Religion, Race, and Resistance: 
White Evangelicals and the Dilemma of Integration in South Carolina 
1950–1975

by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation contends that religion played a critical role in explaining why and how white South Carolinians decided to resist changes in the racial caste system of their society during the middle decades of the last century. As early as 1950 with the first stirrings of desegregation occurring in their state, white evangelicals in the Palmetto State began making appeals to both the Bible and the natural world to derive a theology that emphasized the divine mandate for racial segregation. In touting this “segregationist folk theology,” religious white southerners proved willing and able participants in the political massive resistance movement that attempted to thwart racial reforms initiated by civil rights demonstrations, court rulings, and federal legislation in the South from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s.

Just as political massive resistance moved from explicitly racist language to coded appeals to racial prejudice in the period after 1965, however, so too was transformed resistance that drew upon religious sources for its inspiration. During the period from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s white evangelicals largely abandoned the biblical proof-texts that ostensibly revealed divine favor for racial segregation and turned instead to a rhetoric
of individualism and colorblindness to fight against attempts to desegregate southern churches and schools.

Tracking how white evangelicals’ biblical defense of segregation changed over time to a rhetoric of colorblind individualism and examining the particular ways this transition affected southern religion and society by the mid 1970s is this dissertation’s central focus.
I have always enjoyed reading acknowledgments but until now have never appreciated how difficult they are to write. To succinctly recognize the individuals and institutions that propelled this dissertation’s writing in a sentence or two seems nearly as hard as completing the work itself. I trust the people named below understand that their influence on this project far exceeds the brief mention I am able to give them.

There is no better place to pursue a graduate degree in history than Rice University. This dissertation could not have been completed without generous funding from the Department of History, the Dean Currie Fund for Research in Southern Religious History, and the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. In addition to the financial support, the administrative assistance provided by the history department has been invaluable. From the moment I first stepped on campus as a prospective graduate student until the day I turned in my dissertation, Paula Platt, Rachel Zepeda, Anita Smith and Lisa Tate have been nothing but helpful in navigating me through the proper channels of my graduate work. As the Directors of Graduate Students during my time at Rice, Paula Sanders and Ed Cox were similarly of tremendous assistance.

There are numerous historians and archivists I need to thank for their help with this project. Almost the entire staff at the South Carolina Historical Society helped photocopy documents and fielded follow-up phone calls I had regarding SCHS holdings. In addition to providing a useful roadmap for my dissertation with his own study of massive resistance in South Carolina, John White hunted down and photocopied relevant material for me from Special Collections at the College of Charleston. Jane Yates at The Citadel kept me busy with numerous boxes of archival material to sift through and
took time out of her own busy schedule to give me a personal tour of the school’s museum. At the South Caroliniana Library, Graham Duncan offered sage advice both for negotiating the library’s impressive holdings and surviving the final weeks of our wives’ pregnancy. Kate Moore and Herb Hartsook were gracious hosts during my extended time working through the boxes of the Workman Papers at the South Carolina Political Collections. In addition to handling my copious requests for photocopies, Kate gave me an insider’s perspective on many South Carolina issues, while Herb pointed me to the best barbeque I tasted in the state. Stephen Barden at the Trenholm Road United Methodist Church allowed me free access to the church’s archival collection and even let me poke around the church sanctuary where Bill Workman sat for so many Sundays. Peter Murray at Methodist University helped fill in the details of his father’s transfer in 1955 for criticizing the Citizens’ Councils and provided me with materials on this incident from his personal collection. Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the aid of Phillip Stone at the Wofford College Archives. On a fairly regular basis during the course of this project, I asked Phillip to hunt down information on South Carolina Methodists and he never failed to deliver. Documents I requested from Phillip always arrived in short order. His contribution to this work cannot be understated.

Jason, Karen, Alex, and Matthew Perez graciously afforded me lodging and meals during my research trips to Columbia. Their warm and generous hospitality (and close proximity to Dunkin’ Donuts) made for enjoyable stays in their home during my time in South Carolina.
I could not have hoped for a better dissertation committee. It has been a privilege having John Boles advise my graduate studies and oversee the writing of this dissertation. It is impossible to overstate the luxury of having an advisor who prioritizes your personal well-being over your scholastic output. Those of us who have been students of Dr. Boles know how fortunate we are. Allen Matusow helped steer me toward my dissertation topic and was a consistent source of encouragement throughout its progression. Michael Emerson’s research on race and religion played a significant role in shaping the ideas in this project and his personal and professional guidance over Reuben sandwiches in the Village was a highlight of my time at Rice. Although these three men are the foremost experts in their respective fields, they are all even better people than they are scholars. Their examples of teaching, scholarship, and mentoring are models I can only hope to emulate in my career.

Other faculty members have also contributed to my Rice experience and deserve mention here. Ira Gruber, Alex Lichtenstein, Caleb McDaniel, Anthony Pinn, Carol Quillen, and Lora Wildenthal were all helpful in one way or another in getting me through my years in graduate school.

My fellow students have been perhaps as important as the faculty to my training as a historian. Among this group, Luke Harlow and Wes Phelps warrant special mention. Luke and I began the program at the same time and his perspectives and advice on everything from publishing to pulled pork over the past five years have enriched my life in innumerable ways. Wes started the program the year after me and I had the good fortune of being assigned his “mentor” during his first semester at Rice. Wes surely got short-changed in this arrangement as he has taught me more about teaching, work ethic,
and appreciating Bruce Springsteen than anything I ever “mentored” him about. I count myself blessed to have passed through Rice at the same time as Luke and Wes and am thankful for their friendships. I also benefited immensely from interactions both in and out of seminar rooms with Joseph Abel, Drew Bledsoe, Andrew Canady, Jessica Cannon, Renee Chandler, Blake Ellis, Catherine Fitzgerald-Wyatt, David Getman, Derek Hicks, Alyssa Honnette, Allison Madar, Merritt McKinney, Carl Paulus, Tom Popelka, and Jim Wainwright.

My family at the City of Refuge has been a constant source of encouragement and support over the past five years and has given me hope that the story in the pages that follow may yet be redeemed.

Paul and Kathy Sauer, Jason and Karen Perez, Kevin and Rachel Sauer, Kyle Sauer and Kelly Sauer have been tremendously supportive over the years even as they no doubt wondered what was taking their son/brother-in-law so long to finish.

My mother-in-law, Maria Sauer, passed away weeks before I was admitted to Rice. She was an early and ardent supporter of my graduate education and I am confident she would have been proud of this project.

Jerry Deck has played a more significant role in my life than cousins typically do. Telephone conversations with the Reverend Deck are always welcomed (and occasionally fruitful) distractions.

My father and mother, James and Carolyn Hawkins, helped nurture my love of history at a young age with every quarter deposited at my “president’s stand” and by incorporating visits to historical sites during just about every family vacation. They,
along with my sisters Emily and Kathryn, have been unrelenting cheerleaders throughout this graduate school journey and never doubted that I would someday complete it.

My sons serve as perfect bookends to the project. Caleb was born right before I turned in the first chapter. Micah came along just before I completed the final draft. Their presence has not only been a gift of incalculable joy but has also helped me maintain much needed perspective on the truly important things in life.

Finally, this dissertation would never have been completed without my wife Kristi. During the past five years (and indeed long before that) she has been a constant model of selflessness, empathy, and patience as she has endured more conversations about religion, race, and the South than anyone not writing a dissertation on the topics should ever be subjected to. She has sacrificed countless evenings and weekends over the years to insure that I finish this project and never stopped believing I could even when I gave her every reason to do so. She is my biggest supporter, proudest promoter, and best friend. This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to her.
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INTRODUCTION

EXAMINING RELIGION IN MASSIVE RESISTANCE

In a 2000 article that seemingly every historian writing on massive resistance has since cited, Charles Eagles alerted *Journal of Southern History* readers of the “asymmetrical” development of civil rights historiography. Historians of the civil rights movement in the South, Eagles observed at the time, “have tended to emphasize one side of the struggle, the movement side, and to neglect their professional obligation to understand the other side, the segregationist opposition.” This one-sided approach to the history of civil rights, as Eagles saw it, left an inexplicable hole in the field’s literature and suggested that “scholars seem to have assumed that little remains to be learned about the segregationists or that they are simply too unattractive or unimportant to warrant examination.”¹

Were he to survey the civil rights historiography today, Eagles would likely arrive at a different conclusion. What he called for has happened. In the years since Eagles penned his essay the long-ignored topic of white opposition to the civil rights movement has emerged as one of the most active areas of southern history. The study of conservatism generally, and segregationist thought and practice specifically, has exploded in the past decade, as historians have turned out books, articles, and dissertations that have helped fill the once-glaring void in civil rights historiography.²

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² Some of the books alone that have appeared since 2000 on the topic of white resistance to civil rights include, Keith M. Finley, *Delaying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight Against Civil Rights* (Baton Rogue: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); James
these recent studies historians have started to investigate not only the attempt to maintain segregation throughout the South from the mid 1950s to mid 1960s but also the subsequent realignment of American politics and society in the late 1960s and early 1970s when these efforts failed.

While the newly published studies on the anti-civil rights movement have helped balance the historiography, they are not without their own omissions. Indeed, the vast majority of works in this new school have almost completely neglected the topic of religion. Given that since the turn of the nineteenth century the South has been the most

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3 There are three notable exceptions to historians who have neglected religion in their analysis of massive resistance. In their respective monographs, Joseph Crespino and David Chappell both incorporated an exploration of white religion's role in resisting civil rights. Additionally, Carolyn Renee Dupont examined how religious revivals and anti-
religious section of the country, that after the Civil War evangelical Christianity was second only to racism as the most important ideology ordering southern society, and that conservative religious ideals became practically interchangeable with conservative political beliefs during the Right’s national resurgence in the wake of the civil rights backlash, an examination of religion’s role in massive resistance is necessary.

This dissertation contends that religion played a critical role in explaining why and how white South Carolinians decided to resist changes in the racial caste system of their society during the middle decades of the last century. As early as 1950 with the first stirrings of desegregation occurring in their state, white evangelicals in the Palmetto State began making appeals to both the Bible and the natural world to derive a theology that emphasized the divine mandate for racial segregation. In touting this “segregationist folk theology,” religious white southerners proved willing and able participants in the massive resistance movement that attempted to thwart racial reforms initiated by civil rights demonstrations, court rulings, and federal legislation from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s. The second and third chapters of this dissertation examine the explicitly religious defense of racial segregation promulgated by southern clergy and laity who, during the first decade after the 1954 Brown v. Board decision, in actions and words promoted an interpretation of God as an avowed segregationist.

communism ideology influenced the white response to the civil rights movement in Mississippi. See, Dupont, “Mississippi Praying: White Religion and Black Equality, 1954-1966” (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Kentucky, 2003). Crespino and Dupont’s scholarship is focused exclusively on Mississippi, while Chappell seeks to analyze southern white religion as a whole. Of these three, Chappell’s work is most important to this dissertation, primarily because of the differing conclusions Chappell and I have regarding white religion’s role in massive resistance. These differences run throughout this study but are explicitly detailed in chapter 3.
Just as political massive resistance moved from explicitly racist language to coded appeals to racial prejudice in the period after 1965, however, so too was transformed resistance that drew upon religious sources for its inspiration. During the period from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s white evangelicals largely abandoned the biblical proof-texts that ostensibly revealed divine favor for racial segregation and turned instead to a rhetoric of individualism and colorblindness to fight against attempts to desegregate southern churches and schools. The last three chapters of this study, accordingly, consider different events that occurred in South Carolina during this ten-year span that demonstrate the way religious defenses of segregation changed both in word and deed in the post-Civil Rights Act era.

From 1962 to 1965 the largest two evangelical denominations in South Carolina—the Baptists and Methodists—both wrestled with the issue of desegregating their respective colleges in the state. The debates that took place over this issue at the state conventions and conferences for both these denominations in these years revealed that segregationist folk theology was still a motivating factor for religious conservatives during this period but that evangelicals were growing more reticent to espouse these beliefs publically.

In 1966 the white and African American annual conferences of the Methodist church in South Carolina began a six-year process to merge those separate entities into a single racially inclusive body. In the protracted battle to fight this process, whites in the denomination who opposed the forced merger revealed how by the late 1960s publically stated rationales given by religious conservatives to maintain racial segregation had
largely, though not entirely, discarded explicit segregationist folk theology and employed
the language of colorblindness and individualism.

The turn to colorblind individualism allowed religion to play a central role in
massive resistance's final chapter in South Carolina: the private schools. These new
colorblind individualistic arguments enabled church schools—as well as secular
academies that nevertheless had strong religious underpinnings—to participate in the
frenzied white flight from South Carolina public schools in the 1970s and claim that race
had little or no role in their creation and/or existence.

Tracking how white evangelicals' biblical defense of segregation changed over
time to a rhetoric of colorblind individualism and examining the particular ways this
transition affected southern religion and society by the mid 1970s is this dissertation's
central focus. In the course of this project, several recurring themes and terms appear
that must be explained and defined at the outset. A primary theme in this work is the
cultural captivity of white churches in the South during the period this study covers. The
cultural captivity of southern churches is best described by historian Samuel S. Hill in his
seminal study on southern religion, *Southern Churches in Crisis*. One of the distinctive
traits of southern religion, Hill stated in his 1966 book, was the "peculiar relation which
exists between the southern church and its surrounding culture. Tersely stated, it has
been a long and happy union. The southern church is comfortable in its homeland, and
the culture sits comfortably within its church."— The practical outcome of this "happy
union" between the churches in the South and southern culture was a relationship

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Samuel S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press,
1966), 30.
whereby southern religion both influenced and reflected the social mores of the 
surrounding culture. On questions of race, therefore, the majority of white evangelical 
churches in the South during the 1950s and early 1960s mirrored the racist beliefs of 
southern culture even as the churches themselves promoted a segregationist theology that 
helped reinforce cultural racism. Demonstrating the cultural captivity of the southern 
white church is a central component of this dissertation.

A thematic corollary to the idea of cultural captivity that appears with regularity 
in this study, but is less developed, is the shift in beliefs about racial egalitarianism that 
broadly occurred in southern culture beginning in the mid 1960s. Again, because of the 
symbiotic relationship of the southern church to its surrounding culture, this dissertation 
argues that a southern society that grew less tolerant of overt racism helped drive the 
transition of publically espoused religious arguments against integration from ones 
explicitly grounded in racially inspired biblical hermeneutics to those couched in 
putatively neutral calls for colorblindness. While there is ample quantitative evidence 
that southern white attitudes about race—at least those expressed publically—grew more 
egalitarian between 1950 and 1975, the exact cause for this change has remained open to 
interpretation.⁵

There are three factors historians regularly cite for the change in southern whites' 
attitudes about race that occurred in the mid 1960s: the moral weight of civil rights 
demonstrators' direct-action protests; federal legislation and court rulings that forced

⁵ For data showing the change in whites' views on race, see Howard Schuman et al., 
*Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard 
University Press, 1997); and Steven A. Tuch and Jack K. Martin, eds., *Racial Attitudes in 
racial changes by government edict; and the economic self-interest of southern white businessmen who sought to minimize racial tensions in their communities in order to attract investors from outside the region. Although this dissertation is less concerned with how the racial mores of South Carolina society were changed in the 1960s than it is with the changes affected by this transformation, the evidence in this study supports the idea that all three of the above sources—civil rights protests, federal intervention, and economic interest—worked in concert to drive openly bigoted sentiments from the realm of social acceptability in the Palmetto State during the civil rights era. While the

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7 Sociologists, like historians, are in agreement that white racial attitudes have changed significantly since 1940, but this former group has focused more on the way racial transformations occur within individuals themselves rather than stressing external events in order to explain the metamorphosis of whites’ racial views. While these sociological studies make up a burgeoning field, an interpretation by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva is particularly pertinent to this dissertation. In 2003 Bonilla-Silva conceptualized “colorblind racism” as an ideology that originated in the late 1960s “that explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics.” According to Bonilla-Silva, under “colorblind racism” “whites rationalize minorities’… status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations.” See, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists: Colorblind
changes in the South Carolina racial environment and its attending causal factors are not explicated at length in the following pages, it is regularly referenced throughout and the interpretations of the dissertation rest heavily on this social change.

One final theme must be explained: massive resistance. In the traditional narrative put forth by the first generation of scholars on the subject, massive resistance is a collective term referring to those legislative actions undertaken by state and local governments to resist changes to Jim Crow segregation once the federal government began challenging it in earnest after the 1954 Brown decision. In this narrative, massive resistance crumbled by the mid 1960s when the federal government—in the form of largesse and court rulings—became too exacting a presence in southern society for legalized segregation to continue. In recent years, a second wave of historians of massive resistance have widened our understanding of the way white southerners participated in the anti-civil rights movement by moving away from the first generation's "top down" approach to undertake "grass roots" investigations of white resistance to civil

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Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 2. Bonilla-Silva's concept of "colorblind racism" fits very nicely with the colorblind individualistic rationales given by religious conservatives in South Carolina during the late 1960s as they worked against efforts for racial integration in their churches and schools. See also, Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and William Ryan, Blaming the Victim (New York: Patheon Books, 1971).

rights that are grounded in social and cultural analyses.\textsuperscript{9} This dissertation fits decidedly into the latter school. What follows is by no means an exhaustive documentation of all the measures white South Carolinians undertook in their state in order to avoid racial integration in the mid twentieth century.\textsuperscript{10} Rather, this dissertation focuses on instances in South Carolina when religious conservatives participated in the process of maintaining segregation in their society as well as their religious institutions and tries to explain why they felt compelled to do so.

The terms “evangelicals” and “religious conservatives” are used interchangeably throughout this work, and the definition used to categorize individuals in this camp is supplied by British scholar David Bebbington, whose four point definition of “evangelical” has become the standard in defining the term. Bebbington’s four essentials of evangelicalism are Biblicism (the belief in the Bible as the final authority on all matters for faith and living), crucicentrism (the belief that humanity is saved by the atoning work of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion), conversionism (the occurrence of a life-transforming and supernatural experience when one accepts the Christian faith), and activism (the belief that faith compels believers to actively preach, witness, or participate in some type of broadly defined missionary work).\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{9} For a fuller explanation of this shift in massive resistance historiography, see Kruse, \textit{White Flight}, 6-12.

\textsuperscript{10} A recently published Ph.D. dissertation by John White does an excellent job of chronicling most of the political maneuvers South Carolinians employed during its era of massive resistance. For all of its thoroughness on politics, however, White’s dissertation gives little attention to religion. See John W. White, “Managed Compliance: White Resistance and Desegregation in South Carolina, 1950–1970” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 2006).

In the mid twentieth century the percentage of southerners who subscribed to a version of Protestant Christianity that could be classified as evangelical under this definition was extraordinarily high. Nine of ten southerners self-identified as Protestant Christian in 1954. By 1966 that percentage had slipped only three points to 87 percent. From 1950 through 1966, 79 percent of Protestants in the South belonged to the Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian denominations, all of which were decidedly evangelical in nature during this period.\(^\text{12}\) As scholars have long noted, "religion in the American South has been distinguished by the long cultural hegemony of evangelical Protestants...."\(^\text{13}\)

Evangelicalism’s cultural dominance was no exception in South Carolina as the same Baptist-Methodist hegemony whose existence historians had recognized throughout the region flourished also in the Palmetto State. For this reason, Baptists and Methodists occupy the vast majority of this study’s focus.\(^\text{14}\) Evangelicalism’s centrality to the


culture of South Carolina as expressed by these two denominations resulted in numerous instances when religious conservatives in the state acted to support segregation, allowing for a deeper understanding of the way religion mixed with massive resistance in the state. But another reason South Carolina is the locus of this dissertation is because of the source base made available by William D. Workman Jr., an ardent segregationist and devout evangelical who was a prominent member of the state’s political and social structure from the 1950s to the 1970s.

When historian Numan V. Bartley published *The Rise of Massive Resistance* in 1969, making it the first monographic study of white resistance to the modern civil rights movement, he included an extended essay on his sources intended to point future researchers to material that the pioneering scholar had found useful in compiling the documentation for his work. Bartley arranged his bibliographic essay both topically and by the states that comprised his study, and in his section on South Carolina, the historian singled out the work of journalist William D. Workman Jr. as a wealth of information from which future students of massive resistance might draw. As an editorial and political correspondent for the state’s oldest and most staunchly segregationist newspaper, the Charleston *News and Courier*, Workman was at the center of the political and social upheaval that began in the Palmetto State with the Supreme Court’s ruling against racially segregated schools in 1954. William Workman’s utility for future historians interested in massive resistance, as Bartley saw it, stemmed from the journalist’s reporting and editorials written from his unique position in the eye of the segregationist maelstrom that raged in South Carolina for more than two decades.

segregation, see Matthew D. Lassiter, "Biblical Fundamentalism and Racial Belief at Bob Jones University" (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1994).
When Workman's son donated his father's personal and professional papers to the University of South Carolina in the early 1990s, the decorated South Carolina journalist became even more important for students of both sides of the civil rights struggle. Civil rights historians were now able to go beyond the published editorials and public speeches to get a revealing glimpse into the mind of one of South Carolina's most significant voices for segregation. But despite William Workman's prominence in South Carolina's massive resistance movement, it is unfair to cast the newspaperman as one of the movement's leaders. Workman treated his position as a journalist with a professionalism that made him more willing to reflect the attitudes of his fellow South Carolinians than to attempt to shape them. For historians, Workman's usefulness comes more from his detailed chronicling of the civil rights movement and its backlash in his home state—and the pamphlets, sermons, and other material he collected in the course of his career—than from his leading the opposition to the black freedom struggle. As Numan Bartley recognized thirty years ago, Workman was "somewhat of a rarity in that he was both an active proponent of massive resistance and at the same time a journalist who had established a deserved reputation for balanced and incisive reporting."15

What makes William Workman instrumental for the purpose of this dissertation, however, is not the journalist's uniqueness but the attributes he shared with many other white South Carolinians with regard to segregationist thought and religious affinity. Like

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15 I am by no means suggesting that William Workman achieved objectivity in his reporting. To the contrary, his biases and prejudices are often plainly obvious in his columns. I believe, however, that a strong counterfactual argument could be made that if William Workman never existed, the massive resistance movement in South Carolina would not have been significantly different, if at all.

the vast majority of white South Carolinians in the mid twentieth century, William Workman was an ardent believer in racial segregation and concurrently a devoted and active member of his church. Workman’s papers, therefore, contain invaluable insight on both segregationist and conservative religious thought in South Carolina during the previous century. Through his eyes—or via his typewriter—we have a portal into the mindset of many of his South Carolina contemporaries. His importance, therefore, lies in what he represents.

The dissertation that follows is not a biography of William D. Workman. Although he plays a significant role in some of the chapters to come, Bill Workman—as the reporter was commonly known—barely makes an appearance in others. For this project, Workman is best understood as a window through which to view the intersection of religion and segregation rather than a vehicle on which to travel that road. Nonetheless, because of the centrality his papers play in this dissertation, the first chapter is a brief and admittedly incomplete biographical sketch of William D. Workman provided in order to better appreciate his position as emblematically straddling white conservative religion and segregationist thought. His papers are an indispensible aid toward understanding race and religion in South Carolina during the period of the civil rights movement.
CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM D. WORKMAN JR.

William Douglas Workman Jr. was born August 10, 1914, in the upcountry town of Greenwood, South Carolina, to William and Vivian Workman. Shortly after his birth, Workman’s father joined a generation of Americans who went to fight in France in the First World War. The elder Workman returned home with the rank of major and a “splendid record” in battle, which buoyed his reputation in the community.\(^1\) His mother was the niece of H. H. Watkins, United States District Judge of the Western District of South Carolina.\(^2\) Workman’s childhood was comfortably spent in Greenville, South Carolina, where his father’s good name served him well in his law practice. Young Workman attended the white public schools in Greenville and graduated in 1931 at the age of 16.\(^3\) Workman later recalled that “the home training I have received has been well above average and has been largely responsible for making me what I am.”\(^4\)

Part of the “home training” Workman nostalgically recalled included being raised in the Baptist church, a heritage Workman shared with the majority of white South Carolinians during that time.\(^5\) When Workman followed in his father’s footsteps and

\(^1\) Wilton H. Earle to James T. Williams, Jr., May 19, 1936, box 1, William D. Workman Jr., Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina.


enrolled at The Citadel, the state military academy, in Charleston, South Carolina, in the fall of 1931, Workman was taken aback by some of the hostile attitudes toward religion he encountered there. “When I first entered college I was both surprised and shocked at the number of boys who are, or profess to be, atheists,” Workman wrote in a college paper. “I possess a certain amount of religious feeling, and the intensely skeptical views many of my fellow students took towards my sentiments somewhat alarmed me. However, I have since learned that the majority of these critical opinions and disparaging remarks are prompted by the desire of the speaker to be different, to achieve notoriety.” Workman ventured that eventually many of these religious critics would acquiesce to the social custom of the day and join him in the properly understood southern role of practicing the Christian faith. As for Workman, “I try to lead my idea of a Christian life for I firmly believe that I will be amply rewarded in the next life if not this one.”

Workman’s prediction that the self-professing atheists at The Citadel would eventually accept some kind of religious belief turned out to be correct for at least one of his classmates. A year after they had graduated, Wilton H. Earle Jr. wrote Workman to inform him he had joined his fellow cadet on the straight and narrow path. “Incidentally I tacitly acknowledge that you were right in our many arguments upon religion in that I am joining a church,” Earle confessed.

Workman enjoyed his time in college immensely and often spoke in letters of feeling close to being over-committed between the academic, military, and extra-curricular activities in which he participated. When he graduated with a double major in

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7 Wilton Earle to Workman, May 14, 1936, box 1, Workman Papers.
English and history, Workman was set on becoming a politician. “There are numerous reasons why I plan to enter into political service in some manner or another,” Workman wrote in the summer of 1935. “Chief among them is the fact I firmly believe that I can do much constructive work in whatever field of government I choose to enter.”

“My tendency at the moment,” mused Workman on the eve of his twenty-first birthday, “inclines me to set myself to the service of my native state, for there is much to be accomplished there.” Workman decided the best avenue by which to pursue political office was through the time-tested route of practicing law. His plan upon receiving his law degree was to return to Greenville, run for district attorney, build up a sufficient background, and “if I succeed as I plan to,” run for governor of South Carolina.

In the same 1935 autobiographical reflection in which he articulated the plan for his political future, Workman also laid out his political philosophy, which is interesting to note in light of how far he would depart from it twenty years later. “My political attitudes, briefly, are these: I believe in a strong central government with a highly centralized form of government. The centralization should not be carried to the point of bureaucracy but it should be of such degree that the state interests would be subordinate to those of the nation,” Workman stated. “As I would have it, the states could be made definitely subordinate to the Federal Government but without losing their own individuality nor all of their sovereignty, articulated Workman in a position he would adamantly reject two decades later.

9 Ibid., 21.
10 Ibid.
In September 1935 Workman took the first step in his plan to put these philosophies into practice and departed his home state to enroll in law school at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. To help reduce the cost of law school, Workman took night classes at George Washington; and through South Carolina Senator James F. Byrnes, he secured a position in the Navy Department. His official designation was “messenger, CU-3, Bureau of Construction and Repair, assigned to the Secretary’s Office, Appointment Division,” but as Workman gloomily admitted after less than two months of holding the position, were the ostentatious title stripped away, he was merely a clerk. “Yet I am not a clerk, my mind is not that of a clerk, to me the dull routine of matters clerical is abhorrent,” complained Workman in his autobiographical reflections. He was working seven hours a day, five days a week, and four hours on Saturdays in addition to his night courses at George Washington University.\footnote{Ibid.}

By the spring of 1936 Workman had had enough of his dull clerical duties for the navy and started applying for jobs that were less monotonous. He wrote the headquarters of the American Red Cross in Washington and informed them that he was a licensed life guard and certified in first aid. “At present, I am employed in the Secretary’s Office of the Navy Department and am studying law at night at the George Washington University. As I mentioned above, I have no particular type of job in mind as I write this,” confessed Workman in his application letter. “I merely wish to secure a position which embraces something other than pure office routine.”\footnote{Workman to Harold F. Enlows, March 13, 1936, box 1, Workman Papers.}
In addition to being disgruntled in his position as a clerk for the navy, Workman was also becoming less convinced about the wisdom of his decision to pursue a law degree. "I am studying law but I have not the love for it that is necessary for the making of a great lawyer, or even a lawyer at all. It may come, but I haven't it now," Workman wrote. "Even so, law does not become at once inviting to me," he continued. "It is not so much the laws that I am interested in as the men who make and break them."\footnote{13 Autobiography/Reflection on Life, box 20, Workman Papers.}

No doubt adding to his sense of frustration were letters Workman received during this period from his former college roommate, Robert M. Hitt Jr. Upon graduating from The Citadel, Robert—or "Red" as he was known to friends—stayed in Charleston and took a position as city reporter for the Charleston \textit{News and Courier}. In letters to his former roommate, Hitt portrayed the life of a newspaper reporter in Charleston as glamorously exciting as a naval clerk's was tedious. Hitt regaled Workman with stories of scurrying about the city scooping other reporters, reporting on tug-boat races where he found himself riding along and celebrating with the winning boats, and covering town festivals that provided him with the opportunity to socialize with women. "And what with all these good looking queens all around me everywhere I go, my baser instincts have hit a new high," boasted Hitt. "Why don't you shuffle off the embryonic mantle and get in this newspaper racket," Hitt encouraged Workman. "The whole thing is that you get in everything free, you are not afraid of the cops because you have a police pass, you meet everybody and its different every day."\footnote{14 Hitt to Workman, April 16, 1936, box 1, Workman Papers.} For someone trying to escape the
monotony of law school and clerical work, Hitt's suggestion to join the fourth estate must have been sorely tempting.

By June 1936 Workman was ready to follow his college friend into the world of newspapers. Writing to himself, Workman admitted “I have, at this point, fully given up the idea of studying law…. It is to a profession that has always appealed to me that I now turn my attention, or rather will shortly turn my attention. I refer to the field of journalism.” Workman was not giving up on his political future, however. To the contrary, Workman believed that “I can, with intelligent procedure, prepare myself better for future public service through the medium of newspapers than through law.” His plan was to spend one more year taking law courses that he thought would help prepare him for politics. “At the end of that time,” Workman planned, “I shall be ready to go back to South Carolina, become connected with some paper, and begin the long, hard, but interesting struggle to the top.”

Upon hearing his friend’s decision, Red Hitt offered Workman some words of encouragement and caution. “The newspaper racket is, to my mind, the most interesting and enjoyable work anywhere.” But, Hitt warned, “the rewards of a newspaper man lie largely in his self-satisfaction…. A successful lawyer makes more in a week than a newspaper man makes in many weeks. Seriously speaking, I think you would make a good lawyer but a poor politician,” Hitt confided to his friend. “I also think you would make a good newspaper man. Either offers much.” Assuming that his friend was sincere in wanting to break into the world of journalism, Hitt promised Workman that he


16 Hitt to Workman, November 9, 1936, box 1, Workman Papers.
would try to keep him abreast of any potential openings. “There are none here at present. One never can tell when something will happen. Maybe one of our men will get run over or shot and if it isn’t me I’ll let you know and put in the good word.” Hitt promised his old roommate.17

William Workman’s opening into the newspaper business came not from gunshot or car accident but through a much more pedestrian resignation. When the state news reporter at the News and Courier resigned his position in December 1936, the newspaper suddenly found itself in need of another reporter. Red Hitt excitedly wrote Workman to tell him the good news. “The situation, in a word, is this. There is an opening in the city room of the News and Courier. Not only is there an opening but I’ve just about closed if for you. How do you like that?” Hitt instructed Workman that time was of the essence. If he was still interested, Workman needed to write immediately to the city editor for the News and Courier, Tom Waring, to tell the editor of his interest in the reporter’s job. “There can’t be any hesitation here, boy. It’s take it or leave it as I see it. My advice is take it,” Hitt advised Workman. “Knowing you as I do, you’ll never regret getting in.”18

Red Hitt’s words to William Workman in December 1936 were prescient. Although it meant sacrificing another semester of studying law, Workman took his friend’s advice and joined the staff at the Charleston News and Courier as the city reporter. If Workman ever had regrets about his career choice, he kept them to himself.

The association with his first editor at the newspaper, Thomas Waring, largely dictated the direction of Workman’s career. Hailing from a prominent Charleston family,

17 Ibid.

18 Hitt to Workman, December 10, 1936, box 1, Workman Papers.
Tom Waring was the nephew of federal judge J. Waties Waring. While judge Waring was among the most strident advocates for civil rights in the federal judiciary in the 1940s and 1950s, Tom Waring shared none of his uncle’s distaste for racial segregation.\(^{19}\)

To the contrary, as an arch-conservative, Tom Waring would become one of the most influential voices for continued segregation in South Carolina as the struggle for civil rights gained traction in the state in the 1950s. As editor, Waring’s political and racial views were often reflected in the pages of the *News and Courier* and the newspaper earned the reputation for being the most conservative in the state.

It is unknown if Workman comported his own political beliefs to match those of his employer or if he grew into his conservatism on his own accord as he reported for the *News and Courier*. Regardless, in 1955 when the massive resistance movement began in earnest in South Carolina, the *News and Courier* often served as its mouthpiece and Workman was its star reporter.

In 1939, however, Workman was still toiling away as a local reporter in Charleston, though he had been promoted to the police and hospital reporter at the *News and Courier*; the best beat on the paper in Red Hitt’s estimation. Even still, Workman, perhaps still harboring thoughts of making a run for the governor’s office and wanting to acquaint himself with a broad knowledge of state affairs, desired to get out of Charleston and try his hand at doing survey reporting on a wide variety of aspects of South Carolina society. Writing his autobiographical reflections three years earlier, Workman had speculated that acquiring “generalized knowledge” through newspaper reporting “will be

of inestimable worth when I enter politics. South Carolina is backward in so many respects that a trained specialist will be handicapped in a position of political responsibility because of his very specialization,” Workman had theorized. Justifying his recent decision to enter journalism, Workman continued, “[i]t is my belief that a man thoroughly conversant with a number of subjects, and possessed with executive ability can accomplish more for the state than a man trained in one field, law, for example.”

After two years of beat reporting in Charleston, Workman was likely finding himself underprepared for a run at the statehouse in Columbia and attempted to adjust his career trajectory accordingly. In March 1939 he wrote a letter to Wall Street financier and FDR consultant Bernard Baruch to see if the native South Carolinian would be interested in financing a broad survey of his home state. Franklin Roosevelt a year earlier had famously declared the South to be the nation’s number one economic problem, and Workman might have seen this as an opportunity to extend the president’s analysis. “The state, to my mind, is not in particularly good health. What I propose to do is to spend an entire year in taking it’s temperature, feeling its pulse, listening to its grievances and perhaps drawing some sort of diagnosis,” Workman pitched Baruch. The young reporter informed the New York tycoon that he wanted to talk to average South Carolinians across the state and hear their thoughts on the “social, economic, political, racial and educational” condition of the Palmetto state. “At the end of a year of such research, I believe I would be in a position to record with a fair degree of accuracy that

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which ails my state. I believe further,” continued Workman, “that an articulated expression, a concensus (sic) of ideas, opinions and reactions of South Carolinians would do much toward helping the state set its feet on the path to not only prosperity but to social, economic, and sectional well-being.” Workman estimated that this diagnosis and treatment of South Carolina’s ills could be achieved with $2500 of Bernard Baruch’s money.\(^{22}\) He received no reply.

Denied the opportunity to spend a year traveling the state, 1939 was nonetheless as year of transition for William Workman. In June he married Rhea Thomas of Walterboro, South Carolina. Rhea—who Workman affectionately called Tommie, a nickname apparently derived from her maiden name—was a 1937 graduate of Winthrop College and the 1938 Miss Walterboro. She was an English teacher in South Carolina schools before earning her Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina, whereupon she took a position as an English professor at Columbia College in South Carolina’s capital city.\(^{23}\) Rhea Thomas was also a staunch Methodist. Since his new wife’s attachment to her denomination was stronger than his Baptist affinities, Workman followed Tommie into the Wesleyan fold and remained an active Methodist the rest of his life.\(^{24}\)

Marriage and Methodism were not the only changes in store for Bill Workman in 1939. In October of that year two Charleston newspapers, the *News and Courier* and the *Evening Post*, purchased a local radio station. Recognizing the opportunity to try his

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\(^{22}\) Workman to Bernard Baruch, March 22, 1939, box 1, Workman Papers.


\(^{24}\) Workman to Charles Peebles, July 15, 1964, box 23, Workman Papers.
hand at a new venue, Workman resigned from the newspaper business to manage the new radio station.25

The Second World War preempted Workman’s radio career. The Citadel graduate was called to active duty in 1940 and spent the war as an intelligence officer in various parts of Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific. Ever the reporter, in 1942 Workman began sending letters back to Tom Waring to publish in the *News and Courier*.26 There was deliberateness to Workman’s correspondence with Waring during his deployment. As the war drew to an end, the South Carolina government sent surveys to deployed Carolinians in order to anticipate what the state could expect from the returning veterans. Nine out of ten of those surveyed indicated they were planning on returning to their home counties. Most of these, however, were interested in performing work other than that which they were performing before joining the Army.27 William Workman was solidly among this camp of returnees. Having tried his hand at radio, he desired to return to the newspaper business upon his discharge and hoped some correspondence work for the *News and Courier* during the war would help him with that plan. Because Workman and Tommie had two children by 1945, the question in Workman’s mind was whether he could support a family of four on a reporter’s income. Initial reports from Charleston were not promising.

25 Workman to Bill Workman, April 30, 1940, box 1, Workman Papers.

26 Some of these letters can be found in folder 1, box 457, Thomas R. Waring, Jr. Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.

Workman’s friend Red Hitt described the obstacles the returning soldier faced in typical blunt fashion. “You had something less than two years of experience as a reporter on the News and Courier... before you plunged into the mystics of radio. [T]he period you were with WTMA did nothing to bolster your qualifications as a newspaperman. From what I see of radio people around here I would want no part of them on my newspapers,” Hitt candidly wrote Workman. “In normal times, reporters for the small town daily (and that we are and are destined to be for time to come) come for about 14 cents a dozen. Even now, as things loosen up, more and more young folks are applying for work, eager to become journalists, ready to work for free if necessary to get the experience,” stated Hitt frankly. It was not a hopeless cause, however. Red Hitt had reason to believe that Tom Waring would offer Workman just over fifty dollars a week to return to the News and Courier, and Hitt encouraged his old friend to take it. “You could do better, perhaps, but then you could do a lot worse. Tom eventually will be editor of the N&C. He has a high regard for you, but much of it is regard for you as an individual rather than a newspaperman,” wrote Hitt. “He has not seen a great deal of you as a newspaper man but he is acutely aware of your high qualifications and, currently, he is greatly in need of some brains,” Hitt concluded candidly.28

Whatever his motivation, Tom Waring was happy to welcome Bill Workman back to the News and Courier. “As I understand it, Tom has a pretty good deal mapped out for Bill and I know he will be anxious to get underway as soon as he has re-oriented himself to civvies, gotten some rest and begun realizing that the war is really over,” Red

28 Hitt to Workman, August 17, 1945, box 1, Workman Papers.
Hitt wrote in a letter to Tommie Workman in September 1945. Waring’s plan for Workman was a permanent assignment in Columbia, South Carolina, as the News and Courier’s chief political correspondent.

It was an exciting time to be a political reporter in South Carolina’s capital. The Workmans were just getting settled in Columbia when an upstart politician named J. Strom Thurmond upset the old-line South Carolina political machine by winning the governorship in 1946, and the new governor’s tenure was marked by a slew of government reforms that kept political reporters busy informing their readers of all the changes. Workman’s journalistic ability as the News and Courier’s political correspondent won him the respect of many of the newspaper’s readers, and he and Tom Waring both began receiving letters from subscribers expressing their appreciation of Workman’s skill. Recognizing the popularity of his young reporter, Tom Waring in 1947 gave Workman permission to begin editorializing in his stories from Columbia, with the only stipulation being that Workman include “editorial correspondent” in the byline of those articles in which he chose to inject his own opinion. No longer tethered to the strict rule of journalistic objectivity that were the hallmark of his earlier articles, Workman’s editorial reporting caused his status to grow in the state as the journalist acquired a reputation as a strong advocate for “states’ rights,” a phrase that in the late 1940s everyone understood meant maintaining racial segregation.

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29 Hitt to Tommie Workman, September 28, 1945, box 1, Workman Papers.


31 Waring to Workman, October 9, 1947, folder 1, box 457, Waring Papers.
Despite the desires of “states’ rights” defenders to uphold the status quo, it was becoming increasingly evident in the post-WWII South that the issue of the region’s racial oppression was heading toward a climatic confrontation. African American soldiers returning to the South from fighting overseas to protect democracy were intent on securing civil liberties of their own. Even before war veterans had returned, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had instigated legal challenges to Jim Crow by bringing suit against the system. Several of these cases were making their way up the appellate ladder in the late 1940s representing another potential threat to racial segregation in the South.

Added to this combination of NAACP lawsuits and black veterans’ adamant insistence on social change, President Harry Truman began intimating in early 1948 that the federal government needed to strengthen civil rights legislation, the first American president ever to do so. Truman’s commitment to civil rights reform had a South

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Carolina connection: Isaac Woodard’s 1946 beating in the state served as a catalyst in prompting the president to act decisively on civil rights.

Woodard was an African American soldier who was discharged from the army in Georgia and took a bus through South Carolina to attend a reunion with his family in North Carolina. Upset that Woodard was taking too long during a bathroom break in Batesburg, South Carolina, the bus driver called for the chief of police, who arrested Woodard on charges of being drunk and disorderly. With Woodard insistent that he was neither drunk nor being disorderly, the officer took the war veteran into an alley, beat him with his blackjack, and drove the end of his nightstick into Woodard’s eyes. The chief of police then had Woodard jailed overnight without medical attention. The next morning a local judge fined Woodard fifty dollars and sent him on his way. When he finally arrived at an Army hospital in Spartanburg, South Carolina, doctors found both of the veteran’s corneas to be damaged beyond repair. He never regained his sight. According to historian Kari Frederickson, Woodard’s 1946 travails in South Carolina made President Harry Truman insistent upon including civil rights legislation as a priority in the 1948 campaign. Truman, Frederickson states, “reacted with special revulsion to Woodard’s blinding, and he referred to it often in public and private when justifying his support for civil rights.”

Whatever his motivation, upon Truman’s insistence, and with the persuasive advocacy of Senator Hubert Humphrey, the 1948 Democratic Party at its Philadelphia convention adopted a platform that endorsed civil rights measures. This decision occurred much to the consternation of states’ rights southerners who pleaded

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36 Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 56.
with their fellow delegates to remain true to the traditional principles of the Democratic
Party and not abide federal interference in the affairs of the states.\textsuperscript{37}

Following their disappointment in Philadelphia, states’ rights southerners
decided to defect from the Democrats in 1948 and form their own “Dixiecrat” party.\textsuperscript{38}
For their standard bearer, the Dixiecrats tapped Strom Thurmond, thrusting Bill
Workman right in the middle of the states’ right storm in 1948. Following the South
Carolina governor’s presidential campaign kept Workman busy throughout the summer.
In a Christmas letter to a family friend, Workman described his busy year. “As for my
activities, I put in a good year’s work as a red-hot States’ Righter. I took in (and fumed
through) the Philadelphia convention, and also sat in on the States Rights sessions at
Jackson, Miss; Birmingham, and Houston, Tex.”\textsuperscript{39}

States’ rights did more than just keep Workman productive in 1948. The issue
also raised the reporter’s profile in South Carolina. As his editorial reports were well-
received in the state, Workman became popular as a speaker on states’ rights in South
Carolina. He made fourteen speaking appearances on the topic between June and
December 1948.\textsuperscript{40} Although it was unclear what turns the segregation issue would take
in the twilight of the 1940s, one thing was certain: it was an unavoidable subject. What
white southerners craved in the late 1940s, therefore, were ideas that justified and
reinforced the South’s racial caste system. In South Carolina, this segregationist desire

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 129-30.

\textsuperscript{38} For a complete history of this event, see Frederickson, The Dixiecrat Revolt.

\textsuperscript{39} Workman to Evans Crowell, December 29, 1948, box 1, Workman Papers.

\textsuperscript{40} Workman to Waring, December 23, 1948, folder 1, box 457, Waring Papers.
was met by the *News and Courier*, and William D. Workman was the newspaper’s rising star. When Workman raised the possibility of doing some additional work for other newspapers with his editor, Tom Waring demurred. Workman, Waring told his star reporter, had become a valuable commodity to the *News and Courier* because its readers looked forward to his reports and editorials on the state’s politics. To appease his reporter, however, Waring gave Workman an immediate raise and promised more in the future if the journalist would curtail his ambition.  

With his reputation as a staunch states’ righter, Workman’s editorials undoubtedly carried much weight among white South Carolinians. As early as 1950, Workman sounded the alarm that a challenge to segregation in South Carolina loomed on the horizon. In January 1950 the *News and Courier* ran a four-part series of reports Workman wrote on an upcoming Supreme Court case dealing with school desegregation. In *Sweatt v. Painter*, an African American law student named Hermann Sweatt sued the state of Texas for admission to the University of Texas law school, reasoning that the state’s law school for blacks was vastly inferior to the one for whites.  

“It is well within the bounds of probability that a decision adverse to the South would precipitate a greater upheaval in the educational, economic, and social life of this region than anything since Reconstruction days,” Workman warned his readers in the series’ first installment. As Workman noted, the outcome of the *Sweatt* case was of particular importance in South Carolina.

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41 Waring to Workman, November 1951, folder 2, box 457, Waring Papers; Waring to Workman, December 1951, folder 2, box 457, Waring Papers.


43 “Sweatt Case Decision Is Important to South,” *News and Courier* (January 2, 1950).
Carolina because “negro parents and guardians of a Clarendon county school district recently have asked for public school facilities ‘equal in all respects’ to those afforded white students.” Workman displayed remarkable prescience in referencing the Clarendon situation. Denied their request for equalized schools, African Americans in that county with the support of the NAACP eventually brought suit against the school district, and their case became one of the five the Supreme Court lumped together in 1954 and heard as Brown v. Board of Education. In this regard, Workman correctly recognized the threat to school segregation in South Carolina more than four years before it was realized.

William Workman was also ahead of his time in pointing out that in filing a “friend of the court” brief in support of Hermann Sweatt in his lawsuit against the state of Texas, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) took a position that ran counter to the ideas of many white southerners who attended FCC member churches. “The church people of this state, and of the nation, would do well to study their course before blindly subscribing to the policies now being promulgated by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America,” Workman wrote in an editorial. It was one thing, Workman thought, for the FCC to promote the unity and fellowship of the nation’s different Christian denominations, but “it is something else...for this Federal Council of Churches to preach before the supreme court of the United States a doctrine which is not practiced by council members themselves.” Citing the FCC’s statement in the Sweatt amicus brief renouncing “the pattern of segregation in race relations as unnecessary and undesirable and a violation of the Gospel of love and human brotherhood,” Workman—a

Methodist layman—concluded, “here then is an executive council whose preachments on racial admixture are not adhered to by many of its own members.” Workman pointed out that church-related colleges in South Carolina continued to practice racial segregation, despite being sponsored by denominations that were part of the FCC. More to the point, Workman asked, “[h]as racial separation been done away with in the churches themselves? No! Nor should it be!”45 In Workman’s view, the decision to support Sweatt, “apparently stems from the top, not from the bottom, of the family of churches in the federal council.”46

As a member of the Methodist church, Workman wanted to make sure others in his denomination realized that an organization to which their church belonged was advocating an idea that ran counter to the sensibilities of many southern white Methodists. A week after his editorial urging South Carolina church-goers to familiarize themselves with the FCC’s racial position ran in the News and Courier, Workman made sure members his own church family understood the FCC’s racial liberalism by addressing the Washington Street Methodist Church’s Young Men’s Club on the matter. Workman invited along the Washington Street senior pastor to explain the relationship between the church and the FCC and the possibility of the church withdrawing from the council if appropriate.47


Although no South Carolina churches attempted to officially withdraw from the FCC over the *Sweatt v. Painter* matter, several individuals contacted Bill Workman to thank him for drawing attention to the matter and to register their displeasure with the FCC's involvement in the case. L. E. Faulkner wrote Workman to express his belief that "[r]egardless of the good things that the Council (FCC) does acting as a political action committee for the Church of the Living God, all these good things are a sin because the church has no authority from her Head, our Lord Jesus, to waste her precious time trying to solve economic, political, social and racial problems. The Church has just one function and that is to spread the gospel of our Lord Jesus."\(^{48}\)

Douglas Featherstone also passed along to Workman a resolution the Main Street Methodist Church in Greenwood, South Carolina, adopted in light of the reporters’ editorials about FCC involvement in *Sweatt v. Painter*. The resolution stated that the issue raised in the *Sweatt* case was not only about equal facilities and fair treatment but also the practice of segregation itself. Yet, the resolution reasoned, "Southern Methodism not only does not furnish equal facilities to negro Methodists, either in its schools, hospitals, seminaries, or churches... by its system of separate jurisdictions [it] provides and practices segregation [see chapter five]." Until the Methodist Church is willing to end segregation in its schools, seminaries, hospitals and colleges, the Greenwood Methodists resolved, it should "refrain itself from being part of an organization working toward ending the practice of segregation."\(^{49}\)

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\(^{48}\) L. E. Faulker to Workman, January 25, 1950, box 39, Workman Papers.

\(^{49}\) "Resolution Passed by the Fellowship Class of the Sunday School of Main Street Methodist Church," box 39, Workman Papers.
 Churches in South Carolina grew progressively troubled over the role the National Council of Churches (NCC)—which succeeded the FCC in 1950—played in pushing for civil rights initiatives in the South. By the late 1950s and early 1960s local Methodist and Presbyterian churches in the state finally found they could no longer tolerate the racial liberalism of the NCC and accordingly passed resolutions withdrawing from the national organization, a course of action William Workman no doubt had in mind as early as 1950 when *Sweatt v. Painter* initially revealed the rift between FCC doctrine and lay belief.

The day the *Sweatt* case was heard before the Supreme Court, Workman minced no words when speculating on the potential for a ruling against segregation. “If the decision goes counter to Southern tradition, the consequences might be catastrophic,” Workman intoned. Even though the Supreme Court ruled against the state of Texas and granted Hermann Sweatt admission to the previously white-only law school, it was a narrowly defined decision and the South was spared the reckoning Workman predicted. It was another four years before the Supreme Court found racial segregation in and of itself to be unconstitutional. With “separate but equal” thrown out in the 1954 *Brown*

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decision, William Workman’s career as a journalist and states’ right defender once again took a steep upward tick.

Workman was in great demand as a public speaker immediately following the Brown ruling and spoke to such varied groups as Greenville Women’s Club, the Sumter Rotary Club, and the South Carolina Society of Professional Engineers. The topic on which Workman invariably spoke was the desegregation crisis facing the state and the impending implantation ruling the court was to remand the following year. As the long-time political correspondent for the state’s most ardently segregationist newspaper, Workman was extremely well positioned to speak on the segregation issue.53

“Particularly am I glad you will discuss the segregation problem because it is, I think, one of the most important and difficult issues of our day and I know of no one who is better qualified to openly discuss the matter than you,” the program chair for one of Workman’s speaking engagements wrote the journalist in confirming his appearance.54 Insight as clear as Workman’s came at a price. Eventually he commanded $25 per speech plus reimbursement for his travel expenses.55

Workman’s talk on desegregation usually followed a standard format. He began by telling his audience that by human nature it was difficult to avoid emotion—even Jesus himself grew emotional over the death of Lazarus—but that the desegregation dilemma facing the state demanded that the white citizens remain calm. A major


54 J. D. Reynolds to Workman, June 24, 1954, box 25, Workman Papers.

problem Workman saw contributing to the crisis was the fact that northerners did not fully comprehend how many African Americans lived in the South. While African Americans made up 10 percent of the national population, their numbers were significantly higher in the South. Workman liked to point out that in South Carolina, 43 percent of the state’s citizens were black, and in some of the state’s counties African Americans made up 70 percent of the population. Having established the problem of the skewed racial demographics in the South, Workman concluded that South Carolina had a “surplus of 693,000 Negroes,” and proposed sending 529,000 African Americans to California and the remaining 164,000 to Minnesota to help balance the national average.56

After attacking the Supreme Court for basing its ruling on sociology rather than law and articulating a supposedly innate affinity among southerners for a strict adherence to the Constitution (because of “blood, belief, and behavior”), Workman then turned to the reasons why it was necessary to preserve segregation. African Americans and whites have “different standards of health, morality, [and] education,” Workman told his listeners. Blacks contracted venereal disease at a rate of 6-1 compared to whites. Nineteen percent of black children born in South Carolina were “illegitimate” compared to only 2 percent of whites. And blacks were illiterate at a rate three times as high as whites in the state. “This is not intended to demean the Negro of South Carolina,” Workman assured his audiences, “but to explain why white persons feel that integration is not yet feasible.”57

56 Workman integration/civil rights speeches notes, box 26, Workman Papers.
57 Ibid.
Workman’s talks usually ended with the journalist laying out the different options South Carolina had in responding to the *Brown* ruling. These different plans were ones that Workman heard discussed as he traveled the state reporting on the topic. Articulating options that ran from nullification to full acceptance, Workman endorsed the policy of “passive resistance” as South Carolina’s best hope for maintaining segregation in its schools. Rather than openly defying the federal government, Workman suggested that South Carolina simply choose not to comply with the ruling. The state should continue to equalize school facilities throughout the state in the hope that in “play[ing] fair with the Negro,” African Americans in South Carolina would abandon any intentions of integrating white schools. Workman ended his speeches by reiterating the need for calm no matter what response South Carolina decided to pursue. “The fact that the Supreme Court has seen fit to jeopardize tranquility is no justification for South Carolina’s joining in fomenting trouble among her own people,” Workman said before closing by paraphrasing from the book of Proverbs, “‘he that soweth discord among brethren is an abomination to the Lord.’”

Giving speeches around the state as a segregationist partisan was not the only way William Workman’s reputation rose in South Carolina in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision. In the fall of 1954 Workman became the sole South Carolina correspondent for an organization called the Southern Education Reporting Service (SERS). Created by a collection of southern newspaper editors and educators almost immediately after the *Brown* ruling, SERS was financed by a grant from the Fund for the Advancement of Education to collect objective information about school desegregation in every southern

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state. The collected reports would be published in a monthly bulletin called the Southern School News. SERS's founders believed that the information published in the Southern School News would be useful for education officials in the South who could benefit from receiving news about how desegregation was proceeding in other states and communities. Additionally, SERS's founders hoped that Southern School News would become a reliable source for objective and factual information about school desegregation that could be cited by newspapers and magazines covering desegregation in the South.\(^{59}\)

The first issue of Southern School News in September 1954 plainly stated SERS's goals. The organization intended to "tell the story, factually and objectively, of what happens in education as a result of the Supreme Court's May 17 opinion that segregation in the public schools is unconstitutional," for the purpose of disseminating detailed reports of the process for news organizations and educators across the country. SERS was adamant about emphasizing its objectivity. "[I]t should be stated again—as categorically as possible—that the Southern Education Reporting Service will not be an advocate for or against anything, that it will express no opinions of its own on what is good and bad or wise and unwise, and that it will adhere scrupulously to the accurate and objective reporting of facts as it finds them," stated the headline article in the Southern

\(^{59}\) "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southern Education Reporting Service," box 13, Workman Papers. Interestingly, the SERS board of directors first met on May 11, 1954, six days before the Brown decision was announced. Although many white southerners were reported to be "shocked" by the ruling, apparently the southern newspaper editors and educators assembled for this first meeting felt fairly confident that Plessy was going to be overturned. For a thorough historical account SERS's founding and its impact on southern journalism in the organization's first six years, see Douglas O. Cumming, "Facing Facts, Facing South: The Southern Education Reporting Service and the Effort to Inform the South after Brown v. Board, 1954-1960" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2002).
School News's inaugural issue. SERS’s directors repeatedly stressed the reporting service’s neutral stance in organizational meetings. SERS board members declared that the field reports from the various states “should be confined to verifiable facts and that correspondents should meticulously avoid injection of their own opinions” in their reports. At the first meeting of SERS correspondents in July 1954, SERS directors again instructed the state correspondents to “avoid adjectives and adverbs” when writing their monthly articles.

Ironically, it was SERS insistence on objectivity and neutrality that created the opportunity for the ardent segregationist William Workman to be a Southern School News correspondent. Because SERS founders believed that maintaining strict objectivity on the question of desegregation was paramount to the acceptance of the Southern School News as a reliable source for information, the organization’s first board was made up of newspaper editors and educators whose personal feelings on integration ran the spectrum from acceptance to resistance. To represent the latter end of the integration spectrum, SERS founders tapped Tom Waring to be the vice-president of the board of directors. SERS directors believed Waring’s well-known segregationist reputation would alleviate suspicion that the organization had a liberal bias.

As historian Douglas Cumming has noted, “The extremity of individual opinion on the board [on the issue of

60 Southern School News (September 1954), 1.

61 “Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southern Education Reporting Service,” box 13, Workman Papers.

62 “Southern Education Reporting Service, July 24, 1954,” box 13, Workman Papers. This document is the hand-written notes William Workman took at this first correspondent’s meeting.

63 Cumming, “Facing Facts, Facing South,” 150.
desegregation]... was the very thing that proved SERS's objectivity. According to this theory, diverse views assured objectivity by countervailing cancellation.... That board members who disagreed on race matters could emphatically agree on the importance of objective reporting of the subject offered further proof of SERS's credibility, according to this theory."

The individuals selected to be SERS state correspondents were all among the best reporters in the South. Workman had long established himself as one of the top reporters in the state, and his relationship with Waring—who knew first hand his journalistic abilities—likely made Workman’s selection as the South Carolina correspondent a foregone conclusion. Being a SERS reporter required Workman and the other state correspondents to submit exhaustive monthly articles that surveyed the desegregation process in a variety of sectors of southern society ranging from legislative policies to grass-roots reaction against integration. Workman served as the South Carolina SERS correspondent for the first eight years of the organization’s existence. From 1954 to 1962, therefore, William Workman was the foremost expert on desegregation in South Carolina as well as the most informed student of strategies employed to undermine the process.

Despite his personal preference for racial segregation, Workman’s monthly summaries of the South Carolina situation were models of objective journalism. The

64 Ibid., 152.

65 Ibid., 169-70. By 1954, Workman was no longer working exclusively for Waring’s News and Courier. He had left the newspaper in 1952 to return to the world of radio broadcasting. After a nine month hiatus from print reporting, Workman returned to covering South Carolina politics in 1953, but was a correspondent for several different newspapers, including the News and Courier.
correspondence in Workman’s papers with SERS editors contains only once instance in which SERS directors felt information in Workman’s copy failed to achieve SERS standards of objectivity. This occasion occurred in May 1960 when Workman included in his report a quote from the Reverend H. P. Sharper, the president of the South Carolina chapter of the NAACP. Workman cited a Rock Hill, South Carolina, newspaper report that had quoted Sharper as saying, “my place is in the mayor’s chair—in the governor’s chair and a nice pretty black woman laying up in bed with me.”  

SERS director Marvin Wall wrote Workman that the *Southern School News* planned to strike the quote from publication. “It struck us as being a bit colorful for *Southern School News,*” Wall informed his South Carolina correspondent regarding the Shaper quote. “As you know—after nearly six years of tireless toil for SERS—we have to walk a tightrope here, and if such an item slipped through, it could be a troublesome slip indeed. Critics are apt to seize upon small items such as this one to make trouble for us. So we have to keep our guard up.” Wall was quick to point out that Workman’s “slip” was “definitely atypical in light of the splendid copy you have given us heretofore.”

Workman accepted his editor’s decision but made sure to make his opinion on the subject known. “I think your quarrel is not so much with me... as with the individual I quoted,” Workman wrote back. “If the president of the NAACP in South Carolina is damn fool enough to make statements in public meetings such as he did, then I don’t see where it is necessary for me or any other reporter to cover up after him. I would not have

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67 Marvin Wall to Workman, May 17, 1960, box 14, Workman Papers.
quoted any Tom, Dick and Harry to that effect, but where the official head of a formal organization makes declarations as revealing as that in public, then I feel his words are proper subject for quotation," continued Workman. "In the past, when Klansmen and other whites unburdened themselves of rough statements, I have quoted *them* when direct quotes were available." Workman closed his letter by quoting from a memo Wall had circulated a month before: "Every effort should be made to fully cover Negro *attitudes and activities* relating to school desegregation...we should not overlook statements and actions coming from the (Negro) side."

Beyond this isolated instance in 1960, it appears Workman had no trouble performing objective reporting. In March 1956 Workman became worried that his objective reputation might be sullied by erroneous reports that he was a member of the Citizens' Council in South Carolina (See chapter 2). Workman wrote then-SERS director Don Shoemaker to clear up this misunderstanding. "I am *not* a member of the Citizens Councils, nor do I intend to become one," Workman informed the SERS director. "I am not a 'joiner' in any sense of the word and have steered clear of affiliations with everything from service clubs to Citizens Councils, although I have had offers to join both. My newspaper writings and radio-TV broadcasts leave little doubt as to my opposition to the Supreme Court's decision...but I am not a combatant in the sense of being a member of an active organization," clarified Workman.

For his part, Don Shoemaker was unconcerned about Workman's alleged association with the Citizens' Councils. "I care not one whit whether our correspondents

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68 Workman to Marvin Wall, May 21, 1960, box 14, Workman Papers.

69 Workman to Don Shoemaker, March 30, 1956, box 14, Workman Papers.
belong to Council[s] or NAACP, Republican or Democratic parties, Rotary or Kiwanis,” wrote Shoemaker. “Your writing for Southern School News has been completely uncolored by personal conviction and is a model of objectivity. I do not remember ever having to change a line of your copy in this respect. Indeed, I like to cite you as an example of a man with strong and sincere opinions who nevertheless is down-the-middle when he writes for us,” Shoemaker reassured Workman.\(^{70}\)

While technically true, Workman’s claim to never have joined the Citizens’ Councils was disingenuous. Workman was an advocate for the Councils, arguing that “the caliber of both the leadership and the membership of the Citizens’ Councils has been such as to deter organized and unorganized violence in innumerable communities throughout the Deep South.”\(^{71}\) Additionally, Workman’s financial records from the late 1950s and early 1960s reveal that he made numerous speeches before Council groups for which he was paid between seventeen and twenty-five dollars, and he was occasionally featured as the keynote speaker in Citizens’ Council fundraising drives.\(^{72}\) Workman also helped edit Citizens’ Council material and recommended individuals he believed would make good leaders in the movement.\(^{73}\) Workman was as involved as possible without officially signing up with the movement.

\(^{70}\) Don Shoemaker to Workman, April 3, 1956, box 14, Workman Papers.

\(^{71}\) William D. Workman, Jr., The Case for the South (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1960), 140.


\(^{73}\) Various letters and documents found in Box 32 of the Workman Papers substantiate this claim.
Nevertheless, Workman’s close association with the White Citizens’ Councils in
his home state was of no concern to SERS directors as Shoemaker had made clear to his
South Carolina correspondent. In fact, SERS actually encouraged its board members and
correspondents to openly express their personal feelings on segregation in venues outside
of SERS. As historian Douglas Cumming states, “[t]he bold and partisan opinions
expressed by board members and correspondents outside of SERS business was
allowed—even celebrated—as a mark of SERS’s tolerance and breadth of
representation.”74

SERS board members and correspondents were afforded the freedom of
expression on the topic of desegregation as long as they claimed no affiliation with SERS
when making their views known. In late 1954 Bonita Valien, an African American SERS
staff member, transgressed this policy when she criticized southern strategies to avoid
school desegregation and was identified as a SERS research specialist and consultant in
an article appearing in the Christian Science Monitor. When William Workman saw the
Valien article, he fired off a letter along with a copy of the article in question to SERS
board member Tom Waring in order to register his displeasure. “Stories such as the one I
enclose can have no other effect but to persuade its readers that the SERS is aimed at
accomplishing desegregation. Since I am convinced, or have been convinced up until
this time, that SERS has no such purpose, I have been pleased to work with it,” Workman
wrote to his friend. “If I am wrong in that, then I cannot in good conscience continue to
represent an agency with whose viewpoint I differ so completely.”75

74 Cumming, “Facing Facts, Facing South,” 179.

75 Workman to Tom Waring, January 14, 1955, box 14, Workman Papers.
A fellow hard-core segregationist, Waring was similarly disturbed by Bonita Valien’s comments and forwarded the article and Workman’s letter to SERS director Pete McKnight along with his own thoughts on the matter. “It is my understanding that SERS is not proselytizing for any viewpoint, but is what its name implies, a reporting service. Yet here a staff member appears as a partisan pleader,” complained Waring. “If Mrs. Valien has been speaking for SERS... I as a board member would like to know about it. I also would like to know, if the account is accurate, how much other such missionary work is being done on either side.”

Pete McKnight was quick with his reply to Waring and Workman. “I quite agree with you and Bill Workman that no one associated in any way with the Reporting Service should make any public statements under the SERS label which advocate for a particular viewpoint,” McKnight reassured the two South Carolinians. “I shall see to it that Mrs. Valien does no more of it. In fact, I shall ask her not to make any public appearances unless she works from a manuscript which I have previously read and approved.”

McKnight did not have to monitor many more of Bonita Valien’s statements. When her contract with SERS expired in June 1955, the organization chose not renew her services.

Workman’s position as a SERS correspondent helped raise his profile beyond the bounders of South Carolina. In November 1956 New York publisher Devin A. Garrity contacted Workman about the possibility of writing a book outlining the South’s position

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76 Tom Waring to Pete McKnight, January 15, 1955, box 14, Workman Papers.

77 Pete McKnight to Tom Waring, January 17, 1955, box 14, Workman Papers.

78 Cumming, “Facing Facts, Facing South,” 206-08.
against racial integration. "The right book, I feel, would do very well in sales, particularly in the South, which seems to me to need it even more than the North," Garrity solicited Workman.\footnote{David Garrity to Workman, November 12, 1956, box 24, Workman Papers.}

Workman did not require much convincing and responded that he was "in full agreement with your belief that there is a place for such a book." Workman, however, was interested in writing the book only if he could do so from the angle of defending states' rights. "My personal conviction is that the matter ranges far beyond the black and white of race relations, although the effect of that aspect cannot be minimized," Workman thought. Workman wished to expand the scope of the book beyond being simply a matter of race. "I look upon the South as a vestigial citadel of governmental, sociological, and tribal thinking such was characteristic of the founders of America," Workman told Garrity. "Whether that be praiseworthy or lamentable is something I would develop in the book, but it will not surprise you to learn that I find much of value in the southern effort to cling to fundamental concepts of constitutional government and similar beliefs."\footnote{Workman to David Garrity, November 21, 1956, box 24, Workman Papers.} In December Workman sent Garrity a proposed outline along with a sample chapter. Garrity liked what he read and signed Workman to a contract that called for a completed manuscript by December 31, 1957.\footnote{"Sequence of Events re Writing of 'The Case For the South,'" box 24, Workman Papers.}

No doubt fueled by incidents like the federal intervention in Arkansas to desegregate Little Rock's Central High, Workman threw himself into the project and sent
a completed manuscript to David Garrity in New York in January 1958.\textsuperscript{82} The New York publisher promptly sat on the project for the next twelve months. By June, Workman began to grow impatient and wrote to Garrity that the project was “no money-grubbing venture on my part, but rather a conscientious effort to strike a blow for the South and for truth as we see it. I visualize further difficulties over the school segregation crisis in September, and feel that the time is ripe to begin pushing toward fall publication. If the book is to serve a useful purpose it should appear before further Little Rocks occur and make matters even more difficult.”\textsuperscript{83}

In November with Garrity continuing to delay publication of Workman’s book, the South Carolinian shot off an angry missive. “You’re not playing fair with me, and you know it.... I thought I was writing an argument for the South to be used during the great debate, not a post-mortem. Am I going to have to find a new publisher come January?” Workman asked threateningly.\textsuperscript{84} The next month Workman had resigned himself to his plight. “I have the uncomfortable feeling that I have fallen into the hands of city slickers,” opined Workman, “yet I see no way out of my predicament other than to simply ‘relax and enjoy it,’ as the saying goes.”\textsuperscript{85} David Garrity finally started the process of bringing the book to publication in 1959. The publisher hired a writer in New

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Workman to David Garrity, June 15, 1958, box 24, Workman Papers.

\textsuperscript{84} Workman to David Garrity, November 28, 1958, box 24, Workman Papers.

\textsuperscript{85} Workman to David Garrity, December 7, 1958, box 24, Workman Papers.
York to help edit nearly one hundred pages from the manuscript and by December 1959, *The Case for the South* underwent its first printing.\(^8\)

The book was essentially an expanded version of the stump speech Workman had crafted in his innumerable speaking engagements throughout the years. Workman portrayed the South’s resistance to desegregation as rooted in the region’s strong adherence to constitutional principles and decentralized government. He attributed the South’s disproportionately high percentage of African Americans in the region and the perceived overall moral, educational, and hygienic deficiency of the group as a major reason why southern whites did not want integration since the practice would surely lead to widespread miscegenation. Workman’s book ended with a call for southern whites to treat their black neighbors with more dignity but also warned that the African American “cannot continue in his improvident ways, squandering his relatively small earnings on drink, trinkets, and carousing, forsaking his family with the mood strikes him, ‘forgetting’ legal and moral obligations—and still look for the sort of treatment reserved for the more worthy person.”\(^9\)

Revealing Workman’s own thoughts about religion and the question of integration, *The Case for the South* also included a chapter devoted to criticizing religious leaders who had started advocating for desegregation after the 1954 *Brown* ruling. The South, Workman wrote, had long been noted for its religion and “addiction to the Word of God. Yet all of a sudden, the Word seems to have changed, but by secular rather than divine decree,” Workman scoffed. “A way of life based on racial separation and

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\(^8\) “Sequence of Events…,” box 24, Workman Papers.

subscribed to by ministers and laymen alike for generations in the South, and for centuries elsewhere, now is labeled ‘unChristian’ by clergymen whose powers of divination seem to have blossomed forth simultaneously with the Supreme Court’s delivery of Chief Justice Warren’s sermon from the bench.” Workman believed it was “high time that the church laity should call for an opportunity to make its own voice heard in the open of free debate” so church leaders could learn that they cannot “force-feed their flocks with integration.”

Unsurprisingly, Workman’s book won praise from a vast number of white southerners. His personal papers contain dozens of letters and postcards he received thanking him for his effort on the South’s behalf along with a note from the archivist stating that hundreds more were eliminated from the collection because of their redundancy. Workman’s book went “way beyond my expectations—and I expected plenty from Bill Workman,” Ralph Simmons praised the journalist. Many of Workman’s fan letters were convinced that Workman’s book argued the South’s position so strongly that it was imperative that non-Southerners get copies. “[D]o you suppose you could get Dick Nixon to read it?” one letter writer asked Workman. “He might be our next president, and it is just possible that a little of the contents might rub off on him, or something therein might stick in his mind, and influence some act or decision in our favor.” Strom Thurmond, who had moved from the South Carolina statehouse to the United States Senate, agreed with the idea of getting Nixon a copy of Workman’s book.

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88 Ibid., 95.
89 Ibid., 99, 101.
90 Ralph Simmons to Workman, n.d., box 25, Workman Papers.
The South Carolina senator sent a copy to the vice president and every member of the United States Senate with a note expressing Thurmond’s “fond hope that you will read it and find it helpful to you in the current debate.” Pleased that the staunch conservative Thurmond found his book useful, Workman wrote the senator’s staff assistant to suggest that the book “might serve you as a labor-saving device next year if Sens. Thurmond, Russell, and Company decide to filibuster against the projected Civil Rights legislation. Just read the book to the assembled Senate!!”

Strom Thurmond was not the only South Carolina politician who found value in Workman’s book. South Carolina Governor Ernest F. Hollings mailed a copy of The Case for the South to every member of the Southern Governors’ Conference so they could read Workman’s “thorough and authentic analysis of the South’s stand in the maintenance of constitutional government, particularly as reflected in the question of racial segregation.” In similar fashion, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a resolution commending Workman “for his great contribution to the South in its present struggle for a better understanding by the writing and publishing of his book,” and passed a bill authorizing the purchase of 1000 copies to be distributed to members of Congress and elsewhere where “there greatest good will be accomplished in fostering a better understanding for the cause of the South.”

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92 Storm Thurmond to Workman, March 8, 1960, box 25, Workman Papers.
93 Workman to Harry Dent, November 11, 1959, box 25, Workman Papers.
95 Quoted in Southern School News (February 1960), 11.
Of course, not all responses to Workman's book were nearly as positive. A review in the *Negro History Bulletin* called *The Case for the South* "a tired book and one which does a distinct disservice to the forward-looking elements of the South today." Another reviewer dismissed Workman's study as a "highly questionable treatise," while the Des Moines *Register and Tribune* speculated that "only a very small minority of the Southerners could accept the twisted logic that Workman describes."

This last review was too much for Workman. "As a practicing newspaperman, I marvel at your ability to bridge the miles and mores which separate Iowa from the South and to speak with such authority on how Southerners feel," Workman chided his journalist peers. "There are more Negroes within 10 miles of where I sit than there are within the entire state of Iowa, and I submit that my credentials for evaluating their impact upon Southerners are perhaps better than yours. When the time comes, and I hope it shall," Workman continued, "that Iowa can lay claim to a population made up of 40 per cent Negroes instead of the $\frac{3}{4}$ of 1 per cent you now have, then you may entertain second thoughts of the problem, based on first-hand knowledge."

Although prominent print media outlets like *Time* and the *New York Times* chose not to review *The Case for the South*, in February 1960 the NBC morning television show "Today" extended Workman an invitation to appear on the network to discuss his book. "I realize that there are many listeners who will disagree with Mr. Workman, but he will

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handle himself with proper decorum and fairness,” a representative from Workman’s publishing company assured the “Today” show program manager. “I know the South does not have a popular case nationally, but it is a case about which the nation should be informed.”

Bill Workman made his nationally televised debut on February 18, 1960. In a six minute segment, “Today” show host Dave Garroway provided Workman with a platform to make his case for the South to the country as a whole. Workman sounded his familiar themes, telling Garroway that many southerners felt like their home region had become the “whipping boy for the rest of the nation.” But integration in the South, Workman informed the “Today” show host, was a different proposition than in the North because of the large percentage of African Americans in the South. When Dave Garroway asked if there could be no peace between the races in integrated classrooms, Workman deflected the question. “[T]his is the thing that rankles southerners particularly, that we are charged with a lack of peace in the South, whereas actually here in many parts of the North there is extreme bitterness.” The fact was, Workman concluded, “[w]e were making progress until the federal government brought things to a grounding halt to pursue a business they have no constitutional right to pursue.”

Many southerners were pleased to see Workman’s interview and wrote to congratulate him. Robert Patterson, the founder of the Citizens’ Council movement in Mississippi, wrote Workman a letter immediately after his segment aired, saying “[o]n

99 Augustus Graydon to Eugene Jones, February 1, 1960, box 24, Workman Papers.

Dave Garroway’s program this morning you struck a mighty blow for the cause and the possible future understanding of our nation’s racial problem.”

Other southerners were upset with Garroway for cutting the interview with Workman short. Workman received numerous letters from individuals who shared complaints with Gene Taylor about the way the “Today” show treated Workman. In a letter to Dave Garroway, Taylor protested the television host’s obvious preference for integrationists. “I have seen you take up a great deal of time with such people (integrationists)…, talk freely with them, hold up their books, discuss the books et al, while they were comfortably seated at your desk most of the time puffing away at large cigars – in other words they were afforded every courtesy,” Taylor wrote Garroway. The Charleston woman continued, “Mr. Workman had ONE MINUTE, he had to stand, you did not hold up a copy of his book, and it would appear from this that he certainly was not treated with the same courtesy as those with a different viewpoint on the all important issue in our country today.” Taylor ended her diatribe by saying that William Workman had said more in his sixty seconds on television than any integrationist had said in an hour.

Praise for Workman’s book continued to flow into the journalist’s office throughout 1960, and he sent answers to many of the letters. In a response to one fan’s interest in Workman’s opinion on the attention presidential candidates Nixon and Kennedy were giving civil rights in 1960, Workman replied, “[m]y chief concern over that situation lies in the obvious fact that it is being used as a device to undermine the

101 Robert Patterson to Workman, February 18, 1960, box 25, Workman Papers.

federal system of government, ultimately vesting all power in the central government. I abhor centralism."\textsuperscript{103} Workman’s strong dislike of centralism in 1960 was a stark departure from his preference twenty-five years earlier for a strong central government that would exercise authority over the states.\textsuperscript{104}

While some of his ideas had changed with age, Workman’s ambition for politics continued to linger. By 1961 Workman had syndicated columns running in newspapers in both Carolinas, his monthly reports for SERS reached a national audience, and \textit{The Case for the South} had undergone three printings. With his reputation reaching new heights, the time was right to make a run at political office. Workman’s run for United States senator in 1962 marked an important turning point for the reporter and politics in his home state.

In September 1961 political strategists around Columbia began considering Workman’s viability as a political candidate. Significantly, the group interested in Workman as a politician was the Richland County Republican Committee. Although the GOP in South Carolina was not unheard of, the party was largely dormant in the state after Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{105} Nonetheless, as the national Democratic Party continually embraced policies that southerners perceived as violating states’ sovereignty in the post-New Deal era—especially those policies that interfered with the South’s racial caste system—many in the region grew uneasy with their yellow-dog status. By 1960 in southern states including South Carolina, growing numbers of southerners began

\textsuperscript{103} Workman to Jesse Roberts, August 14, 1960, box 25, Workman Papers.


\textsuperscript{105} For a history of South Carolina politics, see V. O. Key, Jr., \textit{Southern Politics in State and Nation} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 130-55.
considering the party of Lincoln as an alternative to the Democratic Party from which they felt increasingly alienated.\textsuperscript{106}

In 1961 South Carolinians elected the first Republican to the state’s General Assembly since Reconstruction. A friend of Workman’s writing from New York shortly after this watershed election expressed his hope that the two-party system would soon blossom in South Carolina. “If you will pardon the analogy,” Workman’s friend wrote about the newly elected GOP representative, “he actually is to the two-party system what Jackie Robinson was to integration in major league baseball.”\textsuperscript{107}

South Carolina Republicans, hoping to capitalize on their recent success at the state level, turned to William Workman to carry their banner in the 1962 race against the Democrat Olin D. Johnston. In December 1961 Workman announced that he would pursue the Republican nomination for senator. While he would continue to write for SERS and his syndicated column on regional and national affairs, Workman officially ended his career as a South Carolina reporter, saying “it would not be ethical for me to be both a candidate and reporter at the same time.”\textsuperscript{108}

While Workman was extremely well known throughout the state and had impeccable conservative credentials, he faced an almost impossible task in running against Olin Johnston in 1962. Johnston was seeking his fourth term as South Carolina


\textsuperscript{107} Earl Mazo to Workman, January 8, 1962, box 2, Workman Papers.

senator and had previously served two terms as governor; even Workman was not overly optimistic about his chances of unseating the incumbent. Nevertheless, Workman felt it necessary to challenge Johnston and replace the long-time senator with a “conservative South Carolinian who, under the Republican banner, would give greater support to the preservation of constitutional government.”  

Workman received help in his campaign against Johnston from Arizona senator and rising Republican star, Barry Goldwater. Goldwater sent Workman material on Johnston’s voting record to use against his Democratic opponent during the campaign and visited South Carolina to keynote the state Republican convention. “People up here are agog about the successful Republican Convention in South Carolina,” the future GOP presidential candidate wrote to Workman upon returning to Washington. “It is impossible for them to believe we have advanced that far in the deep South.”

Workman traveled the state throughout the summer of 1962 justifying his candidacy as a Republican by hammering away at the Democratic Party. In one of his favorite lines, Workman instructed his audiences to “take the question, ‘When has the Republican Party ever done anything for the South?’ and change it around a bit to read: ‘When has the South ever done anything for the Republican Party?’” The South had been an unflagging supporter of the Democratic Party “through thick and thin, through good

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110 Barry Goldwater to Workman, April 25, 1962, box 4, Workman Papers.
111 Barry Goldwater to Workman, March 21, 1962, box 4, Workman Papers.
times and bad, in sickness and in health,” Workman told his crowds, and the national party rewarded the region’s faithfulness by trampling states’ rights.112

In the fall of 1962 the Kennedy administration gave Workman more campaign grist by ordering federal marshals to enforce James Meredith’s enrollment as the first African American at the University of Mississippi and then deploying troops to disperse the rioting crowd which had gathered to prevent Meredith’s matriculation.113 At a Workman rally days after the riot at Ole Miss, the candidate began his speech by thanking the band for its rousing rendition of “Dixie,” saying “I just hope that that song could be heard all the way from Oxford, Mississippi, to Washington, D.C.,” before using the Meredith situation as a launching point of his attack on the loss of state sovereignty to the federal government.114

For all his talk of states’ rights, Workman rarely mentioned segregation explicitly on the campaign trail and when he did it was to note that he was not using it as an issue. “I have no intention of making...the question of racial integration or segregation an issue in this campaign. And I say that for this reason – my own position in these matters and in related fields is perfectly clear, as shown in my many years of writing in newspapers and in magazines, and more particularly, in this book of mine, The Case for the South,” Workman told his supporters. “I could not withdraw from this position if I would


113 For a brief account of Meredith’s enrollment, see John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 138-42.

withdraw—and I have absolutely no intention of doing so.” As both candidates were avowed segregationists, Workman was content to let this issue be a subtext to his states’ right rhetoric.

Waging his campaign against considerable odds, Workman looked to be in good position as election day drew near. Four days before South Carolinians headed to the polls, Workman received a letter from his old friend Red Hitt. Hitt wrote Workman that his father could was too frail from cancer to leave the house and regretted that he was not able to vote for Workman. “I remember as a young boy that Dad said to me he would never, no never, vote for a Republican,” Hitt wrote. “Yet today he is staring at his most critical crossroads and he remembered you and your cause.” On election day, thousands of life-long Democrats like Hitt’s father entered polling booths and voted for a Republican for the first time in their lives.

When their votes were counted, Workman had fallen short of recognizing his dream of holding public office. Yet the newspaper reporter turned politician captured 44 percent of the vote and sent a strong signal that the days of the Solid Democratic South were waning. In his concession speech Workman declared that his campaign demonstrated “to the conservatives of our state that they can find a political home in the Republican Party.” At least a few political commentators who wrote Workman after the election had designs on how South Carolina’s electorate might more effectively be

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116 Robert Hitt to Workman, November 2, 1962, box 2, Workman Papers.

117 “Memo for Trunk Line from W D. Workman, Jr.,” undated, box 5, Workman Papers.
nudged into the Republican column in future elections. A strategist from the consulting firm that had helped with his campaign offered Workman this advice from hindsight:

"While I know it might not be the gentlemanly thing to do to keep the race question in the forefront, it is necessary, sometimes to fight fire with fire. You should have campaigned openly against the NAACP, in every one of your speeches. You could have done this, while, at the same time, disavowing any race hatred and claiming to be a friend to the colored people, the same as any other average white South Carolinian."

A lawyer from Laurens, South Carolina, was more explicit with his thoughts on race and Republicans:

All of us were raised under the shadow of the black man, a fact that still colors our thinking, and our forefathers were smart enough to realize this and take advantage of it. Today this weapon has been placed in Republican hands in South Carolina and I know will work just as well as it ever did. It must be subtly and carefully used but spreads like wildfire once it is introduced. In casual conversations about the election I mentioned the negro and democratic vote as one, and I have seen some of my listeners wince when this is mentioned.

Six years before a Nixon strategist coined the term, the idea of a "Southern Strategy" was already taking shape in the minds of South Carolina Republicans. To his credit, Workman left proving the strategy's effectiveness to subsequent politicians.

Having come up short in his bid for senator, Workman returned to the world of newspapers, taking a position as an assistant editor of The State in Columbia, South Carolina, the state's largest newspaper. Though he maintained a relationship with

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118 Jesse Orvin to Workman, November 21, 1962, box 5, Workman Papers.


SERS—he eventually replaced his former boss Tom Waring on the board of directors—Workman resigned his correspondent position during his campaign in 1962. His duties as a newspaper editor prevented him from performing the reporting duties on which his reputation had risen. Although Workman’s post-1962 career slowed down, he remained a voice for conservative South Carolinians through The State’s editorial page for the next seventeen years until his retirement in 1979. Workman suffered from Parkinson’s disease later in life and eventually succumbed to the disease, passing away in 1990.

Workman’s career as a journalist was inextricably linked with the Brown v. Board ruling. Indeed, his roles as defender of the South’s right to racial segregation as well as his reporting with SERS are unimaginable without that 1954 decision. In the same year that the Supreme Court handed down the decision that helped shape Workman’s professional pursuits, a group of Methodists in Columbia, South Carolina, were laying the groundwork for a new church that would have a profound impact on Workman’s personal life.

In the spring of 1954 two couples living on the east side of Columbia, South Carolina, met for a game of bridge. All four of these neighbors were members of the same church, Washington Street Methodist in downtown Columbia. Like other members of Washington Street Methodist living on the Columbia’s east side in the early 1950s, they enjoyed their church but were not nearly as fond of the distance they had to travel to attend, especially considering the multiple activities their children were involved in at the church throughout the week. As the card game continued, the conversation turned to the possibly of planting a new Methodist church on the east side of the city. The idea was appealing. After all, Columbia’s east side was rapidly expanding in the mid 1950s and
four other Washington Street families already lived in that part of town and might be interested in attending a church closer to home. In the weeks after their evening of cards, the original two couples discussed the idea of a convenient east-side church with the other four Washington Street families. The group decided to canvass the neighborhood to gauge their neighbors’ potential interest in such an endeavor.\footnote{122}

Working in couples, twelve east-side residents of the Washington Street Methodist Church knocked on doors in the area around Trenholm Road in the summer of 1954 and eventually found fifty other people who expressed a desire to see a Methodist church established in their community. The church had its first official meeting September 13, 1954, at which time the district superintendent appointed J. Claude Evans as the temporary pastor of the new church.\footnote{123}

Ironically, Evans had previously been an assistant minister at Washington Street Methodist Church. In 1942 the young minister preached a sermon entitled “This Conflict of Race,” that unsettled both the congregation and the radio audience that was listening to the sermon broadcast across town. Church leaders were so upset with Evans’s sermon—some went so far as to say he had “desecrated” the pulpit—that they voted 87-3 to prohibit him from preaching in the church again.\footnote{124} In 1954 Claude Evans worked as the editor of the \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate}, which was published in Columbia. If any of the Washington Street Methodist Church transplants were bothered with Evans’s

\footnote{122} “History of Trenholm Road United Methodist Church,” undated document in the Trenholm Road United Methodist Church (TRUMC) Archives, Columbia, South Carolina.

\footnote{123} \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate} (April 12, 1956), 9.

appointment as the interim minister of the new plant, their disgruntlement did not last long. By November 1954 Evans was back to editing the denominational journal full-time and the church received its first permanent pastor.\textsuperscript{125}

Although the church had a minister, it did not yet have a name, and a committee was formed to explore some options. After considering such possibilities as St. Timothy, St. Andrew, and Whitefield Methodist Church, the congregation voted to eschew these giants of the Christian faith and instead chose to name the church Trenholm Road Methodist after the street on which the building sat.\textsuperscript{126} The new church grew quickly. By September 1955, only a year after its first meeting, the membership had grown to 226. Seventh months later that number swelled to 302 representing over 116 Columbia families.\textsuperscript{127} In August 1958 membership topped 570 and the church broke ground on a new 400 seat chapel to complement the educational building constructed the previous year.\textsuperscript{128} By 1970 Trenholm Road United Methodist Church had become one of the best known churches in the state with “a congregation of 1,050 members, a staff of eight persons [and] a varied ministry to the city, state, and world.”\textsuperscript{129}

William Workman and his wife Tommy were among those founding members of Trenholm Road Methodist Church in 1954 and were instrumental in getting the church

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate} (April 12 1956), 9.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Gabriel’s Trumpet}, unpublished church newsletter found in TRUMC Archives (November 28, 1954).

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate} (April 12, 1956), 9; “Church Membership Folder,” TRUMC Archives.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate} (August 18, 1958).

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Columbia State} (February 2, 1970).
plant off the ground. The Workmans participated in the original door-to-door survey of Columbia’s east side to determine if the area could sustain a new Methodist church plant. The *News and Courier* reporter chaired the committee that settled on Trenholm Road for church’s name. Workman served on Trenholm Road’s inaugural education committee in 1955, a position in which he helped select Sunday School curriculum and train the teachers.\(^\text{130}\)

As the church grew, so too did Workman’s involvement in it. Workman wrote publicity pieces for the church to run in the local newspaper and helped teach the young adults Sunday school class.\(^\text{131}\) The SERS correspondent headed Trenholm Road Methodist’s building drive and mailed out pledge cards on behalf of the treasurer for the church’s annual budget.\(^\text{132}\) Workman was even selected one year to give the sermon on lay Sunday and used the 100\(^{\text{th}}\) Psalm for his text.\(^\text{133}\) Having proved himself a devoted member and able leader in his local church, statewide Methodist organizations also tapped Workman for his services. Beginning in 1960, Workman joined the advisory board for the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* and was selected several times to be a delegate to both the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference and the General Conference of the Methodist church in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^\text{134}\) Despite Workman’s persistent unease with what he perceived to be a liberal drift within the Methodist denomination, he

\(^{130}\)“History of Trenholm Road United Methodist Church;” “1955 Trenholm Road Methodist Church Plan Book,” TRUMC Archives.

\(^{131}\) Workman to Melvin K. Medlock, June 3, 1957, box 23, Workman Papers.

\(^{132}\) Workman to Edward R. Barnes, January 2, 1956, box 23, Workman Papers.

\(^{133}\) “100\(^{\text{th}}\) Psalm,” undated, box 26, Workman Papers.

\(^{134}\) A. McKay Brabham to Workman, May 11, 1960, box 22, Workman Papers.
continued to be a faithful member of Trenholm Road Methodist and remained active in
the church for as long as his Parkinson’s disease allowed.

In the person of Bill Workman, then, devotion to the church coexisted seamlessly
with strong support of racial segregation. Workman edited publication material for the
Citizens’ Council while at the same time acting as an advisor to the *South Carolina
Methodist Advocate*. His door-to-door visits with neighbors to raise support for a new
church in Columbia came between speeches in which he advocated maintaining separate
schools for African Americans in the state. While he taught Sunday School at Trenholm
Road Methodist, he concurrently wrote a book that justified Jim Crow on the basis that
African Americans on the whole were inferior to whites morally, hygienically, and
educationally. And when Workman sought public office as an ardent defender of states’
rights, he already occupied a seat on Trenholm Road Methodist church’s official board.
As a practitioner of conservative religion and defender of segregation, Workman was
similar to the vast majority of white southerners of his generation whose religious faith
was perfectly compatible with their segregationist belief.

As African Americans pursued racial equality in South Carolina, many white
Christians demonstrated that their religious beliefs were more than just compatible with
segregation; their beliefs, in fact, justified segregation. If Workman was in this camp, he
never articulated it. He was no doubt aware of the arguments many white southerners
made in the 1950s that the Bible ordained segregation—his personal papers contain
numerous pamphlets and sermons arguing this position—but there is no record of
Workman promoting such ideas publically or privately. Workman’s son recalled later
that he could think of “no instance in which he (Workman) used religious comments as
any sort of justification for segregation.” Workman’s reticence to argue for segregation on religious grounds likely came from the reporter’s insight that both advocates and enemies of segregation thought their position was religiously justified. Responding to a Dave Garroway question about discord in the South during his “Today” show appearance, Workman told the NBC host “it is not the system—whether it be integration or segregation—which brings about discord, but the application of the system. And Christianity can be made to work in either application, under segregation or integration.” It is quite possible that Workman never bothered to promote a religious defense of segregation because he saw the fruitlessness of trying to convince someone that God really was not on their side. “The integrationists have succeeded, through their long years of persistent and persuasive propaganda, in dragging the school segregation question into the realm of morality,” Workman wrote in The Case for the South. “In doing so, they may have achieved a major purpose and a major advantage, but they have simultaneously laid the basis for opposition, which, by invoking morality on its side, becomes all the more resistant to change.” Although Workman was unwilling to say that segregation was divinely mandated, he also had no tolerance for the argument that Christianity demanded racial integration and harmony. On this point, Workman was an outspoken and consistent critic. While he chose to remain silent on a religious defense of segregation, Workman never missed an opportunity to argue against religious calls for integration.


137 Workman, The Case for the South, 121.
Perhaps because of his own religious commitments, Workman’s monthly reports for SERS regularly detailed the way South Carolina churches acted to maintain racial segregation. Even after he retired his reporter’s notebook, Workman continued to editorialize against aspects of religion and integration in his home state. And in the late 1960s Workman took part in a movement of conservative Methodists in South Carolina to block the denomination’s insistence on racial inclusiveness in the church. Because of these instances of reporting on, editorializing about, and participating in the efforts of religious conservatives to maintain segregation in their schools and churches, William D. Workman, oftentimes as a reporter, sometimes as a participant, is a central figure in the story to follow. He accurately reflected the symbiotic relationship between conservative Christianity and support of the racial status quo in South Carolina. As such, his public and private writings illuminate the controversy in that state over segregation and will form a major source base for the chapters to come.
CHAPTER TWO

DISSENT IN THE Pews

THE LIMITS OF DENOMINATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR SOUTHERN DESSEGREGATION

If, as C. Vann Woodward’s famous line goes, the Civil Rights era constituted a “Second Reconstruction” for the South, the 1954 Brown v. Topeka Board of Education was a “Second Appomattox.” For just as Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox sounded the death knell for legalized slavery, so did the Brown decision signal Jim Crow’s last rites. And in the same way that religious white southerners in the nineteenth-century had to grapple with the abolishment of an institution they perceived to be ordained by God, so too were their twentieth-century descendants left to figure out a response to the ruling that the racial apartheid they believed was divinely mandated was suddenly unconstitutional.

A key difference between 1865 and 1954, however, was the role church denominational leadership played for white southerners in the years leading up to and following these watershed dates in southern society. The historiography of proslavery theologians who vigorously defended slavery as scripturally sanctioned in the years prior to 1865 is rich and continually growing.¹ In addition to this abundant literature on the

antebellum period, historians in recent years have taken up the task of demonstrating how religious leaders in the South reforged their proslavery ideas for a society that had seen its "peculiar institution" abolished. Among this new scholarship, one of the most arresting studies of the post-bellum period suggests that it was precisely religious leaders' retooling of proslavery ideology for a post-slavery society that paved the way for state-sanctioned racial segregation throughout the South in the first six decades of the twentieth century.²

If southern denominational leadership made straight the path of Jim Crow in the 1800s, the same cannot be said of church leaders in the waning days of legalized segregation in the following century. By the midpoint of the twentieth century it seems the majority of religious leaders in the South had come to believe racial segregation was wrong. In fact, in the years leading up to the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown decision, every major church denomination with a significant presence in the South issued statements that either supported racial amity or condemned racial segregation. In 1949, for instance, the General Assembly of the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) urged local churches in the region not to give up their duty to work for improved race relations to "secular, non-Protestant, and non-Southern Christian forces," while at the same time

warning Presbyterian clerics not to be “guilty of supporting by their silence an unchristian social order” in the South.³

Similarly, the Southern Baptist Convention in 1947 adopted a race relations platform that included pledges to “teach our children that prejudice is un-Christian” and to “protest against injustice and indignities against Negroes, as we do in the case of people of our own race, whenever and wherever we meet them.”⁴ Likewise, the Methodists—who thirteen years earlier had repaired their antebellum split into northern and southern camps over the issue of slavery—in 1952 declared that there was “no place for racial discrimination or racial segregation” in their churches.⁵ When the Supreme Court in 1954 reversed the nearly sixty-year-old precedent of “separate but equal” and ruled that racial segregation was unconstitutional, all three of these southern denominations came out in support of the ruling.

Historian Kenneth Bailey has asserted that pre-Brown calls for racial equality and subsequent support of the Supreme Court’s decision by the major Protestant denominations in the South during the late 1940s and early 1950s were the result of an array of forces at work in American society during this period including a rise in mass education and an increased national emphasis on freedom and equality in the wake of the United States’ involvement in WWII.⁶ Whatever their cause, were one to survey the religious pronouncements and attitudes at the denominational level in 1954, it would be


⁴ Quoted in Ibid., 140.

⁵ Quoted in Ibid., 138.

⁶ Ibid., 136-37.
easy to conclude that a revolution in southern society was on the horizon, especially considering the priority white southerners have historically assigned their religious beliefs. After centuries of interactions poisoned by racist beliefs and assumptions, race relations in the South appeared at long last to be the mend. “The pulpit is ever this earth’s foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world,” Herman Melville wrote in the nineteenth century.7 Taking Melville and church pronouncements at their word, it could reasonably be assumed that at this moment, with the country poised to embody the egalitarian ideals it had just fought a war to secure, southern white denominational leaders had seized the opportunity and were shepherding their flocks down the path of racial righteousness.

Studying not just what denominational leadership said, however, but also how local churches and individual church members reacted to the egalitarian rhetoric of church bodies and ministers in the mid-1950s, presents a more accurate version of how religious white southerners felt about Jim Crow’s demise. Put simply, by the mid-twentieth century in the American South, Melville’s poetic musings about clerical leadership did not aptly describe white Protestant churches on the issue of race relations. As this chapter will show, rather than the pulpit leading the pews during this period, a more fitting description would be the pulpit acquiescing to the pews on the issue of race.

To a certain extent, dissonance between clergy and laity has always existed in American churches. But in the years following the Brown decision, the incongruity between what church leaders said and what local church members believed reached new levels. The collision between pulpit and pew over the issue of racial integration in the

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second half of the 1950s foreshadowed the role that the majority of southern white churches would play in the resistance to civil rights initiatives for the next two decades. Most clerical attempts to challenge the entrenched racist beliefs of the laity during this period were met primarily with resistance if not outright rebellion by southern congregations. South Carolina is a useful laboratory for examining grass-roots-level response to denominational leaderships' calls for racial reform because all the major Protestant bodies within its border experienced heightened tensions over the issue in the mid-1950s. These tensions existed on various levels in South Carolina: between state denominational bodies and their respective national counterparts; between the state denominational bodies and local South Carolina churches; and, finally, between ministers and parishioners within particular congregations.

Historian Michael J. Klarman has argued that rather than improving race relations or providing for substantive desegregation, the actual immediate effect of the 1954 Brown decision was instead a widespread southern white backlash to the court ruling. Klarman views the result of this backlash as effectively ending toleration for racial moderation in the South for several years. The move toward ending state-sanctioned racial discrimination that had gathered momentum in the early years of the Cold War, Klarman persuasively asserts, suffered a major setback in the post-1954 period as southern politics veered hard to the right in reaction to Brown. Klarman's backlash thesis holds for religious white South Carolinians. After the Brown decision, denominational calls for racial brotherhood and egalitarianism—which, prior to 1954 had received little comment from local churches—became anathema. This change did not

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happen overnight. In the immediate wake of the *Brown* ruling in May 1954, for instance, South Carolina Governor James Byrnes received a letter from the president of the United Church Women in South Carolina, which read: “In view of the Supreme Court’s decision banning segregation...I wish you and the public might know the attitude of United Church Women. Both on a national level and statewide, we have always maintained that enforced segregation had no place in any Christian activity and constituted a real threat to our Democracy....”

As the 1950s progressed and the backlash to *Brown* grew, sentiments like the ones endorsed by the United Church Women were rarely publically expressed in South Carolina as the majority of local white churches and their members lined up on the side of defending the racial status quo.

Examining South Carolina Baptists is useful in demonstrating the backlash that occurred on the topic of racial desegregation within white churches in the 1950s. Meeting in St. Louis just weeks after the Supreme Court had declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional, the national Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution that recognized the ruling as being in “harmony with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens, and with the Christian principles of equal justice and love for all men.” The resolution further reiterated denominational support for the country’s public schools, praised the Court for suspending the implementation of its ruling until additional hearings could be had, and urged Baptists and all Christians “to conduct themselves in this period of adjustment in the spirit of Christ [and] pray that God may guide us in our thinking and our attitudes to the end that we may help and not hinder

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9 Quoted in *Southern School News* (September 1954), 12.
the progress of justice and brotherly love..."10 In practical terms, however, there was an unbridgeable chasm between the rhetorical idealism sounded by the above resolution and the lived experience of the majority of Southern Baptist parishioners. At the state level, the dichotomy between the resolution and the belief of the average South Carolina Baptists became slowly apparent.

At their November 1954 state convention, for instance, South Carolina Southern Baptist messengers meeting in Greenville asked church members to "earnestly and prayerfully" seek God’s will on the issue of school desegregation. While the state convention did not hint one way or another as to what it felt that will might be, the messengers did adopt a report from the convention’s Social Service Commission that "urged an attitude of friendliness in race relations, (and) a general strengthening of public schools."11 In addressing the matter of strengthening the state’s public schools, the messengers also resolved that equal and adequate educational experiences had historically not been provided in South Carolina, a politically safe position since the majority of state voters had felt strongly enough about this issue to approve a tax-increase redressing such inequalities four years earlier.12

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12 Howard H Quint, *Profile in Black and White: A Frank Portrait of South Carolina* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958), 60. The tax increase to reduce the disparity between black and white public schools was a tactic endorsed by Governor James Byrnes and other state leaders in the years that the *Brown* case was making its way to the Supreme Court. It was obvious even to segregationists that black schools in South Carolina in the 1950 were nowhere near the standard of white schools. The 1950 tax increase was an attempt to equalize black and white school facilities in order to bring the
It was one thing, however, to adopt a resolution calling for racial harmony and egalitarianism at a national or state convention, and quite another to implement such ideas at the local level. Church laity was usually overwhelmingly against the idea of racial integration and found denominational sanctioning of such radical change to be befuddling. As the 1950s progressed, South Carolina Baptists became increasingly less tolerant of resolutions and statements emanating from the national convention that endorsed racial integration. When the Associated Press reported in May 1957 that the Southern Baptist Convention meeting that year in Chicago had adopted a statement that called for Baptists to stop resisting integration, South Carolina Baptist laymen and ministers who had not been in Chicago for the convention denounced the denomination. In response to the alleged actions of the SBC in Chicago, the First Baptist Church of Denmark, South Carolina, voted unanimously at their quarterly church meeting “to go on record as opposing integration in any form” in their church.”

When South Carolina messengers who had been present in Chicago clarified that the AP story had misrepresented the resolution in question and that the SBC had not adopted such a statement, the controversy was quelled, but not before South Carolina Baptists had demonstrated that they were no longer willing to remain silent if the national

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14 *Baptist Courier* (October 31, 1957), 14.
denomination continued to pass resolutions that ran contrary to their beliefs on matters of race.¹⁵

Tensions between South Carolina Baptists and the SBC grew in September 1957, when the Baptist seminary at Wake Forest in North Carolina agreed to allow qualified African American students to enroll at the school. For at least two Baptist churches in the Palmetto state, the decision by Wake Forest combined with the SBC’s distribution of printed material that was more relaxed on the issue of racial segregation than the churches deemed appropriate, meant that it was time to speak out. Both the Springfield Baptist Church in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and the Black Creek Baptist Church in Darlington County adopted resolutions that complained of the SBC’s actions as being not “in accordance with the beliefs and desires of the churches of the Southland.”¹⁶ The Springfield congregation professed their belief “that the welfare of both races will be best served by having separate public schools, churches and Church Institutions,” and they “[did] not intend to continue to support integrated Schools or Institutions.” Furthermore, the Orangeburg congregation suggested that if the Southern Baptist Convention continued to pursue and endorse racial integration, the day might soon be coming when it would be necessary “to dissolve the so-called Southern Baptist Convention and reorganize, according to regions, different associations with Churches that share like beliefs and convictions.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Southern School News (July 1957), 4.

¹⁶ Southern School News (September 1957), 2.

¹⁷ Baptist Courier (September 12, 1957), 23.
In the fall of 1957 Baptist churches throughout South Carolina soon followed Springfield Baptist’s lead, adopting resolutions denouncing the Southern Baptist Convention’s pro-integrationist stance and suggesting the day might fast be approaching when it would be necessary to leave the convention altogether.\textsuperscript{18} In October the Orangeburg Baptist Association—a voluntary organization of thirty-three Baptist churches in that city—adopted a resolution protesting integration in Baptist seminaries and colleges and alluded to “further action in protest thereof” if pro-integrationist practices continued.\textsuperscript{19} The following month, the Santee Baptist Association followed suit, protesting the Southern Baptist Convention’s dissemination of “material encouraging integration of the races” and emphasizing that “the solution to the race problem is not to be found in... Supreme Court decisions.”\textsuperscript{20}

In December 1957 Antioch Baptist Church in Camden, South Carolina, joined the growing tide of churches in the state to register their displeasure with the national denomination in the form of a resolution opposing the integrationist position the Southern Baptist Convention seemed to be endorsing. But the Antioch church took an additional step and formally requested SBC president Brook Hays to formally state his personal position on the issue of racial segregation.\textsuperscript{21} Although there is no record of Hays responding to this request, the move by Antioch Baptist Church requesting Hays to make known his feelings on integration signals that the racial controversy that enveloped

\textsuperscript{18} Southern School News (October 1957), 13.

\textsuperscript{19} Quoted in Southern School News (November 1957), 15

\textsuperscript{20} Quoted in Southern School News (December 1957), 7.

\textsuperscript{21} Southern School News (January 1958), 12.
Baptist churches in the South was not limited to disputes between churches and denominational bodies. In the 1950s ministers were expected to mirror their congregation’s views on desegregation or face potential consequences.

Southern ministers who were sympathetic to any degree of racial egalitarianism were often forced to avoid publicizing such views for fear of retribution from their parishioners. The vulnerability of Baptist pastors was particularly acute because of the congregational polity in Baptist churches, which allowed the local congregation to replace its minister whenever it so desired. Charles Marsh, writing on the subject, captured the reality of Baptist ministers’ job security this way:

If you are a Baptist preacher and want to be successful, you better size up the people quickly. If they want aqua carpet instead of the standard maroon, you’ll take a sudden liking for the aqua. If they root for Ole Miss over the Crimson Tide, you’ll not say too much about your fondness for the Bear. If they want you to keep quiet about Negroes, you’ll put a lid on your uneasy conscience. No bishop or presbyter will come to your defense. The local church is free to do its own thing, governed by the contingencies of race, class, and custom, by whatever idiosyncrasies prevail.22

A 1955 incident that occurred in South Carolina illustrates the ramifications for Baptist divines who found themselves on the opposite side of racial questions than their congregation and is instructive for understanding how perilous holding unorthodox racial beliefs could be for southern ministers during the period following the Brown decision. In October of that year, a Batesburg, South Carolina, minister named George Jackson Stafford was forced to resign his pulpit because of his “broad” views on desegregation and the fact that he was in agreement with those desiring racial integration in the state’s

public schools. Stafford was by all accounts a popular minister among the majority of congregation. During his tenure he had successfully grown the church membership roles as well as its budget. When his resignation was finally proffered after a drawn-out battle with the board of deacons, only a small minority of the church members voted to accept it; the others simply refrained from voting, a move Stafford no doubt appreciated, but nonetheless did nothing to save his job. Stafford was not overtly vocal about his support for desegregation. He apparently preached no sermons on the subject and was not directly linked to the civil rights movement in the state. What led to the “informal dispute” with some in his congregation and ultimately cost Stafford his pulpit was the vote he cast in favor of the resolution supporting the Brown decision as a messenger to the 1954 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis. Stafford later asserted that his dismissal had resulted from “several highly placed members of the Batesburg church playing politics,” and on this charge he was most likely correct. The head of the deacons who led the movement to oust Stafford, as it were, was Federal Judge George Bell Timmerman, whose son (and fellow church member) George Timmerman Jr. had been elected governor the year prior to Stafford’s resignation. The younger Timmerman made his gubernatorial run on an anti-integration platform and could therefore hardly be expected to support a minister whose position on such a volatile issue was diametrically opposed both to his own and those of the majority of South Carolinians who had voted for him.


24 Newman, Getting Right with God, 43.

25 “Batesburg Minister Resigns in Dispute;” Quint, Profile in Black and White, 60.
After Stafford was forced to abdicate his pulpit, the banished minister shared his views concerning race relations in a letter to William Workman. “My religious conviction on the subject of race relations is that a Christian should treat others as he would have them treat him, regardless of race,” Stafford wrote. “In regard to the United States Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954 declaring legally enforced segregation in the public schools unconstitutional,” the minister continued, “I believe that the court decision is in keeping with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens, and also is in harmony with the Christian principle of equal justice and love for all men.”

Stafford, however, had never publically expressed these views apart from the single vote he cast as a Baptist messenger. As the case of George Jackson Stafford demonstrates, even privately held sentiments that deviated from the segregationist line could result in a minister’s dismissal.

Disputes over racial integration were not reserved to South Carolina Baptists and similar “low churches” in the state in the mid 1950s. Even the state’s “high church” denominations like the Episcopalians and Lutherans rallied to the segregationist cause after the Brown decision. In April 1956 the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina took issue with the national church’s declaration that racial segregation was “un-Christian” and its suggestion that Episcopalians should make a conscious effort to integrate their churches. Adopting a resolution at their annual convention in Charleston that month, the South Carolina diocese responded to the national church’s stance, saying “there is nothing morally wrong in a voluntary recognition of racial differences and that

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voluntary alignments can be both natural and Christian... It seems unnatural and unwise to insist upon bringing those of another race into a specific congregation just because they are of a different race.” 27 The argument advanced by South Carolina Episcopalians in 1956 that voluntary racial segregation was perfectly acceptable for church bodies had been at the center of a debate the previous year regarding racial integration in South Carolina Lutheran churches.

In late 1955 Charles P. Carroll, a Lutheran minister serving as an administrative assistant of the National Lutheran Council, was the guest preacher at an evening service at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Charleston. In the course of his remarks that autumn night, Carroll suggested “it is time we realized the church should be opened to all people.” An astute listener sitting in the pews for Carroll’s remarks pressed the minister after the service about the implications of his message. Might opening the church to all people lead to racial integration in the church, this listener wanted to know? Carroll was quick with his reply: “Oh yes. Let there be no doubt of that.” Carroll’s inquirer that evening was a reporter for the Charleston News and Courier, and, unsurprisingly given the newspaper’s position as Jim Crow’s staunch defender, Charles Carroll’s advocacy of racial integration in Lutheran churches was the focus of the story the News and Courier ran about the service the following day. 28

Carroll’s call for open churches published in one of South Carolina’s largest newspapers drew a quick repudiation from lay Lutherans in the state. Margaret Lilienthal from Windermere, South Carolina wrote a letter to the editor of the News and Courier

27 Quoted in Southern School News (May 1956), 14.

expressing her dissatisfaction with Charles Carroll’s remarks. Lilienthal claimed that her lifelong adherence to the Bible and its teachings left her unable to condone mixing the races. “I think it is time for all church members, regardless of denomination to let their ministers know where they stand on the mixing of races,” Lilienthal remarked.29 Recognizing the divisiveness of clergy and laity disagreements over issues of racial integration, four members of the committee that arranged to bring Carroll to Charleston—themselves all ministers—moved quickly to diffuse the situation. Their statement, which ran on the front page of the News and Courier in bold letters, stated that Charles Carroll’s comments on integration in the Lutheran church “DOES NOT REFLECT THE THINKING OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AS A WHOLE.” The ministers went on to reprimand the paper for its coverage of the incident, saying that while the News and Courier correctly recorded Carroll’s remarks about integration, they did not believe the “purpose and spirit of the service were accurately conveyed” in the paper’s reporting of the event.30 Such was the zeitgeist in the South during this era, however. Any departure from the accepted norms on the segregation question, particularly from southern ministers, was met quickly with denunciation of the unorthodox views and a call to the laity to unite in the face of their ministers’ apparent apostasy.

For its part, the News and Courier breathed a sigh of relief editorially in the aftermath of the Carroll affair. “Many church people, both Lutherans and members of other faiths, will find comfort and relief in a clarifying statement...published on the front

30 “Lutheran Pastors Issue Statement.”
page of yesterday’s *News and Courier,*” the newspaper postulated. “While public worship of God is open to everyone without restriction, the organization and association of church congregations in many ways is distinctly a private affair. The insistence on forcing incompatible elements to mingle, it seems to us, is the reverse of Christian principle.”  

The newspaper’s take on freedom of worship was full of paradox, mirroring the dilemma at the heart of southern white evangelical culture in the mid 1950s. The *News and Courier* endorsed the socially accepted idea that freedom of worship was a foundational freedom in the country, but, as was customary with southern society at the time, narrowly defined what that freedom entailed. “While all Christians recognize one God and one Savior, they reserve the right and privilege to select those with whom they worship and those who are qualified to come to the communion table,” the *News and Courier* editor opined. Southern whites adamantly defended their rights in attending a segregated worship service but had a hard time recognizing the freedom of individuals to merely suggest worshiping in a mixed-race context.  

Redefining freedom of worship as freedom to enjoy segregated church services was a theme William Workman explored in *The Case for the South.* In the chapter he devoted to debunking the notion of an enlightened clergy trying desperately to cajole their obstinate parishioners into accepting racial integration, Workman employed freedom of association as a defense of the segregated status quo. Pointing out that southerners had already been made to provide equal educational facilities for people of all races, Workman bemoaned the fact that white Christians were now saddled with the

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32 Ibid.
guilt arising from a “pseudo-religion” that dogmatically declared “the will of God is inoperative among persons who, for reasons of peace of community and pride of identity, prefer the company of their own kind.”\textsuperscript{33} Workman’s use of the term “pseudo-religion” left little doubt as to his opinion of clerical initiatives to integrate southern society.

Frustration over racial issues was not limited to the laity. If the people in the pews were angered by some of their ministers trying to shepherd them into fields they did not want to go, integrationist ministers were equally agitated by their obdurate flocks. In early 1955 an example of this clerical frustration boiled over in an editorial written by a Methodist minister in the \textit{South Carolina Methodist Advocate}. The occasion for the editorial was the recent defeat of a plan of union between the southern and northern branches of the Presbyterian Church. According to the editorial, approximately 85 percent of southern Presbyterian ministers favored reunification, while a majority of the laity did not. It was ultimately the lack of the support from the latter group that derailed the planned merger.

Observers familiar with actions by the Presbyterian church in South Carolina were probably not too surprised by the merger’s failure. In 1954 a substantial rift developed between the state synod and the PCUS General Assembly after South Carolina Presbyterians had voiced their vigorous opposition to the General Assembly’s post-\textit{Brown} position that racial segregation ran counter to the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{34} Additionally, the state synod of South Carolina voted four months after the \textit{Brown} decision to maintain


strict segregation in all Presbyterian institutions in the state, viewing such action as being “in the best interests of harmonious relations between the white and Negro races in this section at this time.” These acts by the South Carolina synod were indicators of the divided mind of southern Presbyterianism. Local segregationist practices continued to trump denominational pronouncements toward racial equality. The fact that in 1955 the majority of southern PCUS laity did not favor uniting with northern Presbyterians who were even more adamant in their support for racial integration, therefore, would not have been too surprising for someone living in South Carolina with a knowledge of recent Presbyterian actions. Nonetheless, at least one South Carolina minister saw the outcome of the failed Presbyterian merger as indicative of a growing and troubling trend in churches throughout the country. “By and large Protestant laymen everywhere are lagging behind their ministers in their understanding of the Christian faith. This is true as regards biblical studies, race relations, modern theological trends, and in ecumenical understanding and experience,” the minister complained.

Clerical criticism of this nature was not something easily accepted by many lay South Carolinians. It certainly raised the ire of William Workman, who angrily composed a rebuttal to the editor of the *Methodist Advocate*. The problem with sentiments like the ones expressed in this particular editorial, Workman wrote to his denomination’s journal, was that they “pre-suppose a clerical wisdom and understanding which is denied us mere laymen. We are charged with ‘lagging behind’ if we do not subscribe to the ‘enlightened’ thinking of ministerial leaders. We are described as

35 Quoted in *Southern School News* (October 1954), 12.

'sinful’ if we do not accept the racial attitudes of our preceptors. We are told, in effect, that the poor, benighted layman is incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong UNLESS his views coincide with those of our ministerial mentors.”

The notion of clerical authority was especially troubling for southern Protestants like Workman who had knowledge of reformation history. In a 1963 response to a letter in the *Methodist Advocate* that had chastised the laity’s overt political conservatism, Workman again expounded on the idea that southern ministers had no special authority to dictate their parishioners’ social views. If the people of his church did not follow this minister “into the liberal pastures where he would lead—then that is his affair,” thought Workman. “[A]s a Protestant who subscribes to the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, I reject the notion that the ministry is either privileged or endowed with the authority to stand aloof and aloft as the official interpreters of God’s will on earth.”

Other lay South Carolinians were of the same mind as Bill Workman about the universality of the priesthood of believers, even if they could not articulate their beliefs in such theologically rich terms. After a local Presbyterian minister came out against racial segregation, a Presbyterian lay woman wrote to the *News and Courier* to voice her complaint. The minister in question “has been very forthright in expressing himself about segregation, and since he is a minister, many people have believed he represents the Presbyterian church in his pro-integration stand. I think it should be made clear that [this minister] represents himself only, and what I sincerely believe to be a very, very

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37 Draft letter from Workman to Editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*, undated, box 22, Workman Papers. It is not clear if Workman sent this letter.

38 Workman to Editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*, December 12, 1963, box 23, Workman Papers.
small minority of Presbyterians,” declared the Mt. Pleasant woman.\textsuperscript{39} Statements like these showed that when confronted with ideas that differed from their own, southern white laypeople were willing to disregard ministerial authority and retain their own interpretations of how to practice their faith.

The examples of the clergy/laity rifts that occurred in South Carolina churches as shown in examples taken from Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, did not occur in a cultural vacuum. Indeed, the growing disparity between local churches in South Carolina and their respective national denominational bodies in many ways paralleled the growing backlash to the \textit{Brown} decision that occurred throughout the state in the 1950s.

Over a twelve month period beginning in late 1954, backlash to the \textit{Brown} decision surged in South Carolina as white resistance groups organized in the majority-black lowcountry section of the state in order to fight the anticipated integration of the state’s schools. By November 1954 pro-segregation groups such as the States Rights League, The Grass Roots League, and the National Association for the Advancement of White People had formed in the rural eastern part of South Carolina. In addition to these groups, the powerful State Farm Bureau grew ever more vocal in its protest of \textit{Brown}, saying issues of segregating the races were matters of local, rather than federal, concern. These efforts at local organizing and grass-root movements would later prove to be the scaffolding for the massive resistance bulwark that was beginning to take shape in late 1954.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{39} “Presbyterian Replies,” \textit{Charleston News and Courier} (September 6, 1955).

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Southern School News} (November 1954), 14.
Constructing the framework for an ardent defense of segregation was by no means left solely to private citizens. The South Carolina legislature also began preemptive measures in 1955 that would allow the state to continue operating segregated schools should the forthcoming *Brown* implementation ruling force the integration of public schools.\(^{41}\) In April legislators passed a bill increasing the autonomy of local school boards in order to better position them in the fight to maintain segregated schools. Additionally the legislature repealed compulsory school attendance laws so parents who desired to hold their children out of mixed-race schools could do so with a clear conscience that they were breaking no laws.\(^{42}\) With citizens already forming resistance organizations and the legislature granting segregationist movements the imprimatur of the state, conditions were favorable for the introduction of Citizens’ Councils in South Carolina.

Citizens’ Councils had first formed in Mississippi a month after the *Brown* decision in 1954. The idea behind the Citizens’ Council movement was to organize local whites into groups that could thwart any attempts at school desegregation primarily by

\(^{41}\) Although their ruling in the 1954 *Brown* decision had unanimously declared segregated schools to be unconstitutional, the Supreme Court justices were divided on how the situation should be remedied. The court decided to postpone implementing their decision until they could hear arguments on how the desegregation process should occur in the South. These arguments were not heard until May 1955, providing segregationist-minded southerners with twelve full months to brood about possible best and worst case scenarios for their society. When *Brown II*, as the implementation ruling was commonly referred, was handed down in May 1955, it took much of the bite out of the original unanimous ruling from the year before by mandating that southern schools desegregate “with all deliberate speed” but putting no timeframe on when desegregation must be achieved. The *Brown II* ruling proved to be the best case scenario for segregationists as they were able to postpone any kind of desegregation in many southern states for the next decade. See Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 739-50.

\(^{42}\) *Southern School News* (November 1954), 14.
employing economic pressure to keep African Americans from pursuing this goal. If a black parent signed a petition requesting his child be transferred to an all-white school, for instance, the local Citizens’ Council would make this fact known publically. As this information circulated, the black parent might suddenly find his credit cut off at a local grocery store or have his mortgage called in by the bank. Because the Councils were often made up of prominent members of southern white society, they were able to exert pressure on anyone who attempted to violate the socially accepted racial mores of the day as whites had defined them.  

After demonstrating their effectiveness in preventing African Americans from challenging school desegregation in Mississippi, chapters of the Councils began to spring up in communities all across the South. The first Citizens’ Council in South Carolina organized in early August 1955, and the movement spread rapidly throughout the state within a month. For South Carolina whites uneasy about potential desegregation, the Citizens’ Councils with their tactics of economic intimidation to keep blacks in line proved reassuring. By October 1955 the Council movement had become so popular among white South Carolinians that they began forming at a rate of one per week for the next year. Discussing the Council movement’s promise, a former South Carolina state senator in 1956 said, “naturally the state will use every legal means to head off


destruction of constitutional rights, but in the final analysis, the Citizens’ Council movement stands between segregation and integration.”

By January 1957 the Association of Citizens’ Councils in South Carolina had grown to nearly sixty local chapters and initiated a statewide drive to increase that number. The Citizens’ Council movement’s growth in the state paralleled the intolerance South Carolina churches had for pronouncements coming from denominational leaders calling for more moderate race relations. In some instances, the Citizens’ Councils actually helped nurture potential rifts between the laity and clergy by sending out questionnaires to South Carolina ministers to measure their position on integration. These questionnaires included such questions as “Do you think it is a Christian attitude to integrate people against their will?” and “Do you think segregated schools are best for both races?” In explaining the reason for the questionnaires, J. A. Shuler, the chairman of the Charleston, South Carolina, Citizens’ Council said, “we are not trying to put pressure on any minister. We are only trying to get information that we may find the understanding to make a better community in which to live. We hope that each minister will cooperate in answering these questions that we might keep our Council on a Christian basis.”

Despite Shuler’s remarks that the Council did not wish to put pressure on any minister, given the movement’s widespread popularity among whites in South Carolina, any minister who went against the Citizens’ Councils’ purposes faced almost certain

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46 Southern School News (October 1956), 4.

47 Southern School News (February 1957), 11.

48 Quoted in Southern School News (July 1957), 4.
retaliation from church laity. This was a lesson two Methodist ministers learned in 1955, and their story reveals several important points about the laity-controlled balance of power in southern churches in the 1950s.

Like the rest of the national denominations, the Methodist Church supported the Brown ruling at an early date. Six months after the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision, the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church met in Chicago and issued a statement making explicit the Methodist Church’s official position on the ruling. “The declaration of the [Brown] decision was made in the magnificent home of the Supreme Court in Washington, but the ultimate success of the ruling will be determined in the hearts of the people of the nation,” the bishops intoned. “We accept this responsibility,” the bishops declared, “for one of the foundation stones of our faith is the belief that all men are brothers, equal in the sight of God. In that faith, we declare our support of the ruling of the Supreme Court.”49 Of course, unflinching support of this type for the Brown decision could hardly be expected at the state level. And, in fact, a month before the Methodist bishops met in Chicago and issued their statement in support of Brown, South Carolina delegates at their annual conference in Spartanburg had already served notice of their opposition to the “mandatory mixing of the races” as it was then assumed Brown would do.50 South Carolina Methodists, therefore, were already on record for supporting segregation and rejecting the position of church leaders who leaned toward integration in 1955 when they gathered for their annual conference meeting that year.

49 “Statement by the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church, Chicago, November 18-21, 1954,” quoted in Campbell and Pettigrew, Christians in Racial Crisis, 154.

50 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, Journal and Yearbook (1954), 158-60.
The 1955 annual conference meeting took place in Florence, South Carolina, in August, just as the Citizens’ Councils’ popularity was poised to explode. Late Saturday afternoon, the day before the conference meeting was to conclude, two young ministers brought a hastily written resolution before the assembled group of Methodists for its consideration. Concerned about Citizens’ Councils’ rising influence in their state, the Reverends A. McKay Brabham, Jr., and John V. Murray felt it was proper to take a stand against the movement’s use of economic pressure in maintaining segregation. Their resolution in part read as follows:

Whereas, it has been brought to our attention through the public press that various communities in our state are in the process of organizing groups commonly titled Citizens’ Councils... and whereas it is popularly supposed that these councils are being formed for the express purpose of exerting economic pressure upon a portion of our citizenry to prevent the exercise and development of their moral conscience and their civil rights according to the dictates of their conscience, now therefore be it RESOLVED, that we the members of the South Carolina Conference here assembled do hereby affirm our belief in the Sermon on the Mount as the basic expression of Christian philosophy of behaviour toward others and do further declare our belief that any action which seeks to strip a person of his means of livelihood in violation of his conscience is a contradiction of the basic teachings of our Lord and Master.51

It was a short statement—less than two hundred words in total—but in the ensuring weeks and months after its adoption, Brabham and Murray’s resolution resulted in a firestorm of protest from Methodists across the state and exposed in very clear ways the deep divisions existing between Methodist clergy and laity over the issue of racial equality.

Days after its passage, A. McKay Brabham denied that his resolution explicitly condemned the Citizens’ Councils movement in South Carolina, and a careful reading of

51 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, Journal and Yearbook (1955), 159.
the resolution supports this position. “The resolution did not discuss segregation, for or against. It neither condemned nor commended the ‘Citizens’ Councils’,” McKay Brabham wrote in a letter to his local newspaper. Brabham and Murray’s resolution instead condemned using economic pressure against a person who chose to exercise his or her conscience in pursuing their civil rights. Another minister wrote the *News and Courier* attempting to make this love-the-sinner-hate-the-sin distinction. “Now the Methodist Conference did not oppose the Citizens’ Council movement, but simply disapproved as unchristian talk of coercion...,” wrote Reverend Albert Betts of Columbia. “The Citizens’ Council movement may yet prove to be a very constructive step forward, probably settling many questions out of court with justice, goodwill and cooperation among all concerned,” Betts concluded. The *Methodist Advocate*—the official organ of South Carolina Methodism—likewise tried to clear up the “misunderstanding” about Brabham and Murray’s resolution. Writing editorially, the paper reported, “There was nothing in the resolution criticizing the Councils as such. The Conference was not asked to evaluate the Council movement as a whole, nor did it do so. The resolution said nothing for or against segregation itself.” In the ensuing uproar about the resolution, however, subtle nuances of this variety went unappreciated. For the majority of white South Carolina Methodists, any threat—real or imagined—to the racial status quo, could not be countenanced.

The *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* portrayed Brabham and Murray’s resolution in positive terms, a position not unexpected for a publication edited by a member of the clergy. A week after the annual conference ended in Florence, the *Advocate* ran an editorial titled “A Conference To Be Proud Of…,” which listed various achievements that came out of the Florence meeting. “The Conference pointed up the lack of Christian insight in the actions of those Citizens’ Councils in the state that are using or plan to use economic pressure upon minority groups,” the editorial reported. Perhaps in an attempt to downplay potential backlash to the resolution, the editor concluded rather blandly that “[t]his was a much-needed statement for an age in need of religious guidance in controversial areas.”

Bland or not, any words supporting Brabham and Murray’s resolution proved to be too much for Carol Ervin of Dillon, South Carolina, who wrote the *Methodist Advocate* to register her complaint about the journal’s endorsement. “I wonder how many members of the membership in general of The Methodist Church in South Carolina are proud of what happened in regard to race relations at the Conference in Florence,” Ervin asked. Displeased that her denomination was spending time dealing with an issue “so foreign to the question of Christianity,” Ervin placed the blame squarely at the feet of the clergy. “It is unfortunate for us that we have leaders in our Church who receive such satisfaction and sublimity from breaching this isolation,” Ervin wrote angrily describing her denomination’s dabbling in social, rather than spiritual, affairs. In her concluding sentence, Ervin captured the dissonance between the church leaders and members that would grow more pronounced as racial

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55 “A Conference To Be Proud Of…,” *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (September 8, 1955), 3.
issues came to the fore in South Carolina: "We are seriously opposed to a certain few expressing such a viewpoint as coming from The Methodist Church which we love and of which we are a part." Carol Ervin's letter is indicative of the lines that South Carolina Methodists began to draw over the issue of race in the mid 1950s.

The Charleston News and Courier noted the division and ran several editorials highlighting the tension between the small number of church leaders desiring racial change and the majority of the denomination who found the idea of desegregation distasteful, if not unbiblical. Referring to the Methodists' anti-Citizens' Council resolution, the newspaper speculated that the resolution was not in accordance with the "sentiments of most churchmen in South Carolina." The editorial went on to report that at an organizing rally for a Citizens' Council chapter in Orangeburg, South Carolina, the most prolonged applause of the evening was drawn by a man who lambasted "'so-called Christian leaders' for calling separation of the races 'un-Christian'." After local Methodist congregations began to make known their disagreement with the adoption of Brabham and Murray's resolution, the News and Courier returned to the cleavage between the clergy and laity. Writing editorially, the paper speculated:

Church leaders may find their spiritual influence does not extend to matters which are essentially social. If they insist on pressing social theories unacceptable to the majority of people, these people may withdraw support from churches or change their leaders. Of the two courses, we believe a change of leadership would cause less damage. The fundamental beliefs of religion do not change with fashions of social thinking or even with the personalities of churchmen. As more congregations and individual members make known their feelings on the great

56 "Dislikes Editorial 'We'," South Carolina Methodist Advocate (September 22, 1955), 10.

social and political issues of the day, we believe that officials of the denomination will heed them.\(^{58}\)

Make known their feelings South Carolina Methodist did. Across the state, South Carolina Methodists responded to Brabham and Murray’s resolution with resolutions of their own in support of the Citizens’ Councils. The Asbury Memorial Methodist mens’ club endorsed organizing the Councils, “in order to preserve control in the hands of law-abiding, right thinking Christian people and insure the continuation of separation of the races in accordance with the will of God in creating different races.”\(^{59}\) A copy of this resolution was sent to the bishop and conference superintendent. Similarly, the official board of the Elloree-Jerusalem Charge Methodist Church unanimously voiced their opposition to the annual conference’s Citizens’ Councils resolution. The church board “hereby goes on record as condemning the action of the South Carolina Methodist Conference in adopting the said resolution and respectfully requests that the action of said Conference be rescinded as soon as possible.”\(^{60}\) Methodists in Norway, South Carolina, adopted almost word for word the same resolution as their brethren in the Elloree-Jerusalem church, and they additionally noted that the Citizens’ Councils “have been and are being organized for the purpose of protecting and fighting integration in our public schools.” The anti-Council resolution passed at the annual conference “does not express the views of the members of the Norway Methodist Charge,” who also

\(^{58}\) “Church Protests,” Charleston News and Courier (October 26, 1955).

\(^{59}\) “Methodist Laymen Endorse Forming Citizens’ Councils,” Charleston News and Courier (October 21, 1955)

“strenuously oppose any form of co-mingling of the white and colored races in any of
[the denomination’s] churches, colleges and assemblies.”

In adopting their anti-resolution resolution, the official board of the Kingstree
Methodist Church emphasized the idea that since questions of racial integration were
secular in nature, church ministers and leaders had no business trying to influence the
denomination one way or another on the subject. In the preamble to their resolution, the
Kingstree church declared, “too many leaders and ministers in our Methodist Church
have been saturated with propaganda and even made to have a guilt complex with
reference to the question of integration of the races....” Rather than being led astray by
such misguided church leaders, the Kingstree official board resolved to stand behind the
Citizens’ Councils and any other individuals or organizations whose purpose was to
“maintain segregation in our schools, churches, or other institutions where it is
traditionally felt that to do otherwise would be harmful to the races.”

At the
Hemingway Methodist church, the issue of racial integration was perceived to be so
pressing that both the church’s official board as well as the Women’s Society of Christian
Service adopted resolutions that opposed action by the denomination at any level that
would attempt to mix the races. Lest there be any confusion on the subject, the

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61 “Norway Methodists Support Aims of Citizens’ Councils,” Charleston News and
Courier (December 11, 1955)

62 “Official Board of Kingstree Methodist Church Passes Resolution Condemning Annual
Conference Resolution,” South Carolina Methodist Advocate (October 6, 1955), 7.
Hemingway women’s group forthrightly stated, “We are definitely in favor of racial segregation.”

Individual South Carolina Methodists also took the time to write letters to various publications registering their disagreement with church leaders over the annual conference’s Citizens’ Council resolution. “The Citizens’ Councils are everything we could have hoped for: community organizations, with almost unanimous support, led by the natural leaders of the community (not politicians), by the lay leaders of the Methodist Church,” declared Thomas Traywick in a letter to the *Methodist Advocate*. A layman from Trio, South Carolina, had strong ideas about how to respond to the rift that was becoming apparent between the laity and clergy over desegregation. “We... ought to refuse to receive or support any minister who believes in the false doctrine of mixing the races. We ought to have all Methodists who believe in segregation to organize to this end. We ought to make it our business to find out what our ministers believe before next Annual Conference,” wrote E. Robert Rowell. Charles Haigh of Florence hoped that the events that transpired at the annual conference would “awaken some of these complacent church members who need a jolt.” Chastising his denomination’s ministers,

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64 “Amen to Mr. Pok, Etc.,” *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (October 6, 1955), 10.

Haigh wrote, “You people should be attending Citizens’ Councils and lending your moral and physical support to the same instead of trying to break them up.”

No doubt to Charles Haigh’s approval, there were, in fact, a handful of Methodist ministers who came out in support of the Citizens’ Councils after the annual conference. One minister—a displaced northerner who chose to settle in South Carolina because of his preference for the “people, climate, and conditions” the South offered—wrote the Methodist Advocate that in his judgment, “the formation of Citizen’s Councils and other organizations seems to me perfectly proper.” Reverend E. S. Jones of St. Paul’s Methodist Church in Orangeburg also went on record as being in favor of racial segregation a week after the annual conference passed Brabham and Murray’s resolution. In a printed statement distributed to his congregation at their Sunday services, Jones said, “A number of people have asked that I make a statement concerning the question of races in the public schools. I have from the beginning felt that it was unwise for the races to be thrown together in the public schools and I have not changed from that position.” Some lay Methodists came to the defense of their beleaguered ministers in the aftermath of the Citizens’ Council resolution. Speaking of many ministers he had encountered, one layman stated, “most of those I know deplore the sinful intermixing of the races...(and)

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66 “Protest To Methodist,” Charleston News and Courier (September 6, 1955)


about 97 per cent of the ministers come from the same backgrounds as the laymen. I have heard of no plan to put anything over on the laymen."69

Just as some ministers supported the work of the Citizens’ Councils and racial segregation, members of the laity were by no means monolithic in their fight against racial integration. A few letters from church laypeople in support of desegregation appeared in both the News and Courier and the South Carolina Methodist Advocate, but these were in the vast minority. That letters in support of segregation were published disproportionately to those favoring integration in the News and Courier comes as no surprise. It was, after all, a segregationist publication and had no incentive to objectively represent its readers’ viewpoint on the subject. The Methodist Advocate, on the other hand, was edited by a member of the clergy and had come out in favor of the resolution condemning the actions of the Citizens’ Councils. The fact that letters supporting the resolution were so few in number compared to those against it, demonstrates that most Methodists in South Carolina took the position opposite of that of the annual conference on the issue of Citizens’ Councils.

But if, as the response seems to indicate, the majority of South Carolina Methodists were opposed to the ideas encapsulated in the resolution condemning the Citizens’ Councils, the question arose how the resolution gained adoption in the first place. Exactly how the resolution managed to pass without a fight became a contested point in the aftermath of the resolution’s adoption. In its initial reporting on the affair, the News and Courier noted that Brabham and Murray’s resolution only “drew some

69 "The Minister As Prophet,” South Carolina Methodist Advocate (October 20, 1955), 10.
scattered negative votes” before being passed without discussion. After the editor of *Methodist Advocate* estimated that the vote on Brabham and Murray’s resolution passed 150-12, a delegate who had opposed the resolution wrote the *Advocate* to take issue with this calculation. “I made it a point to look around see just how many voted against the resolution,” layman David McLeod wrote. “There were very few present at this session and an estimate of 150 ‘yea’ votes in my opinion, was extremely excessive.” In McLeod’s estimation, the only reason the resolution passed was because it was “sprung” on the conference members late Saturday afternoon after many lay delegates already left. Disproportionate representation of clergy members became a popular explanation for the resolution’s adoption. The *News and Courier* cited a source who confirmed that the Citizens’ Councils resolution was “passed after…most lay delegates had left.” The Asbury Memorial Methodist Church’s men’s club adopted a resolution of their own specifically condemning the procedure that, in their view, made the Citizens’ Council resolution passage possible. This resolution read in part, “…The annual conference of the Methodist Church of South Carolina did at an inopportune moment late on the afternoon of August 27, 1955, pass a resolution that condemns the organization of Citizens’ Councils, which could not have been passed at a scheduled time.” In order to

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avoid another situation where the laity had an unpopular resolution hoisted upon them, E. Robert Rowell admonished his fellow Methodists that "all lay delegates should go and stay until the Annual Conference is over." The way South Carolina lay Methodists seized on the explanation that they were not properly represented when the annual conference voted on the Citizens' Councils, pointedly demonstrates the divide between the clergy and laity. "Rules, policies, etc., may be made by church officials but the laymen will carry the final vote in his or her support of the church," wrote Cohen Davis of Charleston Heights. In the case of what happened to John V. Murray after his and McKay Brabham's Citizens' Council resolution passed, Cohen Davis's statement of lay authority proved prophetic.

Murray was the minister for four small churches in Orangeburg County, none of which was at all pleased that their minister chose to co-sponsor the Citizens' Council resolution. Representatives of the board of stewards from each of Murray's four churches met with Orangeburg district superintendent, Pierce E. Cook, and asked that Murray be relieved of his duties at their churches, "due to his being co-author of a resolution passed at the recent South Carolina Methodist Conference." The superintendent, in turn, conferred with the bishop over South Carolina, and both men determined the best course of action was to transfer Reverend Murray to a different charge. The whole affair took place so quickly that within a month of his resolution's


75 "No Halfway Ground," South Carolina Methodist Advocate (September 8, 1955), 11.

76 "Co-Author of Resolution Condemning Citizens Councils Rejected By Area Methodists," Orangeburg Times and Democrat (September 12, 1955).
passage, Murray had been relieved of his duties in Orangeburg and transferred to the Gilbert charge in Lexington County, a location where racial tensions were less pronounced than in the neighboring Orangeburg.77

Until a replacement could be found for John Murray, the minister continued pastoring his four congregations. In the Sunday bulletin for his church in Springfield, South Carolina, Murray included a short letter to the congregation informing them of his imminent transfer due to “the misunderstanding arising from the resolution, of which I was the coordinator, passed by the South Carolina Conference.” Upon the appointment of a new minister, Murray told his parishioners, “my relation as pastor with the churches of the Springfield Charge shall cease.” Despite the apparent ill-will the churches had toward their embattled minister, Murray nonetheless offered to continue his ministerial duties until his transfer was complete, telling his congregation, “if I can render pastoral service to the churches during this period, I shall be happy to do so.”78

Murray’s transfer was met with approval from most advocates of the South Carolina Citizens’ Councils. “We congratulate the church on its courageous action in asking that the preacher be relieved of his duties and removed from the charge who offered the resolution in Florence,” a Methodist from Beaufort wrote. He went on to add, “the pity of it all is that he (Murray) was pushed off on some other charge.”79 For Methodist ministers, the action taken against Murray sent a distressing signal. Unlike


Baptist churches, church polity in the Methodist structure did not grant authority to the local congregation on matters of concerning ministerial appointment. Transferring a minister who did not cater to the views of his congregation set a dangerous precedent, wrote one minister, because “such action makes the position of the minister mighty hazardous not only with reference to the racial issue but any other issue where laymen may disagree with the clergy…. We are not a called ministry, and laymen must be taught again, if our system is to survive, that they will take the minister assigned to them,” declared Reverend James M. Copeland.\(^{80}\) In the mid 1950s, however, issues of race in South Carolina were volatile enough that even a Methodist minister—ostensibly protected from lay backlash by the bishop—who offended his parishioners’ racial sensibilities was not beyond reproach.

The tensions that arose in South Carolina churches over the issue of race in the mid-1950s illuminate several points that are important for understanding how conservative southern white evangelicalism contributed to the massive resistance movement. First, these tensions demonstrate that there was a significant divergence between official denominational pronouncements and the actual accepted beliefs of the majority of lay members within those denominations on the issue of racial equality. Quite simply, the racially progressive resolutions that all the major southern denominations adopted both before and immediately following the 1954 *Brown* decision had no impact on altering the racial prejudices held by white southerners during this period. As the laity proved in both words and deeds, they were the true arbiters of what

\(^{80}\) “Concerned Over Post-Conference Move,” *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (October 20, 1955), 10 (emphasis in original).
position southern white churches practiced on the issue of segregation, regardless of the denominational hierarchy.

Because the laity was the true power within southern churches, southern ministers were ineffectual agents in leading their congregations into positions of harmony with the southern denominations' call for racial equality. From secure positions in seminaries, future clergy of liberal persuasions might boast about their ability to enact changes in southern churches. Writing to the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* in protest of John Murray’s transfer and the entrenched racism in the church, for example, Mason Stapleton Jr. remarked, “I think it must also be said that I am not a voice crying in the wilderness. The chorus is swelling. I am one of a group who will soon be leaving the walls of seminary to take upon ourselves the frightful task of ministering in the Church of Christ. If I know us all aright, we shall come, if necessary, in the name of him who said, ‘I come not to bring peace, but a sword’.”

Strong words such as these, however, proved difficult if not impossible to put into practice in the 1950s South. White southerners, comfortable in their place atop the racial hierarchy, refused to be coaxed into reexamining their racial beliefs, and any minister attempting such action did so with a great deal of risk to his job security. Southern ministers learned quickly during this period that speaking out for racial reform came at a high cost.

Four months after their resolution sent shock-waves throughout the state, William Workman wrote to McKay Brabham and John Murray to see if they would like to record their views on the issue of school integration. Clearly fearful that any remarks he made

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on the subject would be misrepresented by the press, Brabham wrote back, “I have given a good deal of thought to this matter and have come to the conclusion that I have nothing to say at this time…. If I could write the headline which would accompany the article, I might find I have something to say.”

Brabham eventually left the pulpit for the relatively more secure position editing the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*. In this position he raised the ire of conservative Methodists in the denomination for years to come.

In his circumspect response to Workman, John Murray demonstrated that the lesson about falling out of favor with a congregation did not go unlearned. Rejecting the opportunity to publish his views about school integration, Murray wrote, “[a] pastor, in a new field of work, can very easily be misunderstood, especially when he speaks on controversial social issues. Since I have been in my present pastorate less than six months you can understand why I do not wish to make a statement.” Despite their best intentions, the case of John Murray demonstrates that on the issue of race southern pulpits were unable to lead their people in the course of racial desegregation anywhere other than where the people in the pews wanted to go.

Finally, the tensions that arose in southern churches during the 1950s over the issue of race reinforce arguments historians have made about the democratization and cultural captivity of southern religion. As historian Nathan Hatch recognized, the

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82 Brabham to Workman, January 18, 1956, box 27, Workman Papers.

83 For more on Brabham’s career as the editor of the South Carolina *Methodist Advocate*, see Susan Pierce Johnston, *The South Carolina United Methodist Advocate and Civil Rights: One Editor’s Stand* (Columbia: South Carolina United Methodist Advocate, 1992).

84 Murray to Workman, January 5, 1956, box 27, Workman Papers
distinctively populist form that Christianity took in the United States ensured its relevance and numerical success among a vast number of Americans. As Hatch explains, democratic Christianity refers not to church polity but instead to the "the incarnation of the church into popular culture." In no region of the country was the incarnation of church into culture more apparent than in the South. In order to gain relevance in the lives of southerners, churches adopted positions whereby they reinforced southern values as much as they shaped them. And as Sam Hill and other purveyors of southern religious history during this period have pointed out, once southern white churches conformed to the prevailing racial mores that ran throughout southern white society, it became nearly impossible to shed their "cultural captivity" to support civil rights initiatives in their region. Instead, just the opposite was true. Southern white churches worked to maintain racial segregation even as the surrounding culture started desegregating.

Because the power of southern churches resided in the laity, the true position of southern churches on racial questions is best understood at the grass-roots level. Top-down studies focusing on religious elites that cite denominational-sanctioned pronouncement on matters of racial equality miss the extent to which southern churches actively sought—and were able to achieve—segregation of the races in the South. Understanding the motivation of white southerners to maintain segregation requires a study of the folk theology of segregation to which most white laity adhered.


CHAPTER THREE

SEGREGATIONIST FOLK THEOLOGY IN SOUTHERN EVANGELICALISM

As it neared the height of its popularity in the late 1950s, the Citizens’ Councils of Mississippi began sponsoring annual state-wide essay contests to award college scholarships to high school students. According to advertising brochures, the purpose of these contests was to help “assist our young people to develop into informed, patriotic, American citizens,” “stress the importance of maintaining States Rights and Constitutional Government,” and to impart “the importance of maintaining Racial Integrity” to a generation of white high school students whose days in segregated public schools were now feared to be numbered.¹

Judges of the 1960 Citizens’ Councils essay contest chose a young woman from Madison, Mississippi, as one of two high school seniors whose essay was worthy of a $500 scholarship. For her topic, Mary Rosalind Healy discussed why she believed in the social separation of the races, and wrote, “I know that the social exposure of one race to another brings about a laxity of principles and a complacency toward differences which can only develop into an incurable epidemic of intermarriage. This malady has but one inevitable result—racial death.” Setting up the problem of integration as being the beginning of racial miscegenation, Healy arrived at her thesis: “Thus, I must believe in the social separation of the races of mankind because I am a Christian and must abide by

the laws of God.”² For those lacking knowledge of how God’s laws were related to segregation, Healy provided her readers passages from Hebrew Scriptures, which she believed gave her a “Biblical and historical basis for the belief that racial separation was divinely instituted.” Healy’s defense of racial segregation was not limited to Old Testament texts. Citing a verse in Paul’s second epistle to the church at Corinth, Healy interpreted the apostle’s proscription for first century Christians against becoming “unequally yoked” with non-Christians to apply “to color and culture as well as spirituality.” Reaching the end of her biblical analysis, Healy concluded, “if I am to call myself Christian, I must accept God’s plan of human development as well as the laws of nature established by Him.”³

It is safe to assume that Mary Rosalind Healy was awarded a Citizens’ Council college scholarship on the strength of her prose rather than originality of argument. Although Healy’s appeal to her Christian faith as the primary impetus for her belief in racial segregation no doubt strains the theological credulity of twenty-first century readers, her essay likely failed to raise eyebrows at the time it was written. In fact, Healy’s segregationist interpretation of the Bible parroted countless other white southerners in the late 1950s, surprising as that may be today. Fifty years ago, however, observers analyzing southern resistance to civil rights initiatives certainly understood the combination of white Protestant religion and segregationist thought. In 1955, for instance, the NAACP attorney Spottswood W. Robinson III mused that “the worst

³ Ibid., 2.
obstacle we face in the fight to preserve segregated schools in the South is the white preacher.”

In addition to remarks like Robinson’s, the majority of both historians and journalists writing near the time of massive resistance’s zenith acknowledged the role conservative religion played in helping to maintain segregation’s place in southern society. Neil McMillen’s early history of the Citizens’ Council movement, published in 1971, for example, understood southern religion as lending significant support to the Council movement. Similarly, Numan V. Bartley’s seminal work, *Massive Resistance*, published in 1969, gives extended attention to the southern white church as a social institution that helped make possible the rise of the massive resistance movement.

Eleven years before Bartley’s work appeared in print, historian Howard H. Quint, writing specifically about South Carolina, surmised, “During the 1850’s the church provided one of the bulwarks in the Southern defense of slavery.... The 1950’s finds the churches of South Carolina dangerously close to taking a similar position—only this time on segregation.” Even as late as 1973 historian Francis M. Wilhoit posited that “religious

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6 Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 293-305. Bartley contends that, although some churches explicitly preached a theology of white supremacy, the complicity in the rise of massive resistance for the majority of southern white churches came from their lack of repudiating segregationist thought. In this sense, I believe Bartley, like David Chappell after him, fails to appreciate the degree to which southern church-goers were influenced by segregationist folk theology.

factors were second only to politics in creating the chain of events that led to massive resistance.\(^8\)

Historians were not alone in noticing the close relationship between southern religion and segregation; journalists were perhaps even more attuned to the co-mingling of southern religious belief and Jim Crow. Reed Sarratt of the Southern Education Reporting Service, for instance, gave attention to the specific theological arguments of segregationist clergy in his 1966 book, *The Ordeal of Desegregation*.\(^9\) Four year earlier James Graham Cook devoted an entire chapter of his book, *The Segregationists*, to southern clergy who staunchly defended the region’s racial apartheid.\(^10\) And in the chapter of his 1960 book in which he was primarily concerned with lamenting how out of touch denominational leaders were with the religious belief of the laity, William D. Workman nonetheless registered the influence of religion on massive resistance by conceding that “the rank and file of Southern church-goers still refuse to be led by the hand into the paths of integration, and seem increasingly willing to make that opposition known both within and without the church.”\(^11\)

Despite the wide attention segregationist religion received among the first generation of scholars to chronicle southern white resistance to civil rights initiatives, latter-day historians have been much less inclined to include religion as a central

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contributing element to massive resistance. In one recent synthesis of the anti-civil rights movement, for instance, the section on religion’s influence runs less than two full pages of a nearly two hundred page book. Even more surprising than this neglect, however, is David L. Chappell’s interpretation that religion was, in fact, not a primary motivating factor for white southerners wishing to extend segregation’s tenure in their region. Having published numerous chapters, articles, and a book on the subject, Chappell has devoted more scholarly attention to the religious thought of southern segregationists than perhaps any other historian. Drawing on all that he has written about

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the subject, Chappell’s thesis on religion and massive resistance can be briefly summarized as follows: Integration proceeded relatively swiftly in the South because the southern white churches “failed in any meaningful way to join the anti-civil rights movement” and “gave no significant support to segregation.” Because the clear biblical mandate that had existed for pro-slavery theologians in slavery debates of the antebellum period had no comparable validity for segregationists in the twentieth century, segregationists were left on tenuous theological ground when seeking to prove the practice’s divine sanction. The justifications for segregation that southern whites were able to extract from the Bible, therefore, were strained to the point that “[s]egregationists do not seem to have had much confidence in these biblical or theological arguments and did not use them much.” Ultimately, the inability of southern religious leaders to articulate any viable defense of segregation was a primary reason segregation in the South failed.14

Although Chappell has made an invaluable contribution to the understanding of segregationist thought, his interpretation that religion did not play an influential part in the massive resistance movement suffers from a focus that has been too narrowly set on southern religious elites.15 As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the most accurate


15 David Chappell’s focused attention on the thoughts of religious elites is apparent by examining his source base. Additionally, however, during a now infamous exchange with Jane Dailey—herself a proponent that religion played a prominent role in defending
picture of southern white churches in the civil rights period comes not from examining
the seminary professors or the pulpits but the pews. There were hundreds of thousands of
white southerners sitting in southern churches in the 1950s who, like Mary Rosalind
Healy, understood their Christian faith to complement their segregationist belief.
Subsequent chapters of this dissertation will examine the way white church-goers in
South Carolina continued to believe segregation was compatible with their Christianity
through the mid 1970s and acted accordingly to maintain segregated churches and
schools. But to fully apprehend how and why white southerners continually pushed for
segregation, it is first necessary to investigate the theological understanding about racial
integration that drove so many of them. And to appreciate how white evangelical
religion became a central motivating factor in the effort to maintain racial segregation in
the South, it is necessary to begin by examining what conservative white southerners
believed the Bible taught about the separation of the races.

Historian Mark Noll has identified a “reformed literal hermeneutic” for Bible
reading as being a central tenet of American evangelicalism, and utilizing Noll’s two-fold

segregation—at a panel during the Southern Historical Association Meeting in Memphis,
Tennessee, in 2004, Chappell stated that his analysis of religious segregationists had been
limited to the elite level. See, David L. Chappell, “Little Faith: The Lack of Religious
Zeal behind Massive Resistance,” Paper presented at the 2004 Southern Historical
Association Meeting, Memphis, Tennessee, in author’s possession. In this paper,
Chappell called into question the degree to which white southerners actually used
religious justifications to defend segregation by demonstrating that letters written to the
governor of Virginia in the month following the Brown decision protesting the ruling
cited religious rationales in calling for segregation far less often than Jane Dailey had
implied in her work. As was noted in the previous chapter, however, there seemed to be
a considerable lag between the Brown ruling and the subsequent backlash. Examining
letters written one month after the decision may be sufficient to call into question
Dailey’s interpretation, but it by no means undermines the notion that religion played a
central role for massive resistance among rank and file white southerners.
interpretive scheme is a helpful starting point for understanding southern white attitudes about religion and segregation in the mid 1950s. What Noll intends by a "reformed" approach to the Bible, is that southern evangelicals believed in the supreme authority of Scriptures not only for the blueprint of their spiritual salvation but also to demonstrate to them how they should order their entire existence.\(^{16}\) As heirs to this reformed tradition, in which the answers to all life's questions could be found in the Bible, it seemed natural for religious southerners to look to the Holy Text for instructions on how they should respond to all social matters, including those of race relations.

The "literal" component of Noll's formulation meant that within American evangelicalism, it was believed that lay readers of the Bible could by their own volition "grasp what Scripture really meant. [And] what Scripture really meant was exactly what it said."\(^{17}\) In other words, any person reading the Bible had the ability to correctly interpret Scripture simply by applying common sense reasoning.\(^{18}\) Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the results of this reformed literalist approach to biblical

\(^{16}\) Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 377. Although Noll applied his reformed literal hermeneutic to nineteenth century evangelicalism, it continued to hold sway among conservative southern evangelicals into the 1950s. The modernist/fundamentalist controversy that caused reformed literalism to fall out of place as the dominant interpretive model of Scripture in the North did not take place widely throughout the South, allowing reformed literalism to retain its prevalence in southern society.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 381.

interpretation was generations of white southerners who found in their Bibles a defense of their racially segregated society.

Historian Paul Harvey has labeled the biblically sanctioned defense of racial separation a "segregationist folk theology" in order to differentiate the theological rationales of rank-and-file anti-integrationist southerners from those formally trained theologians and religious elites whose pronouncements on race were decidedly more egalitarian in nature. As Harvey notes, "laypeople in the South articulated, defended, and enforced the theology of segregation" by turning to specific biblical passages they interpreted as condoning their racially segregated social arrangement in the 1950s.\(^{19}\)

The importance of southern white lay belief in Scriptural defenses of segregation cannot be overemphasized. Because, as historian Nathan Hatch has stated, the democratic strain of evangelicalism in American context has meant "it is the people who are custodians of orthodoxy," it mattered very little that segregationist folk theology did not pass muster with the seminary-trained theologians of the day.\(^{20}\) As long as the majority of common southerners believed that the Bible they read endorsed the separation


of the races, they continued to work against attempts at racial integration. And white southerners in the 1950s had no difficulty seeing segregation written in the Good Book.

Even before turning to the pages of Scripture, however, white southerners saw divine sanction for segregation pulsating through the general revelation of the natural world surrounding them. As a theological principle, general revelation is that which humanity can discern about God through observation of the natural world.\textsuperscript{21} "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handywork," one segregationist minister quoted from the nineteenth Psalm. "The corollary of the above passage," continued W. C. George, "is that since nature is God's handywork, it reveals his laws to those who have the diligence and the insight to discover them."\textsuperscript{22} Following George's line of thought, segregationist folk theologians looking intently at nature declared that God plainly revealed himself as a segregationist.

In a treatise on the Bible and segregation he published in 1957, Festus F. Windham challenged anyone to prove that segregation was sinful. "I am referring to voluntary segregation," Windham clarified, the kind he believed existed between whites and African Americans. "We find much voluntary segregation even in nature," the Alabama Sunday School teacher continued, "hordes of black ants several times larger than the little red ants do not integrate with any other ants, though they may live not too


\textsuperscript{22} W. C. George, "Race, Heredity, and Civilization," folder 5, box 432, Thomas R. Waring, Jr. Papers, South Carolina Historical Society.
far apart in their ground tunnels."

When Dr. Mack P. Stewart, Jr., preached a sermon to his congregation of nearly a thousand as to why he believed in segregation, the Louisiana Baptist minister said, "...I am a segregationist because God ordained it. It is true with plants and animal life... If you leave plants and animals alone, they will stay separated. Animals will not mix. Birds will not mix. Plants do mix if left alone. God intended it that way."

The Reverend William Talley, Jr., a circuit Methodist preacher in Florida and Alabama, seconded this notion of natural law, writing, "[b]irds, fish, and any animal you care to name is separated according to 'kind' in keeping with the primary creative formula by God Himself."

One of the most widely circulated defenses of segregation, written by the president emeritus of Belhaven College in Mississippi, Reverend G. T. Gillespie, also pointed out nature's part in segregating the races. In a 1954 address to the synod of Mississippi Presbyterians, Gillespie insisted that segregation was a universal natural law. "The fact that man...is a gregarious animal and that human beings everywhere and under all conditions of life tend to segregate themselves into families,

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tribes, national or racial groups,” Gillespie told the gathering of Presbyterians, “only goes to prove that all human relations are regulated by this universal law of nature.”

Carey Daniel, the pastor of First Baptist Church of West Dallas in addition to being the vice-chairman of the local Citizens’ Council chapter, suggested that the earth’s geographical features further demonstrated God’s intent to keep the races apart. “Mother Nature, with her huge geographic barriers of oceans, deserts, and gigantic mountain ranges, clearly confirms that [God prohibited the mixing of the races],” Daniel proclaimed the Sunday following the Brown ruling in 1954. The Councilor, a segregationist newspaper in Louisiana whose circulation number reportedly topped 250,000, reprinted an article by the Reverend A. C. Lawton that echoed Daniel’s perspective: “God originally separated his five races by mountains, oceans, continents, language and colors. God does not change and his color scheme should never be obliterated as world powers are trying to do today.” H. C. McGowan, a self-described “servant of God,” saw segregation ordained in the heavens even before the creation of mankind. “After God had created the heavens, He made the other worlds, stars, suns, moons, and all the other wonders that are in the heavens; and God created them, He

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26 G.T. Gillespie, “A Christian View on Segregation,” Address delivered before the Synod of Mississippi of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., November 4, 1954, pamphlet found in Right Wing Collection, roll 26, frame C28, 5.

27 Carey Daniel, “God the Original Segregationist,” pamphlet reprint found in Right Wing Collection, roll 26, frame C28, 4.

separated them from each other, and set each one in his individual place with perfect balance and commanded them, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.’”

Segregationist folk theologians like these believed that general observations of the natural world revealed God’s intent to separate the races. In the eyes of these segregationists, forced integration of blacks and whites violated the natural order insofar as they believed God had created the different races and intended them to remain distinct. Segregationists could not understand why segregation—a law they saw as written into nature itself—would suddenly come under attack by religious elites and wondered why the South had enjoyed God’s blessing if the separation of the races was contrary to Christianity as denominational leaders were proclaiming by the mid 1950s. As one Baptist church group wondered, “if segregation became wrong in 1954 why was it not wrong before that year? And, if it is wrong, why has the God of both races so wonderfully blessed the area...where total segregation has been practiced?” The Methodist Medford Evans agreed with the idea of seeing God’s favor in separating the races, saying, “[t]he system of segregation has worked,” and he quoted from the New Testament book of Matthew—“By their fruits ye shall know them”—to express his belief


30 Pointing to God’s favor for the South in the 1950s as justification for segregation echoed the call southern divines issued a century earlier in defending the Confederacy as being part of the will of God. See Daniel Stowell, Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33-38.

31 “Farmerville First Baptist Church Adopts Resolution Against Race Mixing,” The Councilor (December 1957), 7.
that the South’s blessings and divine aid had come because of segregation. In similar fashion, Reverend Maylon D. Watkins interpreted God’s favor as extending beyond even the boundaries of the South, writing, “[f]or over 150 years our nation has prospered under the practice of separation of the white and negro races. With this practice our nation has built the most churches, the best schools, and has become the wealthiest nation with the highest standard of living for all people of any nation of earth.” As if the natural record was not enough, these segregationist theologians believed the South’s blessing under Jim Crow was further proof of God’s segregationist tendencies. Surely if God detested segregation, these men supposed, he would not have so generously lavished his favor on a region that practiced racial separation.

Segregationist folk theologians did not limit their critique of racial integration to evidence from the natural world. In addition, segregationist ministers and other members of the southern rank and file carefully mined biblical texts for examples of instances when God made his desire for racial segregation known. A common starting point for segregationist folk theologians was the story of the Tower of Babel found in the book of Genesis. In the first verse of Genesis 11, the text says, “[a]nd the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.” According to the story, humanity decided to collectively build a city with a tower that reached to heaven before God intervened. “Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language…and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” By the end of the story, God had confounded

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33 Maylon D. Watkins, “Segregation of the Races is Biblical and therefore Christlike,” article reprint found in folder 3, box 457, Waring Papers.
their language so they could no longer understand each other and had “scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.”

Segregationists read the story of the Tower of Babel as the point when God created distinct racial and ethnic groups and viewed the U.S. government’s attempt to hoist integration upon the South as a plan that ran contrary to God’s intent as established in this story from Genesis. Calling attention to religious leaders who supported desegregation as an act in concert with the Christian faith, one segregationist theologian declared, “the good church people of the United States want to rebuild the Tower of Babel.” After writing a twenty-four page pamphlet to protest church leaders’ involvement in anti-segregation causes, Stuart Landry concluded, “[l]et it (the church) not try to rebuild the Tower of Babel, and to attempt to bring together in concordance, discordant and disintegrating elements of the great human family, separated by God thousands of years ago.”

Beginning with the premise that God had separated the races at the Tower of Babel, segregationist folk theologians cited abundant examples of God’s desire for the different races to remain apart. Most of these biblical proof texts came from Old Testament passages that spoke of God’s prohibition of—or punishment for—intermarriage between Jews and those not belonging to the people of Israel. Beginning with Abraham’s desire to find a wife for his son Isaac from his own people rather than the surrounding Canaanites and running through Ezra’s lament that the Jewish exiles


returning to Jerusalem from Babylon had married foreign wives, segregationist ministers pointed to a host of examples of biblical figures who brought destruction upon themselves or their country because they failed to follow the divine proscription against intermarriage. From Sampson’s illicit liaisons with the Philistine Delilah, to Solomon’s marriage to hundreds of foreign wives, segregationist folk theologians suffered no lack of material in citing examples of divine retribution that came from “cross-racial” relationships. The Old Testament was ripe with such instances, and segregationist theologians cited passages ranging from Genesis to Jeremiah to support their segregationist purposes.  

It is important to note that in the minds of most segregationist theologians, integration and miscegenation went hand in hand. With few exceptions, those who expressed religious justifications for upholding segregation included in their analysis a conflation of the idea of social integration and intermarriage between the races. “The enemies of God, who would destroy Christianity, know that they must turn the white race into a ‘coffee-colored race,’ if they are to succeed,” A. C. Lawton cautioned his followers. The widespread nature of sentiments similar to those of A. C. Lawton has led historian Jane Dailey to give unwarranted primacy to sexual fear as the motivation behind segregationist folk theology. According to Dailey, “[i]t was through sex that racial segregation in the South moved from being a local social practice to a part of the


37 Lawton, “Christianity vs. Integration.”
divine plan for the world. It was thus through sex that segregation assumed, for the
believing Christian, cosmological significance.  

While Daily is certainly correct that the fear of miscegenation was a hugely
important component to the Christian defense of Jim Crow, it is wrong to suggest that
sexual apprehension was the sole or primary reason white southerners believed God
ordained segregation as Dailey seems to do in her analysis of segregationist folk
theology. If fear of interracial sex was the only driving force behind segregationist folk
theology, it would have lost its influence over white southerners once it became apparent
social integration did not lead to widespread intermarriage. As will be seen in subsequent
chapters, however, religious conservatives continued to fight for racial separation in their
churches and schools even after social integration became a begrudgingly accepted
practice in the South in the late 1960s. For segregationist folk theology to maintain this
degree of influence, it had to include components that moved beyond merely equating
integration with miscegenation.

Indeed, segregationist folk theologians proved willing and able to advance
ecclesiastical arguments that, at least on a conscious level, had nothing to do with sex.
The abundant examples of God’s intolerance for interracial marriage aside, segregationist
folk theologians saw plenty of other evidence that God desired segregation. C. H.
Hardin, for instance, pointed to God’s response to history’s first murder as proof of God’s
segregationist leanings. As punishment for killing his brother Abel, God put a mark on

Second Reconstruction (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154. Daily also
advances this argument in “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” The Journal
of American History 91 (June 2004): 119-44.
Cain and made him wander the earth. As Hardin interpreted the story, this was the first instance in which God practiced segregation.\(^{39}\) God, however, continually supported segregation, even writing segregation into the Jewish law as it appeared in the book of Leviticus. “Thou shalt not let them cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy fields with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee,” God had commanded his chosen people, and segregationist theologians extrapolated these divine decrees to bolster the idea that God also detested the mixing of races.\(^{40}\) And lest anyone object to obscure Old Testament laws as a valid defense of segregation, folk theologians were quick to point out that in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it and that “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”\(^{41}\)

The biblical defense of segregation was not limited to readings of the Old Testament, though segregationist passages from the New Testament were more difficult to come by. The reason for this, according to segregationist theologian C. R. Dickey, was quite rational. “New Testament writers said little or nothing about the law of segregation because it never occurred to them that Christians would question or repudiate any fundamental law in the Old Testament,” Dickey explained.\(^{42}\) Undeterred by the

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\(^{40}\) This passage is found in Leviticus 19:19. For an example of a segregationist publication that appealed to this verse, see Stewart, “Why I am a Segregationist,” 2.


challenge of finding material supporting segregation in the New Testament, segregationist theologians carefully combed through the gospels and epistles to find evidence that God maintained his desire for segregation. Segregationist theologians proved remarkably skilled at turning even the most irrelevant New Testament passages into segregationist proofs. According to Marvin Brooks Norfleet, Jesus was a segregationist as evidenced by the fact that upon his return all nations will be gathered before him, “and he shall separate them one from another....”

Using Paul’s letters to both the Corinthians and Timothy in which the apostle discusses women’s submission to men, Reverend J. U. Teague drew the conclusion that “the modern teaching that God created all people equal in every respect is not substantiated by the Scriptures.”

The social equality between the races that Teague saw civil rights activists as trying to impose upon the South, therefore, went against biblical precepts.

Maylon D. Watkins also made use of the apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians to find justification for segregation. Quoting Paul’s instruction to “[l]et all things be done decently and in order,” Watkins concluded “to mix the races is not only unscriptural and unChristian, it is indecent, disgraceful, and completely and altogether out of order.” Segregationist theologians turned not only to Paul’s writings to support their cause, but also to examples culled from his life as recorded in the book of Acts.


Citing the example of Paul and fellow missionary Barnabas's decision to separate in the wake of a disagreement, E. Earle Ellis reasoned that “even within the church the differences between individuals and/or groups are not done away. Paul and Barnabas came to the conclusion that in certain circumstances their best unity lay in separation.” Employing this interpretation as a response to the calls of religious leaders for Christian unity on racial issues, Ellis concluded, “the unity of Christians does not necessarily mean a physical ‘togetherness’ or organizational conformity; the Kingdom in the church does not negate the church’s relation to the social customs of the world….”

The New Testament defense of segregation cited most often by folk theologians came from another of Paul’s actions. During his visit to Athens as recorded in the book of Acts, the apostle gave an impromptu sermon before the philosophers in the city in which he declared that God “hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” Because of the last clause in this verse—the idea that God had divinely demarcated the distinctions between people groups—this passage from Acts became a favorite among segregationist folk theologians. But it was also widely cited because integrationists often used the first half of the verse—the idea that God had made all the peoples of the earth from one person—as evidence that all humanity shared a common brotherhood before God. Segregationists rejected this interpretation as biblical proof-texting. “One of the worst things any preacher and any Bible teacher can do is take a piece of Scripture out of its context,” J. Elwood Welsh told his Baptist congregation in

46 E. Earle Ellis, “Segregation and the Kingdom of God,” pamphlet found in folder 3, box 457, Waring Papers.

47 Acts 17:26
Columbia, South Carolina, before launching into a sermon defending segregation as Christian. "For many good people in our denomination and many in other denominations, both clerical and lay, who entertain opposite opinions on this great matter as voiced this morning, I have only the profoundest respect… But having said all this, I cannot suppress expressing my surprise at some of the conclusions many of these good people come to" said Welsh in drawing his sermon to a close. "I cannot concur in their conclusions. I am baffled to understand their refusal to face many self evident facts. I am stunned at their urging mixed membership in our churches."48

J. Elwood Welsh was not alone in his confusion over calls for racial equality and integration from denominational elites. For segregationist ministers like Welsh, the idea of racial integration ran counter to everything they had been taught in the church and preached in the pulpit. As religious authorities in the wake of the 1954 Brown decision began more vigorous calls for moderation on racial matters, defenders of segregation were forced to respond to their biblically based calls for integration. Religious leaders who called for racial equality, for example, cited passages such as the one in which the apostle Paul declares "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all are one in Christ Jesus."49 Segregationist W. Clyde Odeneal’s response to “those who advocate the violation of God’s law” of segregation by citing this passage from Galatians was the same reply most segregationists gave when confronted with this supposed support of racial equality. To the segregationists like Odeneal, it was obvious Paul was not speaking literally about there


49 Galatians 3:28
being no distinction between the races for professing Christians. After all, he reasoned, Christians retained their gender differences as “conversion to the Christian faith neither destroys nor changes the sex of the convert. With both sex and race the lack of distinction is spiritual, not physical or racial.”

The emphasis on the spiritual rather than the physical was a crucial distinction for segregationists. “When I was living in China as the son of a missionary,” Carey Daniel explained, “I was one in spirit with every born-again Christian in my native homeland, even though we were separated physically by the widest ocean in the world.”

According to Daniel’s logic, therefore, spiritual unity should not be confused with physical proximity. It was possible for black and white Christians to be one in spirit and still respect Jim Crow’s customs.

There is little doubt that the biblical arguments supporting segregation explicated in the examples above pushed the limits of plausibility for any objective person on the matter. Indeed, the logical fallacies, blatant misinterpretations, and evident sophisms apparent in these segregationist arguments almost defy belief that anyone could accept these lines of reasoning. But on a subject as contentious as racial integration for white southerners in the 1950s, objectivity was in short supply. At the onset of southern furor over the Brown decision in 1954, the South Carolina Methodist Advocate tried to offer some advice for finding answers in the Bible for the integration dilemma. “A lot of people these days are saying that segregation has divine sanction. Sometimes they even go so far as to say that segregation is supported by the Bible. Therefore, so the argument goes, segregation is in accord with God’s will, for the Bible says so. Christians need to

50 W. Clyde Odeneal, “Segregation: Sin or Sensible?” pamphlet found in box 33, Workman Papers, 4.

be careful here. What is happening is that many people have already made up their minds about segregation, and then go back to the Bible to find 'proof' texts to support their view. This is not good exegesis, nor the proper way to use the Bible." As segregationist folk theologians continually proved throughout the 1950s, however, good exegesis is not a prerequisite for constructing an acceptable theology.

History is full of examples of religious justifications for ideologies that appear patently false to those who disagree with them. What is important when considering these ideas is not the degree of intellectual gymnastics required to adhere to them, but the extent to which people proved willing to do so. Historically, it makes no difference that from the perspective of a seminary-trained theologian segregationist folk theology could be arrived at only through ignorance or disingenuousness. Instead, what matters for the historian is how white southerners responded to this segregationist folk theology. And in the case of white southerners during the era of civil rights, segregationist folk theology proved influential indeed.

In many instances, white southerners explicitly invoked segregationist folk theology when arguing against integrationist initiatives. These arguments can be found scattered throughout the public record and in private letters across the South in the 1950s. In the days immediately following the Brown decision, South Carolinians flooded Olin Johnston's office with letters urging the U.S. senator to fight the Supreme Court's ruling and help the South maintain its tradition of segregation. For many of these letter writers opposed to integration, the issue went beyond a matter of personal preferences and was instead rooted in religious belief. "I am a southern born man and firmly believe in

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52 South Carolina Methodist Advocate (November 11, 1954), 3.
segregation from both a moral and Christian standpoint of view and I believe I am right in my conviction,” one constituent wrote to Johnston. Other letter writers expounded on the idea that Christianity was incongruent with integration. I. D. and Marion Yonce wrote the senator to ask if he thought whether “white and colored children could go to school day in and day out together without leading to intermarriage?” The Younces made their religious arguments against the intermarriage that would surely result from school integration clear: “[t]his as you know would mix the races and we as Christians, do not believe that God intends this.” Thomas Howe shared the Younces’ conviction that integration ran counter to Christian principles. “My God said to love every body but he don’t want negroes and white people mixing this way,” wrote the Spartanburg, South Carolina, man. “He made the white man and he made the negro. If God would[n’t have] wanted it this way he [would have] made us all alike. I am a Christian and I believe in the right thing. We should take our troubles to God. The South doesn’t want this. God loves a peace maker not a trouble maker.”

In her letter to Olin Johnston, Jan Revill of Sumter, South Carolina, declared that “[s]egregation is a perfectly proper social order, or situation, and is fully upheld by the teachings of the Bible,” sentiments echoed by James B. Davis who cited the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis and the apostle Paul’s teaching on the “bounds of habitation”

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in Acts 17 to bolster his claim that segregation was biblically mandated.\textsuperscript{56} Religious-grounded arguments for segregation such as these were not limited to private letters between politicians and their constituents, however. They also appeared widely in newspaper articles and letters to the editor in the 1950s as well. When a \textit{News and Courier} reader wanted to know why the South was so adamant about segregation, for instance, J. J. Patrick responded in a letter to the editor by claiming, “God created the different races and set their bounds and habitation. God commanded, demanded, and taught segregation from the Flood, right on down until the Bible was written and said that Heaven and earth shall pass away but My word shall never pass away.”\textsuperscript{57}

More common than detailed invocations of specific segregationist folk theology like J. J. Patrick’s, however, were less explicit allusions to the idea by white southerners. Shortly after taking office in 1955, for instance, South Carolina Governor George Bell Timmerman Jr. (who would later play a part in having his pastor removed for his supposed support of the \textit{Brown} decision), told the state’s education association that integration was “contrary to the divine order of things.”\textsuperscript{58} In another instance, a federal judge who was critical of religious leaders for supporting racial integration alluded to segregationist folk theology when he asked if these men were “getting their religion from the U.S. Supreme Court or from God.”\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Charleston News and Courier} (August 28, 1955).

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Southern School News} (April 1955), 13.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Southern School News} (July 1957), 4.
In 1959 former South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes also appealed to a common argument of segregationist theologians in publically disagreeing that segregation was a sin. “For more than a century, in churches North and South, preachers have led their flocks in segregated congregations. The people have looked to the church for theological guidance,” the former Secretary of State and Supreme Court Justice told the Georgia Bar Association. “If a preacher honestly believed segregation was un-Christian, it was his duty as a Christian leader to make known his views. However, I do not recall ever hearing this ‘un-Christian’ charge until after the segregation decision of the Supreme Court on May 17, 1954.”

But the strongest evidence of segregationist folk theology’s sway over southern whites came not through its explicit espousals or implicit allusions but by the fact that southern white religious conservatives time and again acted to oppose civil rights initiatives and supported measures that sought to continue racial segregation. “The Christians of the South will not accept integrated schools and churches,” South Carolinian H. Odelle Harman said in a speech before the Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America in Pennsylvania. It was with good reason Harman could make such a claim. A native southerner, Odelle Harman had been exposed his entire life to the segregationist folk theology that permeated southern society. Harman understood that for the majority of white Christians in his home state of South Carolina, the question of integration was not just a pressing social issue; it had cosmological implications.

What was at stake in the minds of thousands of white southerners was whether their

60 Southern School News (July 1959), 10.

society would continue to follow the will of God. Odelle Harman’s prediction in 1956 that white Christians would brook no toleration for integration proved remarkably foresighted as religious conservatives continually lined up to support segregationist positions even into the 1970s.

It is important to note that southerners had not arrived at the point that they viewed segregation as a theological truism without aid from southern ministers. Segregationist folk theology was never exclusively a lay ideology. To the contrary, southern ministers were instrumental in both teaching and spreading segregationist theology throughout the region. As considered in the previous chapter, it is possible the official positions denominations took on racial issues has occluded historical appreciation of the degree to which local ministers advocated against integration. David Chappell, for instance, has claimed that southern clergy largely failed to support segregation.62 Although Chappell is certainly correct in this claim insofar as it applies to denominational leaders and religious elites, there were countless other members of the southern clergy who consistently reinforced segregationist arguments. While some of these men published their formulations of segregationist folk theologies in pamphlets, books, and sermons like the ones cited above, most of these men toiled away in the obscurity of the ubiquitous small churches that dotted the southern landscape, content to make their views on segregation known only to their congregations in their weekly sermons.63


63 Since beginning this project I have spoken about the topic with many white southerners over the age of 55, the vast majority of whom said they had heard forms of segregationist folk theology expressed in their churches or homes as youth. Although these
Current-day disagreements over the extent to which southern ministers supported segregationist theology echo similar debates that occurred on the issue in the 1950s. An historical example of this difference of opinion from South Carolina in 1959 is particularly telling. In April of that year, newly elected South Carolina Governor Ernest Hollings publically stated that “integration will never come to the South.” In response to the governor’s statement, Methodist minister James Copeland wrote a letter to the Charleston News and Courier questioning the state leader’s reasoning. “On what does he base such an astounding prophecy? His own ideas of segregation? His own convictions? His own determiniation?,” Copeland asked rhetorically. “He would and should realize that the Christian Church and its leadership are almost solidly behind the doctrine of the brotherhood and equality of all races of men,” wrote Copeland. “Only here and there does one hear an ecclesiastical voice raised in opposition to integration even in the South, and their voices are usually just as strong in declaring their opposition to the very churches that mothered them in the Faith,” the minister continued. “It is conceivable that the battle at this point is not so much against the U.S. Supreme Court as it is against God,” James Copeland concluded. “If it turns out God is for integration Governor Hollings’ prophecy of no integration in the South will vanish as a bubble.”

Not surprisingly, James Copeland’s letter generated dozens of replies taking issue with his premise that very few church leaders were behind segregation. Some South Carolinians were upset enough with Copeland’s letter that they even responded to the conversations by no means constitute a scientific survey, the almost complete consensus of these individuals’ familiarity with segregationist theological arguments further suggests that these ideas were widespread in southern churches in the 1950s.

64 News and Courier (April 19, 1959).
letter in state newspapers other than the *News and Courier*. When the *News and Courier* refused to print Copeland’s response to one of these letters, the Methodist minister and the paper’s editor, Thomas R. Waring, Jr., exchanged heated letters. “I can understand your refusal to print my letter... the truth hurts, doesn’t it? In fact, I can well understand why you do not wish to start another round,” Copeland chided.

“Segregationists really hate the light.”

Tom Waring could not let Copeland’s charge go unanswered. “You say that you understand our refusal to print your second letter, but in the next sentence you show that you have chosen to misunderstand,” the newspaper editor fired back. “Your generalization that ‘segregationists really hate the light’ is an enlightening reflection on your own thinking. My acquaintance with other Methodist ministers leads me to believe that in this respect you do no represent their customary approach to these grave matters,” Waring wrote in closing.

The other ministers Waring alluded to in his response to James Copeland included William C. Stackhouse, pastor of Trinity Methodist Church in Charleston. Waring passed along his correspondence with Copeland to Reverend Stackhouse for the Charleston minister’s thoughts. “I feel that you have made a wise decision not to print further letters from Mr. Copeland,” confided Stackhouse to Waring. “Anything further that he might have to say on the subject could only lead to further misunderstanding on the part of the general public as his views relate to the clergy in general. While I cannot

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65 *Southern School News* (June 1959), 9.

66 James Copeland to Thomas Waring, June 10, 1959, folder 4, box 393, Waring Papers.

67 Thomas Waring to James Copeland, June 11, 1959, folder 4, box 393, Waring Papers.
deny that some of the brethren are too far to the left,” Stackhouse continued, “by and large his view represents only the fringe minority, the les[s] notice we can give to such the better off all concerned will be. Unfortunately,” Stackhouse concluded in a statement that could well have been applied to latter-day historians, “there are many people who will accept his view as being typical of the clergy in general.”68

As demonstrated in the letter exchange between Waring, Copeland, and Stackhouse, both integrationists and segregationists were eager to claim their position was supported by the majority of the clergy. For every James Copeland who claimed the majority of southern clergy stood solidly behind integration, there were probably several William Stackhouses who said otherwise. A poll taken in 1958 claimed that the majority of southern ministers favored obeying the Supreme Court’s edict to integrate public schools. But reading the accompanying newspaper article that reported the poll results made it clear that only a majority of those who responded to the questionnaires sent out by the pollsters favored integration and did not mention which pastors were chosen to be polled. Perhaps appropriately, the responses from South Carolina were evenly split between clergy who favored and opposed segregation.69

While it may be impossible to know with any certainty what their actual numbers were, pro-segregationist ministers indisputably played a prominent role in lending divine sanction to segregationist causes throughout the South. This clerical aid was particularly instrumental in wrapping the Citizen’s Council movement in sacred garb in the 1950s. A sympathetic minister was almost always on hand to open Council meetings with prayers

68 William Stackhouse to Thomas Waring, June 13, 1959, folder 4, box 393, Waring Papers.

69 “Most Southern Pastors Favor Obeying Court,” The State (October 20, 1958).
and close them with benedictions. The simple presence of clergy at the Citizens’
Councils gatherings gave a tacit endorsement to the reputed righteousness of the
segregationists cause, but ministerial participation was by no means limited to implied
support. The official organ of the Citizens’ Councils of America—prosaically entitled
Citizens’ Council—noted that “[e]very [Citizen’s Council] session is opened with fervent
prayer to God for guidance, leadership, and protection in these times when the devil is
shaking the very foundations of our land.”

White ministers were involved enough in local chapters of the Citizens’ Council
movement to draw praise in Council pamphlets. “We are proud of the growing numbers
of Christian clergy who have joined in the great Council movement, and who are lending
their support and influence in the fight for our people—both Negro and Caucasian,” the
Incorporated Association of Citizens’ Councils of Louisiana proclaimed admiringly.
“Our churches and our ministers are bulwarks of strength in our Christian world,” the
Association went on to note, “[w]ithout their uplifting influence, our lives would present
a confused pattern of spiritually weak and troubled people.”

Clerical participation in local Council chapters is not too surprising considering
the positions ministers held in the national and state-wide Citizens’ Council movement.
A quarter of the editorial board for the nationally distributed Citizens’ Council was made
up of clergymen, while white ministers were either the president or executive secretary of

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70 The Citizen’s Council, (May 1956), 2 quoted in McMillen, The Citizens’ Council, 174,
note 43.

71 “The Citizen’s Councils...Their Platform,” pamphlet found in folder 7, box 393,
Waring Papers.
the state-wide Citizens’ Councils in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia\textsuperscript{72}

Ministerial endorsement of the Citizens’ Council movement was especially strong in South Carolina in the 1950s. Newspaper articles regularly reported state pastors’ addresses to local Councils, such as Reverend J. S. Megg, who was the featured speaker at the Hartsville, South Carolina, meeting in November, 1958. “Segregation is not the least bit sinful,” Meggs told the Councilors. “Many churches and preachers are taking the wrong stand or no stand at all. Many young people are being taught the wrong thing. We should be kind to and helpful to all men, but that does not mean we have to socialize with other races,” the Baptist preacher told his auditors.\textsuperscript{73}

For their part, the Citizens’ Councils welcomed the ecclesiastical legitimacy the ministers’ association provided the groups. “On behalf of our Citizens’ Council, I want to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for your coming to speak to us this past Thursday evening,” the chairman of the North Charleston Citizens’ Council wrote pastor Marion Woodson. “The Citizens’ Councils of South Carolina should be very greatful (sic) to God for such men as you... The burden of work on the leadership of the Citizens’ Council would be greatly reduced if all our spiritual leaders would give us this kind of support,” continued chairman Ed Roberts. “I feel confident that the majority of the ministers in the Charleston area know that integration and mixing of the races is wrong, and that it is harmful morally and spiritually... May God continue to bless you as

\textsuperscript{72} McMillen, \textit{The Citizens’ Council}, 172-73.

\textsuperscript{73} “Pastor Talks to Hartsville Citizens Body,” newspaper clipping found in box 47, Workman Papers.
you do this fine work for the State Association of Citizens’ Councils,” Roberts wrote in closing.\(^{74}\)

On some occasions, even meetings of groups that were not explicitly segregationist in nature provided platforms for segregationist folk theologians to disseminate their message. In December 1955, S. Emory Rogers, a Summerton, South Carolina, attorney who had represented the state before the Supreme Court in the *Brown* arguments, used his talk before the Manning, South Carolina, Lions Club to explain how Christian love was compatible with segregation. As Rogers had studied his New Testament in the original Greek, he discovered that there were two different words, “agapao” and “fileo,” that the King James version, “with which we are most familiar,” translated as “love.” “But what a difference in meaning,” Rogers told the gathered Lions. “Agapao denotes the love of reason of esteem, of respect. Fileo denotes the love of feeling, of affection... I can agapao the Negro, I can respect him. He can merit my esteem. We can be one in Jesus Christ in our mutual respect and esteem for Christ and for each other,” said Rogers. “However,” the Greek linguist continued, “I cannot fileo him, nor do I want him to fileo me; nor do I want the relationship existing between him and me that filial love implies; and neither Christ nor Christianity requires such love.”\(^{75}\)

S. Emory Roger’s talk was reprinted almost in its entirety the following day in the Charleston *News and Courier*. The state’s Association of Citizens’ Councils appreciated the talk so much they reprinted it in pamphlet form for redistribution by local Councils.

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\(^{74}\) Ed Roberts to M. A. Woodson, March 7, 1959, folder 4, box 393, Waring Papers.

\(^{75}\) “Christian Love is Compatible with Segregation,” *News and Courier* (December 11, 1955).
throughout the state, complete with scriptural citations sprinkled throughout that
supported Rogers’s claims.

By the early years of the 1960s, explicit segregationist folk theology that cited
chapter and verse from the Bible to support the proposition that God was a segregationist
widely disappeared from public discourse. The segregationist message so commonly
heralded in pulpits across the South in the 1950s became muted as the civil rights
movement transformed southern culture. Although the vast majority of white southerners
remained opposed to the idea of racial integration, by the 1960s it was more difficult to
be forthright about such sentiments as open expressions of bigotry fell out of social
acceptability in southern society. The transformation of a culture that had helped birth
segregationist folk theology in southern white churches had obvious implications for
religiously motivated segregationists. Just as public espousals of blatantly racist views
became increasingly rare as the 1960s progressed, so too did public statements from
southerners expressing their belief in divinely mandated segregation cease in their
regularity.

In the middle years of the 1960s a southern minister or layman would
occasionally make news by publically employing religious language to defend
segregation, as did Presbyterian minister and Clarendon County, South Carolina, school
district superintendent L. B. McCord in May 1964. In a speech that month before a
Citizens’ Council meeting in Mississippi, McCord told the crowd of segregationists that
“[t]here is no such thing as equality. Read your Bible. We’re everything but equal. God
was a segregationist.”76 Though white southerners continued to express ideas such as

76 Southern School News (June 1964), 16.
these behind closed doors and in private letters, public sentiments like McCord’s disappeared rather quickly from the public record in the 1960s. But ideas do not die simply because they are no longer openly spoken. No paradigm shift in the thought of white religious southerners occurred merely because polite society dictated that they not express their beliefs in such blunt fashion. Just as racist remarks and sentiments continued to pepper private conversations among those known to share similar values, so too did segregationist folk theology survive through knowing asides and veiled comments—most often beyond public hearing.

In the course of southern history, the era of publically preached segregationist folk theology was a relatively short enterprise. Though its roots predated the *Brown* decision by a century, segregationist folk theology itself was not widely expressed until the culture in which it fermented was challenged. There was no need, after all, to continually reiterate God’s desire for segregation until segregation became threatened. As the attack on Jim Crow gained traction in the 1960s, southern culture acquiesced accordingly. For religious belief held captive by that culture, the result of southern society becoming less hospitable to overt pronouncements of racism was the transformation of that religious belief’s expression to more socially acceptable standards of public racial sensitivity.

The relative scarcity of publically sounded segregationist folk theology by the 1960s did not mean that the ideas were no longer prevalent in evangelical circles throughout South. The fact that conservative white Christians no longer openly discussed

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God’s plan for a segregated society did not mean this group ceased believing this to be the case. With their actions in the early years of the 1960s, religious conservatives in South Carolina showed that the divine desire for keeping the races separated was an idea very much alive in southern church pews. When the state’s two largest denominations—the Baptists and Methodists—became caught up in the desegregation of their denominational colleges, their words and actions revealed the continued persistence of segregationist folk theology, regardless of how implicitly it was communicated.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE DESEGREGATION OF BAPTIST AND METHODIST COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH CAROLINA

At the start of the 1961 academic year in September, South Carolina joined Alabama and Mississippi as the only three states left in the country that maintained complete segregation throughout all levels of their public education system.\(^1\) Classrooms from kindergartens to colleges remained strictly segregated along racial lines in the Palmetto State at the start of the seventh school year since the Supreme Court had declared such arrangement unconstitutional, and no change in the situation appeared imminent. Even though education officials in South Carolina seemed in no rush to integrate public institutions, the possibility existed that private colleges could desegregate their classrooms and dormitories in a more expedient manner. Desegregating religious colleges and universities, however, was perhaps even more unlikely than integration in their public counterparts. As one contemporary observer noted at the time, “[s]outhern Protestant schools clung to segregated patterns more tenaciously than public institutions.”\(^2\) Merely considering desegregation for South Carolina’s Protestant colleges and universities in the mid 1960s would represent a significant break from the past.

Holding out hope for a breakthrough in integrated education for the state’s church colleges was Reverend James Copeland, the same minister who had raised segregationists’ ire two years earlier when he claimed that South Carolina clergy members were solidly against segregation. In the autumn of 1961 Copeland wrote a

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\(^1\) *Southern Schools News* (September 1961), 1.

letter to the *Greenville News* calling for an end of segregation in religiously affiliated colleges:

The great majority of church bodies, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the Methodist Church, have declared themselves unequivocally in favor of the integration of the races. Thunderous pronouncements by these and other church bodies have sounded the death knell to antiquated ideas and concepts of race. From the standpoint of official pronouncements, the churches on the whole have been gloriously progressive and have shown a desire to point the way, at least, for those who name the Name of Christ. It is in the realm of practice that the churches have been painfully derelict. Like the Pharisees of old, they have said, but they have not acted. The churches have spoken the truth, but they have failed in the practical application of the truth. Every church worthy of the name Christian and every church related college should, not only in theory but in practice throw their doors open to receive all of any race who love God and seek to learn about and lead a better life... The churches and church related colleges must get their frightened heads out of the sand and begin at once to face up to life as we find it crowding in upon us now. If we fail, we will deserve the just and certain condemnation of God and an enlightened world. Wake up, churches! Wake up, church related colleges!³

Copeland would soon learn the lesson that southern church goers had known for generations: the power of the church came not from denominational pronouncements but from the response to those pronouncements by those who sat in the pews. Much more than any statements by denominational leaders, it was the action of church members that served as the best indicator as to whether or not the "death knell" for ideas about segregationist folk theology had truly been sounded.

James Copeland did not have to wait long to have his ideas about desegregating church colleges tested. Just weeks after Copeland penned his letter to the *Greenville News*, Baptists from across the state gathered at the denomination’s flagship educational institution, Furman University in Greenville, for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. On the afternoon of the convention’s second day, the assembled Baptist messengers

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considered a resolution as to whether fraternities and sororities should be banned from Furman and other Baptist supported schools in the state. It was a contentious matter that centered on a debate as to the role the state convention should play in overseeing procedures at church-related colleges. The question was whether the state convention had the authority to instruct college trustees on crafting school policy. After a considerable amount of discussion on the issue, the messengers voted to require the trustees at every Baptist-controlled college and university in South Carolina to outlaw Greek-life on their campuses beginning in 1962.

Immediately following the vote on fraternities and sororities, just as the tired messengers were preparing to break for dinner, David Wells, pastor of West Hartsville Church, approached the floor podium and moved that “since we are so determined to be Christian, that we instruct all our institutions to receive students irrespective of race, color, or creed.” Wells then simply walked back up the aisle as the messengers sat in stunned silence. Apparently taken aback, none in the crowd offered a motion to discuss Wells’s impromptu resolution, causing convention president John C. Murdoch to call for voice vote on the matter. As the Greenville newspaper reported the following day, “[t]here was a weak ‘aye’ vote from perhaps 50 to 75 persons. Then many hundreds voted ‘no’ in a loud and definite manner.” Despite the statements of denominational leaders and the cajoling of ministers like James Copeland and others of his persuasion, South Carolina Baptists continued to “vociferously oppose” the idea of integration in their church related colleges in 1961.4

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4 South Carolina Baptist Convention Journal (1961), 44-45; Greenville News (November 16, 1961); Southern School News (December 1961), 16.
No doubt to the great displeasure of the Baptist messengers who had overwhelmingly voted against racial integration in their church-related colleges, students and faculty at Furman University a month later demonstrated that they had different beliefs about desegregating their school. In an unofficial vote conducted at a campus chapel service in early December, Furman students, by a narrow majority, voted in favor of allowing “all properly qualified applicants regardless of race” to be considered for admission. This student action came a week after a similar resolution passed among the faculty by the large margin of 112 to 25. If these pro-integration attitudes were formalized into an official admission policy for the university, conflict with the state Baptist convention was inevitable. In order to apprehend where the university stood legally in case of such a conflict, a Furman trustee asked a United States Circuit Judge to review the school’s charter in order to clarify the relationship between Furman and the state Baptist convention. In May 1962 the school received assurance that the convention’s control over the Furman trustees ended with their appointment. While convention messengers nominated and elected trustees, it could neither replace those duly elected nor exercise any managerial authority over them. If Furman University, therefore, abided by the wishes of the state convention, it was out of courtesy rather than obligation.

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Despite the apparent lack of inhibition regarding racial integration at Furman, desegregation did not come to that school or any others in South Carolina in 1962. In fact, when James Meredith enrolled at the University of Mississippi in October of that year, South Carolina became the last state in the country without integration of any kind in its institutions of public education. While one Catholic junior college in South Carolina voluntarily desegregated in June 1962, the remainder of the state’s religious colleges and universities remained lily-white at the beginning of the 1962-1963 academic year. South Carolina’s dubious distinction as the lone state never to have experienced integration in its tax-supported educational institutions lasted only a few months. In January 1963 a Federal Court ruling decreed that Harvey Gantt would be the first African American to enroll at Clemson College. Gantt’s matriculation at Clemson was the result of a drawn-out process that had started in June 1962 when he arrived on campus to register for classes. Gantt was greeted that afternoon by Reverend Charles A. Webster, a white minister who, as director of student work at Clement Baptist Church, worked on the Clemson campus. Webster directed Harvey Gantt, himself a self-identifying Baptist, to the office of the registrar, “as a gesture of Christian courtesy” from one Baptist to another.\(^7\)

Charles Webster’s act of Christian courtesy was not interpreted as such by officials at Clemson College. When Harvey Gantt began classes at Clemson, he and Charles Webster continued to have interactions on campus. Apparently disturbed by these exchanges, Clemson president Robert Edwards requested that the deacon board at

\(^7\) *Southern School News* (April 1963), 14. For details on Harvey Gantt’s desegregation of Clemson, see Maxie Myron Cox, Jr., “1963 – The Year of Decision: Desegregation in South Carolina” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1996).
Webster’s church look into the young minister’s actions. In March 1963 the deacons at Webster’s church recommended that he resign his position because of his contact with Gantt, and two days later Webster took their suggestion. Webster alleged that his encounters with Gantt were seen as “a subversive plot to integrate the college” by the school’s administration, while Clemson president Edwards disingenuously refused to comment on the situation on the basis that it was a church affair outside the concern of the college. 8 Charles Webster’s dismissal signaled two important trends in Baptist thought on racial issues in the early 1960s. First, it revealed that ministers continued to be in a precarious situation if they transgressed the socially accepted limits on interracial exchange in the early 1960s. Additionally, relieving a minister of his duty for implicitly supporting integration at a public college served as a harbinger of the conflict to come over the desegregation of Baptist supported schools in South Carolina.

The dilemma of desegregation in their church schools was not long coming for South Carolina Baptists in the spring of 1963. In the fall of that year, the board of trustees at Furman University held a three-and-a-half hour meeting during which they voted to drop the racially exclusionary application stipulation and adopted a resolution that allowed the school to “consider applications for admissions from all qualified applicants.” 9 Although one of the trustees later wrote that the decision to desegregate Furman was to keep the school in line with its Christian mission, historians who have written on this topic have demonstrated that the anticipated loss of federal funds resulting from a discriminatory admissions policy was equally, if not primarily, a motivating factor


9 *Baptist Courier* (October 17, 1963), 5.
for Furman trustees. While the length of the meeting is a testament to how difficult the decision to integrate Furman was for the board of trustees, all but one of the trustees ultimately voted to allow consideration of African American students for enrollment. The lone holdout among the trustees pounded the table with his fists and declared the day Furman admitted a black student, "was the day he ended all associations with the university."10

Perhaps anticipating reactions similar to those of the dissenting Furman trustee by messengers at the state-wide convention scheduled for the following month, South Carolina Baptist leaders moved to limit the parameters of the Furman desegregation debate with a preemptive strike. In a meeting of the General Board of the South Carolina Baptist Convention convened to finalize the agenda for the convention the following month in Charleston, the state’s denominational Executive Committee voted to "request the Furman University Board of Trustees to defer any action based on its recently announced racial policy until the Convention adopts a policy for all its colleges, and that the matter be referred to the Executive Committee and the General Board before the meeting of the Convention in 1964."11 In other words, Baptist leaders were asking for a twelve month delay before any action was taken on admitting black students to the church-related school and hoped that narrowly framing the question under consideration by the convention—whether or not to adopt a year of study on the topic—would result in less divisiveness among messengers at the convention.


11 Baptist Courier (October 23, 1963), 2.
Despite the General Board's intention to limit the debate on the question of Furman's desegregation at the 1963 state convention, Baptist messengers from across South Carolina proved eager to argue the larger implications of the Furman situation. On one side were Baptists like Reverend R. C. Johnson, Jr., of Early Branch, South Carolina, who stated, "[w]hen the state convention meets..., I am sure the people of this state will see the South Carolina Baptists go on record as favoring segregated schools for their children by overwhelmingly reversing the action taken by the [Furman] trustees."

Opposing such forthright calls for maintaining segregated schools were Baptists who expressed concerns about the precedent of the state convention overruling the university trustees. "We Baptists must learn the meaning of trusteeship," remarked Reverend L. D. Johnson, whose sentiments countered those of the segregationists. "A trustee is named upon the presumption of his competence in the area in which he is made a trustee. The wisdom of directing the destiny of a church-related college through trusteeship is confirmed when one observes its being done on the floor of a convention meeting," Johnson continued. "Under such conditions the institutions may become the pawn of politically inspired denominational forces."12 The opposing views sounded by the two Reverend Johnsons became the central question for debate when the 1963 South Carolina Baptist Convention considered what action to take regarding desegregation at Furman.

The resolution posed to the messengers on the Furman question proposed delaying the school's open admission policy for a year to allow for study of the issue. In short order, however, the debate slipped outside the preset boundaries. The first messenger to speak to the issue reminded his fellow Baptists that "we are messengers

12 *Southern School News* (November 1963), 12.
which means we are not bound by our churches, neither are our churches bound by any action we take.” The issue in question, therefore, Edward Byrd argued, was whether the convention was going to remain true to Baptist polity of local autonomy. If local Baptist churches were not required to abide by the pronouncements of the state convention, why should a different standard hold for the trustees of a Baptist college? “Let the trustees of each institution determine their own course,” Byrd encouraged his fellow Baptists. Before returning to his seat, Edward Byrd moved to amend the original motion for a year of study as follows: “we leave to the trustees of each college the policy on which students are accepted.” Reverend Julian Cave immediately challenged Byrd’s substitute amendment and spoke out against the action of the Furman trustees. Cave proposed an alternative motion of his own suggesting, “that the 1963 South Carolina Baptist Convention disapprove of integration in its colleges.” Cave admitted that Baptist missionary efforts overseas would likely suffer as a result of maintaining segregated church-related schools, but at the same time he believed that the state Baptist convention would not “help our missions by creating a colossal problem in [our] church and denomination. Integration will not bring the millennium,” Reverend Cave concluded as delegates broke out into applause for the only time during the convention and had to be called to order by the convention president.

With the lines now drawn by the Byrd and Cave substitute amendments, debate went back and forth on both sides. Proponents of the Cave amendment appealed to traditional segregationist theology by claiming that desegregation at Furman would result

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13 South Carolina Baptist Convention Journal (1963), 40-41

14 Southern School News (December 1963), 4.
in mixed race marriages that were scripturally prohibited by God. These arguments prompted a call from A. A. Lawson to his fellow messengers to reread the ninth and tenth chapter of Ezra in hopes of correcting their misunderstanding of God's view of mixed marriages.\(^{15}\)

Following Lawson's plea for a reexamination of the last two chapters of the book of Ezra—perhaps because of it—Julian Cave withdrew his substitute motion, which insured that the 1963 convention would not officially condemn integration. Other messengers, however, chose not to let the subject of integration go and continued to speak out against it even after it had been withdrawn from consideration. The Byrd amendment entrusting full authority on matters of desegregation at church-related schools to the trustees of those schools remained in question but was defeated after further debate. Messengers were now left to vote on the original resolution requesting a year postponement on desegregation at Furman. When this motion carried by an overwhelming majority, a segregationist-minded messenger quickly moved that the language of the resolution be altered so that the convention would "instruct" rather than "request" that Furman trustees wait a year until implementing their new admissions policy. This motion was defeated.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) *South Carolina Baptist Convention Journal* (1963), 41. As detailed in chapter 3, Ezra chapters 9 and 10 were common Old Testament passages cited by segregationist theologians. In these two chapters the Israelites, recently returned from their Babylonian exile, are convicted by Ezra for taking non-Jewish wives. In repenting of this violation of Jewish law, the Israelite men promised to purify themselves by separating from their non-Jewish wives. Segregationists used this story to suggest that God abhorred the idea of mixed race marriages.

\(^{16}\) *Ibid.*, 42.
The question yet to be answered following the convention’s resolution on Furman’s admission policy, however, was whether school trustees would assent to the state Baptist convention’s request to the delay in the new open admission policy. Furman students clamored for school officials to ignore the convention’s resolution and to enact the new admissions policy immediately. Despite the student outcry, however, Furman trustees abided by the state convention’s wishes and agreed not to change the university’s admissions policy until the denomination had studied the situation for a year. Yet during this twelve month interlude it became apparent that Furman officials had every intention of desegregating regardless of the convention’s ultimate response. In the summer of 1964 Furman hired a new president who accepted the position on the stipulation that the school desegregate. Additionally, the school was trying to secure federal funds in 1964 for the construction of a new science building and needed to comply with federal non-discrimination policies to qualify for the government largesse.\footnote{Tollison, “Moral Imperative and Financial Practicality,” 107-13.} By the time the South Carolina Baptists convened their 1964 state convention, the end of segregation at Furman seemed a foregone conclusion in the minds of university administrators. Baptist messengers, however, had different thoughts.

The nine-member committee charged with studying desegregation in Baptist colleges had a difficult task during its year of study. It was clear that the vast majority of Baptists in South Carolina opposed desegregation in their denominational schools. At a public hearing the committee held on the topic in the spring of 1964, forty-four Baptist ministers and laymen spoke out against integration and suggested that racial segregation be maintained in all Baptist-related schools compared to only nine individuals who
expressed support for desegregating the schools. Complicating matters was the fact that a fundraising effort was underway in 1964 for a new Baptist college in the Charleston area. Denominational leaders feared a biracial policy at Furman would likely hurt fundraising efforts for the new school.18

A month before the 1964 convention began in Columbia, South Carolina, the study committee submitted its report to the denomination’s General Board for consideration. The committee’s report read in part: “We consider it impractical, at this time to adopt a uniform admissions policy for all our colleges. Therefore, we approve the policy of allowing each college to deal with student admissions in whatever way the Trustees feel is best for that particular institution and the South Carolina Baptist Convention.” By appealing to the traditional Baptist polity of local autonomy, the committee hoped to appease the segregationists making up the majority of the state’s Baptist denomination, while at the same time allowing Furman to pursue the path of integration to which it had clearly already committed itself. The committee’s suggested policy also conveniently side-stepped the larger question of the morality of segregation altogether. Satisfied with this arrangement, the Baptist General Board adopted the policy and passed it on for consideration by the assembled Baptist messengers at the state convention in November.19

The 1964 South Carolina Baptist Convention conducted its proceedings in the sanctuary of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, the same sanctuary in which South Carolinians a century before had cast their votes to secede from the Union. More than

18 *Southern School News* (October 1964), 11.

19 *Baptist Courier* (October 22, 1964), 23.
two thousand Baptist messengers were crowded into the church when Dr. George Lovell introduced the new proposal for admission policies at the denomination’s colleges and universities. The proposal, Lovell told his fellow Baptists, had been “prepared in agonizing prayer,” and he urged respect from those gathered before moving on with the proceedings. Surprisingly, the convention voted not to debate the resolution and instead immediately put the proposal allowing for trustee autonomy on matters of admission to a vote by secret ballot. When the ballots were counted, the policy of trustee autonomy was narrowly defeated by margin of 28 votes, 943 to 915.  

Having asserted its desire to have a say in the admission policies of its denomination’s schools, the South Carolina Baptist Convention felt it appropriate to make its beliefs about integration known. Reverend Julian Cave, who a year earlier had proposed a segregation amendment at the convention only to later withdraw it, again rose to ask the messengers to take a stand on the integration question. Saying that the trustees of Baptist colleges needed to know what the convention thought about racial integration, Cave moved that “the messengers of this convention vote direct ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as to whether they favor or disfavor, approve or disapprove integration in the schools owned and promoted by this body....” Confusion reigned throughout the sanctuary as shouts of “define integration” rang out amidst attempts to table Cave’s motion. With order restored and ballots distributed, South Carolina Baptists, sitting in the same pews their forbearers

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20 Southern School News (December 1964), 6; South Carolina Baptist Convention Journal (1964), 42.
once occupied when deciding to leave the Union, overwhelmingly voted against the idea of racial integration in church schools, 905 to 575. 21

With the state Baptist convention not only unwilling to yield control over admission procedures to the trustees of the denomination’s colleges but also solidly opposed to the idea of racial integration, the Furman trustees were at an impasse. The school was not bound legally to follow the directives of the state convention, and Baptist polity favored local autonomy over outside control. Nonetheless, it was the state convention that had elected the Furman trustees, so a sense of obligation to abide by their wishes undoubtedly existed to some degree among the group. Furman’s president-elect, Gordon Blackwell, still several months from taking office, wrote the trustees to remind them that he had accepted the job with the understanding that the school would be desegregated. In a meeting in early December 1964, Furman’s trustees chose to cast their lot with president-elect Blackwell—as well as the significant federal funds the non-racially exclusive stance would make the school eligible for—and voted to defy the South Carolina Baptist Convention in implementing their previous decision to admit any qualified student regardless of race. 22

Baptists across the state expressed disbelief over the Furman decision. The president of the state Baptist Convention, R. W. Major, was restrained in his disappointment, saying, “I’m a little surprised to hear the news. I thought they would have gone along with the convention.” Less guarded in his reaction was Ben E. Manley,

21 *Southern School News* (December 1964) 6; *South Carolina Baptist Convention Journal* (1964), 44.

chairman of the South Carolina Baptist Laymen’s Association, who stated “I had no idea they would do anything like this in the face of the decision of the convention. It’s a tragedy. It is my opinion that 80 to 90 per cent of the church members in the state oppose this decision. We recognize the school as being ours and not the private domain of school officials. If they integrate it, our objective will be to disintegrate it.” Manley went on to call for “a study of the charter of Furman and of the Baptist Convention to see what can be done with the democratic process.” Along these same lines, another Baptist lay leader promised, “we church members are not going to let a minority tell us what to do. We must maintain the democratic principle of the rule of the majority.”

With their interest in vigilantly abiding by majority rule when it came to the issue of maintaining segregation, these lay Baptist leaders actually demonstrated their willingness to depart from Baptist governing procedures, which granted little authority to the state Baptist convention.

Ultimately, however, it was precisely this autonomy Furman enjoyed apart from the South Carolina Baptist Convention that shielded the institution from the denominational backlash. The only recourse Baptist churches in South Carolina had against Furman was to withhold their funding of the university through the convention. This act might achieve a symbolic victory but would do little to hinder operations at the school since the convention money made up only 6 percent of the Furman budget. As angry as they may have been, therefore, there was nothing conservative Baptists could

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23 *Southern School News* (January 1965), 8.

24 Ibid.
legally do to prevent Joe Vaughn from becoming the first African American undergraduate in Furman history in January 1965.\textsuperscript{25}

At Furman, the Rubicon had been crossed. But in the case of the new Baptist school being organized in Charleston in 1965, the opportunity still existed to prevent racial integration; the South Carolina Baptist Convention acted to insure the new school's trustees would not violate the conscience of the state convention. In light of what had transpired at Furman, the Baptist College of Charleston had its charter drawn so that the school's trustees were bound to follow the policies and directives of the state convention, again, a move incongruent with the Baptist model of local autonomy. In the eyes of these Baptist leaders, the issue of racial purity was more important than traditional Baptist polity.\textsuperscript{26}

The Baptists were not the only religious group in South Carolina dealing with integration in their denomination-affiliated college during the mid-1960s. A similar struggle took place among the Methodists in the state during this period at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Like the situation at Furman, the question of desegregation at Wofford ultimately came down to a dispute over whether the college's admissions policy was the discretion of the school's trustees or the state's annual conference of the Methodist church. The issue of desegregating their church schools first arose in 1962 during the annual conference meeting that year in Spartanburg, South Carolina. After the report of the Board of Christian Social Concerns had been read that year, Reverend James Copeland—the same minister who just the previous fall had called

\textsuperscript{25} Southern School News (February 1965), 7.

\textsuperscript{26} Southern School News (January 1965), 8.
for Baptist and Methodist colleges in South Carolina to desegregate—took the conference floor to call “attention to the position of the Methodist Church in the matter of race, and urg[e] more action in this matter.” To this end, Copeland made a motion that the report of the Board of Christian Social Concerns include the statement, “we recommend that the doors of admission to Wofford and Columbia College (the men’s and women’s Methodist colleges in South Carolina respectively) be open to receive all qualified students irrespective of race or national origin and that this action become effective September of 1963.” After he made his motion, Copeland went on to lecture his fellow delegates. “We ought to be ashamed of ourselves for our reticence,” Copeland told the assembled Methodists. “The Methodist Church ought to be in the forefront of this very great issue. Most ministers of South Carolina believe as I do and so do many of our laymen. It is time for the Church of Jesus Christ to speak out.”

James Copeland’s proposed amendment and subsequent remarks provoked the ire of his fellow churchmen who took an opposite perspective on the question of race relations in the church. Reverend W. R. Kinnett rose to dispute Copeland’s claims. “I resent the overtones that to disagree (with Copeland) is to divide those who are Christian on this issue from those who are not,” Kinnett told the delegates. Another minister, R. C. O’Donnell, similarly challenged Copeland’s view that a good number of Methodist clergy and laymen were of Copeland’s thinking on issues of racial equality, saying “I am afraid that Mr. Copeland’s motion is too far down the road for our people to accept at this


28 *Southern School News* (July 1962), 11.
time." In their vote on the Copeland's motion, the 1962 conference delegates proved O'Donnell to be correct. The official denominational record did not record the actual tally of the vote, noting instead simply that Copeland's amendment was "defeated by a large majority." A reporter covering the annual conference, however, estimated that of the more than 1000 delegates in Spartanburg, fewer than 20 rose in support of Copeland's call to desegregate the Methodist colleges by 1963. Clearly in 1962 the idea of racial integration in their church-related colleges was a distasteful idea to a vast majority of South Carolina Methodists.

The following year, South Carolina Methodists again traveled to Spartanburg for their annual conference meeting where, just as he had the year before, James Copeland again motioned to initiate integration at the denomination's institutions of higher education. Copeland's action at the 1963 conference came in the form of a proposed amendment to the report of the Commission on Christian Social Concerns, which Copeland suggested include the statement, "the South Carolina Methodist Conference go[es] on record as approving enrollment of all qualified students to Wofford and Columbia Colleges irrespective of race, color, or national origin and that this action become effective September 1963." Copeland's 1963 proposed amendment was almost identical to the motion that was overwhelmingly defeated the previous year, including the timetable under which integration at the Methodist colleges would be achieved. Perhaps

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29 Southern School News (July 1962), 11.

30 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1962), 80; Southern School News (July 1962), 11.

31 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1963), 91.
recognizing that Copeland’s motion had very little chance of being adopted in its original form, Claude Evans, the long-time editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* who shared Copeland’s liberal persuasion, suggested instead that the conference endorse racial integration in the denomination’s colleges but that the “time and date of this change be left to the discretion and wisdom of the respective Boards of Trustees.”

Upon hearing Evans’s amendment, conservative delegates sprung into action. E. C. Stroman from Sumter took the floor to speak out against the amendment. Dan Albergotti—later a prominent member of the Methodist Christian Fellowship (see chapter 5)—then motioned to table but was ruled out of order on the basis that motions to table could not follow speeches. Moves to amend previous motions were allowed, however, and conservative delegates acted accordingly to remove the teeth from the original amendment. The amendment the delegates ultimately adopted made no endorsement of racial integration. Instead, it put the South Carolina annual conference on record as wishing “to express our confidence in our trustees of our colleges, both as regards their spiritual dedication and their administrative wisdom. Therefore we wish to declare that we place no restraints on them in their policy-making activities in regard to the racial or other composition of the student bodies of our colleges.”

Although this amendment was a far cry from the radical one James Copeland had originally put forth, it was nonetheless a move toward the integration of the Methodist colleges in South Carolina and as such was adopted only after much heated deliberation took place among the conference delegates.


When the votes were counted and the motion putting the question of integration into the hands of school trustees had passed 252-126, Bishop Paul Hardin asked for a point of personal privilege to address the gathered Methodists on the “tense situation which exists throughout our country, especially in the South, in regard to race.” Hardin was also the bishop of the Alabama-West Florida conference and was one of the eight clergymen to whom Martin Luther King Jr. had addressed his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” just two months earlier. In his remarks to the South Carolina conference, Hardin reiterated the moderate position King had chastised him for in his letter, telling the South Carolina delegates that on racial issues he fell somewhere between “die-hard” conservatives and “irresponsible” liberals. Hardin told his fellow Methodists that “it is a source of personal concern and grief to me to see my beloved Southland and The Methodist Church torn by the race issue.”

Two days before Paul Hardin’s impromptu speech before the South Carolina Methodist conference, President John F. Kennedy had addressed the issue of civil rights in a nationally televised broadcast. In his speech, Kennedy told the nation that the question of civil rights was “not even a legal or legislative issue alone,” and that that “law alone cannot make men see right. We are confronted primarily with a moral issue,” the young president told Americans. “It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be


35 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1963), 91.
afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, Kennedy continued, "because his skin is dark...cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?"36

Two days after Kennedy's address to the nation, Bishop Paul Hardin's remarks to the South Carolina Methodist delegates sounded similar themes. When it came to the racial tension that existed in the church, Hardin told the delegates, "my anguish is all the more acute when I realize that basically the main issue is not race but simple justice and personal dignity. It is as natural for a colored person to seek his place under the sun as it is for a white man to do so."37 The terms "integrationist" and "segregationist," Hardin continued, had become epithets that were dividing the church and causing Christians to hate their fellow Christians. In closing, Paul Hardin again echoed Kennedy in stressing moral obligation over legislative pressure in moving toward racial equality. "In Christian calmness and dignity, let us work together in an effort to grant justice and opportunity to all people—not because of economic and political pressure but because we believe that justice is the common property of all free men."38 Hardin's words received a standing ovation from the conference delegates, but the fallout over Wofford College's subsequent decision to desegregate revealed that not all of South Carolina Methodists were willing to


37 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1963), 91-92.

38 Ibid., 91.
leave behind segregationist folk theology teachings to march toward the light of racial equality.

The president of Wofford College, Dr. Charles Marsh, was somewhat conflicted about desegregating his institution. In a confidential statement four months after the Methodist conference put the decision whether to integrate in their hands, Marsh told the school's board of trustees that he had “no personal objection” to admitting black students and saw “strong moral and ethical reasons why they should be granted this opportunity.” However, as a longtime resident of the South, Marsh was “sympathetically aware of the strong personal feelings of some members of this Board and many other constituents of the College against the admission of Negroes to Wofford.”

In his statement to the Wofford trustees, Marsh iterated the adverse effects of both rejecting and admitting qualified black students. Of the ten adverse outcomes Marsh imagined would result from not admitting African American students, economic reprisal—either in the form of denial of federal grants or reduction in alumni giving—was the main concern of eight of them. There was precedent in South Carolina of institutions of higher education eschewing federal dollars to safeguard segregation. In 1957 Clemson College turned down a federal grant to avoid strings that might later mandate that the school desegregate. In 1963, however, Marsh recognized that Wofford College was in no position to sacrifice government largesse; especially for the principle of segregation, which was growing increasingly dubious in the minds of many white southerners in the mid 1960s.

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39 “Confidential Statement to the Members of the Board of Trustees of Wofford College,” Papers of President Charles F. Marsh, Wofford College Archives, Sandor Teszler Library.

40 Southern School News (September 1957), 2.
In addition to the monetary restrictions resulting from maintaining segregation, Marsh also believed the school would have a difficult time recruiting faculty and students and would grow increasingly isolated “from the main currents of educational and religious policy and practice.” As Marsh reasoned, “most of the national educational associations and religious bodies have taken strong positions in favor of integrated admissions policies at colleges and universities.”

Despite Bishop Hardin’s stated wishes, it appeared Wofford was heading toward integration due more to economic pressure than pure Christian altruism.

In January 1964 a special committee created to explore the logistics of desegregating Wofford College unanimously recommended that “no qualified student be barred from Wofford college on the account of race or creed” and that the board of trustees should act accordingly. In May 1964 Wofford trustees, “after months of study and careful and prayerful consideration,” heeded the committee’s suggestion and opened the doors of the Methodist college to any qualified applicant, irrespective of race. Some of the press releases announcing the change in admissions policy erroneously reported that the decision was unanimous, and the dissenting trustees moved to correct this false report. “I wish to say that I was and still am very definitely opposed to the motion passed by the Board changing the admissions policy,” trustee W. Cantey Sprott wrote to the

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41 “Confidential Statement to the Members of the Board of Trustees of Wofford College,” Marsh Papers.

42 “Minutes of Special Committee of the Board of Trustees on Wofford College Admission Policies,” Marsh Papers.

43 Charles F. Marsh to Members of the Wofford Faculty, Administrative Staff and Student Body, May 19, 1964, Marsh Papers.
editor of the *Methodist Advocate*. "I was one of those voting with the minority against the motion and I make no apologies to anyone for this stand." As the reaction to the Wofford decision would make clear, rather seeking an apology, a large contingent of South Carolina Methodists no doubt viewed Sprott's vote as a laudable act.

The backlash began almost as soon as word about the change in Wofford's admissions policy was released. In an emergency meeting called fifteen minutes before the start of Sunday School, the Official Board of Trinity Methodist Church in Sumter, South Carolina, voted to end the church's financial support of Wofford College and divide the more than $2500 in allocated funds between other Methodist schools in the state. Two weeks later, when Marsh traveled to the annual conference meeting to address the admissions policy change before the delegates, the chorus against the Wofford action swelled. "We at Wofford humbly believe that this step we have taken to open the doors of your college to future Negro leaders of our state will help to release from this reservoir the streams of Christian love needed to ensure the kind of South Carolina all of us want," Marsh told his fellow Methodists. For a good number of the gathered delegates, such sentiments directly contradicted their long-standing beliefs on the issue of Christianity and race relations and they acted accordingly to defend those beliefs.

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44 "Opposed Wofford Action," *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (June 11, 1964), 5.

45 George C. James, Secretary of the Official Board, Trinity Methodist Church to Charles F. Marsh, May 25, 1964, Letters Opposing folder, Marsh Papers.

46 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction *Journal and Yearbook* (1964), 243.
More than a dozen churches sent resolutions to the annual conference announcing that they, like Trinity Methodist Church, were cutting off funds to Wofford and would send the money to the state’s other two Methodist schools.\textsuperscript{47} One delegate made a motion that the Wofford College board of trustees “be requested to restudy their new admissions policy, and that in so doing, they consider opinions of Wofford men and South Carolina Methodists.” After much deliberation, this motion was narrowly defeated 272-250.\textsuperscript{48} On the heels of this defeated motion, another delegate moved that the Wofford trustees “rescind their recent action to integrate Negroes into the College, and that the Board of Trustees of Columbia College and Spartanburg Junior College (the other two Methodist schools in the state) not take any action in the future to integrate their respective institutions.” This motion was also defeated after sharp deliberations.\textsuperscript{49}

If conservative Methodists were unable to get the annual conference to adopt their views, they nonetheless made sure their opinions on racial integration were made known in the wake of the Wofford decision. Letters poured in to Charles Marsh’s office protesting the school’s admission policy. E. B. Woodward wrote Marsh to request that he be removed from the school’s mailing list and appealed to the folk theology argument that God is unchanging and therefore so too should be ideas about racial segregation remain static. “If you think integration is right,” Woodward asked Marsh, “please explain why you have made no move in that direction long, long ago; or was it wrong then and

\textsuperscript{47} Southern School News (July 1964), 7.

\textsuperscript{48} South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1964), 101.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 102.
Other Methodists opposed to the Wofford decision were more explicit in wielding their segregationist folk theology arguments. "I am still opposed to mixing of races and base my stand on the Holy Bible which clearly teaches separation.... Mixing of races brings not racial peace but the exact opposite as clearly proved by examples in other countries. Let us return to the Scriptures," Paul Harless wrote to Marsh.\(^5\)

The Official Board of the Manning Methodist Church published an extended letter in the *Methodist Advocate* reaffirming their belief that "segregation of the races is best for the white people and the colored people of our state...." The Manning church leaders went on to state that actions such as the one Wofford officials were taking, "makes one wonder who is calling the signals—is it our God who thought it best to create man with different colors and characteristics and none of us equal? Or is it our leaders in government and church who think that He made a mistake? To our knowledge Christ never preached equality nor did He preach integration."\(^5\) The segregationist folk theology that had been so prevalent during debates in the 1950s still proved to have currency for some religious conservatives well into the 1960s.

The majority of letters written to Charles Marsh in opposition to the change in Wofford's admissions policy made no explicit mention of segregationist folk theology. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that segregationist folk theology influenced the actions of the letter writers. This is especially true of the dozens of Methodist churches


\(^{51}\) Paul W. Harless to Charles F. Marsh, June 20, 1964, Letters Opposed folder, Marsh Papers.

\(^{52}\) "A Letter From Manning" *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (July 2, 1964), 12-13.
across South Carolina that wrote to Marsh to inform the Wofford president that they would no longer be financially supporting the college in light of the racially inclusive admissions policy. If these conservative Christians believed God was neutral on the question of racial integration, it is unlikely that they would adopt formal resolutions condemning Wofford’s move toward integration and direct their financial contributions to the two schools in the state that continued to practice racial segregation. Yet, this church-sanctioned condemning and/or redirecting of funds was precisely what the official boards and Sunday school classes in Methodist churches across South Carolina did in response to Wofford’s racially inclusive admissions policy. The Young Adults Sunday School Class at the Bethlehem Methodist Church in Bishopville, South Carolina, for example, wrote Charles Marsh in order to “go on record as being fervently opposed to the recent decision of the Board of Trustees of Wofford College concerning the lowering of racial barriers. There are twenty-six members of our Sunday School class, and in the not-too-distant future our children will be ready to attend Wofford and Columbia College. They, and we, have been betrayed by this infamous action, and we cannot under any circumstance condone it,” wrote Dan McDaniel on behalf of the Young Adult Class.\(^53\)

Perhaps more troubling for Wofford officials than letters simply expressing dissatisfaction with the new admissions policy were those that ended financial support to the college. These letters came from both individual Methodists as well as churches. Kenneth Suggs wrote Charles Marsh to express his “shock” that “without any vote being taken on the subject by the membership of the alumni or the churches which are affected,

the Trustees, had...opened the doors of Wofford to the mixing of races. While my contribution has not been much in the past, I have no further interest in making contributions to the college for any purpose."\(^5^4\) Similarly, W. W. Alman was so upset when he heard about the new admissions policy that wrote Marsh to cancel his membership in an alumni association and to inform school officials that he had had his will rewritten "and Wofford is no longer mentioned—a rather nice legacy gone."\(^5^5\)

Individuals like Suggs and Alman were not the only ones redacting their financial support of Wofford College. Charles Marsh received letters from Methodist churches across the state informing the Wofford president that his school would no longer be receiving their annual contributions. In the vast majority of these letters, the chairman of the churches' official boards wrote to Marsh informing him of this news and included the resolution church members had adopted to voice their displeasure over Wofford's integrationist stance. In almost all cases the resolutions took the funds that had originally been allocated for Wofford and reallocated them between Columbia College and Spartanburg Junior College, the two Methodist colleges in South Carolina that retained segregated admissions policies in 1964. In several instances Methodist churches stipulated they would only continue supporting these two institutions as long as they retained their racially segregated charters.

The loss of funding from the Methodist Churches in South Carolina was of particular concern to Wofford officials. Church contributions to Wofford in 1963 had


made up nearly 13 percent of the schools operating budget, a percentage significantly higher than the South Carolina Baptist Convention’s support of Furman. Throughout the spring and summer Charles Marsh seemed to receive notice on an almost daily basis from churches who had decided to pull their support for Wofford. In September the \textit{Methodist Advocate} printed the results from questionnaires it had sent to churches throughout South Carolina in an attempt to accurately gauge the amount of support Wofford had suffered from desegregating the college. Of the 316 churches that responded to the journal’s questionnaire, 86—close to 30 percent of all respondents—reported they had withdrawn financial support from the school. Despite the loss of support from local churches throughout the state, Wofford officials went forward with their plan to consider any qualified applicant regardless of race. In the fall of 1964 Albert W. Gray became the first African American student to attend Wofford College.

School officials remained apprehensive about giving levels throughout the 1964-1965 academic year. In May 1965, however, Roger Milliken, a wealthy textile executive from Spartanburg, South Carolina, and longtime friend of Wofford College, discreetly donated $100,000 to the school to establish a “Gift Stabilization Fund,” which school officials could use if church donations continued to plummet. Despite the fact that many of the churches who chose to withdraw support were numerically small, the cumulative effect of their actions nevertheless forced Wofford officials to dip into Milliken’s fund. Although the fund was only accessed once, its very presence was enough to assuage the

\footnote{56 Tollison, “Moral Imperative and Financial Practicality,” 139.}

\footnote{57 \textit{Ibid.}, 140-41.}
concerns of Wofford’s administrators and was a welcomed insurance policy against the conservative backlash to Wofford’s desegregation.\textsuperscript{58}

Despite the best efforts of conservative Baptists and Methodists, the respective flagship institutions of higher education for both these denominations were desegregated by 1965. Examining the fallout from the decision to integrate Furman and Wofford reveals several important aspects about religiously motivated massive resistance in the mid 1960s. While there is no data indicating how many South Carolinians identified as Protestant Christians, it is reasonable to think that the percentage of those in the state identifying as Protestant during this period was similar to percentages from the South as a whole, for which there is record. During the period of the Wofford and Furman desegregation battle, 87 percent of Southerners identified as Protestant.\textsuperscript{59} Although not known precisely, South Carolina’s Protestant population was likely close to this extraordinarily high percentage. Moreover, of those who \textit{did} identify as Protestant in South Carolina in this period, over 80 percent belonged to Baptist or Methodists churches in the state.\textsuperscript{60} Based on these numbers it is possible to use the controversy over the desegregation of Furman and Wofford to draw conclusions about the representative attitudes and approaches of white evangelical Christians in South Carolina on racial issues in the mid 1960s.

\textsuperscript{58} Courtney Louise Tollison, “Principles over Prejudice: The Desegregation of Furman University, Wofford, Columbia, and Presbyterian Colleges” (Master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, 2001), 55.

\textsuperscript{59} John Shelton Reed, \textit{The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society} (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 58.

First, the controversy surrounding the desegregation of Furman and Wofford reveals that segregationist folk theology continued to maintain viability in the eyes of conservative white church-goers into the mid-1960s. As shown in both the state’s Baptist Convention debate over Furman and the letters Methodists sent to Charles Marsh protesting Wofford’s admission policy, whites in South Carolina continued to make overt appeals to segregationist folk theology in justifying their desire for racially segregated church schools. It is true, however, that it was only a minority of Methodist letter writers and Baptist messengers who explicitly invoked segregationist folk theology arguments. Yet, by a huge majority, Baptists messengers in 1964 rejected the idea of integrating Furman, while Methodist delegates overwhelmingly voted down a plan to integrate their denominational colleges in 1962. And when Wofford did desegregate in 1964, enough Methodist churches withdrew their financial support that the school had to utilize an emergency fund to meet the budget. Clearly, then, conservative Baptists and Methodists were still motivated by the idea that integration went against the will of God, even if such ideas were no longer openly vocalized by the mid-1960s. Although segregationist folk theology grew increasingly muted in the 1960s, the ideas behind the folk theology retained their viability in the eyes of many, if not most, conservative white Christians in South Carolina.

The silencing of explicit segregationist folk theology can be explained in part by examining the cultural context in which questions of racial equality resided in the mid-1960s. Indeed, the controversy surrounding the desegregation of Furman and Wofford provides the opportunity to view the social forces that prevented South Carolina Baptists and Methodists from freely espousing their religiously motivated segregationist beliefs
even as they continued to be influenced by them. It is clear that the desegregation of Furman and Wofford did not occur in a cultural vacuum. The primary impetus for the decision to integrate both schools, after all, came from outside forces. At Furman, the goal was to raise the university’s reputation by recruiting a top-level president and faculty, which school officials discovered was impossible as long as Jim Crow resided on campus. At the same time, Wofford desegregated in large part to qualify for federal funds. School officials at both Furman and Wofford were able to gauge the shifting tide of public opinion and federal policy against discriminatory practices and made accommodations at their respective institutions accordingly.

Political savvy was not limited to the ranks of school bureaucrats in the 1960s. It is telling, for instance, that Bishop Paul Hardin addressed South Carolina Methodists on the issue of racial equality by sounding themes that closely echoed the ones John F. Kennedy had first heralded two days earlier. Most white southerners were attuned to the changes that had already occurred and were coming by the 1960s on the issue of racial equality.61 The impetuses for these changes were not limited to federal pressure. The civil rights demonstrations in South that had done so much to affect changes in the racial climate of the region by the mid 1960s had also occurred with regularity in South Carolina. Nonviolent direct action protests in the state began in February 1960 in Rock Hill, South Carolina when African American college students sat down and asked to be served at the “white only” lunch counters in several of the city’s drug stores. Although the South Carolina legislature moved almost immediately to enact measures making it

more difficult for activists to carry out protests, African American demonstrations against
discrimination and segregation continued unabated for the next decade.\textsuperscript{62} As white
Baptists and Methodists considered ending segregation in their denominational colleges,
therefore, they did so in the midst of African American protests over the practice.

Civil rights demonstrations coupled with reform brought on by federal economic
pressure had created an environment in the South where open and blatant displays of
racial antagonism and discrimination were becoming less socially acceptable. The
impact of this change in southern culture on a religion that had always made cultural
accommodations was telling. By the mid 1960s it was now an affront to polite social
customs to talk about God's desire and plan for racial segregation even while the belief of
God as a segregationist maintained significant motivating power. The work of
sociologist James Davison Hunter on the accommodationist tendency in evangelicalism
helps explain the incongruence between social conduct and doctrinal belief. Hunter
asserts that, "[c]ultural pluralism places pressure on the adherents of a particular belief
system to be accepting of those from other traditions. Evangelicalism has resisted
accommodating to this pressure at the doctrinal level; it has made certain concessions at
the level of social demeanor and social discourse."\textsuperscript{63} What Hunter is suggesting, in other
words, is that when conservative evangelicals hold beliefs that run contrary to the broader
culture, they often stop espousing these beliefs for the sake of social civility. But they do
not necessarily stop believing them.

\textsuperscript{62} Southern School News (April 1960), 4; I. A. Newby, Black Carolinians: A History of
Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968 (Columbia: University of South Carolina

\textsuperscript{63} James Davison Hunter, American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the
The accommodationist trend Hunter sees in evangelicalism was illuminated clearly in the backlash to the Furman and Wofford desegregation decision. While only a minority of South Carolina Baptists and Methodists actually vocalized their opposition to racially integrating their denominations' colleges in terms of segregationist folk theology, by their deeds a majority of the state's Baptists and Methodists demonstrated they continued to hold to the doctrine that God desired racial segregation.

Additionally, by voting against the desegregation of their denominational colleges and withdrawing financial support when those institutions did finally desegregate, the Furman and Wofford incidents reveal that the divergence between the laity and clergy over the issue of racial equality (see chapter 2) continued into the 1960s. It is worth noting that it was the chairman of the South Carolina Baptist Laymen's Association who publicly announced his intent to disintegrate Furman should the school desegregate. Similarly, it is telling that it was Methodist ministers in 1962 and 1963 who proposed the resolutions that ultimately paved the way for Wofford's desegregation. It was one of these ministers that J. C. Hubbard took to task in an angry letter to Charles Marsh a month after Wofford announced it was opening its doors to any qualified applicant regardless of race. Hubbard singled out J. Claude Evans for purportedly saying that "no respected Bible scholar in America today will say that racial segregation is Biblically based. Why is today different from any other day?" Hubbard rhetorically asked Marsh. "I do not know just who he (Evans) classifies as a Biblical scholar. I am at least glad he did not say 'respected Methodist.' Can he point out in the Bible where integration is Biblically based?"64

64 J.C. Hubbard to Charles Marsh, June 24, 1964, Letters Opposed folder, Marsh Papers.
Like J. C. Hubbard, Climent J. Mint was also distressed about the direction Methodist Bishops and liberal clergymen were taking the denomination. "It is evident that some of our Bishops and Superintendents have forgotten that the Laymen pay the bills...," Mint wrote in a letter to the *Methodist Advocate* responding to the changes at Wofford College. "We are looking to the day when the great Methodist Church again will feel the heart beat of the Local Church. When the dead branches are trimmed off, the pulse of Methodism can be felt again in America.... The Conference and the Institutions, with all its leaders, including the Bishop and the District Superintendents, have forgotten that they need the local church and its support." The sentiments expressed by J. C. Hubbard and Climent J. Mint spoke for countless other laymen throughout South Carolina in 1964. Church colleges may have desegregated. Liberal clergy and denominational boards might speak out for racial equality. But for the majority of white church-goers who filled South Carolina pews in the mid-1960s, their version of Christianity continued to hold that segregation was part of God's plan and they would continue to fight for this divinely mandated social arrangement even in the face of societal change.

In December 1964 a group of Methodist laymen in Orangeburg, South Carolina published the first issue of the *Methodist Bulletin*. One of the stated purposes of this new publication was to fight the desegregation that was occurring within the Methodist denomination. Earlier in the year, Wofford had desegregated and now a new threat was looming on the horizon. "There should be no doubt that the present leadership of the

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Methodist Church has adopted the goal of integration—the absence of all racial distinctions,” the editors of the *Methodist Bulletin* warned their readers.\(^66\) There were indeed changes afoot in the Methodist denomination in late 1964 as Methodist leaders sought to end the racial segregation that had existed within the church governmental structure since 1939. Like the controversy surrounding the desegregation of Furman and Wofford, the revolt against merging black and white annual conferences of the Methodist Church in South Carolina would demonstrate that ideas influenced by segregationist folk theology continued to evolve in order to maintain social currency in the changing racial climate of the South.

\(^{66}\) Quoted in *Southern School News* (January 1965), 8.
CHAPTER FIVE

TRANSFORMING THE RELIGIOUS ARGUMENT FOR SEGREGATION
THE METHODIST MERGER

In the spring of 1970 William D. Workman sat down at his desk to compose a news release for publication in the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*. The piece’s purpose was to inform other conservative Methodists in the state about a newly formed organization called the Methodist Christian Fellowship (MCF) that would likely be of interest to many of them. “Members of the Methodist Christian Fellowship,” Workman wrote, “have been brought together by a common concern over their fear that some elements of the ministry and laity are departing from beliefs and behavior which have characterized Methodism in the past.”

Among the litany of departures from traditional Methodist practices, of particular worry to the denominations’ conservatives that year was the proposed plan of merger between South Carolina’s black and white Methodist Annual Conferences. This concern was subtly articulated in a portion of the MCF’s official position paper that Workman included with his news release. The MCF position paper outlined the fellowship’s stance on the denomination’s need for renewed emphasis on evangelism, the necessity of traditionally orthodox theology, and the adherence to law and order before iterating a fourth purpose of its creation. “Believing in the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God, we stand for political, economic and religious freedom for all racial, cultural, and religious groups,” position point four began innocuously. Only in the second half of position point number four was the true reason

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for the MCF's founding hinted at: "[w]e rededicate ourselves to resolving tensions between the races both within the Church and without, seeking to foster natural affinities, mutual appreciation of each other's merits and the voluntary association of individuals."\(^2\)

As benign as it may have seemed, the MCF's position on the issue of race relations in the church actually carried heavy implications in the context of 1970 South Carolina Methodism. The phrases "natural affinities," "mutual appreciation of merits," and "voluntary association of individuals" had a history in the South much longer than the MCF. They were, in fact, words that Supreme Court Justice Henry Billings Brown had written in 74 years earlier when crafting the majority opinion in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

"The argument also assumes that social prejudices may be overcome by legislation, and that equal rights cannot be secured to the negro except by an enforced commingling of the two races. We cannot accept this proposition," Justice Brown wrote in 1896. "If the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other's merits and a voluntary consent of individuals."\(^3\) The fact that the MCF chose to appropriate nearly word for word a line from the Supreme Court case that gave Jim Crow legal sanction in the South for over six decades is a telling revelation of the group's not-so-subtle segregationist agenda. Beyond laying bare the group's separatist intent, however, the language the MCF employed in its effort to thwart the merger of African American and white church conferences in South Carolina is indicative of the transformation in the rhetoric of religious segregationists in the South during the waning years of the 1960s. Understanding the meaning behind these


\(^{3}\) *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
emblematic, coded phrases reveals both a continuity of segregationist thought from the 1950s and a portending of how racial separatism became sanctioned by churches—even unwittingly so—by the mid 1970s.

As detailed in the previous chapter, one of the greatest difficulties in measuring the racial temperament of religious conservatives in the South by the late 1960s stems from the fact that southern religion was so often culturally inscribed. As southern culture changed throughout the 1960s, the region’s churches reflected the societal moderation of openly racist language and the decline of socially accepted racist rhetoric. Sermons and writings explicitly defending segregation as divinely ordained grew scarce as the 1960s progressed. Because white southerners retreated from employing segregationist theology to defend the racial status quo in their region, some historians have concluded that the “foundation of God-ordained racial inequality crumbed” by the end of the 1960s and that those southerners who had wielded segregationist folk theology in the previous decade were never entirely convinced of its perspicuity. The racial separation that lived on in southern churches, the reigning interpretation has it, though lamentable, could not be attributed to a conscientious plan by white southerners to remain set apart from fellow believers of African American descent.

Belying the above interpretation is an incident within the Methodist denomination in the late 1960s that challenges the idea that white evangelicals accepted the idea that segregation was un-Christian and ceased actively resisting attempts at racial inclusion and integration in the post-civil rights act South. Understanding this incident necessitates

a brief synopsis of Methodist church history. In 1844 the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) split into northern and southern branches over the issue of a slave-holding church bishop in the South. During the era of Reconstruction, most African American Methodists left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) to join either new black denominations or retained their affiliation with Methodism by joining the northern MEC. As relations between the sections thawed in the early twentieth century, discussion began to reunite the MEC and the MECS. When reunification was achieved in 1939, the rejoined denomination wrote racial segregation into the very blueprint of church government. Appreciating this segregation requires knowledge of the Methodist church structure.

Churches make up the most basic unit of the Methodist church hierarchy. A group of churches within a defined region is called an annual conference, so named because once a year the churches send delegates to a meeting where business ranging from ministerial appointment to conference budgeting is conducted on behalf of all the churches in the annual conference. The geographical borders of annual conferences vary, but in some cases they follow the boundaries of states; such is the case in South Carolina.


6 Morris L. Davis, The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4-5. For more on the reconciliation of religious northerners and southerners throughout the late nineteenth-century, see Edward J. Blum, Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005). Blum’s work supports the idea that the conciliatory stance of northern and southern Methodists after the Civil War was typical of most white Christians in the two regions in the post-Civil War decades.
All the Methodist churches in South Carolina, therefore, comprise the South Carolina Annual Conference.

Every four years each annual conference elects delegates to send to the General Conference meeting of the entire Methodist church. The annual conference/General Conference system was how Methodism had functioned in the United States from its introduction until 1939. Even with the church split in 1844, both churches maintained the annual conference/General Conference arrangement in their respective region.

Talk of Methodist reunification started as early as 1910 with a proposal known as the “Chattanooga Plan,” which proposed adding a new structure of government to the traditional Methodist hierarchy. Under the Chattanooga Plan, the denomination would insert an intermediary conference between the annual conferences and General Conference and would be called a jurisdictional conference. The addition of jurisdictional conferences to the reunified Methodist church was significant because it was the mechanism whereby northerners in the denomination made concessions to white southerners on the issue of race in the newly formed church. The jurisdiction plan ultimately adopted under the 1939 reunification agreement allowed for five jurisdictional conferences based on geography and a sixth jurisdictional conference based on race.

Whereas white churches that made up the various annual conferences were assigned to the appropriate jurisdictional conferences based on their geographic locales, black Methodist churches, regardless of location, were grouped into the sixth jurisdictional

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8 Davis, The Methodist Unification, 5.
conference called the Central Jurisdiction. Many southern Methodists had hoped the black churches could be persuaded to leave the denomination altogether. When it became apparent this white southern desire would not be fulfilled, the segregated Central Jurisdiction became an acceptable alternative.\textsuperscript{9} Key to the South’s agreeing to reunification was the fact that with existence of the Central Jurisdiction, African American Methodist churches, irrespective of their geographic proximity to white Methodist churches, belonged to separate annual conferences and jurisdictional conferences than their white counterparts. In such an arrangement, there was no danger of an African American pastor being assigned to a white church and racially integrated churches and conference bodies could be avoided. When the Methodist church reunited in 1939, therefore, it did so as a racially segregated denomination.

The newly formed denomination became the biggest Protestant denomination in the country with over 7 million members. The South Carolina Annual Conference belonged in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, numerically the largest jurisdictional conference in the reunited denomination with over 27 percent of the nation’s Methodist churches. The Central Jurisdiction, comprised of all the African American annual conferences in the denomination, accounted for only 4 percent of the church total but the South Carolina Annual Conference of the Central Jurisdiction was the jurisdiction’s largest conference with over 40,000 members making up 13 percent of the total.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{9} Murray, Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 31-52; Davis, The Methodist Unification, 86-88.

\textsuperscript{10} Murray, Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 45-46.
The majority of white lay Methodists in the South were satisfied with the segregation the Central Jurisdiction provided and this contentment extended even to the South Carolina bishop in 1950. “I am in agreement with you that the abolishing of segregation in no way offers a solution to the race question,” Bishop Costen J. Harrell assured a parishioner worried about possible integration in the Methodist church. “I cannot foresee the time when segregation will be abolished in the Methodist church,” the bishop continued. “To do so would require a constitutional procedure, and we of the South could prevent it.”¹¹

Contrary to Bishop Harrell’s assessment, many Methodists outside the South began to see the need for abolishing the Central Jurisdiction to improve race relations in the church as the racial segregation officially sanctioned in the denomination became an affront to many in the church during the 1950s. The fact that black and white churches in the same region were part of separate conferences was viewed as hypocrisy for a church body that had spoken out against racial segregation. Talk of abandoning race-based jurisdictions began as early as 1956 within the Methodist Church. In a policy decision that in many respects matched the Supreme Court’s 1955 mandate that school desegregation should proceed with all deliberate speed, Methodists in 1956 committed to abolishing the Central Jurisdiction but set no timetable for doing so. Instead, delegates to the General Conference meeting that year called for the adoption of an amendment to the church constitution that would allow for the voluntary transfer of black annual conferences out of the Central Jurisdiction into regionally appropriate geographical jurisdictions. Once the transfer had been complete, overlapping annual conferences in

¹¹ Costen J. Harrell to Frank W. Hollingsworth, May 1, 1950, box 39, Workman Papers.
the same regional jurisdiction would be merged into a new racially inclusive annual conference. The 1956 General Conference was the first to promote "voluntarism" as a means for the transfer and merger of black and white conferences to take place. Historian Peter Murray has noted that voluntarism was welcomed in parts of the South precisely because it did not mandate that racial categories be abandoned in that region and that segregated conferences could continue for as long as such an arrangement was desired.¹²

Although white southerners may have looked askance at the voluntary process of transferring and merging black and white conferences as the first crack in the denomination's segregationist facade, it was clear that many white Methodists of the former Confederacy had no intention of voluntarily dismantling their segregated conferences in the foreseeable future. In 1957, for instance, the Board of Lay Activities for the white annual conference in South Carolina prepared a resolution to be presented at a meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, where Methodist bishops were holding meetings to determine the need for any jurisdictions in the Methodist church. The resolution of the Board of Lay Activities began with the statement that "the present Jurisdictional System of the Methodist Church has been and is functioning satisfactorily and efficiently, and there is neither need nor sufficient reason for any change to be made in such system." As the resolution continued, it became clear that the disgruntlement of the lay board members centered on the issue of the Central Jurisdiction. "[I]n no event should there be any further change in the present status of the Central Jurisdiction," the resolution stated.

¹² Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race*, 86-90. Murray’s book is the best source for explaining the very complicated process of abolishing racially defined governing structures from the whole of the Methodist denomination. South Carolina white Methodists reacted negatively to the idea of transferring and merging black and white conferences but were relieved that the process was completely voluntary. See *Southern School News* (June 1956), 14.
Recalling the debates that occurred between northern and southern Methodists leading up to the 1939 reunification, the South Carolina board of lay activity defended its disagreement with doing away with separate jurisdictions for black and white Methodists. "[I]t has long been the understanding of this body and of the overwhelming majority of our local church members that assurance was given to the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and formally stipulated at the time unification was agreed upon, that the Jurisdictional system, including the Central Jurisdiction, would be maintained and that no effort to change that status would later be made."\(^{13}\) The resolution ended with board members stating that if certain groups were upset about the racial arrangement of the Methodist church, they should leave the denomination rather than force their dissatisfaction "upon those loyal members who do not themselves raise the issue."\(^{14}\) If, however, the separate jurisdictional conferences were to be "sacrificed upon the alter of integration," the South Carolina lay group told the denominational leaders, many churches and church members would undoubtedly withdraw their support and membership from the denomination.\(^{15}\)

Ultimately the denominational leadership agreed that jurisdictional conferences were still useful for the Methodist church and decided to continue the voluntary transfer and merger of the Central Jurisdiction conferences into the geographic jurisdictions as proposed in 1956. The procedure of voluntarism to transfer and merge black and white churches into the same conferences had the same impact in the South during its first

\(^{13}\) "Jurisdictional Hearings October 30-31 in Charlotte," *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* (October 24, 1957).

\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{15}\) Quoted in *Southern School News* (December 1957), 7.
decade as the Supreme Court’s timeframe of “all deliberate speed” had produced for southern school desegregation in its first ten years: negligible. The transfer and merger process was complicated, to be sure. First, annual conferences from the Central Jurisdiction could transfer into the appropriate geographical jurisdiction only upon receiving a two-thirds vote from each conference in question. The second step in the process came when the two overlapping annual conferences adopted a plan of merger that each conference had to adopt by majority vote. The South Carolina Annual Conference of the Central Jurisdiction transferring into the Southeastern Jurisdiction, for example, required a two-thirds vote by both the Central Jurisdiction as well as the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Once the transfer had been completed there now existed two South Carolina Annual Conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, one made up of white churches, the other comprised of black churches. These two annual conferences were expected to come up with a plan to merge the two annual conferences into a single racially inclusive conference. With such a complicated process it seemed unlikely that the structure of racial separation would soon end in the southern Methodist conferences. Indeed, in the South Central and Southeastern Jurisdictions, the two jurisdictional conferences comprising all the states of the former Confederacy, not a single annual conference from the Central Jurisdiction had transferred into the geographical jurisdiction, let alone had any overlapping conferences merged by 1964.

In November 1966 a special session of the Methodist General Conference met in Chicago to consider two pressing issues before the denomination. First on the agenda

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16 Murray, Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 84-85.

17 Ibid., 184.
was a vote on the possible union of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical Brethren Church. For many southern Methodists uneasy about the trend toward racial inclusiveness in their church, however, the second order of business was more important because it pertained to the Conference’s consideration of a resolution presented by the Commission on Interjurisdictional Relations concerning the transfer and merger process.

The resolution in question recommended that the Methodist Church pledge its "determination to do everything possible to bring about the elimination of any structural organization in the The Methodist Church based on race at the earliest possible date and not later than the close of the Jurisdictional Conferences of 1972." The Omnibus Resolution, as it became known, proposed the immediate abolition of the Central Jurisdiction and transfer of the Central Jurisdiction’s annual conferences into the five geographic jurisdictions as the first step in ending structural racism in the denomination. This plan would proceed only if each of the six jurisdictions approved the resolution by a two-thirds vote.

In addition to the immediate transfer of African American annual conferences into the geographical jurisdictions, the Omnibus Resolution was significant in that it set a target date of 1972 for all overlapping black and white annual conferences to adopt plans of merger to form racially inclusive conferences throughout the country. The issue of the target date became a contentious point because it appeared to be an abandonment of the voluntarism that had marked the Methodist desegregation process up to this point. In

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the eyes of some southern delegates to the General Conference, imposing such a short
timeline for conference mergers was an unreasonable request for white southerners.

Leading the charge against the Omnibus Resolution at the 1966 General
Conference was a lay delegate from Mississippi named John C. Satterfield. Satterfield
and his fellow lay delegate, Edwin L. Jones of North Carolina, were both members of the
Commission on Interjurisdictional Relations, the committee responsible for drafting the
Omnibus Resolution. The two southerners, however, felt strongly enough in their dissent
toward the Omnibus Resolution to write a minority report containing an alternative
resolution to the one the other twenty-four members of their committee proposed. In
their minority report, Jones and Satterfield, the later a former head of the American Bar
Association, noted that the Commission on Interjurisdictional Relations was far from
proportional in its representation. Each jurisdiction had four members on the
commission. But, as Jones and Satterfield pointed out, the Southeastern Jurisdiction had
almost 3 million members compared to the slightly less-than quarter million member
Central Jurisdiction. This meant that the Central Jurisdiction was unfairly over-
represented in the commission’s deliberations. In a statement that perhaps revealed
discontent over recent apportionment rulings by the Supreme Court, Jones and
Satterfield’s report remarked, “[i]t is fortunate that there is a separation of Church and
State, as otherwise the Supreme Court of the United States would hold our Commission
to be unconstitutional under its decisions requiring representation in proportion to
population.”²⁰

Taking the floor to defend his minority report and urge his fellow delegates to adopt the changes it proposed, John Satterfield attempted to explain that ramifications for conference mergers would be different for the Southeastern Jurisdiction he represented than it would be for other jurisdictions in the church. "I hope that you from the Western Jurisdiction and the North Central and Northeast and probably the South Central realize...the tremendous difference in your area and in ours."\(^{21}\) In South Carolina, Satterfield noted, there were 340 African American Methodist churches. In Louisiana and Mississippi the number of black Methodist churches was 153 and 216 respectively. In Satterfield’s view, figuring out how to merge such large number of churches required a more delicate approach than would be called for in a region with only a small number of African American Methodists. Satterfield was quick to point out that Jones’s and his alternative proposal was not a case of the southern white churches "dragging our feet or not acting in good faith."\(^{22}\)

In fact, the white Southeastern Jurisdiction had already voted to approve the transfer of black annual conferences into their jurisdiction, but had yet to concede to any plan that would merge overlapping black and white annual conferences into single racially inclusive conferences. Because of the lack of discussion regarding merging the black and white conferences, the Central Jurisdiction refused to approve the transfer of churches out of its purview because of fear the annual conferences would remain segregated indefinitely. The Central Jurisdiction was willing to grant transfers only if a plan of merger between the black and white annual conferences was already in place.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 2615.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 2613.
This position was understandable from the point of view of the Central Jurisdiction conferences who did not want to forgo the relative power granted them in a segregated jurisdiction to become subservient members of an integrated jurisdiction. Satterfield nevertheless pointed out that it was the black jurisdiction and not the white that had until now balked at transfer. 23

Satterfield was certain that, although white Methodists in the Southeastern Jurisdiction had displayed noble intentions by voting to accept transferred annual conferences from the Central Jurisdiction, they would not be nearly as amenable to a plan that forced them to merge with black conferences in a mere six years. White Methodists in the South needed time to digest the radical changes occurring in their society regarding issues of race. In Satterfield's opinion, a heavy-handed mandate requiring a swift merger of black and white conferences would yield disastrous results in his home region. "After living and working in the Southeastern Jurisdiction for many, many years, it is my judgment that if this Conference by one means or another forces action to be taken which we know would be destructive of our Church...this Methodist church will lose a minimum of one million members and perhaps more." 24 Speaking for the thousands of likeminded Methodists he represented, Satterfield declared he "could not, in good faith and in honor as a Christian and as a member of The Methodist Church vote for this [Omnibus] resolution which, in my opinion, amounts to a statement of coercion on any named date, to-wit, this one in 1972." 25

23 Ibid., 2613-14.

24 Ibid., 2616.

25 Ibid.
When Satterfield yielded the floor, a delegate from India named Eric Mitchell rose to address the Mississippian’s remarks. “The retention of the Central Jurisdiction is a stigma to the World Methodist Fellowship and to all Christians,” Mitchell began. “I would like you to think, my friend, of the problem not only in the light of the domestic situation and of your present situation, but in the light of the world’s needs.” Racial segregation in the Methodist church in the United States undermined efforts of Methodists working around the world to combat secular movements whose rhetoric of anti-colonialism and social egalitarianism masked darker ambitions. “As I see it, there are two claims before us. The claim of Jesus Christ and the claim of Karl Marx,” Mitchell concluded. “Communism has succeeded where the Christian witness has failed. We cannot win the world to Jesus Christ if we discriminate against people because of their race or color. We will drive them to Karl Marx. We will drive them into the fold of Communism.”

The co-author of the minority report, Edwin L. Jones, agreed with Eric Mitchell that attention to evangelism was needed in the denomination. But he disagreed with his brother from India about the contours of an evangelistic emphasis. “God will hold us responsible some day for not spending some time and some energy and some thought and some consideration on how to reach the unsaved and how to carry out Christ’s last commission to his disciples,” Jones told his fellow delegates. “There isn’t a word in there [the bible] about bothering yourself with the structure of the Church. I ask you to

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26 Ibid., 2617.

27 Ibid., 2618.
reread it.” Jones reiterated the necessity of voluntarism for transfer and mergers to succeed and stated firmly, “I am unalterably opposed to trying to whiplash people into doing something which their conscience will not allow them to do at a certain time.”

K. Morgan Edwards, a delegate from California, followed Jones in the debate over the minority report and offered two pertinent points for consideration. First, Edwards noted that the racial issue was not merely a southern issue. “Those of us who are in the Far West will one day have to stand before the judgment bar of God and accept heavy responsibility for the real estate conspiracies, the lack of economic opportunity and all of the things which we did which produced the Watts riots,” Edwards began. “I think none of us can think clearly unless we recognize that prejudice belongs just as much to those of us in the West and the North as it belongs to anybody in the South.” Second, Edwards tried to complicate the notion set forth by Edwin Jones in his comments about white Methodists being forced to do something against their will. As Edwards explained, “[t]here is compulsion, to be sure; but the compulsion which embarrasses me is the compulsion we are forcing upon our Negro brothers by depriving them of rights which are guaranteed by our Lord and underscored by the Constitution.” Signaling his intent to vote against Jones and Satterfield’s minority report, Edwards declared he was embarrassed that African Americans had been forced to wait as long as they had to realize the right granted to them by the Christian faith or the Constitution. “I’m unwilling to ask them to wait longer.”

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28 Ibid., 2621.

29 Ibid., 2622.
Vincent Mouser, a delegate from Louisiana was next to speak and threw his support behind Jones and Satterfield’s minority report. Mouser noted that the Methodist church had historically established separate churches for ethnic groups such as Swedes or Germans and that the necessity of such churches naturally passed away as ethnic divisions faded. “I recognize that the Central Jurisdiction will pass away. I recognize that separate Negro Conferences will pass away. I recognize that eventually there will be no separate congregations…,” Mouser conceded. But he believed that that time could not be hastened simply by abolishing the structure of segregation in the church. The eradication of structural separation would only be effective when it “conform[ed] to the inward changes within hearts of Methodists, white and black, throughout the entire Southland where these changes actually will have the impact.” To this end, Mouser pleaded with his fellow delegates, “give us time, give us the means by adopting this Minority Report, to have a little more time to attain and to have a little more voluntarism so that we can hope to bring the hearts and minds and thinking of our people into harmony with what we are now trying to require from a structural standpoint.”

Finally, John Satterfield took the floor to close the pro-minority report arguments. Acknowledging that his thinking probably deviated from the majority of the delegates and that they would reject his minority report in favor of the Omnibus Resolution, Satterfield lamented in that case, “I believe it will be the saddest day we have had in The Methodist Church since I became a member of the General Conference beginning the year 1952.” Satterfield noted that adopting the Omnibus Resolution went against the wishes of the lay representative for three million Methodists and would most likely push

the denomination to “a point of no return.”31 After one last speech in favor of the Omnibus resolution, the General Conference put the two proposals to a vote. By a show of hands the delegates defeated Jones and Satterfield’s minority report and adopted the Omnibus Resolution.32

The floor debate that occurred at the 1966 General Conference over Jones and Satterfield’s minority report reveals ways in which ideas about racial segregation in southern churches had changed. Allowing for the fact that the debate took place at the highest level of the Methodist denomination, it is nonetheless striking that there was no questioning whether the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction should occur. Those who spoke against the Omnibus Resolution took issue with the timing, not the intent. At the same time, however, it is clear from the floor debate that the biggest concerns for the transfer and merger of the African American conferences had more to do with the perceived racial attitudes of white Methodists rather than other non-race based apprehensions such as the bureaucratic or financial logistics of the transfer and merger process.

In many respects the debate over Jones and Satterfield’s minority report mirrored arguments southern moderates and conservatives made twelve years earlier in the wake of the Brown decision. Southerners in that debate acknowledged that the South was unique in its racial practices but reasoned that such a large population of African Americans necessitated that uniqueness. The disproportionate burden the South had to bear in desegregation was a mainstay of the segregationist critique of calls for integration

31 Ibid., 2625.

32 Ibid.
from outside the region. In fact, the high ratio of African Americans was precisely the rationale given by South Carolina Methodists in 1954 for passing a resolution at the annual conference in Spartanburg denouncing the Brown decision. Noting that of the "approximately 15,000,000 Negro American citizens, [approximately 9,000,000 of these live in the South]," which meant that the impact of the Supreme Court’s ruling would be felt much deeper in the region of the former Confederacy. Expressing a sentiment that Satterfield and Jones would resurrected twelve years later, the 1954 South Carolina annual conference cautioned that "these problems [of school desegregation] will not be resolved by hasty words or irresponsible sentiments but rather by a calm and patient consideration of all the factors involved and by a sincere desire to do what is best for all persons concerned." Delegates at the 1954 conference then defined what was best for all persons concerned: "It is the judgment of this Conference that in situations where the minority race is present in large numbers, where the general sentiment of both races favors separate schools, and where the good of all is best served by separation, such voluntary separation is not contrary to the spirit and teaching of the Christian faith" and should therefore be supported.\(^{33}\) While Satterfield and Jones made no explicit argument for the spiritual correctness of racial segregation, their call for an open-ended timeline for conference mergers due to the higher ratio of African American churches in the South was a continuation and extension of segregationist thought from the prior decade.

Similarly, arguments made by the minority report proponents all indicated that racial attitudes, while not perfect, had steadily progressed throughout the South. The

\(^{33}\) South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction Journal and Yearbook (1954), 158-159.
proponents’ primary concern was that in dictating the merger of black and white annual conferences by a set date, the denomination risked destroying the tentative steps whites had already taken in moving toward racial equality. Given more time, white southerners would continue to accept changes in the racial caste system of the Methodist church, but this was a process that could not be rushed. In this argument, too, the Methodist church revisited a common trope espoused by racial moderates in the days following the Brown decision. Indeed, it was this very line of thinking that Martin Luther King took to task three years earlier in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail.” Writing to a group of white clergymen in 1963, King had “almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate... who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom.... Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” Satterfield and Jones’s suggestion that the racial dilemma would solve itself if given more time was a position thoroughly rejected by King and other civil rights leaders by 1966.

Interestingly, even the arguments given for rejecting the minority report did so using logic similar to that wielded by those who pushed for racial desegregation leading up to the Brown decision. Eric Mitchell’s argument that the Central Jurisdiction was a blight on the Methodist church and would drive people away from Christ into the arms of Karl Marx was almost identical in its thinking to the Justice Department which, in an amicus brief for the Brown case, reasoned that, “the existence of discrimination against minority groups in the United States has an adverse effect upon our relations with other

countries. Racial discrimination furnishes grist for the Communist propaganda mills, and raises doubts...as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.” 35 Clearly, then, the Methodist church in 1966 was fighting the same battles that had been waged intensely in southern society for over a dozen years. And as the debate above evidenced, some southerners in the Methodist church continued to call for the perpetuation of racially divided churches using the same rationalizations that had defined the conservative and moderate position for decades. At the same time, however, the 1966 floor debate at the Methodist General Conference—in the rhetoric of religious conservatives unsettled by the possibility of merged black and white annual conferences—hinted at changes to come. This change was most apparent in the remarks made by delegate Vincent Mouser of Louisiana. Mouser’s comments about the need for individual racial attitudes to be transformed before structural changes in the church could be affected signaled a new turn in the conservative position. A close reading of Mouser’s remarks reveal that at the heart of his argument is a call for colorblindness. The need for separate black and white organizations will pass away, Mouser believed, “when we would have attained within our hearts that spirit of brotherhood, that communion of interest, that complete freedom from prejudice which we must achieve if all of these

things we are talking about here are to do any good in God’s service.\textsuperscript{36} Though it is
doubtful Vincent Mouser meant any ill-intent with his remarks, the call for individualistic
colorblindness became a mantra that religious conservatives in South Carolina used in
attempting to block the merger of the annual conferences in their state.

John Satterfield had predicted that even if the Omnibus Resolution was adopted
by the General Conference, it had no chance of passing in the Southeastern Jurisdiction
with the necessary two-thirds majority needed for its implementation and white
Methodists in South Carolina did their part to prove Satterfield prophetic. In fact, several
Methodist groups in the Palmetto State had already made their disapproval of abolishing
the Central Jurisdiction known prior to 1966 when the issue was formally put to a vote.
At the annual conference meeting in 1964, for instance, the men’s Bible class of Wesley
Memorial Methodist in Yonges Island, South Carolina, expressed its belief that the 1939
Methodist reunification never would have occurred “had the people of the South
known... the church would one day reverse its pledge to keep the Jurisdiction separate
and seek to do away with the Central Jurisdiction.” The Wesley Memorial men’s group
pledged that they would “exercise all the powers at our command” to resist dissolving the
Central Jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{37} Similarly, the official board of the Pinewood Charge Methodist
Church in Pinewood, South Carolina, requested that the annual conference “refrain from
legislating any act which will integrate the Central Jurisdiction with the Southeastern

\textsuperscript{36} The Methodist Church General Conference, \textit{Journal} (1966), 2623.

\textsuperscript{37} South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, \textit{Journal and Yearbook}
(1964), 99.
Jurisdiction.”\textsuperscript{38} So disillusioned were two South Carolina churches with the direction the General Conference was taking the denomination regarding racial issues that they proposed that the South Carolina annual conference “withdraw completely from the General Church and set up the Methodist Church of South Carolina.”\textsuperscript{39}

The following year, the clamor against the edicts of the General Conference regarding race continued. Following the lead of the churches the previous year, St. Paul’s Methodist church proposed that the South Carolina annual conference withdraw from the denomination and form its own church in part because the 1964 General Conference had voted to financially support civil rights groups.\textsuperscript{40} Perhaps reading the writing on the wall, meanwhile, the official board of St. Mark Methodist in Charleston, South Carolina, proposed adopting a measure stipulating that “in the area of race, the local church shall be integrated only by a 2/3 majority vote of the congregation.”\textsuperscript{41} The South Carolina annual conference chose not to adopt any of these resolutions. The fact that such resolutions were even considered, however, signaled that the ratification of the 1966 General Conference’s Omnibus Bill by the South Carolina annual conference was unlikely. And, in fact, when the delegates to the 1966 South Carolina annual conference considered the bill, it went down in defeat as the conference voted in concert with the

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}, 106.

\textsuperscript{40} South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, \textit{Journal and Yearbook} (1965), 201.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}
annual conference of South Georgia, and the four annual conferences of Mississippi and Alabama, all of whom refused to give the Omnibus Resolution a majority of the vote.42

When all the Southeastern Jurisdiction’s annual conferences’ votes were tallied, however, the Omnibus Resolution received 67 percent of the vote, earning narrow passage in the jurisdiction. But those opposed to the conference mergers refused to give up without a fight. In July 1968 John Satterfield and Edwin Jones wrote to white Methodists throughout the Southeastern Jurisdiction introducing themselves as members of the interjurisdictional commission who disagreed with the decision to merge black and white annual conferences in the jurisdiction by 1972. The two men sent the letter asking for assistance from their fellow members of the Southeastern jurisdiction to “act in helping defeat any attempt to have the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference adopt [the majority] report at its meeting” scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.43 In their letter, Satterfield and Jones noted that of the sixteen annual conferences in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, half of them, South Carolina included, voted against the resolution for the transfer and pledge to merge with the annual conferences of the Central Jurisdiction. Satterfield and Jones acknowledged that the transfer of the annual conferences of the Central Jurisdiction into the Southeastern Jurisdiction had already been completed, but they firmly believed “that the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference cannot and should not attempt to override the express wish of one-half of its Annual Conferences and/or compel them to merge with other Annual Conferences unless

42 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, Journal and Yearbook (1966), 91; Murray, Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 194-95.

43 John C. Satterfield and Edwin L. Jones to Fellow Methodists, July 1, 1968, box 22, Workman Papers.
and until these eight conferences vote themselves for such merger." To prevent the jurisdictional conference from "riding rough-shod over their annual conferences,"
Satterfield and Jones requested that Methodists throughout the South sign an attached petition asking the Southeastern Jurisdiction to either refuse to abide by the 1966 Omnibus Resolution or refuse to enforce the Omnibus Resolution in those annual conferences that voted against it. In the petition, Satterfield and Jones once again reiterated the disproportionate ratio of black churches in those areas of the South that had voted against the Omnibus Resolution, pointing out that such a ratio "raise[s] questions, problems and financial difficulties entirely out of proportion and unrelated to those existing in the other Annual Conferences and in other parts of our Church, east, north, and west."^45

One of the South Carolina Methodists who received Satterfield and Jones's letter was a man named Rhett Jackson. In a terse reply to Satterfield and Jones, Jackson stated bluntly, "it seems to me that your goal is one of delay to a Methodist Church that has committed itself to being an inclusive church and that you would only increase the image of the Southern racist in these tactics of delay."^46 Like William Workman, Rhett Jackson was a member of Trenholm Road Methodist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. But Jackson, unlike the conservative Workman, was a theological and social liberal who eagerly anticipated the merger of the black and white annual conferences in the state.

^44 Ibid.

^45 "Petition to Members of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of the United Methodist Church," box 22, Workman Papers.

Two years earlier in 1966, South Carolina bishop Paul Hardin Jr. had appointed Rhett Jackson to serve as the chairman of a forty member committee to investigate the feasibility of merging the black and white conferences in the state. Chairing the merger committee was not an enviable task. In addition to the incredible time commitment required, chairmanship practically guaranteed unpopularity in a state where the majority of white Methodists had little or no desire to merge with the African American conference. Recognizing that leading the merger committee could lead to a tense situation between a minister and his congregation, the nominating committee had the foresight to back a layman as chairman. As the Methodist layman who had already chaired the denomination’s Board of Christian Social Concerns in South Carolina, Rhett Jackson fit the bill.47

In his response to Satterfield and Jones, Jackson was pleased to inform the men that they were too late contacting the South Carolina delegation for support resisting conference mergers at the Southeastern Jurisdiction meeting in late July. The white South Carolina Annual Conference (1785) had already met in June and voted almost unanimously to merge with the black annual conference (1866) in the state.48

47 “The United Methodist Church Had Two Annual Conferences in South Carolina,” undated document, box 4, Rhett Jackson Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

48 Rhett Jackson to John Satterfield and Edwin Jones, July 3, 1968, box 22, Workman Papers. The transfer of Central Jurisdiction annual conferences into the geographic jurisdictions resulted in regions containing overlapping annual conferences, one white, one African American. How these two overlapping conferences were identified varied in different locations. In South Carolina the two annual conferences were referred to by the year they were established. The white annual conference was therefore identified as '85 conference (1785) and the black annual conference as '66 (1866).
An attorney and former state representative from Manning, South Carolina, also received Satterfield and Jones’s letter as well as Rhett Jackson’s response. Joseph O. Rogers Jr. however, could not have disagreed more with Rhett Jackson. “By your letter you are leading Mr. Satterfield and Mr. Jones to believe that the action taken by the Annual Conference at Spartanburg was a repudiation or reversal of the vote that was taken at the Annual Conference 1967 in which the Conference voted against the merger,” Rogers wrote to Rhett Jackson. “It has been carefully explained on a number occasions in my presence,” Rogers continued, “that, although the Conference voted against the merger, the whole church voted for it and, therefore, nothing further could be done.”49 Rogers’s letter belied the notion that the white South Carolina annual conference was ready to merge with the black annual conference in the state. “The truth of the matter,” Rogers wrote, “is that we are not all dedicated to an integrated church”50. The truth of Rogers statement would be borne out in South Carolina during in the subsequent years.51

Joseph Rogers was correct that the Methodist denomination had decided to move forward with the transfer and merger of Central Jurisdiction conferences into the

49 Joseph O. Rogers, Jr. to Rhett Jackson, July 5, 1968, box 22 Workman Papers.
50 Ibid.
51 In addition to being an active Methodist layman, Joseph O. Rogers, Jr. was one of the most influential segregationists in South Carolina. During his tenure in the state legislature, Rogers served as the vice president of the state’s “segregation committee,” and consistently went on record with plans how South Carolina could avoid desegregating its public schools. Rogers developed such a strong anti-integration reputation that when the Nixon administration nominated him for U.S. Attorney for the District of South Carolina in 1969, the president of the South Carolina NAACP vigorously opposed it saying Rogers had done so much to avoid abiding by the law in thwarting school desegregation that appointing him U.S. Attorney was akin to “appointing a fox to stand guard over a chicken house.” Columbia Record (July 8, 1969). Despite the protest of black South Carolinians, Rogers’ nomination was confirmed.
geographic jurisdictions. But just as John Satterfield and Edwin Jones had hoped, the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference meeting agreed to replace 1972 as the target date for annual conference mergers with the goal of “as soon as possible” for the black and white conference mergers.⁵² Despite this change in language, the church was undoubtedly moving toward merger. As a lay delegate from South Carolina reported after the Southeastern Jurisdictional meeting, “[m]ake no mistake, the Methodist Church including the Southeastern Jurisdiction has committed itself to complete elimination of all racial lines and organization from the General Conference to the local church.”⁵³ Although racial conservatives in South Carolina were no doubt troubled by the report that the Southeastern Jurisdiction was moving forward with integration in the church in 1968, they could at least take solace in the fact that the jurisdiction placed no timeframe on accomplishing this goal. Furthermore, in 1969 conservative Methodists in South Carolina received indication that an organization was forming in the state to help defeat forced racial inclusiveness as well as other perceived liberal tendencies in the denomination.

As delegates across the state prepared for the 1969 South Carolina Annual Conference meeting, a letter of introduction arrived in their mailboxes from the Methodist Christian Fellowship (MCF). Sent by Don Herd, a Methodist layman and president of Lander College in Greenwood, South Carolina, the group’s officers described the MCF as “a fellowship of Methodist Christians in South Carolina who love


⁵³ Ibid.
the Church, who love Methodism, and want it to continue to reach the people.” In this introductory letter, the MCF was touted as already speaking for 160 ministers and 500 laymen who had grown discontented with the liberal drift of the Methodist denomination and were now banding together to do something about it. Although few specific details of the group were presented in the initial letter to the annual conference delegates, it was clear the MCF was an evangelical-leaning fellowship that wished to hear less about social issues from their pulpits and more about personal piety. “Some of our ministers seem to get marbles in their mouths when they try to say something about God or Christ or life after death but are flaming evangelists about the economic disorders of our times,” the manifesto stated. “The Church is put together as a religious institution and it needs a revival of contagious faith in the saving mercy of God.” The MCF letter ended with a pledge to hold a statewide meeting after the annual conference in order to explicate the group’s purposes for those interested.

In late 1960s South Carolina there were many Methodists like William Workman interested in an organization seeking to stem the liberal drift of the denomination. For Workman and his wife, the frustration in the direction of the denomination had been mounting for some years. In response to a July 1964 letter from Trenholm Road Methodist Church reminding the couple that the church had yet to receive their tithing pledge for the upcoming year, Workman in a reply letter confessed, “[o]ur delay...has not been occasioned by procrastination, but by an extended—and not yet ended—period

54 “To the Delegates of the South Carolina Annual Conference,” box 22, Workman Papers.

55 Ibid.
of prayerful soul-searching over our future role in and association with the church.”

Nine years earlier in a letter to the editor of the South Carolina Methodist Advocate, Workman adamantly declared, “[w]hen Protestants were led from the folds of Catholicism, it was with the idea that religion and Christianity are matters of individual conviction and personal relationship with God.” Workman and other religious conservatives watched in dismay as their denomination moved away from this concept of privatized faith into areas of social concern that ran afoul of their convictions. By 1964 Workman viewed the Methodist denomination as “becoming increasingly alien to [my] own concepts of religion.”

Workman no doubt spoke for thousands of South Carolina Methodists in 1964 when he wrote that he and members of his family “are deeply concerned over the present course of the Methodist Church. We are agreed in our feeling that the church, both as an individual denomination and in conjunction with the National Council of Churches, is engaged in propaganda, agitation, and political activity in areas of race relations, national and international affairs, and other pursuits which we consider not properly within the clerical domain.” With sentiments such as these, it is little surprise that five years later William D. Workman Jr. was included among those prominent South Carolinians who had pledged support to the Methodist Christian Fellowship.


57 Workman to Editor of the South Carolina Methodist Advocate, undated, box 22, Workman Papers.


59 Ibid.
It is also not surprising that the Methodist Christian Fellowship appeared on the scene prior to the 1969 South Carolina Annual Conference, for that was the first year both the white (1785) and African American (1866) conferences belonged to the same episcopacy. Although the two annual conferences had not yet merged and therefore continued to meet separately, the fact that both conferences were now part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction and under the authority of the same bishop, meant that merger was approaching. For conservatives, 1969 was a decisive year with the specter of merged conferences forcing them to finally speak out against the direction they saw their church heading. Indeed, at the 1969 annual conference, delegates were informed that the Conference Committee on Merger, under the leadership of Rhett Jackson, had already begun meeting and would have a proposed plan of merger in place and ready for distribution by the next annual conference.60

For Methodists in the state concerned about the impending changes in the racial structure of their denomination, the Methodist Christian Fellowship offered some reassurance. Although the MCF was ostensibly organized as a brake against the liberal drift of the denomination generally, some questioned the organization’s true intent. In later years Rhett Jackson called the MCF “racist,” whose sole purpose was to stop the 1785 and 1866 conference merger. Jackson also described experiencing much hostility when meeting with the MCF members to explain merger details.61 The fact that the Methodist Christian Fellowship disappeared shortly after the white and black annual


conferences eventually merged supports the notion that the MCF’s chief concern was racial change. Regardless of the stated reasons for the MCF’s founding, the issue that quickly dwarfed all others in the fellowship’s statements and correspondence dealt with race. Dan Albergotti, a Methodist from Florence, South Carolina, was pleased to hear about the creation of the MCF. “Until the formation of the Methodist Christian Fellowship, I felt that I was fighting this battle alone and therefore was prepared to take individual action when and if the time arose,” Albergotti confessed. First among Albergotti’s concerns was the integration of the Central Jurisdiction with the geographical jurisdictions. “As usual the conservative viewpoint is being expressed at the eleventh hour,” Albergotti wrote in a letter to Bill Workman, “but I hope and pray that we have not again come forward with ‘too little-too late.’” Like Dan Albergotti, a Methodist layman from Williston named Keith Whittle was grateful to hear about the MCF and was eager to help by covering mailing costs and spreading information about fellowship in his native Barnwell County. With the advent of the MCF, Dan Albergotti, Keith Whittle, and thousands of other conservative Methodists at last had a vehicle to voice their concerns.

It was not until early 1970 that the MCF officially codified its beliefs in a position paper sent to media outlets across the state. In the section that dealt with the impending conference merger, the position paper stated, “[b]elieving in the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God, we stand for political, economic and religious freedom for all racial, cultural, and religious groups. We rededicate ourselves to resolving tensions


63 Workman to Don Herd, Jr., June 13, 1969, box 22 Workman Papers.
between the races both within the Church and without, seeking to foster natural affinities, mutual appreciation of each other’s merits and the voluntary association of individuals.”

Euphemistic phrases like “natural affinities,” and “voluntary association,” indicate the changes in southern churches by 1970. Many Methodists counting themselves part of the MCF undoubtedly retained the idea that segregation did not run counter to Christian doctrine. But such explicit sentiments could no longer be expressed in a national culture that was now largely intolerant to overt racism. Still, some members of the MCF were less politically astute when it came to grasping this new reality as evidenced by a letter to the editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* by a member of the MCF:

> Let me make this crystal clear. I do not believe that racial segregation is un-Christian. I believe that Christian relationships existed between individual white men and individual black men during slavery and during legal racial segregation and during voluntary racial segregation and can exist under any social order. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, did not believe that segregation was un-Christian. The Methodist Church, as brought about by the Unification in 1939, did not believe that segregation was un-Christian because they created the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction. The Rhett Jacksons of our Church must have received a new revelation from God. I for one find it hard to believe that God would choose Earl Warren and the United States Supreme Court as His vessel to reveal this so-called truth to mankind.

In rehashing tenets of segregationist folk theology that had once powerfully influenced southern white religion, the above letter demonstrates that for many white southerners, issues of race continued to produce similar sentiments and emotions in 1970 as they had in 1955. Throughout South Carolina in 1970, Methodist officials heard comments such as “I don’t want a black boy dating my daughter,” and “I don’t want a Negro man sitting

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65 Dan Albergotti to The Editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*, July 20, 1970, box 23, Workman Papers.
by my wife in church” from church members. But naked expressions of blatant racism became increasingly rare by the 1970s. If the Methodist Christian Fellowship was to successfully thwart a merger between the black and white conferences, it could not rely on a now impolitic segregationist folk theology. Utilizing more polite appeals to voluntary association and natural affinities served the MCF purpose without earning the fellowship an easily applied racist tag.

When South Carolina Methodists gathered in Spartanburg in June 1970 for their annual conference, merger talk hung heavy in the air. One of the main items on the agenda for the conference was the presentation of the plan of merger between the 1785 and 1866 conferences. “We, by some miracle, still have a chance to witness to the people of South Carolina that we do indeed believe that all baptized Christians are brothers,” the Board of Christian Social Concerns informed the delegates. The District Superintendents were similarly hopeful for the promise of merger, stating in their report, “the merger of the two South Carolina Conferences in the immediate future calls black and white United Methodists to a new way of life based on forgiveness, reconciliation and human sensitivity....” When the proposed plan of merger was finally distributed, delegates read an idealistic preamble stating that the black and white annual conferences of South Carolina, “serving one Lord whose Gospel declares that in Christ there is neither Greek nor barbarian, bond nor free, male nor female, but that all of us are without

66 “The United Methodist Church had Two Annual Conferences in South Carolina,” Undated document, box 4, Rhett Jackson Papers.


68 Ibid., 127.
distinction the children of God whose love is all inclusive, do now declare our earnest hope that The United Methodist Church in our area shall truly become an inclusive church....” The delegates were instructed to spend twelve months studying the plan and would vote on its adoption the following year.

The year between the plan’s introduction and vote was to be used for holding informational sessions, answering questions, and suggesting amendments. Although many details for the proposed plan of merger became important during the year interlude, of particular significance was a mandated racial quota of 75 percent white and 25 percent African American ratio for all conference boards, agencies, and leadership positions. This ratio was to be in effect for twelve years following the merger to insure a racial balance proportionate to the two annual conferences. Also significant was the ratification process. With a simple majority vote in each annual conference, the merger would take effect and the segregated South Carolina conferences would cease to exist.

Congregations throughout the state held meetings to inform parishioners about the plan of merger and to hear feedback from the pews. Trenholm Road United Methodist, the church home of both William Workman and Rhett Jackson, sponsored discussions over several months in the fall and winter of 1970 to make sure the plan was thoroughly understood by all church members. In one session, the MCF member Workman and chair of the merger committee, Jackson, even appeared on the same panel to answer

69 Ibid., 176.

70 Lippy, “Towards an Inclusive Church,” 222.
The fear of many white South Carolina Methodists was reflected in a list of questions and answers provided by Trenholm Road United Methodist Church to its members. First on the list was the question, "[w]ill merger of the two conferences result in black ministers being assigned to white churches and vice versa?" The handout reassured church members that "[f]or the immediate future it is not probable that ministers will be assigned across racial lines."\(^{72}\)

In addition to participating in his home church’s discussion on the Merger, Rhett Jackson, along with an African American minister and former head of the South Carolina NAACP named Matthew McCollom, traveled extensively throughout the state to inform church members of the plan. Jackson later recalled that he and McCollom were often met with resistance if not hostility, and there were few places the two men could even share a meal together.\(^{73}\)

The Methodist Christian Fellowship was also deliberate in its approach to the merger. Though they were no doubt aware, the MCF advisory committee was told that the "South Carolina Conference is faced with the most serious decision it has had to deal with since the Civil War. The question of Merger should be prayfully, seriously, and thoroughly dealt with by every Methodist in our Conference. It is too important and is fraught with far too great peril to let it go by default. Our Fellowship should meet

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\(^{71}\) "Recommendation form the Council on Ministries to the Administrative Board," undated document, box 23, Workman Papers.


\(^{73}\) "The United Methodist Church had Two Annual Conferences in South Carolina," Undated document, box 4, Rhett Jackson Papers.
Clearly both sides were positioning themselves for a battle at the annual conference.

The 1785 conference convened in June 1971 a little more than two weeks after the 1866 conference had met and approved the plan of merger by an overwhelming majority 241-9. If the 1785 conference adopted the plan, the two conferences would go forth with the merger. Were the plan to fail, no merger would take place and a committee would have to devise an acceptable alternative plan. On the third day of the conference, the time to vote on the plan of merger came at last. The morning began with the hymn, “Come Thou Almighty King,” and an offering was taken before Bishop Paul Hardin declared the consideration of the proposed plan of merger to be the order of the day.

A member of the Methodist Christian Fellowship almost instantly seized the initiative in trying to favorably influence the outcome of the vote. Roy C. Moore, an MCF member from Cheraw, South Carolina, asked if it were possible to vote on the planned merger by orders and if both orders would have to vote positively on the plan for it to pass. Voting by orders meant that rather than voting together as a single body of delegates, the laity and the clergy would vote separately. When Bishop Hardin answered both of Roy Moore’s questions in the affirmative, the latter immediately moved that the vote on the merger be by orders. Although Moore’s motion was defeated, its intent was transparent. Thinking that the laity was more likely to be conservative, restricting the more liberal leaning clergy from the voting pool might lead to a defeated plan. It is

74 B. B. Black to Workman, November 9, 1970, box 22, Workman papers.

75 South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, *Journal and Yearbook* (1971), 76.

76 *Ibid.*, 76-77.
possible this strategy was inspired by a letter to the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* written earlier in the year by another member of the MCF. Saying he was appalled that the vote on the merger was to be conducted just like any other mundane article of business, Dan Albergotti believed requiring a simple majority for adoption of the plan was an outrage. What Albergotti viewed as most troubling was the fact that almost half the delegates to the conference were members of the clergy who were appointed by pro-merger bishops. It seemed only appropriate to Albergotti that the merger vote be opened to all Methodists in the conference, not just those delegates serving at the annual conference meeting.\footnote{Dan Albergotti to the Editor of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*, June 16, 1970, box 23, Workman Papers.} Had Roy Moore’s motion to vote by orders passed, it would have given more weight to the laity’s opinion of the plan as Dan Albergotti had hoped. The rejection of Moore’s motion, however, signaled that the merger plan would not be defeated simply by some clever procedural maneuvering by members of the MCF. Fortunately for those opposed to the plan, there was another possible route to defeating the merger: by attacking the plan itself.

In early 1971 William Workman sent a letter to the Committee on Merger expressing some of his worries about the plan of merger. From his perspective, the proposed plan contained a violation of the Constitution of the United Methodist Church. Pointing to the article in the Church Constitution that prevented discrimination in the denomination based on race, color, national origin, or economic condition, Workman declared that the mandated racial quotas in the plan of merger were “clearly unconstitutional through any reasonable interpretation of the Constitution of the United
Methodist Church” in that the quotas excluded individuals for consideration because of their race.\textsuperscript{78} Furthermore, Workman continued, the plan’s scheme to “proportionately reflect” the racial makeup of South Carolina Methodists in church governing boards and agencies, “makes for forced brotherhood ‘by the numbers’ and is inconsistent with the ethical spirit of inclusivity promulgated several years ago for and by the United Methodist Church.”\textsuperscript{79} Workman believed adopting the plan of merger as it was originally proposed “is likely to produce continuing friction and would perpetuate and emphasize race consciousness, since race would become a critical factor in determining church assignments and associations.”\textsuperscript{80} What was needed, Workman concluded, was to “eliminate racial distinctions or discriminations in the conduct of Methodist affairs.” Quoting directly from the MCF’s position paper—as well as the \textit{Plessy} decision—Workman wrote that creating an “atmosphere in which ‘natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each others’ merits, and a voluntary consent of individuals’ may contribute to the ultimate elimination of emotional as well as structural barriers between the races.”\textsuperscript{81}

It is impossible to judge the sincerity of Workman’s letter to the merger committee. Perhaps if it had come from someone other than one of the most ardent voices for segregation in the state, the letter could be accepted at face value. Given Workman’s history, however, it appears more as a brazen attempt to simply exploit a

\textsuperscript{78} Workman to the Joint Committee on the Merger, January 7, 1971, box 23 Workman Papers.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}
weakness in the proposed merger plan by appealing to the letter rather than the spirit of the proposal. Indeed, labeling the mandated racial quota component of the merger plan as unconstitutional because of its racial exclusiveness seems to be a deliberate misunderstanding of the mandated ratio on Workman’s part. Workman surely recognized that the quota was included to prevent racial exclusiveness. Most likely, Workman’s letter was an attempt to undermine the merger process by pointing out pitfalls in the proposed merger plan that opponents could exploit.

Whatever his intent, it is clear that the Workman strategy of questioning the constitutionality of the plan because of its racial language became a popular response for opponents of the merger plan as these ideas were parroted in letters to the editor of the South Carolina Methodist Advocate leading up to the annual conference. It is plausible that these ideas were well received because it gave opponents of the conference merger a way to vote against the plan for reasons ostensibly other than racial prejudice. Opponents supporting these views could claim they were not voting to support a racially discriminatory church structure. Instead, they were voting against “reverse discrimination” and in favor of colorblindness.

It is unknown if anyone asked about the constitutionality of the plan of merger during the debate at the annual conference, though it seems unlikely that delegates voiced their hesitation on these grounds, further supporting the notion that it was a disingenuous concern. Rhett Jackson later recalled that he began to lose hope that the plan would be adopted as the debate continued and anger toward the merger became apparent. 82

82 “The United Methodist Church Had Two Annual Conferences.” Undated document, box 4, Rhett Jackson Papers. Once the plan of merger had been defeated, a committee compiled a list of contributing reasons. A primary reason people gave for voting against
Following almost three hours of debate, the time finally came to vote on the plan of merger. A period of silent prayer was called for, followed by the distribution of the ballots. After the delegates cast their ballots, the conference broke for lunch while the votes were tallied. When Rhett Jackson returned from lunch, he found Bishop Hardin sitting in the almost empty conference hall with tears in his eyes. The tally was in; the plan was defeated 528-432.

Immediately following the vote, delegates shared the reasons why they voted against the plan. Many of these reasons had to do with either questioning the constitutionality of having racial quotas or simply being against the mandated racial ratios. Some delegates said the mandated ratios were “racist in nature,” while others said the entire plan “contained too many favorable leanings” toward the black conference. Delegates expressed concerns about cross racial appointments, and some expressed opposition not to the plan of merger itself but to the idea of merging with the African

the merger dealt with questions of the constitutionality of the mandated racial ratios and appointments. In addressing these concerns the following day, Bishop Hardin stated that, as far as he knew, nothing in the plan was unconstitutional. It is possible that the question of constitutionality was raised prior to the vote and the delegates chose not to believe their bishop’s opinion. It seems more plausible that the point was never raised prior to the vote so that the question of constitutionality could remain in play for delegates looking for a reason to vote against the plan. See, South Carolina Annual Conference Southeastern Jurisdiction, Journal and Yearbook (1971), 99-100.


84 “The United Methodist Church Had Two Annual Conferences.” Undated document, box 4, Rhett Jackson Papers.
American conference in general. Two months after the plan's defeat, with the benefit of slightly more time and distance to better analyze the various reasons for opposing the merger, the 1785 conference published an open letter explaining the causes of the plan's defeat. The first reason given for the merger's rejection was the idea of racial inclusiveness in general. Next on the list was the quota system.

Southerners already had one Lost Cause in their past, and for South Carolina Methodists, resisting the General Conference's directive to merge the two annual conferences in the state would surely constitute a second. Immediately after the original plan of merger went down in defeat, Bishop Hardin appointed a committee of six individuals from each annual conference to come up with an acceptable alternative plan. Prior to crafting a new plan, the committee of six from the '85 Conference published a letter reminding (or perhaps reassuring) Methodists that a merger of the two conferences would not require local congregations to merge and therefore would probably have little effect on the racial composition of Methodist churches in the state.

The alternative plan that the '85 Conference proposed reflected both the stated and unstated apprehensions delegates had toward the original plan of merger. The new proposed plan of merger reduced the guaranteed time of racial quotas from twelve years to eight and changed the mandated racial ratio for boards and agencies from 75/25 to 80/20. The new plan then sought to further undercut the mandated ratio by stating that voting for membership on

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86 Lippy, "Toward and Inclusive Church," 222.

denominational boards and agencies should be done by “conscience rather than fixed quotas,” which essentially made the stated ratio meaningless. Three weeks after the ’85 Conference proposed this new plan, the ’66 Conference rejected it.\textsuperscript{88}

The plan both conferences ultimately agreed upon made the biggest concessions to the concerns of the white ’85 Conference. The plan included provisions for racially diverse conference boards and agencies at a ratio approximately reflecting the racial composition of the newly merged conference but set no quotas for this ratio. Instead, delegates were to “follow their consciences on secret ballots to maintain the balance” when assembling denominational boards and agencies. Being intentionally inclusive in this manner was only mandated for eight years. Furthermore, the chairperson of the elected boards would be chosen “on the basis of merit, not racial quotas.”\textsuperscript{89} When the two conferences met in January 1972 to vote on the new plan of merger, the ’85 Conference accepted the plan with 70 percent of the delegates voting “yes.” Only 68 percent of the African American delegates voted for the plan, however, a significantly lower number than the 96 percent who had voted to accept the original plan.\textsuperscript{90} Clearly African Americans understood that they were being asked to make larger sacrifices than whites in order for the merger to succeed.

The mass exodus of white Methodists from the denomination as predicted by John Satterfield in 1966 did not materialize after the merger in South Carolina. In fact, the

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 222-223.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 223.

\textsuperscript{90} “The United Methodist Church Had Two Annual Conferences.” Undated document, box 4, Jackson Papers; Lippy, “Toward an Inclusive Church,” 222.
denomination actually gained members in the five years after the merger, an impressive feat for a Methodist conference in the 1970s. Yet it is likely there was no widespread white flight because the merger in no perceivable way changed anything for the vast majority of white church members. Five years after the merger took place, not a single black minister had been assigned to a white church. Additionally, of the more than a thousand United Methodist churches in South Carolina in 1976, less than a dozen of these had both black and white members. With the merger, just as with the Brown decision, everything changed and nothing changed.

The story of the Methodist merger in South Carolina is important in what it reveals about racial attitudes of white religious conservatives in the late 1960s. Because the rhetoric of Christian segregationists grew quiet as the 1960s progressed, it is possible to believe that southern white churches had rejected segregationist folk theology and, if not fully receptive to the idea of racial inclusiveness, at least were no longer convinced that racial segregation was something requiring a robust defense. A more likely explanation for the growing silence of southern religious conservatives on matters of race throughout the 1960s is the fact that there was no real reason for concern. By and large the widespread threat of race mixing in schools and churches that had prompted the uprising of segregationist theologies of the 1950s failed to materialize in the 1960s. Jim Crow may have flown the coop, but segregation remained throughout much of southern society. When the Methodist General Conference demanded an end to racially separated


92 Ibid.
conferences, however, the specter of integration was resurrected and religious conservatives were forced back into action. Although this chapter has focused exclusively on the Methodists, it seems unlikely that the response would have been measurably different if desegregation was mandated in either Baptist or Presbyterian churches. If anything, the conservative response may have been more strident in the former denomination. But church polity insured that neither the Baptists nor Presbyterians would be asked to fellowship with any racial groups with whom they were uncomfortable doing so.

Beyond providing an instance where once again white religious conservatives were forced to make known their feelings on race, the story of the Methodist merger is valuable in demonstrating how the rhetoric of white Christians changed over time. To be sure, many white Christians still adhered to a segregationist folk theology that viewed racial segregation as a divinely endorsed enterprise. Eight months after the South Carolina Annual Conferences merged, for instance, William Workman received a note from a friend and former Sunday School classmate, Mitzi Matthews, recruiting the Workmans to leave Trenholm Road United Methodist Church and help start a new church in the Columbia area in the near future. Asking for prayer for this endeavor, Matthews also sent along “the information I said I would send you.” The promised information was a seven-page exegesis of biblical passages that purportedly supported racial segregation. Clearly segregationist theology remained influential into the 1970s for white southerners of certain stripes.

93 Mitzi Matthews to Workman, August 1, 1972, box 22, Workman Papers.
More revealing, however, was the new attention to colorblindness that religious conservatives started promoting in the late 1960s. The suggestions touted by the Methodist Christian Fellowship to promote “natural affinities” between the races based not on forced interaction but on appreciation of merit remarkably foreshadowed arguments white religious conservatives began to make about race even as it was rooted in the segregationist past. In this language religious conservatives in South Carolina repackaged the logic of the Plessy decision and make it applicable to the latter decades of the twentieth century. What was needed, these conservatives argued, was not more attention to skin color, but less. Instead of creating intentional frameworks to insure racial inclusiveness and working to identify and abolish structural inequalities between the races, attention instead should be given to interpersonal relations—“natural affinities”—based not solely on race but on “each others’ merits.” These ideas no doubt sounded familiar to white southerners in the late 1960s. They had been expressed quite famously earlier in the decade by a fellow southerner who had dreamed of the day his children would be judged by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin. In many respects, the rhetoric of religious conservatives by the late 1960s—in addition to simply being a dusted off version of Plessy—was an appropriation of Martin Luther King’s call for a colorblind society. Ironically, it was people in southern churches who had no interest in cross-racial relationships who ultimately benefited from the colorblind arrangement.

Freed from being tied to the explicit and outdated segregationist folk theology of the 1950s, their new rhetoric of individualistic merit allowed conservative evangelicals to argue against programs and policies that promoted racial integration in the 1970s on the
grounds that such initiatives violated colorblindness. This shift in the language of religious conservatives by the 1970s allowed religion to play a major role in massive resistance’s final stand in South Carolina: the private school movement.
On the evening of May 28, 1965, a small group of people gathered to participate in the commencement exercises of a high school in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Indistinguishable in many ways from the high school graduations that take place each spring around the country, proud parents that evening beamed as their children’s accomplishments were celebrated, even while the graduates themselves likely struggled to remain focused on the commencement address. But this event in Orangeburg was unique in the respect that the seniors receiving diplomas that evening were the inaugural graduates for a newly established private school called the Wade Hampton Academy. The school’s founders named the institution “in honor of that great South Carolinian who fought gallantly in the cause which was lost by the overwhelming might of armed force, but who returned to lead his people out of the darkness of reconstruction. In his life he exhibited the courage of the soldier, the dignity of the scholar, the refinement of the gentleman, and the integrity of the true Christian.”

The year before the Wade Hampton Academy opened a group of concerned citizens in the Orangeburg area circulated a report stating their belief “that the separation of the races in education, in recreation, in living quarters, and in churches is in the best interest of both races and is essential to the preservation of racial integrity.” Worried about a number of lawsuits pending in federal courts in 1963 that most likely signaled the

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end of segregated schools in South Carolina, these Orangeburg parents concluded that “separate private school facilities must be provided...[to] avoid the pernicious ‘experiment’ being foisted upon the people of this state and nation.”² With much resolve, these South Carolinians dedicated themselves to creating a private school for white students that would be operational by the start of the 1964 school year. Wade Hampton Academy was the fruit of their labor. The fanfare accompanying the school’s first commencement in May 1965, therefore, just as much a celebration of the school’s successful first year as it was an honoring of scholastic achievement.

The Wade Hampton class of 1965 was small, consisting of only three seniors and the invited commencement speaker, William D. Workman Jr., began his address quoting a German proverb that all good things come in three. After all, Workman informed his audience, the school’s namesake, Wade Hampton, along with George Washington and Robert E. Lee, formed a trio of valiant southerners who, at different points in history, had fought “against oppression and invasion...to perpetuate a well-ordered society, not to overthrow it.”³ The imagery Workman provided of these three southerners resisting foreign invaders—Washington the British during the American Revolution, Lee the Yankees in the Civil War, and Hampton the carpetbaggers and scalawags of the Reconstruction era—undoubtedly struck a chord with the families of the Hampton Academy graduates in 1965 who surely perceived their Southland as being oppressed yet again by outsiders. The invading force this time, however, was not martial but judicial, taking the form of federal court decisions mandating less deliberation and more speed on

² Ibid., 5.

the issue of school desegregation. “I like to think that were he here with us tonight, [Wade Hampton] would approve of this gathering and be pleased that his name had been chosen for an institution which—while insistent upon freedom of choice and of association—will have no part in rabble-rousing or race hate,” Workman told the group.⁴

At the close of Workman’s remarks to the three graduating seniors that spring evening, the trio came forward to receive their diplomas along with lapel pins on which the Confederate battle flag, a South Carolina palmetto tree, and the word “survivor” was inscribed. Wade Hampton’s headmaster, T. Elliott Wannamaker, explained the meaning of “survivor” by saying that just as the Confederate veterans had returned from the war to “rebuild” and “redeem” their state, “so we today, despite many evil signs we see about us...shall survive the fight, God willing; and with us will survive our Country, redeemed from those who would destroy it, -- to be passed on to our children as a very precious heritage.”⁵ Nearly a century to the day after the Civil War ended, battles were still raging in some corners of the South.

Beginning in the mid-1960s white South Carolinians established Wade Hampton Academy and a host of similarly styled private schools for the purpose of avoiding desegregation in the state’s public schools. In so doing, South Carolinians joined white parents throughout the South who opted for continued segregated education in private schools rather than sending their children to desegregated public schools. The creation of private schools that sprang up across the South following school desegregation was the

⁴ Ibid.

final act in the massive resistance drama that had been playing in the region since May 17, 1954 and the schools are a useful corrective to the idea that massive resistance ended with passage of civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965.6

Just as it had done in previous incidents during the massive resistance period, conservative evangelical religion played a central role in maintaining segregation as religious groups and ideas helped establish and sustain the post-1965 private schools in the South. Examining the ways churches participated in the “segregationist academy” movement, as well as the degree to which even secular private schools were imbued with religious language and practices in the 1970s, lends further support to the idea that religion was a key component of whites’ resistance to civil rights initiatives in the South. Understanding religion in the private school movement is also important for demonstrating the transformation of religiously based segregationist rhetoric that occurred between the mid 1950s and the mid 1970s. Similar to shift away from segregationist folk theology to appeals to a colorblind individualism that took place during the course of the Methodist merger (see previous chapter), so too did racialized language undergo a metamorphosis in the context of the private school movement in South Carolina. As Workman foreshadowed in his commencement address at Wade Hampton Academy in 1965, advocates for the new private schools established after the 1964 Civil Rights Act replaced racist rationales for the schools with less offensive justifications. Instead of explicit mentions of race, there were now appeals to “freedom

6 Scholars working on the topic in the early 1970s were the first to advance the thesis that massive resistance ended in the mid 1960s. Historians in recent years, however, have produced studies demonstrating that massive resistance was a phenomenon that predated 1954 and lived past 1965. See Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6-12.
of association," "behavioral concerns," and "academic excellence," all which proved effective in promoting racial segregation while simultaneously obscuring racist overtones.

In South Carolina, the idea of utilizing private schools as a way to avoid public school desegregation actually predated the 1954 Brown decision as state leaders, reading the writing on the wall, took steps that would allow white students flexibility should the integration mandate come to pass. In a 1951 speech urging state lawmakers to allocate money for the construction of new schools for African American children, Governor James Byrnes suggested that if the public schools were forced to desegregate, the newly built schools could be handed over to citizens to form their own private segregated schools. In the post-Brown era, however, favorable talk of encouraging private schools as an alternative to desegregated public schools did not surface among state officials until April 1957 when the Ways and Means Committee of the state’s House of Representative considered a bill that would grant tax exemptions for parents whose children attended private schools. State Senator Marion Gressette, who had been appointed five years earlier to head an advisory committee to maintain segregation, reported that the state was sufficiently prepared “to meet any situation that may develop in the present [school desegregation] crisis” and pronounced that there was no need in 1957 to pass additional legislation. The Gressette Committee, in fact, had been instrumental in the passage of


8 Southern School News (May 1957), 3.

several legislative bills two years earlier that provided white South Carolinians firm legal
ground to avoid school desegregation if and when that battle was to be fought. These
acts included repealing the compulsory school attendance law, which allowed parents to
hold their children out of desegregated public schools without legal consequence, and
granting more authority to local school boards, which effectively allowed local boards to
construct bureaucratic roadblocks to integration.\(^{10}\) In the summer of 1957, therefore,
state leaders saw no need to enact legislation promoting private schools.

In October 1958 a member of the South Carolina legislature representing a low
country county with a high African American population again raised the issue of private
schools. Sam Harrell, a white representative from Florence County who was irritated by
what he perceived as inaction by Gressette Committee, publicly stated that the
segregation committee “should do something to set up private schools before the courts
act.”\(^{11}\) Harrell’s perspective in the fall of 1958 was no doubt colored by President
Dwight D. Eisenhower’s deployment of the United States Army to enforce the
desegregation of Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas. Indeed, many white South
Carolina citizens looked anxiously at the situation in Arkansas and pledged to support
their segregationist neighbors to the west who vowed to continue fighting against school
desegregation. The men’s club of St. Matthew’s Methodist Church in Bishopville,

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\(^{10}\) *Southern School News* (February 1955), 3; (April 1955), 13.

\(^{11}\) *Southern School News* (November 1958) 5.
South Carolina, for instance, passed a resolution of support for Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus and his fight “against the unChristian [sic] and evil forces of the Supreme Court and federal government caused by the pressure of politicians, sociologists, psychologist and do-gooders, ignorant of the issues at hand….”12 One Baptist minister from Olanta, South Carolina, urged members of the Citizens’ Council in South Carolina to send money to Arkansas to help support private schools there. The issue was so important, Reverend Marion A. Woodson believed, that it was time for South Carolinians to make sacrifices to support the private school effort. “We have reached the point,” Woodson declared, “where we must be willing to give up the second car, cancel a vacation trip and buy less clothing in order to provide private schools for our children.”13

The effort to provide private schools for South Carolina white children was soon championed by the state’s Farm Bureau and Citizens’ Councils. The former group petitioned the state legislature in November 1958 to give “serious consideration” to proposals that would abolish public education in South Carolina altogether. Meanwhile, seven Citizens’ Council groups in the Charleston area conducted a survey of the cities’ public buildings and churches to investigate the logistical feasibility for private schools should the need arise.14

Despite the concerns of white citizens, school desegregation in South Carolina was not an imminent threat in 1958. There would, in fact, be no integration of any kind in South Carolina elementary or high schools until 1963. While South Carolina held out

12 Ibid., 13.
13 Ibid.
14 Southern School News (December 1958) 16.
longer than the rest of the South in keeping all levels of educational facilities segregated—it was not until Harvey Gantt enrolled at Clemson College in January 1963 that South Carolina joined the rest of the Union in admitting black students into one of its public educational institutions (see chapter four)—the fact was, the decade following the *Brown* decision produced little change in the demographics of the vast majority of southern public schools, particularly in the Deep South. The Supreme Court’s 1955 ruling in *Brown II* that school desegregation should be undertaken “with all deliberate speed” effectively insured that desegregation moved throughout the South at a glacial pace. The year after the *Brown* ruling, for instance, less than fifth of one percent of black students in the South were enrolled in schools with white children. In 1962—eight years after the court had declared school segregation unconstitutional—the number of southern African American students attending school with white peers was still less than one half of one percent. So long as desegregation was merely talked about rather than enacted, the need for an alternative for public education remained at bay. Despite occasional calls for private schools throughout the late 1950s and first few years of the 1960s, therefore, it was not until 1963 that the South Carolina legislature gave serious attention to providing a safety valve in the event that desegregation occurred.

In January 1963, just weeks after the state had witnessed Harvey Gantt integrate Clemson College, a bill was presented to the South Carolina House of Representatives to provide tuition grants to public school students who decided to withdraw from public schools and enroll in private institutions. The bill proposed that

the state give parents the amount South Carolina spent per pupil—$225 a year for elementary school students, $250 for high school in 1963—for use toward tuition costs at private schools. In order to avoid questions of church/state separation, the bill stipulated that the money could not be used at religiously affiliated schools. The grants were to be available to families regardless of race. Demonstrating that state law makers were aware of the necessity for toning down explicitly racial arguments by 1963, school desegregation was “not mentioned or in any way alluded to” when legislators presented the bill. In talking about the bill in his state of the state address, Governor Donald S. Russell justified the necessity of the legislation, saying that passage of the tuition grants would help keep public schools accountable to high standards. What Russell failed to mention in his talk of public accountability for the state’s public schools were three desegregation suits filed against South Carolina schools pending in federal courts at the time the tuition grant bill was proposed.16

The tuition grant idea was first hatched by Senator Marion Gressette’s segregation committee as a safeguard for segregation in the event that the courts ruled that South Carolina’s public schools must integrate; a fact that revealed that the issue of race played a larger role in the drive for tuition grants than advocates publically admitted. As cautious as legislators and the governor had been in not mentioning race or school desegregation when debating the merits of tuition grants, the Gressette Committee itself was less discreet in discussing the need for the legislation. In the report proposing the tuition grant measure, the committee declared “South Carolina at all costs must prevent

16 Southern School News (February 1963), 8; Maxie Myron Cox, Jr., “1963 – The Year of Decision: Desegregation in South Carolina” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1996), 144-69.
the development of its grammar and high schools into the lawless ‘blackboard jungles’ that integration has made” in other parts of the country. It was coded language, to be sure, but undoubtedly communicated volumes to South Carolinians anxious about school desegregation. The idea of “lawless blackboard jungles,” in fact, was a theme white South Carolinians sounded time and again in the following decade, albeit without the unseemly racialized undertones.

The tuition grant bill was by no means widely endorsed by South Carolinians. Probably recognizing the true impetus for the grants, some legislators right away foresaw problems with the bill passing Constitutional muster. The state NAACP threatened immediate court action if the bill was passed. Additionally, state education officials, already financially pressed, were particularly critical of the tuition grant plan because state school funding was directly tied to student enrollment. Some legislators believed the amount of money the bill allocated for children to attend private schools was not enough to cover the cost of tuition for most families and would therefore only serve as a subsidy for wealthy South Carolinians who already had their children enrolled in private schools.18

One private citizens’ group supported the bill’s intent but worried that its exclusion of religious schools was too restrictive and requested that the General Assembly amend the bill to allow tuition grants to be used at church-related schools. George Cornish, the attorney for the Foundation for Independent Schools, a group seeking the bill’s amendment, argued that disallowing the tuition grants for use at

17 Southern School News (February 1963) 8.

religious schools discriminated against parents who wanted their children educated in such institutions. More importantly, Cornish presciently reasoned, even if a private school was not sponsored by a particular church or explicitly religious in its intent, newly established private schools would likely need to make use of church buildings to help defer overhead costs until the time the schools could become financially stable enough to move into their own facilities.\(^\text{19}\)

Despite pressure from those who wanted the bill voted down and those who desired an expanded version of the legislation, the General Assembly passed the tuition grants bill in May 1963 with the clause prohibiting their use at religious schools intact. The bill encountered no serious opposition from lawmakers in either chamber, passing 78-28 in the House and 35-4 in the Senate. In its final version, the legislature allocated $155 per pupil who opted out of public schools to attend accredited non-religious private institutions. It also provided that local districts could decide for themselves if they wanted to participate and could subsidize the grant with additional local money if thought prudent. One state senator who was in the minority opposing the bill took to the floor just before the vote in an attempt to lay bare the bill’s true intent. Despite the fact that lawmakers had consciously made no mention of desegregation in debating the bill, state senator Roger Scott declared bluntly, “we might as well say it, it’s about white people and Negroes.”\(^\text{20}\)

For South Carolinians worried about school desegregation, the tuition grants bill passed at a particularly fortuitous moment. Just months after the tuition grants bill

\(^{19}\) *Southern School News* (March 1963) 16.

\(^{20}\) *Southern School News* (June 1963) 14.
became law, a United States District Court judge in Columbia, South Carolina, heard arguments on whether twelve African American students would be allowed to enroll in white high schools in Charleston for the 1963 school year. In arguing their case for the necessity of maintaining segregation, the Charleston school district called a professor emeritus of biology from the University of South Carolina to testify that "Negroes have 'an innate lack of capacity' for matching the performance capabilities of whites," which justified educating them separately from whites. The expert witness based his analysis of the intellectual abilities of the races on the weight and perceived characteristics of the brains of whites and African Americans. In his decision, Judge Robert Martin rejected the school district's pseudo scientific defense and ruled that the black plaintiffs were to be allowed to attend one of the four white high schools in Charleston. Additionally, Judge Martin ruled that all the heretofore exclusively white Charleston schools would have to implement some amount of desegregation by the start of the 1964-1965 school year.\footnote{Quoted in Cox, "1963 – The Year of Decision," 167-68; \textit{Southern School News} (September 1963), 22.} The era of complete segregation in South Carolina's primary and secondary schools had at last come to an end. In closing one sordid chapter of the state's racial history, however, Martin's 1963 ruling also marked the beginning of another in South Carolina: the rise of private schools to avoid racial desegregation. And as it had done all throughout the era of massive resistance, religion played an important role in sustaining the private schools.

As the 1963 school year began with four of their city's schools experiencing desegregation for the first time, white groups in Charleston immediately began meeting...
to discuss opening private schools to take advantage of the newly enacted tuition grant program. Five separate groups in Charleston alone made plans for private schools, including the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston, which carefully wrote the school charter so it was unassociated with the church itself and thereby qualified for the tuition grants.\footnote{Southern School News (October 1963), 16.} The scene in Charleston was one that was replicated across the state starting in the mid 1960s as court decisions and federal funding programs led to desegregated schools in communities throughout South Carolina. Complying with court rulings and the Department of Housing Education and Welfare (HEW) guidelines that mandated desegregation in exchange for federal money, South Carolina school districts between 1964 and 1967 produced freedom-of-choice plans for school integration that produced little more than “token” desegregation. These plans invariably resulted in no white students choosing to attend black schools, while only a miniscule number of African American students “integrated” formerly all-white schools.

For all intents and purposes, the practical result of these plans was the continuation of segregated education in the state. During the 1965-1966 school year, for instance, despite 80 percent of the state’s school districts being in compliance with HEW guidelines for acceptable desegregation plans, only 1.5 percent of African American students in South Carolina attended school with white students.\footnote{McNeill, “School Desegregation in South Carolina,” 39. For more on the history of HEW guidelines and freedom-of-choice plans, see J. Harvie Wilkinson III, From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration: 1954-1978 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 102-18.} During this same period, thirty-two new private schools—all racially segregated—opened their doors. As federal courts’ rulings forced southern schools to move beyond token desegregation and
demonstrate substantial integration percentages, private schools in South Carolina flourished. The rate at which private schools were created was directly proportional to the amount of desegregation occurring in state schools. In 1970, the year the Supreme Court's ruling in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* mandated immediate and massive desegregation take place throughout the South, 93 percent of South Carolina's African American students attended desegregated schools. The previous year, only 29 percent had done so. Not coincidentally 1970 also marked by the advent of thirty-six new segregated private schools in South Carolina, the most in a single year.24 Between 1964 and 1972, when the majority of school desegregation in their state took place, white South Carolinians formed 111 new private schools. In 1973 these recently established private schools enrolled 25,000 white students.25

South Carolina had a higher percentage of students enrolled in private schools than any other southern state by the mid 1970s.26 But the same pattern of public school desegregation followed by a rash of private school openings that occurred in South Carolina was repeated to varying degrees in all the states of the South. The same factors at play in desegregating South Carolina schools—court rulings and access to federal money—insured that the integration of public schools in the former Confederacy


quicken its snail-like speed. The microscopic number of African American students attending formerly all-white schools throughout the South rose to 46 percent of the total southern black school-age population by 1973.

South Carolina’s private school boom that began in 1964 mirrored a similar phenomenon that occurred across the South that year. The movement to establish private schools in the South beginning in the mid-1960s reached a crescendo in the wake of the 1971 Supreme Court decision in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, which sanctioned busing as an acceptable instrument to achieve school desegregation. In October 1969 an estimated 300,000 students throughout the South were enrolled in private schools upholding racial segregation. Following a November mandate that same year from the Supreme Court ordering school districts to integrate “at once,” the estimated enrollment numbers jumped an astonishing 33 percent. By 1971 the number of pupils attending segregated private schools topped a half million. Twenty years after the Supreme Court handed down its Brown decision, it was estimated that between three and four thousand private schools had been established in southern states whose roots could be found in the desegregation of public schools. Attendance at these

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30 Kitty Terjen, “Close-up on Segregation Academies,” *New South* (Fall 1972), 50.
“segregationist academies” accounted for an estimated three-quarters of a million white schoolchildren whose parents believed strongly enough in segregation to pull their children out of the free public school system and pay to enroll them in these newly established institutions.\(^\text{31}\)

Most state money that may have originally been devoted to help parents pay for these private schools was frozen by court challenges by 1967.\(^\text{32}\) In South Carolina, for instance, tuition grant payments were halted almost as soon as they were dispersed. Opponents of the payments were granted an injunction against the state-sponsored tuition grants, and the courts ultimately ruled them unconstitutional in 1968. Despite this, however, the growth of private schools in South Carolina remained unabated after school desegregation began in 1963.\(^\text{33}\) The same scenario held for white families across the South: as the 1960s progressed and school boards at last put desegregation into practice, many white parents throughout the region demonstrated that they were willing to bear the financial burden of private school tuition to keep their children out of racially integrated public schools. Faced with the requirement to send their children to desegregated public schools, parents instead chose to simply create their own schools. Independent of public funding, these schools sheltered white children from mixing with members of different races.

\(^\text{31}\) Nevin and Bills, *The Schools That Fear Built*, 9.


In South Carolina some felt that the new wave of private schools operating in the state by the mid 1960s necessitated the creation of an organization to help further private education in the state. Accordingly, in 1965 T. Elliot Wannamaker, the headmaster of the Wade Hampton Academy, invited representatives from seven of the other newly formed private schools to Orangeburg in order to discuss the creation of an independent school association. As a result of that meeting, the South Carolina Independent School Association (SCISA) requested and received a corporate charter from the state.\textsuperscript{34} The executive secretary of the SCISA in the first two years of its existence was a young lawyer from Barnwell County, South Carolina, named Tom Turnipseed. As one of the founders of the Jefferson Davis Academy in Blackville, South Carolina, Turnipseed was committed to the idea of private education, and as the executive secretary of the SCISA, Turnipseed was instrumental in establishing private schools throughout the state. The majority of these schools were located in the South Carolina low country, where the African American population density was highest. In addition to insuring that the quickly forming new schools were able to obtain tax-exempt status, Turnipseed’s other chief responsibility was to spread information about the SCISA. As the public relations manager for the SCISA, Turnipseed’s primary message was that the newly formed association was not a segregationist organization but instead was a group of prominent citizens concerned about quality education in the state.\textsuperscript{35} In later years, however, after he had undergone a transformation in his racial attitudes, Turnipseed admitted that race

\textsuperscript{34} Robert Joseph Steeley “A History of Independent Education in South Carolina” (Ed.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1979), 94-95.

\textsuperscript{35} Tom Turnipseed telephone interview with the author, February 21, 2008.
played much more of a motivating factor in the establishment of the independent schools in South Carolina than the association let on at the time. Publically, the SCISA never mentioned race, reflecting the significant change taking place in southern society at that time. In reality, however, the independent school movement of the mid 1960s “had everything to do with race.” The SCISA even brought in a scientific expert in the mid 1960s to explain to association board members and headmasters that the frontal lobes of African Americans’ brains lacked the deep folds found in the brains of whites, supposedly inhibiting the formers’ capacity for critical thinking. Ideas such as these were the basis on which the Charleston school district had petitioned the U.S. district court to uphold segregation in the city’s public schools. The school district appealed the ruling rejecting these supposedly scientific findings all the way to the Supreme Court in 1964. Even though the highest court in land rejected the notion of the innate inferiority of the black race without comment, such ideas were still being promulgated among the supporters of the private schools in South Carolina.

Tom Turnipseed was only with the SCISA for two years before leaving South Carolina to help organize George Wallace’s presidential campaign in 1968. During his brief stint with the SCISA, Turnipseed helped organize more than thirty schools while broadcasting the message that the newly formed schools had nothing to do with race. Despite the mantra of quality education, the leaders of the SCISA were unquestionably driven to support private education at least in part because of racial prejudice. SCISA

36 Tom Turnipseed telephone interview with the author, February 21, 2008. For more on Tom Turnipseed and the shift in his racial attitudes, see Tom Brokaw, *Boom!: Voices of the Sixties* (New York: Random House, 2007), 62-68.

37 *Southern School News* (November 1964), 1.
president, Elliott Wannamaker, for instance, had written two years before founding the private school association that the "separation of the races in education, in recreation, in living quarters, and in churches is in the best interest of both races and is essential to the preservation of racial integrity."38 As executive secretary, Tom Turnipseed shared Wannamaker's racial views and even withdrew from the Methodist denomination to join the Southern Methodists who remained firmly committed to segregation of the races.39 It was not too difficult to see the racist motives underneath the thin veneer of "quality education" the SCISA espoused to justify its schools' existence.

Religion figured prominently in the creation of private schools in both South Carolina and the region as a whole. In South Carolina, white churches were essential in forming many of the member schools in the South Carolina Independent School Association. As leader of the SCISA, in fact, Elliott Wannamaker encouraged groups interested in starting private schools to work in conjunction with local churches, which had ample Sunday School classroom space to house the schools during the week. Wannamaker's own school, Wade Hampton Academy, spent the first year of its existence housed in the Northside Baptist Church in Orangeburg. In time the school was able to


39 Turnipseed, interview with the author. When the Southern and Northern branches of the Methodist church reunited in 1939, a small contingent of southerners refused to follow the rest of their fellow Methodists into the unified denomination. This remnant established the South Methodist denomination in 1939 in Columbia, South Carolina and was staunchly segregationist during the period of the civil rights movement. Although the denomination remained small, Methodists in South Carolina disgruntled with the direction their church was taking on issues of race in the 1950s and 1960s regularly wrote to the Methodist Advocate that South Carolina churches should withdraw from the Methodist denomination and rejoin their erstwhile brethren in the Southern Methodist denomination.
raise enough capital to move out of the church building and construct its own facilities, but for Wade Hampton Academy, the church was instrumental in getting the school off the ground.⁴⁰

Many churches in South Carolina, however, did more than just house newly formed private schools. While some churches like Northside Baptist granted private schools use of their facilities while having no formal association with the schools, a good number of churches took an active role in creating and running racially segregated schools that operated under the authority of the churches themselves. According to one study, of the 111 segregation academies in South Carolina by 1973, more than one-third were church sponsored and operated.⁴¹ That churches established schools for the sake of avoiding racial integration is strong evidence that religion played an instrumental part in the fight against desegregation into the 1970s. The schools that met across the South in church basements, Sunday School classrooms, and fellowship halls in the wake of desegregation did so with God’s implied sanction. The inescapable message of a racially segregated school created under the aegis of a church was divine favor for such a school. The statement these church-affiliated schools made, tacit or otherwise, was that God supported racial segregation—exactly the religious argument conservative white Christians had preached for decades in explicit segregationist folk theology and in more recent years in covert appeals to racial orthodoxy as demonstrated by the arguments during the Methodist merger.


⁴¹ “Private Schools In South Carolina: A Case Study,” box 11, Mizell Papers, 38.
Even the secular private academies established in the South, however, were not without religious underpinnings that helped buttress the righteousness of the segregationist cause. "Religion is an integral part of the Independent School movement because it's an integral part of the South," Donald Roberts, a principal of one of the newly formed private schools, professed in a 1972 interview. "Our people—supporters of the Independent Schools—are convinced that God is behind us. That I am sure of, we are doing God’s work,” Roberts continued. “This is something somebody outside the South can’t understand. If you don’t include that [the religious] aspect you’re missing a good part of the motivation behind this movement. People believe full heartedly that God doesn’t want us to mix." Religion, therefore, was not limited in its importance to the private schools directly associated with local churches. Even schools that claimed no religious affiliation relied heavily on Christian reputations to justify their existence. Many of these secular private schools also emphasized Christian principles in their classrooms. One study examining the philosophy of the southern private school movement found that even the non-sectarian schools "open classes with prayer…[which is] expanded into a considerable devotional exercise, with readings from the Bible." In throwing his considerable political weight behind the SCISA, Senator Strom Thurmond reiterated the idea that independent schools, although often unassociated with any church, nonetheless maintained a palpable religious identity. As Thurmond told his constituents

42 Interview with Donald D. Roberts, May 24, 1972, quoted in Margaret Rose Gladney, “I’ll Take My Stand: The Southern Segregation Academy Movement” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1974), 134.

43 Ibid., 37.
in South Carolina, the newly created independent schools "are unabashedly Christian in outlook and daily practice," despite the fact that they were not church-related.\textsuperscript{44}

The Southern Council Academy provides a useful example of how schools not affiliated with local churches still imbued their students with Christian teachings. Established in Durham, North Carolina, in September 1971, the Southern Council Academy was one of 396 institutions in a network of schools overseen by the national organization of the Citizens' Councils of America that year alone.\textsuperscript{45} "Although Southern Council Academy is not affiliated with any church group," the school's handbook informed potential applicants, "it is a 'Christian' school. A basic premise for our school is 'The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge.'" In addition to the quote from the book of Proverbs, the handbook assured parents that "every home room teacher daily conducts devotions during the home room period." The headmaster of the school "is also a Christian minister, [and] teaches a Bible class daily...." The school also required chapel once a week for the high school and elementary students who attended.\textsuperscript{46}

Conspicuously missing from the Southern Council Academy's informational handbook was any mention of race. At the time school officials wrote the handbook in the early 1970s, however, explicit mention of racial segregation as a purpose of these private schools was usually absent. In addition to the fact that an openly discriminatory

\textsuperscript{44} "Strom Thurmond Reports to the People," June 4, 1967, box 27, Workman Papers.

\textsuperscript{45} Numbers from Terjen, "Up-close on Segregation Academies," 54.

policy was outside the bounds of social acceptability by the 1970s, the omission of race from private school handbooks was in large part also the result of changes in IRS tax codes, which required private schools to strike any mention of racial discrimination from their institutional charter in order to maintain tax exempt status.47 “As middle class whites in the South have become more conscious of their image in racial matters,” one study suggested in 1976, “they have begun to say (and to believe) that they have many reasons for patronizing the schools that have little to do with race.”48

This sentiment was certainly true. Parents began citing behavioral problems and lower academic standards that they saw growing in desegregated public schools as justification for sending their children to receive religious-based teachings in all-white private schools whose very existence was owed to racial integration in public schools.49 Even a headmaster of one of the schools in the South Carolina Independent School Association conceded that “there can be no doubt that one of the major factors affecting the growth of those (independent) schools and the establishment of a great number of private schools in 1964 and the following years in South Carolina was the beginning of mass integration of black students into the public schools.”50


48 Nevin and Bills, The Schools that Fear Built, 17.

49 Ibid., 25-27.

50 Steeley, “A History of Independent Education in South Carolina,” 90.
Though the publically stated reasons white parents gave as to why they chose to send their children to private schools usually did not mention race in the 1970s, it was not difficult to see through the new race-less rationales. One researcher who attended a Student Council Convention for students enrolled in private schools interviewed many of the students at the conference. “Without exception,” the researcher reported, the students “said they were attending the private school because their parents did not want them in integrated schools.” One student from Louisiana phrased it bluntly: “Niggers are dumb, can’t learn; and when you have a majority of low standard in a school, they will pull all the rest down. It’s not really a race issue, just a matter of lowering standards.” In his candid statement, this young Louisianan perfectly captured the essence of the “colorblind” language that gained traction in the 1970s. While claiming academic opportunities were of more pressing concern than race, this student revealed nevertheless that perceptions of intellectual achievements were still tied to racist belief in African American inferiority.

51 Quoted in Gladney, “I’ll Take My Stand,” 126.

52 Sociologists Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders have labeled this phenomenon of non-racialized justifications used to support ideas that are clearly based on racist assumptions as “symbolic racism,” and explain it as follows: “A new form of prejudice has come to prominence, one that is preoccupied with matters of moral character, informed by virules associated with the traditions of individualism. At its center are the contentions that blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that they take what they have not earned. Today, we say, prejudice is expressed in the language of American individualism.” See Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 106. Kinder and Sanders’s expression of “symbolic racism” very neatly syncs with the rise of colorblind individualistic arguments that religious conservatives started touting in the late 1960s to avoid racial integration.
The new idea of racism being couched in language of colorblind individualism—and the role of southern conservative religion in helping sustain this new ideology—that was so forthrightly represented in the statement by the Louisiana private school student above was strikingly demonstrated in an incident that occurred in Lamar, South Carolina, in 1970. The previous year the public schools in Lamar had undergone token desegregation. The historically white Lamar elementary and high school had nine and ten black students respectively, while the historically black Spaulding high school and elementary school on the other side of town had no white students. In January 1970, following the Supreme Court’s directives in *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education*, the U.S. Fourth District Court of Appeals ruled that the schools in Lamar must move beyond token desegregation immediately. To accomplish this court ordered desegregation, city officials drew zoning plans that sent 520 African American students to the white Lamar schools and transferred 120 white students into the all-black Spaulding schools. Neither African American nor white parents were satisfied with the plan. The former felt the plan did not go far enough with integration, the latter thought the plan carried integration too far.

On March 3, 1970, the second day of the implementation of the new desegregation plan, a group of nearly two hundred white parents waited outside the Lamar schools with ax handles, bricks, and bottles. When a bus of black students tried to pull up to the school building, the mob blocked the road while some members tore open the engine hood and ripped out cables, rendering the bus immobile. The sixteen black students aboard (including the driver, a senior at Lamar High) got out of the bus and ran into the school as the mob showered the vehicle with rocks and broke out the windows
with their ax handles. When a second bus of black students arrived, it was blocked by the first disabled bus. This time the white parents did not bother to wait until the children were off the bus before smashing the windows. Covered in broken glass, the children exited the bus to shouts of “Run, nigger, run!” as South Carolina highway patrolmen tried to repel the mob with tear gas. Before the rioters had been dispersed, they managed to overturn both school buses on the side of the road.\textsuperscript{53}

Thirty-seven men were charged with rioting in the fallout of the Lamar school incident. Freed on bail, they departed the county courthouse to the cheers of an appreciative crowd. A reporter covering the scene noted that “the mention of God and ‘the good Lord’ was made often. A man said, ‘God made men white and God made men black and he sure didn’t mean for them to mix together.’”\textsuperscript{54}

For white community members in Lamar, who shared the perspective that God did not desire the races to mix, or those who simply did not want to send their children to an integrated school, a Baptist church in nearby Timmonsville provided an alternative by setting up a private academy in 1970 to help ameliorate the tensions brought on by public school integration. Anxious about the impeding desegregation order, deacons at Lake Swamp Baptist Church had called a former Lamar elementary school principal on a Friday evening to gauge his interest in overseeing a proposed private school. Securing his agreement, the church hastily held registration and within ten days the Lake Swamp


\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, 102.
Baptist School was operational. The school immediately enrolled four hundred students and turned two hundred others away for lack of space. All were white.

The Lake Swamp Baptist School proved so popular that the sponsoring church could not hold all the students, and school officials were forced to locate other venues for classroom space. Pine Grove United Methodist Church made its space available for the Lake Swamp Baptist school’s seventh grade, despite the fact that the church had received a memo from state denominational leaders advising against such action. In February 1970, just weeks before massive integration was set to take place across the state, Methodist leaders on the church’s statewide Board of Christian Social Concerns disseminated a letter to ministers in South Carolina regarding the use of Methodist church buildings for private schools. “In some section of our state private schools are being organized in response to court-ordered desegregation of public schools,” the memo read. “Methodist churches may be asked for the use of their buildings and facilities by these privately operated schools. As ‘pastor in charge,’ the minister of the local congregation has the final authority regarding the use of church facilities.”

Although not expressly forbidden to use their church buildings for private schools, the South Carolina Board of Christian Social Concerns included four pages of material for ministers’ consideration that suggested doing so would not be in the church’s best financial or spiritual interests. “As you arrive at your decision and exercise your responsibility in the light of your conscience, please know that we share the heavy weight of your responsibility,” the letter concluded. Weighing his options, the pastor of Pine

55 “Memo Concerning the Use of Church Buildings by Private Schools,” box 10, folder 680, Christian Action Council Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

56 Ibid.
Grove United Methodist Church apparently thought it best to reflect the desires of white families in the community in supporting the private school rather than following the wishes of the denominational authorities. Pine Grove's involvement with the segregated private school in Timmonsville demonstrates that even in the 1970s local pastors continued to understand the importance of adhering to the racial sensibilities of their congregation rather than following the racial inclusiveness of denominational leaders.

For his part, the pastor of Lake Swamp Baptist Church hoped that the creation of his school did not give the wrong impression. The church's establishment of a private school, pastor Ed Duncan told a reporter, had nothing to do with desegregation in and of itself. At issue was the timing of the desegregation. "Now, some got the idea it [setting up the private school] was done through racial prejudice. If the government had waited until summer and done this the following fall, there wouldn't have been anything like as much trouble," Duncan surmised. "The public would permit token integration," the Baptist minister continued, "but it's when a school isn't a white school anymore that you have a problem." One of the community leaders who had participated in attacking the school buses carrying black students echoed the pastor's sentiments that race was not the primary issue at stake in the controversy. "It definitely was never a race issue," Jeryl Best told a reporter. "My children have been to integrated schools. It's simply the matter of education, quality of education. I'm not going to get my daughter drug down in her education." In 1970, then, the segregationist mindset was alive and well in South

57 McIlwain, "On the Overturning of Two School Buses...,” 103.

58 Ibid., 102.
Carolina, albeit repackaged in the language of colorblind individualism that justified the private schools whose existence afforded white children an opportunity for an education that would not be stunted as a result of accommodating academically inferior black students.

Under its founders' original plan, the Lake Swamp Baptist School was only to be open for the remainder of the 1970 school year, homage to the idea that it was the timing rather than integration that was the real impetus behind the school. The private school, however, proved to be more popular than perhaps anticipated, and many white families in the community clamored for it to remain open. By 1973 it had moved out of the Baptist church and was housed in a former furniture renovation factory that had previously been owned by the Darlington Country School District; it also had joined the South Carolina Independent School Association.59

As racist attitudes were mitigated throughout the state in the 1970s, many South Carolinians sounded seemingly sincere appeals for private education. Some parents saw private education as good and necessary regardless of its ties to segregation, past or present. "Parents are prohibited from giving their children the school environment they would like," one South Carolina father wrote to William Workman. "When pupils are bused away from their communities to achieve the kind of integration our courts seem to desire, it not only hurts the child, but it hurts the community socially.... It is not so much the integration but rather the environment in the public schools to which I object."60 One South Carolina mother who wrote to Workman spoke for many who were growing tired

59 "Private Schools In South Carolina: A Case Study," box 11, Mizell Papers, 23.
of the constant association between private schools and racism: "it is a little exasperating that ‘private school’ has become a dirty word, synonymous with racism and sin." For many South Carolina parents by 1975, private schools were not likely regarded as intentionally segregationist havens, despite the institutions’ history. Instead, they were viewed as something necessary to make sure the sons and daughters of South Carolina received the best education available.

Yet southern private academies of the mid 1970s simply cannot be divorced from their segregationist origins. In a 1972 interview, one of the founders of Clarendon Hall, a private school in Summerton, South Carolina, claimed that the school—which operated in the county that *Briggs v. Elliot* originated—"was started not so much because of integration as [it was] the Supreme Court decisions on prayer and teaching the Bible in school." Although this kind of justification for private schools were becoming popular in the 1970s, they were difficult words to believe coming from S. Emory Rogers, the lawyer who had argued for segregated schools before the Supreme Court in 1954; who went on to serve as the president of the South Carolina Association of Citizens’ Councils; and who published a pamphlet on the compatibility of Christian love and segregation that circulated across the South in the 1960s.

Even if Rogers was sincere in his claim that Bible reading and prayer were the primary cause for Clarendon Hall’s founding, the enrollment history suggests a different reason for the school’s continued success. When Clarendon Hall opened in conjunction with a Baptist church in 1968, 127 students attended; the following year enrollment stood

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at 124. In 1970, however, the first year Clarendon County saw significant school integration, Clarendon Hall’s student body swelled to 434 pupils. By 1972 enrollment topped 500 and the school was no longer associated with the Baptist church. The fact that enrollment at Clarendon Hall exploded after desegregation and continued to grow even when the school was no longer operated by the Baptist church cast doubts on the idea that religious concerns were the sole motivation behind the county’s largest private academy.

By the early 1970s the South teemed with schools like Clarendon Hall that were created in the years between 1954 and 1970 as the threat of desegregation spread through the region. As a character candidly admits in a Walker Percy novel written in the heyday of the private school movement, these institutions were founded “on religious and patriotic principles and to keep Negroes out.” Percy perhaps used one conjunction too many in his description of the South’s private schools. Schools “founded on religious and patriotic principles to keep Negroes out” would have been a more accurate description of the segregationist academy movement that took hold in the South by the mid 1960s. When the Supreme Court ordered schools desegregated in 1954, the Deep South held out valiantly. Many who participated in the massive resistance against integration did so with the unassailable belief that God was against racial integration. It was a belief white southerners found supported as they viewed nature, read their Bibles, and listened to their ministers. Some historians have suggested that segregationists gave up their fight relatively easily compared to their pro-slavery forebears in large part

63 “Private Schools In South Carolina: A Case Study,” box 11, Mizell Papers.

because religion was not a motivating force for twentieth century southerners as it was for their Confederate ancestors. But this view perhaps underestimates the rise of private academies in the South and conservative religion’s importance to the new schools. Massive resistance morphed into segregationist academies; white evangelical religion justified both.

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In October 2008, with the country poised to elect the first African American president, the New York Times ran a story about white southerners’ racial attitudes on the eve of the historic election. The story’s reporter roamed the South interviewing white southerners about their thoughts on Barack Obama’s racial heritage. It was a short article with only a half-dozen individuals quoted—ones the reporter no doubt selected to increase the story’s impact—but two responses the journalist uncovered revealed a surprising continuity of thought from a previous era. “He’s neither-nor,” one white Alabamian said in explaining why he would not be supporting the Democratic senator in the upcoming election. “He’s other. It’s in the Bible. Come as one. Don’t create other breeds.” A 74-year-old man from Virginia shared similar sentiments in expressing his uneasiness with Obama’s racial make-up. “I would think of him as I would of another mixed race,” the retired textile worker told the Times reporter. “God taught the children of Israel not to intermarry. You should be proud of what you are, and not intermarry.”

While a small number of septuagenarian southerners may have helped carry segregationist folk theology into the twenty-first century, the days of the ideology’s continued expression are surely waning. Even Bob Jones University, the stalwart fundamentalist institution in South Carolina that famously forbade its students from interracial dating until 2000 because of the interpretation that mix-racial relationships violated biblical proscriptions, issued a statement in 2008, saying:

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For almost two centuries American Christianity, including BJU [Bob Jones University] in its early stages, was characterized by the segregationist ethos of American culture. Consequently, for far too long, we allowed institutional policies regarding race to be shaped more directly by that ethos than by the principles and precepts of the Scriptures. We conformed to the culture rather than provide a clear Christian counterpoint to it. In so doing, we failed to accurately represent the Lord and to fulfill the commandment to love others as ourselves. For these failures we are profoundly sorry.  

Ideas about God’s desire for racial purity might always be held by a miniscule percentage of the population, but it seems likely that professions of such beliefs will soon be restricted to a tiny contingent of racial extremists. But if segregationist folk theology is at this late date finally taking its last breath, colorblind individualism on matters of race is alive and well in white evangelical circles.

In 1978 when schools in the South Carolina Independent School Association faced the threat of losing their federal tax exemption on the grounds that they were hyper-segregated and therefore racially discriminatory, SCISA president Charles Aimar posed a pertinent question to IRS regulators about racially segregated institutions. “Does the implication of the proposed IRS regulations also extend to churches, both Black and white, which have such a low or non-existing mix of Black and white in their congregations,” Aimar asked the government officials? “Are they also to lose their tax-exempt status? Are they also to be considered non-charitable and without love because they have not exhibited the specified percentages or quotas for minority/majority mix?”

Aimar’s hypothetical questioning presents an interesting point. In the mid 1970s churches were among the most segregated institutions in the country. At that time, the

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segregated arrangement was likely preferred by many in the pews who still held to, however privately, notions of divinely decreed separation of the races.

In time, however, white evangelicals came overwhelmingly to understand racial segregation as a great evil whose demise should be celebrated and encouraged. And yet American churches have remained almost totally separated by race. Indeed, studies have shown that in the first years of the twenty-first century, churches that consisted of more than one race made up only 7 percent of the Protestant congregations in the United States. And researchers estimate that those churches whose congregations are a mix of whites and African Americans represent less than 3 percent of all churches in the United States.\(^4\) This hyper-segregation in American churches occurs despite the fact that a majority of white evangelical leaders profess a desire for racial diversity in their churches.

In 2000 sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith published *Divided by Faith*, a book that offered an explanation for the rigid segregation that persists in the overwhelming majority of evangelical churches in the United States. Emerson and Smith’s study found that “many race issues that white evangelicals want to see solved are generated in part by the way they themselves do religion, interpret their world, and live their own lives.”\(^5\) Emerson and Smith identified three components of white evangelical theology and practice in particular that have greatly contributed to the difficulty in bridging racial divides in evangelical churches. These three key elements are

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\(^4\) Michael O. Emerson with Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 138. Emerson suggests that this number is probably even lower than the 2.5 percent reflected in his data. Under Emerson’s definition, a multiracial church is one in which no racial group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation.

"accountable free will individualism, relationalism (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and antistructuralism (inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social structural influences)." According to Emerson and Smith, these basic rudiments of white evangelicals' faith "direct them to see the world individualistically... and to desire a color-blind society." Ironically, their emphasis on individualism and desire for colorblindness has led contemporary white evangelicals to believe that overcoming racism requires something akin to the very strategy the Methodist Christian Fellowship continually called for in 1969 when trying to avoid racial integration: "natural affinities, mutual appreciation of each other's merits and the voluntary association of individuals."

Most African Americans, however, view the world very differently than white evangelicals do and believe that ending racism requires addressing the structural racism that exists in institutions and American society. But precisely because of the deep influence of individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism, white evangelicals often fail to even recognize the existence of structural racism. As Emerson and Smith note, the emphasis on individualism and attempts at colorblindness lead white evangelicals "to assess the race problem in divergent and nonreconciliatory ways" from the way African Americans do. The two sociologists go on to conclude that "[t]his large gulf in

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6 *Ibid.*, 76.


understanding is perhaps part of the race problem’s core, and most certainly contributes to the entrenchment of the racialized society.”

Ironically, then, although most contemporary white evangelical leaders profess a desire to alleviate the racial divisions that plague their churches today, their approach to race relations is, in many respects, a continuation of a rationale many southern evangelicals advanced in the late 1960s in order to perpetuate segregation. As they left behind segregationist folk theology with its explicit considerations of race, these religious conservatives began instead to couch their justifications for segregated institutions in language that stressed colorblindness over skin color and individualism over structural reform. These arguments not only resulted in the persistence of racially segregated churches and schools in the early 1970s, they have continued to pay dividends—albeit widely undesired—in maintaining the racial divide in churches to this day.

In *Divided by Faith* Emerson and Smith suggested that evangelicals should strive to “integrate their faith with knowledge of race relations, inequality, and American society,” if they wish to successfully address the complex issue of race in their churches. A quarter-century earlier, John Perkins, an African American civil rights activist and evangelical Christian from Mississippi, foreshadowed the conclusion of Emerson and Smith’s latter-day sociological analysis in more personal terms. As he traveled across the South, Perkins discovered that many of the white religious conservatives who sought his reconciliation did so without expressing any repentance. “I find that they want my relationship, but they want more to quickly forget the brutality and

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9 Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 91.

the injustice that their people put upon many of us in the name of Christianity," Perkins wrote in his autobiography. Although they were written over thirty years ago, Perkins's words still resonate today. White evangelicals seeking a solution to the present stultified state of race relations in their congregations would perhaps do well to begin their search in the past.

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