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AN UNQUENCHABLE FLAME: THE SPIRIT OF PROTEST AND THE SIT-IN MOVEMENT IN CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

by

SAMUEL R. JACKSON

Under the Direction of Dr. Jacqueline Rouse

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the Sit-in movement in Chattanooga, Tennessee during the early 1960s in the context of a perpetuating tradition of protest in the African American community spanning more than a century. The study will also illustrate how it was a unique episode in the annals of the Civil Rights Movement in that it was strictly orchestrated by high school students without the input or support of adults, yet it has largely been neglected by historians. The research conducted includes oral histories, newspaper clippings, private manuscript collections, books, videos, and periodicals which provide great insight into the minds, motives, and methods of those involved. The study also depicts the galvanizing spirit, ignited by the students, which compelled the community to act and resulted in monumental social changes.

INDEX WORDS: Sit-ins, Bushtown, Chattanooga, Jim Crow,
C.B. Robinson, James Mapp, Lincoln Park

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SAMUEL R. JACKSON

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Masters of Arts

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Georgia State University

2008

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AN UNQUENCHABLE FLAME: THE SPIRIT OF PROTEST AND THE SIT-IN MOVEMENT IN CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

by

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Georgia State University

August 2008

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to several people who have meant so much to my endeavors and in helping me to reach this point. First, to my beautiful wife, Vivian, and my four wonderful children: Nicholas Gerard, Hamilton Sinclair, Samantha Maria, and Sarah-Nicole Danielle, whose love and support certainly helped make this possible. Second, it is dedicated to the memory of George and Louella Jackson, my grandparents who raised me and to Harold and Earlean Evans, my father and mother-in- law who treated me as their son. Finally, to my mother, Roberta Jackson, my sister, Sherry, and my brother, Tim, who have encouraged me along the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I have travelled on this journey, so many people have helped me that to list them all is almost impossible. With that in mind I would like to try and mention a few who have just been tremendous in assisting me with this project. To begin with, thanks to Dr. Jacqueline Rouse, who stuck with me over the course of this tedious journey, for her expertise, valuable wisdom, guidance, and patience. Thanks also to Dr. Akinyele Umoja, for being a part of my committee and his unselfishness in this undertaking. A special thanks to Admiral Paul Yost and the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation for affording me this opportunity and working with me to see its completion, and certainly I owe a tremendous dept to the members of the Howard Class of 1960 for giving me so much of their time and sharing their history for this project. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge those who worked in the local history department at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Bicentennial Library, Mr. Steve Cox of the Special Collections Department at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, The staff of The Civil Rights Collection and Nashville Room at the Nashville Public Library, the manuscript staff at the Tennessee State Archives in Nashville, and the staff of the Chattanooga African American Regional Museum. Last, but certainly not least, thanks to my Creator, my Lord and my Savior, Jesus the Christ, for blessing me to have such wonderful experiences and such wonderful people in my life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

High schools leave their mark on students by shaping their future. Often, students also leave their mark on their schools in unforgettable ways. The Howard High class of 1960 is an example of a group of students who indeed left an indelible mark, not only on the school, but on the city as a whole. Howard, located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, through the years produced numerous students who went on to achieve great things. The class of 1960 was no exception. In fact, this class was a very special group that helped to spearhead and accelerated political and social changes, reigniting a new spirit of protest that many black *Chattanoogans* had not witnessed in many decades. In many regards, it was a typical year at Howard until the evening of February 19, 1960. On that winter day, about thirty local students from Howard gathered in the downtown business district and staged what became known as a "sit-in", where protesters gathered at a local establishment, such as Woolworth or W.T. Grant, and sat down at the lunch counter to order food. While all customers were allowed to shop and purchase merchandise, these students were forbidden by local custom or law from being served food at the lunch counter simply because they were black. The group from Howard included many honor students and class leaders, such as Paul Walker, senior class president, Andrew Smith, vice-president, Robert Winston, class business manager, Robert Parks, student council president, Virgil Roberson, captain of the football team, Gloria (Underwood) Jackson, Joanne (Humphries) Favors, and others. The attempts by these students were direct assaults on the laws and customs of segregation, ones that kept the races separated in most public venues and placed strict restrictions not only on places where blacks were allowed, but also on many activities in which

they could engage. Their protests had a profound impact on social relations and were instrumental in ending segregation in many public and private facilities.[1]

Chattanooga, like many other southern cities, allowed vestiges of quasi-slavery to continue despite efforts by blacks and whites alike to produce change in the social and political order. Legally, slavery came to an end with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the end of the Civil War in 1865. Yet, a *de facto* slavery continued for roughly one hundred years following emancipation. In the American South, the segregation laws, or "Jim Crow" as they were known, were written into all state constitutions as the nineteenth century ended and the twentieth century began. According to historian John Hope Franklin:

> Whites solemnly resolved to keep the races completely separate, for there could be no normal relationships between them. Laws for racial segregation had made a brief appearance during Reconstruction, only to disappear by 1868. When the Conservatives resumed power, they revived the segregation of the races. Beginning in Tennessee in 1870, Southerners enacted laws against intermarriage of the races in every Southern state. Five years later, Tennessee adopted the first "Jim Crow" law and the rest of the South rapidly fell in line.[2]

While racial discrimination was prevalent nationwide, in the South it not only was a tradition, but with the force of legal proscription, was institutionalized in every facet of life. Socially, blacks were segregated from the mainstream of the dominant American culture. Laws forbade blacks from drinking from the same water fountains as whites, from using the same restrooms as whites, and even from being buried in the same cemeteries with whites. Where there was only one graveyard, blacks were buried in different sections. Blacks were basically second-class citizens, even prohibited from eating in the same restaurants or at the same lunch

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[1] *Chattanooga Times*, "Negroes 'Sit Down' Here: No Incident, No Service," 20 February 1960, 1, 9.

[2] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: a History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1947), 342.

counters as whites.[12] Blacks grew increasingly tired of their second-class status and many agitated again and again for change and equality, fostering a spirit of protest that became characteristic of many within African American communities. For example, in protest, some blacks published their own newspapers, such as Randolph Miller of the Chattanooga *Blade*, in order to inform the community of community news including social issues that often were not reported in white papers. Others resigned themselves to accommodate the new restrictions, often blaming segments of the race for their plight. Author Lester Lamon addressed this psychological dilemma in Black Tennesseans 1900-1930. Lamon pointed out that blacks, due to wide geographical disbursements and high rates of illiteracy, adjusted to the depletion of rights and resources and took on an increasing conservative flavor of improving on their moral deficiency, which, as they saw it, was at the root of their condition. Blacks believed, as whites propagated, they were at fault for the deplorable conditions of their communities. Since they were to blame, they were also responsible for rectifying their conditions. The correction in their moral stock, and thus within their economic, and in time political status, was something that would not occur overnight. Advocates of this position insisted on patience and gradualism. Influenced heavily by Booker T. Washington and his stance on accommodation, some southern blacks came to an acceptance of the way things were and began emphasizing a need to focus on practical economic survival while abandoning or at least postponing aspirations for legal equality.[3]

Blacks in Tennessee, Chattanooga included, were often not equipped to take on jobs that would enable them to be self-sufficient economically. Segregation, illiteracy, discrimination, and limited resources rendered many inadequate and kept them dependent on and subservient to the goodwill or whims of whites. When employed, blacks were assigned mostly menial jobs that

[3] Lester Lamon, *Black Tennesseans 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 256.

required manual labor. Though blacks had been emancipated, a system of sharecropping and tenant farming emerged to replace outright slavery yet overall conditions for African Americans worsened. As historian John Hope Franklin stated, the "Negro …workers contributed greatly to the economic recovery of the South. As free workers, however, they gained little."[4] He further stated that "the wages paid to freedmen…were lower than those that had been paid to hired slaves."[5] The new economic system of the South generally ensured that the African American did not rise above the level of mediocrity. Blacks remained tied to the land, reminiscent of Medieval serfdom, and because most were illiterate (it was illegal in most southern states to teach slaves how to read or write), they found themselves entering into contracts that they did not fully comprehend.[16] In manufacturing areas, such as Chattanooga, Blacks fared somewhat better but were still employed in the lowest paying jobs.[6]

To make matters worse, the economic plight was exacerbated by their political impotency. After slavery, during the period of Reconstruction, blacks were enfranchised at least in theory and in some cases in reality with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. In Chattanooga, several were elected and served in public offices. In 1868, just three years following emancipation, C.P. Fletcher was the first African American to be elected to the Chattanooga Board of Aldermen. The year prior, Esquire Flowers had been elected to the county court. With the vote, Blacks aligned themselves with the Republican Party and played a huge

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[4] Franklin, 311.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Alrutheus A. Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee 1865-1880* (Washington, D.C.: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1941), 25.

role in determining who served in office.[7]However, many were merely used as pawns of the white radical Republican leaders, many of whom had come from the North in an attempt to gain control over the South.[8] Ex-Confederate leaders were punished through disfranchisement and forbidden to hold office in the early stages of the period. Despite the restrictions placed on the ex-rebels, many were still elected and eventually white Democrats known as the "Redeemers" regained control of the political landscape of the former Confederacy. They were called Redeemers for they were said to, in an almost glorified spiritual passion, redeem, *or reclaim*, the South from the hands of the Yankee invaders and their black allies. With the redemption, blacks were stripped of any real influence or ability to bring about sustained positive change.[9]

The situation in Chattanooga, on the other hand, seemed promising to blacks initially. African Americans of the city during the late 1800s enjoyed political privileges rarely seen in other areas of the South. As local historians Gilbert Govan and James Livingood wrote: "from the end of the Civil War until 1910, it was customary for at least one Negro to be seated on the city council or board of aldermen."[10] They, however, were pushed aside shortly after the turn of the century and virtually eliminated from holding any major positions. The redemption in Chattanooga, as elsewhere in the South, proved very effective in the reduction of black participation in the political arena. Through legislation and intimidation, blacks were thrust outside of the realm of power and what little gains made were quickly reversed by the new

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[7] Rita Lorraine Hubbard, *African-Americans of Chattanooga: A History of Unsung Heroes* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007), 49-50.

[8] Ibid., 47.

[9] Lamon, pp.52-53

[10] Gilbert E Govan and James W. Livingood, *The Chattanooga Country 1540-1976: From Tomahawks to TVA*, (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 234.

southern governments. Joel Williamson, in *The Crucible of Race*, said this concerning the exclusion of blacks from the political arena:

> The movement to disenfranchise blacks by legal and constitutional means that swept through the South in the generation after 1890 was only a part of a larger process that might be called the depoliticalization of the Negro…. The political reduction of black people - by persuasion if possible, by fraud and intimidation if necessary - was precisely the central process of redemption. The effort had its practical side in relieving Negroes of offices and removing ballots from black hands, but it also had a psychological aspect. A major part of redemption involved enforcing upon the Negroes the conviction that significant political power would never be theirs again. Most blacks it seems learned that lesson well. They simply retired from practical political activity…[11]

Yet in spite of limiting and eventually eliminating black political participation, some worked diligently to hold on to their rights. Endued with this spirit of protests, black politicians such as William Hodge and Hiram Tyree, resisted the effort to move them out of the way by going to great lengths to ensure African Americans voted where they could. Hodge became the first African American state representatives while Tyree operated what can only be termed as a political machine for almost twenty years.[12] Despite such valiant efforts to challenge the prevailing political order, far too many blacks remained silent and watched their rights disappear. Things remained woeful for Chattanooga's blacks until protest efforts to desegregate schools and direct action campaigns such as the sit-ins forced the community to come to grips with the reality of needed change. The latter demonstrations proved that the spirit of protest did not die with the elimination of black formal political participation.

With the recapturing of political might by the Redeemers, the system of Jim Crow became firmly entrenched as the normal mode of affairs in southern society. Socially, blacks were marginalized from the mainstream. Economically they were largely kept under wraps in a

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[11] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 225.

[12] Hubbard, 25, 124.

quasi-slavery system due to the aforementioned sharecropping, tenant farming, and low paying manufacturing jobs. Yet, in Chattanooga, blacks managed to establish successful businesses, an accomplishment itself that stood as a symbolic protest against the prevalent notion of racial inferiority.[13] At the same time, their economic success contributed to the rise of a substantial middle class that often served to stymie that very same spirit. Many benefitted from segregation and therefore had great interest, similar to whites, in things remaining as they were for the masses. Greatly influenced by the accommodation philosophy of Booker T. Washington, blacks such as G.W. Franklin, a successful funeral director, saw no need to agitate for civil rights.[14] Their limited economic success did not, however, shield them from losing influence. Politically they ultimately were excluded from any semblance of power. Collectively, this reality had a tremendous psychological effect, as Williamson noted, on the southern blacks. They were made to feel inferior in every segment of society and in many cases began to internalize this sense of inadequacy, thus shouldering the blame as afore mentioned. Many saw no hope for a better life, thus explaining their "retiring" from the process. The temporal elation that came with emancipation quickly faded. Blacks began to sense a loss of control over their own persons.[15]

Not all blacks developed this sense of fatalism and the spirit of protest that had been present in the early arrivals in Tennessee persisted through the eras of discrimination, finding new venues for release in the sit-in movement of the 1960s. This spirit also served notice to the very real threat of social and political uprising. In reference to the possibility of challenge,

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[13] Hubbard, 49-50.

[14] Lamon, 30.

[15] Williamson, 225.

Lamon explained that blacks, often younger and less conservative:

> …recognized the inferior socioeconomic status of black Americans but rejected the ideas of racial inferiority and dependence on paternalism. While accepting the reality of isolation within the white social structure and economic system… [they] were nevertheless optimists, not pessimists. Their tone was aggressive, and they stressed the potential strength of the black population rather than the moral and economic weaknesses…[16]

Blacks engaged in dissenting activities designed to magnify the inequalities they faced while manifesting their dissent. Some migrated from farms to nearby cities where they could escape sharecropping. Others migrated farther, often to northern cities where job opportunities appeared promising. Others left, in protest, when it became apparent that changes were not occurring rapidly or when their lives were in jeopardy. During times of massive migration, Chattanooga, however, enjoyed a relatively successful working environment. Too hilly and mountainous for extensive agricultural production, the area supplied factories and foundries with minerals and ores in abundance. Thus Chattanooga escaped some of the privations of other Tennessee communities and forged, as a consequence of generational propriety and industry, a sizeable black middle class. From these ranks sprang the seeds of protest. For example, when Jim Crow laws were applied to streetcars in 1905, blacks, led by Randolph Miller, boycotted against the practice. Miller's protest gained momentum and sparked the protest among the younger members of the middle class and several progressive black businessmen. The protest also exposed the tensions and divisions within the black community when the city's black political, educational, and religious leaders did not support it. The boycott and its failure demonstrated the lack of cohesiveness and power in the black community.[17]

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[16] Lamon, 15.

[17] Ibid., 30.

To compound matters, black men in Tennessee were lynched in alarming numbers. One reason for the violence perpetrated against black men and blacks overall was their economic progress in spite of attempts to keep them enslaved. The thriving middle class of blacks in Chattanooga caused many whites, especially poor whites, to be envious. To curve trends of economic success, and often economic independence from white influence, lynching and intimidation were often used. The protection of the sanctity of white womanhood was the most acceptable excuse used for the justification of such savagery. Often blacks were murdered for such trivial issues as being perceived of thinking too much of themselves. They were said to be acting "uppity," a term signifying an unacceptable arrogance. Blacks endured these atrocities without any sympathy or help from local law enforcement, who in many cases were the culprits. Black women, compelled to work out of economic necessity, found employment in the homes of upper middle class and affluent whites as maids and were subjected routinely to sexual abuse. Neither the black female, her husband, nor the black community had enough power to demand justice.[18]

Chattanooga served as the host to at least three such barbaric displays[28]. The last occurred in 1906. In January of that year, Ed Johnson, a black laborer, was accused of raping a young white woman not far from her home as she arrived from work. Despite the inability of the woman to identify her attacker and the lack of evidence against Johnson, he was convicted of rape. As the case progressed, including an appeal, to the U.S. Supreme Court which surprisingly granted a stay, a white mob forcefully removed Johnson from jail and took him to the Walnut Street Bridge and hanged him. When death failed to take him, the mob shot several times to the pleasure of the masses who had gathered in typical southern fashion for such events. The

[18] Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response.: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 30-2.

lynching of Johnson was certainly a reminder of the precarious position of black men as well as of the impotency of the black community who tried to intervene on his behalf, but to no avail. It also signaled loud and clear that blacks were still at best second class citizens and they had better stay in their place, thus preserving the prevailing social order**.** Even under such trying circumstances, blacks responded in protest. Plants were forced to shut down the day after the lynching when blacks, out of protest, stayed home from work. By not reporting to work as a show of disgust over this incident, they took the risk of being fired from their jobs. They undertook this risk to make a statement that did not go unnoticed by their white employers. In stead of reprimanding or firing the employees, which could have resulted in an all out riot, the plant management recognized the legitimacy of their complaint.[19]This protest, mild as it was by some standards, was indeed a continuation of this spirit that challenged the status quo and moved blacks to make a statement through their actions.[20]

If the mindless act of violence wasn't enough to teach blacks to stay in their place, the city went to a commission form of government in 1911, basically eliminating what little remaining political clout blacks enjoyed. Prior to this, aldermen, local governmental representatives, were elected from specific wards. If a ward had a predominately black population, it assured the election of a black alderman who had some voice in community and governmental affairs. The new commission form required the election of commissioners at large. This system diluted the black vote tremendously for blacks were still a definite minority. This virtually guaranteed that no black would be elected to the local commission. Blacks saw their power eclipsed. Whites were able to ignore the plight and interest of blacks. Subsequently,

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[19] Chattanooga Times, "Aftermath of the Mob: Rumors of Colored Retaliation," 21 March 1906, 4.

[20] Shapiro, 32.

pragmatism won out, for whites also realized the need for black business. Whites were forced to do business with blacks, who still comprised a large share of customers of many white businesses in spite of segregation. Whites had to at least appear to be on amicable terms with blacks in order to maintain much of their profits.[21] Since the highly publicized lynching of Johnson in 1906, the city provided blacks with some opportunities for equal facilities while at the same time keeping them politically impotent. Black teachers received equal pay. Black police officers were hired in the 1940s, but with restrictions on arresting whites.[22] Most southern cities did not hire African American policemen in the 1960s, exceptions like Atlanta noted. In the 1940s it was virtually unheard of to have black officers in these places. Blacks also gained access into the front entrances of some public venues and were allowed usage of Chattanooga's public library in the late 1940s. By the late 1950s, Jim Crow signs came down from bus terminals. Yet, far too many places were still off limits in 1960. Parks, theatres, restaurants, and lunch counters were still closed to black patrons. Segregated water fountains, restrooms, and schools were the norm. Additionally, residential patterns remained separate for all but the poorest of whites, who at times found themselves sharing neighborhoods with blacks, yet they were given privileges because of their whiteness.[23]

Lying somewhat dormant beneath the system of segregation in Chattanooga, there was a tension fueled by ignorance, frustration, and alienation. The tension was easily detected in incidents such as lynching, but also visible in other forms. Racial stress surfaced in an incident

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[21] Nancy J. Potts, "Unfulfilled Expectations: The Erosion of Black Political Power in Chattanooga, 1865-1911," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 49, Spring 1990, 112-28.

[22] *Chattanooga Times*, "Negro Policeman's Case is Examined," 19 September 1948, 1.

[23] C.B. Robinson Interview, Tennessee State Legislator and educator, interview by Moses Freeman April 1983 as part of the Oral History Project, Chattanooga-Hamilton County Public Library, Chattanooga, TN.

where a twelve year old white girl was shot by an eight year old black girl in a dispute over the rights to a spring frequented by the mining community just north of the city.[24] Another example of repressed hostility became evident in the case of a black police officer suspended for arresting a white man charged with a misdemeanor offense. This incident demonstrated that both sides of the racial divide harbored some emotional anxiety over race relations. Black officers were trained to arrest whites only when committing certain felonies.[25] Tensions further mounted within the black community when a renowned local business and political black leader, H.W. Newell, president of the Willing Workers Club of the Seventh Ward renounced the recommendations of President Harry Truman's Civil Rights Committee and its attempt to promote equal rights and stated that Truman was just seeking the black vote in the South. Newell stated that "the intelligent Negroes of the South do not want to do away with segregation at this time."[26] Newell's position prompted a dissenting response from civil rights advocates, especially those of the NAACP.[27] This type of disagreement between the established leadership within the black community served to retard more progressive racial policies. It also brought to the surface the level of division within the black community, a division in which whites often capitalized on to weaken the voice of protest.

As time passed, blacks were pushed more and more outside of the realm of real citizenship and forced to establish their own institutions within the confines of a segregated society or be deprived totally. Segregation molded relationships, set boundaries, and determined

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[24] *Chattanooga Times*, "Children Shot in Race Battle," 15 September 1921, 5.

[25] _____, "Negro Policeman Return to Beat," 21 September, 1948, 1.

[26] *Chattanooga News Free Press*, "Negro Says His Race Fares Better in South," 31 October 1947, 1, 5.

[27] *Chattanooga Times*, "NAACP Condemns Views of Newell," 11 November 1947, 4.

the quality of life for the people of Chattanooga and throughout the South. Howard High School was but one segregated black institution. The student body totaled more than 3000 students who came from all walks of life. The prevailing social structure mandated blacks, regardless of socio-economic status, attend the same (and only) high school in the city. This was the case with the majority of schools throughout the southern region, even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 outlawing segregation in public schools. Some school systems, however, complied with the court's ruling. In Chattanooga, a push for desegregation shortly after the *Brown* Decision revealed entrenched racial hatred from whites to racial equality. It also sparked the spirit of protest among a younger generation of blacks in Chattanooga. In spite of segregation, black schools like Howard took great pride in its role within the community and produced student leaders who matured into adult leaders. Former students credited their experiences at Howard with equipping them for their subsequent trials and triumphs in the struggle to obtain justice, equality, and full citizenship[28]

These experiences for the class of 1960 included taking the risk of leading a direct challenge to segregation when many adults did not venture to do so. The students, mostly seniors of the class of 1960, were aware of similar protests in Greensboro, North Carolina and in Nashville, Tennessee. In those cases, the demonstrators were mainly college students who had the option of going home if situations became too stressful. The students in Chattanooga did not have that option, which meant that they were subject to threats and attacks without any means of escape. Some who orchestrated this protest, such as Walker, Winston, Roberson, and Smith were "debating each other in their third-period mathematics class while reading about the Nashville sit-ins in the newspaper" on whether to act or not.[3] Without consulting adults or established

[28]Personal interview with JoAnne (Humphries) Favors, participant in Chattanooga Sit-ins and member of Howard Class of 1960, interview by author on 14 February 2007, Nashville, TN.

black civic leaders, the students decided to take action and stage a sit-in protest in an attempt to change things in Chattanooga. This demonstration by high school students was a direct assault on the prescribed racial caste system and led to great consternation and tension throughout the city, both in the white and black communities, culminating in a heightened awareness that inevitable change was on the horizon. This protest also served to galvanize the civil rights movement in Chattanooga, helping to speed up the process of social and political reform long desired by blacks in the city, while perpetuating a spirit of protest, exhibited by Randolph, Tyree, and others, that had prevailed for generations.[29]

[29] Robinson.

CHAPTER II

ILLUSION: CHATTANOOGA'S AFRICAN-AMERICANS MAKE SIGNIFICANT, YET LIMITED, GAINS FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR.

The close of the Civil War saw a major change in the social, political, and economic landscape of Chattanooga. The area witnessed a major transformation that culturally blended at least four different groups into the "New South" city that Chattanooga ultimately became. These groups included northerners, often referred to as "carpetbaggers"; southerners who for the most part remained loyal to the Union throughout the conflict and who worked with the northerners and were known as "scalawags"; the newly emancipated blacks, and southern whites who had rebelled. This new social configuration on the surface looked promising for the "freedmen" who wanted freedom with its accompanying civic, social, political, and economic opportunities. To accomplish this, with the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, blacks were provided with a framework for political involvement need in order to secure any real progress.[30] Elated, enthused, excited about future prospects, it became increasingly clear that these aspirations were an illusion.

At the end of the Civil War, Chattanooga suffered, as did many other southern urban areas, from economic impoverishment. The situation changed quite remarkably when northerners with enterprising aspirations took notice of the abundant natural resources in the area. Along with southern compatriots, and to a great extent, black labor, the city became an industrial magnet drawing others who sought fortunes in the "reconstruction of the South." Some northerners, who had served in the Union Army such as General John T. Wilder, the first to fire on Chattanooga during the war, relocated there and cast their lots with its promising economic

[30] Taylor, 23-4.

future. Many local union supporters, such as William Crutchfield, a successful entrepreneur, as well as others from outlining Hamilton county areas who had enjoyed a period of economic and political clout prior to secession, also hoped to carve their niche in land and business ventures once controlled by a planter elite within the city area of Chattanooga**.** [31] There were also some who remained sympathetic to the southern cause, such as Mrs. David Key, the wife of a prominent local businessman and Confederate soldier who had served as an escort to Jefferson Davis during Davis' visit to the city in an attempt to persuade Tennessee to secede from the Union. Key fled to Atlanta when Union forces attacked the city, but his wife stayed amidst very difficult times when the bare necessities could not readily be secured. Wounded at Vicksburg, Key recovered and returned to Chattanooga after receiving a guarantee from his friend Crutchfield that he would be treated kindly. He in fact did returned and found success in business and politics. Still others, such as the Reverend T.H. McCallie, from a prominent and successful family, stayed during the war mainly for a philosophical vantage point rather than for financial interest. He did, however, undertake strenuous effort to preserve the family home when Union officers indicated that it would be razed in similar fashion to some other homes belonging to rebels or to those sympathetic to them. Although he opposed secession, he was supportive of the theory of states' rights and expressed a loyalty to what he felt was his call from God to minister in the city. After the war, McCallie was able to pick up the broken pieces of his family's heritage and continue successfully in impacting the community.[32]

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[31] Govan and Livingood reported there had been an intense rivalry between the town of Harrison and Chattanooga for local political domination. In a referendum in 1870, Chattanooga won out largely due to its location on the Tennessee River, railroads, and proximity to Alabama and Georgia.

[32] John Wilson, *Chattanooga's Story*, (Chattanooga, TN.: Chattanooga News Free press, Inc., 1980), 126.

Perhaps the greatest change was in the status of African Americans in and around Chattanooga. Blacks had been instrumental in the development of the planter class' wealth as well as local business interest who hired free blacks as laborers. During the war, the number of blacks in the area increased to alarming rates for both the army and local citizens. To resolve this problem with "contrabands" as the blacks were called, the army enlisted them in most instances, and impressed them in others, in order to utilize their labor to build an infrastructure that assisted greatly with army operations during the tenure of the war and later became the foundation for the building of an industrial Chattanooga at the war's end. When the Union army firmly took control of Chattanooga, it became a base of operation and support for General William Tecumseh Sherman's successful campaigns into Georgia that had a profound impact on bringing the war to a close. Southerners, loyal to the Confederacy, abandoned the city in groves, seeking shelter in friendlier terrain. In the process of evacuation, they left their possessions, lands and the hope of ever returning to the life they once knew. Some stayed and witnessed a transformation in Chattanooga that no southerner, black or white, could have possibly imagined.[33]

As the war drew to an end, the city of Chattanooga was inundated with refugees of both races. However, the black population increased tremendously as it sought an escape from the rural countryside to urban communities that could at least create a space of fellowship and familiarity. The army in blue provided assistance in the acquisition of their freedom and it seemed natural to them that the Yankee conquerors become responsible for their sustenance. Unfortunately, blacks discovered racial disdain among the northern victors, largely from Midwestern states, reminiscent of pre-war sentiment in the South. Soldiers from the Union Army of the Cumberland fought, in their estimation, for preservation of the Union, "not for the

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[33] Charles Stuart McGehee, *Wake of the Flood: A Southern City in the Civil War*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1987), 135-9.

Negro.”[34] When the war came to an end, blacks congregated in large numbers in enclaves on the northern side of the Tennessee River across from the city. Conditions were deplorable and the federal government was urged to intervene to provide much need relief. Jobs were eventually provided to rebuild the city’s roadways, bridges, as well as opportunities in the newly establish foundries and mines. Since many blacks were employed in similar capacities during the war, many continued in the same or similar types of jobs, often working for the same men who directed them in the army. Blacks as a result were employed in many industries. Yet, they were usually paid the lowest wages. In Chattanooga, in spite of employment opportunities, many blacks still remained unemployed. Crime rose and white concern increased with pressure mounting to resolve the “Negro problem.” Steadily more industries developed in the city and conditions improved. Improvement in job prospects produced a renewed optimism for better wages, living conditions, and equality.[35]

Consequently, blacks, living in close quarters and beginning to earn increased income, organized their own communities and churches. They also became active in politics. Loyal to the Republican Party, the party of emancipation, blacks became a key ingredient in Republican control of the local government. This control to a large degree was directly due to black men exercising their newly won right to vote. The party of Lincoln also benefitted greatly from the disfranchisement of ex-rebels, who were being punished for their part in the rebellion. Blacks became visibly active in the politics, even winning and being appointed to some offices. In a very enlightening account, author Rita Lorraine Hubbard, in *African Americans of Chattanooga:*

[34] Ibid., 123.

[35] Taylor, 145-7.

A History of Unsung Heroes, conveyed the level of interest and activity in which blacks became involved:

> By 1867 Chattanooga's African Americans were actively taking part in city government. Mr. Esquire Flowers became the first 'colored' man to be elected as a member of the county court in 1867. ..John James Irvine was elected as county clerk. …C.P. Letcher went on record as being the very first Negro in Chattanooga to sit on the Board of Aldermen in 1868. He was followed two years later by the Reverend Clem Shaw, who represented his own ward in 1870.[36]

From Hubbard's account, blacks increased in numbers and migrated to other areas of the city, resulting in the creation of their own wards. Blacks voted freely and served in various political offices. They served on the police force, comprising half of the force by 1880. They became postal clerks, justices of the peace, constables, and volunteer firemen, as they served on the board of education. Chattanooga had two elected to the State's General Assembly- Styles Hutchins from 1887-1888 and William C. Hodge, who served from 1885-1886.

Some historians, such as James Livingood and Gilbert Govan, in *The Chattanooga Country 1540-1976*, characterized these positions as "minor" political offices; however, considering the times, the holding of any position by those formerly enslaved, particularly an elected office, was a significant accomplishment. In some of these positions, blacks wielded significant influence. Nonetheless, the voting power of blacks was a force to be reckoned with. For example, as Hubbard pointed out, Hodge, during his tenure in office, fought for voting rights for all people of the state. He lobbied against legalized discrimination in hotels and on various modes of transportation. He tried to get legislation overturned which allowed for such unfair practices. He became a major irritant to white Democrats and Republicans alike, the latter eventually sided with the former to nullify black political influence. He recognized that whites had the substantial power, but reminded white Republicans that in Chattanooga and Hamilton

[36] Hubbard, 22-3.

County, blacks, in the mid-1880s, had a sizeable majority vote, surely the reason the Republicans remained in office.[37]

In addition to making strides in politics, blacks in Chattanooga proved very enterprising. The city itself did not lend itself to large-scale farming, though in the outlying county areas farming did occur. Within the city, blacks were able to gain employment in factories, especially the iron work foundries. Many, working since the Union take-over in 1863, earned enough money to afford luxury items many whites could not, especially the whites who returned after Appomattox to find land confiscated or personal belongings missing. Blacks often purchased materials from destitute southern whites who struggled to make ends meet. Driven by necessity to sell to the freedmen, whites developed hostility toward blacks who seemingly were out of place. Others poured into the city believing in the rhetoric of the city leaders who bragged that Chattanooga was "not a Southern city nor a Northern city….One's politics, religion, or section is not called into question here. This is the freest town on the map. All join together here for the general good and strive, to a man, for the up building of the city."[38]

While it appeared that all were welcomed, Chattanooga's black citizens discovered that there were restrictions to their welcome. Blacks were indeed afforded opportunities virtually unheard of in many southern cities. In1870, there were fifty-eight industries operating in the city and many of them employed blacks without reservation. Some, such as the Roane Iron Company, one of the most successful endeavors in the entire southern United States, even paid

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[37] Ibid., 124. In 1884 Tennessee white Republicans declared themselves in opposition to black office seekers. Hodge reminded them of the fact that black Republican voters in his locale outnumbered whites 1400-400.

[38] *Chattanooga Times*, editorial, "Ohio Editors- Their Entertainment," 11 January 1884, 4. General John Wilder was quoted as an encouragement for business entities to invest in the city.

them on an equal basis with whites. Yet, the "new masters," ex-Union officers such as John Wilder and Hiram Chamberlain who joined together to make Roane efficient and prosperous, and northern-connected entrepreneurs who owned other iron works, railroads, and similar industries that hired blacks, exploited them often in order to keep wages low. Chamberlain admitted that his plant hired blacks often to keep the lower class working whites from unionizing. Not only was his motive, as were others, class based, it was also racially entrenched. The owners and managers, operating under the notion that economic survival was stronger than men's prejudices, deliberately pitied one against the other creating tension that occasionally manifested itself in violence and reprisals, again seeking the result of blacks mandated to a prescribed position of inferiority. Just as in the rural areas, where white landowners and planters were successfully keeping blacks in poverty via sharecropping, the manufacturing sector did its share to keep blacks limited to unskilled labor positions. In terms of illusionary aspirations toward economic viability and independence, the cities mirrored the rural areas. Blacks were locked into a system designed to keep them deficient in skills and on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder as "two of every three black Chattanoogans were unskilled manual laborers [and]... almost no industrial workers owned property."[39]

Despite the staunch reality of class and race exploitations, compared to their immediate past, blacks were in a better position if only because there were opportunities to succeed. Their success, however, proved to be misleading in terms of overall racial progress. Black Chattanooga produced or attracted several successful businessmen, professionals, and other enterprising personalities who contributed to its rise. J. Bliss White, librarian and lawyer, wrote on the thriving black community in his *1904 Biography and Achievements of the Colored citizens of*

[39] McGehee, 217-21.

Chattanooga." According to White's account, at the turn of the century blacks paid their fair share in taxes-totaling over $222,694- on personal properties. They owned church, business, and personal property, though the latter two were somewhat limited, yet still impressive considering the obstacles they faced. Blacks in Chattanooga, shortly after the turn of the century, built and operated one of the few black owned hospitals, in the area. Built by Drs. Emma Wheeler and John Wheeler, Walden Hospital saw seventeen doctors utilized its remarkable space.[40] One of the endearing institutions to emerge from the post-Civil War era was the establishment of the first public school, black or white, in Chattanooga, Howard School. Ewing Tade, a white evangelical missionary working with the Freedman's Bureau, established Howard in 1865 and named the school after General O.O. Howard, the director of the Bureau. Legislation mandating the segregation of schools destined Howard to become a *Negro institution.* Blacks realized the need for education and made this a primary focus. Howard quickly became the means to achieving education as a road to success and progress. Howard established a tradition of excellence and spirit of progress that helped to consolidate the African American community in Chattanooga, producing and attracting teachers of color, a very rare sight during this time. Howard's success at educating blacks also served as an example of what black people could do when provided an opportunity.[41]

There were many other examples of African American thrift and genius:

> The city boasted as many as twenty or more privately owned African American grocery stores, including the Wester Brother's Grocery owned by S.S. and W.H. Wester… there were other businesses that African Americans could be proud of too, like Southern Stove and Hollowware Manufacturing which made its own stoves and hollowware sand shipped to states like Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia. The Rising Sun Manufacturing Company, located on Harrison Avenue and run by J.A. Strickland, also specialized in

[40] Hubbard, 98.

[41] Ibid., 36-7.

> stoves, grate baskets, fenders and fronts, stove repair and hollowware…Chattanooga African Americans also had their own progressive pharmacy."[42]

While many ventures were sole proprietorships, blacks also demonstrated a willingness and ability to work together. As customs and laws relegating social restrictions in terms of race relations increased, blacks out of necessity were forced to ban together in order to continue their progress in freedom. The organization and distribution of black newspapers exemplified cooperative efforts within the African American community. At various times blacks operated about twenty newspapers. Papers such as *Justice*, operated by Edward Horn and H.H. Wilson, demonstrated the viability of cooperation. Another publication, *The Liberator,* came into being when J.P. Easley and W.H. Hasty combined energy and resources. One of the most successful papers was *The Blade*, operated by Randolph Miller. Miller learned the trade working for *The Chattanooga Times* and its well known owner and editor, Adolph Ochs. Blacks and whites alike read Miller's *Blade*, despite Miller's tendency at times to "tell white folks about their shortcomings and faults…" [43]

Blacks were optimistic due to the economic and political gains they made, but these proved to be shallow and in many ways illusionary. Blacks yearned for the opportunity to prove themselves. Fighting in the Civil War demonstrated their desire to win their freedom and contribute to the preservation of the Union. Overcoming a lack of educational and economical opportunities, blacks showed amazing progress in a very short period of time by developing businesses and establishing communities from the fringes of shantytowns and contraband villages. There was reason for hope. Increasing tension from whites within the Republican Party, combined with the revival of conservative southern Democrats, effectively pushed blacks out of

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[42] Ibid., 49.

[43] Govan and Livingood, 407.

politics. Without true advocacy and a real voice in government, disillusionment quickly caused their hopes to begin to dissipate. They no longer possessed the leverage of suffrage and office to safeguard economic interests or civil rights. As a consequence, sensing social and political repression, thousands throughout Tennessee left the state for the prospect of prosperity in Kansas and other western states. Chattanooga was affected by this exodus, though not as much as other sections of the state and region. Still, the horizon was not as bright. Lester Lamon, in *Blacks in Tennessee 1791-1970*, expressed it this way:

> …most [white Republicans] resented having to depend upon blacks for their success. Furthermore, there was a growing hostility in all regions of the state toward the aggressiveness of black politicians and the high visibility of black officeholders. Even in east Tennessee, where token black recognition had been traditional, long-standing white commitment to paternalism and Christian duty were severely tested by the highly visible presence of blacks in *their* republican party….Sentiment grew in the republican party for seriously reducing their dependence upon the black vote. Many white leaders felt that if they were ever to be a permanently viable and socially acceptable southern party, they too must woo, instead, the new industrially-minded faction of Democrats. After n1886, therefore, the brief flowering of black political representation wilted rapidly under a barrage of new electoral laws and municipal redistricting…[44]

The South, during this time, underwent a period of "Redemption," in which conservatives, mainly Democrats, reemerged after the penalty of Reconstruction to reclaim their domain and "save" the South from the evil of Republican and black- influenced control. In Tennessee the Redemption occurred under the governorship of Dewitt Senter, who served from 1869-1871, but the Redemption was not manifested fully until the mid-1880s. Chattanooga, temporarily, still witnessed some African American participation, though reduced to activity which was local in its reach.[45] It all but disappeared shortly after the turn of the century. With the change in political status, blacks saw increasingly more restrictions. This did ironically have a

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[44] Lester Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee 1791-1970* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 52.

[45] After Styles Hutchins tenure in office ended in 1888, no black was elected to the Tennessee General Assembly until 1971.

beneficial effect economically. As black businesses achieved success, a black middle class developed. Many were successful because blacks were not able to conduct business with whites on their own terms and consequently chose to cater to African American businesses. In many regards, some blacks simply preferred to patronize their own, forging a real sense of community. There were those who did not want to deal with whites at all. On the other hand, in some white establishments, blacks were not allowed to do business at all. They had no choice but to patronize black businesses. This led to conservatism among many in the black middle class who, because of segregation, saw an increase in business and thereby they sought to maintain the status quo rather than agitate for equal rights. In addition, many of these black businesses continued trading with whites, but it was the whites who most often determined to what extent the two transacted business.[46] An era that seemed so promising suddenly turned just the opposite. Blacks continued to protest through the limited means available. Hodge's case was a prime example of the spirit of protest. When Republicans throughout east Tennessee were divorcing themselves from their one-time black allies, Hodge's protest resulted in his election as state representative. When that door was eventually closed, he served on the Chattanooga City Council where he continued to aggressively pursue equal rights of his people.[47] Even with Redemption, the spirit and tradition of protest did not die.

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[46]McGehee, 225-30.

[47] Hubbard, 124.

CHAPTER III

CONFUSION: BLACK CHATTANOOGA CONFRONTS A PERPLEXING REALITY IN THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Chattanooga's population experienced a period of transition from the illusion of egalitarian opportunities to a confusion centered on the proper "place" for all citizens. Blacks and whites alike struggled over the "proper place". Blacks underwent a progressive elimination of many of their civil rights, a strategy used to strip blacks of their humanity. This was the cause of great consternation as well as the source of great confusion because blacks had achieved and contributed so much in such a short period of time that it left many wondering what they had to do to be considered equal. On the other end of the spectrum, whites in Chattanooga became perplexed as they tried to create a balance between racism, Christianity, and American democratic ideals. With blacks, situations that existed in early the 1900s led to increased tensions, both between blacks and whites, blacks and other ethnic groups, and within the race itself. On the other hand, whites struggled to develop a worldview that allowed for the domination of white supremacy, regardless of the values expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the United States' Constitution. This worldview was grounded in the black subjugation, a perpetual condition to be accomplished through segregation and protected through the use of threats and actual acts violence against persons and properties. Now this theory had to be balanced with the country's profession of faith in Christianity and its teachings of love, respect and equality...[48]

Redemption had firmly solidified the South as a white man's land. Redemption guaranteed a steady erosion of civil and political rights for blacks as residents of the city, county,

[48] Williamson, 24-7.

state or nation. Like in the decade of the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, black Americans still had no rights that a white man had to respect. African Americans saw more than just the redemption of southern political rule, they also experienced an attempted return to the Antebellum Era in American history, the era of enslavement and the trading in slavery. There was one major distinction: slave masters were motivated to exercise restraint in dealing with resistance from their slaves, unless it was urgent that extreme measures be used to maintain order on the plantation. Slave property had to be protected from external threats as well. That motivation disappeared following emancipation; respect for and protection of the African American community did not complement the theory of white progressivism. David Southern in *The Progressive Era and Race Reaction and Reform, 1900-1917* spoke of how racial segregation became so widespread that whites throughout the United States, even so-called progressives, embraced racial teaching of white superiority, implicit in works by Darwin and others, as the natural state of things. Southern detailed how progressive muckrakers in the North during progressivism shied away from race issues. Perhaps the only one, according to Southern, who tackled the subject in any depth, was Ray Stannard Baker. Baker, a northerner, was appalled at the living conditions and fear that southern blacks endured. He witnessed the atrocities of the Atlanta race riots in 1906 and in his study depicted "a grim picture of African American life. It found southern blacks living under constant insult and threat of violence and having no chance of receiving justice in courts." He, however, favored disfranchisement and segregation and viewed blacks as inferior, even animal like and criminal in nature, "densely ignorant and [having] no appreciation for the duties of citizenship."[49]

[49] David Southern, *The Progressive Era and Race, Reaction and Reform 1900-1017*, (Wheeling, IL.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2005), 58-9.

Racist literature and rhetoric increased dramatically after the turn of the century. Whites, not content just to enact legal sanctions to keep blacks in their place, resorted to more comprehensive efforts at race control. The objective of totally segregating the races socially was one such attempt. Prior to the onset of Jim Crow laws, social segregation was customary but not legally proscribed in much of the South. As segregation laws were passed and more restrictions across the board were placed on blacks, it became an impossibility, not to mention inherently contradictory, to enforce such standards since economic necessity often required that the races mingle. Confusion often resulted as to what constituted proper and acceptable interaction. Need, but not wanted, blacks struggled with forging an acceptable racial persona. Whites, claiming the religious badge of redemption, effectively denied true Christianity in their disregard for the rights of blacks and many had an outright disdain for African Americans.[50] The result was moral, spiritual, and social confusion, often resulting in tensions that served only to further the perplexing conditions present in Chattanooga. The city experienced great tension, politically and socially, in the early part of the twentieth century, which did not, however, destroy but rather added to a spirit of protest within the black community who looked for a better day.

In Chattanooga at the turn of the century, blacks still held elected offices and a growing middle class had achieved some economic clout. This made it impossible for whites to avoid them all together. However, it was clear to all that equality did not exist. Adopting the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, conservatives in the city such as Franklin and others, often people of considerable prestige in both black and white circles, advocated an accommodation to segregation and promoted internal self help and self determination strategies. Others, such as Randolph Miller, agitated for equal rights and protested vigorously when the first real Jim Crow

[50] Williamson, 100-08.

laws were passed in the city requiring segregation on street cars in 1905. Miller organized a "hack" line of three vehicles to transport patrons to and from the city for work. Popular sentiment against segregation was so strong among blacks that it kept the line operating to full capacity. As the demand for business increased, black businessmen, including Miller, decided to expand their operation. The backlash by the white power structure, including the newspapers, and the lack of support from many influential black political, educational, and clergy leaders hindered their efforts. A riot took place over the street car issue and served to undermine Miller's efforts. The riot also demonstrated that a spirit of protest was real in the African American community. [51] Yet, the predominant attitude within the black elite was that of accommodation, which directly clashed with the progressive stand by Miller and others who challenged segregation head-on by refusing to support the segregated street cars. The division in the black community created confusion as to whether capitulation to racial restrictions or confrontation through direct action such as boycotts was the way to ensure prosperity and progress. In further protest, Miller gave a scathing prognosis in an appeal to the black community when he protested in *The Blade* that "They have passed the Jim Crow law; they have knocked us out of the jury box; they have played the devil generally, and what in thunder more will they do, no one knows."[52] The criticism of Jim Crow did not dissipate, as many whites hoped, with the waning of the boycott, but instead continued among those who sought the respect and regard that they believed all people deserved.

The confusion caused blacks to deal with their realities in different ways. As Joel Williamson in *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* exclaimed, "Some simply withdrew, masking their inner feelings, others protested.

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[51] Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee1791-1970*, 30.

[52] *Chattanooga Times*, editorial, "Word with a Colored Editor," 12 October 1905, 4.

Still others accommodated. Most did all three at various times and under various circumstances." The confusion among whites compelled them to find justification for how they treated blacks relative to their religious profession. One area that became increasingly more difficult to justify, especially on religious pretext, was the act of lynching as a vehicle of social control. These attacks created a moral dilemma when a law-fearing and professed religious society, such as the American South, sat by in far too many instances and allowed blacks to be mercilessly beaten, hanged, mutilated, and burned alive, with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of spectators looking on in approval.[53] The mobs guilty of these heinous acts included an array of the citizenry, including local law enforcement and political leaders. In order to win the approval of the masses, lynchers had to engage in a crusade that they felt excused their barbaric behavior. The excuse that was sure to find affirmation was the supposed rape of a white woman by a black man. Lynching, therefore, became an effective and very useful weapon in keeping most blacks in their place, paralyzing black aspirations politically and economically. This created an inherent struggle among blacks; on one hand, some blacks were tempted to stand up for themselves, and on the other hand, most blacks had to be concerned for families and associates. At the same time, those who carried out such barbaric acts were depicted as knights in shining armor, defending the virtue of southern white womanhood.[54]

In March 1906, a lynching occurred in Chattanooga that left the black community shaken, angered, and harboring feelings of hopelessness for decades. Similar events, unfortunately, occurred too frequently during this time throughout the South with similar disdain horror, shock indignation, and with a resignation that nothing would be done to rectify things. There had been at least two other lynchings in the Chattanooga area, but this captured the

[53] Williamson, 117-8.

[54] Shapiro, 30-2.

attention of Black Chattanooga... It occurred at a time when blacks were beginning to step out of the shadow of slavery and insist on full citizenship.[55] Coming on the heels of the streetcar boycott, this heinous act signaled loudly and clearly that blacks were to stay in their place, one that would be determined by whites. Lynching provided one unmistakable mark of racial caste. In looking at the lynching that occurred in Chattanooga in 1906, Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr. chronicled the events both prior to and in the aftermath in *Contempt of Court: The Turn of the Century Lynching That Launched a Hundred years of Federalism.* A black man, Ed Johnson, was forcibly taken from the city jail, taken to the Walnut Street Bridge, and hanged for a crime in all likelihood he was not guilty of committing. Johnson was accused of raping Nevada Taylor, a young white woman. Johnson's situation fell into the typical pattern for black men accused of such a taboo and monstrous act. As Herbert Shapiro explained *in White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery:*

> The cry of rape, appealing to the most extreme fears and hatreds, drawing upon racist myths concerning black male sexuality and a hypocritical view of white womanhood, became a summons to the mob and also was used to justify the lynching to national public opinion. The mob would begin to search for the black or blacks reported to have offended, and if the black person identified could not be found the mob would turn its wrath on someone else, a wife perhaps or other relative of the accused, and indeed sometimes anyone who was black would do. The point was that for the supposed crime or insult the black community as a whole was accountable, and one black victim for the lynch mob would serve as well as another.[56]

When the attack occurred, it was too dark for the victim to see her attacker and she could not positively identify even the race of her attacker. After being pressed about the attacker's race, she stated that she thought it was a black man. According to her statement, she left her job in the downtown Chattanooga area around 6:00 p.m. She boarded an electric trolley for her home in St.

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[55] Govan and Livingood, 408.

[56] Shapiro, 30.

Elmo, a suburban area south west of the city. She got off the trolley and started walking home. She and her father lived in a small home in the middle of Forest Hills cemetery, where her father worked as the cemetery caretaker. As she approached the cemetery's gate, someone grabbed her from behind, placed a leather strap around her neck, and warned that she would be killed if she screamed. Her assailant applied pressure with the strap causing Taylor to become unconscious. When she was revived about fifteen minutes later, she walked to her house and informed her father of what had happened. Mr. Taylor called the sheriff, who rounded up some deputies and blood hounds and headed to the Taylor residence. Nevada was examined by her family doctor, also summoned by her father, who determined she had been raped. The sheriff questioned Nevada in hopes she could provide a description, but all she could say was that he was short with muscular arms and was dressed in black. She added he had a "soft, kind voice."When asked about his race, she stated she had not gotten a good look at the man, but believed him to be black.[57]

The hunt began for a black man, a little below average height, with a stocky build. The pressure on local authorities was intense to solve this, the most brutal attack, according to local papers, in the city's recent history. In addition, the sheriff, Joseph F. Shipp, was up for re-election and felt more than the usual pressure to make an arrest so he would not be perceived as soft on crime, especially black crime. Very little information came until a reward totaling $375 was offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator. The attack occurred on a Tuesday, January 23rd, and on Thursday, January 26th a white man named Will Hixson, who worked near the cemetery, reported that on the night of the assault, he saw a black

[57]Mark Curriden and Leroy Phillips, Jr. *Contempt of Court: The Turn of the Century Lynching that Launched 100 Years of Federalism* (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1999), 22.

man spinning a leather strap around his finger. Having seen him again on that Thursday, he called the sheriff. The sheriff was eventually able to track down the man in question, named Ed Johnson, who sometimes worked for and frequented local saloons, and arrested him. The sheriff had arrested another man earlier who vaguely fitted the description.

Prior to Johnson's arrest, the town was beside itself, fueled in large part by local newspapers. Reports that crimes by blacks were increasing dramatically angered many whites, and with this act, it was clear, in many people's minds that something had to be done. *The Chattanooga News* on Wednesday January 24th included the following headline: "Brutal Crime of Negro Fiend: Details Shock Entire Community: A Crime without Parallel in Criminal Annals of Hamilton County." Not to be outdone, on the next day, *The Chattanooga Times* printed: "Feeling at High Pitch: Black Brute Managed to Cover up Tracks Well and No Trace of Him Has Yet Been Found." The sheriff decided to appeal to the greed motive of individuals by offering a reward. Nevada's place of employment, the W.W. Brooks Grocery store, and others, including the governor, added to the reward. It did not take long before a taker surfaced. Hixson called to inquire if the reward was still being offered. Once it was confirmed, Hixson made his statement and provided information that led to the arrest of Johnson.[58]

The news of Johnson's arrest travelled fast. That evening a large crowd gathered in front of the Hamilton County jail and demanded the black male be turned over to them. Many were carrying guns that they fired into the air when their demands went unmet. Nevada Taylor's younger brother joined the medley and further inflamed the mob's passion for blood when he demanded that Johnson be given to the mob. He exclaimed: "The time for justice and punishment has come. We want the Negro. He must be punished for what he did to my

[58]Ibid., 34-9.

sister."[59] One of the mob's leaders stepped forward to say to the jailer that he would allow five minutes for someone to turn over the keys or they would force their way into the jail. When the jailer refused to oblige them, some of the men grabbed a steel post and began ramming it into the front door. The power lines were cut and the jail was thrown into utter darkness. Others stole sledgehammers from a nearby shop and started loosening the hinges of the heavy door.

The intensity of the circumstances led to the arrival of the National Guard. Although they confronted the mob, they were unsuccessful in turning the crowd away. A group of deputies managed to somehow grab the sledgehammers away from the mob. A little while later, Judge Samuel McReynolds, alarmed over the situation, showed up. McReynolds, very much respected by most in the county, tried to get the men to go home but they were in no mood to listen. They wanted blood and wanted it now. Judge McReynolds informed the crowd that the man they were looking for was not in the jail. He informed them that he had been sent to Knoxville a few hours earlier. The judge offered to let five men from the mob inspect the jail along with him. They took him up on his offer and discovered that Johnson was indeed not there. The blacks incarcerated in the segregated section became overwhelmed with horror, fearful that they would become substitutions to appease the crowd. A news reporter for *The Times*, who accompanied the men in their search, reported that "when the Negro department was reached, the inmates were found to be in a state of the most abject terror. They were nearly all on their knees praying with upturned face, ashen faces, and gave every evidence that they believed their hour had come."[60]

Although McReynolds reported that Johnson had been moved to Knoxville, Johnson had instead been ushered to Nashville for safekeeping and misleading information was purposely given in the event a mob had planned to intercept the sheriff's party responsible for transporting

[59] Ibid., 42.

[60] Ibid., 50.

the prisoner. Nevada Taylor was summoned to Nashville the next day and identified him as her attacker. Her identification was certainly questionable but enough for Judge McReynolds to convene a grand jury that same day. Ms. Taylor also wanted it known that she and her family did not agree with mob violence. She stated that her brother spoke purely out of the heat of anger and did not wish to see anyone lynched. In realizing the urgency of the moment, McReynolds stated to the grand jury that:

> Such outrages as this must have the immediate attention of the law, that the law may be preserved. It is the 'laws delay' that brings about a mob spirit. And this court is determined that there shall be no delay in enforcing the law in this instance and the court is equally determined and takes this method to serve notice on this community, that the law shall be respected…[61]

The grand jury returned an indictment in less than two hours. The next morning, Judge McReynolds appointed three local attorneys to represent Johnson in his upcoming trial: Lewis Shepperd (Chattanooga's best known and well-respected defense attorney), W. G. M. Thomas, and Robert Cameron. McReynolds told the lawyers that the Johnson trial would begin as soon as another trial, the Westfield trial involving the death of a constable at the hands of a black man ended. This notice effectively gave them less than a week to prepare. The attorneys, with the exception of Shepperd, had limited experience in criminal trials and experienced confusion among themselves and within their families. Cameron's children were taunted and his wife refused to talk to him for some time. Thomas' secretary left her job and his mother refused to cook for him due to her disgust of his decision to represent Johnson. Rocks were thrown into his house which forced him to relocate his mother to her brother's home for safety. His friends and family did not understand how he could do such a thing and he did not understand why others

[61] Ibid., 57.

did not see he was only doing his job. He pointed out that he hadn't asked for this, it was handed to him. Needless to say there was much anger and consternation over this trial.[62]

The Johnson trial opened on Tuesday, February 6th. The first witness the prosecution called was the victim, Nevada Taylor. Taylor described the attack and identified the leather strap as being similar to the one used by her assailant. When asked if the man who attacked her was present in the courtroom, Taylor replied "I believe he is the man," pointing to Ed Johnson. The first witness for the defense was Ed Johnson. After Johnson, thirteen witnesses testified on his behalf and stated Johnson had been at the Last Chance Saloon around the time of the attack. The most dramatic event of the Johnson trial occurred on its third and last day. At the request of jurors, Nevada Taylor was called back to the stand. Juror J. L. Wrenn questioned her and asked, "Miss Taylor, can you state positively that this Negro is the one who assaulted you?" Taylor answered, "I will not swear he is the man, but I believe he is the Negro who assaulted me." Wrenn, apparently wrestling within and needing more certainty, asked again: "In God's name, Miss Taylor, tell us positively--is that the guilty Negro? Can you say it? Can you swear it?" Taylor, with tears running down her face, responded "Listen to me. I would not take the life of an innocent man. But before God, I believe this is the guilty Negro." At that point another juror rose and lunged toward Johnson and shouted as he was restrained, "If I could get at him, I'd tear his heart out right now."[63] The jury deliberated the fate of Ed Johnson for over six hours, ultimately finding him guilty. His lawyers told Johnson his choice was to accept the verdict and die in an orderly way at an appointed time or to die at the hands of a lynch mob. They did not recommend he appeal, partly because they sensed it to be an act of futility and partly because

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[62] Ibid., 50.

[63] *Chattanooga Times*, "Last Day of Trial Proves Sensational in Extremes," 9 February 1906, 1.

they feared a prolonged process would endanger them and their families and that it was only delaying the inevitable. Johnson was sentenced to be "hung by the neck until dead" on March 13, 1906. [64]

Johnson eventually received help from Chattanooga's best black attorneys, Styles Hutchins, former state representative, and Noah Parden, long viewed as the preeminent "colored" attorney in the city. After making fruitless and futile appeals within the state, the attorneys appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and were granted, much to their surprise, a stay of execution largely due to the influence of Justice John Marshall Harlan, the lone dissenter in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court case which legalized segregation in 1896. The news that the Supreme Court had stayed Johnson's scheduled execution did not sit well with many whites in Chattanooga. About 8 p.m. on March 19th a group of men carrying guns arrived at the Hamilton County Jail where Johnson was being held. Only a single deputy guarded the prisoners. About 8:30 p.m., Ed Johnson, on the third floor alone, with the exception of one other prisoner, due to the fact all the other prisoners had been moved from his floor, was awakened by the cries of inmates below. Johnson looked out the window of his cell to see a large crowd of men and women in the area below. The only other inmate on the floor, Ellen Baker, said to Johnson, "You better do some prayin'." Soon the mob made their way up and after about two hours of struggling to remove doors and hinges, they finally got to Johnson. The men tied Johnson's hands with rope and dragged him from the cell to the crowd. Angry and hateful cries rang out. Those leading the mob were uncertain as to what to do next. Finally someone yelled, "To the county bridge!" Reports from *The Times* stated that the mob marched him six blocks to the Walnut Street Bridge that stretched across the Tennessee River. Johnson, given the

[64] *Chattanooga Times*, "Ed Johnson Jury Stands 8-4 for Conviction," 9 February 1906, 5.

opportunity to speak, addressed the crowd and maintained his innocence, ending by saying "God bless you all. I am innocent." They hang him and when he refused to give up life, they opened fire on him, one of the bullets severing the rope. When his body felled to the wooden floor of the bridge, he was still alive but another hail of gunfire ended his life.

In Chattanooga, there was mixed reaction to the lynching. Dr. Howard Jones, pastor of the First Baptist Church, who had tried to intervene, condemned the killing of Ed Johnson in the strongest possible terms. He preached a gut-wrenching strong message against lawlessness, a message that made him a target of threats and reprisals. On the other hand, J. G. Rice, the editor of the *Chattanooga News*, indicated in his editorial the day after the lynching that Johnson had received one of the fairest trial ever in Chattanooga and that "the worthless, shiftless, …black brute who outrages a white woman has no more rights under the law than a serpent undeterred."When asked about the fairness of a trial not by his peers since blacks were kept out of the jury polls, the editor boasted that it was indeed done deliberately because "the South long ago decided this to be a white man's government**."**[65]

Blacks were outraged at the lynching. Talk spread rapidly of blacks planning to take matters into their own hands. The fear that the mob had hoped to instill was not evident as blacks staged protests throughout their communities. Crowds of blacks took to the streets in Alton Park and on Ninth Street. The sheriff deputized over 200 men to help maintain law and order. This infuriated blacks even more. Some voiced their outrage at the sheriff for his unwillingness to protect Johnson with more deputies. When the mob took Johnson from the jail, there had been only one deputy assigned to safeguard him along with the other prisoners. When it seemed that black crowds could possibly be taking a stand, it became a necessity to add more staff on an

[65] Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 10.

emergency basis for the safety of the public. For the most part the black protest remained within the confines of their communities. There were a couple of instances where blacks fired on deputies as they patrolled on Ninth Street. The greatest statement blacks made came in a one day strike from their jobs. By refusing to go to work in protest over the lynching, blacks again demonstrated a spirit of protest at considerable risk. Should they have been fired for protesting, it was highly unlikely that they would have been given other employment from white owned factories. Several plants were forced to shut down for the day due to black employees not showing up for work. Blacks did not lose their jobs for taking their holiday; something the owners knew would have caused a full riot.[66]

An investigation was launched by the federal government when it became obvious that local officials would do nothing. In fact, the investigation produced evidence that both Judge McReynolds and District Attorney Whitaker, the prosecutor in the case, knew about the attack on the jail from the moment it began and watched the events from a window in the courthouse. The investigation also revealed that Sheriff Shipp did nothing to stop the lynching and claimed he was unable to identify a single person who participated. The lynching certainly had an effect on blacks and whites alike. Blacks became afraid and many joined whites in ostracizing Parden and Hutchins. Many blacks stopped doing business with the attorneys, afraid whites would also shun them and put at risk their jobs or businesses if they owned one. Both men eventually moved from the city with their families for safety reasons and relocated to Oklahoma. Undoubtedly there were some who staunchly stood behind the two men but few were brave enough at this time to risk their homes and businesses. Whites were also shaken by this ordeal. As Dr. Jones echoed in his message, that "the largest injury to the community has not been realized, Just as the

[66] *Chattanooga Times*, "Aftermath of the Mob," 20 March 1906, 4.

demoralizing effects of war are felt for generations, so a season of lawlessness such as we have just gone through is as far reaching in its baneful effect." Whites were left to resolve an internal tension between what they knew to be right and their willingness to allow such barbarism to occur. Dr. Jones touched a nerve in the white community with his sermon.[67]

Blacks in Chattanooga, facing the all too real threat of violence, were forced to struggle with a real dilemma- to insist on full citizenship and risk possible annihilation or to acquiesce to the degradation of racial caste for the sake of survival. The former promised increased tension and repression of varied forms while the latter created an internal struggle which pitied self-pride against self preservation at the expense often of self worth. Blacks in Chattanooga certainly faced issues that created confusion. Chattanooga on one hand prescribed to the same irrational racial mores found throughout much of the nation, and especially acute in the South. On the other hand, the region faced a moral and social dilemma centered on trying to balance Christian ethics of brotherhood with racial dictates designed to keep blacks as a permanent underclass. Chattanooga was perplexed as to how to deal with blacks who had demonstrated since Emancipation their value and had provided much needed resources in Chattanooga. Blacks were perplexed on how to handle societal contradictions which often kept in check a spirit of racial progress. The confusion however did not extinguish the flame of protest. That spirit continued to shape attitudes and actions designed to bring about first class citizenship

[67] *Chattanooga Times*, "Dr. Jones-Determined Denunciation of Lynch Law," 26 March 1906, 5-6.

CHAPTER IV

EXCLUSION: AFRICAN AMERICANS ARE SUBJECTED TO INCREASING SEGREGATION

The lynching of Ed Johnson made it clear that blacks were second class citizens. For some time afterwards, both blacks and whites walked on eggshells, emotionally shaken by the lawlessness and the brutality exhibited by their fellow citizens. To make matters worse, white politicians were not content just for blacks to be emotionally demoralized; they took steps to ensure that blacks were rendered powerless in every possible facet. To ensure this, the county political and business leaders, in the name of progressivism, changed the city's form of government so that the once formidable black influence was reduced to a minuscule remnant. Jim Crow laws increased steadily in the early part of the twentieth century until blacks were restricted in almost every sphere of public life. These efforts were met, however, with staunch opposition from black political and business leaders, although some black businessmen remained quiet to avoid alienating their white patrons. Whites managed to all but silence blacks by excluding them basically from all governmental processes.[68] The exclusion only served to ignite the flames of protest among the most progressive of the African American community, while black conservatives remained accommodative and conciliatory.

The concerted attempt to ban blacks from the political process began with the Redemption. Failing to nullify the presence of blacks due to their sheer numbers, whites were forced to tolerate blacks for a few decades, all the while placing restrictions or adding obstacles to weaken the black vote. In 1883 Democrats tried to diminish the black vote and its Republican influence by having the city's charter changed to make Chattanooga taxing district governed by a

[68] Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930,* 39.

council appointed by the democratic governor. Although the effort failed, this attempt did establish a precedent by white businessmen to appeal to the state when local ordinances did not comply with their desires. From 1909 through 1911, using the progressive mandate to eradicate government of corruption, white businessmen again petitioned the legislature to change the city's government. White Democrats viewed the black vote as being always linked to corruption: blacks were believed to be too illiterate and ignorant to understand the political process, therefore, easy targets to be used as political pawns by corrupt white Republicans.[69]

The answer in solving this problem, as white democratic business leaders saw it, was to eliminate or at least severely reduce the black vote, which would reduce Republican control of local government. While most of the South, Tennessee included, fell under democratic control following Redemption, the Chattanooga area remained steadfastly Republican. This was the direct result of African American political power. White entrepreneurs, trying to lure more business into the area as they sought to stabilize the area economically, saw the potential harm in having a prominent black presence in politics. Republican leaders such as John T. Wilder, H. Clay Evans, and H.S. Chamberlain owned and operated several businesses as well as major stock in several others. They joined with progressive white Democrats to disfranchise blacks. Democrats finally regained control in Chattanooga in 1890. They adopted the Australian ballot that allowed for secrecy in voting by printing the names of all candidates on one ballot, eliminating party emblems or colors. Prior to this change, ballots for different parties had its own distinct colors and emblems printed on them that allowed any observer to immediately know how a person actually voted. Party bosses monitored voting closely through poll watchers. The new ballot made it impossible for these watchers to know exactly how a person voted. This

[69] Potts, 114.

reduced the bosses' influence. The new ballot also eliminated any advantage one candidate had over another if not enough ballots for a particular party were printed. On the surface the new ballot appeared to be a way of cleaning up elections. However, illiterate voters, many of whom were black, did not know how to pick their party's candidate; other blacks discovered their elimination from voting by the newly enacted poll tax or the redrawing of districts, gerrymandering, a highly effective way to dilute a black political voting bloc.[70]

Only one district was unaffected by the change and it continued to elect an African American representative. Its perennial choice for alderman was Hiram Tyree. Tyree made a living in politics. He served in numerous positions before becoming alderman. He had long enjoyed the support of influential white Republican businessmen such as Evans. His clout in the city's government was widely known and for years he dominated Chattanooga's Fourth Ward. He served as chairman of the Republican Executive Committee and as school commissioner for ten years and brought many improvements to his district. According to J. Bliss White in his *1904 Biography of the Achievements of the Colored Citizens of Chattanooga* , Tyree was known as a" race man who never lost an opportunity to aid in [his race's] development." However, in 1907, many of his white supporters abandoned him in favor of the son of a democratic businessman. The Republican Party made a decision to become "lily white"[71] and divorced itself from black voters and politicians alike. Tyree managed to remain in power. Although he lost his alderman seat in 1901, he fought back and won in 1903. His victory amounted to a protest over the attempts to render him and the black community powerless. To win, Tyree incorporated the "hack lines" of Randolph Miller, the vehicles of protest, to ensure voters were registered and

[70] Ibid., 16.

[71] White Republicans came to resent their dependence on the black vote. They combined in the late 1880s to produce a state where blacks had no political power. The white Republicans who advocated distancing themselves from blacks were said to promote a "lily" white party.

went to the polls to vote. In 1911 everything changed when the state passed legislation changing the city's form of government from wards to a commission based system. The commissioners were elected at large so concentrations of voters in any one ward did not now determine the outcome of an election. It practically guaranteed that blacks, undoubtedly a minority, and Republicans would lose in city wide elections. Republicans did manage to win the mayor's seat in Chattanooga in 1899 due to a split in the Democratic Party. Statewide, they also won the governor's seat in 1910.[72] Joel Williamson noted the "striking persistence of black activism in politics" where a Hiram Tyree maintained the spirit of protest against his exclusion from local politics. Williamson referred to the re-emergence of the Republicans as a "second reconstruction." This was a period when the Republicans, sometimes including blacks, regained power for a short duration. This short-lived era was followed by a "second Redemption" that not only saw that white Democrats took control, but also eliminated blacks from political power far more completely than they had been in first Redemption.[73]

The exclusion of blacks from politics and from much of the social scene in Chattanooga resulted in blacks carving out a niche for themselves within the friendlier and safer confines of their own neighborhoods. Segregation did not, however, eradicate the desire for equality nor did it extinguish the fires of protest, especially vibrant within the hearts and mind of the younger generation, who were better educated or at least had access to better educational opportunities. Blacks reached some degree of economic success and because agriculture was not the dominant livelihood, black youth were not relegated to endless days on a farm and therefore sought other experiences to cultivate their minds. While segregation determined what a black person could or

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[72] Potts, 119.

[73] Williamson, 227.

could not do in public, the neighborhoods that sprang up throughout the city often had blacks and whites living in close proximity and often interacting with one another. Lines were naturally drawn in regard to certain activities so that blacks would not forget their place. Yet, blacks and whites played baseball together and on some occasions ate at each other homes. [74]

C.B. Robinson, former state legislator and educator, interviewed for the oral history project of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Library, recalled how blacks and whites interacted during his formative years. Robinson was born in 1911. His father was Lewis Robinson who worked for a dry-cleaning business. His mother, Leona Robinson, was a laundress for white families. She often took care of their children to supplement her family's income. The homes where she worked were close enough to hers so that if an emergency arose at either locale she could always get to her children quickly. Sometimes, out of sheer protest or necessity, Robinson brought the white children home or she brought her children to the home of the white families and everyone sat and ate supper together without anything seeming strange. Yet, these same families were not allowed to eat in public together. Certainly the racial mores enforced in the public sphere seemed contradictory to Robinson's experiences and served to help move him to engage in direct action to institute social and legal changes. Robinson was also heavily influenced by his mother in other ways, ways that transmitted the spirit of protest to him. He attributed his strong sense of self and his aggressiveness to his mother. Robinson remembered how she stood up to the local land magnate who wanted to buy the land where their church, The Missionary Ridge Baptist Church, stood. This local landowner, whose name was Sheppard, bought up most of the land blacks lived on located on the backside of the Ridge. His family owned one of the largest plantations during the antebellum period and sold the land in smaller

[74] Robinson.

lots to families of both races. Robinson' parents wanted to buy some property Sheppard owned adjacent to their family owned cemetery.[75] Sheppard decided he was not going to sell any more land to "coloreds" and conveyed that to "Aunt Julia," as white people called Robinson's mother. That's when, as Robinson put it, "something sparked within her and she boldly proclaimed, Mr. Sheppard, at this moment we have decided that we are not going to sell you this church." Robinson added that the people who were with her applauded and "stuck with her." What "sparked" in Mrs. Robinson was this spirit of protest that stirred the courage of those who chose to take risks and to defy the prevailing social order and the notions of black inferiority. C.B. Robinson, as the Reverend H. Joe Johnson, pastor of the Orchard Knob Baptist Church, informed him, inherited this spirit from "Aunt Julia."[76]

The spirit which Leona Robinson displayed was not one unique to her. Growing up in an area where blacks had achieved a level of economic autonomy, evident by blacks being able to purchase property, and a history of having some political weight (prior to the second Redemption and advent of Jim Crow), undoubtedly many blacks possessed this boldness. However, southern etiquette demanded that it be kept dormant. Blacks, especially older blacks, realized that if they ventured out of their place at the wrong time or with the wrong people they risked possible dangerous repercussions. In examining the racial expectations of the period, David Goldberg in *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* explained how relations were shaped in the South:

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[75] This cemetery, The Pleasant Hill Cemetery, was purchased, according to Robinson, by his ancestors in 1870 and he stated that this was a matter of record according to the City Directory and is where Ed Johnson, the victim of the 1906 lynching, is buried.

[76] Reverend Johnson was one of the city's premier African American pastors, respected by whites and blacks alike. He was also the one who relayed the story to Robinson concerning the offer to buy the church and Mrs. Robinson's bold stand.

> Aside from ordering an unsettled society and creating a certainty, however artificial, amidst the whimsy of man and nature, racial etiquette created a system and behavior that served to reinforce the supremacy of the white race and the inferiority of the black. In the process, the etiquette produced dire consequences for both races and for the South. The tone of speech, the gesture, what was said and not said, where and how one stood or sat became parts of the rituals of southern personal relations. It was theater...where everyone had to learn his lines and adhere to the script. An act of bad manners was not merely a regrettable faux pas, but a major social transgression that threatened order, violated expectations, called into question the rectitude of social and racial givens, and challenged integrity. The players assumed their roles carefully, especially the blacks.[77]

While Leona Robinson violated this etiquette, the breach did not go unnoticed. The church was burned down twice within a relatively short span but each time the community responded in a show of defiance. C.B. Robinson noted that each time the church burned it was the black people in the area who rallied to rebuild, demonstrating again a spirit of protest against the racial prescriptions that demanded submission to the desires of whites.[78]

For most African Americans growing up in and around Chattanooga during the Jim Crow era, open defiance was not the norm. The spirit of protest remained and occasionally reared its head when injustice became overbearing or if the time seemed right for redress of carefully chosen issues. One example of the dissent of African Americans to social conditions occurred when World War I veteran and author George W. Lee of Memphis was invited to speak at Howard High School's Emancipation Day. In his address, Lee spoke of how blacks had been left out of New Deal reforms and stated that blacks were tired of un-kept promises. He advocated direct actions such as boycotts indicating that blacks should not trade where they could not work. Lee stated that blacks were living close to people who were warlike and that to often the views of African Americans were shaped by the views of whites even if those views were destructive to black people. Lee called for action beginning with education-both of blacks and whites. He

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[77]David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 2.

[78] Robinson.

pointed out that whites had to be educated to a new racial attitude in order to eliminate their fear of blacks. He called for blacks to gain education that promoted self awareness and self-definition so that whites would think of blacks in terms defined by blacks and not as whites would have them see themselves ,i.e., ignorant and morally bankrupt. Lee blamed the newspapers for helping to foster this negative image of blacks by highlighting the vices and crimes of the few as if they were the practices of the masses. This served to diminish the perception of African Americans in the eyes of all and was used to perpetuate a justification for segregation in spite of interracial residential patterns prevalent in Chattanooga. Lee proclaimed that blacks "will not make must progress until we learn the lesson of cohesion and mass action."[79]

Such volatile rhetoric like Lee's address did not fall on deaf ears, white or black. The white press urged the community to be aware of the actions of blacks. In an article printed in *The Chattanooga Times* on March 20, 1938, "Negro's Awakened Civic Interest Mirrored in New Activities Here," the writer began by inquiring about activism in the black communities of Chattanooga, seemingly to indicate that whites should take an interest or show support. The writer pointed out that "the how and why of their activities and changing thoughts are also important to those who live side by side with them, and of whose lives they form an integral part."The same article went on and described various events planned by African Americans. Among these events was a program at the James A. Henry Branch of the Y.M.C.A.[80] The speaker was Professor Paul Mowbray, the head of the sociology department at Fisk University in

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[79] *Chattanooga Times*, "Negroes Told to Get Rights," 2 January 1938, 1.

[80]The African American branch named after the first black principal at Howard High School.

Nashville. Those ages eighteen to forty were invited to attend where they could become "better acquainted with the ideals of democracy, for better health and training in the exercise of the rights of suffrage and good citizenship." When questioned about the age restrictions, it was pointed out that the age restriction was established "so as to keep our body from being dominated by old-time politicians with axes to grind, who would likely seize upon the opportunity because of their age and experience, to thwart our efforts toward seeking clean citizenship and to make political tools of us."[81] It was obvious that a younger generation, whose ideas and thoughts tended to be more progressive, was targeted and not the conservative older blacks.

Another interesting activity reported in the March 20th article was the coming together of whites and blacks in the twenty-ninth Anniversary for Pastor H. Joe Johnson, the blind minister of the Orchard Knob Baptist Church. This illustrated that blacks and whites could and did come together in social activities. Also mentioned was the change in direction of the reporting of *The Times* to reflect more positive things happening in the "Negro Community" instead the usual stories on crime and violence that served to maintain the racist view of blacks as being morally deprived. The article mentioned how police were treating blacks "kindlier" and that had led to a "better civic feeling." The paper also reported new clubs springing up in black communities, including the Independent Civic League of Bushtown, one of the black communities nestled between white communities, and the Young People's Civic League. These and other activities were signs that the spirit of protest and passion for first-class inclusion into the mainstream of society had not died but was beginning to rise again, though with different forms of expression. Blacks were creating for themselves what was denied them in their exclusion from white civic and social circles. Yet, the exclusion lingered.

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[81] *Chattanooga Times,* "Negro's Awakened Civic Interest Mirrored in New Activities Here," 20 March 1938, 3.

It was within the constriction of segregated exclusion that the seeds of social consciousness were planted in the minds of those who later participated in direct action protests which led to concrete changes. For instance, all of the participants of the sit-ins which occurred in 1960 in Chattanooga grew up under Jim Crow and were acquainted with the black struggle for equality as well as with the limitations placed on African Americans. With greater educational opportunities and civic involvement, this generation became more and more aware of the inequities present in Chattanooga, and they were influenced by a tradition of protest in the black community. Second class citizenship did not sit well with younger, more educated, and progressive blacks; yet, growing up in the South, as Goldfield pointed out, "southern blacks understood that they couldn't do a thing about it… whites controlled not only behavior, but employment, housing, social services, education, and the legal system."[82]This resignation to the status quo was transmitted but was not accepted by the young blacks in Chattanooga.

In speaking with several of the sit-in participants, they all echoed the sentiments that segregation was the way of life. Blacks in Chattanooga were dispersed throughout the city and in the surrounding counties. However, larger concentrations of African Americans were in Bushtown, South Chattanooga in the area known as Alton Park, located near the base of Lookout Mountain, and the Westside near downtown. Most blacks lived on the Westside and, even if blacks lived in other areas, chances are their roots were from the Westside. There was also a thriving African American neighborhood in North Chattanooga, the historic area once known as "contraband city" where black refugees after the Civil War settled. These areas prized family values and basically families watched out for each other regardless of socio-economic status. In fact, many professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, in addition to blue collar

[82] Goldfield, 6.

workers, lived in the Bushtown and South Chattanooga areas. Virgil Roberson, one of the sit-in participants, grew up in Bushtown and recalled that Mrs. Wynona McGhee and Mrs. E. Ometa Martin, two of his teachers at Howard, lived in or near his neighborhood.[83]

Virgil Roberson was the captain of the football team at Howard High School and a member of the class of 1960. Bushtown was a conservative low to middle income neighborhood. Robertson lived in a small three bedroom house. His parents owned a small mom and pop type variety store and were a little better off economically than many in their neighborhood. Virgil enjoyed his childhood and his recollections reflected no major race issues growing up because blacks basically "knew their place." He, like all African Americans, was aware of what they could and could not do and where they could and could not go. He mentioned that children in his neighborhood, located close to whites in both the Avondale and Glenwood sectors, often played with the whites with no problems. Blacks did not necessarily feel deprived in most things because what they needed they had access to within their communities, like Ninth Street, or they could purchase it from downtown stores where they were allowed to shop. On Ninth Street, the black business and social hub, blacks owned restaurants, night clubs, hotels, insurance agencies, newspapers, pharmacies, small variety stores, and many other businesses. It was where blacks shopped and socialize. It also had a reputation for being the gathering spot for undesirables such as prostitutes and gamblers and parents placed restrictions on where and when their young went on Ninth Street.

Within the black communities, churches, schools, and recreational centers allowed blacks to mingle, grow, and develop the closeness that characterized these areas as true communities. Each area had its own recreation center and youth of all ages enjoyed an array of activities under

[83] Personal Interview with Virgil Roberson, member of the Howard class of 1960 and Sit-in participant, interview by author 16 June 2006, Chattanooga, TN.

the attentive eyes of the center's director who was often instrumental in stirring children in the right direction. Virgil spent many days in the Carver Recreational Center, located in Bushtown, and there forged friendships that have lasted him a lifetime. Carver often competed with other recreation centers and since all blacks in the city went to Howard High School, their competitions became legendary. Virgil took the city bus to school for at that time school buses were not dispatched to transport black children to schools. He also walked some days to school which was located about three miles from Bushtown. He walked across the 3rd Street viaduct on his way to Howard. Although Chattanooga City High School was much closer, as was the county's Central High School, located in Avondale; segregation required all blacks in the city to attend Howard.[84]

As the students from Bushtown traveled to school, each day they passed by segregated Warner Park where they were not allowed to play. Blacks had their own park, Lincoln Park. While Lincoln Park was a nice park, they passed right by Warner park in route to Lincoln. Twice a year blacks were allowed to attend special events at Warner Park, the circus and the fair. The rest of the year the park was off limits. Of all of the outward icons of segregation, the signs were the most demeaning. Signs designated "white" water fountains from "colored" fountains, white restrooms from colored, and where there were no signs, blacks knew where not to enter. African Americans were not allowed to eat at white restaurants, go to movies in white theatres, swim in white swimming pools, and while they were allowed to shop in the downtown stores, they were barred from eating at the lunch counters. Yet, blacks had their own restaurants, movie theatre, and swimming pool in Lincoln Park. Lincoln was unlike any other in the southeast. In addition to having its own pool, it also had a ferris wheel, a merry-go-round and other rides,

[84] Blacks living outside the city limits attended the county school Booker T. Washington High School.

tennis court, plenty of picnic area, softball and baseball field, concession stand, and a dance hall. People came from Atlanta, Nashville, Birmingham, Memphis, and throughout the southeast to visit Lincoln Park. Warner Park paled in comparison, although Warner Park had a zoo. [85]

Despite having amenities rarely seen in other areas of the South, the students of the class of 1960 resented the unfair treatment that blacks received. While older African Americans cautioned them, even taught them, to adhere to the racial rules, this generation of blacks grew increasingly agitated with their second class citizenship. JoAnne Humphries, a classmate of Roberson, and Andrew Smith, vice-president of the senior class, as well as others, indicated in interviews that blacks with aspirations of working in certain fields all knew that they had to leave Chattanooga, even the southern region, in order to have a chance. Regardless of talent, skills, and intellectual ability, Chattanooga was entrenched in *Jim Crowism* that denied blacks any real hope of racial desegregation and equal economic opportunities. They knew that blacks could do some things here that blacks in other cities in the South could not. For example, Chattanooga employed black police officers beginning in 1948. The officers were restricted, however, in arresting whites unless it was under very narrow circumstances.[86] Progress had been made in equalizing teacher salaries for all educators. C.B. Robinson led this successful fight, culminating in the pay scale for black teachers on par with their white counterparts. In fact, the record reflected that the city had an active biracial commission, which included Robinson, studying a wide array of issues, including the desegregation of schools following the *Brown v. Board of*

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[85] Favors Interview. Ms. Favors is currently a State Representative in the Tennessee General Assembly, after having served on the Chattanooga City Council; and Roberson Interview.

[86] *Chattanooga Times*, "Negro Policeman's Case is Examined," 19 September 1948, 1.

Education Decision. With the desegregation issue, Robinson acted merely as an advisor.[87] When the class of 1960 was just entering junior high, there was a tremendous stir about schools integrating. The ruling did not really have much of an impact on the students at that time but as they progressed through high school the reaction from the white community concerning this issue did not escape them. It became increasingly clearer to them that white folks did not want them in their schools and, in the students' minds, whites did not want them in their society.[88]

The members of the class of 1960 were ardent readers. They kept up with local and national black newspapers. They read about the white hostility over school desegregation, and the resistance by whites stirred something in them. The Chattanooga School Board announced shortly after the Supreme Court ruling that it was going to comply with the ruling. The school board was quoted by *The Times* on May 18, 1954 as being "quite desirous of abiding by the ruling." The board estimated that thirty-two of forty- four schools would have students of both races. The remaining twelve schools were located in areas where one race dominated the district. It was obvious by the numbers that blacks and whites lived in close proximity and in all likelihood knew at least some of the neighbors they would now be classmates with. Yet, whites resisted with great passion. It happened that in that same year, a new Howard High School was opening and many blacks assumed that it was a great opportunity for desegregation to take place. It was not to be. The backlash was so great from the white community that the board postponed making any immediate decision. Nothing concrete was done for over a year though discussions were continuous. An advisory board of forty --twenty eight white and twelve blacks-- was appointed in November of 1955 to study the issues and make recommendation that would allow

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[87] Robinson.

[88] Personal Interview with Andrew Smith, member of the Howard Class of 1960 and Sit-in participant interview by author 22 April, 2007, Chattanooga, TN., and the Favors Interview.

the board to comply with the law in the most non-destructive manner. At a subsequent board meeting a week after the committee was appointed, someone threw tear gas toward the end of the proceedings. The meeting was highly charged with mostly people opposed to integration. The board was unable to conduct its business due to constant interruptions. As the crowd continued to heckle members of the committee who tried to speak, one witness informed the police that a black woman reached in her purse and pulled something out that she dropped and broke. He stated it was tear gas. No one else corroborated his story.[89]

The climate in Chattanooga in the late 1950s was very volatile. Citizens did their best to carry on business as usual but did so very nervously. It became increasingly more difficult as the decade drew to a close. Threats of violence circulated wildly in black neighborhoods. The city continued trying to improve race relations and following the Montgomery Bus ruling in 1957, the city removed all Jim Crow signs from its city buses. Many whites protested vehemently. There was talk of Klan warnings. Many became frightened even recalling the lynching of Ed Johnson as the police removed a dummy hanging in effigy from the Walnut Street Bridge with the words written on it: "All NAACP bus riding Niggers."[90] Such events caused blacks to be more determined to stand firm in the pursuit of first class citizenship and to bring an end to their exclusion. Instead of retreating and cowering in fear, progressive blacks, with their spirit of protest stirred again, became bolder in their efforts to bring an end to segregation in Chattanooga.

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[89] *Chattanooga Times*, "School Board Ends Parley, Tear Gas Tube is Dropped," 16 November 1955, 1, 4.

[90] *Chattanooga Times*, "Dummy Hanged on Bridge," 8 January 1957, 1.

CHAPTER V

OBTRUSION: THE STUDENTS STAGE INITIAL SIT-INS AND CONFRONT SEGREGATION

On February 19, 1960, the spirit of protest, long present but sporadically manifested, began to stir students to engage in a demonstration that produced dramatic and long desired changes for blacks in Chattanooga. On this date, students from Howard High School, including Paul Walker, Andrew Smith, Virgil Roberson, Robert Parks, Robert Winston, Leamon Pearce, Joanne (Humphries) Favors, and Gloria (Underwood) Jackson, decided to confront segregation head-on by staging a" sit-in" demonstration. A sit-in was a direct action campaign that occurred when blacks entered stores, usually the Five and Dime variety stores such as Kress or Woolworth, where lunch was served daily but not to blacks, and sit down at the counters requesting service which would be denied. Blacks were later joined by whites in these demonstrations in some cities. The protest was designed to bring attention to the denial of service, to embarrass the establishment, and to cause a disruption in the normal course of business. Sit-ins occurred in several cities in that February. Most notably was the one in Greensboro, North Carolina led by four freshmen. This particular protest has been given the most credit in terms of starting the movement on a regional-wide scale. Perhaps the best organized campaign occurred in Nashville, Tennessee, where organizers prepared students for months on how to conduct such demonstrations using a non-violent strategy. Although non-violent, the sit-ins caused major anger on the part of white store mangers and white customers, often resulting in a violent backlash against the student protesters. Many students were jailed for attempting to break the law and for disrupting business. The sit-ins did more, however, than just disrupt business; they created havoc and confusion in Jim Crow societies. Life in the South now faced

perhaps its greatest challenge. It wasn't just some obscure seat on a bus where a person could simply choose another seat. This was an attempt to obtrude into an intimate sphere, where people ate and conversed in close proximity. In the words of civil rights leader the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, orchestrator of the Birmingham campaign, this movement had the potential to "shake up the world."[91]

Blacks were forbidden by Jim Crow laws and customs from being served food at establishments which catered to whites only. This was but one area in which blacks had been excluded for decades. This situation was made even more intolerable for African Americans due to the practice of allowing them to shop throughout the store but not allowing them to spend the same money as the dined at the store's lunch counter. It was in essence the quintessential display of racism based on the supposed inferiority of blacks and their perceived inhuman character and animal like nature. As in the case of Leona Robinson, this prohibition against blacks and whites eating together was often hypocritical, as were many tenets of segregation that could be violated privately at the whim of whites, but not acknowledged publicly. Goldfield explained why the lunch counters demonstrations struck such a raw nerve:

> The lunch counter…highlighted the preposterous and humiliating nature of segregation. Blacks could purchase toothpaste and underwear at Woolworth's, but not a soft drink. In the elaborate etiquette that defined southern culture, eating with someone held particular connotations. As one white southerner informed Gunnar Myrdal, "in the South, the table …possesses the sanctity of an intimate social institution." To break b read together implied a rough equality.[92]

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[91] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1988), 273.

[92] Goldfield, 119; Gunnar Myrdal was a Swedish sociologist and economist who conducted an eye opening study of southern culture during the Jim Crow days entitled *The American Dilemma,* in which he indicated social trends in America would force fundamental changes in race relations.

Whites were appalled at the thought of African Americans eating with them in almost the same vein as they were over the prospect of blacks sitting down next to them in a classroom. Both settings required intimate interaction on some level. Blacks, on the other hand, saw this direct action as a frontal assault on the very foolish and illogical basis for segregation. African Americans students from Howard decided it was time for them to claim their rights and demand a change when most adults in the city were still waiting on their cues from whites or were too afraid to take such risks. The pace of change occurred too slowly for this generation, who were raised during the post war years and realized blacks in America not only should have equal rights, they have earned them. Education had taught them that blacks built this country with their labor and helped to preserve it with the sacrifice of their lives.[93] There was a spirit of protest, as evident by the sit-ins, which was rapidly increasing and demanding an end to second class citizenship.

On that Friday morning in February 1960, honor students sat in their trigonometry class and debated among themselves as to what they should do to stimulate change in Chattanooga. These students, including Walker, president of the senior class, Smith, vice –president, Parks, Student Council president, Winston, class business manager, Roberson, captain of the football team, and others, had read of the accounts in Greensboro and more recently in Nashville.[94] Often on Fridays, after taking a test or quiz, the students had time to talk. These students were fervent readers and made a habit of reading papers such as *The Pittsburg Courier* and other black papers in order to stay informed on issues facing the black community that local white papers did not cover. Another teacher, Wynona McGhee, a Language Arts and drama instructor, noted that these students were some of the "best and brightest" she ever encountered over her thirty five

[93] Favors.

[94] The initial Nashville sit-ins occurred a week earlier on February 12, 1960.

years as an educator. It was not unusual for this group to be civic minded. Realizing the risk they were going to take, the students decided to act. The risk involved not just the possibility of danger from dissidents or arrest from the police; several were more concerned over what their parents would do should they find out.[95]

Deciding to keep specifics from their teachers, these student leaders circulated notes among their classmates who they felt could be trusted to assist and who would conduct themselves orderly and calmly should they decide to participate. Unlike Nashville, where students had trained for months leading up to their demonstrations and were actively supported by adult guidance,[96] the Howard students had no formal plans or training. They deliberately did not include adults fearing the adults simply would discourage them or attempt to thwart their efforts. They crudely developed a set of informal guidelines of "dos and don'ts" but relied strictly on group discipline in carrying out this protest. They included such rules as no taunting, cursing, or responding to taunts or insults that may be hurled at them. They agreed to keep their usual routine when leaving school in order not to arouse suspicion. The students did a masterful job of keeping their plans concealed. They only included other classmates in this first sit-in who they felt could be trusted to act in an orderly fashion and who also would keep the plan discreet.[97] Mrs. McGhee indicated that she suspected something was up because the students were much more subdued and acting secretly, but admitted she had no earthly clue as to what. Teachers and administrators, including Mrs. McGhee, were really caught off guard when they learned through news reports that Howard students were involved. She was not surprised that

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[95] Roberson.

[96] Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The free press, 1984), 175.

[97] Roberson.

these students were involved. In her estimation, if any students could pull this off, these were the ones.

Shortly after school dismissed, about thirty students from Howard boarded their bus while others walked in order to meet downtown. They entered the Woolworth Store located at 729 Market Street and sat down at the lunch counter. Customers briefly paused as these children took their places in areas reserved strictly for whites. The waitress in the area at the time was stunned and after a brief moment placed a sign indicating the counter was closed. The demonstrators then left and walked to the McLellan Store at 713 Market Street. The counter remained open but the black students still were not served. So they sat, some read, some completed homework, some read the newspaper, or some talked softly among themselves. They were orderly and respectful throughout, just as their cohorts had been in Nashville. When a group of white youth entered the store, the manager called the police because he feared trouble was brewing. One of the white students, a boy with red hair, sat down and began talking quietly with the black students about the problems between the races. This gave the demonstrators an opportunity to voice some of their concerns and also allowed them to see that there were some whites their age who understood the inequalities African Americans faced and were willing to enter a dialogue. The white student stated that he knew how they felt, being able to live by whites but not be treated with equality. One of the Howard students responded that “Negroes can go into the white person’s home and can prepare his food and nourish his children, but that’s as far as he can go.” Another protester stated that “we defend our country together, so why shouldn’t we have togetherness in other things?” The white student agreed and recognized their

differences but genuinely seemed to sympathize with the position of the Howard students. After about thirty minutes, the blacks left walking in the direction of Ninth Street.[98]

The next day was a Saturday and the headlines from *The Times* read: Negroes 'Sit Down' Here; No Incident, No Service." The sit in news dominated the conversation in black Chattanooga. Parents were really concerned over the safety of their children in the aftermath of this first encounter. Most knew that boldly challenging the system could have deadly consequences. JoAnne Humphries Favors recalled how her parents and grandparents spoke often about the dangers of crossing "white folk." She also knew first hand of the danger because of what had happened to Emmitt Till, a teenage from Chicago visiting relatives in Mississippi who was lynched because of an alleged comment to the white female clerk upon leaving a local grocery store.[99] Favors recalled Till being around their age and seeing his picture in *Jet* magazine after he had been brutalized and how much that disturbed her and her parents. She recalled that seeing that picture left a lasting impression on her and many of her peers, which was all the more reason she was stirred to protest, wanting to do something to help bring about a change. Her grandmother warned her that things like that can happen to blacks if they "get white folk mad."[100] Virgil Roberson's parents also warned him not to get involved, not realizing he was one of the organizers and first day participants. Virgil remembered the news reporters taking pictures and how he kept his head turned from the camera so he could not be recognized by his parents. Virgil said he was so scarred somebody was going to tell his parents of his involvement that he could not rest well that night following the sit-in. After he realized they did not know, he felt relief. Yet in spite of the possibility of angering his parents, Virgil decided that he would

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[98] *Chattanooga Times*, 20 February 1960, 1, 9.

[99] Goldberg, 88-9.

[100] Favors.

continue being a part of this protest. He and his classmates were determined to see things changed. He felt that he could not let them down by quitting just after getting started. After all, he had not been elected captain of the football team by being a quitter.[101]

The following Monday, February 22nd, Howard was buzzing over the sit-in. Principal Claude Bond was at school extra early that day and received a call from the city school superintendent who read him the riot act over his students causing such a raucous downtown. Bond explained that they were off school grounds and school was out and therefore there was very little that the administration could have done that Friday. Additionally, Bond explained that this event completely caught them off guard. Bond called an assembly that day and urged students, at the superintendent's behest, not to engage in further activities of that nature. While publicly reprimanding the students, not knowing who was involved, privately Bond supported what they were trying to do. Due to his position, he was compelled to take the stance he did. Besides warning the students, Bond did not try to intervene with subsequent protests until it became known that trouble was brewing and that possible violence could occur. Teachers also lent their moral support. Their official capacity also limited what they could say or do in support of the student protests.[102]

That same day, more than two hundred students made their way to the lunch counters of four stores. Each store shut down. While many students left, some remained reading and eating snacks which they had brought with them. Symbolically they were eating at the counters though not served. The police were called but nothing happened. The students visited the S.H. Kress

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[101] Roberson.

[102]Claude Bond Interview. The principal of Howard High School 1956-1964, interview by Norman Bradley 16 June 1982 for the Oral History Project of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Public Library, Chattanooga, TN.

store approximately twenty minutes before the counter was scheduled to close. Kress was the only store of the four that had a counter for blacks, but the students sought to sit at the one designated for whites. White students rapidly occupied the empty seats in order to prevent the blacks from sitting in them. Black and whites protesters far outnumbered the available seats and many stood in the aisles. The police ordered the aisles to be cleared and both groups obeyed without incident. Waitresses closed both counters about ten minutes after the students sat down.[103] Not far away, in the Glenwood community, James Mapp, local president of the NAACP, accompanied by two other parents, attempted to integrate the all white elementary school. Spurred on by the student protests and its publicity, Mr. Mapp, who had been advocating immediate integration since the school board had announced its intentions to comply with the court's ruling, believed this was indeed the right time and atmosphere to insist on a change. With the student sit-ins on Friday, along with what was happening with demonstrations across the South, Mr. Mapp decided to force the desegregation issue. He had no idea the students had staged a second sit-in on the very day he tried to integrate the Glenwood school. He later admitted that it had to be divine providence that both occurred as they did. He was aware of the stir within the community over what happened with the students, and like them, change for Mapp at this time was taking much too long.[104]

The sit-ins continued on Tuesday, February 23rd. About one hundred and fifty whites tried to bar about fifty black protesters from sitting in at the Kress store. The store received

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[103] *Chattanooga Times*, "About 200 Negroes in 'Sitdowns' at Four Stores," 23 February 1960, 1.

[104] James Mapp Interview. The president of the Chattanooga branch of the NAACP who filed desegregation suit in the Supreme Court case, *Mapp v. School Board*, interview by Booker Scruggs II 16 March 1983 for the Oral History Project of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Public Library, Chattanooga, TN.

orders from the police to close their lunch counter by 3:30 p.m. since the sit-ins usually began around four in the afternoon. Two of the stores complied, but Woolworth and Kress kept their counters open beyond 3:30. The white crowd, comprised of mostly students with some adults mingling around, went to the Woolworth store and occupied all of the seats before the blacks could arrive. Word reached them that the blacks had actually started toward the Kress store and the whites quickly left Woolworth and raced towards Kress. Both groups arrived at Kress about the same time and immediately hurried to the lunch counter. The white students were able to cut off the blacks and some pushing and shoving took place as the whites jeered the black students. Someone threw a punch and a medley broke out with bodies moving in every direction. White shoppers and sales staff were appalled at the way the white children behaved and took noticed how the majority of blacks remained calm when accosted. The manager closed the counter, rang the closing bell for the day, and turned off the lights. Police rushed in, few in number, and began separating the angry crowds. Most of the blacks obeyed the officers' commands and were ushered in the direction of Ninth Street. One white youth, Jimmie Henderson, appeared to be the leader in the assaults on the blacks. He and a companion had a bullwhip they claimed they had used on a black youth who was swinging a shovel. Another black youth was spotted with a knife but disappeared into the crowd when the police gave chase. A middle age black man, William Bryson, received a cut on his ear as he left a taxi when the crowd approached. One sixteen year old white student was injured slightly after being hit with a flower pot that someone had thrown. Other objects were thrown and surprisingly the two were the only known injuries from the fighting. Police arrested eleven whites and one black and were commended by most for handling

things as well as they did to prevent more injuries. They were also criticized for arresting whites and "letting the niggers go."[105]

Word quickly spread of Tuesday's clash. The situation worsened on Wednesday. Police estimated that at one time there were close to three thousand people in the downtown area on this day in and about Market Street, the hub of the confrontations, with about as many black as there were white. Columns of blacks and whites met in between Eight and Ninth Streets, the whites moving east while the blacks moved in the opposite direction. Police moved in between the two groups before any violence occurred. The blacks were ushered back towards Ninth Street but instead they continued north and made a turn on Seventh Street towards Market Street. The Negro crowd crossed over Market Street and headed back south towards the hot spots from the previous day, but the police were able to divert them west on Eight Street away from any large group of whites. From there they were marched south on Broad until they again reached Ninth Street where they were steered east toward the black business section located there. As they reached the intersection of Ninth and Market again, the crowd hesitated but the police blocked off the access to the street. At one point the Police Chief, Ed Brown, moved directly into the crowd followed by several officers. Even the Police Commissioner joined in to help keep the blacks moving east on Ninth Street. A brief altercation occurred at Ninth and Lindsey by those who resisted the police's commands to move on. The police used night sticks to help bring about order and arrested some who they identified as ring leaders.[106]

On Market Street, trouble brewed among the large number of whites who had gathered there. The police had a more difficult time trying to get the whites to comply. As a result, the

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[105] *Chattanooga Times*, "Racial Fight Breaks Out at Market Street Store; Negro, 11 Whites Arrested," 24 February 1960, 1-3.

[106] *Chattanooga Times*, "Hoses Help Curb Milling Crowd- Cool Heads Prevent Big Blow Up," 25 February 1960, 1, 4.

commissioner called in the Fire Department who turned their hoses upward, allowing water to drop onto the white crowd. This technique proved very effective for the crowd immediately began to disperse. Another dispatch was sent to Lindsey Street where large pockets of blacks kept regrouping after the police tried to disperse them. The hoses were used in the same manner as they were with the whites and with similar results. Some blacks began to throw rocks, bottles, and other objects. The police and firemen were persistent and the crowd finally dwindled. Twenty arrests- eleven blacks and nine whites- were made. Some of the blacks were carrying weapons when arrested. There was some property damage to cars and a few building had glass broken. Market Street was virtually shut down and downtown businesses experienced anything but normalcy during this period. On the other hand, many businesses operated for the most part as usual; buses ran on normal schedules and people walked up and down the streets to reach various destinations. Some, out of curiosity, stopped occasionally to peek in at what was happening, adding to the woes of law enforcement. The police determined that among blacks and whites there existed a "hoodlum element" and their plan was protect the "decent people" and to maintain order. By all accounts, they succeeded admirably, administering similar treatment to all parties involved.[107] Within that development, blacks achieved a victory in their fight for equality. In other cities, such as Nashville where police intervened in response to demonstrations, the number of black arrests was disproportionately higher than whites.[108] In Chattanooga, a major riot was averted with the combined use of the fire and police departments. It was the first time

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[107] *Chattanooga Times*, "Restraint Noted: City Officials, Policemen, Public Generally Keep Down Mob Temper," 25 February 1960, 1.

[108] Lovett, 126.

hoses were used in the city to quell a commotion since a riot involving street car workers in 1917.[109]

The situation in Chattanooga required a concerted effort to maintain calm. The mayor, who had also appeared during Wednesday's clash, called for community leadership to assist in bringing about peace. Ministers, who had been noticeably absent during the first few days, surfaced and urged the black community to stay away from downtown and not to resort to violence. The ministers opposed the actions of the students and continued in their opposition. They cited the violence that occurred as justification for their position. People were admonished not to go downtown unless absolutely necessary. Superintendent Letson called a meeting of school principals and laid out directives for each to convey to their respective schools. In response to Bond's earlier statement about student accountability following school dismissal, the superintendent maintained the courts had established the rights of the school to hold students accountable under the authority of the school from the time they leave home until the time they arrive back home. He made it clear that he was holding the principals accountable for the actions of their students even after the dismissal bell. The schools were instructed to impose severe punishment upon any student who ventured downtown instead of going home unless that student had a need to be there as in the case of those who had to transfer buses or go to work. The students from Howard who had initiated the sit-ins withdrew from demonstrating when the first outbreak of violence occurred on Tuesday. From the onset, the student leaders took a non-violent approach and they were determined not to go back on their pledge. In another assembly called by the principal to address the issue after the superintendent's mandate, the student leaders appealed

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[109] *Chattanooga Times*, "20 Are Arrested: Seven Juveniles are Among the 11 Negroes and 9 Whites seized," 25 February, 1960, 1, 5.

to their peers to refrain from violence and to avoid downtown as the administrators asked. Special buses were employed so that students were taken through downtown without stopping. Teachers were posted at each door as students exited to prevent them from congregating and some were sent downtown to ensure that Howard students did not go into the area. [110]

The scene was quiet that Thursday afternoon with downtown resembling a ghost town. While businesses bemoaned a drop in revenues, they willingly worked with the Chamber of Commerce and city officials to limit hours and to maintain a vigil in the event of trouble. Mayor Rudy Olgiati was also very involved in taking action to ensure order. The mayor told the Rotary Club that the city could solve its race issues if enough people of both races wanted them resolved. He also stressed the seriousness of the problem indicating it has been "controlled but not solved," adding "it's going to take the leadership of both races to work it out." He further stated that "we have made a lot of progress in Chattanooga physically [but] we are being broken down morally."[111] Hebert Barkes, the Chairman of the Rotary Club's resolution committees, also appealed for leadership. Barkes stated that "our community is on fire. It is time to speak out on behalf of settling these issues. I bring the matter up because it is tied into education."[112] The issue of school desegregation was also addressed because many discerned that the issue was equality and not just sitting at a lunch counter. In addition, Mapp, while continuing to raise the issue of school desegregation, added a call for calm and declared his abhorrence for violence and with people carrying weapons. Mapp sent a letter to the school board threatening a suit if action was not taken immediately to bring about integration of schools. Mr. Mapp knew that the

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[110] *Chattanooga Times*, "Hoodlums Vanish: Adults Ask Harmony, White, Negro Leaders on Broad Street Seek to Solve Race Issue." 26 February 1960, 1, 4.

[111] *Chattanooga Times*, "Olgiati Appeals for Leadership," 26 February 1960, 1, 5.

[112] Ibid.

atmosphere was indeed ripe for insisting on compliance with the Brown Decision. Capitalizing on the attention over race-related issues spurred on by the sit-ins, Mapp seized the moment to more vigorously protest the gradualism of the school board and community in bringing about the required change.[113] The student-led movement had indeed ignited a spark in Chattanooga, as Barkes proclaimed, which left whites scrambling to find ways in which to extinguish it.

Mapp's threatened lawsuit against the school board received a lot of national attention. Representatives from the major television networks, along with reporters from *The New York Times*, *Life* magazine, and the *United Press* descended upon the city causing additional concern for city leaders. Some correspondents associated with the national press arrived in time for the clash on Wednesday and those who did not arrive in time learned of the incident through the local media. The Chamber of Commerce was especially concerned about the negative publicity the city received. The Chamber passed a resolution calling on all citizens and community leaders to work together for racial harmony. The pleas seemed to work. Friday was relatively quiet but Howard received a bomb threat and the school had to be evacuated until it was determined to be a hoax. Students were forbidden from going downtown unless accompanied by parents. Some students from Notre Dame High School, a private Catholic institution, violated the edict and were expelled from the school. As the month ended a feeling of uncertainty lingered on. March produced a heavy snow and ice storm which paralyzed the city. Mapp recalled the mountains looking like ghosts and to him it seemed as if God was speaking to this situation in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He stated "that perhaps God had directed [things] this way because it

[113] Mapp and *Chattanooga Times* "Demand Received by School Board," 26 February 1960, 1, 5.

Allowed two groups to take an action where neither could be focused on by a hostile community…it does look as though that there was a hand mightier than ours in the plan…”[114]The city was frozen but the passion of the students’ protest was still burning.

[114] Mapp.

CHAPTER VI

INCLUSION: STUDENTS RESUME DEMONSTRATIONS LEADING TO A HISTORIC CHANGE

Spring brought new student-led protests to Chattanooga with many activists from Howard High prominently visible. For almost two months, the city recovered from one of the most traumatizing episodes in its history. Mayor Olgiati worked feverishly with white and black leaders trying to reach an amicable solution. Blacks for the most part trusted him and considered him to be a fair man. Prior to being elected mayor, Olgiati served from 1946-1951 as Commissioner of Public Works. He worked with the Police Commissioner, Bookie Turner to integrate the police force, to open the public library and to open the Memorial Auditorium for both blacks and whites. Additionally, he opened Engel Stadium, home of the minor league baseball team, the Chattanooga Lookouts, to allow all people the option of open seating based on ticket pricing. Historically there had been a "colored entrance" and seating area. Now as mayor, he continued in trying to make Chattanooga a fairer community for all of her citizens. Along with C.B. Robinson and others, the mayor negotiated with the downtown stores during the cessation of protest.[115]

By Easter no agreement had been reached and the students decided to resume their protests. While the students in Chattanooga had temporarily suspended their efforts after the near riot in February, sit-ins continued around the southeast. In Nashville, whites began to harass the college students staging sit-ins there. The Nashville sit-ins had continued without incident for two weeks. After the violence in Chattanooga hit the Nashville papers, violence soon marked those demonstrations as well. Police arrested over one hundred demonstrators on February 27th;

[115] Robinson.

two days after the papers recorded the events in Chattanooga.[116] Police did not arrest any of the whites who harassed them. After hearing of the confrontations in Chattanooga, student protesters in Nashville were warned that they too could be in for trouble. Nashville was not the only place preparing for trouble. Officials in Knoxville also took proactive measures to prevent an occurrence similar to Chattanooga.[117].

Frustrated by the pace of the adult negotiations, the students, possessed by a spirit of protest, could no loner remain inactive. They started the sit-ins again on April 18th. It seemed they were not alone in assailing gradualism. On April 16th, James Mapp, along with twenty young people not involved in the sit-ins, boycotted select stores. On the same day the sit-ins resumed, seven local black ministers held a silent prayer protest standing with signs on a traffic island at the intersection of Market and Ninth Street. The signs read: "We Pray For Our City in Christian Love, Stop Jim Crow." [118] The three events were not coordinated. Though the students knew the ministers and other adults had been involved with talks since the near riots, the students still acted independent of any adult involvement. In the beginning stages the ministers had staunchly opposed the students' actions. The NAACP and Mapp were playing a tug-a-war over the timing of their demands to the school board. There had been disagreement within the ranks of the NAACP and Mapp had grown weary of their hesitation. He decided to be more forceful in his demands. The group's members ultimately stood behind Mapp once they recognized his

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[116] *Nashville Tennessean*, "Fire Hoses Halt Racial Battle in Chattanooga," 25 February, 1960, 1, 3.

[117] *Chattanooga Times*, "Race Parley in Knox; Mayor, Negro Leaders to Try and Avert Trouble," 26 February 1960, 1.

[118] *Chattanooga Times*, "Segregation Hit By Negro Groups in Actions Here," 19 April 1960, 1, 11.

determination. Mapp's new strategy included using students to protest.[119] The local NAACP did not have a youth council and did not have any direct bearing on students' decision to sit-in. Using Howard High's students represented a change in Mapp's tactics.

Protest fever, initiated by the students of Howard High, had infected others, adults included. Segregation was being hit from three angles- student led sit-ins, NAACP boycotts, and protest from ministers. The latter two undoubtedly were influenced by the boldness of the students. The students demonstrated in three stores - Kress, Woolworths, and W.T. Grant on 18th day of April. Store personnel recognized some of the students as those who were involved two months earlier. On April 30th, about fifteen students carried out sit-ins at four stores, led by an unidentified female leader. The next day over fifty students joined the demonstrations. An argument ensued between some of the sit-in participants and a group of white youth who had been ordered by police to disperse earlier but lingered looking for a confrontation. Reports circulated that a fight had broken out. The police arrived to witness the two groups "mouthing" at each other.[120]

In each of the three sit-ins during the second stint, students were not served nor hassled with the exception of the "mouthing" incident. This changed when they sat-in on May 12th at Kress. A group of fifty Howard students, led by Andrew Smith, filled all the counters at Kress while others conducted sit-ins at three other stores. When the manager asked them to leave or to reduce their numbers, the students refused and the manager had the police to arrest them. The manager, Robert Thacker, informed the students that he would go along with their protest if they conducted it using five or six students. Andrew Smith recalled him telling the students that he

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[119] Mapp.

[120] *Chattanooga Times*, "Counter Sit-ins at 4 City Stores: Police Disperse Groups of White Youths, Break Up 'Mouthing Fight'," 1 May 1960, 3, 12.

basically agreed with what they were trying to accomplish, but that he could not allow them to just take over the store. Thacker indicated to the police that when the demonstrations began the previous Saturday he was not that concern because the groups were orderly and relatively few in number. In subsequent demonstrations, the number of students increased. Smith indicated that Thacker was not rude to them but was concern about the number of activists. The store manager felt he had no choice but to call the police, who arrested the demonstrators based on an old ordinance that prohibited loitering at restaurants and movie theatres. This marked the first time students were arrested for just conducting a sit-in in Chattanooga, and the first arrests since the disturbance on February 24th.[121]

After the students were arrested, Andrew Smith served as their spokesperson. When asked why the students began the sit-ins again, Smith responded that they had grown tired of waiting for the stores to treat them fairly as some ministers had assured them if they agreed to reduce the number of participants per site. Realizing that many of the same ministers opposed their initial actions, the students were leery of their advice. After the first two attempts were carried out in small numbers with no service, the students decided they would press the issue by continuing to increase their numbers until the city and merchants had had enough. Smith stated that "there were opportunities for the store managers to serve them without creating a disturbance, but that they were not served." He added, "Because we didn't seem to be making any progress, we stepped up the numbers."[122] Smith and the Howard students maintained order and discipline, something that was lacking on February 24th when the Howard student leaders did not take part. On that date, students from other schools, different students from Howard

[121] Smith and *Chattanooga Times*, "50 are Booked in Kress Sit-In," 13 May 2006, 1, 11.

[122] Ibid.

High, as well as non-students, were drawn to the scene after word circulated that there might be trouble. There was no trouble on May 13th.

Students sang as they were carted off in the police wagons. The songs included "On the Battlefield," "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and "Onward Christian Soldiers." Student shoppers who happened to be in the downtown area cheered in support as the students sang. Some tried to get arrested by moving toward the lunch counters but police headed them off. The next day, twenty four additional arrests were made while over sixty students marched around the jail singing, "two, four, six, eight, we want to integrate."A black attorney, R.H. Craig, arrived to represent some of the youth jailed and he directed the students outside the jail to stop singing. A little later, James Mapp and some ministers arrived downtown to survey the situation. The presence of the three groups was a reminder of the three-tier assault on segregation. During this time, Andrew Smith stood before a judge to answer charges from the previous day. He was fined $50 as a test case to see if the city ordinance used to justify the arrests was constitutional. Juveniles were released into the custody of their parents. Those eighteen and older were given bonds of $100. Six of the boys arrested chose to remain in jail rather than bail out, the spirit of protest once again manifesting itself.[123]

Appearing in court, those arrested received a warning from Judge Burrell Barker. Barker in essence affirmed the students' right to protest what they felt was an injustice but said such protests must be done orderly. Barker addressed the juveniles and their parents and issued a restraining order limiting demonstrators to six at any locale. In doing so, the judge explained his reasoning:

> In the interest of amity, law and order, the court ruled …that they were at least technically guilty of violation of [the] city ordinance. Therefore, pursuant to that

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[123] *Chattanooga Times*, "Sit-In Arrests Net 12 Negroes," 14 May 1960, 1, 5.

> judgment, a restraining order was issued against mass demonstrations in these sit-ins and limiting the number to six at any one time. In issuing that order, the court recognized the right you boys and girls have in pursuing an objective you think involves a right, but sought to regulate and put under better control …for your best interest and the best interest of the community.[124]

The judge also held the parents responsible for the compliance of their children. By limiting the number of students who could participate, the judge's ruling took a bite out of the intent of the sit-ins. While the order dampened the spirit of protest, yet, it also served as vindication. Here was a judicial authority acknowledging the students' right to protest. In his statement the judge also commented that "the primary principal on which this democracy of ours was founded is equality."[125] What the students had contended all along was their right for equal access and equal treatment, their basic constitutional rights. Judge Barker agreed that all should have the same rights. Later that day, students staged sit-ins in seven stores with no more than six participating at any one location. While their numbers were limited at each locale, the students compensated for this restriction by including more stores, thus increasing the number of demonstrations while maintaining about the same overall number of demonstrators. By staying within the framework of the judge's ruling, the students were able to actually expand their protest. For some stores, such as Liggett-Rexall, this was the first time they were targeted.[126]

As summer neared, the number of sit-ins decreased. With school out, the students did not have an opportunity to collaborate as usual. Most of the persistent and consistent demonstrators were seniors. Graduation produced a myriad of activities geared toward each student's immediate future. For the most part those who planned on continuing their education in colleges

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[124] *Chattanooga Times*, "11 Negro Boys Hear Warning by Barker," 20 May 1960, 3, 23.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

planned to do so elsewhere. Chattanooga's option for higher education, [127]Chattanooga College, was off-limits to them because of Jim Crow rules. Many planned to relocate to Nashville, Knoxville, Huntsville, or Atlanta to further their education. These cities all had traditionally black colleges with a history of producing stellar graduates. Although preparing for college, the military or the world of work, a contingent of the class of 1960 occasionally stage sit-ins as a constant reminder that their protest was not over. Virgil Roberson planned to enroll in Morehouse College in Atlanta and Andre Smith decided to attend college in California where his family was in the process of relocating. Yet they continued to participate in sit-ins on special targeted dates when they thought it would garner the most reaction.

While students were preparing for their future, city leaders, now spurred on with more urgency from ministers, were plotting the future of Chattanooga. The ministers, long time conservatives, were moved into more direct action by the student demonstrations. While the two groups never formally joined ranks, there was certainly more support at this stage than it had been throughout the spring. Some students felt that the adults had not given the kind of support to their efforts as they should have. Others believed it was better that they did not, thinking that the adults, for the most part, continued to accept things as they had been, waiting on what little whites in their own time decided to bestow on them. Andrew Smith and his cohorts through their actions were demanding a change from life as usual.[128] The city leaders were now responding to their demands.

In late July, the mayor working with leaders, black and white, along with the merchants of the city, negotiated a deal. Many of the merchants had stated all along that personally they would not have a problem serving African Americans, but directives had to come from their

[127] Roberson and Smith.

[128] Smith.

home office or from an agreement with fellow merchants. They also had to consider the city ordinances requiring segregation. All parties finally agreed that a change was necessary for the good of the city and for all parties concerned. They did not immediately notify anyone outside of the negotiations of their decision. C. B. Robinson and Mayor Olgiati, along with the ministers, businessmen and other civic leaders negotiated an agreement where merchants would allow blacks to be served beginning August 5th.[129] They called in representatives of the students, who they felt had influence and who had conducted themselves throughout with great dignity, to inform them and to have them to be a part of this historic day when segregation would come to an end at lunch counters. The students included Smith, Paul Walker, Ernestine Dial, and Robert Winston, to name a few. Some ministers and civic leaders were also included in this historic event, though mostly the first group to dine was the students.

On August 5, 1960, African American students sat down at the lunch counters of seven downtown stores - W.T. Grant, Woolworth, Miller Bothers, Lovemans Department store, Liggett-Rexall Drug Store, McLellan, and S.H. Kress - and for the first time in the city's history were served. There wasn't much fanfare around this historic occasion. The *Times* only devoted a small section of seven paragraphs explaining what took place. The students' spirit of protest, through their persistence and determination, paid off. There were no counter-demonstrations from whites who had opposed the effort in the early stages. Police were on hand just in case, but in small numbers. Blacks in Chattanooga now were included in at least one area of social mixing involving the races. Stores reported that business remained as usual with a slight increase of African American patrons. The students had accomplished in part what they had set out to do.[130]

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[129] Robinson.

[130] *Chattanooga Times*, "Lunch Counters Serve Negroes," 6 August 1960, 1.

In the mean time, the desegregation of public schools became more and more the focus of community activism. Some white groups vigorously opposed the efforts to end segregation in the public schools and lamented the mood that seemed to have taken over the city with the desegregation of the lunch counters. Militant groups opposed to racial equalities began to assail the city's efforts at racial harmony. Bombings became frequent during late July and August. The first blast occurred on July 16th at two homes and a two-storied building owned by blacks was damaged. Two more African American homes were damaged on August 11th, just six days after the desegregation of the lunch counters. Two bombs badly damaged the home of real estate broker Ross Walker on August 17th and an early Sunday morning blast on August 21st caused minor injuries to four children when it exploded around 3:34a.m., damaging two duplexes in St. Elmo. In that blast, severe damaged occurred to a back room in one of the duplexes. Police reports detailed how fatal the blast would have been if that room had been occupied. In the other unit, where the injuries occurred, the children were seven months, two years, three years, and four years respectively. The bomb was set off about ten feet from where the infant slept. Police said it was a miracle the child was not hurt more severely. The other blasts were spread around the city from East Lake to the area called Fort Cheatam. The homes damaged appeared to be randomly targeted causing great anxiety within black Chattanooga. Mayor Olgiati expressed outrage over these bombings and offered a reward of $2000 to anyone who could provide information that could lead to the capture and conviction of those responsible. The mayor stated that the bombings "were a disgrace to our city."[131]

The bombings subsided in wake of community outrage and the effect of the bomb blasts served to motivate blacks even more to demand their rights. Efforts began to target other areas

[131] *Chattanooga Times*, "St. Elmo Duplex Blasted; 4 Hurt: Olgiati Indignant," 22 August, 1960, 1.

still segregated. The school issue took center stage as James Mapp continued to press the local school board to implement the Supreme Court ruling, now six years old, as soon as possible. He felt that with the decision to end segregation at downtown lunch counters, the board would be more inclined to integrate the schools. He faced unrelenting stiff opposition as well as limited support from local leaders. It seemed the excitement for change the students had ushered in was rapidly being replaced with the gradualism they assumed had been eradicated. C.B. Robinson and some others continued to work within the Mayor's biracial committee to promote more wide-scale changes. As the year drew to an end, controversy was stirred when the board of education refused to allow Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak at Howard auditorium, the largest black auditorium in the city. Instead, King spoke at the NAACP Emancipation Day Observance at the Memorial Auditorium before a crowd of approximately twenty-five hundred. King held the audience's attention as he urged them to keep fighting for an end to segregation. He exhorted them not to settle for "token integration because it is nothing more than token democracy." King further stated that "if America is to remain a first-class nation, she no longer can have second-class citizens." He continued, "The Americans who are breaking down racial barriers may be God's instruments to democracy and may save their country."[132] King's presence left a great impression on the city and helped to arouse more determination to end segregation in other areas and to keep the spirit of protest burning. With King's visit, many of the ministers became affiliated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which King had founded to fight for civil rights. Chattanooga now had yet another vehicle in which to stage protests. It seemed that other changes were on the horizon.

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[132] *Chattanooga Times*, "3 Branch Effort is Urged By King: Negro Leader Calls for Executive, Legislative Backing in Fight," 31 December, 1960, 1.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The year of 1960 proved to be a pivotal year in race relations in Chattanooga. African Americans were no longer willing to accept second-class citizenship. Using the most recent weapon to draw attention to injustice and inequality, blacks in the city rose up and demanded a change by nonviolent direct action, i.e., sit-ins. The striking element of the student protest in Chattanooga was that it did not mirror similar protests that were taking place in various places during the early part of 1960. In each case blacks staged sit-ins to expose to Americans the inherent unfairness of segregated eating establishments and public libraries. The United States took great pride in the rhetoric of freedom and democracy but in reality fell woefully shy of fulfilling these promises to its African American citizens. The sit-ins forced America to address some of its shortcomings. Sit-ins were given a tremendous boost on February 1, 1960 when four college freshmen at North Carolina A& T University went into a local variety store and sat at the lunch counter restricted for white patrons only. Their actions ushered in similar protests across the region.[133]

There had been other sit-ins. They were staged as early as 1942 in the Chicago, Illinois area by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and in1943 in Washington, D.C. by students at Howard University affiliated with the NAACP. In 1958 sit-ins were directed against stores in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and Wichita, Kansas by youth groups also associated with the NAACP. However, what happened on February 1st set off a chain reaction which marched across the South. In addition, the sit-ins forced whites to look at segregation as a moral issue and either find a way to justify its maintenance or make a decision to eradicate it based on what was

[133] Morris, 198.

the right and just thing to do. In city after city demonstrations followed almost the same course as if they had been carefully choreographed and scripted. Morris attributed the similarities to an established well respected leadership, many times ministers, who took on the responsibility of organizing, recruiting, and planning the events. Such was the case in Nashville, Tennessee. This movement became "the model movement" largely because of its efficiency in planning and implementation. Morris also credited the churches and communities, what he called "movement centers," for supplying badly needed resources, including money to bail students out of jail. With such community underpinning, the sit-ins seemed destined to succeed.

While Morris' points have been well documented, the story in Chattanooga was noticeably different. In most of the other demonstrations the protesters were college students from across the country and abroad. This afforded them an opportunity to return home should things become too stressful and prevented them or their families from being targets of economic and political reprisals. In the places where high school students participated, they were primarily under the guidance of the adult or college leaders, as was the case in Oklahoma City. Chattanooga was an exception. Here, high school students planned and implemented the sit-ins without any adult help or supervision. The communities and churches were not movement centers. Adults did not ban together and raise bail money, Recruitment was conducted simply among peers. Training, for lack of a better term, was spontaneous and the risks were great, especially if arrested. Students faced a double peril if booked for committing a crime. First, their names and addresses were printed in the local papers. Anyone seeking retribution knew how to find them. Secondly, and perhaps more frightening, was the specter of facing parents, who out of concern staunchly forbade their children from being a part of these activities. Yet, these students

persevered for over six months until the lunch counters were desegregated. [134]While there were ongoing negotiations with civic and community leaders to help bring a peaceful resolution to these issues, it was the students who were mainly responsible for raising the issues and for keeping the protests in the public eye. In a real sense, the students' spirit of protest compelled the adults to do something. As Andrew Smith asserted, "we were tired of waiting for adults to act."[135]

As the year closed, many of the ministers became affiliated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the organization led by Dr. King. The ministers also opened a dialogue with the students and began working with them to coordinate further protests. In February 1961, in conjunction with regional activities commemorating the anniversary of the sit-ins, students throughout the South began "stand-ins" to protest continued segregationist policies of local businesses, i.e., theatres. Students stood in lines and tried to buy tickets at theatres designated for whites only. In Chattanooga, students from Howard High also participated. Some of the demonstrators were "veterans" at this time while many engaged in the protests for the first time. With the stand-ins, the ministers' alliance, now associated with SCLC, gave the students its full backing and helped in every facet of this campaign. The theatres took the position that theirs was a private business and hence they could restrict their patrons. The students and ministers took the position that any discrimination infringed on the civil rights of the students. In making their concerns known, Dr. Major J. Jones, president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, conveyed the official position of the students. This position included the following tenets:

> …The position the students take is that they have a right to go to all of the theaters and to say that they cannot is an abridgment of their civil rights…to hold that a business is private is to rule out the fact that a business avails itself of facilities and instrumentalities

[134] Roberson.

[135] Smith.

> provided by the public. The Negro is part of that public. A business could not exist without streets and sidewalks. These are paid for out of public funds. A business gets fire and police protection, water, and electricity. There are needed inspections of sanitation of the premises…Taxes pay for all of these services. A part of the Negro's tax dollar is included. Is it constitutional for the Negro to pay for services in aid of a business serving only white people? Indeed, is it fair or just?[136]

Once again, Chattanooga was confronted with the moral and ethical question concerning segregation. Students and supporters maintained their stand-ins and increasingly annoyed the businesses targeted. These protests also annoyed some white students who took it upon themselves to harass those attempting to desegregate the theatres. Police began arresting student demonstrators at the request of theatre management. During one episode on March 16th, Reverend Robert Hunter, working on behalf of the Alliance and overseeing the activities of the students, was assaulted by a white man identified as a Harry Light. Light reportedly asked Hunter when he was going to put a stop to what the students were doing and before the minister could answer, Light struck him above his right eye. Light was arrested and charged with assault and battery. That same evening a group of black protestors were demonstrating at the Tivoli Theatre on Broad Street when police arrived. The students left rather than face arrest. As they were leaving, a group of white youth confronted them and both groups pulled out knives and sticks. As the whites approached, a couple of blacks picked up garbage can lids and threw them at the whites. The black students then fled the scene. In their flight, one of them ran into an eighty-eight year old white woman, slightly injuring her. In response to these incidents, James Mapp called on the mayor to make his position known on the violence.[137]

Mayor Olgiati, as he did before, expressed his grief over these incidents and appealed to the community for sensible actions. The bi-racial committee, in the meantime, continued

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[136] *Chattanooga Times*, "Alliance Tells Stand-In Views," 9 March 1961, 1.

[137] *Chattanooga Times*, "Racial Incidents Bring 11 Arrests," 17 March 1961, 1, and "Mapp Calls on Mayor for View on Violence," 18 March 1961, 1.

working on finding ways to end segregation. The Ministers Alliance was also called on to work in this effort. Throughout the year, protests continued with an occasional concession. However, African Americans continued to face segregation in public parks, swimming pools, restaurants, and in the schools. A new mayor, Ralph Kelly, was elected to succeed Olgiati, whose term expired. Blacks initially were skeptical about the change in leadership. Kelly had been a state representative and had sponsored segregation legislation. As mayor, sensing a change in community attitude as a whole, Kelly worked to end segregation due to what he thought was best for the city. He, along with C.B. Robinson, James Mapp representing the NAACP, the Reverend Cordell Sloan representing CORE, and other activists met with members of the Chamber of Commerce to work out solutions for the city. During this time C.B. Robinson was invited to Washington, D.C. to meet with President John F. Kennedy to discuss the pending civil rights bill.[138]

In July 1963, seventy restaurants ended segregation. Public parks were opened to all, and the Chamber of Commerce and the Chattanooga Manufacturing Associations joined ranks in opposing segregation. In September, the City Commission officially voted to open all city facilities to all citizens. An editorial appearing in the August 8th edition of the *Times* called the changes "the most significant sociological change" in the city's history. The editorial further asserted that "the real revolution in the summer of 1963 came in private facilities serving the public." In that summer, most theaters, restaurants, hotels, and motels ended discrimination based on race. Community centers, swimming pools, and activities at some venues remained segregated. Times had indeed changed. The students of the Class of 1960 of Howard High

[138] Lovett, 182.

School deserved the credit for fueling a spirit of protest which led to vast changes in a very short span.

For over a hundred and thirty years, Chattanooga had never afforded her black citizens all of their rights, obligations, and privileges of full citizenship. Initially prospects appeared promising. Blacks serve in elected positions, were appointed to patronage jobs, and protected within the umbrella of the Republican Party, which operated strongly in eastern Tennessee before and after the Civil War. The hopeful prospects turned out to be an illusion. In less than a decade, white southerners re-emerged and assumed control of the government during the "Redemption." In the process, the "Redeemers" created political and social confusion for blacks and whites alike. It became unclear as to what role blacks would be allowed to play. The resulting tension manifested itself in disfranchisement, intimidation, and violence. Blacks were lynched throughout the South in an effort to define their "place."In Chattanooga, at least three lynchings were recorded and served noticed to blacks of an uncertain future. What grew from this was a virtual exclusion which took shape in "Jim Crow" segregation.

Jim Crow finally began to unravel in the early 1960s, due to the activism of the students of Howard High School, specifically the class of 1960. These remarkable and courageous students carried within them a spirit of protest that had been a part of the African American heritage in the area which became known as Chattanooga since blacks arrived on the banks of the Tennessee River in 1791. It had often been reduced largely due to a conservative black middle class that had benefitted from segregation. The class of 1960 ignited it, however, into a blaze for social change. The students, operating within this spirit, levied a direct assault on segregation. Without adult support or intervention, these students took great risks and faced the forces of racism and discrimination. They confronted these forces with such determination that it

gained the attention of the entire city. They succeeded in desegregating lunch counters in downtown Chattanooga previously restricted for white patrons only. They did not stop there. They engaged in other protests in an effort to end discriminatory practices in places like theatres and parks. As further protests mounted, this group of young activists was directly responsible for bringing governmental, business, and community groups together with a sense of urgency to bring about a change. In less than three years, Chattanooga did indeed change.

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