and South. King’s “Letter from the Birmingham Jail” chastised white moderates who criticized the movement for their tactics, which helped prompt a shift in attitudes toward civil rights across the nation and within the federal government as the Kennedy administration began responding to the movement by sending Department of Justice officials to Birmingham to broker an agreement.¹⁷

Thus, the Danville movement ramped up their plans to begin direct-action protest in the city. On May 31, Revs. Campbell and Dunlap walked to city hall with roughly fifty high school students to demand equality in municipality employment (firemen, policemen, city clerks, meter readers, and typists). This protest did not draw much

16. Patricia Sullivan, *Justice Rising: Robert Kennedy’s America in Black and White* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2021), p. 143.

17. Crossley and DeVinney, *No Easy Walk: 1961-1963*; Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*; Lewis and D’Orso, *Walking with the Wind*.

attention as the Danville city management and police seemed to be playing Albany, Georgia's, police chief Laurie Pritchett's game: avoid a conflict at all costs to keep the protesters from justifying their actions.¹⁸

The protestors would not give up and began adopting bolder strategies. They continued to visit city hall nearly each day in the same manner, but the situation escalated on June 5. The ministers and students between the ages of fifteen and eighteen went to see Mayor Julian Stinson at city hall and sat down in the mayor's office when he refused to see them. At that point, the police moved to disperse the group and the situation became disorderly as police arrested Rev. Campbell there in the mayor's office. According to a SNCC pamphlet, the police incited the violence by pushing Dunlap downstairs and choking a girl, who retaliated by swinging her purse. The Temple report described the scene differently. According to the report and McCain's testimony, as the group exited the building, the girl mentioned in the SNCC pamphlet, Mary Elizabeth Bethel, swung her purse at McCain, and she was arrested. After the demonstrators reached the street, they blocked the Main Street rush hour traffic completely. The demonstrators and crowd of onlookers did not disperse until the police threatened to turn fire hoses on them.¹⁹

18. Ibid.; Dorothy Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia* (Atlanta, Ga.: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1963), 5; T. Edward Temple, "A Statement and Documented Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville during the Past Two Weeks" (Earl Gregg Swem Library and Special Collections, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, June 15, 1963), series 13, folder 4601, William Munford Tuck Papers, 1918-1968; Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 170.

19. James W. Jr. Peters, "James W. Peters, Jr." Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights, interview by Emma C. Edmunds, November 15, 2003, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia,

The events of June 5 finally brought the Danville struggle into the local press. The *Commercial Appeal* characterized the demonstrations as violent and disorderly. The *Danville Bee* ran an editorial stating that Danville would resist protest movements. The news also spread across Virginia as the *Roanoke Times* stated that “this is Birmingham all over.” This estimation of the Danville movement soon became true as the protests escalated.²⁰

The four days following June 5 saw efforts by white officials to use legal means to stop the protests, increased demonstrations, and an influx of people into Danville to assist the movement. On June 6, Judge Archibald Aiken issued a court injunction against any racial demonstrations, while movement leaders attempted a meeting with the Danville city council and city leaders. On June 7, a grand jury indicted the ministers on charges of “inciting a riot” and encouraging a minor to commit a misdemeanor and set their bond at \$5,500 each, but collective fundraising by James Peters, Jr., a local businessman, paid their bonds. The felony charge against these protesters was the “John Brown statute,” an antiquated law from the antebellum period, which accused the

http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_peters.html; Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia*, 5; Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 18; “Transcript of Testimony of Eugene McCain, Commonwealth of Virginia v. Lawrence George Campbell, Alexander Isaiah Dunlap, Arthur Pinchback, and Julius Adams” (Corporation Court of Danville, The 1963 Danville (VA) Civil Rights Case Files, series xi, reel 2328, accession 38099, September 19, 1963), 5–8, Local Government Records Collection, Microfilm, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia; Temple, “A Statement and Documented Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville during the Past Two Weeks,” 3–4.

20. Charles W. Crowder, “Danville Is at the Crossroads,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 10, 1963, Microfilm; Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 77–78.

ministers of “inciting Negroes to riot against white people.”²¹ This indictment was only the beginning of attempts to squash the Danville movement through legal means.

The events of June 5 also brought more people to Danville to bolster the fledgling movement; Lawyer Len Holt arrived in Danville to defend the leaders of the movement. SNCC responded quickly to the Danville movement’s requests for assistance and had workers there by June 10. The leaders also contacted Dr. King of SCLC, the national NAACP, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), asking for assistance. Over these four days, more support came into the city, including Claudia Edwards and Bruce Baines from CORE and SNCC’s Avon Rollins with the promise of seventeen other field secretaries. In all, there were fifteen SNCC workers who came to Danville that summer at various times; three workers remained most of the summer – Avon Rollins, member of the SNCC executive committee, Robert Zellner, a field secretary, and Daniel Foss, a summer volunteer. As outside support grew, the movement leaders contacted news media about the protests, but received a less than enthusiastic response. The *Danville Register* even published on June 9 that the indictment would end Danville’s “racial troubles.”²² The next day, now known as “Bloody Monday,” would prove otherwise.

Bloody Monday, June 10, catapulted the Danville movement into the national spotlight, as the police reaction to protestors turned excessively violent. As the demonstrators were marching that morning, the police arrested thirty-eight of them, including SNCC leaders Rollins and Foss, and in a scene reminiscent of Bull Connor’s

21. Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 3, 78–80; Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia*, 5; Peters, “James W. Peters, Jr.” *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*.

22. Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 82,88; Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia*, 5.

Birmingham, the police turned fire hoses on the marchers and beat them with clubs. The demonstrators fled from the downtown area, and the police followed and began arresting Blacks indiscriminately, including spectators. As many of the demonstrators were underage, when they called their parents, the police arrested the parents, too, for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Other arrests included Avon Rollins and Daniel Foss for taking photographs of the arrests. SNCC field workers Bob Zellner, Dorothy Miller, and Ivanhoe Donaldson arrived in town that afternoon as well, but avoided arrest that day.²³

The violence of the morning continued that evening. Bibleway Holiness Church (Rev. Campbell's church) hosted a mass meeting (with an estimate of five hundred attending) at 8:30 PM where some of the protestors from that day gave their testimony. After hearing these testimonies, many people volunteered to march down to the city jail, walk around it, and sing. As the group marched around the jail and sang, the police stopped them on the second time around the jail. The police and deputized garbage collectors brought the hoses and clubs out again and turned them on the crowd of mostly women and teenagers; forty people sustained injuries. Rev. Campbell's wife, Gloria Campbell, testified that the demonstrators were bloody and looked like "butchered cattle." Mrs. Campbell sustained injuries herself, including bruises and impaired hearing. Of the forty-seven people hurt that day, some suffered head lacerations, were knocked unconscious, and needed oxygen and artificial respiration. The events of Bloody Monday

23. Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia*, 5; Holt, *An Act of Conscience*, 91–93.

led Sam W. Tucker (NAACP lawyer) to state that it was “a day of infamy to the fair name of Virginia.”²⁴

On June 11, the number of protestors swelled. Rev. LW Chase, president of DCPA, led a group of two hundred to peacefully protest the violence; many came on crutches and with bandages still wrapped around their heads; these were the “Group of Six,” who also carried signs stating they were victims of police brutality. As the number of protestors grew, so did the police and media response. Thirty state troopers moved into Danville, armed with repeater shotguns, tear gas, guns, and an armed tank. Media flooded the city; NBC, CBS, ABC, UPI, AP, and INS news service, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Evening Star*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* all sent reporters to Danville. Prominent civil rights leaders also arrived in Danville, including James Forman, John Lewis, and Danny Lyons of SNCC, Leo Branton, a civil rights trial lawyer, and Rev. Milton Reid, head of the Virginia SCLC. During this period, the SNCC field secretaries held non-violent training workshops at High Street Baptist Church..²⁵

The next and last incidence of widespread violence occurred June 13 after several days of direct action protest. The evening of June 13, Avon Rollins of SNCC brought two hundred people to stage an all-night vigil at city hall. The police responded with tear gas and clubs. James Forman of SNCC intervened with Chief McCain before he could direct the police to turn fire hoses on the protestors and arranged a meeting with the mayor for

24. Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 12,17,25; Campbell quote p.25; Tucker quote p.12; Miller and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Danville, Virginia*, 6.

25. Temple, “A Statement and Documented Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville during the Past Two Weeks,” 13; Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 101; James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries; a Personal Account.* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 326.

the next morning. The group went back to Bibleway Church for a mass meeting while the police set up machine guns and roadblocks outside of the church. After that night, the police eased the violence but continued to use intimidation while the white elite and city council began passing ordinances and injunctions to stop the demonstrations.²⁶

Legal Sabotage of the Danville Movement: June 14-July 28, 1963

From June 14 to June 30, the Black citizens' efforts to protest against the city's discriminatory practices were met with injunctions and indictments that sabotaged the leadership and numbers of the movement. On June 14, the city council issued an ordinance prohibiting picketing.²⁷ This resulted in an additional thirty-five people arrested on charges related to the movement.²⁸ A week later, on June 21, an additional ten people were indicted with felony charges for violating the "John Brown" statute, including Holt, Dunlap, and Forman.²⁹ By the end of June, at least 140 people faced charges for participating in the movement.³⁰ The judges and prosecutors in the cases sought maximum punishments and used tactics to slow the judicial process down by continuing cases and requiring all defendants to be present every day in court, rather than giving specific dates for trial.³¹ The movement lawyers also tried to move the cases from

26. Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 119–20; Temple, "A Statement and Documented Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville during the Past Two Weeks," 14; Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries; a Personal Account.*, 328–29.

27. "Summer 1963: Danville's Racial Unrest: How It Started...Where the Situation Stands Today," *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1963, Microfilm.

28. "Sunday is Calm as New Moves Develop in City; Riots in Nearby Oxford," *Commercial Appeal*, June 17, 1963, Microfilm.

29. Holt, 3; "Summer 1963: Danville's Racial Unrest: How It Started...Where the Situation Stands Today," *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1963, Microfilm.

30. "White Citizens Council Member Charged with Death of Evers; Calm Continues to Prevail Here," *Commercial Appeal*, June 24, 1963, Microfilm.

31. Holt, 149-152, 186.

Corporation court (a precursor to Virginia circuit court) to federal court, hoping they would have more recourse there, but Judge Thomas Michie refused the request.³² While arrests hampered the local movement, SNCC, SCLC, and NAACP sent more support and lawyers to Danville through the second half of June. By the beginning of July, the leaders' struggles moved to fighting the court battle and making attempts to bring Martin Luther King to Danville to raise morale. With the leaders embroiled in the legal struggle, it fell to the students to continue the protests for the rest of the summer.

The last week of June, leaders from the DCPA announced that Dr. King would visit Danville "soon." On June 28, while speaking in Suffolk, Virginia, King stated that he planned to be involved in the Danville movement and called for a mass descent on Danville for a July 3 rally.³³ However, despite plans made for the rally, the city and judges of Danville sabotaged this rally by refusing parade permits, condemning the baseball diamond where the rally was to take place, and issuing another injunction, which issued restraining orders against Campbell, Dunlap, Chase, the DCPA, Milton Reid, King, Zellner, Forman, Holt, and CORE.³⁴ These orders enjoined the named people and organizations from "participating in, financing, sponsoring, encouraging, or engaging in meetings or other activities" related to civil rights. When the local movement leaders called King and informed him of Michie's injunction, King replied, "Tell the people that I shall, regrettably, not be able to come to Danville at this time because of pressing business involving SCLC in Atlanta."³⁵ The rally went forth at Langston High School

32. "White Citizens Council Member Charged with Death of Evers; Calm Continues to Prevail Here," *Commercial Appeal*, June 24, 1963, Microfilm.

33. Holt, 194.

34. *Ibid.*, 199.

35. *Ibid.*, 200-201.

Athletic Field on July 3 with Fred Shuttlesworth from SCLC speaking, but the rally was poorly attended. This second injunction was a major blow to the Danville movement.³⁶

The Danville movement introduced new tactics into the struggle through the month of July. After the July rally, students renewed the protests and picketed the response of the judges, but Judge Michie did dissolve the federal injunction on July 10, which allowed King to come to Danville on July 11.³⁷ King's arrival brought a renewed zeal in protests, as two hundred people turned out to march with him. The mass meeting at High Street Baptist Church that evening brought in thousands of protestors.³⁸ The marches continued for the next several days, resulting in more arrests but no major violence. Students continued the momentum with picketing, including an incident of demonstrating outside of Mayor Stinson's home at night, which was led by a US Army private who was AWOL.³⁹ While the students continued picketing, the lawyers for the movement took the case to the federal circuit court of appeals, but the cases were continued to September for a decision.⁴⁰ SCLC and SNCC also began voter registration drives in Danville, which were somewhat successful as they managed to register over two hundred Black residents.⁴¹ SNCC also called for a boycott of Dan River Mills, the largest employer in Danville, which practiced discriminatory hiring.⁴² The students also

36. Ibid.

37. Holt, 205; "Negro Demonstrators Appear Before Mayor's Home, Then Quickly Jailed," *Commercial Appeal*, July 15, 1963, Microfilm.

38. Holt, 205-207.

39. "Negro Demonstrators Appear Before Mayor's Home, Then Quickly Jailed," *Commercial Appeal*, July 15, 1963, Microfilm.

40. Holt, 210.

41. "Negroes Register 218 As Part of Vote Drive Here," *Commercial Appeal*, July 22, 1963, section B, Microfilm.

42. Holt, 203-204.

conducted sit-ins at the Mill.⁴³ Fed up with the slow response of the federal government and not seeing much progress in the local efforts, local leaders made plans for another “D-Day” rally at the end of July.⁴⁴

By the end of July and into August, the struggle in Danville began losing momentum. The planned “D-Day” rally for July 28 only had seventy-seven participants turn out despite the pledges of over three hundred people. It was the largest demonstration since the July 11 rally led by Dr. King. There were many arrests for parading without a permit and violating the injunction against demonstrations, but the demonstrators remained non-violent as did the police, even as they led those arrested away in the back of a tractor-trailer.⁴⁵ However, on August 2, Judge Aiken expanded the injunction against the demonstrators to stop the large-scale protests, in addition to making the injunction permanent. The court also later announced that they would transfer the court cases to jurisdictions that were at least one hundred and twenty-five miles away from Danville.⁴⁶

Another factor working against the Danville movement was the upcoming March on Washington, as the March took media coverage away from Danville and the national organizations took on other projects and had little time to rouse momentum in the city.

The Danville group participated in the March on Washington on August 28, but they also

43. Ibid.

44. Holt, 210.

45. “Police Arrest 77 Sunday Marchers Here; 22 Halted at Farmville Church Service,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 29, 1963, Microfilm; “Loading Up for a Short Ride to Jail,” *Danville Bee*, July 29, 1963, NewspaperArchive.

46. “City Streets are Quiet But Racial Developments Unfold Behind the Scenes,” *Commercial Appeal*, August 5, 1963, Microfilm; “Summer 1963: Danville’s Racial Unrest: How It Started...Where the Situation Stands Today,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1963, Microfilm.

tried to marshal the numbers in Washington to rally in Danville the next day.⁴⁷ However, the leadership of the March on Washington, specifically Bayard Rustin, the deputy director of the March, refused to endorse the Danville effort as they feared it would detract from their event.⁴⁸ Danville also lost much of the outside help from the national organizations as activists and lawyers like Len Holt left Danville in August.⁴⁹ The local students were the last line of protest. They renewed demonstrations, but this time they demonstrated at Langston High School, the Black school in Danville, yet they were not suspended.⁵⁰ With the adult leadership crippled by the injunctions, the high school students of Danville could not marshal support and sustain the momentum of the summer. As the school year began in September, it would be increasingly difficult for students to commit to the movement. The few adult leaders left knew they had to change their strategy.

Controlling the Narrative: Media Suppression as a Tactic to Quell Demonstrations

In addition to the legal means of stopping demonstrations, the local media of Danville provided critical reinforcement of the local government's preferred narrative of the movement, devoting much of its coverage to praising the city's actions and condemning the local movement as a product of outside agitation. This was not an uncommon approach for the Southern press; newspapers across the South buried their

47. "National March Group Turns Down Campbell's Bid to have Demonstrators in Washington Come Here," *Commercial Appeal*, August 26, 1963, Microfilm.

48. Ibid.

49. Holt, 219.

50. "Racial Front is Quiet in City on Sunday," *Commercial Appeal*, September 2, 1963, Microfilm.

coverage of civil rights activity in hopes to stamp it out.⁵¹ Editorials and reports of the demonstrations often included references to how the local government was magnanimous and paternal toward the demonstrators. The Danville *Commercial Appeal* published an editorial as the demonstrations of June 1963 were beginning, stating that “steady, real progress; almost unnoticed, there has been integration on the buses, the public park and the library; negroes are on the police force...signs distinguishing the races have been removed from city hall... Danville has a reputation for getting things done quietly.”⁵² Later editorials by Charles Crowder in the *Commercial Appeal* from the summer complained of communist influence on the Danville movement, stating, “without question, minority groups such as our Negroes are prime targets of exploitation by not only the Communists but other extremists.”⁵³

Most whites in Danville argued that they knew what was best for the Black citizens of the city. Other editorials and letters to the editor published that summer again painted the Danville movement negatively by comparing it to beginning a holocaust that would create racial hatred not seen since Reconstruction.⁵⁴ This inflamed rhetoric is indicative of how fear and anxiety drove the white response to the Danville movement. Fearful of losing their privileged standing in society, white government officials not only portrayed the participants of the movement in a negative fashion, but also attempted to write the narrative on the movement themselves, emphasizing paternalistic attitudes.

51 James Dao, “40 Years Later, Civil Rights Makes Page One,” July 13, 2004, *New York Times*, New York, pg. A1.

52. Crowder, *Commercial Appeal*, June 10, 1963.

53. Charles W. Crowder, “Red Opportunity – Or Ours?,” *Commercial Appeal*, July 22, 1963, Microfilm.

54 Edward R. Tucker, “Letters to the Editor,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 24, 1963, Microfilm.

City manager T. Edward Temple, published a report of the events of the 1963 direct action protests in Danville to serve as the official record.. Temple used much of the same rhetoric found in the editorials and coded his remarks about the protesters.⁵⁵ He implied that the previous media reports on the movement which showed the violence of the police officer's actions of using fire hoses and clubs were untruthful or biased. Temple's statement also implied that these media reports, which showed the police force in a negative light, belied the paternalistic attitudes of whites in the city. The Temple report used coded language and rhetoric to shape public perceptions of the local movement. It reflected much of the white sentiment expressed in editorials, but it also is highly significant as this piece was intended to be the official record of the movement, which put forth a narrative placing the white government in a positive light. City manager Temple was not alone in trying to control this narrative out of Danville; Congressional representative William M. "Bill" Tuck took many steps to shape the media narrative and undermine the local protestors.⁵⁶

Bill Tuck represented the Fifth Congressional District of Virginia from 1953 to 1969, and he previously served as Governor of Virginia from 1946 to 1950. As noted earlier, Tuck played a central role in implementing this resistance to integration in Prince Edward County, the locality included in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. He, along with several other Southside Virginia politicians, led a funding campaign for the private all-white school, Prince Edward Academy, when the county shut down all public

55. Temple, 1.

56. Temple, "A Statement and Documented Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville during the Past Two Weeks," 1–22.

schools.⁵⁷ Continuing this resistance to equality for African Americans, Tuck's actions and words from the summer of 1963 demonstrate his commitment to maintaining the racial and cultural status quo.

Soon after the first altercation between the demonstrators and the police on June 5, Tuck began communication with the Danville city government and other local governments about the demonstrations and the approaches to take to repress them. On June 10, Tuck wrote to Mayor Stinson commending him, Judge Aiken, and the police department on how they had handled the demonstrators and pledging Stinson his full support. Tuck also characterized the demonstrations in Danville as a symptom of the national Civil Rights Movement, saying "this eruption of violence...can be traced directly to troublemakers in Washington and elsewhere...We do not need and will not tolerate any outside interfering such as that which has plagued Birmingham and other parts of the Nation."⁵⁸ In addition to communicating with the government officials in Danville, Tuck also followed news reports about the demonstrations in the city as he amassed a collection of AP wire reports and newspaper clippings from across the country that covered the Danville movement.⁵⁹

However, as national media began covering Danville, Tuck became more closely involved in controlling the narrative. On June 17, Tuck wrote to the clerk of the

57. Letter from James D. Hagood to Bill Tuck, Letter from Tuck to Hagood, and lists of donors to Prince Edward Academy. December 19, 1961. William M. Tuck Papers, series 15, folder 5471, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

58. Letter to Julian Stinson from Bill Tuck, June 10, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

59. William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Corporation Court in Danville, Tommy Tucker, who had sent him a copy of the papers in the Aiken injunction. Tuck offered the clerk his assessment of the situation in Danville, believing that the federal government was responsible for civil rights protests and would send in federal officials when violence broke out. Tuck implored the Danville government officials to hold fast to their segregationist practices.⁶⁰

Tuck believed that compromise would not preserve the social order of Danville (and the South), nor would the federal government be of any help to the white cause. Tuck and the other white officials in Danville began colluding to hamper the Danville movement, including pursuing legal recourse. In a letter from Judge Aiken's wife, Mary, who was writing on behalf of her husband, she conveyed a plan for repressing the movement:

The present plan is to bring a barrage of suits in Judge Michie's court; one to be brought be a group of white citizens asking him to enjoin these Negroes because they are interfering with the Civil Rights of the white citizens of Danville; one civil action against Slick [SCLC], Snick [SNCC], Core [CORE], and the NAACP for damages for the tremendous expense brought upon the City by these violent demonstrations, etc; one for criminal libel who appeared on the CBS program; a civil suit against CBS, and anything else we can think to use in the meantime.⁶¹

Of all of the actions mentioned in this plan, only the suits against CBS were actually entertained, as the city officials believed that a news story from June 15 libeled the police and city officials in their reports of the demonstrations. Tuck tried to obtain the tape to be used in a suit. From the transcript that he did obtain, CBS showed footage of Mayor Julian Stinson speaking "furiously" about the protests and portrayed the demonstrators in

60. Letter to Tommy Tucker from Bill Tuck, June 17, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

61. Letter to Bill Tuck from Mary Aiken, June 27, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

a sympathetic light.⁶² However, according to a state senator from the area, Dan Daniel, the most offensive part of the broadcast was not included in the transcript. Tuck then wrote to CBS demanding the tape, threatening to sue and to pass legislation in Congress demanding that any news organization would have to relinquish their tapes if asked.⁶³ In his letter to the General Manager of CBS, Blair Clark, Tuck wrote that “responsible people who have cause to believe that they have been falsely and unjustly held up to public contumely should have some redress,”⁶⁴ meaning that the city officials were intent on preserving their reputation as southern gentlemen. CBS denied the request for the film, and the threatened lawsuit did not materialize.⁶⁵

Again, controlling their image was of utmost concern for the city officials; CBS’s response to Tuck indicated that City Manager Temple did not want to make any statement to correct the previous broadcast despite a CBS journalist allowing him that opportunity. Mrs. Aiken’s letter also indicated that the town officials had to supervise the mayor to make sure he comported himself correctly: “So far, Julian Stinson is holding up beautifully, with constant supervision from Dan [Daniel] and Ed Temple and John

62. Transcript of CBS News Broadcast June 15, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

63. Memos from secretary to Tuck dated June 21 and 22, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers; Letter to Congressman Oren Harris, Chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, June 20, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers; Letter to Blair Clark, Vice President and General Manager of CBS News, from Bill Tuck, July 8, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

64. Letter to Blair Clark from Bill Tuck, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

65. Letter to Bill Tuck from Thomas Fisher, Vice President and General Counsel of CBS News, July 18, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

[Carter]. Of course, with him, there is always the question of ‘How long, Oh Lord, how long?’, but so far, so good.”⁶⁶ As the summer progressed, Tuck continued to ensure as best as he could that the preferred narrative gained traction.

In addition to threatening to sue CBS, Tuck continued through the months of July and August attempting to interfere in the movement by using his official capacity as a Congressman.⁶⁷ In July, the arrival of Congressman James Corman’s (of California) legislative aide, Robert Wager, to observe the demonstrations in Danville enraged Tuck. Corman’s receptionist, Deborah Barger, accompanied Wagner, and Danville police ordered them from the scene of a demonstration and reportedly told them to “keep right on going back to the West Coast.” According to a report from the *New York Times*, Tuck was “infuriated” and “laid into Corman for intruding and meddling in his Congressional district.”⁶⁸

In an attempt to strike against the national civil rights organizations, Tuck requested files from the Committee on Un-American Activities on the SNCC leaders in Danville. He received a list that he passed along to the clerk of the Corporation Court in Danville for use in the legal suits against the demonstrators in order to again accuse them of being outside agitators and communists, an alarming charge in the Cold War era.⁶⁹ By

66. Letter to Bill Tuck from Mary Aiken, June 27, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers.

67. Letter to Bill Tuck from F.W. Boye, Jr. Deputy Chief of Legislative Liaison, July 19, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

68. Ben A. Franklin, “Danville Ousts Legislator’s Aide,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1963 in William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

69. Memo to Bill Tuck from Secretary; List of demonstrators and “communist” activity, William M. Tuck Papers, , series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

August, Tuck again tried to influence media reports through playing several of the state newspapers against each other. He wrote to the editors of the *Richmond News Leader* and the *Roanoke Times*, claiming that the *News Leader* had represented Danville unfairly in its coverage and encouraged the editors to print an editorial from the *Danville Register* refuting the *News Leader*'s position. However, the Richmond and Roanoke papers refused to as neither of the papers recalled their coverage. James Kilpatrick (who usually was not sympathetic to civil rights struggles) of the *News Leader* replied to Tuck again criticizing the actions in Danville:

I am satisfied, after a reasonable amount of legwork, that some of the newly deputized Danville cops engaged in brutal conduct on the night of June 10 that cannot possibly be condoned by anyone. Danville's ordinance on picketing, in my judgement, seriously invades the most cherished rights of free speech. As for these State and Federal injunctions that attempt to enjoin a whole countryside, it is enough to say that they go right back to the contemptible sedition act of 1798. On these points, I will fight like a bobcat. My right to disturb society is a hulluva lot more important than [sic] society's supposed right to remain undisturbed.⁷⁰

Kilpatrick's criticisms point out the extreme measures white city officials were willing to take in order to suppress the Danville movement. They were willing to use police brutality and massive amounts of litigation against the protestors, and when called out on the hypocrisies of these tactics, the officials bristled at the thought of their image being sullied. Tuck continued to project this image in his dealings on civil rights and interfering on progress for equality, including giving a speech in Congress against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but by the end of August, the white elite of Danville managed to entrap the

70. Letter to Bill Tuck from James Kilpatrick, Editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, August 15, 1963, William M. Tuck Papers, series 13, folder 4601, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

movement into legal fights that absorbed their efforts and their resources, causing morale to plummet.

Creation of the “Danville Method”

The local white establishment managed to silence the direct-action phase of the movement through manipulative tactics including media suppression, unnecessary arrests, and legal machinations. Legal means were the most effective as several judges issued multiple injunctions in the local court and in federal court and sought to disperse cases. Over two hundred arrests were made over the course of the summer, which greatly depleted the movement’s numbers.⁷¹ The harsh punishments and multiple injunctions seemed typical of white segregationists of the civil rights era..Danville officials, however, crafted an intentional method of suppressing the local movement that became known as the “Danville Method” that other white segregationists across Virginia sought to use to quench any civil rights activism.

As the summer went on, the effort by white officials to stop protests became more calculated. The city officials, Judge Archibald Aiken and his wife, Mary, John W. Carter, and Mayor Stinson, and Bill Tuck formed a cabal that worked specifically to bring down the local movement and preserve the “Virginia Way.” Their correspondence from this summer traces all of their attempts to sabotage the movement as noted previously. According to Archibald Aiken’s son, his grandfather was a part of the 1883 massacre,

71 “Summer 1963: Danville’s Racial Unrest: How It Started...Where the Situation Stands Today,” *Commercial Appeal*, September 23, 1963; “Sunday Is Calm as New Moves Develop in City; Riots in Nearby Oxford,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 17, 1963; Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 3; “White Citizens Council Member Charged with Death of Evers; Calm Continues to Prevail Here,” *Commercial Appeal*, June 24, 1963.

and then his father was a part of suppressing the 1963 movement in a formal role.⁷² By August 1963, Danville's method of suppression made it into national press. . Ben A. Franklin published an article, "Danville Method Studied in the South – Other Cities Observe Ways to Resist Negro Protests," which detailed how the members of this cabal had used violence, suppression of local media, and legal machinations. Franklin noted that "officials of other Virginia cities traveled here to observe and learn in an unspoken compliment to a defense strategy that is among the most unyielding, ingenious, legalistic and effective of any city in the South." Reverend Chase also noted in the article that the movement was trying to resist "a display of psychological warfare" from the city's white officials.⁷³ This Danville method was responsible for keeping attention off the movement and characterizing it as a failure, a reputation that lingered for decades.

By the end of July and into August, the struggle in Danville began losing momentum. As the lackluster "D-Day" march on July 28 showed, the morale of the local demonstrators was extremely low. An editorial in the *Danville Bee* on July 29 detailed all the obstacles the demonstrators faced: "The city administration...has demonstrated one thing, - that it will not be pressured into any sort of concession until out-of-town agitators leave our people alone and stop firing them up, telling them to go to jail and then conveniently leaving the local leaders with a very uncertain hold on their people...there can be no possible solution of our problem so long as our Negro population permits itself to be misled and misguided by self-assumed opportunistic Negro leaders."⁷⁴ Direct-action

72 James Hershman, in conversation with the author, August 2020.

73 Ben A. Franklin, "Danville Method Studied in the South," *New York Times*, August 11, 1963, 71.

74 "Far Below Expectations," *Danville Bee*, July 29, 1963, NewspaperArchive.

protest against the municipal government was seemingly not working. On August 2, Judge Aiken expanded the injunction against the demonstrators to stop the large-scale protests, in addition to making the injunction permanent. Danville also lost much of the outside help from the national organizations as activists and lawyers like Len Holt left Danville in August, although SNCC kept staff there. The local leaders who were left knew they had to change their strategy; they decided they would have to focus their energy in a new place, so they turned to the economic sector in the late summer.⁷⁵

What lessons can historians learn from the Danville civil rights movement? Participants and historians alike consider the Danville civil rights movement a failure, due to the loss of momentum in the fall of 1963. Considering the very small gains the movement did make in the city, overall it was not successful in dismantling Jim Crow in Danville then. After 1963, African Americans made slow progress, steadily resisting and challenging racial discrimination and local white culture. Late in the summer of 1963, as the Southside movements began waning, local activists targeted economic discrimination, a cornerstone of white supremacy.

⁷⁵ Holt, *An Act of Conscience.*, 219; “City Streets Are Quiet But Racial Developments Unfold Behind the Scenes,” *Danville Commercial Appeal*, August 5, 1963, 31 edition; “Summer 1963: Danville’s Racial Unrest: How It Started... Where the Situation Stands Today”; SNCC, “Danville Report – An Overall Proposal,” in *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers* (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982).

CHAPTER 6

RESISTING THE “DANVILLE METHOD”: DANVILLE AND PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY’S CIVIL RIGHTS TRIUMPHS IN LATE 1963

Sixty miles north in Farmville, students took note of Danville and began their own demonstrations although the Black leadership in Farmville had been reluctant to press forward in that way with the court case to reopen the schools taking precedent. However, the volatility of 1963 had a major impact on the Prince Edward County movement as Brian Lee and Brian Daugherity state in their article, “Program of Action: The Rev. L. Francis Griffin and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Farmville, 1963.” The white power structure in Prince Edward County were terrified of the potential threat of protest activity and began coordinating with other white officials across Southside to employ the “Danville method” to suppress these demonstrations, but the activists’ focus on economic discrimination began to chink away at the armor of discrimination. Traditionally, Southside natives and scholars consider the movement as a failure, but the movements were successful in their long-term aim to bring more equality to employment and education in Danville and Prince Edward, albeit limited equality, because they used the force of the federal government to end discrimination.

Shift of Tactics for Prince Edward County’s Movement

In the spring and early summer of 1963, civil rights direct action protests were everywhere across the South and the rest of the country after Martin Luther King’s “Birmingham campaign” and the violent police response commanded national attention. .

Birmingham ignited protests in cities across the country, resulting in nearly twenty thousand arrests that summer.¹ The largest of these in Virginia was the Danville movement in June. As noted, the Danville movement began waning in late July, at which point the students and young adults of Prince Edward County turned to direct action protests. This was a new strategy for the current generation of Prince Edward County students; there had no student protests in Farmville since the 1951 student strike, mainly because the adult leaders of the movement, including Rev. Francis Griffin, believed that they should keep fighting the school closings in court. The leaders and local Black citizens realized that protests would bring additional economic retaliation, which families had suffered in the wake of the school case. This retaliation could come in the form of downtown Farmville stores cutting off credit for the farmers in the more rural parts of the county. This retaliation was a small symptom of the larger problems facing the African American community in Prince Edward County. Due to the school cases being held up in court, the larger problems of no Black representation in government, income inequality, and lack of professional employment opportunities came into stronger relief. Thus, when Rev. Griffin became the president of the Virginia State Conference – NAACP, he began pushing the NAACP to focus their efforts on stepping up direct action efforts.²

Rev. Griffin recognized that the other national organizations, including SCLC, SNCC, and CORE, were gaining significant momentum, he called for a special meeting

1. Brian E. Lee and Brian J. Daugherty, “Program of Action: The Rev. L. Francis Griffin and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Farmville, 1963,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 121, no. 3 (2013): 254.

2. Lee and Daugherty, 254.

in June 1963 to hammer out how the NAACP could step up from its traditionally “conservative” tactics. This special meeting was held on June 8, 1963 (just days before the events of Bloody Monday in Danville), and the meeting was in the Southside city of Emporia, located on the North Carolina border at the crossroads of US 58 and US 301 (and newly constructed Interstate 95).³ At the meeting, Rev. Griffin noted three major issues: 1) a need to drive up participation of “masses” in civil rights demonstrations; 2) finding and establishing leadership in local communities to guide the masses; and 3) a need to “jack up” or energize the whole program of NAACP branches. Participants in the meeting also noted that other issues the State Conference faced included the question of how to distribute “real news” to people as both Richmond newspapers at this time (the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and the *Richmond News Leader*) deliberately omitted news of Black activism and civil rights efforts. . A second issue was how mobilize communities to place pressure on the Kennedy administration – possible solutions were writing campaigns along with mass demonstrations. One of the other major issues also noted was that the NAACP was being outpaced by SNCC and SCLC on the direct action front. . While they had led the way and laid the groundwork for the mass movements, the organization still retained a more “conservative” reputation. The members of the Virginia State Conference noted that “a revolution which is already underway” was an “all out total assault upon all forms of segregation and discrimination, and the prevailing mood is

3. Minutes of the First Meeting of the Virginia State Conference- NAACP President’s Special Committee on Civil Rights in Virginia, June 8, 1963, Emporia, Virginia; NAACP Papers

that it will be accomplished ‘non-violently if possible, but violently if necessary.’”⁴

Coming just a few days before police violently attacked marchers in Danville, the NAACP leaders clearly had some idea of how direct action protests could go if there was not steady leadership in place.

The special meeting resulted in creating a “Program of Action” that consisted of several tactics, mainly based around the same initial goals of the local Danville movement. First, local communities could present petitions to city governments for equal accommodations in all public facilities and equal hiring practices in city employment. After presenting these petitions, mass demonstrations could be directed at city halls if not addressed. The second tactic was to petition key business establishments for equal accommodations and fair hiring practices and target them with mass demonstrations if the petitions were not acted upon. The third tactic was to continue petitions of desegregation of school systems. In this plan, the meeting agreed to immediately begin making plans for Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Lynchburg, and Charlottesville. The first step in initiating this program of action was to formally organize the ministers and students of those cities with a target date of June 27 being the first day of this program of action.⁵

In late June 1963, the Virginia State Conference formally adopted the “Program of Action,” and in the announcement, cited Governor Albertis Harrison’s silence on the police brutality in Danville and the continued closure of public schools in Prince Edward

4. Minutes of the First Meeting of the Virginia State Conference- NAACP President’s Special Committee on Civil Rights in Virginia, June 8, 1963, Emporia, Virginia; NAACP Papers

5. Minutes of the First Meeting of the Virginia State Conference- NAACP President’s Special Committee on Civil Rights in Virginia, June 8, 1963, Emporia, Virginia; NAACP Papers

County. NAACP chapters across the Commonwealth began launching their own selective buying campaigns and petitions against the municipal government, but one particular caveat the State Conference placed on the chapters was that these programs should be led by the NAACP, not another civil rights organization.⁶ The national NAACP convention also endorsed a “direct-action” resolution calling for “picketing, sit-ins, mass action protests, and selective buying campaigns.” This resolution also contained guidelines – any freedom demonstration should be conducted in a lawful and orderly manner and under NAACP leadership. The guidelines also stated that these demonstrations should arouse the public conscience, but they should also only include picketing, silent marches, and lawful demonstrations that the FBI and local police know about prior to the demonstration.⁷ The guidelines for the program of action pushed back against disorganization in leadership, something that was already plaguing the Danville movement. It also emphasized local participation, but Virginia State Conference President Rev. Griffin knew that would be an obstacle in his hometown.

In June 1963, it had been over twelve years since Barbara Johns had led the Moton student body on their historic walkout. Those students had grown up, many moved outside of the county, and those who stayed saw how the battle for the schools had drawn out. Rev. Griffin knew that mobilizing the Black community of Farmville and Prince Edward County would be difficult because of fears of reprisal and a general weariness of battling the Virginia Way of white supremacy for over a decade. However, the current crop of teenagers who had been out of school since 1959 were itching to do

6. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 256.

7. Lee and Daugherty, 256.

something about their situation. Many of those students had traveled out of the county for education and had come home for the summer. Rev. Griffin realized that the first course of action was to reconstitute the NAACP Youth Council in Prince Edward County. He appointed a veteran from the 1951 walkout, who was a pastor now, Rev. J. Samuel Williams, as a leader and mentor along with another young minister, Revered Goodwin Douglas. Several student leaders who also worked on the Youth Council were Ernestine Land, Grace Poindexter, Catherine Scott, Carlton Terry, and Leslie Francis "Skip" Griffin, Jr.⁸ To prepare these students for beginning a direct action campaign in Farmville, Rev. Griffin contacted SNCC leaders and field workers in Danville to come up to Farmville to train the students in non-violent protest and resistance. Ivanhoe Donaldson, Cordell Reagon, and Roland Sherrod came in for several training sessions in July. NAACP lawyers Samuel Tucker and Henry Marsh also counseled the students on their rights if they were arrested while demonstrating.⁹ Armed with this training, the students could not wait to start their own movement in the streets of Farmville.

On July 25, as the marches and protests in Danville were waning, seventy demonstrators began the first picketing line in downtown Farmville at twelve noon. This was the largest protest Prince Edward saw that summer in 1963 although there had been sit-in attempts earlier in April when students from Hampton Institute and Virginia Union University came to town to conduct a survey on the educational conditions of the county. The NAACP funded this survey for the purpose of presenting the results to the Kennedy administration, and the students' presence drew the ire of local leadership, especially

8. Lee and Daugherty, 258.

9. Lee and Daugherty, 258.

after seven of them attempted a sit-in at one of the lunch counters and The State movie theater in downtown Farmville.¹⁰ Following that survey, more “outsiders” came to Prince Edward County for the summer – all related to the issue of school closings. Research teams from northern universities arrived to conduct sociological studies, volunteers came to teach in the training centers, and the Department of Justice sent representatives to try to broker a resolution to the school closure.¹¹ The early July Democratic primary heightened tensions in the county, too. A local white shopkeeper sought to challenge an incumbent for his seat on the Board of Supervisors; this shopkeeper ran on the platform that Prince Edward County had a moral duty to keep schools open. While the incumbent won the primary handily, the shopkeeper’s challenge attracted media attention from around the country. At this juncture, Rev. Griffin recognized that the time for demonstrations had come for Prince Edward County.¹²

Making July 25 the beginning of demonstrations for Prince Edward’s “Program of Choice” was a shrewd choice by Rev. Griffin – Farmville’s police chief, Otto Overton, was on vacation. This allowed the seventy demonstrators who turned out for picketing to make a strong showing without much fear of retaliation. More people joined in the next day on Friday, July 26, and several of those demonstrators conducted a “try-in” (trying on clothes without buying them) at a downtown department store and three separate sit-ins at lunch counters. The demonstrators wrapped up Friday’s activities with a mass meeting at Beulah African Methodist Episcopal Church. At the meeting, the youth council made

10. “Legal or Illegal?” *Farmville Herald*, April 19, 1963 HFB papers; “Sit-In Attempt Follows NAACP Survey Here”, *Farmville Herald*, April 19, 1963, HFB

11. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 259.

12. Lee and Daugherty, 259.

impassioned pleas for more teenagers to join them on the picket lines. Their pleas even persuaded some of the white college students on the research teams to also join in.¹³ The next day, Saturday, July 27, one hundred people turned out to demonstrate on Main Street, and they did so without a parade permit. Farmville police arrested nine people at the College Shoppe for loitering. Two of those arrested were Reverend Richard Hale and Melvin Moore (a college student researcher) who refused bond and were jailed.¹⁴

While the demonstrations from July 25 through 27 were an escalation in protest tactics, what several demonstrators attempted on July 28 truly frightened the white elite – multiple sit-ins at white churches. As Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, the most segregated hour in America is 11 o'clock Sunday morning. Rev. Samuel Williams and others led groups to four different white churches in Farmville that Sunday morning. A group of four people went to Johns Memorial Episcopal Church; they made it into the church for the whole service; Dr. Gordon Moss of Longwood College actually invited the seven Black students there to sit with him in his pew. However, Dr. Moss was later ostracized from the congregation for that action. When another group arrived at Wesleyan Methodist Church, the white congregants walked out of the service and went to the police station to swear out warrants for arrest. Another group made an attempt at Farmville Presbyterian Church, but when they arrived, the service had already started, so the group decided to not interrupt the service.

The most dramatic of these sit-ins was the attempt at Farmville Baptist Church, located on Main Street, right beside the Prince Edward County courthouse. Reverend

13. Lee and Daugherty, 262–64.

14. Lee and Daugherty, 265.

Williams led a group of twenty-three to church before the eleven a.m. service, but an usher met them at the door and refused them entry. The night prior, the deacon board convened an emergency meeting and agreed to not allow any African American person into the church. The group decided then they would have a kneel-in right there on the front portico of the church. They prayed and began singing when they heard the choir inside begin their anthem. Their voices belted out “We Shall Overcome,” “Let Us Break Bread Together,” “Lead Me, Guide Me,” and “This May Be the Last Time” so loudly that the choir inside could not hear the sermon from the pulpit. The deacons of the church then called the police.

Chief Overton came and arrested Reverend Williams along with the rest of the group for disturbing public worship. Using the passive resistance techniques learned from SNCC, the demonstrators went limp, causing the arrests to take over an hour. Meanwhile, the white congregation began filing out the side door. A sudden downpour of rain probably prevented any violence from breaking out in front of the church. However, a law clerk for Henry Marsh who went down to the police station after these arrests got into a fight with several police officers after they harassed him.¹⁵ Several of the twenty-three arrested were sent to neighboring Lunenburg County. While it was a dramatic showdown, Rev. Griffin noted there was a decrease in morale because these arrests took away from their numbers and not enough people volunteered to replace them.

The Farmville direct-action movement suffered the same problems as the Danville movement – maintaining a large enough number of demonstrators. Ironically, the church

15. Lee and Daugherty 268-269; Newspaper articles from *Danville Bee* and *Richmond Times Dispatch*, July 29, 1963.

sit-ins were the same day as the “D-Day” march in Danville, which was the last major effort to make the local marches stick in Danville, but only eighty some protestors turned out after the local movement had announced hundreds would. This also came after Martin Luther King canceled on appearing at the D-Day march, presumably to prepare for the upcoming March on Washington.¹⁶ As with the Danville movement, local white leaders in Farmville adopted “the Danville method” to suppress direct-action demonstrations in Prince Edward County.

Adopting the “Danville Method”

Prince Edward’s white segregationists worked their Southside network, swapping tactics on how to suppress civil rights activity. Congressman Bill Tuck was in communication with Governor Albertis Harrison and leaders from Prince Edward, including J. Barrye Wall, Chief Overton, Commonwealth’s Attorney Frank Nat Watkins, and J. Segar Gravatt. Tuck’s correspondence included passing around the report on the local movement written by Danville’s city manager, T. Edward Temple, and following up on requests to look into the background of civil rights demonstrators and field workers for the national movement.¹⁷ Tuck also soothed many fears of Farmville’s leaders, especially Commonwealth’s Attorney Watkins. Watkins wrote to Tuck as the violence in Danville reached its peak, and Watkins was outraged over many things. First, he commended Tuck for making a statement on “law and order” needed in Danville and then condemned President John Kennedy for being more “appalled at the shooting of the negro in Mississippi [Medger Evers].” Watkins wrote, “So far, I have not heard one word

16. Ibid.

17. Correspondence from June 10, 1963 to July 19, 1963; *William Munford Tuck Papers*, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

out of him about the officers in Danville being shot or anywhere else in the United States.” Apparently referring to JFK’s June 13 speech on civil rights, Watkins suggested that President Kennedy should be impeached for “commend[ing] those publicly who violate the laws of this land, who states that the mob should take charge, that the provisions of the constitution of the judicial system too slow... he swore to uphold the constitution, not to destroy it, directly or indirectly.” Watkins then also noted that “history is repeating itself with the carpet-baggers, scalawags, and the Thad Stevens from the North swooping down...” After complimenting Tuck again, wishing that he were still governor in Virginia (a comment on Albertis Harrison’s silence), Watkins noted that Southside Virginians would have to take measures like South Africa – arming and teaching “every man, woman and child to be able to shoot to kill.” Again noting that Black civil rights would be an anathema to Virginia Way’s white supremacy, Watkins finished his letter by noting “the reconstruction days of the past will be but a ripple compared with what the South is headed for unless a big change is had by the president and his ‘kinsman’ and the Supreme Court of the United States.”¹⁸ Tuck responded to Watkins a few days later, noting that he was doing all he could in Washington and on the local level to stop the demonstrations.¹⁹ However, Watkins’s fears were not assuaged; he later wrote the governor to call out the national guard in response to the Farmville demonstrations. Governor Harrison did not oblige.²⁰

Due to rumors swirling that Farmville could become the next target of the Danville movement, segregationists quickly adopted the Danville method of rejecting

18. Letter to William Tuck from Frank Nat Watkins, June 13, 1963, *WMT Papers*.

19. Letter to Frank Nat Watkins from William Tuck, June 15, 1963, *WMT Papers*.

20. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 271.

permits for demonstrations, dispersing arrests, sequestering media, and incorporating jail spaces to hold more people. Farmville’s police department also began a build-up of military arsenal, afraid of a repeat of Bloody Monday. The police department and sheriff’s department deputized dozens of men and also acquired an arsenal containing the following:

‘three riot guns and an undetermined supply of ammunition, one gas gun, .37 caliber and a limited supply of gas. . . . [and] three motor vehicles attuned to the State Police frequency...1 riot gun with 50 rounds of ammunition, one small pistol-type tear gas gun, one walkie-talkie radio . . . three police cars equipped with 3-way radios on the same frequency and one 9mm German-type machine gun with approximately 50 rounds of ammunition...Chief Overton ordered flashlights, riot sticks, and identification armbands...’²¹

Having seen the tanks rolling through Danville, Prince Edward County wanted to be prepared.²²

In adopting the Danville method to target the morale of demonstrators, white leaders in Prince Edward County specifically targeted Reverend Griffin, for he had long been a thorn in their side. These leaders conducted an opposition campaign in the Black community to undermine his leadership (often through publishing editorials opposing civil rights from Black authors in the *Farmville Herald*),²³ police surveillance against Rev. Griffin, his family, and his acquaintances, and economic measures against his family. At one point, the reprisals were so severe, Rev. Griffin landed in the hospital with ulcers brought on by stress and anxiety, and his wife, Adelaide, suffered multiple nervous breakdowns.²⁴ With the adoption of the Danville Method, too, in requiring permits, mass

21. Lee and Daugherty, 260.

22. “An Armed Car Sits at State Police Headquarters Here But the City was Quiet and Peaceful Sunday,” *The Commercial Appeal*, June 24, 1963.

23. Editorials from *The Farmville Herald*, HFB Papers.

24. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 251.

arrests and dispersal of those arrested, turnout for demonstrations dropped fairly quickly.²⁵

Targeting Jim Crow in the Local Economy

The “Danville method” may have stopped the demonstrations in both Danville and Prince Edward County, but when the local movements switched tactics to target economic discrimination, they made progress in advancing equality. The Danville movement turned its attention to increasing the number of skilled jobs in both industries and education for Blacks in the late summer. Prince Edward County’s adoption of the “Program of Action” also took a similar approach. Both movements then made some small gains, but without the intensive support of national organizations, it was difficult for the local movement to continue, and it would take more than a decade for the local Black population to see real change.

The dominance of tobacco played a role in the strategy of SNCC in the 1963 Danville movement as SNCC sought to equalize employment within the industry and boost the education and skill levels of Black tobacco workers. In SNCC worker Ivanhoe Donaldson’s report on Danville, he stated tobacco was the second largest industry in the city and still significant to Danville society. The report also noted that the tobacco market in Danville was still very strong as Donaldson stated that “most farmers felt they get the best dollar for their tobacco in Danville”²⁶ and that Danville was “the world’s largest tobacco market.”²⁷ This market’s annual profit for the first several years of the decade

25. Lee and Daugherty, 277.

26. Donaldson, 2.

27. Ibid.

had been over \$38,000,000, which accounted for a significant portion of the economy.²⁸

Donaldson also noted that the tobacco industry discriminated against the Black population through wages and lack of opportunity:

Tobacco is significant because first it is completely dependent upon Negro labor and pays the lowest dollar possible and second it is important because it is a seasonal crop and thereby plays and [sic] important role in the fact, that Virginia has no compulsory public school system.²⁹

Not only did the tobacco manufacturers and planters discriminate in wages, but Black tobacco workers also did not have the same educational opportunities due to white resistance to school integration. The Massive Resistance plan adopted by the state in the 1950s in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision repealed Virginia's compulsory attendance law to legalize the closure of public schools.³⁰ With no mandate in place, many Black children did not attend school as they were needed to work in tobacco. Also, tobacco precluded many Black workers from gaining education due to the growing season, which in Danville lasted 211 days per year.³¹ In a SNCC demographic report of the city, the highest percentage of male workers only achieved a sixth-grade education. The next highest percentage of education attained was some high school, with the median average level of education attained being 8.3 years.³² According to the same report, more females received a high school education, but their average level of

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 3.

30. John Irby Hayes, Jr., *Dan Daniel and the Persistence of Conservatism in Virginia*, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 76.

31. Gottsman, 21.

32. "Social Characteristics of the Population of Danville," SNCC, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982), Microfilm. Unfortunately, this report does not differentiate education by race, only gender.

education was 9.0 years.³³ Concerned with the discrepancies in wages and education for Black tobacco workers, SNCC planned several projects and made some progress in equalizing the industry.

The 1963 movement planned several tactics to combat this issue, including filing complaints to the federal government and through boycotts. Several of the major companies the movement targeted had large employment numbers and government contracts, including Corning Glass Works, Dan River Mills, Dibrell Brothers, H.K. Porter, and Riegel Paper. Ivanhoe Donaldson of SNCC wrote that using the courts would be their best recourse:

What has to be done is that a complaint must be filed. All the complaint must allege is that the complainant was discriminated against either in hiring or in elevation because of race, color, etc... Complaints should be filed with the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities. This committee has complete investigatory power, all we have to do is file the complaint. It can if it wants foreclose a company from having any dealings with the gov't in every way except a payment of taxes.³⁴

In this approach, SNCC followed the same tactic the NAACP used in addressing integration of public facilities in Danville, using the federal government to demand change. The President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities (PCEEO) refers to the committee set up by President John F. Kennedy in Executive Order (E.O.) 10925, which forbade discrimination by companies who held federal contracts and federal agencies.³⁵ The Dibrell Brothers listed in that report was the Dibrell Brothers Tobacco Company. This company, dating to the antebellum period, was one of the largest tobacco

33. Ibid.

34.. Donaldson, 8.

35. Judson MacLaury, *To Advance Their Opportunities Federal Policies Toward African American Workers from World War I to the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Knoxville: Newfound Press, University of Tennessee Libraries, 2008), 163.

buyers and distributors in the United States. The company also had a deal with the federal stabilization program to process and store tobacco bought by the stabilization program. Within the stabilization program, the federal government paid white landowners for the tobacco rather than the Black tobacco workers.³⁶ This most likely is the federal contract Donaldson referred to in this report. By using this tactic, SNCC recognized that there was legislation and federal policy in place that gave the local movement an apparatus to demand change. They had hope that the federal government could force these companies to correct their hiring practices and give economic equality to African Americans in the region who had long been denied the profits of a booming industry built on their labor. Donaldson, on behalf of SNCC, advocated for this tactic because the PCEEO held investigative power. Once a complaint of discrimination came to them, they could revoke any contract that a company held with the federal government. The complainant needed to allege that a company discriminated against him or her due to race or color in hiring and promotion. The text of the executive order implied that it was the duty of the federal government to prevent discrimination in employment in order to have not only national security but also a secure economy. The PCEEO was also the strongest measure against workplace discrimination taken by the federal government at that point in time.³⁷

SNCC also planned other tactics to address discrimination in the tobacco industry in Southside. The projects included initiating correspondence with the tobacco industry about hiring practices, picketing Danville tobacco buyers, and forming a local committee

36. Tuck; Strickland v. Flue-Cured Tobacco Co-Op., 643 F. Supp. 310 (D.S.C. 1986), U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, August 27, 1986, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/643/310/1908097/> [accessed April 4, 2019].

37. MacLaury, 163.

on economic development for Danville.³⁸ There were also plans for “widespread testing of hiring practices with follow up complaints to the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunities,” recruitment of “young people from [ages] 15-27 to apply for white-collar jobs,” and investigating the “potential for boycotting of tobacco industries if necessary.”³⁹ A progress report prepared by Avon Rollins shows that these projects were able to make some headway in eliminating this discrimination. SNCC set up citizenship schools to teach adults how to read and write, financial literacy (including how to write checks) and also how to become registered voters. SNCC also under its plan for the tobacco industry sponsored several scholarships to student leaders who were active in the local movement. Other funds helped people who lost employment and unemployment benefits due to participation in demonstrations.⁴⁰ Local Black tobacco growers decided to put the plans into motion in the harvest and sale season of early fall; Adam Fairclough notes that these growers boycotted the warehouses and processing plants in town in the early fall of 1963, offering some hope that the movement might continue.⁴¹ In targeting the tobacco industry of Danville, SNCC focused on not only

38. “Danville Report – An Overall Proposal,” SNCC, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982), Microfilm; This report begins “SNCC will continue to keep staff in the Danville community,” implying that this report was filed after the direct action phase of the Danville Movement fell apart.

39. Ibid.

40. “SNCC Progress Report – Danville, VA,” SNCC, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982), Microfilm.

41. Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001, 161.

addressing how the tobacco industry conducted business, but it also addressed the problems that the industry created, including lack of education and opportunity.

If tobacco was the second largest industry in Danville in the 1960s, the largest was Dan River Mills, the largest single-unit textile mill in the world at the time.⁴² The history of the mill dates back to the late nineteenth century with the opening of the Riverside Cotton Mill in 1882, which became Dan River Mills in 1909 with the merger of Riverside and the Dan River Power and Manufacturing Company. The founders of Riverside founded the latter company to harness the power of the Dan River, which proved to be successful as this mill became the largest mill in the South.⁴³ The mill experienced great prosperity in the 1950s as it acquired many other companies, including Alabama Mills Inc. and its subsidiary Anchor-Rome Mills, Inc.; Iselin-Jefferson Co. and its subsidiary the Iselin Jefferson Financial Co, Inc.; and a majority interest in Woodside Mills in Greensboro, S.C., in 1956. In 1959, Woodside Mills, under Dan River, acquired stock of Norris Cotton Mills, Inc., and in 1960, Sayles Biltmore Bleacheries, Inc. in Asheville, North Carolina, and Jacob S. Benheimer and Brothers, Inc.⁴⁴ By 1963, Dan River Mills sold \$173,511,360 worth of cloth and yarn per year.⁴⁵ The mill also employed most of the city. According to SNCC's Danville demographics report, there were 19,118 employed persons in the city, and the mill employed over 10,000 workers.⁴⁶ As tobacco began dropping off prior to the Great Depression, many farmers of the area took a shift at the mill to help support their families. However, there was a discrepancy in hiring

42. Donaldson, 2.

43. Hayes, 17; Gottman, 420.

44. Donaldson, 2.

45. Ibid.

46. "Social Characteristics of the Population of Danville."

compared to the population of Danville as a whole. Roughly, thirty percent of Danville's population in 1963 was Black, yet the mill only employed 1,110 Black workers. In addition, these workers held the lowest paid jobs at the mill.⁴⁷ This discrimination made the mill a prime target for the Danville movement, as the movement looked to address equality in employment, and Dan River Mills also exerted much influence over the city as its labor force supplanted the tobacco industry as bright tobacco began declining with problems of soil erosion and degradation.

In the first demonstrations of 1963, students and leaders of the Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA) staged sit-ins in the municipal offices to protest for equality in municipal employment. According to SNCC, these protests were the culmination of economic dissatisfaction in the Black community:

The existing socio-economic conditions of the Danville community, along with the realization, which was inspiring Negroes across the South, that the time had come to destroy the present existing hypocritical [sic] institution, made the Negro realize that they had to move... In Danville Negroes have been forced to do the back breaking dirty jobs, that know [sic] one in the white community will take.⁴⁸

SNCC recognized that economic disparities stemmed from the structural inequalities of the tobacco and textiles industries. The movement also wanted to target Dan River Mills for its inequality in hiring practices, too:

Negroes at the Mill are basically unskilled laborers and do not have any of the semi-skilled positions. Dan River is a major factor when considering the economic conditions of the community ... There are no Negroes working at any of the skilled or higher paying jobs in the Mill such as the loom fixers, spinners, doffers, and weavers. The Mill through its hiring policy alone, taking in consideration the fact that the mill is the largest economic force in

47. Donaldson, 2.

48. Donaldson, 1.

the community, has set the stage for the socio-economic plight of the Negro community.⁴⁹

Rev. Lawrence Campbell of the DCPA claimed that the mill had the power and influence to bring integration to the city: “Dan River Mills can, if it wanted to, integrate Danville tomorrow.”⁵⁰ When Mayor Julian Stinson hired Robert Gardiner, one of the public relations managers at Dan River Mills as his own PR assistant, many felt this was a stalling tactic on the mayor’s part: “Many Negroes in Danville believe that Gardiner was taken on to smooth over police brutality and the refusal to negotiate; they say the mill could single-handedly change the racial situation in Danville.”⁵¹ The movement began targeting the mill in July 1963 with picketing and a boycott, which made some gains, and it would be the project that would keep SNCC in Danville through the fall.

A week after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, visit to Danville in mid-July, picketing began at the employment office of Dan River Mills and elsewhere on July 17, 1963. Prior to these demonstrations, the DCPA in conjunction with SNCC announced a worldwide boycott of Dan River Mills and its products.⁵² SNCC’s plans for the boycott were quite extensive. SNCC planned to send protesters to the largest communities that distributed Dan River products, and they also had radical plans for organizing workers at the mill. The group hoped to bring in a professional organizer to create an integrated union and also sought to bring in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the largest union in

49. Ibid.

50. Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 227.

51. Dorothy Miller, *Danville, VA*, (New York: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, 1963), 14.

52. Ibid.

the United States. SNCC also sought to work with a local committee on economic development to further unionization.⁵³

On July 17, demonstrations began in Danville and also in New York City where the financial headquarters of the Mill were located. Members of SNCC even bought stock in the Dan River Mills company just to attend the shareholders meetings to protest. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the New York Friends of SNCC sponsored this demonstration, and on their flyers for the demonstration, alluded to how much power the mill had in the city: “Demand equal rights for Negroes in Danville, VA. Scene of police dogs[,] beatings[, and] tear gas. This town is controlled by Dan River Mills.”⁵⁴ Despite the New York protestors including the presence of dogs in the Danville movement (most likely conflated with the Birmingham struggle), these protests led to a meeting with one of the public relations managers, M.A. Cross, and Rev. Campbell on July 22 to discuss employment practices.⁵⁵ By early August, Dan River Mills announced that they were moving quietly to “erase color lines.” The mill had desegregated the cafeteria, removed partitions in the restrooms, and painted out the “colored” and “white” signs in restrooms and water fountains.⁵⁶ However, the efforts by the 1963 movement did little to change Black employment at the mill.

Dan River Mills did not fully correct their hiring practices until nearly a decade later, but the 1963 movement planted the seeds for the lawsuit that forced the mill to

53. “Danville Report – An Overall Proposal.”

54. July 17 New York City March Flyer, SNCC, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, (Sanford, N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1982) Microfilm.

55. “City Streets are Quiet But Racial Developments Unfold Behind the Scenes,” *Commercial Appeal*, August 5, 1963, Microfilm.

56. Ibid.

comply in practicing equality in employment. One of the leaders in the summer of 1963, Julius Adams, was also an employee of Dan River Mills, and he had worked there for many years prior to the demonstrations. As the treasurer of the DCPA, Adams was very active in other projects of the movement, including filing suit against the local school system for segregation, filing another suit to integrate local restaurants, and sitting in at the local Howard Johnson, for which he was arrested. In the late 1960s, following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), many Black workers at the mill turned to Adams for help in filing EEOC complaints against the mill for discriminatory practices. As more people brought complaints, Adams organized a mass meeting at one of the local churches for any Black worker “who was treated unfairly at Dan River Mills.”⁵⁷ Seventy-five people attended this meeting and ultimately brought EEOC charges and eventually a lawsuit, *Adams v. Dan River Mills*, which included twenty-five charges of discrimination. The Black workers did not win the suit until nearly eight years later in 1977, which was one of the long-term successes for the Danville movement.⁵⁸

Records of the management of the mill show that there was extreme reluctance to integrate fully as many white employees of the mill held racist assumptions about the Black workers, harkening back to the stereotypes placed on Black tobacco workers from the antebellum period. Robert Gardiner, the PR manager for the mill, and Mayor Stinson wrote to a colleague: “When I read Howell’s comment quoted above [that Black workers

57. Minchin, 228-229.

58. *Dan River v. Commercial Union Ins. Co.*, Virginia Supreme Court, June 15, 1984, <http://law.justia.com/cases/virginia/supreme-court/1984/811288-1.html> [accessed April 3, 2016].

had proved to be good textile workers], I was curious because, from all I have heard, the Negroes we are employing are shiftless, lazy, don't want to work, and leave as fast as they are hired."⁵⁹ Wanting to test this observation, Gardiner did a productivity study and found that "conclusively that Blacks had lower turnover and absenteeism rates than whites, and slightly higher productivity."⁶⁰ However, despite white attitudes at the mill, the management recognized that the mill needed to comply with federal law as much of its business was through government contracts.⁶¹ This realization most likely helped with the desegregation of the physical space in the mill in 1963, and the Danville movement would use this realization to target other businesses in the city.

As the movement looked to bring equality in employment in Danville, it also targeted retail businesses in the city, receiving mixed results. According to SNCC, Danville retailers brought in revenues of over \$50,000,000 each year, and the major grievance in retail practices was that "they [retail businesses] generally hirer [sic] Negroes only for janitorial or maintenance positions, even though thousands of dollars pour into their cash register from the Negro community."⁶²

The NAACP branch in Danville also participated in the economic struggle through organizing boycotts in the downtown retailers as part of the State Conference's "Program of Action." According to the 1963 branch report, the committee on labor and industry planned boycotts and "selective buying" campaigns that were ultimately successful as thirty-seven clerks found jobs in retail. The labor and industry committee

59. Minchin, 265.

60. Minchin, 265-266.

61. Minchin, 30.

62. Donaldson, 3.

also reported that they organized a job registration fair and planned to hold job-training fairs in the future.⁶³ The local organizations managed to find some success in their efforts. SNCC reported that at the end of the summer, there was progress in Danville, especially in business. In city government, two Black social workers obtained jobs along with one Black policeman, and the city library replaced chairs that had been previously removed to enforce segregation. In retail, twenty-five Black workers found employment in sales positions, and six downtown lunch counters integrated along with six in the surrounding shopping areas. In the industrial sector, the milk dairies hired three Black workers as salesmen, and Coca-Cola Bottling Company hired one Black salesman. At Dan River Mills, the union, night school, and trade school integrated.⁶⁴ The city council also passed the South's first non-discriminatory hiring policy in November 1963 after joint cooperation between the local DCPA and NAACP branch.⁶⁵ Yet, the locals were able to somewhat realize their original goal in the movement: "Due to these economic reasons [inequality in textiles, tobacco, and retail] the people decided to move to the streets and demonstrate for change in the existing status quo. They brought their protest to the doorsteps of the political power structure... the court house...the mayor's office."⁶⁶

Danville's movement shows the complexities of whether local grassroots versus federal intervention yielded more success in making gains for equality. The local Danville students were the heart behind the Danville movement, beginning in 1960 and through the summer of 1963, but they utilized the resources of national organizations to

63. NAACP 1963 Danville Branch report, *Papers of the NAACP*, (Frederick, Md. : University Publications of America, 1982), Microfilm, 3.

64. "SNCC Progress Report, Danville, VA."

65 Adam Fairclough, 161

66. Donaldson, 1.

gain national attention. The students and local leaders also realized that by challenging public facilities and employment, they could use pressure and exposure to compel the federal government to force the city to comply. The Danville movement provided momentum from below, challenging local officials and targeting federal statutes and policies barring discrimination with the hope that appeals to the President's committee would bring about change. This makes their actions significant and worth serious historical inquiry.

The very modest gains the movement obtained in 1963 in the economic sector were overshadowed by what the movement could not accomplish. The city would not see major progress in race relations until the court cases from the summer of 1963 and the Dan River Mills suit resolved in the 1970s. Schools in Danville did not completely integrate until 1970 due to Massive Resistance and "freedom of choice," a policy that allowed students to choose which school to attend within their district.⁶⁷ Despite this slow march of progress, SNCC felt hopeful that their efforts in 1963 through addressing the culturally and economically dominant industries of tobacco and textiles had aided Danville's Black citizen in their quest for equality and civil rights. . In their progress report for the city, SNCC wrote that there was "a new sense of dignity for himself ["the reborn Negro in the community"], a new sense of civil responsibility, and the refusal to accept discrimination in any form and proud he is a Black man" apparent in the community.⁶⁸ Even if the movement was considered a failure at the time, it did help give

67. Ruby B. Archie, interview by Emma C. Edmunds, June 20, 2004, "Ruby B. Archie," *Danville Stories: Segregation to Civil Rights*, Virginia Center for Digital History, Charlottesville, Virginia, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/bio_archie.html [accessed October 6, 2014].

68. "SNCC Progress Report, Danville, VA."

the citizens a sense of pride and identity, and that is success in itself, considering the long and contentious history of discrimination of the tobacco industry. Shifting tactics to address the racial inequalities entrenched in the region's environmental history ultimately gave the 1963 local movement a way forward to finally see a glimmer of economic equality.

The local movement of Prince Edward County saw a similar trajectory when they shifted their tactics, and its tobacco heritage shaped how the fight for civil rights played out over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. Like Danville, the county was mainly rural and agricultural. Tobacco was the dominant crop, and Farmville was the center of tobacco processing and auction for Prince Edward County but also for neighboring Charlotte, Buckingham, Cumberland, Appomattox, Lunenburg, Nottoway, and Amelia Counties.⁶⁹ Like Danville, many African Americans in Prince Edward were rural tobacco laborers, but unlike Danville, there was a higher percentage of Black tobacco farmers who owned their own farms; Barbara Johns's family was one. Richard Kluger notes in *Simple Justice*, that nearly six hundred tobacco farms in Prince Edward County were owned by African Americans; Kluger posits that percentage may have allowed for more civil rights activism without fear of reprisal.⁷⁰ Even though the Black farmers did not have to worry about getting kicked off their land, they still feared economic reprisals in town – potentially losing credit at the downtown stores. Reverend Griffin had noted this

69. "Facts About Farmville; A Brag Virginia Town," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, July 9, 1916.

70. Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, First Vintage books ed (New York, NY: Vintage, 2004) ebook edition, chapter 19.

in drawing up the Prince Edward “Program of Action.” However, after the sit-in attempt at the churches on July 28, the demonstrators shifted their tactics as the Danville movement did – they focused on economic discrimination. They targeted downtown businesses in several ways. First, they realized that the mere presence of demonstrators at businesses deterred other shoppers, making a dent in a business’s bottom line. Next, the picketers realized they could disrupt travel on Farmville’s Main Street by making their marches continually block intersections – as pedestrians had the right of way in traffic, they could slow down delivery trucks to businesses. Both of these activities had large ramifications for Farmville’s merchant class – they attracted business from five different neighboring counties, and if Black shoppers boycotted, the businesses could lose some serious revenue.⁷¹ Targeting economic discrimination was the tactic that gave both local movements a little bit of revival after the Danville method sabotaged both direct action protests. However, neither movement could sustain major direct-action efforts past 1963 due to interventions from the federal government.

Southside Movements Fade from National Attention: Fall and Winter 1963-1964

National attention faded from Southside as 1963 drew to a close, and momentum for direct-action protest dwindled. Demonstrations that kept Southside in the media faded as the federal government began interventions into both Southside movements at the end of the summer of 1963 and into 1964. For Prince Edward County, the Department of Justice brokered negotiations to open free schools and reopen the public schools in exchange for fewer demonstrations. These were negotiations with white assimilationists and segregationists. For Danville, national civil rights leaders, mainly Martin Luther

71. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 272–73.

King, Jr., made an agreement with the Lyndon B. Johnson administration to not push hard on demonstrations as the 1964 Civil Rights Bill made its way through Congress in the winter of 1963 and 1964. Thus, as the local movements drew less national media attention, they also began fading from the public's conscience, even in Virginia.

In the fall of 1963, the opening of the Prince Edward Free School represented one example of the relationship that the Kennedy administration had developed with struggle in Prince Edward County. As Attorney General, Robert Kennedy had made civil rights a priority for his justice department, including the plight of African American students in Prince Edward County. In January 1963, the Department of Justice (DOJ) joined with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to argue the Prince Edward School case in the US Court of Appeals; the DOJ had previously filed as a co-plaintiff while the case was still in US District Court in April 1961 and had filed a brief with the Court of the Appeals as a friend of the court in December 1962. This case was *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, and it had been specifically amended to contest the closing of public schools. In an April 1961 press release, Kennedy stated, "We have tried to work this out to permit Negro children to go to school. They are unable to. Court orders are being circumvented and nullified. Therefore, we have brought this action to protect the integrity of the judicial process of the United States."⁷² Of course, Harry Byrd responded in typical fashion, calling it an "intemperate and ruthless" action.⁷³ In particular, the DOJ targeted the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors for giving parents tax revenue to pay

72. Department of Justice Press Release, April 26, 1961, HFB Papers; Department of Justice Press Release, December 20, 1962, HFB Papers.

73. Anthony Lewis, "Action on Civil Rights," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1961.

tuition at the Prince Edward Academy.⁷⁴ When the case, *Griffin v. County School Board Prince Edward County*, stalled in the Court of Appeals in the spring of 1963, Kennedy appointed an aide from the Justice Department to the Prince Edward County case to “see what could be done.” This aide, Bill vanden Heuvel, was instrumental in bringing back public education to Prince Edward.⁷⁵

Vanden Huevel proposed opening a “free school” in Prince Edward County, and he worked with Reverend Griffin to make it a reality. Over the summer of 1963, both Griffin and vanden Huevel met with local and state leaders to work out a deal on using the existing public school buildings for educating the students who had been locked out of attending the private schools. Surprisingly, vanden Huevel’s proposal won over several of Farmville’s segregationists, including J. Segar Gravatt, who as the lawyer for the school board, agreed to secure the use of the buildings. Governor Harrison pledged support and would work to create a biracial board of trustees. Harrison’s job was to convince UVA president and former governor Colgate Darden to chair the board, which would lend legitimacy to the school. Darden, for his part, refused to participate unless demonstration activity would not happen. Vanden Huevel told Darden privately that if he would agree to work on the free schools, “there won’t be a parade while you are there.”⁷⁶ Darden then agreed to join the nonprofit organization. When the Court of Appeals ruled against opening the public schools in August 1963, the Prince Edward Free School Association announced the plan to educate students in Prince Edward for the coming school year. Revered Griffin saw it as a victory as he received the DOJ’s support on the

74. Department of Justice Press Release, April 26, 1961, HFB Papers.

75. Lee and Daugherty, “Program of Action,” 274.

76. Lee and Daugherty, 275.

Griffin case. Once the Free Schools opened in September 1963, direct action protest in Farmville dissipated for the time being.⁷⁷

The Free Schools only had to operate one year as the Supreme Court ruled on May 25, 1964, that Prince Edward County had to open its public schools and provide an education. Thus, the schools reopened that fall, but the county still underfunded them. The schools also remained unofficially segregated with the existence of Prince Edward Academy. However, the students who had lost five years of their education could return to public schools, and the Prince Edward movement's determination in the face of hostile white leadership won out after thirteen years.

In Danville, the fall of 1963 brought much confusion for the local movement. After the March on Washington and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Martin Luther King announced that SCLC had a major campaign planned for Danville, similar to the Birmingham movement. SNCC's Avon Rollins remained in Danville to do work on voter registration and work more on grassroots organizing. The NAACP seemed ready to move their "Program of Action" forward with the local branch. However, the power struggles of the summer and the high costs of the demonstrations from the summer remained a point of contention for all of these groups. Then, circumstances changed rapidly with the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 and the swearing in of Lyndon Johnson. In the aftermath of that turbulent time, whatever support the local Danville movement thought they could get from the SCLC seemingly vanished by January 1964.

77. Lee and Daugherty, 275–77.

SNCC was the organization that saw most of the action and pioneered the most successful techniques in challenging Jim Crow over the summer, but they quickly moved on to other communities that needed their help and began preparing for a massive campaign in Mississippi. Rollins stayed in Danville for several months, and he worked on several local political campaigns. While there, he authored several position papers that spoke to how hard it was to break the culture of white supremacy in the city. From the paper, "Which Side Are You On?", Rollins bemoaned that the Black community still struggled with challenging white supremacy in all areas of life because of fear of economic retaliation:

A great number of Negroes have been freedom fighters at mass meetings through their donations, but they have acted like Uncle Toms when they go to their place of employment to their employers, Uncle Toms on the streets of America, Uncle Toms to their white acquaintances. For example, a large majority of Negroes still sit at the Negro lunch counters in the Trailways, and Greyhound bus stations in the Southland.⁷⁸

SNCC continued its focus on economic discrimination, and they were pleased that the city did pass a resolution that prohibited discrimination in municipal hiring, but by the spring of 1964, Rollins and others had moved on to other projects.

For the SCLC affiliate, the Danville Christian Progressive Association and the local branch of the NAACP, they wanted to continue the momentum from the summer, but disagreement over who would pay the court costs from the arrests over the summer and disagreement over local leadership halted that momentum. While in Richmond in September 1963, Martin Luther King announced the Danville campaign to come in the fall. That statement drew some ire from Roy Wilkins, chair of the NAACP, who

78. Avon Rollins, "Which Side Are You On?" February 6, 1964, Freedom Summer Digital Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society.

disagreed on the tactics to take in Danville moving forward.⁷⁹ While the local movement waited for King to visit Danville again, the DCPA and Danville NAACP branch worked to come to a consensus moving forward, but communications and relationships quickly broke down in November. The Virginia State Conference of the NAACP sent a Memo on Danville to the national office on November 7, 1963, which reveals that chances of working successfully with SCLC were extremely slim. The main breakdown of communication was over who should incur the expenses of paying bonds and court costs from the arrests over the summer. Many citizens in Danville had put their homes up as collateral for these bonds, and the total added up to over \$200,000 (\$1.7 million in 2021). The opinion of the NAACP was that it would be impossible to work with the national SCLC workers:

There is urgent need to bring order out of chaos. While the vast majority of the Danville Negro community stands behind the original and subsequent demands of the demonstrations, there is a clear difference of opinion as how best to realize the end objectives. Local NAACP volunteers cannot compete with the professional outside aids of CORE, SNCC, and SCLC. Wyatt Walker is due in Danville today (November 7) to join other SCLC professionals, Harold Middlebrook, Herbert Coulton, Diane Nash, Rev. Bevel, and Dorothy Coulton. Avon W. Rollins of SNCC is also still working in Danville although assurances were made that both CORE and SNCC representatives had been asked to leave prior to October 28. If Danville is to be a civil rights battlefield, the NAACP must match the professionals of the competing organizations man for man. In more ways than we have space or time to record in this memorandum, at least the representatives of SNCC and SCLC operating in Danville are out to discredit the NAACP and gleefully attend its funeral on the local, state, and national levels. We submit that THIS IS THE HOUR OF DECISION.⁸⁰

79. "Governor Mum on Issue in Danville," newspaper clipping, NAACP papers; Will Molineux, "King, Wilkins Voice Different Ideas", newspaper clipping, NAACP Papers

80. NAACP Memo on Danville on November 7, 1963

The local Danville Branch then put out a press release wanting to form a joint body with members of the DCPA to move the Movement forward – but the national NAACP office would not assume the legal costs going forward if demonstrations happened without approval of the joint board. With SCLC potentially involved, that scenario seemed likely.

While these contentious meetings were happening, King did visit Danville in November, but his agenda changed dramatically after November 22. With the assassination of President Kennedy, how the civil rights movement as a whole would move forward was a question no one knew the answer to. King reached out to Johnson in late November to gather what the new administration’s priorities were. Johnson told King that “it’s just an *impossible* period. We got a budget coming up that’s – we got nothing to do with it, it’s practically already made. And we got a civil rights bill that hadn’t even passed the House, and Hubert Humphrey told me yesterday everybody wanted to go home. We got a tax bill that they haven’t touched.”⁸¹ This conversation reveals Johnson’s priorities in upholding Kennedy’s civil rights legacy. According to Johnson biographer Robert Caro, Johnson knew he had to get the tax bill out of the way before the civil rights bill went to the Senate, or else the Southern segregationists could use both bills to hold the other hostage.⁸²

Johnson did go to work straight away to free up the tax bill that December while the civil rights bill was still in committee in the House. Representative Howard Smith of Virginia was blocking the civil rights bill in committee in the House, so Johnson asked

81. Lyndon B. Johnson and Martin I. King, Jr., “Transcript of phone conversation, MLK and LBJ,” November 29, 1963, UVA Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/conversation-martin-luther-king-november-26-1963>.

82. Robert Caro, *Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), ebook edition 615.

civil rights leaders to help with signatures on the discharge petition so it would not die in committee.⁸³ This heat made Smith relent and say the bill would get a hearing in January.⁸⁴ On that same day, December 5, Johnson had lunch with Harry Byrd to talk about the tax bill. As Byrd was the chair of the Senate Finance committee, Johnson had to get past Byrd if he wanted a shot of bringing the civil rights bill to the Senate and seeing it passed. Byrd and Johnson went back and forth negotiating on this tax bill through December and into January. Also meeting with Johnson during this time was King along with other civil rights leaders. Dr. James Hershman suggests that to make a way for the civil rights bill, Johnson asked King to calm civil rights activity down in Virginia, including Danville, to appease Harry Byrd. King then corresponded about the Danville movement in January 1964, and in February, SCLC announced they would pull out of Danville because the city had passed the nondiscrimination hiring resolution in the past fall.⁸⁵ While the historical record is murky on these details, it is possible that for King, the passage of a civil rights bill certainly became more important than one contentious local movement that suffered many, many setbacks.

Overall, 1963 was the most dramatic year for the local civil rights movements in Southside Virginia, but it was the year that the movements saw the most progress in targeting Jim Crow. Farmville saw the opening of a school option for students who had lost their educations, in addition to the DOJ actively intervening on their behalf. Danville saw slow progress in the realm of economic equality. However, the most important thing

83. Caro, ebook edition 612.

84. Caro, ebook edition 615.

85. Caro, ebook edition 615; Dr. James Hershman in discussion with the author; *Records of the SCLC* Microfilm index; Fairclough, footnote 30 on page 454.

both movements accomplished was creating a sense of resilience against the Virginia Way system of White Supremacy. As Avon Rollins stated in his last Danville position paper, attitudes were starting to change:

A great majority of white Americans still believe that Negroes continue to tell them that they don't want freedom, because Negroes continue to tell them that they don't want freedom... you've told with your eyes focused to the side or on the ground as you meet a white man or woman on the street. You've told with your shuffling walk and purposeless attitude. You've told by your refusal to state your beliefs and desires to your employer or business acquaintances. The white man's term, 'good Negro' by this he mean, a Negro who knows his place and stays there. This 'place' can be a chain. This 'place' is the invisible prison into which the Emancipation Proclamation release Negroes. However, we have the key to this prison. Every time an Uncle Tom holds his head up and looks his white brother straight in the eye, he has become a free man.⁸⁶

86. Avon Rollins, "Which Side Are You On?" February 6, 1964, *Freedom Summer Digital Collection*, Wisconsin Historical Society.

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

“It seemed like reaching for the moon,” reads the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial installed on the State Capitol grounds in Richmond in 2008.¹ This quote of Barbara Johns encapsulates the struggle that the Southside Virginia civil rights movement faced in fighting for equal access to education and employment from 1951 to 1964. Prior to 1951, the ideology of white supremacy was entrenched into every facet of life – politics, education, the economy, and social norms. To imagine that a group of high school students from a small, mainly rural county in the “Heart of Virginia” would help set in motion one of the major landmark civil rights cases of the twentieth century is a lot like reaching for the moon. Their resolve in the face of massive resistance and perseverance in pushing forward demonstrations in the early 1960s merits honor and recognition. But why did this honor and recognition come fifty years after the fact?

The answer lies in the minimization of the Black communities’ efforts after 1964 by local governments and historical institutions. What, then, happened to the civil rights movement in Southside Virginia after 1964? In education, Southside underwent token integration in the public schools under the “freedom of choice” plan where students could choose what school to attend, leading to the *de facto* segregation of schools save for a few Black students who chose to attend predominantly white schools. Full integration did

1. Jim Nolan, "History-makers honored at last 4,000 attend unveiling of monument to Black Prince Edward youths," *Richmond Times-Dispatch (VA)*, July 22, 2008: A-1.

not come until 1970 when the Supreme Court ruled that “freedom of choice” was not an adequate solution to integrating schools. Black students in Prince Edward County schools continued to face obstacles to an equal education after 1964; again there were problems of underfunding the schools and overcrowding in addition to a student body that lost five years of formal education.² The County also pressed forward in using public funds to pay tuition grants for Prince Edward Academy, and the NAACP filed a class action suit, *Griffin v. State Board of Education*, in August 1964 to invalidate the state tuition grant program. This suit was finally settled by the Supreme Court in February 1969, ruling in favor of the plaintiffs.³ Two months later, the students of Moton High School proved the spirit of 1951 was still alive when on April 23, the student body walked out of class again to protest the poor conditions that the County had essentially reinstated as well as the dismissal of a popular teacher. Unlike 1951, the 1969 strike yielded more positive results as a member of the School Board decided to step down from his seat, and the Board replaced him with a Black man. Another Black man was appointed to the Board later that year to fill a vacancy. In the following year, the public schools added special education programs, received accreditation, and opened a kindergarten program.⁴ However, the private white school retained most of Prince Edward’s white students, setting forth a continuing *de facto* segregated school system. After the integration of schools, very few people in Prince Edward, especially in the white community, wanted to discuss the past.

In Danville after 1964, local leaders pressed on with the discrimination suit at Dan River Mills and won a victory in 1972, but it too was a slow process through the courts.

2. Titus, *Brown’s Battleground*, 141–42.

3. Titus, 149–50.

4. Titus, 166–68.

Any thoughts of pursuing further direct-action protest were quelled by the ongoing court battles over the arrests from the summer of 1963. There were still outstanding cases in 1973, and finally a circuit court judge suspended the remaining cases.⁵ In Danville, much of the civil rights history became buried as local institutions let Danville's Civil War history take precedent.

The Danville Public Library outgrew the space of the Sutherlin Mansion by the end of the 1960s, and the city made plans to build a new, more modern library at another site in Danville. This left the question of what to do with the Sutherlin Mansion. The idea of it becoming a museum, originally floated in 1912, became a reality as the Danville chapter of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts lobbied to make it their permanent home. The chapter reorganized into the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History officially in 1974, but the museum struggled for over forty years to reconcile the narratives of the site's history for the public. The interpretations of the mansion's Civil War history were steeped in the Lost Cause from 1970s through the present. Only in 2019 did the permanent exhibit on the civil rights struggles of the city open in the museum. This came on the heels of a years-long controversy on what to do about the third national Confederate flag flying outside of the mansion. The museum is continuing to make strides to reconcile these narratives, but as long as the United Daughters of the Confederacy still have a presence in the Sutherlin Mansion, telling historical truth about the Civil War and Reconstruction in Danville will be difficult. In 1971, as the city made plans to construct a new library on Patton Street in Danville, local citizens organized the

5. Emma Edmunds, "Mapping Local Knowledge : Danville, Virginia 1945 - 1975," Charlottesville, Virginia: Virginia Center for Digital History, 2011, <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/cslk/danville/>.

Danville chapter of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and set up a chapter room in the Sutherlin Mansion, paving the way for the mansion to become a full-fledged museum once the library vacated the property. With the founding of the chapter, its mission and purpose was “to promote, encourage, and develop an interest in, knowledge of, appreciation for, and practice of the arts” as well as “to collect, preserve, and display works of art, documents, and artifacts relating to the history of the Danville area; and to establish, organize, sponsor, and operate facilities and programs therefore.”⁶ The mansion then became the home of the museum in September of 1973 when the library moved to its present location. It reorganized as a non-profit into the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History in 1974, later becoming an independent museum in 1978.⁷

From 1974 through at least 2015, much of the museum’s permanent exhibit interpreted the history of the Sutherlin family and Jefferson Davis’s stay there with a heavy focus on the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The audio and group tours offered by the museum emphasize Sutherlin’s history as a tobacco magnate in the city without discussion of slavery or the roles of African Americans in developing Danville’s burgeoning tobacco market. The tours also emphasize the importance of the UDC in saving the mansion, as well as telling that the Anne Eliza Johns chapter owns two of the rooms upstairs.⁸ Recently, visitors have criticized the museum’s interpretation and

6. “Museum Chapter Begins Operations at Mansion,” *Danville Register*, August 25, 1971.

7. “About Us,” Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.danvillemuseum.org/about-us>.

8. *Audio Tour of the “UDC Room”* (Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, 975 Main Street, Danville, Virginia 24541, 2015); *Audio Tour of the “Davis Room”* (Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, 975 Main Street, Danville, Virginia 24541, 2015).

interpretive methods, but the largest obstacle that the museum faces is what to do with a Confederate flag given in the 1990s.⁹

In the 1990s, the Atlanta-based Heritage Preservation Association (classified as a group with white-supremacist ties by the Southern Poverty Law Center) donated a flagpole memorial to go in front of the Sutherlin Mansion to commemorate it as the “Last Capitol of the Confederacy.”¹⁰ Because the property belonged to the city of Danville, city council voted to accept the monument and chose the last Confederate national flag to fly on the flagpole. This agreement also meant that the flagpole was the property of the city, but the flag was the property of the Heritage Preservation Association. There was outcry from the African American community at the time, but the flag remained on the pole until controversy struck again in 2014. To prepare for the then upcoming 150th commemoration of the end of the Civil War, executive director of the museum, Cara Burton, sent a letter to city council asking for permission to move the flag from the flagpole to bring it inside the museum to use in a new exhibit. This action prompted a large outcry from white citizens and groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and a white supremacist hate group, the Virginia Flaggers. The local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the DCPA, spoke in favor of the flag coming down, citing its racist meaning. Yet, the city’s hands were tied as the ordinance that accepted the monument would not allow for

9. Lisa Provence, “Etched in Memory: Pilgrimage to Montgomery Honors Local Lynching Victim,” *C-VILLE Weekly* (blog), July 17, 2018, <https://www.c-ville.com/charlottesville-pilgrimage-travels-past-understand-present/>.

10. “To Fly Or Not to Fly” (Exhibit Label, Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, 975 Main Street, Danville, Virginia 24541, n.d.); “The Neo-Confederates,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2000/neo-confederates>.

any alteration to it. The museum went forward with a new exhibit interpreting the flag and the Civil War.¹¹

Unfortunately, like many other places in the Southern United States, it took tragedy for the flag to come down. In 2015, white supremacist Dylann Roof killed nine African American parishioners in Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina. After his motivations and affinity for white supremacist iconography, including the Confederate flag, emerged, calls went out all over the nation to reconsider the display of Confederate monuments. The Danville city council took up the matter again when the museum asked to remove the flag. The museum also added temporary exhibits discussing the slave trade and the African American freedom struggle in Danville after the Civil War. Unfortunately, some city council members faced threats of blackmail from white supremacists for considering the issue. One board member is the son of one of the local leaders in the 1963 civil rights movement, and he was specifically targeted with blackmail.¹² However, in August of 2015, the city ordered the flag to come down; it no longer flies outside of the Sutherlin Mansion.¹³

11. Denice Thibodeau, "Danville Confederate Flag Stays Put," *NewsAdvance.Com*, October 23, 2014; John R. Crane, "SCLC Calls Confederate Flag in Danville a Symbol of Hate," *The Roanoke Times*, November 3, 2014; Tola Adamson, "Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History Requesting Confederate Flag Be Moved Inside For New Exhibit," *WSET*, October 6, 2014; Matt Ray, "Danville Museum Exhibit Sparks Confederate Flag Debate," *WSET*, January 19, 2015.

12. "Threats Over Confederate Flag Even as It Comes Down in SC," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed January 17, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2015/07/08/threats-over-confederate-flag-even-it-comes-down-sc>.

13. Denice Thibodeau, "Danville Removes CSA Flag from Sutherlin Mansion Grounds," *Danville Register & Bee*, August 7, 2015.

Since the flag came down outside of the Sutherlin Mansion, the museum began working to bring more of the city's African American and civil rights history to light. In 2019, the museum installed a permanent exhibit (an exhibit researched by Emma "Em" Edmunds, a former journalist and researcher for the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities) on the Danville movement that spanned 1960 through 1970 with the integration of schools. The museum has also announced plans to incorporate more of the city's civil rights history into the museum's overall interpretation. In January 2020, director Elsalbe Dixon stated that previously at the museum, civil rights' history was "just ignored as if it didn't exist. It was not acknowledged."¹⁴ Wenn Harold, the education and technology facilitator at the museum, noted plans for incorporating the history between the Civil War and the 1960s in the interpretation, too. The city police department also took official steps to formally apologize for their role in suppressing the movement in 1963 with brutal tactics on Bloody Monday.

However, despite these efforts, many in Danville who support the Lost Cause narrative of history have dug in their heels even deeper. When the flag came down from in front of the Sutherlin Mansion, the Virginia Flaggers group placed a twenty by thirty-foot Confederate flag over the Danville expressway on private land. More Confederate flags continue to pop up on private land around Danville, funded by the Virginia Flaggers group, which has become even more tied to white supremacist groups since the election

14. John Crane, "With a Shift in Focus, Danville Museum Emphasizes Civil Rights History," *Danville Register and Bee*, January 18, 2020; https://www.godanriver.com/news/local/with-a-shift-in-focus-danville-museum-emphasizes-civil-rights/article_44c1e737-1b9b-5ed2-99aa-93f0b2a51eaf.html.

of Donald Trump and the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville in 2017.¹⁵ For the museum, the influence of the Anne Eliza Johns chapter of the UDC remains an issue. Members of that chapter enjoy free access to the museum and retain ownership of two rooms in the Mansion, and therefore have considerable say over the museum's activities. The UDC remains committed to the Lost Cause and white supremacist narratives. If they remain influential at the museum, there is concern that a truthful interpretation of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction could ever be told at the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History.

The Danville Museum is taking some encouraging steps in making its interpretations more complete. In 2018, it released a strategic plan for 2019-2021 that states that the museum “seek[s] to be perceived as a more progressive museum center with a strong emphasis on the arts and a focus on Danville’s rich history beyond the current emphasis on the Sutherlin Family, the Civil War and Jefferson Davis.” The plan also includes a goal of “present[ing] a more balanced history of the Danville region with stronger focus on African American history [in order to] make the Danville Museum welcoming to all people.”¹⁶ To achieve these goals, the museum wants to collaborate more with community stakeholders and underserved individuals to attract more visitation.

15. Harry Kollatz, Jr., “Something Someday Could Happen On Monument Avenue, Maybe,” *Richmond Magazine*, July 3, 2018, <https://richmondmagazine.com/api/content/04fadfb2-7f05-11e8-b428-12408cbff2b0/>; Kevin M. Levin, “For the Virginia Flaggers, It’s Hate, Not Heritage,” *The Daily Beast*, September 21, 2016, sec. us-news, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/09/21/for-the-virginia-flaggers-it-s-hate-not-heritage>.

16. Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, “2019-2021 Strategic Plan” (Danville, VA: Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, 2018), 2, https://www.danvillemuseum.org/content/uploads/2019-2021_strategic_plan.pdf.

The museum also seeks to increase the diversity of membership of its Board of Directors as well as staff. Individual goals in the areas of programming, collaboration, resource development, and board development include gathering data on stakeholder perceptions, beginning dialog with groups that align with the museum's mission, restructuring the museum's volunteer program, and attracting dedicated board members.¹⁷ Recent comments from the museum's staff to the press also demonstrate a commitment to not "white-washing" the civil rights history of the city.¹⁸ Overall, it is hopeful to see that this place that for so long has held two histories in tension is taking steps to make its space welcoming to African Americans and also invites their participation in telling history and thereby provide for a fuller, more accurate representation of Danville's past.

Today, what lesson can historians glean from the two Southside movements? What are their legacies? Overall, the Danville movement illustrates the scope of civil rights activity in Virginia, the influence of local organizing versus national or federal power, and the struggle communities face with historical memory. While the summer of 1963 and the events leading up to that time bear more resemblance to other movements further south, it also demonstrates that there was more civil rights activity and organizing in the state of Virginia outside of massive resistance than has been acknowledged. Even though the civil rights story in Southside begins with education and then massive resistance to education, it does not end there. Much of Virginia's legacy within the

17. Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, 4–5.

18. John Crane, "With a Shift in Focus, Danville Museum Emphasizes Civil Rights History," *Danville Register and Bee*, January 18, 2020; https://www.godanriver.com/news/local/with-a-shift-in-focus-danville-museum-emphasizes-civil-rights/article_44c1e737-1b9b-5ed2-99aa-93f0b2a51eaf.html.

broader movement is the white pushback on school integration. The Southside story also shows how virulent white supremacy was in this resistance, in the face of insistent Black demands for equality and civil rights. This history demonstrates that “moderate” does not accurately describe the entrenched, determined and often violent nature of white resistance to racial change.

The Southside story highlights how direct-action protest moved the movement forward in Virginia. Danville also experienced persistent segregation of schools, but the local movement focused on integrating public facilities and equality in employment. Other Virginia localities that faced civil rights battles that garnered the same amount of attention dealt with forced school closings i.e. Prince Edward County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk. These battles over education were not highly successful initially, and their primary focus was the integration of schools while Danville’s was not. The Danville approach of targeting the local economy brought the African Americans of their community some success, and further study of other local movements in Virginia could show that local movements needed to use a variety of tactics to find success.

Next, Southside’s movements provide nuance to the historiographical argument on the impact of grassroots activism and top-down interventions in furthering civil rights; local activism was critical in securing federal action on civil rights. The students of Moton High School began the walkout, but recognized they needed the assistance of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund. Their insistence to be heard by Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson ensured their place in national history. The local Danville students were the heart behind the Danville movement, beginning in 1960 and through the summer of 1963, but they utilized the resources of national organizations to gain national

attention. The students and local leaders also realized that by challenging public facilities and employment, they could reasonably expect the federal government to force the city to comply. After 1963, Danville African Americans were more successful due to the settling of lawsuits in their favor. From this case, it is difficult to discern if local activity had more influence, but it does seem that the local movement realized that federal intervention and national attention could only help their situation. It is slightly ironic though that this federal intervention also spelled the end of momentum for the direct-action protests.

The broader legacy of the Southside movement in the American civil rights movement is greater than initially thought by scholars. Virginia provided a laboratory to experiment with a variety of tactics that the civil rights organizations would draw on to attack Jim Crow in the Deep South in 1964 and 1965. In this perspective, the Free Schools and the Educational Training Centers in Prince Edward County were a triumph; their curriculum and framework became a model for the freedom schools in Mississippi in 1964. Experiencing the repressive nature of the Danville method taught civil rights activists to be flexible in their tactics in moving to other areas. The local Southside activists knew this – they studied the Birmingham and Albany movements in 1962 and 1963 to prepare for their own movement. Truly, the interconnections of the local movements across the South helped activists leverage their knowledge and experiences to make the gains of the larger civil rights movement possible like the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act.

For historians, the Southside movement demonstrates that failures in the short term teach lessons and they pave the way for future successes – they taught the activists

how to adapt. Thus, characterizations of local movements as “failed movements” fail to convey the dynamics of racial and social change. As with Southside, even if a particular tactic failed, any challenge to Jim Crow in such a repressive place marked at least a small victory. This is the major legacy of the Southside movements: the Black communities of Southside broke the Virginia Way’s (and the Byrd machine’s) authority on prescribed economic and social status of Black people. In both Danville and Prince Edward County, Black activists exposed to the nation how Jim Crow controlled every facet of life. Many scholars attribute the Byrd’s machine disbandment to their dedication to massive resistance; moderates across the state moved on without them. The Southside movements reframe this argument. They used the tactics the Byrd machine feared the most and found some progress, especially when the federal government validated their challenges with Court rulings and eventually the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. Understanding this history and incorporating it into public memory is essential as this region continues to come to grips with its racial past, which has come into stark relief in the past four years. In 2017 white supremacists rallied in Charlottesville to protest the possible removal of the Robert E. Lee statue in a city park; this rally turned violent and resulted in the death of Heather Heyer. This event and subsequent tragedy renewed calls for the removal of Confederate monuments, yet some cities and lawmakers resisted these calls. 2020 brought a summer of racial awakening after the killing of Ahmaud Arbery and the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Thousands of Black Lives Matter marches across the nation changed the national conversation on race in dramatic fashion as localities, institutions, and businesses began efforts to address systemic racism. Let us

continually remember the struggle of the Southside movements and its perseverance as the United States continues its overdue racial reckoning.

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