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A "relatively northern southern state:" civil rights protest in Richmond and Danville, Virginia, 1959-1963

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ABSTRACT

THESIS TITLE: A “Relatively Northern Southern State:” Civil Rights Protest in Richmond and Danville, Virginia

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This thesis reveals the historical narrative of the civil rights campaigns in Richmond and Danville, Virginia, from 1959 to 1963, emphasizing how protesters experienced the movement through direct action and examining the way an inherited philosophy and strategy of non-violent protest was employed by demonstrators. Furthermore, it analyzes the role of Virginia as an Upper South state during the movement. The evidence presented verifies a direct correlation between community size, economic foundations, and social outlooks and the community’s level of resistance to direct action tactics and youth leadership of the movement. Protests were successful in urban areas such as Richmond because greater economic diversity, demands to integrate because of financial losses during boycotts, and the presence of political moderates warranted the death of Jim Crow. Protesters encountered resistance in tobacco and textile towns like Danville because such communities lacked economic diversity and subscribed to traditional Jim Crow structures of segregation.



I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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A "RELATIVELY NORTHERN SOUTHERN STATE:"
CIVIL RIGHTS PROTEST IN RICHMOND AND DANVILLE, VIRGINIA
1959-1963

By

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B.A., Furman University, 1998

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It is with great honor, love, and thanksgiving that I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Mack and Marie Burgess, and to my brother and sister-in-law, Michael and Chrystal Burgess.

PREFACE

The Commonwealth of Virginia exists today as both the gateway to the industrial energy of the North and as the portico to the traditionally conservative and genteel South. While her contributions throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the narrative of American history made Virginia a center-stage performer in the greater American political, social, and military drama, she is, for all intents and purposes an Upper South state. Although Virginia does not geographically border any Northern states, its location in the Upper South and its proximity to such important hubs of commerce and politics as Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia, makes Virginia a transitional geographic and cultural region between the agricultural South and the industrial North. As revolutionary fervor grew to a fever pitch in the 1770s, many leading Bostonians claimed Virginia as an ally and as the mother of such great patriots as Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson. But by the mid 1800s, Virginia was scoffed at by the North, only to be celebrated in the South as the new capital of the Confederacy. Almost a hundred years later, Virginia was struggling to find a balance between its entrenched Southern political heritage and Virginia's post-war industrial growth.

During the 1950s and 1960s, conservative Democrats dominated Virginia's state government. Democratic Governor Thomas Stanley (1954-1958) faced a growing predicament for Southern Democrats. As a Democrat, he urged such social reforms as the improved administration of state hospitals, increased funding for public schools, and

other social reforms. But as a socially conservative Southerner, he was expected to uphold Jim Crow in the Commonwealth at a time when Virginia was coming under considerable scrutiny from the NAACP and the federal government. Stanley successfully spearheaded his social reforms through the state legislature by supporting Senator Harry F. Byrd's (1933-1965) policy of "massive resistance" to the integration of public schools. Byrd's political organization had dominated state politics in Virginia for more than three decades, controlling all state government political agencies, asserting tremendous political pressure on governors in the Commonwealth, and leading the campaign against "race mixing" and desegregation. While a three-judge federal district court and the Virginia Supreme Court found massive resistance unconstitutional in January 1959, the Byrd organization continued to influence the potentially progressive governorships of J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. (1958-1962) and Albertis S. Harrison, Jr. (1962-1966). Both of these governors supported compromises with civil rights advocates, but they were hesitant to launch a definitive stand against the Byrd organization for fear of losing vital political support for their other social and political policies. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were years when intransigent segregationists created hard-line conservative political policy in Virginia, years when progressivism seemed to turn the tide in favor of the eventual racial integration of Virginia society, and years when progressive thought and stalwart Southern custom battled each other for political domination. The civil rights leadership in Virginia would constantly have the difficult task of negotiating civil rights legislation and judicial appeals amid the ever-changing tide of Virginia politics.

While Virginia's political borders continually shifted, its economy during the post-World War II era strengthened. This economy, based on the production of textiles and tobacco, served both a national and an international community. Prior to wartime manufacturing, the majority of Virginians on small family farms produced cotton for textile production, tobacco, peanuts, and other food staples. With the outbreak of international hostilities, such urban areas as Richmond and Norfolk reorganized their industries to produce military-related products to sustain the American war effort in Europe and the Pacific. With the production of uniforms, Virginia's textile industry temporarily re-established itself. Additionally, such tobacco companies as Philip Morris began to supply soldiers in the military with an unlimited supply of tobacco products. Philip Morris experienced tremendous growth and expansion in the World War II era. The tobacco industry demanded increased production from tobacco farmers, who began to consolidate their farms to increase tobacco production. Richmond and Norfolk in central and eastern Virginia, increasingly important urban areas, attracted many black farm laborers to their industries, sustained an educated black middle class, and attracted laborers from the somewhat more progressive North. At the same time, however, traditional Virginia communities were dominant in central, western, and southside Virginia. These communities sustained themselves with one or two tobacco or textile companies, family farms, and a commitment to racial segregation.¹

¹ Andrew Buni, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967).

Early on, civil rights activists viewed the moderate state of Virginia as a monolithic political, social, and geographic entity. What they found, however, was that campaigns in urban areas such as Richmond successfully met protesters' goals in a short amount of time because business leaders were willing to compromise with the demands of movement leaders. In contrast, campaigns in textile and tobacco towns such as Danville were hard-fought and usually reached a protracted stalemate because local government officials refused to compromise. While protesters might achieve a few of their goals in these small towns, actions generally lasted for many years with little change in Jim Crow statutes.

The purpose of this thesis is three-fold. First, it relates an historical narrative. This narrative about the civil rights movement in Danville and Richmond, Virginia, from 1959-1963 has not been thoroughly examined in writings on the civil rights movement. Emphasis in this narrative is placed on how the protesters and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers experienced the movement in Virginia. This study includes narrative of events such as the Pilgrimage of Prayer Marches in 1959 and 1960 on the capitol building in Richmond, the 1960 sit-in movement in Richmond, the 1961 Freedom Ride and its stops in Virginia, the Danville campaign and retaliatory violence in Danville during 1963, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Convention in Richmond in September 1963.

The second purpose of this thesis is to examine the way in which an inherited and revised philosophy and strategy of non-violent protest were employed by student protestors and organizers during the civil rights campaigns in Richmond and Danville.

The student protesters adopted the philosophies of Jesus, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Howard Thurman, Mordecai Johnson, and W.E.B. Du Bois and transformed them into practical applications of non-violent resistance. Philosophy became action: sit-ins, marches, songs, freedom rides, boycotts, and picket lines.

The third and final purpose is to analyze the role of Virginia as an Upper South state during the civil rights movement. Did the movement manifest itself differently in Upper South states such as Virginia than in Deep South states? Evidence suggests that the movement did not reveal itself differently. The sit-ins, boycotts, and picket lines were similar to those used in Alabama and Georgia. The difference was the relatively quick success of the Richmond movement and the early success of the Danville library sit-in movement. These successes can be attributed to less violent resistance to integration by 1960 and to the desire of white residents to resolve quickly the economic and community disruptions caused by protesters in 1960. Did small textile and tobacco towns react differently to the movement within Virginia? It is clear that by 1963 mill communities and urban areas in Virginia were reacting differently to integration. Richmond established the integration of all public facilities as the status quo, while Danville authorities forcibly resisted the integration of local government agencies and businesses. Did movement leaders adjust their tactics depending on whether they were in mill towns or urban communities, or did they try to use an umbrella strategy to accomplish their protest goals despite their location in the Commonwealth? Movement leaders used an umbrella strategy of protest in the Commonwealth. This strategy of using rallies, sit-ins, legal action, and boycotts led to successful integration of public facilities

in Richmond, but a stalemate in Danville. The evidence presented verifies that there is a direct correlation between the size of population, economic foundations, and social outlooks of communities in Virginia and their level of resistance to the direct action tactics and youth leadership of the civil rights movement.

Two qualitative forms of methodology are utilized in this study as the framework for the analysis of civil rights movement protests activities in Danville and Richmond. The two forms are close textual readings and interviews. Through the use of interviews this study explores the ways in which movement participants described their personal goals, and their perceptions of the movement. Primary sources include newspaper accounts, songs, sermons, speeches, and transcriptions of interviews with movement participants.

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INTRODUCTION: CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORIOGRAPHY IN VIRGINIA

Robert Pratt's 1996 article in *The Virginia Magazine for History and Biography*, "New Directions in Virginia's Civil Rights History," encourages scholars to examine the movement in Virginia closely, to write a comprehensive narrative of the Virginia movement, and to devise new analytical constructions to explore race relations and the impact of the civil rights movement on the Commonwealth.¹

One facet of Virginia history that has long been ignored is the Commonwealth's place in the black civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century. The modern civil rights movement is one of the most compelling and monumental episodes in our nation's history. Virginia, like the rest of the country played a significant part in it. And although the events in Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, and Mississippi truly represented the defining moments of black America's struggle against white supremacy, the events taking place in Virginia during those years, even though they were not always in the spotlight, were no less pivotal in the remaking of an American society committed to the ideals of racial equality and social justice.²

This study uses Pratt's words as a guide. It is intended to examine the significant roles the direct action campaigns in Richmond played in the greater civil rights narrative. Pratt also asserts that "Many of Virginia's civil rights activists have never appeared in the

¹ Robert A. Pratt, "New Directions in Virginia's Civil Rights History," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 100 (Winter, 1996): 149-156.

² *Ibid.*, 149.

history books” and that “To date, no such comprehensive history of Virginia has been written.”³

The current civil rights historiography is incomplete in that it fails to address and incorporate fully the experiences of Upper South states such as Virginia. It also neglects the student movement and communities that did not receive the attention of the national news media. Likewise, very few articles devoted pages to the nonviolent direct action campaigns for desegregation in Virginia and similar mid-Atlantic states such as Maryland. No books or articles offer a comprehensive historical examination of school desegregation battles, nonviolent direct action campaigns for the desegregation of public accommodations, and the voting rights campaign in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The two major works that devote considerable attention to the civil rights movement in Virginia are Richard Kluger’s *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* and Robert A. Pratt’s *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia 1954-1989*. *Simple Justice*, a renowned work, analyzes the complex litigation strategy by which the five consolidated cases of *Brown v. Board of Education* were brought before the Supreme Court. Kluger’s work also is a well-researched account of the process by which the Supreme Court reached the *Brown* decision of 1954.⁴ Closely related to Kluger’s study, Robert Pratt’s *The Color of Their Skin* examines Richmond, Virginia’s 35-year resistance

³ Ibid.

⁴ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976); Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia 1954-1989* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1997):

to school desegregation as required by the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954.⁵ Pratt argues that Richmond's "passive" resistance to integration through school district gerrymandering, the creation of private schools, and white flight to suburban areas was far more effective than Virginia's "massive resistance" to desegregation through policies of interposition and school closure. Though both are well-written and carefully annotated studies, neither the Kluger or the Pratt studies offer an examination of the nonviolent direct action campaigns for the desegregation of public accommodations in Virginia or an analysis of the movement as it affected states bordering the Deep South.⁵

Two masters' theses provide basic narratives of the civil rights movements that occurred in Richmond and Danville. Oscar Renal Williams's "The Civil Rights Movement in Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia during 1960" gives a superb overview of Jim Crow statutes in Virginia and early civil rights activism in Virginia prior to 1954.⁶ It also discusses the sit-in movement in Richmond during 1960 as well as white resistance. Williams's work is admirable for its use of *Richmond Times-Dispatch* articles, interviews, and secondary source materials. However, his study could have benefited from an inclusion of the *SNCC Student Voice Newsletter*, a concise analysis of the goals of the Richmond campaign, and an expanded analysis of the movement beyond the twenty pages that he devotes to the sit-in movement in Richmond. The second thesis, Gordon B. Powell's "Black Cloud Over Danville: The Negro Movement in Danville, Virginia," offers a well-written and referenced narrative on the civil rights movement in

⁵ Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin*, Preface.

⁶ Oscar Renal Williams, III, "The Civil Rights Movement in Richmond and Petersburg During 1960" (Master's Thesis: Virginia State University, 1990).

Danville during the summer of 1963.⁷ The author uses articles in the *Danville Register* and *Danville Bee*. He also incorporates files from the Danville Police headquarters and interviews with Police Chief E.C. McCain and L.D. Bennett, Director of the Office of the Virginia Employment Commission, to construct his narrative of the protest events and white response to protests in Danville during the summer of 1963. Although this thesis is a useful source for reviewing the events in Danville, it was written in 1968, appears overly sympathetic to white officials, and glosses over the violent reactions of such officials to civil rights protesters. Additionally, Powell's work contains no interviews with movement participants, black Danville residents, or SNCC organizers who were in Danville during 1963. In its totality, Powell's work lacks both objectivity and a clear and concise thesis. His study fails to incorporate the experiences and perspectives of a variety of residents in Danville.

Similarly, Len Holt's personal narrative *An Act of Conscience*, is a subjective account of an attorney's defense of civil rights protestors in Danville. While the work offers a clear narrative of the trial proceedings within the Corporation Court in Danville during the summer of 1963, it presents no analysis of the importance of the Danville campaign to the greater civil rights movement in the South, nor does it discuss how standard movement strategies proved ineffective in this intransigent southern city.⁸

Other works on the civil rights movement discuss the nonviolent direct action campaigns in Virginia from 1950 to 1963 through chapters or paragraphs devoted solely

⁷ Gordon Brooks Powell, Jr., "Black Cloud Over Danville: The Negro Movement in Danville, Virginia in 1963" (Master's Thesis: The University of Richmond, 1968).

⁸ Len Holt, *An Act of Conscience* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

to narrative accounts of the sit-in movements, the Freedom Rides, and the violence in Danville during the summer of 1963. In a chapter entitled “Massive Resistance: The Negro as an Issue in Virginia Politics” in *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965*, Andrew Buni traces the student sit-in movement of 1960 as it spread from Greensboro, North Carolina into the following Virginia localities: Hampton, Charlottesville, Richmond, Petersburg, Lynchburg, and Farmville.⁹ Buni’s narrative of the sit-ins and their influence on Virginia’s white political system only covers four pages before he changes direction and comments upon the 1963 March on Washington and its impact on Virginia’s political system.

David Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross* contains 623 pages of movement history, but makes no mention of the successful year-long sit-in movement in Virginia during 1960. And in sixteen pages he only briefly addresses the importance of the Danville campaign to SCLC in 1963.¹⁰ Likewise, in Taylor Branch’s two works on Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement (*Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* and *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*), the author only nominally discusses the Virginia campaigns for equal rights as they relate to the goals and concerns of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC during the Deep South civil rights campaigns.¹¹ In *Parting the Waters*, commentary on Richmond and Danville appears

⁹ Andrew Buni, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965*. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1967).

¹⁰ Garrow, *Bearing the Cross* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1986).

¹¹ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1965-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

sporadically and totals only 11 out of 924 pages of text.¹² The same author in *Pillar of Fire* discusses the dissolution of the Danville movement in three pages and does not mention the 1963 SCLC convention held in Richmond during a critical moment in the SCLC decision-making process.¹³ During this time the SCLC leadership considered which strategy the movement should pursue after a summer of intense nonviolent protest action and after the August 28th march on Washington for jobs and freedom. Even in James Forman's autobiographical account of the movement, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, the violent resistance of white authorities in Danville and the courageous actions of nonviolent protesters account for only one five and a half page chapter entitled "Machine Guns in Danville."¹⁴

Similarly, Robert Weisbrot's noteworthy *Freedom Bound: A History of the Civil Rights Movement* provides a compelling and comprehensive overview of civil rights campaigns. It also discusses the incorporation and transformation of non-violence philosophy in the civil rights movement; however, it only briefly mentions the movement in Virginia. Furthermore, this study does not address civil rights direct action activities on the local level.¹⁵

¹² Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1011-1062.

¹³ Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 717-746.

¹⁴ Forman, "Machine Guns in Danville" in *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1997), 326-331.

¹⁵ Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume, 1990).

While it is unclear why authors such as Branch, Buni, Garrow, and Weisbrot did not provide an extensive examination of nonviolent campaigns in Virginia, it is evident that there are many opportunities for research and analysis of the civil rights movement in the state. Specifically, there is a need for writers of civil rights history to not only provide the narrative of the movement, but also to examine the movement through an analysis of population, protest strategy, and the pervasive intransigence of southern social customs.

This thesis does not present a comprehensive history of the civil rights movement in Virginia; what it does do is provide information and analysis of the nonviolent direct action campaigns for public facilities desegregation in Richmond and in Danville that is lacking in previous historical examinations of the civil rights movement. Furthermore, by examining how the urban community of Richmond and the tobacco and textile town of Danville reacted differently to civil rights activism, it is evident that reaction to and success of civil rights direct action campaigns in Upper South states differed from similar campaigns in the Deep South. Protests in such Deep South states as Alabama and Mississippi often fostered an entrenched monolithic segregationist response that required federal legislation or presidential action to remove political and social barriers to liberty. In Upper South states, larger municipalities such as Richmond were more responsive to the demands of protesters, but smaller towns such as Danville proved to be unconquerable by the forces of civil rights because of entrenched segregationist social customs.

CHAPTER ONE: TWO VIRGINIA COMMUNITIES

In a Deep South state such as Mississippi, one could find strong resistance to racial integration from officials and residents in both small rural communities such as Tupelo and larger cities such as Jackson. Similarly, in Georgia, forcible resistance to sit-in demonstrations and other direct action tactics could be found in small mill towns like Conyers and in larger cities like Atlanta. In Virginia, however, larger cities, such as Richmond and Norfolk, contained populations that were more economically, ethnically, and socially diverse and therefore more accepting, to a point, of civil rights demands. According to the 1960 census, Richmond's population was approximately 59 percent white and 41 percent black. The population in Danville was 70 percent white and 30 percent black. Traditional Virginia mill towns like Danville remained forcibly resistant to civil rights protests because of an intimacy between white families and a lack of racial diversity. In contrast, cities such as Richmond and Norfolk which contained businesses that serviced both black and white residents, vacillated in the face of mass civil rights protests and then conceded many of the aims of the protestors in order to restore financial stability to their commercial districts.¹

Geographically, Richmond lies on the fall line of the James River in central Virginia. The James River, her lifeline of trade for centuries, bisects the city. In the heart

¹ United States Census Commission, *U.S. censuses of population and housing: 1960. Census tracts, Richmond, Va., standard metropolitan statistical area, Volume IV* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1960).

of the city lies Richmond's commercial district. In 1960, flanking this commercial district was Jackson Ward, a neighborhood that included both the black middle class and black working class. Virginia Union University and Seminary, all black, was located on the north side of the city. Richmond Polytechnic Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University), predominately white, was established in the center of the city. And the University of Richmond, all white, was nestled west of the city. Towards the east was Church Hill, a predominately black enclave of the city that supported many originally Richmond churches and a large presence of Victorian houses. West, north, and south of the city in Henrico County, were the growing suburbs of Richmond and farmland that once supported local agriculture and contained some tobacco farms. South of the city, in increasingly suburban Chesterfield County, there also existed tobacco farms, small rural communities, and mill towns. Also 30 miles south of Richmond, in Petersburg, existed all-black Virginia State University.²

At this time, Richmond was a city of family-owned businesses, retail stores, Fortune 500 companies, aluminum and steel producers, and tobacco giants such as Phillip Morris. Richmond's schools, churches, theatres, restaurants, hotels, recreational facilities, and parks were segregated under Jim Crow statutes. Outside the municipality of Richmond, neighboring counties of Henrico, Chesterfield, and Hanover supplied the city with tobacco, farm produce, lumber, white labor, and room for commercial and residential expansion.

² Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume, 1990).

In 1960, Virginia's total population of 3,966,949 included 816,258 black residents. Virginia's black population was heavily distributed among the agricultural black belt that ran east to west alongside the James River and in large cities that sprang up within the black belt to foster the buying and selling of tobacco. These cities included Richmond, Petersburg, Hampton, and Norfolk. Richmond's 1960 total population reached 225,333, including 94,000 blacks. Black residents were concentrated in three main areas within the city of Richmond: Church Hill (city census tracts E-1 through E-9, and E-12), a prescribed area on the north side which included Jackson Ward and the area adjacent to Virginia Union University (city census tracts N-1 through N-4 and tracts N-6 through N-10), and an area directly north of the James River six to thirteen blocks south of Richmond's shopping district between 4th and 8th streets (W-5, W-7, W-8, W-10, W-11, and W-14).³

Church Hill and other neighborhoods, contained within tracts E-2 through E-9 supported the black working class. The 1960 census reported that in these tracts black men were employed as operatives and kindred workers, service workers except in private households, and as laborers. Black women were employed as operatives and as service workers, but were most often employed as household workers for the white residents of Richmond. Other areas of employment open to blacks in this area included manufacturing, repair services, hospital staff positions at segregated facilities, and in retail stores located in black neighborhoods. Annual median income stood between \$2,000 and \$3,300. Most of these residents had access to one automobile and either

³ See Appendices A and B.

owned or rented a single-family dwelling or apartment. In white neighborhoods located in or around certain sections of Church Hill, the annual median income ranged between \$3,500 and \$6,500.

In the north side tracts, the annual median income for black residents was \$2,400 to \$5,000 a year (tracts N-1 to N-10, excluding tract N-5). The median income for white residents located in or around these tracts was \$4,800 to \$5,550 per year (tract N-5). Black men were employed as clerical workers, craftsmen, foremen, operatives, service workers, educators, and laborers. Black women were employed as clerical workers, operatives and kindred workers, private household workers, and service workers. Most people in these families had access to one automobile and were located closest to the downtown shopping district from their residences on Lombardy, Graham, and Chamberlyne Avenues.

In the area north of the James River, but six to thirteen blocks south of the shopping district, there existed another enclave of the black middle class in Richmond. Its residents (in city census tracts W-5, W-7, W-8, W-10, W-11, and W-14) earned a median income of \$3,000 to \$5,500. Many in these tracts were employed in similar jobs as the residents in Church Hill and Northside. These individuals were more likely to hold retail positions and professional positions than residents living in Church Hill and the Northside. They also lived in single-family dwellings and had access to one automobile. Most likely, however, the majority of black residents in these three predominately black enclaves of the city took advantage of the city's transportation system and daily rode city

buses to their places of employment. Automobiles were needed for infrequent trips made outside of the city and more often for trips to church during the week and on Sundays.

While Richmond was a staunchly segregated city in the 1950s and 1960s, considerable economic interaction existed between white and black residents. Black residents living in Church Hill, Northside, and near the shopping district had access to small privately owned retail stores, beauty and barbershops, grocery stores, theatres, and drugstores in their segregated neighborhoods. While the black community did sustain these businesses, thousands of black residents chose to shop in the predominately white shopping district between 4th and 8th streets in Richmond. Retail stores such as Thalhimers, Miller and Rhoads, Murphy's, and Woolworth's lined East Broad Street. In these facilities, black residents were not allowed to eat at lunch counters or use water fountains and restrooms reserved for whites, but they were allowed to possess charge plates from the stores and to buy merchandise within them. Prior to 1960, there were two documented events where Jim Crow laws were temporarily suspended. In 1959, members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha, a black sorority, were allowed to reserve the Thalhimers' auditorium in the downtown store despite the fact that such access violated Jim Crow laws in Virginia. Furthermore in 1959, after heated arguments with the manager over equal access, black women were allowed to integrate Thalhimers' beauty salon in the downtown store. The rest of the store remained segregated. The Thalhimers' chain grew increasingly conciliatory in 1959 because black patronage made up a considerable portion of retail sales in these stores, particularly during the Christmas and

Easter holiday seasons. Store owners did not want to face additional civil rights protests so they attempted to pacify the black community with these small concessions.⁴

White retail owners such as the Thalhimer family acknowledged their company's reliance on black patronage by donating money to support educational programs and facilities at Virginia Union University. Not only did white store owners rely on black patronage, but white politicians running for local office in the city's predominately black areas relied on the votes of registered black voters. In the capital of the Commonwealth, approximately 45 percent of blacks were registered to vote and in turn influenced local and state elections.⁵

Richmond supported an active branch of the NAACP, a tightly knit network of local A.M.E., Baptist, and Methodist churches; a voting rights organization; and several service organizations and community clubs for black women and men. Business transactions between white and black residents, and the existence of effective social and political organizations within the black community allowed civil rights protesters to achieve many of their goals for the desegregation of public facilities in the staunchly segregated city.

The small city of Danville, Virginia lies in southwest Virginia, just three miles north of the North Carolina border. Nestled in a river valley next to the Dan River, during the nineteenth century Danville developed its textile and tobacco industries and in April 1865 briefly served as the last capital of the Confederacy.

⁴ Andrew Buni, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902-1965*, 158.

⁵ Ibid.

Danville lacked vital business interactions and transactions between black and white residents due to strictly maintained Jim Crow laws and because the black community in Danville lacked cohesion between its social and political organizations. While there were black workers in industry and in domestic service, black and white residents limited their business interactions with each other in the downtown business district. Many black residents shopped only in black-owned stores in black residential neighborhoods. The lack of cohesion among black community organizations in Danville is attributed to disagreements about strategy among the Danville leadership. Specifically, conservatively minded Rev. Lendell W. Chase, who was pastor of the “status” Baptist church and president of the SCLC in Danville, often disagreed with more charismatic leaders within the Danville SCLC. Rev. Chase urged economic and social change over time, legal action through the NAACP, and compromise. Rev. Doyle Thomas of Loyal Baptist Church of Danville, Rev. Lawrence G. Campbell, and Rev. Alexander I. Dunlap disagreed with Rev. Chase and urged immediate direct action protests. In the end, the more vocal and charismatic factions of SCLC and SNCC in Danville would win out over the voices of gradual change. Despite these protests, the civil rights movement in Danville would crumble in the face of forceful resistance by white authorities and the Corporation Court.⁶

The plants of Dan River Mills, the city’s largest employer, loomed over the north end of town. Many black residents lived on the south side of town in Jackson’s Branch. Jackson’s Branch contained the segregated Winslow Hospital for Coloreds, many run-

⁶ Len Holt, *An Act of Conscience*, 59-231.

down cabins, single-family dwellings, and black-owned grocery stores and drug stores that served this poor black community. Many black residents also lived farther west of the city. Located south of town were the state-of-the-art Memorial Hospital for whites and the Mount Vernon Church, where many white mill managers and tobacco factory owners worshipped on Sundays.

Main Street in Danville, running east to west, provided residents, managers, and laborers with retail businesses, drug stores, grocery stores, beauty salons and barbershops, movie theaters, soda fountains, and restaurants. All of these adhered to strict rules of racial segregation. Black residents could shop downtown, but were not allowed to eat in restaurants or at lunch counters and could not use any facilities reserved for whites. Additionally, Danville's schools, churches, theatres, libraries, recreational facilities, parks, and buses were segregated under Jim Crow statutes. White residents of Danville strongly supported massive resistance following the *Brown v. Board* decision and were prepared to close the public schools to prevent integration.

Black residents could not voice political opposition to these policies because very few literate middle class blacks could register to vote. The majority of black residents in Danville were disenfranchised by white intimidation and literacy tests. Less than 25 percent of the black population was registered to vote. This figure represents approximately half of Richmond's proportion of registered black voters. These statistics reveal that compared to black Richmonders, black residents of Danville had considerably less influence on local government and business policies. This lack of influence

contributed to the failure of the Danville movement to desegregate public facilities in the city.⁷

West of Danville's business district stood the massive City Hall, flanked by the police station and other auxiliary city offices. Further west sat all-black High Street Baptist Church, the launch pad for Danville's civil rights protests. The focal point would be City Hall, home to the nine elected councilmen and the offices of the City Manager, who was appointed by the City Council. The Council in 1960, controlled by City Manager T. Edward Temple, consisted of Democrats dedicated to the maintenance of a segregated society.⁸

By 1960, more than 25 percent of the 46,577 residents of Danville made their livelihood working for Dan River Mills, a producer of textiles for both a national and international market. Its population included 11,500 blacks (24.6 percent of Danville's population). While Dan River Mills did employ blacks, the majority of them were in subordinate positions as unskilled laborers. Conversely, the majority of higher paying jobs were reserved for skilled and unskilled white employees. The discrimination in employment is evident. Many black laborers worked in shipping and receiving on the company's loading docks. The majority of Danville's black residents worked on tobacco farms or in tobacco plants. While Danville produced and processed a considerable proportion of Virginia's tobacco, laborers often scrambled to make ends meet because of the plague of industry-wide unemployment that left them without an income from May to

⁷ Buni, *The Negro in Virginia Politics*, 127.

⁸ Powell, "Black Cloud Over Danville," 1-2.

September. Black men worked as farmers, unskilled laborers, operatives, packers, and drivers. Black women worked in tobacco production, on farms, as clerks, household laborers, teachers, and nurses in segregated Winslow Hospital.⁹

In addition to Dan River Mills and the tobacco factories and farms in Danville, there were also the factories of Corning Glass Works that employed several thousand whites, many Baptist and Methodist churches, Averett College, and Stratford Junior College. Danville also possessed both white and black middle class educators, as well as clerks, doctors, nurses, ministers, and businessmen. Black youth aspiring towards college had to leave Danville in order to pursue higher education because there were no colleges in Danville for them.¹⁰

Although there were black social and church organizations in Danville, they were not unified and often broke down into bickering factions over the social and economic status of their members. For example, the black leadership in Danville did maintain a branch of the NAACP, but it lacked financial resources, had difficulty recruiting supporters and members because of fear of white retaliation, and was virtually ineffective because of the disagreements among Danville's black leadership and its low membership. Danville blacks, Adam Fairclough, writes, "did not enjoy a strong organizational base.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ United States Census, 1960; James E. Ely, Jr., "Negro Demonstrations and the Law; Danville as a Test Case" in David Garrow, ed., *We Shall Overcome, The Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 256-290.

The NAACP was weak and ineffectual [in the 1950s], its newly formed rival, the Danville Christian Progressive Association, had not yet acquired mass support.”¹¹

The bickering among black leaders in Danville over strategy led to a delayed response to massive resistance and segregation. Only after the student sit-in movement began in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960, did civil rights protesters begin to mobilize in Danville. Therefore, Danville lagged behind Richmond in having well-organized community civil rights organizations. The movement in Danville began later than in Richmond, suffered a period of disorganization under local leadership, and later became dependent on outside leadership and training by SNCC and SCLC to foster organization. In Richmond, well-organized and established branches of the NAACP and SCLC began to protest “massive resistance” immediately following the *Brown* decision. Beginning in January 1959, the Virginia movement for school integration and desegregation of public accommodations intensified under the leadership of Wyatt Tee Walker. This young SCLC minister based in Petersburg, Virginia, adamantly pushed for unity of community and for direct action in the nonviolent struggle for political equality and social justice in Virginia.

¹¹ Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The SCLC and MLK, Jr.* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 119.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PRAYER PILGRIMAGES, 1959 AND 1960

As the door of the Shriner's Mosque opened at 2:30 p.m. on January 1, 1959, the light flooded out on gray, rainy Richmond streets and more than 1,500 African-Americans and about fourteen white Virginians poured inside to begin the Pilgrimage of Prayer for Public Schools. On the day that is traditionally remembered and celebrated as the day President Lincoln emancipated the slaves from their oppression, pilgrims across Virginia gathered in the former capital of the Confederacy to protest the state government's closure of nine schools and the lock-out of 13,000 students from their schools during the state's attempt to resist federal laws requiring the integration of public schools.

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, and state branches of the NAACP organized the Pilgrimage of Prayer. The Pilgrimage sought to protest Virginia's school-closing laws. The leadership of the Pilgrimage also desired a change of heart and a change in policy by the state on the question of school integration, petitioned lawmakers to reaffirm their belief in free education for all students, and asked Governor J. Lindsey Almond, Jr. to create a bi-racial committee and to seat several Pilgrimage participants on that committee.¹ Furthermore, the Pilgrimage sought to spark increased discussion on the issue of school desegregation after four years of stagnation and "massive resistance" to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The Pilgrimage

¹ "1,000 Negroes Walk in Rain to Protest School Closings," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2 January 1959, A1.

resistance, but we must love our governor and our legislators.³

Following Rev. Walker's speech, an audio tape of Dr. King was played to those gathered in the Mosque. In it he declared that "what you are doing in Virginia is of utmost significance, you are making history."⁴ He also reaffirmed Rev. Walker's appeal for nonviolent resistance, stating that as a movement "we have chosen, to resist evil with the power and forces of the soul."⁵ Mrs. Vivian Carter spoke next of the determination of black women to serve the movement for school desegregation: "If it means we must hunger, we shall hunger; If it means we must thirst, we shall thirst; And if it means we must make the ultimate sacrifice, we are prepared to make that sacrifice."⁶ This statement significantly illustrates that participants in the "new civil rights movement" were willing to risk their lives for freedom's transition. After both Rev. C.J. Washington and Dr. Phillip Wyatt spoke, Sarah Patton Boyles, a white Charlottesville woman, activist, and writer rose to state:

Emancipation means freedom. A fifth freedom, more important than the others, is freedom from hate . . . to be loved. Virginia has paid dearly for her allegiance to hatred. The opposite of integration is disintegration. Virginia is now in the process of disintegration. We who were raised to love her are here to pray.⁷

³ "1500 Join Pilgrimage for Schools," *Richmond Afro-American*, 10 January 1959, A1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Following an additional period of prayer, the 1,500 protesters poured out of the Mosque and walked five abreast for seventeen blocks to the Virginia state capitol. Once there, the marchers sang the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Rev. Walker then submitted a resolution to the crowd calling for the establishment of a bi-racial committee to seek “compliance with the supreme laws of the land” and to “establish a program and timetable for the desegregation of our schools.” The resolution passed unanimously. The marchers, who had asked for an audience with Governor Almond upon their arrival at the capitol, were informed that the Governor had a prior commitment and would not meet with them. The activists prayed again, sang, and then walked back to the Mosque.

The participants’ actions reflected their commitment to the Christian faith and to nonviolent protest. When asked by a *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reporter why he participated and what he hoped would come of the march, William G. Edwards responded, “I hope it will change the attitudes of whites toward Negroes.” Miss Anne Cannon of Danville answered a similar question: “I would hope that after the Pilgrimage the Governor and the people of Virginia would see that we are sincere.” A Mrs. Reid of Petersburg replied, “You never know. Nothing is ever asked in God’s name that isn’t answered in some measure. Our hearts are in this.” The Rev. J. Owens of Richmond offered, “We hope the legislature will pass a law to open the schools and abide by the law of the land.” Finally, Earl Henderson of Roanoke stated, “We hope to focus attention on this school thing so some people will come to their senses. I guess God is the only [one] you can ask.”⁸

⁸ Ibid.

It is unclear whether the demonstrators used the language of religion as a motivation for achieving a non-violent revolution in the greater community, or as a rationalization for aspiring towards middle class privileges. A cynic might argue that the protesters were cloaking a basic aspiration for bourgeois middle class status in the language of religion in order to give it legitimacy. Was this just an effort to play into the dominant society's own religious beliefs? Was this simply a rhetorical strategy to build moral credibility? Their target would have been the large numbers of moderate white Christians in the Richmond area. Their goal would be to indicate to these masses that black and white Christians share liturgy, scriptures, Christian aspirations, and belief systems. Therefore, black residents in Richmond should be accepted as equals because their economic status and mainstream religious beliefs make them middle class. An idealist would argue that the devotion to religious fervor exhibited by demonstrators was sincere and transcended the mundane religious practices of the white middle class. Theirs was not a religion, but a philosophy of love in action. Regardless of the reasons why the language of faith was used in political protest, the Pilgrimage of Prayer attracted attention from Richmond residents, the media, and the Commonwealth's government.

While Governor Almond failed to respond to the protesters' requests to end school segregation in Virginia and restated his commitment to "massive resistance," on January 18, 1959, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled "massive resistance" unconstitutional and mandated that all public schools in Virginia be integrated. The next day, the court ruled in *Harrison v. Day* that "the state must support such public schools including those in which the pupils of both races are compelled to be enrolled and taught

together.” The court ruled in *James v. Almond* that the Governor’s closing of schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment and failed to grant minority residents equality under the law.⁹

Both these rulings are significant because they marked the moment when Governor Almond could have complied with the federal and state courts. Instead, the Governor pursued a course of resistance to integration. His decision effectively strengthened the commitment of civil rights activists. They intended to force the implementation of the law in Virginia through direct action and petition. But on January 27, 1959, Almond reluctantly renounced “massive resistance” due to the influence of moderates and the business community in Richmond. They encouraged him not to hold a tough line on integration because it would negatively affect business and government efficiency in the Commonwealth.¹⁰ On February 2, 1959, white schools in Arlington and Norfolk integrated without violence or white resistance.¹¹ By September, schools in Norfolk, Charlottesville, Alexandria, and Floyd did so as well.¹² The school board of Prince Edward County, however, continued to enforce policies of “massive resistance.” On June 1, 1959, in resistance to a Federal Court order to desegregate, the school board appropriated no funds to the schools for the 1959-1960 school year and the public schools

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Oscar R. Williams, III, “The Civil Rights Movement in Richmond and Petersburg During 1960,” p. 18.

of Prince Edward County were effectively closed.¹³ Black children were provided no education under the board's decision while white children were given the opportunity by the local school board to attend white-only private schools. The schools of Prince Edward County would not reopen on an integrated basis until 1965; however, when they did so it was because of an effective and well-organized campaign of nonviolent action both in Virginia and throughout the South.

To protest the school closures in Prince Edward County, another Pilgrimage of Prayer March was organized by the NAACP, SNCC, and SCLC for January 1, 1960. Led by Revs. King and Walker, the protestors marched to the capitol to request that the General Assembly repeal Virginia's Freedom of Choice legislation and the state Pupil Placement Act, both vehicles of "massive resistance." March organizers also asked the legislature to give Governor Almond emergency authority to reopen Prince Edward County Schools.¹⁴ These requests were included within a resolution passed by the protestors to "prayerfully and with sincere purpose petition the legislature to reaffirm its belief in and responsibility to free public schools."¹⁵

On that day, over 1,000 marched to the capitol following Rev. King's eloquent speech at the Mosque:

I hope these citizens won't sell their birthright of freedom for a mess of segregated pottage. . . . Nothing is more sublime than suffering and sacrifice in a great cause. But there can be no growth without pain. We stand today on

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Public School Pilgrimage Held Here," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 2 January 1960, A1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the threshold of the most creative period in the nation's history in race relations. We stand on the border of the promised land of integration. We must stand up and organize ourselves to mass action, but we must not use second-class means to reach our ends. . . . We will wear the opposition down with our capacity to suffer. This will lead to a double victory—our freedom, and we will win them over too.¹⁶

Following Dr. King, Rev. Robert G. Williams, pastor of Zion Baptist Church of Petersburg, spoke on the conditions in Prince Edward County: “It is self-evident that the Old Dominion is experiencing a dark night. Schools are closed because we have closed hearts and closed minds. Our state has provided moral leadership for the recalcitrant South. It is this benighted state of affairs that brings us here.”¹⁷ The language of faith and freedom are used in both of these quotes to improve morale of the leadership, inspire others in the black community to participate, and to unite the community across class lines.

Governor Almond failed to respond to the protesters because of pressure from Senator Harry Byrd and other Democrats. Marchers were given a permit to meet in the Mosque, a permit to march, police escorts to direct traffic, and were not confronted with violent action or harassment on the part of the police or white residents. The former capital of the Confederacy seemed willing to allow black residents their First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom to peaceably assemble.

¹⁶ “Dr. King Advises Schoolless Pupils to Shun Private Offer,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 9 January 1960, 2.

¹⁷ “Public School Pilgrimage,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 10 January 1960, A2.

Historian William Thomas Mainwaring, Jr., argues that in Danville prior to the *Brown* decision “it appeared as though segregation in Danville might fall the way of the mill village, quietly and without altercation.”¹⁸ But in the post-*Brown* era, white residents mobilized politically and economically in support of massive resistance. Black NAACP leaders in Danville tentatively began to consider their options for challenging massive resistance. There would be no direct action campaigns in Danville until 1960, however, because conservative Rev. Chase and liberal-minded Revs. Dunlap and Campbell disagreed over how to combat the entrenched system of segregation. After a wave of student sit-ins swept Virginia in 1960, black high school students were inspired to mobilize for the first nonviolent direct action campaign in Danville. The leaders of Danville would eventually follow the actions of the students in organizing non-violent protests. But, in 1959, black Danville residents would have to wait for the coming storm of student sit-ins to materialize.

One month after the second Pilgrimage March in Richmond, four daring African-American students from North Carolina Agriculture and Technology College located in Greensboro, took seats in the Greensboro Woolworth’s and asked to be served. When they were refused service, they remained seated until the store was closed and police forced their removal. The action of the students heralded a declaration of nonviolent warfare against the recalcitrant South. The student sit-in movement spread rapidly throughout the South during the month of February. By February 20, the sit-in

¹⁸ William Thomas Mainwaring, Jr. “Community in Danville, Virginia, 1880-1963.” (Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina, 1988.), 357.

movement, organized by Virginia Union University students, besieged all of Richmond's major department stores, drug stores, and restaurants with a storm of protest and activity. Through faith, commitment to freedom, and nonviolent tactics, the students began to battle established white economic, social, legal, and political systems in Richmond.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RICHMOND SIT-INS, 1960

The sit-in movement that began in Greensboro galvanized and inspired African-American high school and college students across the South to move against segregated facilities. Students at Virginia Union University in Richmond began to consider creating their own sit-in movement in the segregated stores and restaurants of downtown Richmond. Woodrow Grant, a freshman student in 1960, recalls, “Frank Pinkston, Charles Sherrod and I got together and began to talk at VUU. We discussed doing the same thing that they had done over in Greensboro.”¹ The three students recruited other leaders within the student body and organized and trained students who were interested in participating in sit-ins downtown. The Virginia NAACP was asked to help the students organize and lead nonviolent training sessions on campus. Grant asserts that “We increased our knowledge about the city ordinances in Richmond, became aware of what we could and could not do, [and] we started to announce at lunch and by word of mouth that we were going to sit in.”² Virginia Sims George, one student leader, states that “we started by having meetings and discussing what was happening in the community, discussing strategies of what we wanted to try to change and how we would go about changing things. Thalhimers, a major department store, was targeted. We organized ourselves [and] we worked to formalize our strategy . . . our training by the NAACP and

¹ Dr. Woodrow Grant, Interview.

² Ibid.

SCLC was nonviolent.”³ Of the nonviolent training sessions, student Marise Ellison Smith remembers:

They talked to us about Martin Luther King, Jr. and his philosophy of nonviolence and on Gandhi and nonviolence. We play acted situations of people hitting us, calling us nigger and names and all. Those people who thought they couldn't do it, they asked them not to be involved. If they felt that they were going to retaliate in some way then they didn't want them to get involved. They taught us to keep an expressionless face and to look straight ahead. We were advised to dress nice, to carry a book to read, to be peaceful and friendly, mannerly and quiet. Passive resistance was the thing of the day.⁴

Additionally, the students were told not to expect radical change from the sit-in actions, that their safety could not be guaranteed, and that no one could predict how much white resistance they would encounter.⁵ Despite the uncertainties, approximately 500 of Virginia Union's 900 students committed to sit-in.⁶

Out of a subset of 509 students who were enrolled at Virginia Union University and who were listed in *The Panther* yearbook in 1960, 394 (77 percent) were from Richmond and other Southern locations. It is unclear how many of the 509 students participated in the sit-ins, but it is likely that a considerable percentage of this number would have participated since 500 students out of 900 had committed to participate. Only 58 (11 percent) were from the North. However, 11 (32 percent) of the 34 student leaders who organized, led, and were arrested during the first day of sit-ins were from

³ Virginia Sims George, Interview.

⁴ Marise Ellison Smith, Interview.

⁵ Dr. A.J. Franklin, Interview.

Northern states.⁷ Perhaps Northern students were more likely to take active leadership roles in the student protests because they were accustomed to free access to public accommodations that was denied to them in Virginia. Angered that they did not receive the same courteous treatment and free access they enjoyed in their home states, these students actively trained other students, most of whom hailed from Virginia. The goal was to seek freedom now and not later. While many students from Virginia feared local economic and social retribution for their participation in the protests from local whites and from their families, they soon jumped on the protest bandwagon by the hundreds.

Each student chose to participate out of his or her own individual free will, but many were also driven by a collective goal to surpass the civil rights work of their parents' generation. When asked why he chose to sit-in in 1960, Randolph Tobias responded, "We really wanted to be free. I felt that the elder citizens or the people in leadership weren't doing anything . . . we felt that we should be more aggressive at making our rights known. We felt that sitting in at the lunch counter and refusing to move until we were served brought the movement to another level."⁸ He added, "We talked about freedom now . . . we talked about that we wanted our freedom now and that we were tired of not being able to eat where we wanted to eat . . . I really felt that I was a free person and that I should be treated equally."⁹ The editors of *The Panther* yearbook at Virginia Union University included a firm statement in the 1960 volume concerning

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See *The Panther* yearbook, 1960 through 1963.

⁸ Randolph Tobias, Interview.

⁹ Ibid.

the goals of black college students that effectively attacked established black leadership as well as white leadership: “Today’s stance can no longer be characterized by a hat in hand attitude; rather, it is to be symbolized by the foot in door posture; and opponents will find this generation less sensitive to a rap on the knuckles. To move us they will have to kick us in the shins.”¹⁰ They continued with a message that invoked the spirit of students in the Virginia Union Seminary: “Our foot is in the door of a different room not only because we want all the advantages that the whole house affords, but because we recognize that God, not man, is the landlord.”¹¹ Finally, this statement addressed their dissatisfaction with their parents’ generation and their desire to move forward with a revolutionary approach to civil rights:

We do not deprecate the actions of our parents in their effort to solve the racial problem. They operated within the social, economic, and spiritual context of their times. We operate within ours. If they were apologetic in their approach, they were at least successful in providing the kind of environmental background from which we can be militant. It is because of our parents’ perseverance in the face of demoralizing circumstances that we have been able to assume this new pose of determination.¹²

This quote clearly conveys that black college students had run out of patience with their parents’ complacency, Jim Crow, and with the tentative actions of black community organizations such as the NAACP. Their anger seems to have stemmed from frustration at not achieving middle class access. These students were clearly people who viewed themselves as members of middle classes because they were pursuing a college

¹⁰ *The Panther* yearbook, 1960, 156.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

education, were well-dressed, and read the classics, but who were not getting the respect and treatment they deserved because of their race and ethnicity. They did not call for an afro-centric social model, a re-imagination of middle class assumptions, or a re-interpretation of scripture. They only demanded participation in the middle class system that their parents taught them to aspire to, but which they and their parents were denied through segregation.

The students were now determined, impatient, and angry. Marise Smith states, “I was very angry that I was being treated differently because of the color of my skin. I couldn’t go anywhere I wanted to because of the color of my skin.”¹³ Dr. Woodrow Grant later reflected on the nature of his decision to protest the lack of personal freedom.

We didn’t have freedom outside of our communities, outside our own neighborhoods. Black people were governed by two sets of behaviors. There was a public persona and then there was a private persona at home and with friends. In public, you were mindful of freedom, but it had a whole other meaning. It was not truly freedom. It was access to those things that white folks wanted you to have access to. Your behavior had to be such that you took advantage of that access in a formidable way, a way dictated to you by white folks.¹⁴

Dr. A.J. Franklin echoed Dr. Grant’s perspective and added that for him “freedom meant no longer having my basic rights, human rights curtailed. I fundamentally believed that

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Marise Ellison Smith, Interview.

¹⁴ Dr. Woodrow Grant, Interview.

there [were] certain inalienable rights. Was it not worth giving your life to change such a practice as segregation?”¹⁵ For A.J. Franklin and his fellow students, the personal risk of sitting-in paled in comparison to the necessity of taking a firm stand in opposition to segregation. Denied access to public accommodations, the students mobilized and used their cohesive student front, the wait-and-see attitude of Richmond’s white population, and nonviolent direct action to effect change in Richmond’s business district.

On Saturday, February 20, 1960, after nearly three weeks of nonviolent training and organizing, more than 200 students marched downtown from the Virginia Union campus on Lombardy Street and sat in at F. W. Woolworth’s on the corner of Fifth and Broad Streets. Thirty-four students quickly took their seats at the lunch counter. Woodrow Grant removed his new hat and set it beside him on the counter. A young white man walked by Grant, smashed his hat, and called him a “nigger.” Others walked by, spat, and heckled the student protestors. Grant adds, “Had we not prepared ourselves for that kind of behavior, I don’t know, I would have reacted otherwise, but the reaction we knew we had to be about did not include violence of any kind.”¹⁶ Shortly after the students began their sit-in at Woolworth’s, the management of the store closed the lunch counter. The students left quietly. They continued their protests throughout the day at Thalhimers, W.T. Grant’s, G.C. Murphy’s, People’s Drug Store, and Sears and Roebuck. By the close of the day, the students had effectively interrupted business in the downtown

¹⁵ Dr. A.J. Franklin, Interview.

¹⁶ Dr. Woodrow Grant, Interview.

business district, and forced the closure of six lunch counters.¹⁷ The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* quoted Charles Sherrod, who stated that the aim of the sit-in demonstrators was to “end segregation. Period.” The *Times-Dispatch* also recorded one NAACP leader who stated, “Negro youths have just about lost their patience with their adults. They want their constitutional rights.”¹⁸ The students used the following day, a Sunday, to discuss their actions, regroup, and plan their return to the downtown stores on Monday.

The Monday morning *Richmond News Leader* included a surprising editorial written by James Jackson Kilpatrick, one of the most ardent Southern segregationist editors. Very much out of character for Kilpatrick, his editorial commented on the effective nonviolent tactics of the students and their devotion to their mission. It further criticized the ungainly, racist hecklers who harassed the student protestors.

Many a [white] Virginian must have felt a tinge of wry regret at the state of things as they are, in reading of Saturday’s “sit-downs” by Negro students in Richmond stores. Here were the colored students, in coats, white shirts, ties, and one of them was reading Goethe, and one of them was taking notes from a Biology text. And here, on the sidewalk outside, was a gang of white boys come to heckle, a rag tag rabble, slack-jawed, black-jacketed, grinning fit to kill, and some of them, God save the mark, were waving the proud and honored flag of the Southern states in the last war fought by gentlemen. Eheu! It gives one pause.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Sit-Downs at Counters Begin Here,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 21 February 1960, A1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “The Sitdowns,” *Richmond News Leader*, 22 February 1960, A8.

As the students once again marched back downtown on the morning of February 22, 1960, many bystanders in the business district paused and took notice of their resolve, discipline, and quiet manner. The students targeted five stores in the shopping district on Broad Street, Richmond's main thoroughfare. Tensions mounted as the Virginia Union students first sat in at a lunch counter on one of the lower floors in Thalhimers.

A.J. Franklin recalls sitting down next to a white man who had just been served his orange juice, coffee, and plate of two eggs "over light," grits, toast, and bacon. The man was so disgusted by the fact that a young black man sat down next to him that he got up and left his breakfast untouched.²⁰

Randolph Tobias, a young black student, was frightened upon entering Thalhimers because he knew he was about to break the segregation laws in Virginia by taking a seat at the lunch counter. On seeing his best friend A.J. sit at the counter, Tobias followed and took his seat. He recalls feeling frightened because of all of the commotion. The white students and several white customers taunted him and others relentlessly. The unexpected arrival of a group of local black men and boys from Second Street bolstered the protesters' courage because these local men positioned themselves near the protesters, giving them a sense of protection from white hecklers. Tobias recalls that this was his first experience of "having a collective mind. We were all black together."²¹ Tobias's statement implies that the sit-ins transcended socio-economic differences between poor, local blacks and well-educated middle class black college

²⁰ A.J. Franklin, Interview.

²¹ Randolph Tobias, Interview.

students. Thalhimer's management quickly closed the lunch counter to force the protesters to leave. Though they rose from their seats, they did not leave the store. Instead, the students took the elevator to the tearoom (an exclusively white dining room) on the fourth floor where they asked to be served.

Outside the tearoom a standoff ensued. Students repeatedly stepped over the red velvet rope at the door of the tearoom and demanded service. White store managers consistently pushed the students back out of the room and ordered them to leave the store immediately. Finally, the store managers summoned the city magistrates and thirty-four students were arrested and charged with trespassing.²² The police moved in to arrest sit-in leaders first. The police and store managers had been watching the student sit-ins throughout the morning so they were aware of which students were giving instructions to the other students. They targeted female protesters hoping that the male leadership would give up in order to protect them and, in turn, the rest of the students would leave the store. By arresting the leadership, the police showed that they believed that the sit-in movement would crumble in confusion. Marise E. Smith was the first woman arrested. Shortly after Smith's arrest, Virginia Sims George heard a police officer shout, "Get her, she's a leader!" She was roughly taken into custody and placed in the back of a police wagon.²³ All thirty-four Virginia Union students were taken to the police station in such vehicles. Upon their arrival, police officers booked the students, finger-printed them, and charged them with trespassing. They were released from prison later that afternoon. At

²² "34 are Arrested in Sitdowns Here," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 23 February 1960, A1.

²³ Marise Smith, Interview and Virginia Sims George, Interview.

their release, both Smith and George remember whites heckling and spitting on them. George recollects that “when I came out of jail, it had been a long day, and to have some fat, red-bellied person call you a name, it was all you could do not to call something, throw something or do something. You had to be so disciplined. If we hadn’t been, we would have defeated the purpose of what we had done [that day]. I remember someone saying ‘remember, this week we can’t react.’”²⁴ George contemplated retaliating against those taunting her, but her nonviolent training and her commitment to the cause kept her from reacting out of anger.

The following day, in response to the arrest of the students, the black community in Richmond—aided by black attorney Oliver Hill, the NAACP, several ministers, and the Virginia Union students called for a shoppers’ boycott of Thalhimers.²⁵ Student activists began to picket Thalhimers at eleven o’clock in the morning. Other students periodically relieved them. Their placards called for the black community to withdraw its immense buying power from Thalhimers to thwart the enforcement of city segregation ordinances.²⁶ Moreover, the picketers handed out leaflets stating, “Thalhimers had our Negro youth arrested because they tried to exercise their constitutional rights to eat in a public place. Don’t buy in this store. Close out your charge accounts.” Others carried placards that read, “Can’t Eat, Don’t Buy,” “Don’t buy where you may be arrested,” and

²⁴ Virginia Sims George, Interview.

²⁵ “Store is Picketed; Negroes Ask Boycott,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 24 February 1960. A1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

“Khrushchev can eat here...We Can’t.” Other placards reminded shoppers that American democracy was dead unless the country afforded all citizens their equal rights.²⁷

Instead of granting the protesters equality, the Virginia General Assembly made it increasingly difficult for them to exercise their rights of free speech and peaceful assembly. The Assembly passed legislation to discourage boycotts activities because they were disrupting business downtown. The boycott activities, therefore, posed a threat to Richmond businessmen and to the Assembly because they threatened to turn their power base -- moderate voters and middle class shoppers -- in favor of the well-dressed, adamant college students. Furthermore, businessmen were losing money because white middle class shoppers did not want to go downtown to shop as long as the demonstrations continued.

On February 24, 1960, the Virginia General Assembly passed three emergency anti-trespass bills sent down by Governor Almond in reaction to the growing student sit-ins. The laws increased the financial penalty and sentence under the charge of trespass from a \$100 fine and thirty days in prison to the excessive \$1,000 fine with a year’s jail sentence. Luckily for the students, the new laws were not retroactive; the thirty-four students arrested at Thalhimers were charged under the earlier trespass laws and were subsequently fined \$20 out of the maximum \$100 fine. They were not required to serve any time in jail.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Senate, House Approve 3 Anti-Trespass Bills,” 25 February 1960, A1 and “Anti-Trespass Laws Signed to Meet Sit-Down Protests,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 26 February 1960, A1.

In response to the new anti-trespass legislation, and in order to further organize and inform the Richmond black community of plans for further demonstrations, the NAACP, the student leaders, and supportive local ministers called a public meeting at Fifth Street Baptist Church the night of February 24. With the students present on stage, the crowd prayed and sang freedom songs like “We Shall Overcome” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Both had become African American anthems. The crowd of 5,000 drowned out speaker after speaker with their applause in favor of proposals to boycott Richmond stores that refused them service at eating facilities. Hundreds signed up to join picket lines and to support the student sit-ins. Perhaps the most commanding speech of the night was given by Oliver Hill, chief NAACP legal counsel in Virginia. The crowd rose in approval and with loud applause when Hill declared, “One of the things we ought to do tomorrow is get a picket line against one of the most undemocratic institutions in Virginia, the General Assembly.”²⁹ Hill urged the crowd to call upon the legislature to eliminate all segregation laws in Virginia. “The struggle isn’t going to be easy,” he said, “we’ve got to think in terms of sacrifice--when these children went to jail, they made a sacrifice.”³⁰ On testing the boundaries of freedom in America, Hill stated, “I think the time has come when we should put this land of the free and home of the brave on the spot. If we’ve got to go to jail, then let’s start thinking in terms of sacrifice and go to jail.”³¹ Rev. Frank Pinkston, one of the leaders of the student protesters and a Virginia

²⁹ “Negroes to Spread Boycott,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 25 February 1960, A2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Union Seminarian, rose to speak after Hill. Pinkston's commitment to faith in God and to social justice was clearly stated in his oration: "The Bible tells us that God made the Angels and he made man just a little lower than the Angels—but he didn't make one man down here and another up here. We are set on our intent and there is nothing to prevent us from achieving the goal we have to seek."³²

Following the panel of speakers, the audience voted and approved a fifteen-person steering committee to guide the movement's efforts and to help organize the larger Richmond community to boycott Thalhimers and other department stores. This committee, formally known as the Richmond Citizens Advisory Committee (RCAC), included Oliver Hill, Lester Banks, Charles Sherrod, and Frank Pinkston. The creation of the steering committee reflected the desire of the black community to launch a mass nonviolent direct action campaign in the city.

Under the direction of the RCAC, the picketing of Thalhimers continued. There was evidence of strengthening support for the sit-ins as hundreds of working class citizens, Union Theological Seminary students, housewives, and ministers flocked to the picket lines in the downtown business district. Newspapers such as the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, *The Richmond News Leader*, and the *Richmond Afro-American* devoted considerable space to updating the public about the protests. They included the reaction of both blacks and whites to the protests as well as the words of the protesters themselves. On February 27, 1960, an anonymous editorial "For God and Humanity" appeared in the *Richmond Afro-American*. The editorial compared the students to the

³² Ibid.

nation's Revolutionary War heroes. It called for the African American community in Richmond to continue to support the students.

Chances are if some of the early American patriots say like Thomas Paine and Crispus Attucks had witnessed the arrest of the forty-odd Virginia students they, too, would have applauded. . . . The fifes and drums were missing, but the same thirst for human dignity which motivated Paine, Attucks, Thomas Jefferson and the others was evident among the students. . . . Remember why! Remember and know that these youngsters were (and are) willing to go to jail in their quest for equality of treatment in public places. Know that whenever and wherever the desire for freedom clashes with tyranny they need all-out adult support and intelligent leadership. In the name of human decency let these be forthcoming.³³

This invocation of the leaders of the American Revolution is significant because as a reflection of the patriotic education of middle class Americans, they are references to conventional, non-threatening revolutionaries in the American psyche. The rhetoric in this editorial expresses that blacks are patriotic Americans, who share a common historical inheritance with the white middle class.

As the picket lines swelled, protesters and movement leaders became bolder and more confident. While many of the speeches and sermons given at the weekly mass meetings were not recorded, the statements of attorney Oliver Hill and of several local ministers were presented in the city's three major newspapers. In an article entitled "Hill Suggests Increased Picketing," the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported Hill as passionately stating that "the General Assembly hasn't done anything constructive in the

³³ *Richmond Afro-American*, "For God and Humanity," 27 February 1960.

field of social relations for the past 100 years.”³⁴ Horace Scott, a retired postal worker, quoted in the *Times-Dispatch* noted, “I assume that if I am invited into a store to buy a fur coat it is reasonable to assume that I am also invited to buy a ham sandwich.”³⁵ In a statement to the press regarding the NAACP leadership’s presence on the picket lines, Oliver Hill declared that he was marching with the NAACP “to let the world know that Virginia is not the birth place of democracy, but the burying ground of democracy.”³⁶ Offering support to the students, Rev. Wyatt T. Walker asserted that “these demonstrations by a group of students evidenced more than anything else the overwhelming sentiment of the [black] community in the South. That they are going to seek their constitutional privilege regardless of any laws passed by the General Assembly of Virginia.”³⁷ The trespass laws in no way reduced the frequency or number of sit-ins in Richmond. Nor did they reduce the commitment of the activists. During March and April, the students began to carry Bibles in addition to textbooks to their sit-ins downtown. Their actions reflected a fervent determination to remind the greater Richmond public of Christian principles and social justice. Rev. Frank Pinkston quoted Second John: “If a man say I love God and hate his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen . . . He

³⁴ “Hill Suggests Increased Picketing,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 29 February 1960.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Pickets Bolstered: Ministers, Supporters Join March,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 5 March 1960.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

who loveth God, loves his brother also.”³⁸ Such public statements served three purposes: they sent a verbal message to the Virginia Assembly, to the Byrd organization, and to white Richmonders that the sit-in movement would not be thwarted by intimidation or by the passage of emergency legislation; they sent a political and social message to the Governor and to the white establishment which emphasized that the boycotts and the sit-ins were not going to end until segregation crumbled; and they encouraged other African-American citizens to mobilize. They also called on shared religious and historical traditions between black and white citizens. At the very least they hoped that religious people would support the students by boycotting major department stores downtown.

Another effective tactic used by the movement was the display of signs and placards on the picket lines outside of the major department stores. Scrawled in black and blue ink on white poster board were messages calling for an end to segregation, reminders to keep the boycott, statements with a Christian emphasis, and the demand for “freedom now.” Many read as follows: “Every Person is Born With Full Dignity and Rights,” “...Endowed by Their Creator with Certain Inalienable Rights,” “Thy Kingdom Come,” “Thy Will Be Done,” “This is a Moral Issue,” “Is Christ Divided?,” “Support Our Students,” and “Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself.”³⁹ The placards were effective at drawing the attention of bystanders, shoppers, and the news media. They attracted public attention because they spoke in words that appealed to Christians—both white and

³⁸ “Bibles on Sit-Ins: Students Again Visit the Stores,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 2 April 1960.

³⁹ “Court Will Hear Trespassing Cases of 34 Here Today,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 4 March 1960; “Judge Says: This is No Race Issue,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 12 March 1960; “Students March at Capitol,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 9 July 1960; “Judge Says: This is No Race Issue,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 12 March 1960; “Students March at Capitol,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 9 July 1960.

black—to consider the treatment of African Americans within the city and the South as a whole.

Thousands of leaflets were distributed by the RCAC both downtown and in Richmond's black neighborhoods. Much like the placards, these pamphlets and leaflets used the rhetoric of freedom and the language of faith, which were very effective tools for gathering supporters for the boycott of stores downtown. The leaflets read:

Stores are public businesses and all customers are entitled to the same service regardless of race. If any store serves food to whites and refuses to serve Negroes at the same counters, it is because the store management believes that Negroes are not good enough to sit down beside whites to eat. We can lick race prejudice in Richmond department stores and drugstores if we stop spending our money in Jim Crow stores. Instead, spend your money where you are welcomed and treated courteously at all counters and in all departments.⁴⁰

In addition to printing the leaflets, the RCAC ran a full-page advertisement in the *Richmond Afro-American* on March 26, 1960, to encourage participation in the boycott. The advertisement asked blacks not to sacrifice their human dignity, but to wear last year's Easter clothes and donate the savings not spent on a new spring outfit to freedom's cause. Furthermore, the advertisement provided the reader with a boycott strategy to follow: "Stay out of stores in downtown Richmond where you cannot buy in ALL departments. If you cannot eat unsegregated don't buy. Lend your efforts to a strict don't spend program."⁴¹ Other advertisements reminded black patrons not to purchase

⁴⁰ "Store Boycott Spreading, Negro Picket Leader Says," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 5 April 1960, A5.

⁴¹ "Don't Sacrifice Your Human Dignity," *Richmond Afro-American*, 26 March 1960, p. 14.

goods over the phone. Such patronage signified that they were willing to cross the picket line. In an article entitled "Better Jobs, Seating Sought for Negroes," the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported the goals and tasks set forth by the RCAC. Within the city of Richmond the RCAC sought "The opening of eating facilities that have not desegregated for all customers in Richmond; the securing of executive and clerical jobs for Negroes here; the desegregation of theater seating and certain concert and recreational facilities symbolized by the Mosque and Parker Field."⁴²

The campaign to end segregation intensified at the lunch counters in Richmond, and ultimately proved successful because the protesters actively targeted the incomes of retailers, restaurant owners, and pharmacists. By withdrawing their financial support from businesses downtown and on Church Hill, the black community forced retailers and restaurateurs to their knees. Small businesses and drug store owners who were not as financially resistant to the protests as multi-million dollar retailers like Thalhimers pressured the local and state political establishment in Richmond to resolve this situation quickly before they lost customers and profit during the upcoming Easter shopping season. Between March and April 1960 five drugstores on Church Hill, which had been patronized heavily by local black residents, desegregated their lunch counters and dining facilities. Other drug stores located in the East End, such as the Fairmont Drugstores, Jefferson Avenue Pharmacy, and Springer Drug Company, desegregated their lunch counters as well before the summer of 1960. However, Richmond's major department stores and downtown drugstores continued to resist desegregation throughout the

⁴² "Better Jobs, Seating Sought for Negroes," *Richmond Afro-American*, 22 February 1961.

summer. Clearly, the significant revenue losses from the stores demonstrated the severe economic tolls exacted on the department stores by the boycott. The *Wall Street Journal* reported in early March 1960 that one chain store executive announced that business had fallen off fifteen to eighteen percent due to the boycotts.⁴³ Estimates of losses ranged from the thousands to well over three million dollars. On August 30, 1960, after a series of meetings and negotiations between the Richmond Retail Merchants Association and the RCAC ended in stalemate, the RCAC refused to waiver from its position. Shortly after the RCAC took a hard line in negotiations, the Retail Merchants Association determined that there was no other solution to rectify their financial losses other than to desegregate, at least partially, dining facilities in the Richmond department stores. Dining facilities were completely desegregated at W.T. Grant, G.C. Murphy, Sears and Roebuck, and at Woolworth's. Those at Thalhimers, Miller and Rhoads, and at People's Drugstore were desegregated partially, meaning that some of the lunch counters within these stores would be desegregated while others would continue to be reserved for whites only. By the summer of 1961, all of the dining facilities at Thalhimers, Miller and Rhoads, and at People's Drugstore were completely desegregated. Within seven months, the student protestors in Richmond had reversed staunchly enforced Jim Crow statutes. They were successful because they were able to interrupt the flow of commerce downtown and they made middle class white Richmonders see them as fellow members of the middle class through their dress, speech, and appeal to Christian values. The Commonwealth's government had no choice other than to heed the advice of the business

⁴³ "Pickets Bolstered," *Richmond Afro-American*, 5 March 1960.

community and expeditiously end segregation in Richmond's public accommodations. They ended it by repealing the state's Jim Crow statutes and regulations.

At the same time the sit-ins were making headway in Richmond during April of 1960, a determined group of high school students was preparing to integrate the public library in Danville. Their struggle was marked by confrontations with contentious small town white officials, frustration, and finally with tempered success.

CHAPTER FOUR THE DANVILLE LIBRARY SIT-IN, 1960

White Danville's pride in the 1960s lay in its production capacity in the tobacco and textile industries and in its distinguished Confederate heritage. The Central Library was a particularly revered site that demonstrated the town's faithful support of the Confederate government during the war. Formerly the residence of Colonel James Sutherlin, an officer of the Confederate States of America, the library served as the last capital of the Confederacy following the collapse of Richmond. It was later converted into the town's Central Library and served both whites and blacks, albeit in separate and unequal library branches.

During the summer of 1960, a battle raged in Danville between the NAACP and the forces of segregation. As both sides mobilized, the first battleground of the war became Central Library.¹ The movement in Danville was possibly influenced by the campaign in Richmond. It is evident that the crusade in Danville followed similar trends in the use of the rhetoric of freedom, the language of faith, and the use of nonviolent protest demonstrations.

On April 2, 1960, over twenty-five high school students, inspired by sit-ins in other parts of the Commonwealth, prayed, sang, and then marched to the Danville Central Library to ask the librarian on duty if she would grant them registration cards and the

¹ Ruth Harvey Charity, Christina Davis, and Arthur Kinoy, "The Danville Movement: The People's Law Takes Hold in Danville," *Southern Exposure*, 1982 (4): 10, 35-45.

privilege to borrow library books.² Rev. Doyle Thomas, an activist leader in the regional NAACP, organized the students. The librarian quickly replied that the library was closed and that if they did not leave the police would be summoned. The students took seats in the library for about twenty minutes and discussed whether or not they should leave. They left shortly after the twenty minutes had passed. The library closed several hours early because of the protest.

When asked later that afternoon why the demonstration had occurred at the library, Rev. Thomas, head of the Danville NAACP, informed the media that his organization “wanted to test the strength of segregation laws in Danville in relation to tax supported institutions.”³ Thomas further replied that the students were asserting their constitutional right to the use of public facilities and had chosen to target Central Library because they were entitled to use it. They also needed to use library materials to complete a homework assignment that “required materials not available at John M. Langston High School or the Branch Library,” both black facilities.⁴

In an attempt to stifle any further demonstrations, the Danville City Council met on April 4, 1960. City Council members agreed to open all of the segregated branch libraries, but to extend the closure of the Central Library indefinitely because it was the target of the Saturday sit-in. Additionally the City Council passed a resolution that

² *The Danville Register*, 3 April 1960.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

invested the City Manager with the power to close all library facilities if they “could not be operated under the limitations placed on them.”⁵ The City Council resolved that:

Whereas the public library facilities are overtaxed by the demands of its patrons, now therefore be it ordained that the Central Library building located in the Memorial Mansion be used only by the present [white] holders of library cards issued from the Central Library; and that no further cards be issued until further order of the council; and that the City Manager be charged with the responsibility of carrying out this pronounced policy with the full power to close all library facilities should it appear that its administration has become impracticable and to report the same to the council.⁶

The resolution not only effectively closed the library to black patrons, it also sent clear messages to the black community that integration would not be permitted. Protest demonstrations would be swiftly and directly opposed by City Council.

Undaunted, the NAACP called mass meetings to organize black Danville residents, to raise the support of area ministers, to pass out fliers urging the black community to support the actions of the courageous high school students, and to prepare a brief for legal action against the city of Danville. On April 13, 1960, five plaintiffs affiliated with the NAACP and its legal counsel filed a suit against Danville City Council that sought the end of segregation in the city’s public libraries and recreational facilities. The suit was filed in the Federal Western District Court, with the Judge Roby Thomas presiding. The NAACP appealed to Judge Thomas to issue an injunction to prohibit Danville officials from “denying, on the basis or race or color the admission of Negro

⁵ “Minutes of the Danville, Virginia City Council,” 3 April 1960, on file in the City Manager’s Office.

⁶ Ibid.

citizens to any library operated by the defendants.”⁷ Mayor Julian Stinson responded to the proposed injunction by stating that while a close relationship previously existed between the two races in Danville before the library sit-in demonstration, with the demonstrations any cooperation had become “null and void.”⁸

The judge pondered the suit for three weeks, and then, on May 6, 1960, he handed down his decision that called for the partial integration of Danville’s Central Library. The judge permitted only current Negro cardholders to use the Central Library. However, he ordered that when the city began to reissue new library cards, that Negroes seeking them must be included in the reissue. Judge Thomas’s decision supported the Fourteenth Amendment, and he cited a Greensboro, North Carolina, case for his precedent. In Greensboro, segregated municipal swimming pools were ruled a violation of constitutional provisions requiring equal access to public accommodations. Public accommodations included municipal facilities. The black community responded positively to Judge Thomas’s injunction. Although their verbal reactions were not included in the *Danville Register*, it can be speculated that the compromise was satisfactory in meeting the NAACP’s goals for library desegregation because the organization offered no opposition statements to the media about Judge Thomas’s ruling.

Angered and frustrated by the ruling, Danville’s City Council called an unscheduled meeting and a public vote on an advisory referendum under the guise of gathering public opinion on the possible desegregation of the library. The referendum in

⁷ *The Danville Register*, 14 April 1960.

⁸ Gordon Brooks Powell, Jr., “Black Cloud over Danville.”

reality was an attempt to thwart the Judge's decision. It was scheduled for June 14, four days before Judge Thomas's injunction was to desegregate Danville's Central Library. The four-day period between the referendum and the enactment of the injunction allowed City Council time to close the library facilities before the federal courts forced integration on the city. Each voter selected one of the following choices on the referendum as their preference for resolving the situation with the library:

1. Close the public library system.
2. Close the library system if it appears that private library facilities will be reasonably available
3. Open the library to all citizens.
4. Permit the council to work out a "modified plan" to keep the library open (such as a reference library).
5. Close the library building for public use and dispense books by bookmobile.⁹

When the referendum results were tallied, 2,829 votes had been cast for the first two choices on the referendum. 1,598 Danville residents voted to have the library re-opened on an integrated basis. Having the evidence they needed to show community support for segregation, on June 15, 1960, the City Council voted to maintain the closure of the public library in Danville. The NAACP and the student protesters were infuriated with the Council's decision to spurn Judge Thomas's injunction. They had organized a grass roots campaign that included members of the black community and some white residents of Danville in order to show support for the injunction, and now the City Council used its limited political power to subvert the injunction. The NAACP asked Judge Thomas to restate his injunction and to mandate enforcement of it. On June 18, 1960, Judge Thomas

⁹ *The Danville Register*, 15 June 1960.

stated that his May ruling that prohibited the city from operating segregated facilities would be upheld by the court and demanded that it be enforced in Danville by the city government. Danville's City Council remained obdurate.¹⁰

Resistance would not last long, however. Supporters for an integrated library rallied and announced that they would collect five thousand signatures to protest the closing of the library. The pro-integration faction in Danville sought the signatures of all white and black residents who were disgruntled about the closing of the public library. At the June 27, 1960, City Council meeting, Councilman D.L. Arey, a white member, presented the petition for an integrated library with over 3,000 signatures on it, and he called for a re-vote on the library issue. When he received no second to his motion, it failed. Throughout the duration of the summer the Central Library and all other branches remained closed to all patrons.¹¹

Despite the failure to push the council for a re-vote, an organized group of residents daily pressured the City Council to reopen the library. They telephoned City Council to lodge their complaints, collected additional signatures on their petition to reopen the library, organized mass citizens' meetings to discuss the issue, and wrote newspaper editorials discussing their disappointment in the council and their desire to have access for all residents to library facilities. Most importantly, they began injunction proceedings in Federal Court to demand the reopening and total integration of Danville's recreational facilities.

¹⁰ *The Danville Register*, 18 June 1960.

¹¹ Gordon Brooks Powell, Jr. "Black Cloud Over Danville."

The Danville City Council bowed to this constant political and legal pressure and agreed to meet with local NAACP leaders and attorneys to discuss a compromise. In short, “the city wanted a gentleman’s agreement and not a federal mandate.”¹² Shortly after the start of the school year, on September 12, 1960, the City Council, in a five-to-four vote, agreed to re-open the library on the condition that the NAACP relinquished its injunction suit. The NAACP agreed to do so and the previously free public library was opened permanently to both blacks and whites who acquired a library card for a new price of \$2.50. By charging a fee, the Danville authorities were trying to prohibit the poorest of blacks from using the library. The fee mimicked the use of the poll tax as a form of white political resistance to integration.¹³ When the library was fully integrated, City Council opponents to integration made one last feeble attempt to prohibit “race mixing” in Danville. They had the chairs in the library removed so that all patrons would have to stand. This was an uncommon form of compromise for Danville and an unusual solution to the problem of facilities desegregation. The “vertical integration” of the library lasted for many months after the re-opening of the library. Eventually, the library was fully desegregated and the tables and chairs were re-installed. Unfortunately for black residents, “vertical integration” marked one of the last compromises on the part of white residents in the battle for integration in Danville.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

There are similarities between the desegregation of the library in Danville and the Richmond sit-ins. For example, students were the driving catalyst in both instances. Students led, organized, protested, and worked with regional civil rights organizations in both cities. They were successful in reaching their goal of integration in specific cases in Danville and in Richmond. The differences are that the Danville students were predominately high school students and were supported by the NAACP while the Richmond students were college students from VUU who were supported by local ministers, attorneys, and the SCLC. These differences proved insignificant in 1960, but by 1963 they would prove important factors in why the Richmond movement achieved full integration more expeditiously than the Danville movement.

So-called racial harmony was restored to Danville in 1960, and would last until the brutal Danville summer of 1963 when the black community arose to demand their rights to fair employment, equal access to public accommodations, and the vote. During the summer of 1963, activists in Danville under the leadership of the NAACP and the Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA) followed the example of the residents of Birmingham, Alabama, by taking to the streets to march, shout, sing, and sit-in for political and social freedom in Danville. They confronted violent policemen who were under orders to maintain peace and segregation in Danville. They were beaten, shackled by court injunctions, and were frustrated by their own lack of organizational unity and by the inability to achieve many of their goals. Before this explosive moment in Virginia's history, there would be a period of relative calm in this Upper South state.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE FREEDOM RIDES, 1961

Between the 1960 sit-ins in Virginia and the turbulent summer of protest in 1963, the Freedom Riders, led by James Farmer, boarded a bus in Washington, D.C. to ride through Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to test the *Boynton v. Virginia* decision. This 1961 decision prohibited segregation of public accommodations at interstate transportation facilities such as restaurants, bus stations, train stations, restrooms, and waiting rooms. The Freedom Riders organized by SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began their demonstrations in May 1961. They encountered no violence and only slight resistance as they passed through Virginia. Their passage through cities such as Fredericksburg, Charlottesville, Richmond, Petersburg, and Danville marked the successful desegregation of all interstate public accommodations in the state.¹

It is important to include the 1961 Freedom Ride in this study because current civil rights historiography fails to present a complete narrative account of what happened in Virginia. Furthermore, acceptance of the Freedom Riders by white Virginians in both Richmond and Danville supports the argument that reactions to civil rights activity could vary greatly in Upper South states. In Danville, “vertical integration” and acceptance of interstate transportation desegregation would be the last concessions white authorities would make to the federal government. In Richmond, however, acceptance, or at least

¹ Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound*, 55-63.

tolerance of the Freedom Riders, marked a progressive change in the city's desegregation policies. Richmond was beginning to move out of its staunch segregationist past by integrating all transportation facilities and hotels.

In 1947, the CORE had organized a "Journey of Reconciliation" to test the Supreme Court's *Morgan v. Virginia* decision (1946) that declared segregated seating on interstate transportation illegal. A small group of interracial passengers met violent and forceful resistance to their bus ride through the Upper South. After the arrest of many of the passengers in North Carolina, the "Journey of Reconciliation" crumbled under the force of white resistance and police brutality. The moderate Upper South refused to acquiesce to the tenets of the *Morgan* decision.²

Thirteen years later, in 1960, Bruce Boynton, a Howard University student, awaited his Trailways bus at the station in Richmond. Having not eaten for some time, Boynton ventured through the station to find something to eat. He entered the restaurant at the Trailways station and purchased his meal. Seeing that the colored section was full, Boynton took a seat in the white section of the restaurant because he feared missing his bus if he waited until a "colored" seat opened up. Boynton was arrested for his actions. His suit became grounds for a Supreme Court case challenging the constitutionality of segregated interstate facilities. In a logical extension of *Morgan v. Virginia* (the Motor Carrier Act), the Supreme Court ruled that segregated facilities in interstate travel facilities were unconstitutional. Justice Hugo Black declared for the majority that if a bus company "volunteered to make terminal and restaurant facilities available to its interstate

² Ibid.

passengers as a regular part of their transportation,” then the “terminal and restaurant stand in the place of the bus company in the performance of its transportation obligations and they must perform these services without discrimination prohibited by *Morgan v. Virginia*.”³

In May of 1961, James Farmer, director of CORE, publicly announced that the Freedom Riders would be traveling throughout the South to test Federal compliance with the *Boynton v. Virginia* decision. Farmer decided to rename this second journey of reconciliation the “Freedom Rides” because the name conveyed a sense of directness and urgency. Farmer noted that protesters wanted “Freedom, Now,” not later.⁴ The “Freedom Riders,” as they were called, would leave Washington, D.C., on May 4 and travel to large and small cities alike throughout the Upper and Deep South. At station stops, the interracial group would depart the buses (one Trailways bus and one Greyhound bus) and enter the station. The white members of the group would use bathrooms, restaurants, and water fountains reserved for blacks and vice versa. John Lewis writes in his memoirs that:

The federal government was not enforcing its own laws in that section of the country because of fear of political backlash from those states. If, in some way it might become more politically dangerous for the federal government *not* to enforce those laws than to enforce them, things would begin to change. If, for example, those states were forced to visibly—even violently—defy the law, with

³ Lowery, Charles D. and Marszalek, John F. eds., *Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights* (Greenwood: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992).

⁴ John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 138.

the whole nation looking on, then the federal government would be forced to respond in ways it had not so far.⁵

The ride was bolder and more expansive than the first journey south to test desegregation of interstate facilities. For three solid days beforehand, Farmer trained the thirteen riders in nonviolent tactics and in ways to protect themselves during the brutal physical attacks that were inevitable in violent Deep South states like Alabama and Mississippi. On May 4, 1961, the riders boarded the bus. An hour later they made their first station stop, but the riders met no resistance in Fredericksburg, Virginia. As John Lewis reports:

We stepped off to see that the WHITE ONLY and COLORED ONLY signs had been removed from the terminal bathrooms and restaurant. There was no disruption as we used rest rooms traditionally designated for another race and ordered drinks at a counter that never would have served us before.⁶

The riders re-boarded the bus and headed south to Richmond.

In Richmond there also were no incidents. Segregation signs had been removed from the same station where Boynton had been arrested. The riders integrated the bus stations peacefully. At a rally given at Virginia Union University that evening, James Forman, a Field Secretary for SNCC, spoke of their nonviolent mission: "We won't accept segregation in any form. If there is an arrest, we will accept that arrest, and if there is violence we are willing to receive that violence without responding in kind."⁷ That afternoon, before departing for Petersburg, Freedom Riders sang proudly and prayed

⁵ Ibid., 137.

⁶ Ibid., 140.

⁷ "Rally Held Here: 13 'Freedom Riders' Testing Segregation," *Richmond News Leader*, 5 May 1961.

that no violence would touch them on their journey south. Their songs and prayers exemplify the language and spirit of faith that served as a pillar for weary bodies and souls.

Upon their arrival in Petersburg, the Freedom Riders again found that signs had been removed. Met by a few intransigent white on-lookers, they were allowed to integrate the facilities quietly. Local ministers and community activists, led by Rev. Wyatt T. Walker, greeted the riders. They listened to the students' message and their goals at a mass meeting, and then provided riders with shelter for the night. The next morning the riders re-boarded the bus for the next leg of their journey through Virginia.⁸

At Farmville in Prince Edward County, the freedom riders were met by a crowd of whites and freshly painted COLORED ONLY and WHITE ONLY signs. In Farmville, freedom Rider William Mahoney reflected, "I [was] confronted with what the Southern white had called 'separate but equal.' A modern rest station with gleaming counters and picture windows was labeled 'white,' and a small wooden shack beside it was tagged 'colored.'"⁹ Despite the refusal of white officials to remove the signs of segregation, the riders were allowed to use the snack bar, restrooms, and water fountains without any violence or police interference. The riders progressed south from Farmville through Lynchburg with no incidents. Finally they rode into Danville, before crossing over the Virginia state line into North Carolina. In Danville, when the first bus rolled into town, Edward Blankenheim, a white Freedom Rider, and one other CORE member

⁸ Wiesbrot, *Freedom Bound*, 55-63.

⁹ "Freedom Rides," <http://www.watson.org/~nsa/blackhistory/civilrights-55-65/freeride.num>.

were denied service in the “colored” side of the terminal’s restaurant. Blankenheim reported that a black waiter asked him to go over to the white side of the restaurant to eat so that the man wouldn’t lose his job for serving him. He was also asked to “get over to the other side” by a white woman who worked at the terminal. While Blankenheim was not served, CORE riders on a later bus were.¹⁰ The passage of the riders into North Carolina signified the end of segregated interstate facilities in Virginia.

Virginia became the first and the last state that would quietly allow the Freedom Riders to integrate its interstate facilities. Riders were arrested and jailed in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia for attempting to use segregated facilities. In Anniston, Alabama, one bus was stoned and then firebombed. When riders were finally allowed to progress to Birmingham, Alabama, they were severely beaten by a mob and offered no police protection. Fearing for their safety and unable to secure buses to continue their journey, the riders flew from Alabama to New Orleans. Determined not to give in to violent resistance and to continue the bus rides across Alabama and Mississippi, students from Nashville flew to Birmingham to continue the Freedom Rides. They were quickly arrested and driven back to Tennessee and dropped over the state line. They re-organized and once again returned to Birmingham. They rode from Birmingham to Montgomery where they were surrounded by white resisters and severely beaten at the bus terminal as they attempted to exit the bus. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, upon hearing of the increasingly violent white resistance in Montgomery, dispatched

¹⁰ “Freedom Rider Jailed for Seeking Shoe Shine in N.C.,” *Richmond Afro-American*, 13 May 1961.

Federal marshals to Montgomery. The riders continued on into Mississippi, where they were arrested for integrating the bus terminal in Jackson. No Freedom Riders would ever reach New Orleans, but hundreds of students flocked to the Deep South to continue the Freedom Rides throughout the summer. Over 300 were arrested, and many spent their summer in prison in Alabama and Mississippi. In these Deep South states nonviolent action was used to attract national attention to the goal of integrated and free public accommodations for all Americans.

While no violence occurred in Virginia during the Freedom Rides, the demonstrator's passage through the state marked a turning point in white reaction to the civil rights movement in Virginia. As whites in the Deep South increased their violent resistance to civil rights demonstrations, localities in Virginia that embraced Deep South traditions, values, and views concerning race consistently reacted to civil rights demonstrations with increased force and violence. Danville provides one example in 1963. The entire Commonwealth became aware of the increase in violent resistance when public officials in Danville beat and harassed movement participants in their city. Moderates in Richmond denounced the actions of the Danville police, while other conservative statesmen and citizens supported the crackdown on protesters. The civil rights campaign in Virginia intensified in Danville as activists launched massive nonviolent protests during the summer of 1963. Their major miscalculation was to target city officials and legal authorities in Danville instead of launching an all-out campaign against retailers, restaurants, and industry. City government was virtually immune to

their attacks and the downtown business districts never felt the blow of a fully mobilized economic boycott as did the retailers in Richmond during 1960.

CHAPTER SIX: DANVILLE, 1963

During the summer of 1963, racial tension flared and then exploded in Danville as the NAACP and the newly-formed, loosely organized Danville Christian Progressive Association (DCPA), both under the leadership of Lawrence G. Campbell, used marches and pickets to demand of the city government of Danville the complete desegregation of all public accommodations. They also urged the employment of blacks in government positions. They began to march even before they had properly trained demonstrators in nonviolent tactics and before they had filled their ranks. Why they chose to focus on city government and not exact direct pressure on the business district when it had proved effective in Richmond is unknown. The earlier struggle in Richmond seemed to indicate that the market was more responsive than the government and that in time the government would respond to the demands of the business community. Adam Fairclough writes, "Like the failed movement in Albany, direct action was directed against the City Council rather than against the white business community...more entrenched and less affected by black patronage, white politicians remained invulnerable to such opposition." Furthermore, Fairclough argues that white politicians actually found themselves rewarded by their constituencies when they harshly countered the protests with political, judicial, and legal repression. These politicians knew that white tobacco

and textile workers in Danville considered themselves better than blacks socially and economically and would protect their jobs at all costs from black economic competition.¹

The first week of mass demonstrations lasted from May 31 through June 6. Protesters actively, though not always effectively, used nonviolent techniques to challenge the town's authorities. Danville's movement was led by local civil rights organizers who employed outside assistance from SNCC and SCLC in hopes of achieving goals related to equality in employment, voting rights, and access to public facilities. They were dependent on outside leadership because of the long history of disagreement between local civil rights leaders Chase, Dunlap, Campbell, Thomas, and Adams. The local campaign, directed by Northern SNCC field secretaries and activists, would ultimately fail to achieve most all of its goals because of forceful economic, political, legal, and social resistance to the movement by white Danville authorities and residents. These authorities and residents were particularly resistant to outside agencies, such as SNCC. They perceived SNCC to be an organization of outsiders who came to town in order to agitate the native black population to protest.

Despite its apprehension, the city accommodated the mass demonstrations on May 31 in an attempt to placate the demonstration's leadership and in hopes that it would be the only one of its kind in Danville. City Manager T. Edward Temple issued a permit for the march from Spring Street Municipal Parking lot to the steps of City Hall. Additionally, the march was provided police protection. As the marchers sang and

¹ Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The SCLC and MLK, Jr.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 145-147.

shouted for “Freedom,” the police, under orders of Chief Eugene McCain, directed vehicular traffic around the march. They discouraged hecklers. Chief McCain reported that the march was orderly and that adequate police support was given, despite the fact that there had been no intelligence reports about the march until several hours prior to its start.²

On the following afternoon, Saturday, June 1, marchers followed the same route to the steps of City Hall. Upon their arrival at City Hall, they sang, preached, chanted, and shouted for five hours (three hours longer than the previous day’s demonstration). Since protesters did not request a permit for the second day’s march, no permit was issued. While police were present in undetermined numbers at City Hall, they provided limited protection for the marchers from hecklers. Protesters used the following Sunday for prayer and the formulation of strategy for the upcoming marches to take place during the business week.

Demonstrations began again in earnest on Monday, June 4, as demonstrators marched on City Hall without a parade permit. Unlike previous marches, the June 4 march was conducted at 4:00 p.m., the hour of the shift change at Dan River Mills. The protesters at this hour marched in the streets in Danville near the mill and effectively delayed the shift change. Through their actions, the demonstrators intentionally declared war on the powerful economic and political institutions in Danville. The Temple Report from the City Manager’s office states that on June 4:

² T.E. Temple, “A Statement and Report of the Racial Demonstrations Which Have Transpired in the City of Danville, VA, During the Past Two Weeks,” *Report of the City Manager’s Office*, 1963.

As the demonstrators marched North on Main Street, they prepared to cross Main Street at an intersection. Approximately one-half of their number, including some six Negroes carrying a coffin, had crossed Main Street and reformed their demonstration ranks on the sidewalk. At this point, demonstration leaders, including Reverend Alexander L. Dunlap and Reverend Lawrence G. Campbell, dashed into the streets and forced vehicular traffic to stop by standing in the traffic lanes. These leaders signaled the balance of the demonstrators to enter the street against the traffic signals. The entire group spilled into the street completely blocking Main Street from curb to curb and halting the flow of rush hour traffic.³

Although the leadership of the movement in Danville splintered between followers of Rev. Reverend Lendell Chase, who balked at direct action demonstrations, and the followers of Rev. Dunlap and Rev. Campbell, who advocated direct action and confrontation, the protest marches continued throughout the next several weeks.

On Wednesday, June 5, 125 protesters assembled without a parade permit and marched through downtown Danville singing, "We Want Freedom! We Want Freedom, Now!" They sang, shouted, and marched their way into City Hall.⁴ Once inside, they went directly into the outer office of City Manager Edward Temple and requested a meeting with Mayor Stinson, who declined their request. They insisted that the Mayor hear their demands for equality in municipal employment. They demanded the employment of blacks as policemen, firemen, city clerks, meter readers, and typists. If he was not immediately forthcoming, they would have a seat on the floor and wait for him. Since Mayor Stinson again refused to meet with them, all 125 of the protesters took their

³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴ "Demonstrators Become Unruly; Ignore Pleas of Judge, Leader," *Danville Register*, 6 June 1963, A1; "125 Negroes Demonstrate in Danville," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 6 June 1963, A1.

seats on the floor of the City Manager's office.⁵ Chief McCain requested that they leave the building immediately. The protesters responded by shouting "the only way we will leave is to be carried out."⁶ When City Hall closed at 5:00 p.m., Chief McCain ordered the demonstrators to leave. When they refused, he ordered the arrest of five protesters, including Rev. Campbell and Rev. Dunlap. The activists were formally charged with "inciting to riot" and "contributing to the delinquency of a minor." The police quickly disbanded the remaining protesters by carrying and pushing them out of the doors of City Hall.

Shortly thereafter, Revs. Campbell and Dunlap were released from police custody. They gathered 200 demonstrators outside of City Hall and marched through residential neighborhoods and then to the Central Library, site of the 1960 battle for library desegregation. There on the front lawn, city police armed with fire hoses confronted the demonstrators. They were ordered by Corporation Court Judge Aiken to disband. The crowds dispersed under the threat of police violence, but vowed to march again the next day.

The following morning's *Danville Register* included two articles on the demonstration marches on City Hall as well as an editorial that illustrates, even in its condemnation of the marchers, the effectiveness of their strategy of singing and shouting out for "freedom." It is clear that nonviolent direct action gained recognition even from the opposition. In part, the article read:

⁵ Dottie Zellner and Danny Lyons, "Danville, Virginia: A Pamphlet by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee," June 1963.

⁶ Temple Report, 5.

Those Negroes who want to be first class citizens must begin by living and conducting themselves as first class citizens. Disturbing the peace and quiet of the city and its people is a sure way to prove to everybody that the disturbers are not ready to comport themselves as first class citizens. To them first class citizenry is a term. [It is] a slogan rather than a way of life. Those who are following a piper singing hymns instead of playing a pipe should realize the caricature they present when they shout for "Freedom-right now!" One does not have nor enjoy freedom by infringing upon the freedoms of others.⁷

On the morning of June 6, protest leaders released the following demands:

1. Appointment of a bi-racial committee.
2. Desegregation of all public accommodations, i.e., hotels, theaters, and medical facilities.
3. Desegregation of public schools.
4. Employment of Negroes by the city, i.e., police force, clerical and secretarial positions in the water, gas, and electrical departments, etc.
5. The dropping of all charges against those leaders who have been arrested.⁸

During the afternoon of June 6, marchers again protested at City Hall. They gathered only for a short time as they were informed that Mayor Stinson and City Councilman Charles A. Womack had agreed to meet with Rev. Campbell and Rev. Dunlap to discuss the concerns of black Danville residents. On hearing this news, the demonstrators left City Hall, effectively ending the demonstrations for the day. The meeting of the bi-racial committee was scheduled for the next day; however, it was never held, because late in the afternoon of June 6, Corporation Court Judge A.M. Aiken sent down an order "granting a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction prohibiting unlawful

⁷ "Freedom is for the Law-Abiding Only," *The Danville Register*, 6 June 1963, A4.

⁸ Powell, "Black Cloud over Danville."

demonstrations and actions.”⁹ This order prohibited further protest marches and demonstrations in Danville. Discussions between the movement leadership and the Danville city government collapsed. The DCPA organized and conducted marches on June 7, 8, and 9. Meanwhile, the Corporation Court on June 9 called for a grand jury investigation of the racial unrest in Danville as well as for the indictments of Rev. Campbell, Rev. Dunlap, and taxicab operator Julius Adams under Section 18.1-422 of the Code of Virginia (inciting to riot). Judge Aiken scheduled a preliminary hearing by the grand jury on July 1, 1963, to investigate those charged with inciting to riot, and he temporarily freed the three men on bond.

Before June 5, Rev. Campbell called both the state SCLC office and the New York office of SNCC to request additional help from national civil rights organizations. Avon Rollins, a SNCC field secretary, received the call at the New York SNCC office, where members of the executive committee were temporarily working after a fundraiser given by the Friends of SNCC. Avon Rollins spoke with Rev. Campbell.

He talked about all of the problems they were having in Danville. They couldn't get Dr. King there, they couldn't get others and the way they had been mistreated. He told a story about how they had beat a sixteen-year old pregnant girl and threw her down the steps and a crippled fellow . . . and how brutal they were in Danville.¹⁰

On the way home to Knoxville, Avon Rollins stopped in Danville to assist Rev. Campbell and the DCPA leadership with organizing effective nonviolent strategies and

⁹ *The Danville Bee*, 6 June 1963.

¹⁰ Avon Rollins, Interview.

demonstrations. Rollins planned to stay in Danville only a few days before returning to his movement commitments in the Deep South, but on Saturday, June 8, he was arrested for violating Judge Aiken's restriction on demonstrations. He was seen associating with protest leaders and demonstrators. When released on bond, he called the executive SNCC office and asked for assistance in Danville. James Forman, SNCC Executive Secretary, John Lewis, Chairman of SNCC, Field Secretary Bob Zellner, Photographer Danny Lyons, Journalist Dottie Miller (Zellner), Matt Jones, and other SNCC field workers quickly left their posts for Danville.

On Monday June 10, despite the Corporation Court Injunction, marchers left Bibleway Church (march headquarters) and arrived at City Hall at 9:30 a.m. and began to sing, clap, and shout as they had for the previous eleven days in Danville. The police watched the demonstrations and prepared to mobilize. The protestors argued that they would not obey unjust laws that violated their civil rights. The police maintained that it was their duty and legal responsibility to uphold the law and preserve peace in the city. The demonstrators marched twenty-eight blocks through the business district before returning to the steps of City Hall for another sing-in. The police, unnerved by the growing numbers of activists and tired of being restrained by the city government, arrested 38 of the marchers, including several leaders, and took them to the jail located at the rear of City Hall.

Later that afternoon a group of 65 demonstrators followed the police around the building into the alley behind City Hall to protest the morning arrests. Police Captain Norman Boswell ordered the protestors to leave or to face arrest. The protestors who

remained knelt down to pray. At the moment that they began to pray, fire trucks requested by the police arrived at the entrance of the alley that the protesters had just entered, effectively trapping the protestors. Angered at the defiant actions of the protestors, Chief McCain shouted over the din of the prayers, "I am tired of you people! I have told you to stay away! Let them have it!"¹¹ The firemen quickly rolled out fire-hoses and blasted water carrying over a thousand pounds of pressure at the crowd of demonstrators. The demonstrators were knocked to the ground by the force of the water and many were washed down the street. When the water was turned off, protestors attempted to run. Before being arrested, those lying or kneeling on the ground were severely beaten by police officers and recently deputized garbage collectors. At least 47 of the 65 demonstrators arrested that day required medical attention at Winslow Hospital. The others, including SNCC journalist Dottie Zellner, were beaten, but sustained injuries that required little or no immediate medical attention. Dottie Miller Zellner recalls:

We were all praying and then they turned the hoses on us. I was actually flat on the ground so I was clearly unarmed. This policeman came over to me and hit me with his nightstick. This was a gratuitous act of violence, this was not to restrain me, I was not in an aggressive pose toward anybody. I was on the ground, shoeless. I do remember the look in his eyes. I mean he had this sort of blank look. He wasn't grimacing. It looked like it was everyday business to him to hit a woman who was on the ground.¹²

Testifying in Corporation Court in four years later, Gloria Campbell, wife of Rev. Campbell, stated that on June 10:

¹¹ Corporation Court Records, "Testimony of Mrs. Gloria Campbell," 17 May 1967.

¹² Dottie Zellner, Interview.

All of a sudden a great force of water hit me from my back, and I was thrown to the pavement. Water shot up my clothes. I was beaten on my back by a policeman. I saw bodies washed up under parked cars. I heard terrible sounds. Screams like people were being burned up in a fire. As I tried to get up, I was beaten in my back.¹³

These tactics were similar to those of Police Chief “Bull” Connor in Birmingham that year.

The following day, the morning edition of the *Danville Register* included a copy of a telegram sent by U.S. Representative William M. Tuck (D.-Virginia) commending the police for the “forthright manner” in which they handled the “Negro demonstrators.” Tuck also added, “We do not need and will not tolerate any outside interfering. The police force in Danville will handle this situation in a commendable manner with a firm hand and resolute will.”¹⁴ Later that afternoon Rev. Chase led a group of 200 marchers to city hall to protest the previous night’s arrests and police brutality. Many of the 200 present with Rev. Chase were victims of the previous night’s violence. They marched with bandaged heads, arms in slings, and crutches to City Hall to reassert their commitment to desegregation and to the need for equal employment in city hiring. The crowd sang “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me’round.” Many carried placards reading “freedom from police brutality.”¹⁵ Rev. Chase proclaimed, “Tell our white brothers we

¹³ Testimony of Gloria Campbell, 17 May 1967.

¹⁴ “Danville Authorities Commended by Tuck,” *Danville Register*, 11 June 1963.

¹⁵ “Demonstrations to Continue, Danville Negro Leaders Say,” *Danville Register*, 12 June 1963.

will be here each day. We will be here tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.”¹⁶

Chase then called for silent prayer and asked the congregation to pray for God to forgive Danville. Following Rev. Chase, James Forman reaffirmed the nonviolent principle of hating the laws, not the people enforcing them by stating, “We don’t hate the policemen. They are products of segregation. We must feel sorry for them.”¹⁷

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in Danville the night of June 11 and along with Rev. Campbell spoke at a nightly mass meeting. His speech encouraged the crowd to face the moments of personal suffering in order to see the “glorious day” when they all could rejoice in collective freedom. In a commanding voice and sweeping rhythm, Dr. King preached:

You’ve got to be willing to face police forces, you’ve got to be willing to face vicious dogs. I still ask you the question; do you want to be free, tonight? Do you want to be free tonight? You’ve got to put on your walking shoes; you’ve got to fill up the jails of Danville, Virginia if you want to be free tonight. You’ve got to have Mayor Stinson at the point where he will look out of the windows of his city
And see a number that no man can match.¹⁸

Through his words, Dr. King asked Danville’s African-American community to mobilize and fully commit to the struggle for constitutional freedom in the city. What King did not realize was that he was speaking at the height of demonstrations in Danville. Black residents were fully mobilized at this time, but their morale could have been further

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “An Uneasy Calm Prevails as Racial Troubles Mount,” *Danville Register*, 12 June 1963.

¹⁸ Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Paris, France: UNESCO, 1999), 300.

bolstered if Dr. King had remained to launch a full-scale SCLC campaign. King did not remain, however, nor did he lead any marches or completely mobilize the SCLC in Danville. Therefore, the Danville campaign did not have the morale boost afforded the protesters in Richmond under the charismatic leadership of Oliver Hill. The local campaign in Danville might not have experienced discouraging setbacks if the SCLC had financially supported it and if there had been more media attention focused on the city. Dr. King's presence in Danville would have attracted more national media attention. With a budget scarcely more than \$1,000,000 for national administration and with only 250 workers in the field (mostly in Mississippi), SNCC was not in a position to fully support the local movement in Danville with bond money, staff, and a long term commitment. Though many in SNCC and in the local community made great financial and personal sacrifices for civil rights, they were no match for a fully mobilized police force supported by the white community and the judicial system of the state of Virginia.

On June 11, President John F. Kennedy addressed the nation in his "Report to the American People on Civil Rights." The President's address followed in the wake of intense violence and resistance to integration in Birmingham and in Danville. It was perhaps Kennedy's most eloquent statement on civil rights and his first public request for the passage of effective civil rights legislation. The President appealed to the nation to look at its proud heritage and devotion to liberty, to honor it, and to act to change the social, economic, and political oppression of black Americans. He called for immediate action and legislation.

I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives,
will stop and examine his conscience about this and other

related incidents. This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men were created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened. One hundred years have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.¹⁹

When the residents of Danville read the paper the next morning, they found that Medgar Evers, field secretary for the NAACP, had been shot in the back and killed in his own driveway the previous night in Jackson, Mississippi. They read that racial violence in Alabama exploded once again as protesters and picketers filled the jails and the business district of Birmingham, Alabama. And they read in the *Danville Register* that black protesters in Danville resolved to keep fighting through boycotts, voter registration drives, and daily marches.

The next showdown between police and the combined forces of DCPA began on the afternoon of June 13, 1963. Led by Rev. Chase, 250 demonstrators marched on City Hall to demand a meeting with Mayor Stinson. When they arrived, Rev. Chase and four others attempted to enter the building, but all doors were locked and the white city government officials peering out behind the windows refused to let them in. The five leaders rejoined the mass of protestors gathered on the stairs of City Hall and collectively decided to stay all afternoon and night until the Mayor agreed to a meeting with the leadership of the DCPA. From 2:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m., the activists sang, shouted

¹⁹ President John F. Kennedy, "Report to the Nation on Civil Rights," 11 June 1963.

“Freedom, now!” prayed, danced, ate, and listened to a lecture on black history given by James Forman. They also listened to other demonstration speakers.

At 11:00 p.m. the police, who had previously blocked off a four-block area around the demonstration, huddled to confer and then rapidly moved their lines within close range of the protesters. As the police moved, fire trucks arrived and unloaded their high-powered hoses close to the demonstrators. Police came out of the front doors of City Hall and appeared at the back of the demonstrators, tapping their billy clubs against their hands. The civil rights crusaders began to huddle on the stairs, many covered their faces and vital organs, others grabbed the stair railing to protect themselves from the high-pressure blasts of water that were anticipated, and still others began to flee from the police who were moving in to disperse the crowd. Over 50 people were prepared to bear the force of the high pressure hoses located no more than fifteen feet away from them. James Forman, perceiving the gravity of the situation, leaped up from his place on the steps and began to confront Chief McCain verbally. “What are you doing?” Forman asked loudly and with great courage, “What are you doing?” As Forman continued to confront Chief McCain, the demonstrators understood that Forman’s distraction allowed them to escape. They ran from the steps followed by police, but some were injured as they fled to the safe haven of the black residential neighborhoods of Danville.²⁰ Dottie Zellner, pondering her second encounter with brutal Danville policemen within four days recalls:

²⁰ SNCC, “Danville, 1963.”

We were all surprised that Danville was so terrible. Here was Virginia, this relatively Northern Southern state, and the reaction was so vicious. They responded and it could have been in the heart of Mississippi. They deputized everybody, all these white men. It was a license to really beat up on people. They were intending to hurt us on those City Hall steps. [If] we had not left when we did, there would have been unbelievable bloodshed.²¹

The state and city governments' responses to the heightened demonstrations were swift and immediate. After a late-night mass meeting at High Street Baptist Church immediately following the demonstration on June 13, policemen armed with submachine guns and an armored car set up roadblocks near the church and searched several cars, harassing many as they left the mass meeting.²² On June 14, additional state troopers were dispatched to Danville to reinforce 30 who had been sent there after the June 10 demonstration. Furthermore, City Council adopted City Ordinance Number 63-6.2, a highly restrictive statute that stated that all assemblies must be free of noise, clapping, and singing. It required marchers to walk in single file lines with ten feet of space between each individual, and prohibited demonstrations in public buildings. Under the ordinance only six people were allowed to protest at a time and everyone under the age of eighteen was restricted from participating in demonstrations.²³ On June 27, eleven Danville demonstrators, including Dottie Miller (Zellner), Bob Zellner, Avon Rollins, and Daniel Foss were indicted under the same statute that was used to arrest and convict John Brown at Harper's Ferry. The eleven were charged with "inciting the colored

²¹ Dottie Zellner, Interview.

²² SNCC, "Danville, 1963."

²³ *Code of the City of Danville, Virginia, 63-6.2.*

population to acts of war against the white population.”²⁴ While the charges were inflated, in some regard they reflected the spirit of the movement—nonviolent warfare had been declared against the white population of Danville.

SNCC organizers defined their goals through different interpretations of the term “freedom.” Avon Rollins asserts that SNCC’s concerted efforts in Danville were driven by the organization’s belief that young people would turn the world upside right and that freedom was achievable through equal access to public accommodation. He recalls, “I perceived freedom in terms of equality of opportunity. In terms of providing equal access to voting, first-class quality education, public positions, and to the economics that exist in a community.”²⁵ Rollins’ definition presents the concrete goals of SNCC’s mission in Danville. Matt Jones, a Freedom Singer and SNCC activist, illustrates a more ideological, philosophical understanding of the goal of freedom: “We believed freedom was a place where everybody respected everybody—where everybody loved. We called it the beloved community—a place with no racism, no lynchings. We had this dream in our heads. We were fighting until we saw it.”²⁶ From these new constructions of freedom, SNCC developed their rhetoric of freedom and used it as a weapon in a war over the integration of government jobs and community facilities in Danville. While a rhetoric of freedom was not new to civil rights campaigns, it was certainly employed in Richmond’s campaign; it was the tool of choice the Danville protestors used to appeal to black

²⁴ SNCC, “Danville, 1963,” and “10 Indicted in Rioting at Danville,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 22 June 1963.

²⁵ Avon Rollins, Interview.

²⁶ Matthew Jones, Interview.

residents and to any sympathetic whites who might join their struggle. Unlike Richmond, however, there proved to be very few sympathetic whites.

One way the rhetoric of freedom was creatively implemented in Danville was through “freedom calls.” Freedom callers harassed city government offices, the newspaper offices of the *Bee* and the *Register*, and private homes at all hours of the day and night by telephoning them, saying “freedom,” and then hanging up. On business days, local newspapers would often receive over one hundred calls.²⁷

Two creative implementations of freedom rhetoric were the distribution and circulation of leaflets throughout the black community and the picketing of stores and offices downtown. The leaflets, distributed in black residential neighborhoods, read:

Stay out of downtown Danville; This is a fight to the finish
for your freedom. Stay out of downtown Danville; If you
don't fight with all your body, then you don't deserve
freedom.²⁸

In addition to the leaflets, picketers were visible daily during the summer of 1963 walking outside municipal buildings and on the sidewalks in the business district. Picket signs often stated: “Let the light of freedom shine,” “Everyone register and vote to win freedom,” “We want all our freedom here and now,” “White citizens—search your souls for the truth,” “Police are brutal—register,” “Mothers for Freedom,” “Chief McCain beat me,” and “Negroes want first class citizenship.”²⁹ Other means of protest included

²⁷ Powell, “Black Cloud Over Danville,” 60.

²⁸ “Leaflet of Unkown Origin.” Danville Police Department file.

²⁹ “Temple Report,” 41-48.

freedom songs, marches on City Hall and boycotts of vendors in the business district.

After the attacks on protesters in mid-June 1963, SNCC organizers intensified their drive to educate student protesters through nonviolent training sessions.

SNCC organizers Jones and Rollins taught these training sessions. They emphasized that while many civil rights workers had adopted nonviolence as a way of life, it was not necessary to do so to use it as a tactic. This means that a person could feel anger, verbalize that anger, and even act on that anger outside of the movement, but that person could not react towards white officials violently while participating in the demonstrations because that would violate the group commitment to nonviolent tactics. In the Danville Campaign, nonviolence was used as an effective social and political tactic, more so than as a personal philosophy. SNCC leadership advocated nonviolence because it did not want black protesters to appear to be aggressors. Instead, they wanted the police to appear as aggressors to the media. Avon Rollins has argued that common sense told an individual that it was not to his advantage to rise up and violently attack a superior armed force. “If you are surrounded by twenty, thirty, forty policemen with guns and billy clubs . . . even if you do not believe in nonviolence it is not to your advantage to strike back and be totally brutalized and maybe killed.” He added, “We taught people, however, [they] might believe from a strategy standpoint . . . to accept nonviolence—not to strike back, not to carry weapons.”³⁰ Demonstrators were also taught how to roll up in a ball to protect their vital organs, to try to look their attacker in

³⁰ Avon Rollins, Interview.

the eye fearlessly while being attacked, and to be prepared to be harassed or arrested by the police.³¹

Nonviolent tactics proved effective in Danville throughout the late summer months of 1963. Speaking on the power of nonviolence, Matt Jones comments,

We looked at it from the standpoint of being able to walk in the face of another person and the person knows you don't have any weapons and you show no fear. By not having a weapon they felt funny pulling things out on you so they did not do it for a while. They would arrest us. I saw the power of how it affected other people to have to arrest a nonviolent person when they know they are right, we would not have used it if it had not worked.³²

While SNCC and SCLC activism in Danville steadily decreased after the summer of 1963, local activists continued their campaign for equality until 1964. Through the concerted efforts of early SNCC organizers, SCLC voter registration coordinators, NAACP attorneys and local activists, nonviolent-induced change altered the social and political structures of the community. As a result of the protests, the state and local government met a few of the goals previously articulated by the local black leaders, but overall the protests did not change segregated Danville.

By the fall of 1963, the school board integrated Danville's public schools under federal court order, the city hired its first black police officer, several stores and restaurants desegregated their facilities, and a few city jobs were made accessible to black residents. Through a voter registration drive led by Herbert Coulton of SCLC, over 738

³¹ Mathew Jones, Interview.

³² Ibid.

black Danville residents registered to vote in time for the 1964 presidential election. This increased the number of registered black voters to approximately 3,393. In reality, however, these were paltry achievements because they did not change the face of segregation in Danville. Schools remained segregated for many months to come, restaurants and stores were inaccessible to blacks, and white officials controlled the schools, courts, and government offices. While local black leaders encouraged an international boycott of Dan River Mills in order to increase political and economic pressure on mill owners and the local government, the effort proved ineffective because of lack of participation and support in Danville as well as outside of the city. By December of 1963 the movement in Danville faltered because many protestors returned to school and work. The start of school and fall tobacco production had a significant impact on the movement since the many participants were either high school students or tobacco laborers. This problem of not having enough participants had not been an issue in the Richmond movement. Spirits were also dampened due to President Kennedy's assassination and the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. One factor contributing to the disillusionment of black residents was that the white community and white authorities continued to resist any serious changes in Jim Crow policy and rebuffed further negotiations with local black leaders. Full access to public accommodations continued to elude black citizens of Danville until well after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. SCLC acknowledged the few advances in civil rights that did exist by late September 1963 at the SCLC annual convention in Richmond. SCLC even considered the possibility of a more extensive campaign in Danville in order

to force the complete destruction of Jim Crow in Danville and to bolster the spirits of black residents in the city. SCLC would never supply this help, though the idea attracted considerable debate at the annual meeting. SNCC moved its leadership cadre out of Virginia and into Birmingham, Alabama, and throughout the state of Mississippi. They would increase the nation's focus on the civil rights movement by attacking the heart of the Jim Crow South. They hoped that if they could defeat segregationist policies in the two most resistant states, then segregation would also crumble throughout the Upper South.

While SNCC became involved in Alabama and Mississippi, the SCLC met in Richmond to discuss their next plan of action. The meeting was held in Richmond from September 24 to September 28. The goal was to discuss the Birmingham and Danville demonstrations, the September 15 church bombing at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four young girls in Birmingham, and to plan political and economic protest strategies for the upcoming presidential election year.

CONCLUSION

The differences between the Richmond and Danville movements are clear. In Richmond, a group of well-organized students supported by the legal, political, and spiritual resources of the black community desegregated public facilities in less than a year. In Danville, movement leaders bickered among themselves, financial support was limited, and legal restrictions created impenetrable barriers. Under these conditions, Danville protesters were only able to integrate the public library and gain access to a few positions in local government.

The Richmond movement benefited from circumstances that eluded the Danville movement, including the outrage of Northern students, the economic independence of the students, and the adoption of nonviolence as a philosophy of life. The student-led protest in Richmond was further advanced by support from the Richmond black community in the form of willing volunteers to take students' places on the picket lines and the boycott of retail businesses. These key factors contributed to the success of the Richmond movement.

The crucial role of Northern students should not be underestimated in the Richmond movement. These students ventured south to attend a distinguished black institution of higher learning, bringing with them middle class expectations regarding education and personal freedom. They had grown up in the integrated North, where they were accustomed to traveling, shopping, and eating freely in public establishments.

Northern students were extremely frustrated with the restraints placed on their personal freedom in Richmond. They readily organized to assert their right to equal access.

That the protest was student-led also produced its advantage of financial independence from the city and its white residents. The college students were generally financially supported by their parents, grants, scholarships, or loans, protecting student protesters from the financial retribution of white employers or landlords. Many students received room, board, and employment on campus and did not have to seek housing or employment outside of Virginia Union. They were insulated from fears of losing jobs and homes because of participation in the demonstrations, fears that many Danville protesters faced.

The decision of the Richmond movement to adopt nonviolence not only as a tactic but also as a philosophy of life proved critical to its success. Every decision, action, thought, and mass meeting in Richmond was guided by the principle that every person must be loving, forgiving, and nonviolent. If participants could not subscribe to this philosophy of nonviolence, they were asked not to participate. This dedication to nonviolence as a philosophy strengthened the movement because every person in the movement agreed to follow the same principles, leading to less disagreement over tactics, behavior, and goals in Richmond as compared to Danville. The Richmond movement also benefited from the support of the community and of SCLC, the organization dedicated to the philosophy and training of nonviolence. Community supporters of the movement adopted the students' philosophy of nonviolence by rallying around them and filling in on the picket lines when the students needed to attend their classes. This

additional support sustained the morale and activism of the Richmond movement for many months.

This support of the black community coupled with the fact that black residents comprised 40% of all retail store patrons in Richmond, meant that the white business establishment was facing a formidable economic and political foe. These businessmen knew their businesses would not be able to survive a prolonged economic boycott by 40% of their patrons. They agreed to a compromise to avoid losing additional profit.

Though the Danville movement contrasted from the Richmond movement in many respects, several similar factors did advance both movements. These factors included the ambivalent attitude of student protesters towards their parents' conciliatory strategies in regards to desegregation, the compromising nature of white authorities when caught off guard by protesters, and the fact that the sit-in demonstrations in both cities transcended socio-economic differences in the black community.

The intrinsic rebellious nature of teenagers fueled the immediate demands of student protesters. They were impatient with the hesitant "wait and see" attitude of their parents' generation. The students saw that, with the *Brown* decision and the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, America was slowly changing its segregationist policies. The students wanted to encourage this change, ensure its success, and force the speed by which change was realized.

The element of surprise was critical in Richmond because it allowed student protesters to activate without interference from the police or white business establishment. They had sufficient time to discuss their tactics, train nonviolently,

organize, and even walk to their respective sit-in stores or restaurants. In short, they had the tactical upper-hand because white officials were forced to organize and respond quickly without the benefit of weighing solutions to effectively end the sit-ins. The result was a scrambling effort by police to arrest and book the nonviolent protesters, thereby further angering the black community and encouraging others to join the protests. Upon their release, the protesters reorganized and sat in again at stores and restaurants. It is clear from newspaper accounts of the protests that the Richmond police, the General Assembly, and the Governor took several days to organize a strategy to end the sit-ins. In the interim, the protesters received considerable media exposure in Richmond, allowing their goals and intentions to be clearly stated and heard in the greater Richmond metropolitan area.

The surprise element of the Richmond movement was just one of many civil rights protests that swept through the South in February 1960 and caught the white establishment off guard. It was the element of surprise that resulted in the one concrete success in Danville, where no one had foreseen the library sit-in by 25 local students. The librarians, local police, city council, and Danville residents were surprised by the protest and could react only after the fact. Even this reaction was slow and mired in the disagreement between city officials and residents in Danville. This sluggish reaction and a willingness to appease protesters in order to stave off future protests led to the “vertical integration” compromise in Danville. Unfortunately, the library sit-in was the first and only instance surprise was used in Danville.

The final significant similarity between the Danville and Richmond movements was the dissolution of the black communities' previous socio-economic divisions between middle class and working class residents. This suspension of classism can be attributed to a unity of purpose and shared Christian values and morals. Additionally, their racial identity, the fear of economic reprisal against adult members of the community, and vulnerability to the white judicial, political, and social establishment in both cities unified the economic classes in both black communities.

Despite the similarities, the movement in Danville had limited success and was considered a failure by many participants and movement historians. Numerous factors hindered the Danville movement, including nonviolence used as a tactic instead of as a philosophy of life, less economic influence on retail establishments, and greater economic dependence on industries controlled by white residents. Additionally, retail boycotts protests were launched late in the movement, Danville authorities and white residents had ample opportunity to respond to the protests, protesters were unprepared for the violent nature of white resistance, and the use of placards, boycotts, and fliers in the black community and downtown was significantly delayed. Finally, a court injunction prevented youth from participation in protest activities. The three most critical causes of the collapse of the Danville movement were the legal challenges, the too-late boycott, and the lack of an element of surprise.

It is clear from their interviews that Avon Rollins and Matt Jones of SNCC had concentrated their efforts on recruiting the youth of Danville and surrounding all-black colleges to participate in the protest marches. Their strategy was considered sound

because many of the youth were not as susceptible to white economic retribution as their parents. This recruiting strategy resulted in significant percentage of Danville movement participants under the age of 18. The injunction issued by the Corporation Court barred any person under the age of 18 from participating in demonstrations. Thus the injunction dramatically reduced the number of protesters available. Following the injunction, the police far outnumbered the protesters, encouraging the expansion of police repression, and causing further thinning of the ranks of protesters.

Additionally, while Richmond protesters had the legal support of well-known attorney Oliver Hill and a court willing to hear both sides of the issue, Danville civil rights attorneys confronted a racist, conservative, well-supported Corporation Court with a judge who embraced a biased stance in favor of “massive resistance” even before he had heard the first case related to the demonstrations and the boycott.

Further hindering the Danville movement was the fact that, although demonstrations began in early May, a boycott of Danville’s business district did not begin until mid-June 1963. The Danville movement at first targeted city government in hopes of achieving equal access to local government jobs. Only when SCLC and SNCC began to organize the civil rights organizations in Danville in mid-June did the movement seek to boycott Danville’s stores and restaurants. White retailers, aware of the 1960 boycott in Richmond and the 1963 boycott in Birmingham, had time to assure their white customers that their facilities would remain open, active, and segregated even in the face of a civil rights boycott. White citizens angry at the disruptions and “agitators” resolved to continue shopping downtown. Supportive of business owners, white residents in

Danville did not badger the retailers to end the disruptions in the business district as did many residents in Richmond when they grew tired of the commotion downtown.

Needless to say, the boycott in Danville was unable to stem the flow of consumers, specifically white consumers, into downtown restaurants and stores.

By 1963, the civil rights movement in the South had lost the element of surprise. After the 1960 sit-ins and the 1961 Freedom Rides swept through the South, many white communities either began to embrace integration or to brace themselves to resist it. With the 1960 library sit-ins and the Freedom Riders passage through town, white Danville residents realized that their city was a target of civil rights organizers in Virginia. With growing protests across the South, Danville trained its police force to restrain and arrest demonstrators. White residents became angry and frustrated with what they perceived to be the end of the “Southern way of life.” As a growing metropolitan area, Richmond was willing to accept change if it meant that the economic foundations of the city would benefit, but Danville’s white residents were clinging to their identity based on racial superiority, conservatism, Confederacy, and farm and factory production. Danville was more than prepared to respond to civil rights protesters in the summer of 1963 using whatever means necessary, but protesters were not ready to encounter violence in Virginia. After all, wasn’t Virginia “a relatively Northern-Southern state?”

The Danville movement ultimately failed to meet its goals because of the intransigent nature of white resistance and the lack of preparedness and unity on the part of the civil rights leadership in Danville (namely within SNCC and SCLC). In Richmond in 1963, student and adult participants of SCLC met to discuss the Danville campaign

and other civil rights activities in the South. The consensus at the meetings pushed the focus of the civil rights campaign to the Deep South and what momentum that had been gained in Danville was lost. This tobacco and textile town didn't see full desegregation of public accommodations and schools until the early 1970s.

EPILOGUE:
THE SCLC ANNUAL CONVENTION IN RICHMOND, 1963

On September 24, 1963, 500 delegates crowded into the foyers and banquet halls of Richmond's John Marshall Hotel for the annual meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The theme of the meeting was "Freedom, Now." This meeting marked an intersection of the Danville and Richmond civil rights campaigns as well as the conclusion of a generally successful, yet violent, year in the movement.

At the SCLC convention, the issues and concerns about the Danville movement were raised, discussed, and later dismissed within a hotel that was segregated until 1961. The Richmond convention demonstrated the achievement of middle class aspirations and freedom in that city. Civil rights issues in Richmond attracted little attention and discussion at the convention. Delegates wanted to figure out where they needed to focus their attention next. Who would benefit from their resources the most? Where could they be successful?

The SCLC convention was a significant turning point in the civil rights movement. After 1963, the movement would spread from Upper South states such as Maryland, Tennessee, and North Carolina to the Deep South states of Alabama and Mississippi as well as to urban areas such as Chicago and Memphis. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the movement's goals shifted from equal access to public accommodations to voting rights. Tensions within SNCC, CORE, SCLC, and the NAACP led to the fragmentation and radicalization of the student movement after 1965. Other controversial issues facing the movement after 1963 were the influx of white

students into civil rights campaigns like Freedom Summer and the tentative actions of the Johnson administration on civil rights issues. Most importantly, the SCLC meeting in Richmond in 1963 marks the intersection of conflicting organizational approaches of civil rights leaders.

Curtis Harris, President of the Virginia Unit of the SCLC, offered this opening greeting to the convention:

It is our sincere pleasure to welcome the delegates of The Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Richmond. We of the Virginia Unit of SCLC are still struggling to be free men. Our efforts thus far to some degree have been successful due to the complete cooperation of some spirited citizens of Richmond and the adjoining areas. Our freedom will one day be a complete freedom and it shall come on the shoulders of these dedicated souls. On this day America will realize her full self-hood as intended by her founding fathers.¹

From the outset, the meeting determined new economic, political, and social strategies for awakening the nation to the immediacy of civil rights issues and for pushing Congress and President Kennedy to pass viable and effective civil rights legislation. In the wake of Dr. King's August 28 March on Washington, violent protests in Birmingham and Danville, and the September 15 church bombing, the conference delegates sought to create new strategies for social change. Specifically, SCLC's leadership wanted to respond to well-entrenched white resistance in the South and to hesitant Federal Government by unifying local civil rights boycotts into a large and crippling economic blockade that would stifle the nation's productivity. During the four-day convention, all

¹ Curtis Harris, "Program for the Seventh Annual Southern Christian Leadership Conference," 5.

major factions within SCLC expressed policy preferences to be considered by the delegation. These resulting speeches reflected SCLC's commitment to nonviolent direct action.

In a press conference on September 24, Dr. King acknowledged the "terrible situation" in Danville. He promised to send a task force to Danville to continue to mobilize black residents in support of anti-segregation protests and boycotts in the small textile town. "If we can break the barriers in Danville" King stated, "we can break them in the whole state—Virginia has token integration only." As stated before, King's efforts in Danville were too little, too late. Furthermore, he mapped out a "Southwide" selective buying campaign against companies that severely discriminated against black employees. The aim of such a campaign would be to improve job opportunities for blacks. When asked why Richmond was chosen for the convention, Rev. Ralph Abernathy noted, "Virginia is really the leader of the Southern segregationist forces. As Virginia goes, the South will go. This week's conference will seek to give inspiration, direction, and encouragement to Virginia Negroes so they can start nonviolent direct action against the walls of segregation."² Dr. Milton A. Reid, Regional Representative in Virginia for SCLC, elaborated on why the SCLC meeting was called in Richmond. He offered this statement about the civil rights struggle in Virginia.

As we witness police brutality, fire hoses, angry dogs and governmental intimidation in the rocky hills of Danville, as we witness 3,000 demonstrating students in the lowlands of Norfolk, our largest city, as we stand trials and negotiate with a snail pace moving bi-racial commission in

² "King; at SCLC Event Here, Aims at Barriers in Danville," *Richmond News-Leader*, 24 September 1963, A10.

Petersburg, as we are offered compromises and extended promises in Martinsville, tokenism in Roanoke, having reached a stalemate in Richmond, we realize that we are not free. No, we are not free in the birthplace of the nation, but we welcome you to the field of battle for freedom in Virginia. We need you here in Virginia—for the child, democracy, needs to be inoculated with the serum of direct action, corrected with the therapeutic treatment of legal defense and nonviolently transformed by the cooling balm of good faith negotiations. We need you here because you are experienced, prepared and ready to administer to the ills of our demoralizing democracy. Our Danville dogs bite just like the dogs of Birmingham. Our Danville policemen were probably trained in the Birmingham elementary police school. There is very little difference between your Bull O'Connor and our Bull McCain. If the fire department could not drown out the flames of freedom in Birmingham, they are not going to diminish them in our Commonwealth—the birthplace of the nation, mother of presidents, the mother of states, and the embryonic inception of our democracy.³

As they prepared to “bring down the walls of Jericho,” these statements illustrated an increasing urgency within the movement to intensify its efforts in key cities and to inspire immediate policy reversals throughout the South in order to protect democracy in America.

Speaking on the night of September 24, State Senator Leroy Johnson, a black elected official from Georgia, employed the rhetoric of freedom to announce his belief that the freedom movement would soon reap the benefits of the hard work and love it had sown. He asserted, “We are witnessing for the first time a true people’s revolution, based on a passion for freedom. It is in this period that human dignity and first class citizenship

³ Opening speech given by Dr. Milton A. Reid, Regional Representative, SCLC at The Southern Christian Leadership Conference Annual Convention held at the John Marshall Hotel, September 24, 1963.

will come into its own.”⁴ Rev. Wyatt T. Walker also commented on the intensifying force of the movement to influence American society:

The basic approach of the nonviolent revolution will not change. It will be marked by its frequency and intensity. It is already evident that the South will not be the chief locus of activity. The entire nation will feel the brunt of the non-violent forces' demands. The so-called freedom movement can no longer be categorized as irresponsible rantings of extremist forces. Acts of violence have aroused hundreds of thousands of persons in support of the Negroes' efforts.⁵

Johnson's speech also conveyed a sense of urgency and a yearning to expand the movement through intensified direct action campaigns in the Deep South that would inspire a national response and speedily reverse resistance to voting rights and integration in the South. The speeches on the first night of the conference were intense, ambitious, and commanding by SCLC standards, but in their totality they presented the goals of a unified civil rights organization. The debate and the presentations on the second day, however, proved more contentious.

Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, and Dr. King, President of SCLC, debated whose strategy for conducting civil rights campaigns was the more advantageous. Dr. King advocated a nationwide withdrawal from Christmas shopping and continued massive direct action campaigns in Birmingham and Danville, as well as a voting rights march in Montgomery. Wilkins, on the other hand, advised caution, and “statesmanship,” meaning he only supported direct action campaigns that would not

⁴ “Power Structure of South is Called Key in Rights Drive,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 25 September 1963, A9.

⁵ “Conference Continues: Church Blast Held Not Convincing,” *Richmond News-Leader*, 25 September 1963, A13.

provoke the white community to further violence. Further, he supported a “flexible” civil rights program that combined limited direct action with court suits and congressional letter writing campaigns. Commenting on Dr. King’s suggested Christmas boycott, Wilkins stated, “Such a boycott would reverse the whole concept of yuletide. I find it difficult to go against Santa Claus.”⁶ The heated debate between Wilkins and King reflected a larger debate between the ranks of the NAACP and the SCLC—slow versus immediate change. This exchange of rhetoric and policy marked only one difference of opinion. Another statement made by Dr. King was an indirect attack on members of SCLC and SNCC who adopted nonviolence only as a tactic but not as a philosophy. Dr. King wanted everyone involved in the movement to adopt nonviolence as both a personal philosophy and as a tactic. In the “Message from the President” he wrote,

There is a great temptation to accept nonviolence solely as a strategy, a device; this we must guard against. This is one of the chief aims of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; to broadly disseminate through intensive training the heart of nonviolence, that our commitment to nonviolence will not only be a technique, but shall become for us a way of life with love and redemption at its center.⁷

The more significant disagreement over policy pitted the rank and file of SCLC against a platform presented by young adult members of SNCC and SCLC. SNCC requested that the SCLC join SNCC in participating in a national civil disobedience campaign that included “the creation of a nonviolent army, refusal to pay state and local taxes, a general

⁶ “King, Wilkins Voice Different Ideas,” *Richmond News Leader*, 27 September 1963, A23; “Yule Shopping Boycott, Danville Protests Urged,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 27 September 1963, A11.

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Program for the Seventh Annual Southern Christian Leadership Conference,” 3.

work stoppage, and the interruption of communications with Montgomery, Alabama, by mass sit-downs on highways and railroad tracks. It also called for tying up telephone lines.”⁸ In part, the radical suggestions made in this statement stemmed from feelings of anguish and guilt many members of SNCC and SCLC had in the wake of the Birmingham Church Bombing. Diane Nash Bevel, who worked for both SNCC and SCLC, presented this platform to the convention. Bevel later recalled how the platform presented at the SCLC convention came into existence. She remembered that following the church bombing on Sunday September 15, 1963:

Jim [Bevel] came in and told me about the bombing that had taken place and we felt that SCLC should meet and decide what our response to it should be even if we decided not to do anything. We felt it was important to have a suggestion for action that could be modified or discarded, but just a starting point of what we could do and the things you mentioned was the draft that Jim and I pulled together that afternoon. Jim and I really were grieved that day and we felt that the girls probably would not have been killed if there had been no civil rights movement. We felt very involved and felt that as an adult man and woman we could not simply allow children to be killed and do nothing. We drew up the draft. The ultimate goal was to get the right to vote. That was one of a number of presentations to various groups of people. It was rejected for quite awhile. Even though we disagreed on strategy a lot of people really were on the same team.⁹

Despite the crowd’s empathy, the convention failed to adopt the student platform. Many deemed its tenets radical and untimely. Nevertheless, the convention did approve Dr.

⁸ “Yule Shopping Boycott, Danville Protests Urged.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 27 September 1963.

⁹ Diane Nash, Interview.

King's platform, including financial contributions made by SCLC to civil rights organizations in Birmingham in honor of the four young girls killed there. Furthermore, King's platform initiated a program for selective yuletide buying in Birmingham (although no boycott). It also included a resolution requesting that all civil and criminal civil rights cases be placed in federal courts and another resolution seeking the passage of effective civil rights legislation in the coming year.¹⁰

The platform adopted by the convention illustrates that the delegates were able to compromise on some issues. After the convention in 1963, however, compromises among civil rights organizations became harder to negotiate and to sustain. While Dr. King's Christmas boycott did not pass, his proposed direct action campaigns in Danville and Birmingham were accepted. Roy Wilkins' hesitancy fell under much criticism, but his desire to fight inequity in the federal courts received a nod of approval by the SCLC. Young adult members of SCLC and SNCC were satisfied that the convention willingly advocated intensified and frequent direct action campaigns across the South and economic nonviolent boycotts in Northern cities.

The last evening of the convention was devoted to fence mending between the four major civil rights organizations (SCLC, NAACP, SNCC, and CORE). Rev. Walker declared that "although the SCLC may differ in its approach with NAACP and SNCC, the goal of all the organizations is the same." Roy Wilkins paid tribute to Dr. King in his

¹⁰ SCLC Newsletter, "SCLC Holds Most Successful Convention; Upwards of 5,000 Attend Night Sessions," 2, No. 1 (October 1963).

final convention speech: "Dr. King is a man who has awakened the moral conscience of the nation and the world."¹¹

The close of the SCLC convention on September 27, 1963, also marked the approximate end of civil rights direct action campaigns in Virginia. Although small local demonstrations would occur in Danville until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, Dr. King's massive demonstration in Danville never materialized as emphasis in the movement shifted to intensive voting rights campaigns in Alabama and Mississippi. Without consistent local support for the movement in Danville, movement leaders decided that their money, troops, time, and energy would be more effective if concentrated in one area of the South. Furthermore, they believed that Virginia's segregationist system would fall when the oppressive political and business establishment fell in Alabama and Mississippi. Fighting a civil rights battle already bogged down in Danville's courtrooms would not be proactive or effective. Local movements in Virginia and the Upper South would have to fend for themselves and rely on local support while the larger national organizations declared non-violent warfare on the Deep South. Virginia's civil rights battles continued for several more years in courtrooms and council meetings across the state, but the era of mass sit-in demonstrations, marches, and jail-ins had passed.

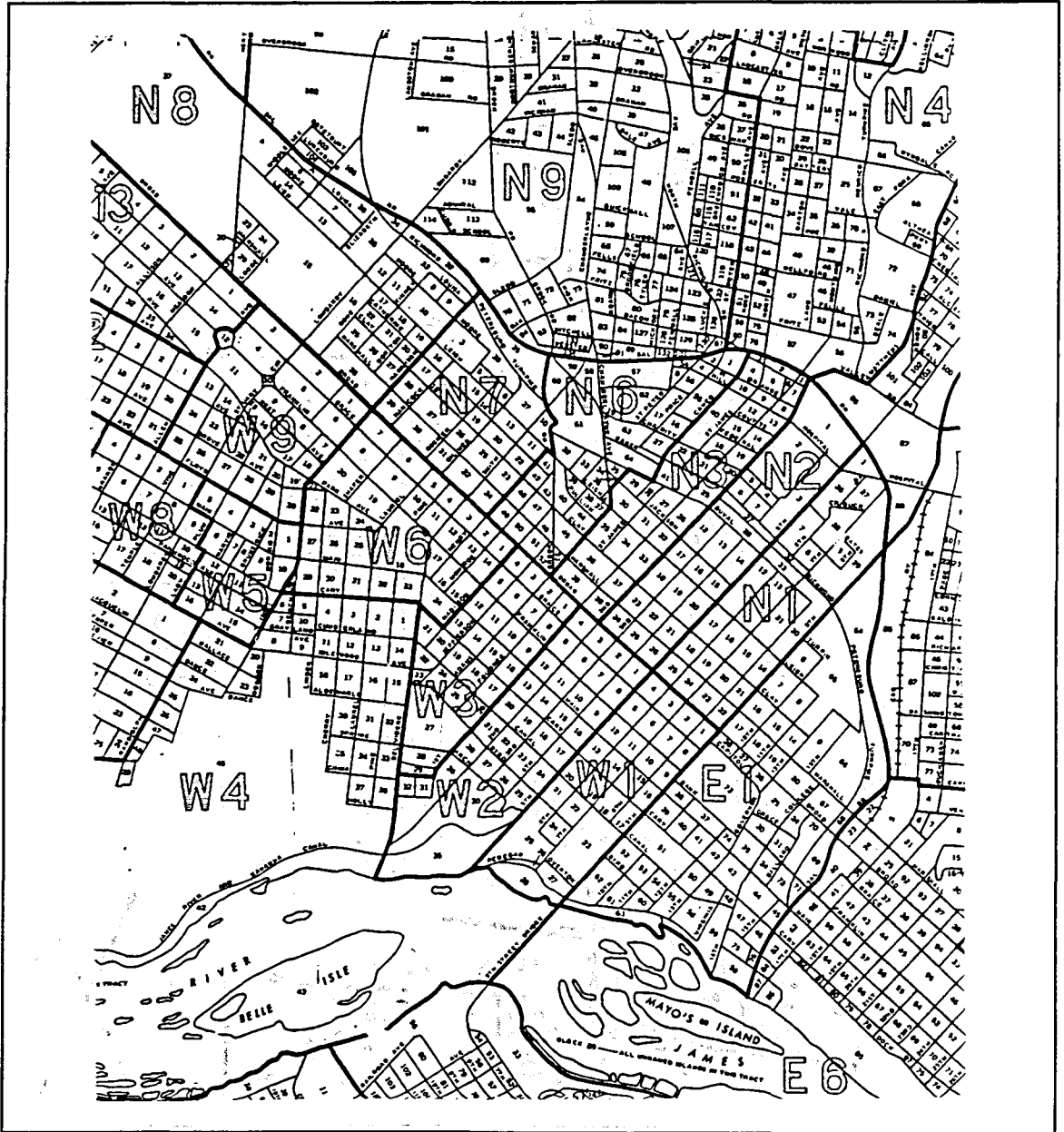
In such Upper South states as Virginia, the size of population, the economic foundations, and the social beliefs that residents held in certain municipalities determined whether or not direct action campaigns for civil rights would succeed or fail. In Danville,

¹¹ Ibid.

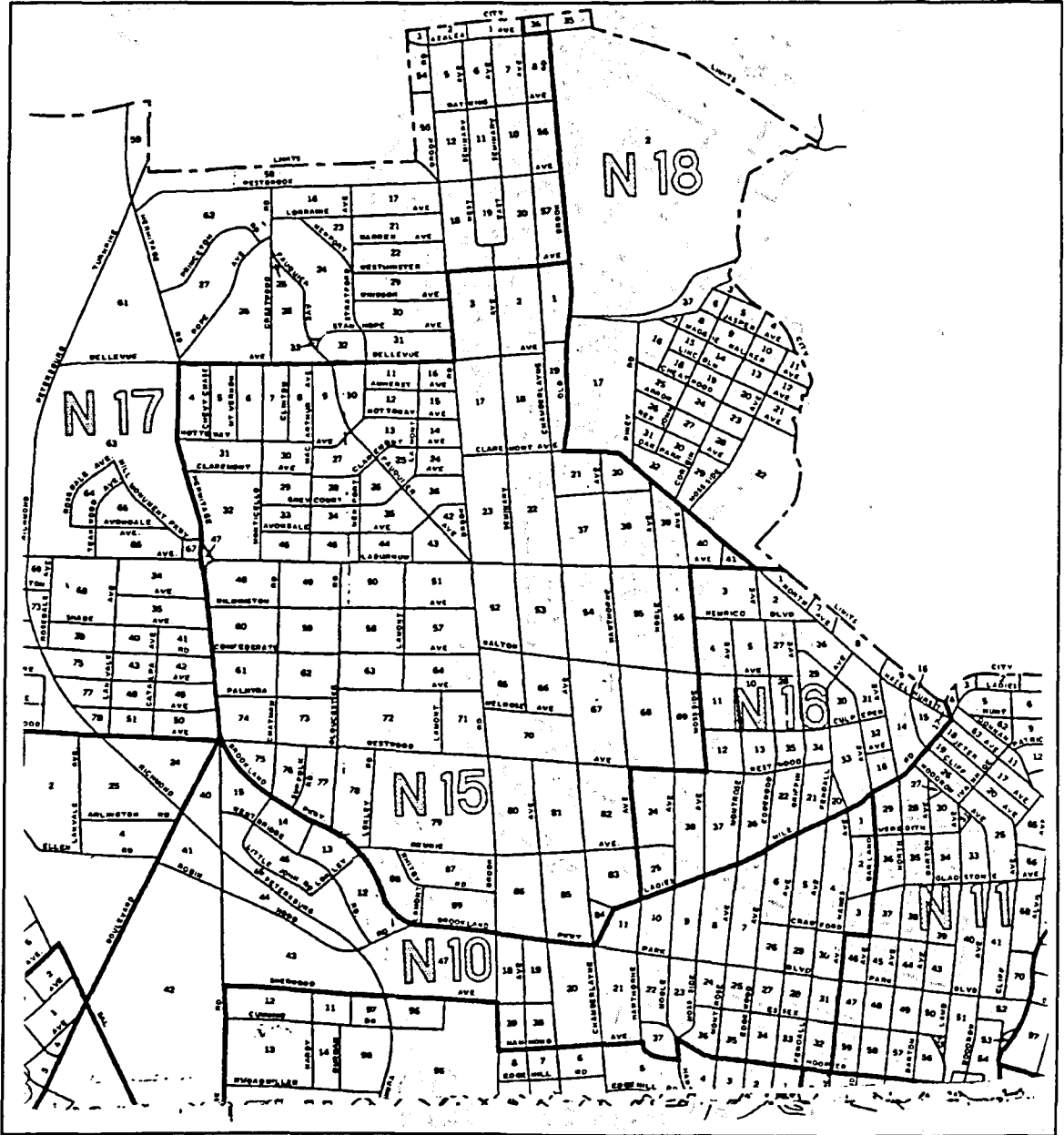
a smaller population, racist social attitudes, and the tradition of racial segregation gave the police and judicial authorities the power to quell the protests forcibly. Although both local protesters and SNCC and SCLC field workers fought valiantly for desegregation in Danville and achieved some of their articulated goals, they could not defeat the well-entrenched institution of Jim Crow. In Richmond, the presence of a larger black voting population, the influence of black middle class patronage in department stores and restaurants, the existence of moderate forces in government and business, an appeal to Christian communality, and the willingness of retailers to meet protesters' demands in the face of revenue loss helped the civil rights campaign meet nearly all of its goals within five years.

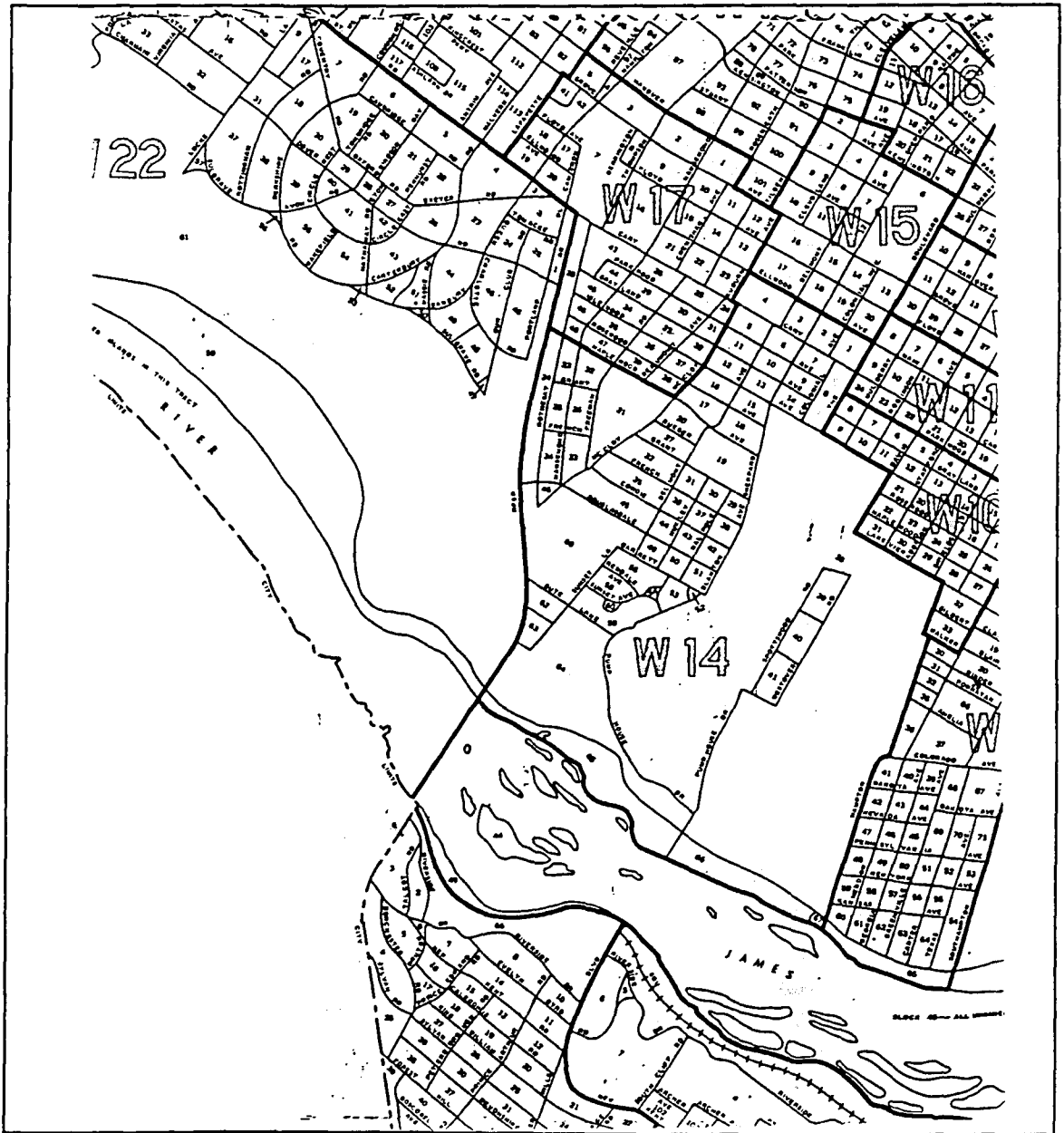
The civil rights movement in Virginia ended as it began, with cries for freedom and justice, and with a unanimous commitment to nonviolent direct action in cities and states. Most black residents of the Commonwealth were still shackled by entrenched segregationist attitudes, beliefs, laws, and violence in 1963, but they would find some relief and justice with the realization of President Kennedy's dream for effective civil rights legislation. When President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964, all states were required to open public accommodations to blacks and whites alike. Hotels, restaurants, stores, lunch counters, theaters, and bathrooms were to be desegregated throughout the intransigent South. After staunch resistance, Virginia finally conceded and the state slowly integrated its schools and public facilities. The battle for desegregation in Virginia was over by the 1970s, but the nonviolent war for equal economic opportunity and social acceptance continues today.

APPENDIX A:
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA CENSUS TRACTS
UNITED STATES CENSUS REPORT, 1960¹



¹ United States Census Commission, *U.S. censuses of population and housing: 1960. Census tracts, Richmond, Va., standard metropolitan statistical area, Volume IV* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1960).





APPENDIX B:
 RACIAL BREAKDOWN OF RICHMOND, VIRGINIA CENSUS TRACTS
 UNITED STATES CENSUS REPORT, 1960¹

TRACT	NO. OF BLACKS	NO. OF WHITES
E-2	3,939	527
E-3	4,455	168
E-4	4,232	23
E-5	4,465	141
E-6	3,680	309
E-7	4,921	199
E-8	4,282	236
E-9	3,234	1,022
E-12	8,623	209
N-1	1,930	45
N-2	2,128	112
N-3	3,787	15
N-4	3,095	660
N-5	3	3,807
N-6	3,868	10
N-7	2,073	7
N-8	1,537	-
N-9	3,567	679
N-10	1,161	2,311
W-5	1,521	665
W-7	5,455	130
W-8	1,966	648
W-10	2,694	790
W-11	940	2,496
W-14	9	3,526

¹ United States Census Commission, *U.S. censuses of population and housing: 1960. Census tracts, Richmond, Va., standard metropolitan statistical area, Volume IV* (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1960).

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