

BLACK FREEDOM AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, 1793-1960

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## ABSTRACT

JOHN K. CHAPMAN: Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina, 1793-1960  
(Under the direction of James L. Leloudis)

Recent histories of the University of North Carolina trivialize the institution's support for white supremacy during slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow, while denying that this unjust past affects the university today. The celebratory lens also filters out African American contributions to the university. In fact, most credit for UNC's increased diversity is due to the struggles of African Americans and other traditionally disenfranchised groups for equal rights. During both the 1860s and the 1960s, black freedom movements promoted norms of democratic citizenship and institutional responsibility that challenged the university to become more honest, more inclusive, and more just. By censoring this historical viewpoint, previous scholarship has contributed to a culture of denial and racial historical amnesia that heralds UNC as the "University of the People," without seriously engaging questions of justice in the past or the present.

This dissertation demonstrates that before 1865, the gentry used the university to promote the growth of slavery. Following Emancipation, university trustees led the white supremacy campaign to suppress black freedom and Radical Reconstruction. At the turn of the century, university leaders organized the movement for black disfranchisement and segregation that led to Jim Crow. Until the 1960s, the university enforced Jim Crow in its employment practices and its relations with the Town of Chapel Hill. Throughout its history, black

workers were the main force challenging UNC's institutional racism on campus, in Chapel Hill, and throughout the state.

An extended Epilogue examines how the university's institutional culture changed during the 1960s from an open defense of Jim Crow to acceptance of non-discrimination. Although the university accepted formal equality in admissions, employment, and its relations with the larger community, it did not acknowledge or attempt to dismantle the institutional structures of white supremacy that it had helped to create throughout its history. In this way, UNC established a paradigm of *diversity without justice* to replace Jim Crow, replacing the open celebration of white supremacy with new forms of subtle, "colorblind" institutional racism that persist today.

To friends and comrades

Mary Smith and Elizabeth Brooks,  
leaders of the 1969 UNC cafeteria workers struggle

Barbara Prear and Marcia Tinnen,  
leaders of the UNC Housekeepers Movement and UE Local 150

Fred Battle, Nate Davis, Eugene Farrar, Bill Thorpe, Al McSurely,  
Hank Anderson and James Brittan, leaders of the Hank Anderson Breakfast Club

## INTRODUCTION

History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

When a people have been robbed of the knowledge of their past struggles they become passive . . . . The suppression of working-class history, and of the history of conflict, has been a powerful tool in keeping poor people, ethnic minorities, and women, confused, deluded, and quiet.

D. E. Campbell, *Education for a Democratic Society*

In 1924, the University of North Carolina named a building for one of its most illustrious trustees, Col. William L. Saunders. In the late 1860s, Saunders led the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan in a violent white supremacy campaign to overthrow biracial Republican politics during Radical Reconstruction. From 1874 to his death in 1891, Saunders served on the Executive Committee of the university's Board of Trustees.

I became interested in the names of university buildings during the 1990s when I was helping the UNC Housekeepers Association research the history of black workers at the university. The housekeepers were gathering evidence for a class action lawsuit against persistent racist employment practices. One morning, I asked a well known liberal professor whose office was in Saunders Hall, "How do you feel about coming to work every day in a building named for the leader of the Ku Klux Klan?" He smiled at me and said, "I feel fine. That was then. That's not my university now." I told him, "I don't think the housekeepers would agree with you."

Some people at Carolina have no inkling that Saunders Hall was named for a KKK leader. When Kristi Booker, a black student from Charlotte, found out, she organized a campus group called Students Seeking Historical Truth to publicize the issue. In October 1999, the outraged students draped Saunders Hall with KKK banners and posters explaining Saunders' history.<sup>1</sup> Yet many, like the professor who worked in Saunders Hall, know the history of William L. Saunders, but do not believe it has anything to do with the university today. In a sense, they are in denial concerning ways that the unjust past continues to shape the present. They have bought into the celebratory progressive mythology promoted by institutional histories, university administrators, and much of the state's media that acts as a fog shrouding the university against critical examination.

Most historical studies of the University of North Carolina have been written from a celebratory viewpoint that trivializes the university's historical support for slavery and Jim Crow, while denying that this unjust past is an active force in the present.<sup>2</sup> Such accounts help to shape an ideological lens, or frame, that bends our minds in ways that conform to the persistent norms of white supremacy that still permeate our culture. We are taught not to see black workers, not to be sensitive to racial injustice, and not to think critically about the past and its connection to the present. That's just the way it was. If we acquiesce in looking at the world through such a lens, we succumb to colorblindness and historical racial amnesia. We cannot really examine the question of black freedom and the university. Yet it would be difficult for any sympathetic person with a real understanding of the hardships endured by

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<sup>1</sup>Jenny Fowler, "Group Objects to KKK Leader's Name on Hall," *Daily Tar Heel*, April 4, 2001.

<sup>2</sup>Battle, *History*, 2 vols.; Connor, *Documentary History*, 2 vols.; Henderson, *Campus*; Lockmiller, *Consolidation*; Spencer, "Sketches of the University"; Wagstaff, *Impressions*; Wilson, *University of North Carolina*.

low-wage workers of color at UNC to believe that the civil rights movement put an end to institutional racism. It is the fact that many people have neither insight into the lives of black campus workers nor any realistic understanding of the university's history of racial injustice that allows the celebratory narrative to dominate. The progressive mythology that has been fundamental to the university's telling of its own story encourages students, professors, and others to make the choice to remain ignorant of the lives and struggles of black workers, as well as the institution's real history. In this dissertation, I present some of the history that this mythmaking has censored and suppressed.

Celebratory accounts of UNC's history have two major failings with respect to racial justice and a realistic understanding of black freedom and the university today. First, such histories have suppressed the story of the university's leading role in promoting slavery and white supremacy since its founding in 1793 to the 1960s. The major studies written since the civil rights movement have not critically assessed the more subtle forms of institutional racism that have persisted at UNC since the overthrow of Jim Crow.<sup>3</sup> Whether this censorship is intentional or not, the affect is to suppress critical thinking concerning the university's unjust past. Such scholarship contributes to a widespread culture of denial that celebrates UNC as "the University of the People," without seriously engaging questions of justice in the past or the present. Since the university funded many of these flawed studies, its failure to fund studies that honestly engage the question of racial justice constitutes a form of ongoing institutional racism.

The second major flaw of historical accounts that view the development of UNC through a celebratory lens is the failure to examine African American contributions to the university

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<sup>3</sup>King, *Multi-Campus University*; Powell, *First State University*; Snider, *Light on the Hill*.

and the impact of black freedom struggle. Most UNC institutional histories credit a pantheon of white, male leaders for guiding the university to become an ever more inclusive and progressive institution. In fact, much of that credit is due the freedom struggles of African Americans and the democratic social movements organized by other traditionally disenfranchised groups. From slavery to the present, the university built itself upon the backs of a low-wage black laboring caste that it did a great deal to create and maintain. It was the struggle of black workers and African Americans from slavery to the 1960s that overthrew Jim Crow. In the wake of these black freedom victories, every disenfranchised group built upon the breakthroughs of the civil rights movement. Women, Indians, Latinos/as, Asians, homosexuals, and others demanded that the university live up to its stated mission of being “the University of the People.” Without these struggles, there would have been no democratic progress at UNC. Yet these facts are ignored or trivialized in celebratory histories of the university. Moreover, such accounts gloss over ongoing injustice at UNC, including more subtle forms of institutional racism and the persistent exploitation of low-wage workers of color.<sup>4</sup>

My approach has been to look at the relationship of African Americans and the University of North Carolina from the viewpoint of black freedom, particularly from the viewpoint of black workers. My aim has been to reveal how UNC wielded its institutional power in relationship to black freedom by examining the historical roots of that dialectic

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<sup>4</sup>My use of the terms “racism,” “white supremacy,” and “institutional racism” all are founded on the understanding that race is a mechanism for implementing power relations. “Race relations,” or how people of different races “get along,” is a narrow and insufficient way of understanding the function of race in America. What I call the “race relations paradigm” obscures the most important aspects of race as a mechanism of power. In general, I agree with the definition of racism advanced by Lani Guinier and Gerrald Torres: “We define racism, therefore, as acquiescence in and accommodation to racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution and resource generation.” Guinier and Torres, *The Miner’s Canary*, 292.

from 1793 to 1960. At the same time, I have tried to retrieve the freedom legacy of African Americans, who have been systematically “robbed of the knowledge of their past struggles.”

Every historian writes from a particular viewpoint, whether or not it is conscious or acknowledged. Over the years, many white conservatives inside and outside of North Carolina have seen the university as far too liberal on race and most other matters. White liberals, on the other hand, have seen the university as a “light on the hill,” bringing enlightenment to a backward and bigoted state and region. The viewpoint of African Americans, however, has little in common with either of these frameworks. While Chapel Hill is known far and wide as “the Southern Part of Heaven,” black campus workers and community residents commonly see the university as “the Southern Part of Hell” or “the plantation.” This has to do with the university’s long history of white supremacy and its role as the dominant institution and main employer in Chapel Hill. Since my uncommon experience with African Americans in Chapel Hill has shaped my understanding of the world, it seems fair to explain to readers how I came to the viewpoint that informs this dissertation.

My decision to enter graduate school to study the black freedom struggle in Chapel Hill was the answer to a call and the fulfillment of a pledge. The origins of these choices lie in the anger I felt concerning racial injustice in America as a high school student during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Later, I committed my life to the struggle for social and economic justice. This dissertation is one way that I have found to answer the call of those feelings and to fulfill my commitment to change the world.

As a ninth grader in 1960, the southern sit-in protests of black youths helped me understand that I had been misled by the media, history books, politicians, and my parents

about the existence of poverty and racism in America. The image of “the ugly American” that began to penetrate the national media in the early sixties opened my eyes to the reality that the U.S. was not true to its principles in world affairs, and was even despised by some of the people of countries to whom we gave foreign aid. One experience marked a turning point in my life, when all these vague apprehensions crystallized into a devastating understanding that American democracy was fundamentally flawed.

In the summer of 1963, I spent six weeks on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation working with an Episcopal youth group. A dozen of us, middle class white youths from private schools in Ohio, went to South Dakota to experience a different world and to “help” the Indians. During that summer I experienced the bitterness Indians my own age felt at our patronizing attitude toward them. We were “do gooders.” We had no understanding of the genocide native peoples in the U.S. had experienced at the hands of white people. Nor did we understand the ongoing racist oppression faced by the Sioux. We considered ourselves superior and enlightened. Nevertheless, we had to depend on the young Sioux for clean water, which they brought each morning from a town several miles away. This trip was not easy. Their old truck was not air conditioned, and the dusty roads were rough and could become choked with mud if it rained. At first, we had no understanding of these difficulties, and did not think about them. We acted like we were helping the Indians, not appreciating how much they were helping us.

One morning, we went to get our water container off the back porch and found a dead rattlesnake on the steps. Then we discovered that our water was foul and brackish. A message had been sent. Webster Two Hawk, the Episcopal priest at St. Elizabeth’s mission, began teaching us the history of the genocide the Sioux people had endured and how the past

had evolved into the present, when the Sioux still suffer racism and exploitation on a daily basis. He applauded us for our desire to help and to learn, but he also guided us to understand the resentment Indians felt toward privileged whites who came to the reservation infected with attitudes of superiority. In short, he helped us understand the past and present oppression of Indian people, as well as our own racist paternalism. With two of my friends, Chellis Glendinning and Jo Bushman, I began questioning our purpose and my own behavior. In particular, I began to understand the dangers of the patronizing attitudes so frequently associated with the values I had been raised to respect of “noblesse oblige” and the responsibility to help those “less fortunate.” I began to understand that many people in the U.S. and around the world are oppressed and exploited so that a privileged few can live well. Returning a bit of the plunder as charity keeps oppressed people dependent and obscures exploitation. As a result of this learning process, I eventually refocused my efforts to change the world from “helping” to fighting injustice, righting wrongs. I tried to become the best ally that I could be to those who were struggling against oppression and exploitation. This dissertation is written in that spirit.

In college, the anger that had informed my high school years deepened into greater understanding through my study of history and my education in the radical student movement. Upon graduation, I went to work in the Harvard kitchens to build a “worker-student alliance.” Perhaps, if it had not been the 1960s, I would have taken the job I was offered to teach at an elite private school. I might have welcomed the opportunity to settle down into a comfortable, middle class life amidst familiar surroundings. The path of least resistance would have been to take advantage of my class, race, and gender privileges, even though I knew that the world was not right. But it was an age of powerful revolutions and

persistent efforts to fundamentally democratize power relations throughout society. The transformative power of those movements helped me struggle for social justice in the years to come.

In 1970, I moved to Atlanta, Georgia where I attended Atlanta Area Technical School to prepare myself for a working class job. My aim was to organize workers for racial justice and labor rights. After moving to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, I worked at North Carolina Memorial Hospital as a Certified Laboratory Assistant for ten years. In 1980, black dietary workers at the hospital protested discrimination, poor working conditions, and low pay. That same year, housekeeping workers at the University of North Carolina (UNC) organized around similar grievances. This protest led to the formation of a workers' organization, the Housekeepers Movement. As a result of my involvement in these struggles, I began to meet many black workers at the university and the hospital, including many who had grown up in Chapel Hill. At the same time, I became active in numerous organizing efforts in the local black community involving high school students, public housing tenants, welfare rights advocates, and black electoral candidates.

In the course of organizing, I heard innumerable stories about the struggles of African Americans in Chapel Hill and at UNC. People told stories as a way of sharing their pain and joy and the lessons of black history. I began to appreciate these stories as part of a rich legacy of community building and resistance to racism. It also appeared that this history was endangered. The stories were part of an oral tradition that was virtually unknown outside of the black community and in danger of being lost with the passage of time.

When I decided to attend graduate school in the late 1980s, one of my goals was to help retrieve, preserve, and make accessible the freedom legacy hinted at by the stories I had

heard from African Americans. I felt that this history, full of defeat, dead ends, and personal tragedy, also abounded in triumph, important lessons, and examples of human growth. I believed that every aspect of such a history was invaluable as a tribute to the participants and a resource in the ongoing struggle for justice. These conclusions led me to study the Chapel Hill civil rights movement of the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> As I surveyed the secondary sources about black lives in Chapel Hill, it turned out that while a great deal had been written about the town and the university, very little had been written about African Americans. Published works generally ignored or distorted black contributions to local history, particularly the black freedom struggle. References in these sources to African Americans were scarce and often patronizing. For my master's thesis, therefore, I relied primarily on oral interviews, as well as other primary sources and secondary literature, to explore how the local movement grew from individual lives. This resulted in a thesis that told the story of the movement and emphasized the way life histories and generational dynamics influenced the development of a black youth leadership core in Chapel Hill.

In the course of my research, I found that the University of North Carolina did not figure prominently in either the secondary sources or the stories black participants in the movement told. This was puzzling, since I knew from my own organizing experience that the university had long been the main employer of black workers and the dominant institutional influence in Chapel Hill. It seemed to make no sense that the Chapel Hill movement had not confronted racism at the university. When I asked Thomas Mason, one of the black youths who initiated the Chapel Hill movement, about this, his reply was revealing. Mason explained that the university was formally desegregated by 1960, though on a strictly token

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<sup>5</sup>Chapman, "Second Generation."

basis. During the Civil Rights Movement, UNC refused to get involved in the conflict, thereby endorsing the status quo. Mason, like other leaders of the desegregation struggle, believed in hindsight that one of the movement's strategic weaknesses was its failure to recognize the power of the university and to make it a target of protest. He called UNC “the real Invisible Empire,” because it had the power to hire and fire so many of the town’s black workers. If UNC had endorsed desegregation in Chapel Hill, that would have been a green light for black workers to openly support the freedom movement. Refusing to get involved sent the opposite message. Most black workers feared that racist supervisors would threaten their jobs if they were seen marching in the streets. As it turned out, Mason noted, the failure of the movement to challenge the university forced black cafeteria workers to undertake their own massive struggle against continuing Jim Crow employment practices in 1969.<sup>6</sup>

After reflecting on Thomas Mason’s observations, I began to consider a whole range of questions related to the history of the university and black freedom. What, for instance, did this history have to do with current conditions in the black community? Black students were performing in Chapel Hill’s top ranked public schools at levels far below white students and sometimes below statewide averages for black students. How could this be in a community with so many educational resources? Why was the Chapel Hill community so polarized economically and racially, with the white population better educated and more prosperous than anywhere else in the state and the black population composed primarily of low wage service workers? Why was the affluent white population of Chapel Hill growing rapidly, while the local black population was declining? Why did so many white people consider Chapel Hill liberal, while so many black people considered it extremely racist? Why was

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas Mason, interview by author.

Chapel Hill known as “the Southern Part of Heaven” in the mainstream media and “the Southern Part of Hell” among many African Americans? Why was the university seen throughout the land as a beacon of enlightenment, while many black campus workers referred to it as “the plantation?” Why were black campus workers marching in the 1990s for the same demands as housekeepers in 1980 and cafeteria workers in 1969? Why did black student activists demanding a freestanding black cultural center in the early 1990s call UNC “Hardin’s Plantation,” in reference to Chancellor Paul Hardin’s opposition to their cause? How could the diversity and freedom of speech championed by the university square with the criticisms of black workers and students?

Despite my focus on Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina, I believed that my questions had broader significance. Indeed, I knew that similar questions concerning the unfinished work of the 1960s freedom movements were being asked at other institutions and in other communities across America. I decided to do my dissertation on the history of black freedom and the university, from its founding to the civil rights sit-ins of 1960. I believed that this look back into the past might help clarify issues of racial justice that continue to challenge the university—and the nation. On the one hand, I wanted to understand what role the university had played, locally and in North Carolina, in terms of black freedom during the periods of slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow. On the other hand, I wanted to retrieve the freedom legacy of the black freedom struggle at the university and in Chapel Hill.

Readers should understand that my purpose is to develop an initial discussion of the history of black freedom and the University of North Carolina over nearly 200 years. I want my work to stand as an usher at the door, inviting further study. I do not develop characters with the goal of painting a nuanced and complex individual portrait. Most of the time, it

would take further research to undertake writing of this type. Instead, I deal with the evidence I have by using individual lives to illustrate themes of black freedom striving or white supremacy. Inevitably, this approach cannot convey the full humanity of individuals. At the same time, it does not gloss over the racism of university leaders or belittle the freedom striving of African Americans, something that has been done all too often in the past.

Another clarification concerns my use of the terms “black freedom striving” and “institutional racism.” I envision black freedom striving as any effort to survive or resist the ways that white supremacy limits and denies African Americans. My usage encompasses the actions of individuals, as well as collective struggle. Working two jobs to put a child through school is as much an expression of black freedom striving as organizing a labor union. Nevertheless, I focus on black freedom struggle, particularly the efforts of community organizations, labor unions, and large scale movements because it is only when poor and exploited people mount such collective efforts that they are able to make effective demands on power. Likewise, the term institutional racism encompasses a broad array of ways that institutions promote or acquiesce in racial hierarchies affecting the allocation of resources. Institutional racism during slavery or Jim Crow meant something quite different than it does in the post-civil rights era, when it is no longer acceptable to openly celebrate white supremacy. Today, institutional racism at the university may mean acquiescence on the part of university officials to traditional Jim Crow patterns of employment in skilled trades or a marked lack of respect for low-wage workers of color by supervisors. It may also mean the promotion of “colorblind” policies that have a distinctly negative impact on African Americans. To constitute institutional racism, such policies need not be consciously racist,

i.e. designed to have a racist impact. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that African Americans and others have often pointed out the racially disparate impact of colorblind university policies to no avail.

My study focuses on the struggle of black workers on the campus and in the community against the university's promotion and enforcement of white supremacy from its founding to the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. I examine the pivotal role of the University of North Carolina in limiting and denying black freedom, thereby creating the context of black survival, struggle, and movement building. At the same time, I focus on the ways that black freedom striving promoted new, broadly accepted norms of social responsibility that challenged the university to become more honest, more inclusive, and more just.

The discussion in each chapter moves between these two aspects of history illuminating the dialectic of institutional power and black freedom along the color line. While Jim Crow enforced a color line defined by black subordination and white privilege, African Americans struggled to assert their humanity. Black freedom was the power to make choices, despite the limits imposed by Jim Crow. White supremacy could not simply dictate the color line; black freedom challenged it. The color line was not a thing, but a process, a dialectic of struggle. It was not simply a distinct type of race relations; it was a mechanism of power for distributing privilege and resources.

Since the lives of African Americans in Chapel Hill are poorly documented compared to the lives of the affluent and politically influential white leaders of the university, it has been a challenge to tell the story of black freedom. Because few sources created by African Americans exist for the nineteenth century, I have relied on these few. For the period of slavery and Reconstruction, I have featured evidence from the diary of Robert Fitzgerald and

the related material in Pauli Murray's history of her family, *Proud Shoes*.<sup>7</sup> I have also focused on the writings of the poet George Moses Horton, who was a Chatham County slave who worked part of his life for the university until Emancipation, as well as the autobiography of Sam Morphis, a Chapel Hill slave and, later, a freedman.<sup>8</sup> For the early twentieth century, I have featured evidence from oral interviews done with famed musician, Elizabeth Cotten, concerning her childhood years in Chapel Hill.<sup>9</sup> My own oral interviews have been central to the portrayal of the lives of black workers during the years of Jim Crow, as well as the story of the origins of the Chapel Hill civil rights movement among local black youth. The collection of oral interviews conducted by the Duke Oral History Project in 1974--with over a hundred participants in the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement--have also been invaluable.

Though it is incomplete and sometimes flawed, the U.S. manuscript census, available for Chapel Hill from 1800 through 1930 (unavailable for 1890), is an underutilized historical resource. It contains a wealth of otherwise unavailable information about individuals and families, community demographics, employment, and neighborhood patterns. The manuscript census is a microfilm or electronic reproduction of the actual notes the census taker wrote going street to street or farm to farm. It shows spatial relationships of families in neighborhoods as well as great detail about individuals and families. Each decade, the questions asked changed, but they generally included information for every member of a household, including name, age, race or color, sex, occupation, level of education, property ownership, and many other details. During slavery, the names of slaves were not recorded,

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<sup>7</sup>Fitzgerald Diary, 1867-71, microfilm, in the Fitzgerald Family Papers, SHC #M-4177; Murray, *Proud Shoes*.

<sup>8</sup>Horton, *Hope of Liberty*; Horton, *Poetical Works*; Horton, *Naked Genius*; Morphis, "Autobiography."

<sup>9</sup>Cotten, interviews.

only their age, sex, color, and the name of their owner. The great weakness of the manuscript census is that it is incomplete and sometimes erroneous. Electronic searches often show that individuals were only counted once or twice in their lifetime. Nevertheless, much of the information available through the manuscript census cannot be found elsewhere. It has been invaluable for my investigations of slave-owning by university professors and trustees, the free black community in Chapel Hill during slavery, changing employment and population demographics for the town and the university, and the comparative conditions of life for African American and white residents of Chapel Hill. The archives of public universities are also an underutilized historical resource. It would be a mistake to assume that the preserved documents tell the whole story, but it is astounding to see what remains in the files and to learn to read between the lines. Without access to UNC's institutional records, for example, it would have been difficult to tell the story of labor organizing by black workers in the twentieth century.

Three additional types of sources have been important for my work. Most of the institutional histories of the university were written during the Jim Crow era and they either ignore or cover up the university's role in promoting and maintaining white supremacy. They are blind to the contributions of the black struggle for justice. Yet, they contain a wealth of information. I have used these sources extensively, though with caution. A second set of sources is the scholarly work done by UNC graduate students during the 1930s and 1940s. These studies shed considerable light on the history of the local black community, the impact of the university on black Chapel Hill, and the conditions of life and work in the town during

the era of Jim Crow before World War II.<sup>10</sup> A third set of sources include studies done since the 1960s focusing on black workers' struggles, the university's efforts to deal with desegregation, and the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill.<sup>11</sup> These works are often insightful and many draw on both primary and secondary sources. Significantly, most of these post-1960s studies are far less biased than any of the major university histories, including the relatively recent and widely read accounts by William D. Snider, *Light on the Hill* (1992) and William S. Powell, *The First State University* (revised and enlarged, 1992).

I tell my story in five chapters and an extended Epilogue. Chapter 1 introduces readers to the history of the growth of slavery in North Carolina and the class conflict that developed between white yeomen, who possessed small farms and no slaves, and the gentry, owners of twenty or more slaves. This conflict was a fundamental dynamic of politics in North Carolina from the revolutionary era through the nineteenth century. I examine how this conflict played out in the founding of the university. Slave owners sought to educate from the top down by creating an institution to train their sons. The yeomanry held a more democratic vision of the purposes of higher education, and sought broader accessibility. The power of the gentry prevailed, resulting in the domination of the UNC Board of Trustees by large slave owners. The remainder of Chapter 1 describes the way that the slave owners' university shaped the Town of Chapel Hill and the university to conform to the norms of slave society. I examine the ways that the university built itself upon slavery profits and slave labor, as well as the way the university supported the extension of slavery throughout North Carolina. I also

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<sup>10</sup>Bain, "Social Factors of the Work Situation"; Barrier, "Economically Handicapped Families"; Brown, "Negro Churches"; Henry, "Emergency Relief"; Freeman, "Growth and Plan"; Mason, "Negro Community Center"; Smith, "Public Welfare Problems."

<sup>11</sup>Barkesdale, "Indigenous Civil Rights Movement"; Blanchard, "Politics of Desegregation"; Buchanan, "Testing of the Liberal Vision"; Cheek, "Desegregation of the University"; Ehle, *The Free Men*; Evans, "Between the Idea and the Reality"; Korstad, *Dreaming of a Time*; Manekin, "Moral Crisis of the University"; Meroney, "Coming of Consciousness"; Williams, "Foodworkers' Strike at Chapel Hill"; Zogry, *Carolina Inn*.

examine the culture of resistance forged by African Americans in Chapel Hill, although this discussion often has to be drawn out from biased white sources. I utilize the federal manuscript census to paint a picture of the free black community in Chapel Hill. Slaves were prevented from developing normal family and neighborhood relations, but the lives of free blacks give an indication of the cohesive families, good jobs, and racial solidarity that would be important to African Americans after Emancipation. The indications of biracial working class solidarity are also evident in the housing patterns and occupational relationships evident among skilled artisans in 1860. Finally, I examine the struggle of slaves seeking a dignified place in Chapel Hill by looking at the extraordinary writings of two slaves, George Moses Horton, and Sam Morphis.

Following Emancipation, African Americans throughout North Carolina took advantage of their new freedom to rebuild families, establish churches and schools, and build a powerful freedom movement to secure political and economic justice. Chapter 2 tells the story of how African American freedom striving unfolded in Chapel Hill and North Carolina immediately following emancipation. It then moves to the development of the biracial Republican Party in 1868. Slavery had foreclosed the possibility of black and white farmers and working people combining to oppose rule by the gentry. Emancipation and black voting rights made such an alliance possible. The political victories of the Republicans in 1868 made biracial political power a reality throughout North Carolina. Chapel Hill became a focus of conflict when Conservatives tried to oust the biracial town commissioners from office. Similar conflicts erupted across the state. Republican control of state government resulted in democratic reforms that benefited both white yeomen and African Americans. Yet these democratic reforms threatened the power of North Carolina's elites who launched a

furious campaign to regain their political power. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of Ku Klux Klan and Conservative Party attacks on efforts by African Americans near Chapel Hill to establish schools and on Republican efforts to transform UNC into a “peoples’ university.”

As a result of the white supremacy onslaught, Republicans lost control of state government in 1870 bringing about an end to the biracial coalition. The “peoples’ university” was forced to close in 1871. When it reopened in 1875, white supremacists once again controlled the Board of Trustees. Chapter 3 discusses the white supremacist violence that pervaded North Carolina after the return of the Conservatives to power. In the face of this terror, black freedom striving persisted. I examine these issues by focusing on two whipping scandals in the 1880s. The first, in 1880, implicated the university in convict labor abuse. The second, in 1886, resulted in armed black resistance to racist incursions by white students into Chapel Hill’s black community. These discussions bring to light both the white supremacist institutional culture encouraged by university leaders and the dogged resistance to white supremacy of African Americans.

The power and persistence of black people after the defeat of Radical Reconstruction created one precondition for the development of new biracial alliances in North Carolina. Chapter 3 traces the development of discontent among white farmers devastated by dislocations arising from North Carolina’s industrial revolution and discontented with the big business orientation of the state’s Democratic leaders. The revolt of these farmers was the second precondition for new biracial politics. They joined with African Americans during the Populist revolt in the 1890s to once again sweep Democratic elites from power.

UNC was at the center of much of the controversy during this era. It was a bastion of white, male privilege in higher education at a time when white farmers, African Americans,

and white women were increasingly demanding expanded educational opportunities. The growing power of farmers allowed them to punish UNC by partially de-funding the university to provide public resources for an institution of their own in 1887. African Americans and their allies in state and national government also gained a share of state education funds in 1891 in a campaign that frequently suggested they would try to integrate the university if they did not get their own school. The threat to the university—and to the hegemony of the Democratic Party—was the danger that these parallel black and white streams of discontent would fuse, as they had during Radical Reconstruction. Indeed, that is exactly what happened during the mid-1890s, when “Fusion” politics swept the Democrats out of office. The Fusionist victory was not simply an expedient political combination. It represented tremendous popular discontent with the domination of large corporations over the direction of New South development and the lives of working people. The university represented the centralized power of the commercial interests in opposition to the possibility of more democratic local control of schooling. Chapter three concludes with a discussion of the leading role of university men in the new white supremacy campaign that crushed biracial politics in 1898. The era that followed—a period of circumscribed opportunity, thought and politics known as Jim Crow—was characterized by black disfranchisement, extreme segregation, and one party rule.

Chapter 4 examines the ways the university made Jim Crow in Chapel Hill from 1898 to 1937 through its institutional culture, employment practices, and influence on the development of local public services and educational opportunities. In the decades following the white supremacy campaigns, a hostile racial environment in Chapel Hill caused many African Americans to emigrate. Those who remained resisted Jim Crow by creating an

affirming culture and developing grassroots community campaigns and organizations. Using oral interviews done in the 1960s and 1970s, I discuss questions of culture and community by telling the story of Elizabeth Cotten, who grew up in Chapel Hill during the early years of Jim Crow. Oral histories are also used to reveal the impact of Jim Crow on black university workers Bruce Caldwell, Edna Lyde, and John Horbet Johnson. I examine black community mobilization efforts by focusing on the public health work of Nurse Compton, the first black professional hired by the Town of Chapel Hill and by telling the story of the black community drive to build a new school in the 1920s. This era also saw the rise of efforts by professors and students at the university to “study the Negro” and get involved in local “settlement work.” In part, such activities were a response to growing concerns that problems in the black community, such as the spread of communicable diseases, would spill over into the white community. Yet much of the progressive reform sentiment developing at the university during this period was probably motivated by genuine compassion. The increasing interracial contacts that developed from these reform initiatives helped inspire positive working relationships between some white students and black town residents. In the long run, such relationships helped undermine Jim Crow. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of the work of the Negro Civic Club and the UNC Janitors Association. The formation of these two organizations in the late 1920s reflects the growing organizational strength of black resistance to Jim Crow in Chapel Hill.

In the mid-1930s, black workers in North Carolina turned to a labor-based civil rights strategy to challenge Jim Crow. This was facilitated by the empowering labor legislation of the New Deal and the rise of industrial unionism in the form of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In Chapel Hill, the number of black workers had grown rapidly after

1920 due to the vast expansion of the university. The university employed an ever-larger percentage of these workers. These changes provided the basis for the emergence of a labor based civil rights movement. In Chapter 5 I discuss the growth of this more proletarian movement in Chapel Hill, beginning with the black rebellion of August 1937. I then detail the rise of the CIO among low wage, black university workers between 1941 and 1948. Although liberal UNC president Frank Porter Graham supported black workers and radical student union organizers, the trustees limited his power to promote racial justice and labor rights. In the era of McCarthyism, following World War II, labor organizing at UNC succumbed to political repression and right wing political forces defeated Graham in his 1950 U.S. Senate election campaign. At this point, my story refocuses on the 1950s and the origins of the Chapel Hill Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Despite the suppression of the labor movement in Chapel Hill and the silencing of most progressive voices, a number of rebellious black youths became advocates of open revolt against Jim Crow in Chapel Hill during the 1950s. I tell the story of how this activist core eventually rejected the more cautious strategies of their elders by examining their lives through oral interviews. Chapter 5 concludes by refocusing attention on efforts to desegregate UNC admissions during the 1950s. I recount the struggles of the first black students to overcome a hostile racial environment and the persistent institutional racism promoted by UNC administrators.

From 1793 to 1960 the university had a shifting, but essentially oppositional, relationship to black freedom. With the eruption of large-scale civil rights struggles across North Carolina in 1960, an opportunity presented itself for the university to take a new direction. African Americans challenged communities across the South to accept racial equality as a new, more just social norm. From a legal perspective, this struggle was successful. The black freedom

movement overthrew Jim Crow and established equal civil rights by 1965. That turned out, however, to be a far cry from equality and racial justice in practice. The university failed to adopt an affirmative, anti-racist stand to break with the legacy of Jim Crow. New, more subtle forms of institutional racism developed under cover of the rhetoric of colorblind equal opportunity and, later, diversity.

In an extended Epilogue, I focus on the university's refusal, and therefore failure, to come to terms with its unjust past during the early 1960s. That refusal is manifest in the failure of the university to respond forthrightly to demands for an end to Jim Crow employment practices in 1964. It is also evident in the university's unwilling response to the overtures of black students for equity in admissions during the early sixties. UNC's policies of glacial gradualism reflected a lost opportunity for the university to embrace the affirmative pursuit of justice, rather than maintain a passive stance of "non-discrimination."

The result of the university's failure to aggressively pursue racial justice in employment and admissions was a massive revolt by black workers and students in the late 1960s. What is particularly interesting, and awaits further study, is the divergent history of black worker and black student organizing after 1969. It was my original intent to carry my story up to the present. Although I was unable to do this, a comprehensive inquiry into the history of black freedom and the university would examine the transformative events of the post-civil rights era with great care. On the one hand, there were a series of dramatic struggles waged by black workers and students—the two cafeteria workers' strikes of 1969, the efforts of the Black Student Movement and the Black Faculty/Staff Caucus during the 1970s to create a black studies department and hire black faculty, the struggle for a freestanding black cultural center beginning in the late 1980s, and the renewal of black worker protests led by the UNC

Housekeepers Movement (later UE 150) throughout the 1990s. On the other hand, there was a subtle transformation in the way institutional power and administrative policies adjusted to black freedom struggle in the context of shifting political developments and the ascendancy of the modern global economy.

As I suggest in the Epilogue, the university belatedly embraced diversity in its student body, faculty, and administration. The same degree of progress and affirmative action is not evident in employment practices. In particular, the antebellum pattern of low-wage workers of color “serving” privileged students and professors remains intact. Nearly all low-wage workers at the university are people of color, even though this group now includes large numbers of Latino/a workers and many Asian workers. Although a comprehensive study has yet to be done on the impact of the 1960s freedom movements on UNC’s employment practices, black workers have shown signs of massive discontent during the 1990s and still find themselves on the lowest rung of the social ladder at UNC.

This pattern of historical development suggests that a new paradigm of power relations has evolved to replace Jim Crow at UNC. While the norms of this new institutional culture maintain the oppression and exploitation of low-wage workers of color, diversity and career advancement, not collective struggle for justice, has become the norm among students. I characterize this new paradigm as *diversity without justice*.

It is my hope that this dissertation, my foray into the history of black freedom and the University of North Carolina, will become a resource for those who want to challenge institutional racism today. Historians and other academics may build upon this work to understand institutional responsibilities for injustice and the contributions of unsung black workers to our finest democratic traditions. The tendency among university leaders to declare

that the past is behind us will not help UNC resolve the issues of racial justice that continue to challenge the institution and all of America. If UNC is ever to become, in truth, the University of the People, and if it is to provide moral leadership to the state and nation, it must teach by example the importance of confronting the past honestly to bring about a more just future. Only such a profoundly practical pedagogy can challenge the ingrained habits and institutionalized structures that are white supremacy's enduring legacy. It is my fervent desire that others will build on my exploratory work to promote a continuing struggle for justice and historical truth at UNC.

Throughout graduate school I have benefited from the guidance of a number of fine teachers. I want to thank, in particular, Lawrence Goodwyn who advised me against becoming an academic and then mentored me for several years as I wrote my master's thesis. Peter Filene served as my advisor during that stage of work and proved to be both supportive and an excellent critic of my writing. Peter Walker, William Barney, Tera Hunter, Don Reid, and James Leloudis also provided guidance and strong encouragement during these years. Michael Hunt worked hard, if not always successfully, in a graduate research seminar to help me learn to discipline my writing. James Leloudis has been my advisor during the writing of this dissertation. His high standards of scholarship, as well as his deep understanding of North Carolina history, have helped raise the level of my work immeasurably. Jerma Jackson's decisive intervention at a difficult stage of writing enabled me to complete this dissertation. Like James Leloudis, she has read every draft of my dissertation, and her comments have been helpful and incisive. The other members of my committee, Reginald

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My work has always been about both academics and using the fruits of research to do grassroots organizing for historical truth and social justice. To my friends who participated in the struggle to retire the Cornelia Phillips Spencer Bell Award and who worked with me for honest history at Carolina as members of the Campaign for Historical Accuracy and Truth (CHAT), I want to say, this is your work, as well. Donelle Boose, Lucy Lewis, David Brannigan, Laura Martin, Barbara Prear, Sascha Bollag, Natalia Deeb-Sossa, Matt Ezzell, Sherryl Kleinman, Steve Wing, Mike Hachey, Mansoureh Tajik, Lily West, Christina Lee, Julius West, Mary Smith, and Elizabeth Brooks have my deepest respect. My friend and

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For many years, my daughters, Joyce and Sandi, have lived with this project, and that has not always been easy. Through thick and thin, they have been a constant source of wisdom, joy, and inspiration. In the final stages of writing, I could not have done without Sandi's diligent and loving support.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFP	Battle Family Papers #3223, SHC
BSM	University of North Carolina Black Student Movement
CPSP	Cornelia Phillips Spencer Papers #683, SHC
MS	Manuscript Census
NCC	North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
OCTS	Orange County Training School Chapel Hill, North Carolina
SHC	Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
UA	University Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
UNC	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
UP	University Papers #40005, UA

## CHAPTER 1

### “THE HOPE OF LIBERTY:” BLACK FREEDOM AND THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA DURING SLAVERY, 1793-1865

According to the 1870 federal manuscript census, Samuel Morphis, a former slave born in 1826, was living in Chapel Hill with his wife Lizzie, a daughter Alice, and his two-month-old baby boy, as yet unnamed. Catie Lewis, a seventy-five-year-old black woman “confined to bed,” also lived in the Morphis household.<sup>1</sup>

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Sam Morphis “dictated” his “autobiography” to UNC professor Horace Williams. Although it seems likely that Williams edited Morphis’ statement and may have influenced what Morphis chose to say, the document has the feel of basic authenticity. Moreover, the professor pledged the accuracy of his “study.” Williams eventually passed on the manuscript to famed UNC playwright Paul Green. Green, in turn, used the story of Sam Morphis in his Pulitzer Prize winning play, *In Abraham’s Bosom*. In 1967, when Green deposited the manuscript and a ten-page typescript copy in his personal papers, he wrote, “Many a time I have thought about the closing lines of Sam’s tragedy—‘And there is some gladness that comes to me when I see that my type of Negro will be soon gone from the face of the earth.’ And like the lonesome bulrush I hang my head in shame, shame not only for myself but for my university which for long generations denied

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N.C., 1870.

entrance to the very people who like Sam Morphis built its towers and its walls with their muscle power and sweat, their tendons and their bones. We have amends to make and finally are making them—but of course without benefit to Sam.”<sup>2</sup>

While Paul Green was courageous and unusual among UNC professors for his defense of black freedom and open critique of the university’s Jim Crow practices, we should be cautious about describing Sam Morphis’s life as “a pitiful story.” Framing Morphis’ life as a simple tragedy can cause us to think of him as a mere victim and blind us to his freedom striving.

The autobiography of Sam Morphis reveals the psychological dimensions of white supremacy and the inner struggle waged by African Americans to find meaning and dignity in their lives. As we reconsider this story from the perspective of current debates over race in America, it can act as a bridge connecting the eras of slavery, Jim Crow, the modern civil rights movement, and the first decade of the twenty-first century, helping us to understand that our history *is* the present. The story of Sam Morphis is thus a fitting place to begin.

Morphis was probably the illegitimate son of his master. There is no definitive proof, but the way he described his mother and their special treatment by the master is strongly suggestive. “My mother was the ‘house-girl.’ She was ready, quick and handsome. She was favored above all the slaves on the place.” As he grew, Morphis sensed that he had a special place in the white household, apart from the other slaves. “I shared in the partiality of my

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<sup>2</sup>Morphis, “Autobiography,” Folder 3040, in the Paul Green Papers, SHC #3693. Sam Morphis dictated “The Autobiography of a Negro” to Professor Horace Williams, who gave it to Paul Green. It is included as part of the source material for Green’s play, *In Abraham’s Bosom*. In his brief introduction to “The Inner Life of a Negro” (Green calls the document “The Autobiography of a Negro”), Williams emphasized the importance of psychology as a useful methodology for understanding “the Negro problem.” He added, “The study, as to every fact, has been read to the Negro and accepted by him.” The date of this document is uncertain. If Morphis’s comment that “seventy years ago I was born in the home of my master” is matched with census data, the date would be 1896.

master for my mother. I was set apart from the rest of the Negro boys. My playmates were the two sons of my master.”<sup>3</sup>

Morphis came to identify with the white race more than the black and with the sons of the master rather than other slaves. Yet at age twelve, he suddenly realized his difference. While one of the master’s sons was to become a preacher and the other a lawyer, Morphis realized that the boys had “no such idea for me.” Morphis remembered, “All my ambition was a deep, undefined feeling.” Moreover, Morphis realized that unlike his two white friends, he had no father. He felt his life was “limited in whatever direction I looked.”

When Morphis was sixteen, “the thing most dreaded by our slaves” occurred. The master died. Shortly, the word spread that all the slaves were to be sold at public auction. Morphis was stunned. “In a day I seemed to pass from a boy to a man. For the first time in my life I understood what it was to be a slave.”

Morphis now understood why he had no future. “I felt the chains and my spirit bowed and groaned.” He felt a slave “through and through, save some of my feelings.” Without a clear sense of what to do, Morphis stole away to Chapel Hill during the night before the dreaded sale. “From here my master had graduated. Many was the story he told us of his life here. I seemed to drift there by an inherited impulse.”

Despite running away, Morphis was sold, along with the other slaves. His new master, however, allowed him to buy his time. The rebellious spirit in Sam Morphis made him determined to forge a place for himself in white society. “I rebelled and determined to spend my life with the white-people.”

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<sup>3</sup>All Morphis quotes are from the *Autobiography*. For descriptions of the special treatment in the master’s household of their children by slaves, see Jacobs, *Incidents* and Murray, *Proud Shoes*.

This rebellion took the form of growing “rapidly into their ideas and feelings, and further still from those of my race.” “Hence it was,” recounted Morphis, “that the hand of the Negro was raised against his race . . . . The students used me as they needed, --and I helped them use my race.”

The “rich students” helped Morphis buy himself from his master for five hundred and fifty dollars. Yet, by law, Morphis was still a slave, though he owned himself. He still felt a sense of rebellion against his situation. Thus, when the students suggested that he petition the legislature to gain his freedom, Morphis decided to make the attempt. Armed with a petition signed by 309 students and with hopes soaring, Morphis lobbied the legislators directly. It was 1858, he recalled. “The war was almost here; I saw there was no hope for a Negro.”<sup>4</sup>

Crushed, the failure “seemed to take the heart out of me. I have been less of a man since that visit to Raleigh.” Although Morphis mustered enough hope and courage to marry, he became completely dependent on the charity of white students. “I depended on them like a child.” The war took even this source of support from him when nearly all the students left to become Confederate soldiers.

On a Christmas eve during the war, Sam Morphis, his wife, and two children were starving. Morphis went out and stole a chicken from the house of his wife’s master, Judge Battle. Yet, somehow, stooping to theft inspired a new idea—“the idea that I must work and have the results of my work. In other words, I saw that my physical welfare must come out of my own hands.”

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<sup>4</sup>John Hope Franklin did primary research on the manumission petition of Sam Morphis. Forty-three citizens of Chapel Hill, including President Swain, signed a letter of support. See Franklin, *Free Negro*, 33. Franklin noted that the documents relating to this issue are in the North Carolina Legislative Papers for 1856, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh, N. C.

“Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> I started afresh.” Sam Morphis worked for twenty years, building up a “good business” and purchasing a “two-storey house in the village.” Or so he thought. Morphis had entrusted the papers for his house to an old friend, a white man. When that man died, the man’s sister inherited his estate. When she died six months later, the estate went to “the village church.” Soon, the executor of the estate informed Morphis that he still owed several hundred dollars on his house. Claiming to have paid every cent, Morphis could not pay again. He lost his house. He and his wife retired to a “little place” in the country.

This course of events precipitated another revelation for Sam Morphis. “My faith in the white folks was broken.” “This tie was deep in my nature, deeper than it should have been,” Morphis felt. “It was the one thing of which I was proud. I loved and trusted the white folks. I expected my salvation from them.”

Sam Morphis had learned a hard lesson. “I see that, until the Negro develops the race-consciousness and lets this be the central and guiding fact of his life, he can never be more than a slave. Our hope is not in the white man.”

Morphis pondered over his life. “I sit by my fire in the miserable hut and brood over a misdirected life.” Yet, as at every crisis point in his life, Morphis reached for meaning. “While I sit in my helplessness, the light of a new thought steals in and I see in the very waywardness and recklessness of the Negro boy to-day the promise of better things. He does not depend upon the white man. There is not a Negro boy in this village that plays with a white boy. There is not a cook in the village, nor a young girl, that will live in the house of white folks. She rather hastens through her work, often leaving it half –done, and walks a mile, in darkness and storm and cold, never failing one night in the year, to be with her own

for an hour and then to sleep under the roof of her race. Slowly and surely the Negro race is growing together.”

Sam Morphis lived a “misdirected life,” and that is the tragic part of his story. The institution of slavery and the ideology of white supremacy that Morphis experienced in the home of his master and among university students taught him to despise blackness and the black community. Sadly, Morphis put his faith in the very system that denied his humanity. Ultimately, however, Morphis never gave up the struggle to be fully human or to realize his deepest ambitions. Because Morphis used every crisis to ponder the meaning of his life, he achieved a deeper understanding and some inner peace. His “Autobiography” suggests that he learned to value who he was and to appreciate the strength that lay in black self-determination. Moreover, though we do not know how it happened, he found a way to pass on the story of his life as a freedom legacy for future generations.

While the story of Sam Morphis sheds a great deal of light on the relationship of black freedom and the University of North Carolina, we must position it in a larger historical context to gain a more complete understanding of its significance. The forcible taking of land from Indians and labor from Africans, the subjugation of these peoples through a system of racial domination, and the consolidation of power in the new state by slave owners were critical developments in the early history of North Carolina. This history is the foundation upon which the gentry established the University of North Carolina and the Town of Chapel Hill in 1793. The first public university in the nation was, in fact, an institution controlled by slave owners to promote the profit and privilege of their class.

## *Slavery And Economic Development In North Carolina*

Both the state of North Carolina and the university were born of the tensions and struggle between contending social forces, not primarily from the efforts of individuals or the force of ideas. As diverse peoples with distinct interests came into conflict in North Carolina, each assembled resources to promote its interests. Indigenous peoples defended their homelands against European settlers. Settlers fought colonial elites for the right to govern themselves. The gentry contended with yeoman farmers for control of the new state. Slaves and free blacks defended their humanity against the domination of slave owners. The history that gave rise to the demand for public education and the founding of the university is fundamentally a story of social forces in conflict.

From the outset, the colony of Carolina embodied both the democratic strivings of the common people and the drive to dominate and profit that animated European colonial elites.<sup>5</sup> Colonial society was more complex and nuanced than such a generalization implies, yet the first worldwide expansion of early capitalism, pulsing outward from the commercial centers of Europe, created its own characteristic societies of haves and have-nots. In the American South, Latin America, and the Caribbean, capital created a model of growth based upon the use of slave labor for the commercial production of staple crops such as sugar, rice, and tobacco. This line of development, though a fundamental aspect of early capitalism, turned out to be a dead end, or perhaps a transitional stage. In the northern British colonies of America and in England itself, mixed economies based on free labor gave rise to market

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<sup>5</sup>For a compelling discussion of conflict engendered by the commercial motivations of colonial elites and the democratic striving of the common people, see Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*. For sources on North Carolina's development during the colonial era and the tension among Europeans, see Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 3-215; Ganyard, *Emergence*; Blethen and Wood, *Ulster to Carolina*, 3-51.

towns and commercial centers more rapidly than did plantation economies. Commercial elites with far-flung trading interests sprang up in these societies, and by concentrating the wealth of both countryside and empire, they accumulated the necessary capital to spark industrial revolution. It was this bourgeois, and ultimately industrial, model of development that became characteristic of modern capitalism, subordinating all else to its requirements.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the South, industrial development was slowed by the system of slavery until after 1865. With little industrial development, there were few industrial workers. Therefore, during the era of slavery the principal contradictions among the people of the state were between the yeomen farmers and the slave owning gentry, between the slaves and the slave owners, and between native peoples and European settlers.<sup>7</sup>

Slavery in North Carolina flowed from the motives and the methods of those who promoted settlement. A Spanish slave trader, Lucas Vasquez de Ayllon, made the first European attempt at colonization in North Carolina in 1526. This settlement of 500 men and women in the Cape Fear area failed, although it did introduce the first known instance of African slavery.<sup>8</sup> The colony was established on a more stable basis in the 1660s by the English king, Charles II, as a commercial venture. Though he did not own or even control the land, the king granted the territory of the Carolinas to a group of profit-seeking English noblemen, the eight Lords Proprietors. These English lords promoted both development and

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<sup>6</sup>Fierce debates over the place of slavery in capitalist development characterize the secondary literature. For a suggestive discussion of how these issues relate to colonial economies, see McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 35-50, 71-88. For a concise summary of the argument over divergent development in the U. S. South and North see Coclanis, "The Paths before Us/U.S.", 12-23.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of social structure that suggests how class tensions evolved in North Carolina before Emancipation, see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 3-84. On the contradiction between slaves and slave owners in North Carolina, see Crow, *Black Experience*, and Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 3-69.

<sup>8</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 1.

slavery in the colony by establishing what was called the headright system, which gave land to new colonists in proportion to the number of slaves they brought with them. In 1669, the Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina drafted in England as the legal framework for colonial government, asserted that “every freeman of Carolina, shall have absolute power and authority over his negro slaves, of what opinion or religion soever.”<sup>9</sup> With these inducements and legal guarantees, planters from the British colony of Barbados launched a slave owners’ migration to the Carolinas. Nevertheless, North Carolina did not develop rapidly into a slave colony. The great expansion of slavery took root in South Carolina, where conditions were more favorable to plantation agriculture.

The first permanent European settlers in the colony appear to have come from Virginia into the Albemarle region of northeastern North Carolina during the 1650s. This migration was probably made up primarily of yeoman farmers, possibly including runaway or newly freed white indentured servants. Some of these settlers brought slaves, although the number is uncertain. There is some disagreement concerning the early history of slavery in North Carolina. John Hope Franklin cites an 1899 study by John Spencer Bassett, professor at Duke University, to the effect that large numbers of the younger sons of the Virginia gentry entered northeastern North Carolina in the seventeenth century, bringing a considerable number of slaves. Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome make no such claim, stating only that among the earliest settlers in the Albemarle, four brought slaves. Jeffrey J. Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley simply state, “By 1663 the number of settlers in the Albemarle region

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<sup>9</sup>Crow, *Black Experience*, 2.

exceeded 500. It is possible, though not known for certain, that the Virginians brought a few slaves with them.”<sup>10</sup>

The early growth of population in the northeast region adjacent to Virginia, as well as the spread of population southward with the development of towns such as Bath and New Bern during the early eighteenth century, seems to have encompassed many non-slave owning farmers, as well as artisans and some slave owners. Virginia officials even complained in 1708 about the loss of population to North Carolina. The president of the Virginia council wrote, “many of our poorer sort of Inhabitants daily remove themselves into our neighboring colonies, especially to North Carolina.”<sup>11</sup>

As towns developed throughout the coastal plains, the settlers’ rush to control the resources of North Carolina brought war with the Indians. Colonists pushing westward from the Atlantic coast and southward from Virginia enslaved many of the native inhabitants and took their land. In the early 1700s Governor John Archdale noted, “God sends war and sickness like an Assyrian angel” to destroy the Indians and “make room for the English.” Though British law required that settlers “extinguish” Indian claims to the land rather than simply take it by force, Lefler concluded that in practice, Europeans decided “the simplest way to carry out this mandate was to extinguish the Indian.” The colonial government offered rewards for Indian scalps and it was standard practice to sell Indian prisoners of war into slavery. Theft was the pattern of white acquisition of native lands. “The whites simply

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<sup>10</sup>Bassett, *Slavery in North Carolina*, 18, cited in Franklin, *Free Negro*, 8; Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 17; Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 1.

<sup>11</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 56.

took over the lands which they desired even though, in many instances, they did go through the formality of purchase or treaty.”<sup>12</sup>

Following the British government’s takeover of North Carolina from the Lords Proprietors in 1725, pressure on the remaining Indian nations increased due to the swift pace of European population growth. In particular, the British crown promoted the naval stores industry and other commercial ventures, which led to the more rapid development of slavery, particularly in the southeast part of the colony.<sup>13</sup> Most Indians who survived European expansion fled to the distant margins of colonial society, while a few managed to melt silently into the new order. By the time the colonial General Assembly created the piedmont county of Orange in 1752, the Eno, the Sissipahaw, and the Occaneechi had gone. This fact, quipped a historian of Chapel Hill, permitted “the Europeans to establish homes, farms, and villages unthreatened by human menaces not of their own creation.”<sup>14</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, yeoman farmers were pouring into the depopulated central piedmont areas of North Carolina in a massive migration from Pennsylvania. Throughout the coastal plains, planters increasingly dominated a society characterized by commercial production of cotton, tobacco, and naval stores using African slaves.<sup>15</sup>

The two streams of European settlement in the Carolinas represented the seeds of future conflict. The yeomen and the gentry came to represent different visions of representative

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<sup>12</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 27-31.

<sup>13</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 8.

<sup>15</sup>On the migration of European settlers into North Carolina, see Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 76-85 and Blethen and Wood, *Ulster to Carolina*, 38-51. On the growth of slavery in North Carolina, see Crow, *Black Experience*, 4-6.

government and the organization of society. White yeoman farmers yearned for independence and opportunity. From the revolutionary era on, they promoted government and institutions that reflected a concern for broad popular democracy and a fear of political domination by elites. Wealthy, slave-owning planters promoted a more restricted and hierarchical form of representative government. In particular, they sought control of the key institutions of society to promote the commercial and political interests of their class. These slave owners introduced a third group, the people who would turn out to be the most devoted advocates of freedom and the fiercest defenders of American democratic principles—African slaves.<sup>16</sup>

From the earliest days of Carolina, the black population consisted of both slaves and free people. While the rights and privileges of free blacks were substantial relative to slaves, they were far less than those accorded to any white resident of North Carolina. Free blacks were under the surveillance of the law to a far greater degree than white residents. In 1785, free blacks in North Carolina's larger towns were forced to wear cloth badges on their left shoulder inscribed with the word FREE. Other laws restricted the movement of free blacks, forced certain free black children to be bound out as apprentices, and subjected free blacks to special vagrancy laws. Eventually, North Carolina enacted a "Free Black Code," that restricted the rights of free blacks even further. In 1795 the legislature extended the restrictions enacted by the towns to the entire state. All free blacks judged by county grand juries to be acting in ways "dangerous to the peace and good order of the state and county"

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<sup>16</sup>On the divergent ideologies of non-elite and elite North Carolinians during the colonial era, see Fischer, *Suspect Relations*. On the political views of yeomen and planters in the nineteenth century, see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 12-31; Ganyard, *Emergence*, 68-89. On the aim of the gentry to control key institutions to promote the interests of their class, see Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 38. For a discussion of how the antebellum traditions of the yeomen and slaves were reflected in political opposition to the gentry following Emancipation, see Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion*, 184-217.

were to be imprisoned until the next court session. When tried, “if any person shall be found guilty. . . he shall be compelled to give bond and security as in case of [free black] persons coming into this state. . . ; and in case of failure . . . he, she or they shall be sold.”<sup>17</sup>

Despite many restrictions on their rights, from at least 1776, free blacks could vote. Despite certain limitations, being free meant African Americans could marry, own property, travel, pursue their chosen occupation, learn to read and write, and live where they chose. Slavery denied all of these rights to those in bondage, and for these reasons, many slaves endeavored to gain their freedom. While some attempted escape from the South, many others claimed a relative freedom within the slave order.

As early as 1586, Sir Frances Drake freed a number of West Indian slaves in North Carolina and left them to fend for themselves. In 1712, the number of slaves in North Carolina was estimated to be 800. In 1708 South Carolina had 4,108 slaves and by 1720 the number had increased to 18,000, three times the white population. From 1730 to 1767, the slave population in North Carolina grew from 6,000 to 40,000. By 1790, at the time of the first federal census, the new state had a population of 288,204 white residents and 100,572 slaves (25.5 percent of the total population), living mostly on plantations in the coastal plains.<sup>18</sup> By 1860, slavery had expanded into the central and western parts of North Carolina and the number of slaves had increased to 331,059. As a percentage of total population, slaves had increased from 25.5 percent in 1790 to 33.3 percent in 1860.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>For a comprehensive discussion of the development of the legal status of free blacks, see Franklin, *Free Negro*, 58-120. North Carolina, *Laws of the State, 1790-1860*, quoted in Franklin, *Free Negro*, 60.

<sup>18</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 1, 3.

<sup>19</sup>Franklin, *Free Negro*, 18.

The free black population was small compared to the slave population, but it grew faster until the 1850s. From 5,041 in 1790, this group increased to 19,543 in 1830 and to 30,463 by 1860. Although the rate of increase of the free black population declined after the enactment of restrictive legislation during the early 1830s, the free proportion of the black population increased from 4.7 percent in 1790 to 8.4 percent in 1860. In this sense, freedom was making slow progress throughout the era of slavery.<sup>20</sup>

The struggle for black freedom developed in other ways, as well. It was not uncommon for slaves to run away in North Carolina. The reason might be to visit relatives on nearby plantations, to escape harsh treatment or being sold, to try to pass as free somewhere else in the region, or to follow the North Star to freedom in New England or Canada. Running for freedom first became a mass phenomenon during the American Revolution, when thousands of North Carolina slaves abandoned the plantations to join the British, who promised them their freedom.<sup>21</sup>

From the early nineteenth century on, slave rebellions were a constant concern for planters. In 1802, stimulated by the Haitian Revolution of 1796 and Gabriel Prosser's rebellion in 1800 in Virginia, slaves in northeast North Carolina plotted to revolt. The plan was discovered and numerous slaves were hung, exiled, or whipped. Collective rebellion erupted in North Carolina again less than thirty years later.<sup>22</sup> In 1829, David Walker, a free black born in Wilmington, North Carolina and who had migrated to Boston, issued an

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<sup>20</sup>On the growth of the free black population in North Carolina and its causes, see Franklin, *Free Negro*, 14-57.

<sup>21</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 22-6, 68-9; Kay and Cary, "Slave Runaways in Colonial North Carolina, 1748-1775." On North Carolina runaway slaves during the Revolution and their experiences in the American and British armies, see Crow, *Black Experience*, 55-81 and Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, 16-17. For general discussions of slave runaways and resistance, see Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion* and Parker, *Running for Freedom*.

<sup>22</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 48.

incendiary pamphlet calling on slaves throughout the South to revolt. “Walker’s Appeal” circulated widely in North Carolina, where copies appeared in Wilmington and New Bern in the east, and Fayetteville, Hillsborough and Chapel Hill to the west.<sup>23</sup> The bloody 1831 revolt led by Nat Turner in neighboring Southampton County, Virginia added further to the anxiety of the slaveholders.<sup>24</sup>

In response to evidence of increasing slave rebelliousness, abolitionism, and sectional tension between the North and the South over slavery, the North Carolina legislature tightened its restrictions on both slaves and free blacks. In 1826, legislators passed a law making it illegal for free blacks to enter the state. In 1830, the General Assembly made it illegal to teach a slave to read or write and made manumission far more difficult. In 1835 the legislature took away free blacks’ right to vote. During this period, Thomas Ruffin, Chief Justice of North Carolina’s Supreme Court and a powerful trustee of the university, issued his most notorious legal opinion. “The power of the master must be absolute,” Ruffin intoned, “to render the submission of the slave perfect.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Origins Of Public Higher Education In North Carolina*

The demand for public higher education that eventually gave birth to the University of North Carolina arose well before the American Revolution. While wealthy slave owners in the eastern part of the colony hired tutors for their sons and sent them to northern colleges or

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<sup>23</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 50-1; Franklin, *Free Negro*, 64-70. For a more complete discussion of David Walker’s *Appeal*, see Aptheker, *One Continual Cry*.

<sup>24</sup>Franklin, *Free Negro*, 70-72; Morris, “Panic and Reprisal: Reaction in North Carolina to the Nat Turner Insurrection, 1831.”

<sup>25</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 49.

English universities, such opportunities were inaccessible for the small farmers in the West. Slavery was the basis for nearly all wealth in eighteenth-century North Carolina, and most of the western farmers owned no slaves and could not afford private education. The agitation for “a public seminary in some part of the back country of this Colony” that arose in Mecklenburg County in 1770 was a popular, democratic demand for equal access to education. Although it had both a geographical and a religious aspect, public higher education in North Carolina was fundamentally a demand arising from the small property owning class of yeoman farmers living in the backcountry.<sup>26</sup>

By 1789, the class dynamics affecting the development of public higher education in North Carolina had become more complex due to the impact of the American and French Revolutions. Though the eastern gentry’s early demands for a state institution of higher education were oriented around issues of geographic accessibility, the American Revolution created a new impetus for the creation of a North Carolina public university.. The former practice of sending young men to Eton or Oxford in England no longer appealed to North Carolina patriots. In addition, the gentry believed that a state university could enhance North Carolina’s economic development. In the early days of the university, President Joseph Caldwell argued this view in a reply to the institution’s critics. “Our youth educated abroad will have little State pride,” he said. “Forcing our citizens to send their sons to Northern Colleges sends out streams of wealth, and increases the advantages they already have over

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<sup>26</sup>For a discussion of the genesis of higher education in North Carolina, as well as documentary evidence concerning the origins of the University of North Carolina from 1776 through 1789, see Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 1-56. For additional discussions of the founding, see Battle, *History*, 1: 1-19; Henderson, *Campus*, 5-21; Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 3-23. Quotes are from Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 2,14.

us.” Instead of exporting wealth to Virginia, South Carolina, and Pennsylvania, Caldwell insisted, “by creating a University of character we cause currents of wealth to flow into us.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet many North Carolina citizens who owned no slaves did not welcome the increased interest of the gentry in public higher education. In 1784, legislators defeated a bill to found the university, partly due to the concerns of radical western farmers. Although these men supported the concept of public higher education, they feared that the gentry would control the university and use it as “an engine of political propaganda and as a bulwark of aristocratic privilege.”<sup>28</sup> Ironically, it was the democratic sentiments of the western farmers, the group that had first raised the demand for public higher education, that slave owners had to overcome to pass the bill for the university in 1789.

The fears of the common people of North Carolina about aristocratic control of the university turned out to have been well founded. Although the University of North Carolina was the first public university in the nation, the Board of Trustees appointed by the legislature in 1789 was not representative of the people. Instead, the make-up of the board reflected the dominant power of the slave owning gentry. Of the forty trustees, thirty-one were listed in the 1790 federal census and thirty of these were slave owners.<sup>29</sup> During this period, 69 percent of North Carolina families owned no slaves. Most of these men and women worked their own small farms and were therefore members of the yeoman farmer class. In contrast, the trustees represented the elite among slave owners who dominated statewide public office holding. While the vast majority of slaveholders owned fewer than

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<sup>27</sup>Open letter from Joseph Caldwell to Basil Gaither, Absalom Tatum, James Welbourn, and William Slade. Battle, *History*, 1: 146.

<sup>28</sup>Robinson, *William R. Davie*, 224.

<sup>29</sup>The remaining nine trustees were either not listed in the 1790 census or were from counties for which census data has been lost.

twenty slaves, members of the Board of Trustees were among the largest slave owners in the state. Representative of this group were Benjamin Smith with 221 slaves, Willie Jones with 120, Samuel Johnston with 96, Stephen Cabarrus with 73, and Richard Dobbs Spaight with 71. Of these men, Smith, Johnston, and Spaight served as governors of North Carolina; Cabarrus was Speaker of the General Assembly; and Jones was president of the North Carolina Committee of Safety in 1776 and first Governor *ex officio* of the new state.<sup>30</sup>

While the trustees represented diverse individual interests and viewpoints, what they had in common was a commitment to the institution of slavery. This represented their most fundamental class interest and they shaped the university to be an institution that strengthened the domination of the slave-owning class throughout the state. It was the only institution that brought the sons of the gentry together from throughout the state. It enabled them to develop relationships with other members of their class, trained them to be masters in both the public and the private sphere, strengthened their sense of duty to class, and sent them back into society to assume positions of leadership.

For example, Calvin Wiley, an 1840 graduate of the university, became North Carolina's first Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1852. In 1856 and 1881 he received honorary degrees from UNC. From 1874 to his death in 1887, Wiley served as a university trustee.<sup>31</sup> Like other antebellum public school enthusiasts, Wiley believed that a system of common schools could help forge a common citizenship among diverse peoples. North Carolina

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<sup>30</sup>For information on the numbers of trustees who owned slaves and number of slaves owned by individual trustees see Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 23. For a list of the original forty university trustees see Battle, *History*, 1: 821. For the percent of slaveholding families in North Carolina in 1790, see Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 11. For the many public offices held by the first university trustees, see Battle, *History* 1: 3-5 and Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 23.

<sup>31</sup>For Wiley's links to the university, see Battle, *History*, 1: 672, 797 and Powell, *First State University*, 60.

initiated a system of public common schools for white youths in 1839. They were free, but rudimentary, only remaining open several months during the year. In the 1850s, Wiley wanted to strengthen this system. In the North, such schools helped bridge divides of class and ethnicity among white Europeans. As a white supremacist in the South, however, Wiley promoted a common white citizenship that required maintaining the racial divide. Wiley viewed public education for common whites as a way of preventing race mixing while promoting respect for the authority of the gentry. As historian James Leloudis wrote, “More worrisome than the prospect of black insurrection, Wiley argued, was the danger posed by ‘vicious’ whites who sank ‘into the bosom of the African community.’” Only by promoting the educational development of the white masses, Wiley believed, could state lawmakers and county officials “hope to preserve a social order governed by a spirit of ‘respect, harmony, and subordination,’ and in which ‘all who are entitled to command [are] cheerfully submitted to in their proper place.’”<sup>32</sup>

Wiley had learned to think from the standpoint of the slave-owning class about those “who are entitled to command” and those who must “cheerfully submit.” Indeed, this was the essence of a university education. In turn, through the men it trained, the university enabled the gentry to extend its domination of public education to a system of white common schools. From the viewpoint of the gentry, public education could be used to bind yeoman farmers to the institution of slavery.

The university played a critical role in guaranteeing the domination of the slave-owning class over political life. The rapid growth of the university after 1835 was an important reason that slaveholders occupied 85 percent of the seats in the General Assembly by 1860,

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<sup>32</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 21.

the highest percentage of any state at that time.<sup>33</sup> Given slave owner control of both the Board of Trustees and the General Assembly, it is no surprise that leaders of the university took as their mission making “young men into masters” to lead both North Carolina and the South.<sup>34</sup>

In order to protect and enlarge the institution of slavery, the gentry hijacked public education in North Carolina to serve its own interests. As a result, the common people of the state refused to support the university as they might have if it had truly been the university of the people. At times, throughout the era of slavery, there were efforts to criticize or limit the power of the university because of its control by the gentry.

In 1793, pursuing the anti-aristocratic critique long advocated by the common people, “Ignoramus” argued in the media that such a university would only benefit the wealthy few. The author proposed, instead, “a public school to be established and supported in every county by a general tax on the inhabitants.”<sup>35</sup> The university survived an attempt by the legislature in 1800 to strip it of financial resources based on arguments similar to those of “Ignoramus.” Even from 1801-1815, when radical Jeffersonian Republicans dominated the legislature, control of the university remained in conservative hands, since the largely

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<sup>33</sup>For an excellent discussion of North Carolina’s class structure and the ways in which the gentry wielded dominant power see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 12-22 and Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 420-424. For the high percentage of slaveholders in the general assembly, see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 15.

<sup>34</sup>It is critical to understand that slave owners had both individual interests and class interests. For the gentry’s class outlook on the university, see Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 38. For a discussion of the efforts undertaken by the slave owning gentry of South Carolina to strengthen slavery in the backcountry and unify the state politically under their domination, see Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*. For an important discussion of the difference between a society with slaves and a slave society in which slave owners constitute the ruling class, see Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 7-11.

<sup>35</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 209.

Federalist board had been appointed for life in 1789.<sup>36</sup> While Republicans were suspicious of centralized authority and advocated greater democratic participation in government by the common people, Federalists believed in a strong national government to promote economic development and they were wary of democracy, favoring a government by “the rich and the well born.”<sup>37</sup> In 1852, the General Assembly again attempted to transfer resources from the university to the common schools and university supporters defeated this effort, as well.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the era of slavery, the common people of North Carolina, despite greater numbers, could not organize sufficient power to successfully challenge the gentry’s control of the university. This remained true as long as political struggles in the state involved only white men. Although black resistance to white supremacy was constant and took many forms in addition to running away and outright revolt, African Americans were virtually excluded from direct participation in political parties, public political debate, and voting. For this reason, the African American demand for public education that flowered after Emancipation found no open expression during the previous period of slavery. Not until 1868, when yeoman farmers were able to unite with emancipated slaves in the Republican Party during Radical Reconstruction, did the grievances of the common people against the gentry have any chance of success. As a result, the people of North Carolina did not control the nation’s first public university during the era of slavery.

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<sup>36</sup>For the efforts of legislators with more radical views to strip the university of financial resources and make it more accountable to the general assembly, see Battle, *History*, 1: 136-50; Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 35; Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 303-4. On the “democratic power and leveling spirit” evidenced by the revolt of Tennessee (formerly North Carolina) citizens against the university’s effort to confiscate escheated land, see Battle, *History*, 1: 397.

<sup>37</sup>The quote is from Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington, cited in Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 286.

<sup>38</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 624.

Power to control African American lives enabled the gentry to enjoy both the profits of slavery and political supremacy over white yeoman farmers. It is not surprising, then, that the gentry's domination of the University of North Carolina caused the institution to play a reactionary role in relationship to black freedom throughout the era of slavery.

While control of the university was a powerful resource enabling the gentry to maintain its ability to profit and rule, this control came at a price. The contradictions resulting from the efforts of the gentry to dominate North Carolina, including their use of the university as an instrument to promote slavery, resulted in deep divisions in society. Over the years, conflict arising from these divisions remained central to North Carolina's political and economic development. Understanding how these contradictions affected public higher education is an important basis for exploring the unfolding relationship between black freedom and the university.

### *Contradictions At The Founding Of The University*

In the summer of 1793, seventeen years after American revolutionaries declared, "all men are created equal," slaves began clearing land to build the first public university in the new nation. Black workers labored through the summer heat to clear a main street for the village of Chapel Hill and to construct the foundations of Old East, the first building at the University of North Carolina. While building contractors during this era were seldom wealthy enough to purchase many slaves, they often rented slaves or found other ways to benefit from slave labor. As architectural historian Catherine W. Bishir noted, "One practice was for a slave owner to furnish laborers to a builder in exchange for a share of the profits.

James Patterson, a Chatham County builder, joined with two local slave owners, Patrick St. Lawrence and George Lucas, to erect the first major structure at the new University of North Carolina in 1793.”<sup>39</sup>

On October 12, 1793, William R. Davie, Revolutionary War hero, delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and wealthy slave owner, stepped forward with a silver trowel to lay the cornerstone of Old East into the massive walls built by slaves.<sup>40</sup> This scene embodied the contention and contradiction among different social groups that had animated North Carolina’s history since the earliest days of European conquest and settlement.

Davie’s personal history exemplified both the revolutionary struggle against British colonial domination and the class conflict among European settlers contending for power in North Carolina after the Revolution. He had been raised in the western county of Rowan among religious dissenters from the Church of England who were mostly non-slave owning yeoman farmers. Among these revolutionary patriots, the idea of the need for public education had blossomed along with revolt from British colonial authority, hereditary aristocratic privilege, and the officially sanctioned Church of England. These democratic ideals led to the insertion of Article 41 into the North Carolina constitution of 1776. Inspired by the revolutionary educational philosophy of Benjamin Franklin and the wording of the Pennsylvania constitution, which North Carolina lawmakers used as a model, this clause called for “a school or schools [to] be established by the Legislature, for the convenient Instruction of Youth, with such Salaries to the Masters, paid by the Public, as may enable

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<sup>39</sup>Catherine W. Bishir, “Black Builders in Antebellum North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 61, no. 4 (October 1984): 439. For James Patterson’s contract with the trustees for Old East, see July 19, 1793, UP.

<sup>40</sup>For and the cornerstone laying ceremony, see Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 227-40.

them to instruct at low prices; and all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more universities.”<sup>41</sup>

When this momentous declaration was made, Davie’s career was just beginning. Thereafter, Davie’s interests led him eastward, into a personal and political alliance with the slave-owning gentry. This group also supported the establishment of a public university to train their sons, but their aims were hardly democratic. While the western farmers tended toward radical democratic politics, the eastern gentry was decidedly aristocratic. Davie’s turn away from his more humble origins set him on a conservative course in politics. He moved to Halifax County in eastern North Carolina, becoming a staunch Federalist and large slave owner like most of his well-to-do neighbors. As a delegate to the US Constitutional Convention of 1787, he was a powerful voice for the interests of the slave-owning gentry. As North Carolina’s representative on the important “Grand Committee” of the convention, Davie played an important part in safeguarding the interests of slave owners by advocating the “three fifths rule.” By this rule, the Constitutional Convention determined that slaves would be counted as three fifths of a man for purposes of allotting the number of Representatives to Congress for each state. This rule gave slave owners additional political power at the federal level and helped ensure slavery as an institution.<sup>42</sup>

While Davie and the Federalists were the prime sponsors of both the proposed U.S. Constitution and the bill to establish a university, the western farmers in the legislature, many of whom had become Jeffersonian Republicans, were wary of control by the eastern gentry.

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<sup>41</sup>Robinson, *William R. Davie*. On the importance of Ben Franklin to the founders, see Battle, *History*, 1: 41, 44. On the origins of the demand for public higher education among the yeomen of the western part of the state and the Pennsylvania origins of Article 41 of the North Carolina constitution, see Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 1-7.

<sup>42</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 279-80.

They opposed the constitution because it contained no bill of rights and they opposed the university, despite their interest in education, because they feared the gentry would control it and promote elite interests. It was not until two years later, after the Federalists had gained in power both nationally and locally, that North Carolina legislators endorsed the federal constitution, this time with the promise of a bill of rights. At the same time, they passed a bill to establish the university. When Davie laid the cornerstone of Old East with his silver trowel, it reflected both the triumph of American revolutionaries over British colonial rule and the victory of slave owners in the political battle among European settlers for control of the new state.<sup>43</sup>

The laying of the cornerstone also reflected the conflict between slaves and masters. Though slaves built the foundations of Old East and slave labor was the source of the gentry's wealth, slaves were not acknowledged during the ceremonies. This was consistent with the logic of a slave society. In North Carolina, African Americans were denied any formal political participation, and their role as political actors was suppressed. Yet slaves and free blacks had a powerful impact on politics from the beginning, and their role would increase and become more open as they gathered their strength and took advantage of growing divisions among national elites.<sup>44</sup> At the laying of the cornerstone, however, masters still held center stage. Yet the conflict between slaves and masters could not be

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<sup>43</sup>On the contradiction between the commercial interests of Federalists in North Carolina and the democratic aspirations of poor farmers in 1787, see Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 255-56. For a more general discussion of how the framers of the Constitution designed it to "contain the spread of democracy" and guarantee the interests of slave owners, see Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*, 54-58.

<sup>44</sup>Steven Hahn argues persuasively that we must broaden our understanding of "politics" beyond the sphere of formal inclusion in the political process. Only then is it possible to understand African Americans during slavery as makers of history rather than mere victims, eventually freed by outside agents. He rightly identifies this outlook as part of the "liberal paradigm" that dismisses black self-determination as unimportant or reactionary. For an elaboration of the thesis that the "day-to-day resistance" of slaves was eminently "political," see Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 1-16.

suppressed indefinitely. Sooner or later, the struggle for black humanity would break into the open. Nothing guaranteed this outcome more than the contradiction between the university's proclaimed values and the reality of its practice. The university declared its creed to be *lux et libertas*, "light and liberty," but its foundations were built on human bondage.

Another unacknowledged conflict at the founding was the relationship between Indian nations and European settlers. This conflict had dominated the history of the colony as much as the contentious relationship with Great Britain or the class struggles among European settlers. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, arbitrary claims on the lands of Indian nations allowed British lords to reward settlers with land grants, while the same method of giving away Indian land was used by North Carolina to finance its revolutionary armies. Colonel Benjamin Smith received 20,000 acres of western land for his revolutionary war service, and he donated the land to the university in 1789. This large gift of land, which in actuality belonged to the Chickasaw Indians, was one of the primary sources of optimism about the university's economic prospects at the time of the founding in 1793.<sup>45</sup>

At the laying of the university's cornerstone, Indians were not physically present because they had been eliminated from areas of European settlement, but they were there in other ways. The injustices done to them, as well as their resistance, became embedded in the walls of Old East along with the sweat of slaves. At times, university workmen collected sand for making mortar from a site near the original homestead of Mark Morgan, whose grandson was one of the original donors of land to the university. In the course of their excavations, the workmen discovered "one hundred and fifty sound arrowheads and a concentration of flint

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<sup>45</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 119; Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 49-54.

chips. . . trading beads and burial grounds.”<sup>46</sup> While the incorporation of sand from Indian burial grounds into the walls of university buildings may be seen as symbolic, the ongoing conflict between European settlers and Indian nations over control of Indian lands also played a direct role in the development of the university. A considerable part of the university’s pre-Civil War income came from the sale of Tennessee lands donated to the university by wealthy individuals like Benjamin Smith. The university also acquired land warrants for thousands of acres upon the deaths of revolutionary veterans who had been unable to take possession of the lands given to them. Most of these men were too poor to have their warrants surveyed and died without legitimate heirs. The General Assembly gave these lands to the university.<sup>47</sup> At the time they were granted, however, the lands belonged to Indian nations, and after the Revolution the university joined with speculators and others to try to legitimize its claims before the U.S. Congress

The comments of Thomas Blount before Congress on January 29, 1795 appear to be representative of the university’s attitude toward native land claims. Blount was a U.S. Representative from North Carolina and university trustee. According to the summary of the debate in the House, Blount claimed that the Indians had never legally possessed the lands in question. “Mr. Blount . . . denied that the Indians ever occupied the lands in question, or were fit to occupy them, in any proper sense of the word. To walk across a country, and to shoot in it, was different from an occupation.”<sup>48</sup> The matter was also addressed in a letter from trustee and U.S. Representative William Barry Grove to another trustee, James Hogg, concerning

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<sup>46</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 7.

<sup>47</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 253-306; Battle, *History*, 1: 13, 282, 297, 328, 378-99, 460-1.

<sup>48</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 331. The full proceedings can be found in the *Annals of Congress*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Cong. December 2, 1793-March 3, 1795.

Hogg's large speculation in Tennessee lands, as well as the university's claims. "It is true," Groves wrote, "we have no evidence of *Consent* on the part of the Indians to relinquish any part of the Lands secured to them in 1777, and here we must *insist on the right and Custon* [sic] *of Conquest after [17]77*, in consequence of a Violation on the part of the Cherokees of that very Treaty of 1777."<sup>49</sup>

To become the dominant power of North Carolina, the gentry had to prevail in struggle with all of these social groups—Indians, British colonial elites, slaves, and yeoman farmers. The founding of a slave owners' university was one of the fruits of victory in these contests, and the institution eventually became one of the gentry's most important means for consolidating its power and spreading the institution of slavery. October 12, 1793 was indeed a historic day. In the moment that Davie stepped forward with his silver trowel, the gentry set its victories in stone.

### *Growth Of The University As An Institution Of White Privilege Built On Slavery*

In 1776, the North Carolina constitution mandated that "a school or schools be established by the Legislature, for the convenient Instruction of Youth. . . and all useful Learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted in one or more Universities."<sup>50</sup> The bill that actually established the University of North Carolina in 1789 was only slightly more specific about the university's mission. It declared that "in all well regulated Governments, it is the indispensable duty of every Legislature to consult the Happiness of a rising generation, and endeavour to fit them for an honourable discharge of the social duties of life, by paying the

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<sup>49</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1:370.

<sup>50</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1:14.

strictest attention to their education.”<sup>51</sup> In practice, the ascendancy of the slave owning gentry ensured that William R. Davie’s vision of the good society guided the physical, intellectual, and cultural development of the university. From the beginning, it was an elite institution established to train the sons of the gentry to lead the state. The mission of the university, as interpreted by men such as Davie, was to reproduce and expand a slave society in which the “rich and the well born” governed.

The trustees took the part of rural Orange County allotted to them and transformed it into a separate and distinct world. University leaders created and governed the tiny village of Chapel Hill, and they shaped it to conform to the needs of large numbers of wealthy students and professors. By 1860, Chapel Hill had become a substantial town, but it was as much a creation of the university as it had been in 1793. It was an elite community compared to the rest of Orange County, which was largely a society of small farmers and farm laborers, although there were a significant number of plantations, as well.

In Chapel Hill, large numbers of slaves serviced the needs of the young men from wealthy families who attended the university, freeing them to pursue their studies or their leisure. Slave laborers liberated the professors from mundane chores and enabled them to lead lives devoted to intellectual pursuits, participate in town affairs, and spend more time with their families and their students. Slave cooks, nurses, housekeepers, and washerwomen relieved the normal drudgery of women’s work for the wives of professors, merchants, and professionals. Without the unpaid labor of slaves, such elite lifestyles would have been far

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<sup>51</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1:23.

more costly to maintain. Thus, slave labor provided a direct financial subsidy to the university.<sup>52</sup>

Even the white skilled tradesmen who made up nearly half the population of the town gained a measure of direct economic privilege from slavery. While these artisans rarely owned slaves, they could aspire to become slave owners. Skilled craftsmen could hire slaves at low wages paid to their masters to help them in their trades. Moreover, they were privileged relative to slaves or even to free blacks, because they were respected citizens with rights denied to African Americans.<sup>53</sup>

In these ways, slave labor made common and menial white labor unnecessary and sustained an unusually prosperous white population. In addition to the economic benefits of slavery, the institution created an ambiance in Chapel Hill that was more refined than the rural districts or the average urban environment. Both the prevalence of servants and the genteel nature of the village proved attractive to sons of the gentry, and many remembered their time in Chapel Hill fondly.<sup>54</sup>

In order to understand how control of UNC by the slave owning gentry gave rise to an institution of public higher education that did not reflect the values and aspirations of most North Carolinians, it is necessary to go beyond generalizations. The university developed as

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<sup>52</sup>The manuscript census for Orange County from 1800 through 1860 makes clear that from its opening most professors were slave owners, while the university steward and local boarding house owners owned relatively large numbers of slaves. Numerous citations in the journal of Elisha Mitchell, cited later in the text, demonstrate his expenditures for slave hiring on behalf of the university and the students in his official capacity as Bursar. For a description of some of the university “servants” and their work, see Battle, *History*, 1: 60-67.

<sup>53</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, N. C. 1860, Schedules 1 and 2. The manuscript census of free people (Schedule 1) for 1860 demonstrates that skilled artisans comprised nearly half the white population of Chapel Hill. The slave census (Schedule 2) shows that these men were not slave owners.

<sup>54</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, N. C. 1860, Schedules 1. The manuscript census of free people shows that very few free common laborers lived in Chapel Hill. Skilled artisans made up a large proportion of the free black population.

a distinctly elite institution and its dominant presence in the affairs of Chapel Hill shaped that community to similar patterns. This was possible because the university depended primarily on private sources of support, rather than on public funds allocated by the General Assembly. This gave the institution a large measure of political independence to operate as the trustees saw fit.

### *Chapel Hill Develops In The Image Of The University*

Following the laying of the cornerstone, the leaders of the university auctioned off lots in what would become the Town of Chapel Hill. Most of those who bought lots were wealthy planters and merchants from Orange County and Hillsborough, the county seat. There were no free laboring people, yeoman farmers, or skilled trades people among these founders of Chapel Hill.<sup>55</sup>

By the turn of the century, both the university and the town were firmly established. The first few students came in 1795, and by 1800, Chapel Hill had 231 inhabitants, including 68 students, 5 professors, 63 slaves, and 100 other free white residents.<sup>56</sup> Of the sixteen family heads, eleven owned slaves. The two largest slave owners were John Taylor and Pleasant Henderson, both with nineteen. The university had named Taylor as Steward when it contracted with him to provide meals and janitorial services to the students. Chapel Hill's relative wealth was evidenced by the fact that 39 percent of the town's permanent population was made up of slaves compared to 20 percent for the county.

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<sup>55</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 34, 44-7; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 20-3.

<sup>56</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, 1800

Slavery in North Carolina developed initially in the plantation East, where slaves made up from one third to one half of the total population in many counties. Orange County was part of the central piedmont, an area of small farms in the foothills between the mountains to the west and the coastal plains to the east. Though slavery developed more slowly in the Piedmont, it was still significant. Slavery spread steadily from the eastern counties, and by 1830 more than 33 percent of the Orange County population was African American, including several hundred free blacks. By 1860, the county population was still over 30 percent black, despite the emigration of many slave owners to the new cotton plantation areas of the Deep South. Chapel Hill, on the other hand, had become a town that was nearly half black.<sup>57</sup> This reflected the centrality of slave labor and elite wealth to the operation of the university.

Enrollment at the university grew from an average of 160 students between 1840 and 1850 to an average of 427 between 1855 and 1860. As it did, white Chapel Hill prospered. The permanent population of the town stood at roughly 561 residents in 1850, doubling to 1,194 in 1860. At the beginning of the period, 25 slave owners owned 178 slaves who made up 32 percent of the permanent population. Thirty-six free blacks comprised another 6 percent of the town's population. Thus, 38 percent of Chapel Hill residents were African American and 17 percent of black residents were free. By 1860, fifty-seven slaveholders owned 464 slaves who made up 39 percent of the population. The number of free black residents had grown to 104, or 9 percent of the town total. The town's population was 48

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<sup>57</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, 1860, Schedules 1 and 2.

percent African American and 18 percent of all African Americans in Chapel Hill were free.<sup>58</sup>

While most white Orange County residents who worked were farmers or farm laborers, the population of Chapel Hill included very few white laboring people and few farmers. In 1850, the nine white laborers comprised 11 percent of Chapel Hill's white working population. The rest of the white working population was made up of skilled workers (35 percent), business owners or professionals (35 percent), farmers (16 percent), and white-collar workers (2 percent). Seventeen of the twenty-nine business owners and professionals (59 percent) owned slaves, including six of seven UNC professors who owned a total of sixty-seven African Americans. Among the skilled trades people, one blacksmith and a carpenter owned a total of three slaves.

During the 1850s, Chapel Hill increasingly became a town where very few white people performed common or menial labor. By 1860, white laborers comprised only 6 percent of Chapel Hill's working population. Of the remainder, 6 percent were white-collar workers, 8 percent farmers, 33 percent business and professional people, and 46 percent skilled workers. Approximately 33 percent of the white family heads owned slaves, including seven members of the gentry (defined as owners of twenty or more slaves) who owned between twenty-one and fifty-four slaves. Among business and professional people, 41 percent owned slaves, including seven of eight professors. More than half of Chapel Hill's thirteen farmers were

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<sup>58</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, 1850 and 1860, Schedules 1 and 2. Population data for Chapel Hill are the author's estimates based on the manuscript census. Although Chapel Hill was enumerated as a separate and distinct entity in 1800, it was enumerated as a township during the remaining years of slavery. Nevertheless, the village can be fairly accurately delimited in the free federal census. In 1860, that census began in Chapel Hill with J. W. Carr, merchant. When the recorded occupations of the residents suddenly become farmers and farm laborers after family 142, the author assumed that the rural area had commenced. The 1850 free federal census for Chapel Hill is more difficult to estimate. My data for 1860 is based on families one through 142, while estimates for 1850 are based on families 107 through 187. All data on slaves and slave owners is based on a comparison between the free federal census and the slave federal census.

slave owners. Twenty-four of fifty-seven slave owners were women, mostly younger heirs or widows. Fully half the white population was made up of artisans. While these skilled workers might hire slaves, only Betsy Cheek, a “tailoress,” owned a slave, a fourteen year-old black male.

Differences of class, race, and gender were sharply reflected in patterns of wealth. Business owners, farmers, professionals, and slaveholders owned roughly 95 percent of the wealth of Chapel Hill, including real estate and personal property. Slave owners were clearly the dominant property holding class, with 91 percent of all wealth. Among them, the census listed six individuals with more than \$50,000 in assets. These slave owners were John Davis, doctor (\$53,500), G. W. Purefoy, Baptist clergyman (\$66,800), D. L. Swain, President of the university (\$76,000), A. Mickle, merchant and university bursar (\$90,000), H. M. Cave, doctor (\$102,000), and H. B. Guthrie, landlord (\$131,000). Together, these six men owned 43 percent of all the property, including slaves, in Chapel Hill. While many skilled workers owned small amounts of real estate or personal property, this large class owned only 5 percent of Chapel Hill’s total wealth. While 42 percent of Chapel Hill’s slave owners were women, there was only one woman among the thirty-eight artisans with property. Most free blacks owned no property, but seven individuals owned real estate or personal property. The census recorded that two black business owners, both barbers, owned property valued at \$5,000 and \$4,400 respectively. These black businessmen owned more wealth than most white skilled workers but the total wealth controlled by free African Americans was valued at only \$13,025, 1 percent of the total wealth of Chapel Hill.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, 1860, Schedule 1.

## *Slavery And The Growth Of The University*

Slaves were critical to the functioning of the same university that denied their humanity. Yet in countless graveyards, including the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery, the lives of slaves are noted, if at all, by unmarked field stones. In university histories by white writers, slaves appear primarily as objects of patronizing ridicule. Such histories do not acknowledge either the cruelty and brutality of slavery, the centrality of black labor, or the importance of black freedom struggle in forcing the university to slowly become a more democratic institution. In this way, these commemorative monuments and historical accounts perpetuate the legacy of white supremacy and rob modern generations of any realistic understanding of how the past has shaped the present. This distortion of history has serious consequences. As historian Tim Tyson put it, “We cannot address the place we find ourselves because we will not acknowledge the road that brought us here.”<sup>60</sup>

While the products of slave labor are displayed in the old stone walls that surround the campus and the university’s nineteenth-century buildings, the suffering and striving of slaves, as well as the fabric of their lives, has been hidden from history by those who owned them. Despite fragmentary evidence, it is possible to develop a basic understanding of the way that UNC was built as an institution of white privilege on the bodies of black workers. This involved far more than slave labor, for the financial lifeblood of the university came from personal wealth created by slavery, as well as the university’s sale of slaves. Moreover, the evidence that exists allows us at least to glimpse the basic contours of black lives and black freedom struggle.

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<sup>60</sup> Tim Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 318.

James Patterson, the contractor for Old East, may have used both slave and free black laborers and artisans, and possibly white artisans, as well. This mixture of free and slave labor was the common practice in North Carolina throughout the colonial and ante-bellum periods. Patterson's partners, George Lucas and Patrick St. Lawrence, were wealthy slave owners from nearby Chatham County and their slaves probably provided the bulk of the labor for building Old East.<sup>61</sup> According to the contract signed by James Patterson and his two partners, "The foundation to the surface of the earth to be of stone wall, three feet thick—from the surface to the . . . first floor two and an half feet in height, the wall to be twenty two and a half inches thick of brick." Old East was one of the largest building projects undertaken in North Carolina up to that time.

Slave laborers dug the hard, red clay for half a million bricks. They refined the clay and packed it into molds and stacked the molds into kilns. Slaves tended the fires day and night, feeding the flames with wood cut from the virgin forest they had cleared to make the streets of Chapel Hill. When the bricks were baked hard, they hauled them to the construction site to be used by masons who laid the brick into the massive walls of the first building of the first state university. Other slaves drove the teams that pulled wagons of limestone to the building site. Slaves tended the fires that burned the stone into lime. They hauled the water from local springs to mix with lime and sand to make mortar. There were other slave artisans as well, including skilled sawyers who ripped ancient pines into tight grained floor boards, carpenters, who shaped the huge central girders and tied them into the walls.<sup>62</sup> There were plasterers, tanners, and painters. They were men and they were property. They had families,

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<sup>61</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 231; Bishir, "Black Builders," 439.

<sup>62</sup>Connor, *Documentary History*, 1: 230.

hopes, and fears, yet we do not know their names, how they lived, or what they felt. We know a good deal about the amounts and costs of the building materials used in the early university structures, but there is no account of the men who labored to build a university for “the people.”

In addition to Old East, slaves hired or owned by white builders helped build South Building, Stewards Hall, the original President’s House, Person Hall, Gerrard Hall, Smith Hall (present day Playmakers Theater), Old West, New East, and New West. Slaves built the stone walls surrounding the university between 1838 and 1844, and Professor Elisha Mitchell was paid “liberally” for overseeing the work as well as for the use of his own slaves on the project.<sup>63</sup>

There were a few slaves during the nineteenth century who were considered “university servants” throughout their lives, though legally they belonged to university presidents or professors. November Caldwell, for instance, belonged to President Caldwell and later to President Swain. Wilson Swain, November’s son, belonged to President Swain and worked for the university until Emancipation.<sup>64</sup> It is not clear just how the owners of these lifelong university slaves were compensated.

The hiring out of slaves was common throughout the era of slavery. Generally, slaves were hired at the beginning of January for the period of a year.<sup>65</sup> There is clear evidence that the university did hire slaves from their masters to be “university servants.” Professor Elisha Mitchell, serving as university bursar in 1839, noted in his journal, “Servant Tom came to

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<sup>63</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 444; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 53-56.

<sup>64</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 535, 601, 695; Battle, *Wilson Caldwell*; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 39, 40, 56, 72, 80, 81, 86, 90, 105, 114.

<sup>65</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 18; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 136-7, 156-7; Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 22-3.

work for college Sept. 16th.” Apparently, Tom was a satisfactory college servant, for in December, Mitchell rented Tom for another year: “Went down to Kirby’s in Chatham and hired Tom for 65 dollars.” The next month, Mitchell noted another payment for servant hire: “Jan. 13, 1840 NJ King hire of servants (60.00).” The university also paid for the food and housing of slaves it hired. For instance, Mitchell noted that on April 20, 1840, “Paid Col. Woods board of servants 20.00.” On December 2, 1841 Mitchell noted, “Settlement with Col Woods Dec 2d 1841. Balance remaining for Servts. \$95.79 1/2. Balance due on servants board. 28.42 1/2.” The university also provided clothing for the slaves it rented. Mitchell noted, “Aug. 22--Cash pd for making 1 pr. Pants + 1 shirt for Tom Jones, Coll. Servant-- .75”<sup>66</sup>

Apparently, when the university rented slaves from President Swain or other professors, it also paid their board. On October 7, 1839 Mitchell wrote in his diary, “Paid Gov. Swain for Dudley (1.00).” On page 133 of his diary, Mitchell noted, “April 13 Board of servants Tom and November March 10 (9”00).” While “Tom” may refer to a slave rented from a Chatham County slave owner, “November” surely referred to November Caldwell, the slave belonging to President Swain. Whether Caldwell was living in one of the President’s slave houses or at a boarding house in town is not clear.<sup>67</sup>

Mitchell also handled the accounts of university students who regularly hired slaves to do their washing and other work. For instance, Mitchell noted, “Paid servant to order of Smallwood 10.00,” and “Paid servant to order of Perkins 10.00.” In nearly all cases,

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<sup>66</sup>Journal entry, September 29, 1839, Folder 14, Elisha Mitchell Papers SHC #518. Also December 27, 1839, January 13, 1840, April 20, [1840], page 128, December 2, 1841 in Elisha Mitchell Papers SHC #518; From “Expense Account” entry, August 15, 1857, OP Folder 6, Oversized Items, in the Miscellaneous Manuscripts 1840-1857, UP.

<sup>67</sup>Mitchell journal, October 7, 1939; Mitchell journal, 133.

payments for servant hire went to masters, not slaves.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, slaves occasionally were allowed to hire their own time or keep some of their earnings. For instance, the Chatham County slave, Moses Horton, who sold vegetables and love poems in Chapel Hill, as well as slave Sam Morphis, were allowed by their masters to keep their earnings after paying a set fee. Mitchell noted a number of small payments to November Caldwell and other slaves for supplying students with wood and other services, “31 January 1840—Paid November wood for Avery two dollars,” for example.<sup>69</sup> University “servants” did a variety of work. November Caldwell built fires for the students in their rooms and hauled water to supply the dormitories and classrooms. His son, Wilson Swain, was apprenticed to the university gardener, Thomas Paxton, an expert brought from England by President Swain to beautify the campus in 1851.<sup>70</sup>

The bulk of the work to provide for the students and maintain the university was contracted to a university Steward and to local innkeepers. In 1795, for instance, John “Buck” Taylor was elected the university Steward for five years. He was to serve meals, bring water, sweep the rooms daily, and wash the floors of all rooms and buildings. For the labor of his slaves, the university paid Taylor a fee of 2,000 pounds, or approximately \$4,000 yearly. Taylor, like many others closely associated with the university, was also a plantation owner. According to Battle, “John Taylor was a fine specimen of the bold, frank, rough, honest, Revolutionary veteran, a good citizen . . . [He] owned a plantation three miles west of Chapel Hill. . . . When he came to his death-bed he requested to be buried on the summit

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<sup>68</sup>Mitchell journal, 128. See Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 136-7, 156-7 and Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 22-3 for the relationship between the hiring of slaves in towns and cities and the opportunity for them to self-hire or claim cash payment for certain kinds of work.

<sup>69</sup>Mitchell journal, January 31, 1840.

<sup>70</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 524, 600-607; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 56.

of a woody hill overlooking the cultivated fields, so that he could watch the negroes and keep them at their work.”<sup>71</sup>

Most of the Professors, including transplanted Yankees, owned several household servants, and some accumulated a large number of slaves. Kemp Battle noted that not long after Professor Elisha Mitchell’s wife had their first child in 1820, Mitchell—“although a Connecticut man”<sup>72</sup>—bought a slave girl for \$350 to nurse his child. In 1850, only Fordyce Hubbard among the 6 university professors owned no slaves. President Swain owned 19 slaves. Manuel Fetter owned 7 slaves, James Phillips, 3, Charles Phillips, 4, Elisha Mitchell, 18, and William Horn Battle, 16. In 1860, Swain’s property had increased in number to 32 and he was the third wealthiest man in the village. Solomon Pool owned 4 slaves, James Phillips, 1, Manuel Fetter, 12, Charles Phillips, 3, H. H. Smith, 4, and instructor W. B. Harrell, 1. Hubbard still owned no slaves, while Mitchell had died and Battle had moved to Raleigh. The allure of slave owning, as well as the pressure to conform to institutional norms, can be judged from the fact that although Hubbard was from Massachusetts, the other professors from the North all owned slaves, including Fetter, James and Charles Phillips, Smith, and Mitchell.

Many of the trustees were among the wealthiest slave owners in North Carolina. When trustee Duncan Cameron died, his son, trustee Paul Cameron, became the richest man in North Carolina. Prior to the Civil War, Cameron’s family controlled approximately one thousand slaves. More typical was William R. Davie, “father of the University,” who owned 36 slaves in 1790 at the time of the founding of the university. Davie retired from public life

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<sup>71</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 53.

<sup>72</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 253.

in North Carolina to his “Tivoli” plantation in South Carolina in November, 1805 with “a proper complement of slaves.” When Davie died in 1820 he owned 117 slaves.<sup>73</sup>

Since the North Carolina legislature provided little funding for the university during the period of slavery, UNC depended financially on tuition and fees, private contributions, and certain funds, called escheats, allocated to it in the legislation that created the university. Most students paid tuition, room and board, as well as other fees, including some that were optional, such as slave hire. Nearly all of the students came from wealthy families that were able to provide an elite education for their sons because of profits from slavery.<sup>74</sup>

The men who could send their sons to the university because they were slave owners also donated money, land, and slaves to the institution. John Calvin McNair, class of 1849, donated his land and slaves to the university, stipulating that the property should be sold and the proceeds used to establish a lecture series designed to “prove the existence and attributes of God (as far as may be) from nature.”<sup>75</sup> The first donations to the university were from Orange County men who contributed land and cash to entice the trustees to locate the university at Chapel Hill. Most of these men were slave owners, as were many of those who bought lots from the university to start the Town of Chapel Hill. The next large contribution to the university came from Benjamin Smith, a wealthy slave owner who donated twenty thousand acres of western land warrants given him by the state of North Carolina for his service in the Revolution.

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<sup>73</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 20. For Davie’s ownership of slaves, see U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N.C., 1790 and U.S. Census MS, Chester County, S.C., 1820. For comment regarding “a proper complement of slaves,” see Battle, *History*, 1: 177.

<sup>74</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 320; Snider, *Light on the Hill*, xi.

<sup>75</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 48; Battle, *History*, 1: 523. Due to the Civil War, the slaves were lost to the university, but the land brought \$14,500 at the beginning of the twentieth century.

While Smith's donation reflected the way the university benefited from the dispossession of native peoples, the Francis Jones Smith Fund reflected how profits from slavery helped finance the university long after Emancipation. When Mary Ruffin Smith died in 1885 she left a 1440-acre Chatham County plantation to the university, stipulating that it be used to establish a fund in her brother's name. Her father, Dr. James Smith, a university trustee, U. S. Congressman, and wealthy slave owner, had left the property to her rather than to her brothers. James Smith's two sons, both UNC graduates prior to the Civil War, became notorious for drunkenness and rape. Between the two of them, they fathered three children by Harriet, a slave belonging to their sister. These children were raised in the Smith household and following the war, Mary Ruffin gave them each one hundred dollars. Eventually, the trustees used the proceeds from the Smith bequest to install the first electric lights on campus and to provide scholarships. In 1938, the university denied admission to Pauli Murray, Harriet Smith's great granddaughter, because of her race.<sup>76</sup>

Some of the university's principal sources of income during the era of slavery were the estates of individuals who died without leaving a will or descendants who could legally inherit their property. Such property was known as an escheat, and the university used all the means at its disposal to collect escheated property. Every district of the state had a lawyer connected with the university who was responsible for investigating court records that might yield escheats. When a potential escheat was found, the lawyer would investigate further,

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<sup>76</sup>On the rape of Pauli Murray's ancestor, see Pauli Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 41-4. On use of the funds from Mary Smith's bequest for electric lighting and scholarships, see Henderson, *Campus*, 300 and Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 101, 120. On Murray's application to the University of North Carolina, see Pauli Murray, *Murray, Autobiography*, 108-12, 115-29.

consult with the university treasurer, and proceed as directed. The university's representatives received a 10 percent commission plus expenses.<sup>77</sup>

Escheats involving slaves were a common occurrence. Slaves, like other property, were sold for cash. On March 1, 1839, for example, attorney B.F. Moore replied to Charles Manley, the university treasurer. "I have recd your two letters in relation to the estate of Dorothy Mitchell. . . . I agree with you, that the best mode will be to sell the slaves and take into my possession the bonds, but it happens that on the first of Jany. the widow hired them out for the year. When I go to No.ampton next week I will see if the slaves can be surrendered on fair terms and if so they shall be sold at the Supr Court; if such surrender cannot be effected they must remain till the end of the year. Upon the whole I do not believe that the interests of the University will be prejudiced by delay of sale, for slaves are advancing in price daily and many of these are children."<sup>78</sup>

The university's aggressive pursuit of escheats sometimes created a great deal of antagonism against the Board of Trustees. One of the lawyers attempting to settle UNC's claims in Tennessee wrote that his efforts had been opposed by "the mob who sympathize with the alleged poor soldier cheated out of his land." The Tennessee Secretary of State wrote that opposition to the university's claims was driven by the "democratic power and leveling spirit" of the people. He added that charges of "gentlemen's children grinding the face of the poor, etc., etc., are still tingling in our ears."<sup>79</sup> Yet, the funds gained from

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<sup>77</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 10, 15, 138-40, 150-3, 622.

<sup>78</sup>From B.F. Moore to Charles Manley, March 1, 1839, in UP.

<sup>79</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 397.

escheats were absolutely critical to the survival of the antebellum university, and the university had the resources and connections to make good on most of its claims.

The sums gained from slave sales were significant. The amount that flowed into the university treasury from the sale of Dorothy Mitchell's slaves, including several children, was \$2,832.10. The entire income of the university for 1839 was \$36,681 and the salary of a university professor in that year was \$1,250.<sup>80</sup>

There is only one instance when a historian of the university has discussed the institution's ownership and sale of slaves in any depth, and then it was done to dismiss the issue. In volume I of Battle's *History of the University of North Carolina*, under the topic "Troublesome Escheats," Battle explained how the trustees adjusted their claims to show compassion for a struggling white woman. Then the following passage appeared: "[The trustees] seemed to experience no difficulty in deciding another case, which in our times would be considered hard. A free negro had a daughter, the slave of another. He bought her, and she then became the mother of a boy. The woman's father died without kin and intestate. His child and grandchild being his personal property became the property of the University. They were ordered to be sold. This sounds hard, but it was proved to the Board that they were in the lowest stage of poverty and degradation and that it would redound to their happiness to have a master. It must be remembered that slaves were considered to be as a rule in a better condition than free negroes."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>For sources on Mitchell receipts and commissions, see Treasurer's Report, November 20, 1841, Item 8, OP Folder 6, Oversized Items, Miscellaneous 1840-1857, UP; November 20, 1842, Item 3; November 20, 1843, Item 4. For total income of UNC, see Elisha Mitchell's Bursar's report, November 20, 1839, Folder 14, Elisha Mitchell Papers SHC #518. For professor's salary, see Battle, *History*, 1: 463.

<sup>81</sup> Battle, *History*, 1: 320.

University records reveal a story that is more complete. On January 22, 1839, Mathias Manley, university trustee and the brother of university treasurer, Executive Committee member, and former governor, Charles Manley, wrote to him from New Bern.

My Dear Brother,

There is a negro girl and two or three children here who I believe have escheated to the university.

The facts are that an old negro man a few years ago was emancipated by one of the Jones family of this neighborhood after which he purchased the girl who is his daughter. The old fellow is now dead without having any kin of inheritable blood or making any provisions for his daughter + grandchildren.

Under the circumstances what ought to be done? I have thought the case rather hard to proceed in without express instructions.

We are all well and send our love to yourself + family.

Mathias Manley.<sup>82</sup>

One week later, in a note added to the back of the letter, Charles Manley wrote: "M.S. Manly on Escheated Negroes. Answered + 'instructed' to take possession + sell for cash. 27 Jan. 1839."<sup>83</sup> Clearly, Charles Manley did not share the feelings of his brother, who "thought the case rather hard to proceed in."

Mathias replied to his brother on February 15, 1839.

My Dear Charles

It is possible for me to communicate to you the condition of the Negroes upon which the University I think has a claim. Since learning that the board of trustees was disposed to assert their rights I have made more particular inquiries.

The slaves consist of a woman and child + not two children as formerly supposed. . . . The negroes are but of little value. The woman is one of those diseased and squallid wenches that are to be found in the outskirts of many towns + the child any [?] way worthy of the parentage. . . .

Mathias Manley<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>From Mathias Manley to Charles Manley, January 22, 1839, UP.

<sup>83</sup>From Mathias Manley to Charles Manley, January 22, 1839, Note on back of January 22 letter dated January 27, 1839, UP.

<sup>84</sup>Mathias Manley to Charles Manley, February 15, 1839, UP.

While this story illustrates the cold-hearted approach of university officials, it also demonstrates how North Carolina law trapped African Americans striving for freedom. In a strategy used by some free blacks to rescue loved ones from servitude, the old man of New Bern bought his own child.<sup>85</sup> This undoubtedly required a great deal of effort and sacrifice, since slaves were expensive and free blacks, for the most part, had limited incomes. The act demonstrates a great love of both family and freedom. The man probably knew very well that he was buying only a brief moment of relative freedom together for his family. North Carolina law was very clear—the father, probably freed before the legislature enacted more restrictive emancipation laws in the early 1830s, was able to buy his enslaved daughter, but he could not free her. Emancipation had, by that time, become illegal, except by special provision of the legislature. Moreover, when the daughter had a child, her son was born a slave as well, since the law determined the status of a child by the status of the mother. When the old man died without any free relative, his personal property, including his daughter and grandson, became the property of the university. This was because the law of escheats granted the university all the property of such persons who died “intestate,” that is, without legal heirs.

The story of the old man of New Bern also teaches us lessons about the response of slaves to the conditions of their bondage. In the face of the overwhelming power of slavery, this slave found a way to gain a measure of freedom for himself and his family. His courage and persistence, even more than his limited success, created a freedom legacy for generations of African Americans to come. Though he died, and the men who led the university sold his loved ones, his example of freedom striving has endured. In all of the many examples of

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<sup>85</sup>Ira Berlin calls this practice “self-purchase.” See, for instance, Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 331-4. On the self-purchase of the Chapel Hill slave Sam Morphis, see Morphis, “Autobiography.”

white domination and black resistance that mark the university's history during slavery, what emerges as the fundamental contradiction is the effort of masters' to deny black humanity and the struggle of African Americans to assert their rights, their dignity, and their worth. That struggle took many forms, both subtle and overt, individual and collective. Although evidence concerning black lives in Chapel Hill during slavery is limited, particularly evidence created directly by African Americans, there can be no doubt about the fundamental conflict. While the university generated a culture of domination to enforce black subordination, African Americans forged a culture of resistance to assert their full humanity.

*"I Can Supply Back As Long As You Can Supply Whip": The Culture Of Slavery, The Culture Of Black Resistance, And The University*

The most powerful testimony concerning the relationship of the University of North Carolina to the struggle for black freedom during the era of slavery is silence.<sup>86</sup> In the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery, slave burials are designated by unmarked fieldstones.<sup>87</sup> In the federal manuscript census, slaves have no names. Each Chapel Hill slave is indicated by a slash mark beneath the owner's name.<sup>88</sup> The old rock walls surrounding the campus are silent concerning the lives and labors of their slave builders. In contrast, buildings, portraits,

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<sup>86</sup>For an excellent discussion of the way that power impacts the production of history, see Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

<sup>87</sup>The black sections of the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery date from circa 1798. In 1973 there were 608 unmarked graves in these sections. See "Old Chapel Hill Cemetery: Directory and Inventory" (Chapel Hill: Town of Chapel Hill, 1990). Online summary at <<http://apdew.com/cemetery/orng/cem076.htm>>.

<sup>88</sup>See, for example, U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N. C., 1860, Schedule 2.

monuments, and university histories trumpet a one-sided celebration of the university's slave past.<sup>89</sup>

These silences, and the contrast with the celebration of white supremacy, tell us that slaves were without power, wealth, or respect in their day. These sources also tell us that the men whose profit and privilege was based on slavery had great difficulty in acknowledging the humanity of slaves or the inhumanity of slavery.

The tendency of slavery era white supremacist culture to define slaves as property is evident in the language of commerce used by masters in reference to slaves. In July 1790, trustee William Lenoir purchased an eleven year-old slave named Martin. In the bill of sale, the seller guaranteed the "said Negroe Boy to be healthy and sound & clear of all infirmity." The young man might as well have been a mule.<sup>90</sup> On March 16, 1844, Lucy Battle wrote to her husband, William H. Battle, a university professor and trustee, ". . . by the way\_ you own another negro. Sue wrote that China has a fine daughter. . . your property is increasing rapidly."<sup>91</sup> In May 1856, lawyer P. H. Winston reported to UNC treasurer Charles Manley on the status of some property belonging to the university, noting that "four valuable negroes" remained to be sold.<sup>92</sup> In July 1857, S. Attmore wrote to treasurer Manley concerning

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<sup>89</sup>A good illustration of the one-sided celebration of white leaders in the university's telling of its own story is Powell, *First State University*.

<sup>90</sup>Bill of Sale, July 14, 1790, in the Lenoir Family Papers, SHC #426.

<sup>91</sup>From Lucy Battle to William H. Battle, March 16, 1844, in the BFP quoted in Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 18.

<sup>92</sup>From P. H. Winston to Charles Manley, May 30, 1856, UP.

possible proceeds to the university from the Jarmon estate. Four African Americans may belong to the university, said Attmore, but two are “worthless.”<sup>93</sup>

Yet slaves were human, masters knew it, and they feared that slaves would resist bondage, perhaps violently. Thus, slave society generated a complex web of power to hem in black freedom striving. In Chapel Hill, as elsewhere, there were slave codes, night patrols, and hunting parties to track down runaways and guard against revolt.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, slaves ran away from trustees, professors, and from the university itself, and they resisted slavery in many ways. In the journal of Elisha Mitchell, professor and university bursar, we see that mundane concerns about the purchasing of supplies are intermingled with concerns about slave resistance. On December 20, 1834 Mitchell noted in his journal, “Paid Mr. Freeland three dollars in full for flour. Mr. King had the boy he sold me returned.”<sup>95</sup>

Slaves ran away from the university as well as from individual professors. On November 25, 1829 an ad in the *Hillsborough Recorder* signed by S. M. Stewart offered a \$20.00 reward for his runaway slave James, who “ran off from the University.” Stewart, no doubt, had rented James to the university. In 1843, a slave boy who had become the property of the university through the law of escheats ran away, probably because he was to be sold. The attorney handling the escheat for the university put the Sheriff of Bladen County on the boy’s trail and notified the university Treasurer. “I shall be at Bladen Court 1<sup>st</sup> Monday in August,”

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<sup>93</sup>From S. Attmore to Charles Manley, July 21 and 30, 1857, UP, cited in Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 36,

<sup>94</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 270; Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 67, 69.

<sup>95</sup>Mitchell journal, December 20, 1834.

the attorney wrote, “ if the boy be taken by that time I shall sell him at Court.” Ten days before Christmas the attorney reported, “Sale of Negro slave Jim in Bladen County \$75.”<sup>96</sup>

The power and privilege that flowed to masters and their families from the institution of slavery came at a great cost to slaves. Their constant assertions of humanity demanded harsh repressive measures by masters. Kemp Battle recounted the story of a Chapel Hill slave who ran away when he was sold to a slave trader to pay his master’s debts. From the point of view of the slave, not only would the sale separate him from his family, but it would also condemn him to the more harsh conditions of servitude in the Deep South. Though a dangerous and extreme alternative, this slave decided to run for freedom. “One of [Samuel Morgan’s] slaves, Tom, having been bought by a trader who designed to carry him to the Southwest for sale, ran away and for several years had two hiding places, one a cave on Morgan’s Creek and the other in a very thick copse of wood near his old master’s residence, under the lee of overhanging rocks.”

Eventually, the small university community mobilized its resources to recapture Tom. In a description that suggested both familiar ritual on the part of white citizens and Tom’s determination to be free, Battle explained how Tom was re-enslaved. “Then a posse was summoned for his capture. Marching through the forest at regular intervals—a process known as “beating the woods”—the men aroused him from his lair, and, on his refusal to stop when commanded, he was shot in the legs, captured and then sent south for sale.”<sup>97</sup>

Young Kemp Battle visited Tom’s “lair” shortly after his capture, and it is instructive to note how the scene meshed with the prevailing culture of white supremacy to reinforce the

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<sup>96</sup>Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 9, 34.

<sup>97</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 31.

image of black bestiality in Battle's mind. Battle recounted his visit to "the den in the woods" a day after Tom's capture. "I remember the shoemaker's bench and the fragments of leather, the scattered bones, relics of his solitary meals, and my young mind was shocked inexpressibly at the resemblance of poor Tom's habitation to the lair of a wild beast."<sup>98</sup>

Battle was a youth at the time, and his experience of this event impressed him deeply. When such stories became part of the lore of the town, successive generations of UNC students learned them. Along with the normative values embedded in them, they constituted a silent pedagogy that framed the way students thought about their own experiences.

This story also suggests that African Americans who resisted slavery may frequently have had the support of family and friends. That Tom could stay hidden from the town authorities for "several years" seems unlikely without such support. In fact, Battle explained that he survived "partly by robbery, partly by food brought by his mother." The story also suggests that Tom may have made shoes for himself or for other slaves, possibly in exchange for food. Battle noted, "Rough boards leaning against the rocks made a dismal shelter from the rain. Under them was a shoemaker's bench and a pile of leaves for his couch . . . . I remember the shoemaker's bench and the fragments of leather."

At times, running for freedom became a collective effort on the part of slaves. The absence of many white men from local communities and the approach of Union troops encouraged slaves to take increased risks for freedom during the Civil War.<sup>99</sup> Henry A. London, a student at the university during the war, gave evidence of such collective slave resistance in a letter on February 16, 1864. He wrote, "The sheriff of the county summoned a

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<sup>98</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 32. Battle was born in 1831, so this event probably took place in the late 1830s or early 1840s.

<sup>99</sup>On the mass "boatlift" escapes engineered by slaves residing near Beaufort, North Carolina following the Union invasion, see Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, 157-59.

‘Posse’ of about thirty of us to break up a camp of runaway Negroes, which we most effectually did, capturing the camp with all its contents, taking 7 prisoners and wounding one, without a man of us scratched.”

London described the attack on runaway slaves as a kind of manly adventure. “We had quite an excitement here last week,” he wrote, “and which we enjoyed very much.”<sup>100</sup>

London also kept a diary, and he described another student’s pastime. “Went around to Burgwyn’s room to a ‘Possum’ supper, but it did not come, saw him frighten some little darkies by shooting his pistol.”<sup>101</sup>

Ridicule was another way that members of the gentry reassured themselves and others that slaves were less than human. In his *History*, Battle noted that there were “some negroes, who in different ways contributed to the amusement and comfort of the students.” “There was Ben Boothe, who, on account of his simian features was, after the publication of Darwin’s books, called “the Missing Link.” His forte was butting planks asunder by his head, and allowing planks to be split upon the summit of his skull. . . . He was no beggar, worked for his living as long as he was able . . . when he became nearly helpless from old age he was well cared for by the King’s Daughters, a white organization.”<sup>102</sup>

Even in 1985, a white author could recount such anecdotes without editorial comment. James Vickers wrote that university students made sport with the body of a dead slave. “A slave . . . named Asgill was hanged for killing another slave. Students made a holiday of escorting the body back to Chapel Hill, and some medical students sent the head in a bag late

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<sup>100</sup>From Henry A. London Jr. to Lil, February 16, 1864, in the Henry Armand London Papers, SHC #868-z.

<sup>101</sup>London diary, 1862-3, 57.

<sup>102</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 602.

one evening to John B. Tenney's teenaged son, Abdel Kader, who worked as the night clerk in a drugstore. Their slave messenger told the boy it was a watermelon."<sup>103</sup>

Though swaggering and vicious acts may have typified the culture of white supremacy among UNC students, bravery and dedication to the Confederate cause were by no means universal. In the same letter in which he described the great adventure of breaking up the camp of slaves runaways, London noted the effort of some students to dodge the Confederate draft. He wrote to Lil that military authorities came to the campus and carried away "half a dozen students who were eighteen." He added, "You know it is only the Juniors & Seniors who are exempt and so last Tuesday the Enrolling Officer took to the Conscript Camp the Sophs and Fresh who were liable to conscription, and who had been skulking here for sometime with the hope of being let alone till they were Juniors, when they would be exempted by the President." Noting his own ambivalent feelings about military service, London wrote, "I hate the idea of skulking, as it were, out of the army, when my Country needs my services so much, but yet when an exemption is proffered a man, he can scarcely [sic] be blamed for taking it."<sup>104</sup>

After the war, Henry London became active in the movement to whitewash slavery and white supremacy, known as the Lost Cause. In 1913, he was a featured speaker at the dedication of the Confederate soldiers' monument at the university. At his frequent speaking engagements, London extolled the bravery of southern white men who answered the noble cause of the Confederacy without hesitation.<sup>105</sup> In this way, through men like Kemp Battle

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<sup>103</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 57; Battle, *History*, 1: 605-6.

<sup>104</sup>From Henry A. London Jr. to Lil, February 16, 1864.

<sup>105</sup>Confederate Memorial Day Speech, May 10, 1887, HALP.

and Henry A. London, the university promoted and justified the culture and power of white supremacy long after the end of slavery.

Although no African American in Chapel Hill had access to the resources and respect accorded to men like Battle and London, slaves and free blacks developed their own counter-culture to resist the dehumanizing impact of slavery on their lives. One of the most severe hardships endured by slaves was the difficulty of maintaining family relationships and community in the face of restrictions on marriage, free association, and the constant threat of the auction block.

Slaves developed these collective aspects of their humanity, though with difficulty. Although slave marriages were not binding by law, they were of great significance to slaves. When Sam Morphis married Lizzie, one of Judge Battle's "house-girls," in the late 1850s, Professor William Mercer Green, later Bishop of Mississippi, performed the ceremony on the porch of Judge Battle's home with many students among the guests.<sup>106</sup> After Emancipation, large numbers of former Chapel Hill slaves had their marriages formally legalized, while many others searched outside of Chapel Hill for spouses who had been sold away. Nevertheless, some masters may have discouraged the marriage of their female slaves, probably to increase their own wealth. This seems to be the implication of Kemp Battle's cryptic comment about President Swain's slaves. Battle wrote, "His female slaves multiplied rapidly, although they did not enter into the matrimonial engagements usual among slaves. . . . One of his women was a grandmother at twenty-seven years of age." Swain's slave

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<sup>106</sup>Morphis, "Autobiography," 6.

property nearly doubled between 1850 and 1860, and it is possible that he discouraged family ties that might have interfered with breeding.<sup>107</sup>

On the other hand, something about African American families, community life, and race relations may be gleaned from census information concerning free blacks in Chapel Hill who, by 1860, made up approximately one fifth of the black population. Such data tells us little about the interactions of slaves and free blacks, yet it seems evident that in a very small town with one main street, where one in five African Americans were free, there must have been a great deal of interaction.

There was apparently little or no residential segregation in Chapel Hill during slavery.<sup>108</sup> Free black families lived interspersed with white families, and there were even a number of households headed by African Americans that included white household members. Two twenty-eight-year-old white salesmen lived in the home of twenty-five-year-old black carpenter Jack Evans, along with his wife and seven-month-old son. Miss M. Spier, a fifty-six-year-old white “instructress,” lived in the household of two black women, thirty-year-old Nancy Gouch and fifty-year-old Clarissa Gouch.<sup>109</sup> Frank Harris, a black twenty-six-year-old painter, included in his household his wife and three small children, a white carpenter and his wife, a white master plasterer, and a second white master plasterer, his wife, and six small children. Next door, Professor Fordyce Hubbard, the only university faculty member who owned no slaves, housed a white twenty-seven-year-old master mechanic, his young wife and

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<sup>107</sup> Battle, *History*, 1: 535.

<sup>108</sup>On the lack of residential segregation in Chapel Hill in 1860 and the details of household members, see U.S. Census MS, Orange County, 1860, schedule 1 (free inhabitants).

<sup>109</sup>Maria Spear had been an instructress in the household of Mary Smith and had helped raise Pauli Murray’s slave ancestors. Her anti-slavery views forced her to leave the Smith household in the 1850s. See Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 161.

small child, another fifteen-year-old white female, and four plasterers and a painter, all black men in their twenties.

Although segregation in Chapel Hill is not apparent in 1860, there does seem to be clustering of free black families suggestive of a desire for social solidarity and mutual support. There also appears to be evidence of interracial clustering along occupational lines. The concentration of free blacks in Chapel Hill was greater than in rural Orange County.<sup>110</sup> That may reflect greater economic opportunities in Chapel Hill for free blacks, since between 1850 and 1860 the number of free blacks listing occupations in the census tripled, while those holding skilled jobs held nearly steady at around 60 percent. Other factors were also probably important in attracting free blacks to Chapel Hill. Indeed, assuming that a free black community itself was important to free blacks, it is difficult to see how that could have been accomplished in rural areas.<sup>111</sup>

Within Chapel Hill, there were twenty-three free African American households. Men headed thirteen of these households, all but one married, and single women headed the other eleven. There were also thirteen free African American individuals living in white households, including ten men, six of whom were skilled workers, and three women. Free black households often occurred in clusters of two to four black families or within the house of another black family. Sometimes, African American households seemed connected by trade and at times these clusters included white tradesmen.

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<sup>110</sup>John Hope Franklin estimated the percentage of free blacks in North Carolina in 1860 at 3 percent. The author's estimate of free blacks in Orange County is 4-6 percent and for Chapel Hill 8.7 percent. In Chapel Hill the percentage of the black population that was free was 18 percent compared to 8.4 percent for the state. See, Franklin, *Free Negro*, 17-8. Author's estimate of percentage of free blacks in Orange County based on U.S. Census MS, Orange County, 1860, schedules 1 and 2. For estimate of 500-700 free blacks in the county by Franklin, see map in *Free Negro*, 17.

<sup>111</sup>John Hope Franklin described free blacks in North Carolina as a predominantly rural population. In Orange County, between 28-39 percent of free blacks lived in the two largest towns, Chapel Hill and Hillsborough. See Franklin, *Free Negro*, 19.

The largest cluster of black families included thirty-three-year-old Susan Bishop and her four children, fifty-five-year-old Millie Walker, forty-five-year-old Adeline Mitchell and her three young children, and twenty-eight-year-old Adam Chavis and his wife and child, along with forty-three-year-old Susan Holden and eight-year-old Lizzie Archer. Only Chavis, a teamster, and Susan Holden, a domestic servant, had occupations listed in the census, while three single women were living with children. Thus, it may very well be that this cluster was based, in part, on black women joining together for mutual support and survival. There may also have been other, less evident connections among these thirteen people. Every individual in these four families was listed in the census as a “mulatto,” though over all, roughly two-thirds of free blacks in Chapel Hill were “mulattos.”

Another apparent cluster, this one tied together in part by trade as well as race, involved a household headed by forty-two-year-old black farmer William Peace, and included his wife and five young children and two unrelated “domestic servants,” John Weaver, thirty, and Kath Whitaker, twenty-seven. The next household was that of Professor Hubbard, including the four black plasterers, the white master mechanic, and the black painter. The next household was that of twenty-six-year-old black painter Frank Harris, his family, a white carpenter from Maryland and his wife, a white master mechanic, and another white master mechanic from England and his family. Other clusters included Green Cordal and Jack Evans, both black cabinetmakers lived next door to each other; William Allen and Young Evans, black masons, lived next door to each other and to John Douglas, a white mason with his mason apprentice son; and Tom Jones, a twenty-three-year-old black barber boarding in

the home of a white wheelwright along with a white printer lived next door to a forty-four-year-old black barber, David Moore.<sup>112</sup>

While all of this evidence suggests that free African Americans in Chapel Hill clustered together for mutual solidarity and support, it also suggests that Chapel Hill was not a rigidly segregated society in 1860. Free African Americans and white residents sometimes lived in households headed by members of the other race, and members of a particular skilled trade sometimes clustered together residentially regardless of race. Housing was racially mixed.

These patterns reflect the importance of family to African Americans as well as community and racial solidarity. Moreover, they may reflect the priority of these kinds of social relationships among slaves, particularly since such relationships clearly became important for all African Americans following Emancipation. For African Americans, forging bonds of family and community was a form of resistance against the disintegrating and dehumanizing impact of slavery.

In addition to seeking out support from family and community, slaves found a myriad of other ways to survive bondage. Slaves often resorted to subtle humor to turn the tables on slavery. Sometimes, slave humor asserted a role reversal or social equality, thereby using humorous jibes to call attention to the injustices of slave culture in a way that stayed within the bounds of racial etiquette. White authors often repeated these stories for their own purposes, although generally they linked them with ridicule in attempts to demean African Americans and make light of slavery.

Kemp Battle described Sam Morphis, for instance, as “a picturesque mulatto. . . very handsome, full of humor, an expert manager of horses . . . . His defect was inclination to

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<sup>112</sup>U. S. Census MS, Orange County, N. C.1860, Schedules 1 and 2.

alcoholic stimulants.” After giving Morphis a touch of praise and then slapping him down, Battle related two examples of the slave’s humor. Battle wrote, “As [Sam] was conveying Professor, now President Winston, from Hillsboro to Chapel Hill, he began to drive recklessly in order to pass all vehicles ahead of him. The Professor saw that he was dangerously near intoxication and prudently insisted on taking the reins. This sobered Sam, and for a full mile he was silent. Suddenly he burst into a laugh and exclaimed, ‘TO THINK of a gentleman of your cloth driving a gentleman of my cloth!’ Battle went on to recount how after marrying one of Judge Battle’s slaves, Morphis considered himself “one of the family.” Battle wrote, “After officiating as a driver of a lady’s carriage through the mountains where the Judge was very popular, he was asked how he ‘got along with the mountaineers.’ ‘Splendid,’ he said. ‘Never had no trouble. All I had to do was to tell them that I was Judge Battle’s son-in-law, and they opened their doors and gave me everything they had.’” While such stories may have been useful to masters like Kemp Battle as a way of softening the image of slavery, such humor was also a resource that African Americans used to protest their “cloth,” i.e. their demeaned place in society, or the pervasive raping of black women by white men. [as I said before, I find this insertion of the issue of rape very casual. I think you should either deal with it directly in it’s own paragraph or leave it out]

Whipping was the most common punishment used to enforce slave discipline<sup>113</sup> As a punishment for adults, it was reserved primarily for African Americans, though white boys under sixteen could be publicly whipped for “willfully injuring the college buildings.”<sup>114</sup>

While both white and black men were required to work on upkeep of the public roads, the

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<sup>113</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 205. On the practice and significance of whipping, see Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 58-9.

<sup>114</sup> Battle, *History*, 1: 205.

work was carefully framed by a system of white privilege. White slave owners sent their slaves to do the work, thus avoiding such demeaning and difficult work themselves. White workers between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, however, had to report to roadwork or be fined. Nevertheless, the system endowed them with a small measure of white privilege. Slaves sixteen to fifty were required to do roadwork, and their punishment for shirking was a whipping rather than a fine.<sup>115</sup>

University professors, like other slave owners, whipped their slaves, yet slaves sometimes defied such treatment and asserted their human dignity. President Swain's neighbors believed that he was too lenient a master. Battle wrote, "the neighbors thought that he 'spoilt,' to use a common term, his children and his slaves." Yet Battle recounted a time when Swain became "irritated beyond measure by his washerwoman." When Swain seized a switch, the washerwoman challenged him: "Whip away! I can supply back as long as you can supply whip!"<sup>116</sup>

This story, recounted by a professor who grew up in Chapel Hill during slavery, makes it clear that the whipping of slaves was an established norm of white supremacy among university professors and the townspeople of Chapel Hill. It also illustrates the deep undercurrent of slave rebelliousness that characterized the black counter culture of resistance.

One example of collective defiance involves the widespread circulation of *Walker's Appeal* throughout North Carolina in 1829. This incendiary pamphlet calling on slaves to rise up against their masters circulated clandestinely throughout the southern states. Walker must have had kindred spirits in Chapel Hill, for copies appeared in the university community and

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<sup>115</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 170.

<sup>116</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 534.

other North Carolina towns. In response, the North Carolina legislature enacted draconian restrictions on free African Americans and the circulation of “seditious” literature.<sup>117</sup>

Another example of black assertiveness during this period comes straight out of Chapel Hill. In 1829, George Moses Horton, a Chatham County slave who had become a phenomenon among students in Chapel Hill because of his gift for poetry, published *The Hope of Liberty*, the first book by an African American in the South and the first poetical challenge to slavery published by a slave.<sup>118</sup>

It was about this time, when slave owners were pondering how to deal with the increasingly difficult and interrelated problems of slave rebellion, abolitionism, and sectional conflict over slavery, that Judge William Gaston, a university trustee, made a speech condemning slavery. He told them that they were the ones “who, sooner or later, must act decisively upon [the question of slavery.]” “On you, too, will devolve the duty,” he said, “which has been too long neglected, but which cannot with impunity be neglected much longer, of providing for the mitigation and (is it too much to hope for in North Carolina?) for the ultimate extirpation of the worst evil that afflicts the Southern part of our Confederacy.” Gaston said he opposed slavery because it, “more than any other cause, keeps us back in the career of improvement. It stifles industry and represses enterprise; it is fatal to economy and providence; it discourages skill, impairs our strength as a community, and poisons morals at the fountain head.” While Gaston did not assert that slavery was unjust, he did make it clear that it was contradictory to his vision of economic and social development Though Carolina

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<sup>117</sup>For discussions of David Walker, Nat Turner, and this era of slave revolt and slave owner reaction in North Carolina, see Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 49-51 and Franklin, *Free Negro*, 64-74.

<sup>118</sup>Horton, *Hope of Liberty*. Horton also published two additional books, *Poetical Works* and *Naked Genius*. The George Moses Horton Project maintains a useful website at <<http://www.chathamarts.org/horton/>>.

men might disagree about slavery, Gaston suggested, they must understand that it was their duty to decide the fate of the institution. Although Gaston owned over 200 slaves at the time of his death in 1844, his words reflect a real dilemma faced by North Carolina's ruling class. As slave rebellions threatened and Abolitionists in the North increased their anti-slavery organizing, there was good reason for slave owners to carefully consider how to best perpetuate their rule. Gaston made his comments in 1832, at a time when it was still possible to voice such opinions in North Carolina without inviting severe public attack. Soon thereafter, that relative openness to debate would end, as North Carolina and the South entered an era of increasing defensiveness about the institution of slavery. Nevertheless, though Gaston's views did not prevail, he helped teach the sons of the gentry from across North Carolina and the South to think as part of the ruling class.<sup>119</sup>

If the speech of Judge Gaston reflected uncertainty about how to rule among North Carolina's gentry and a window of opportunity to discuss the question of slavery, the dismissal of Professor Benjamin Hedrick in 1856 indicated the slamming shut of that window. Hedrick let slip that he opposed the extension of slavery in the territories, and after public attacks against him, he defended his position in the media. The students burned him in effigy and the trustees promptly terminated his employment. His crime, according to the Executive Committee of the Trustees, was that he "violated the established usage of the University which forbids any Professor to become an agitator in the exciting politics of the

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<sup>119</sup>William Gaston, *Address Delivered before the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies at Chapel Hill, N. C., June 20, 1832*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Raleigh: Seaton Gales, 1849). An excerpt of Gaston's speech referring to slavery was reprinted in *The National Era*, August 11, 1853, Washington, D.C., Vol. V. No. 345, 128. For biographical information on Gaston, including his ownership of over 200 slaves, see Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, at <[http://docsouth.unc.edu/bios/pn0000574\\_bio.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/bios/pn0000574_bio.html)>.

day.”<sup>120</sup> No matter that only a few years before, Professor Elisha Mitchell had published a tract defending slavery as sanctioned by the Bible.<sup>121</sup>

These changes in the attitude of the gentry toward the question of slavery had a profound effect on African Americans seeking greater freedom. Before the 1830s, the legal restrictions on emancipation and the rights of both slaves and free blacks were less than after *Walker’s Appeal* and Nat Turner’s revolt. Moreover, after the early 1830s, sympathetic white southerners were less likely to act on behalf of African American interests than before. At the same time, opposition to slavery grew throughout the nation and the world, aided in particular by the free slave communities in the North. After Nat Turner’s revolt, perhaps a thousand slaves each year fled the South, adding their rebelliousness to these communities. Increasingly, therefore, the northern, urban free black communities included a large percentage of fugitive slaves and provided the backbone of the Abolitionist Movement.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, most resistance to slavery did not take the form of overt rebellion or collective escape. Much of the struggle between domination and resistance, in fact, went on in the interior spaces of black lives. Whenever overt resistance did surface, it is certain that an interior struggle had already taken place in the lives of those who stood against subordination. It is important to understand that the system of slavery did all it could not only to enforce obedience through external pressure, but also to convince African Americans that they were inferior and that resistance was futile.

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<sup>120</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 655.

<sup>121</sup>Mitchell, *The Other Leaf*.

<sup>122</sup>Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 57; for a discussion of the growing anti-slavery movement among African Americans in the context of world revolutions, see Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 51-61.

*The Illiterate Genius Of George Moses Horton And The Struggle  
For Black Self-Determination*

Of all the hundreds of slaves who lived in Chapel Hill, only George Moses Horton speaks to us directly out of the past.<sup>123</sup> For much of his life, Horton supported himself by writing and publishing poetry. In this way, he became the first black professional writer in America.<sup>124</sup> Caroline Lee Hentz, a novelist and professor's wife, tutored Horton in poetry and helped him publish his first poem. "Liberty and Slavery" appeared in Hentz's hometown Massachusetts newspaper, the *Lancaster Gazette*, on April 8, 1829.<sup>125</sup> This was the first poem written by a slave to protest slavery in America. Later that year, Horton published a book of poems, *The Hope of Liberty*. This was only the third book published by a black author in America, the first book published by an African American in the South, and the only book published by a slave.<sup>126</sup>

Despite Horton's accomplishments, brief mentions in the most recent officially sponsored histories of the university give no indication of the poet's historical significance.<sup>127</sup> An account of Horton's activities in the only book length study of Chapel Hill refers to him as "the drunken poet."<sup>128</sup> Following student protests of the university's censorship of its historical connection with slavery and its present-day failure to celebrate the contributions of

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<sup>123</sup>Horton is the only slave associated with UNC to leave published writings. Several other slaves wrote letters that have been preserved in the University Archives and it is likely that more writings will come to light as interest continues to grow in the lives of slaves and their relationship with the university.

<sup>124</sup>Horton, *Naked Genius*, Introduction.

<sup>125</sup>Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*.

<sup>126</sup>Jupiter Hammon and Phylis Wheatley preceded Horton. Horton, *Naked Genius*, Introduction.

<sup>127</sup>Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 119; Powell, *First State University*, 48, 67.

<sup>128</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 40.

African Americans, including George Moses Horton, UNC belatedly named a dormitory for Horton.<sup>129</sup>

Horton was a slave from Chatham County who had an exceptionally sharp mind and an irrepressible creative muse. He taught himself to read, studied literature, and became adept at composing poetry. University students purchased his clever love poems to woo their sweethearts. With the money he earned, Horton paid his master a monthly rent in lieu of labor, while saving with the hope of eventually purchasing his freedom.

Horton tells us he “was born in Northampton county, N.C., near the line of Virginia, and within four miles of the Roanoke River; the property of William Horton, senior, who also owned my mother, and the whole stock of her children, which were five before me, all girls, but not of one father. I am the oldest child that my mother had by her second husband, and she had four younger than myself, one boy and three girls. But to account for my age is beyond the reach of my power.”<sup>130</sup>

Like many slaves, Horton acquired the family name of his owner, not his father. Indeed, Horton’s father had no legal marriage or family rights. Since slave property followed female parentage, all of Horton’s brothers and sisters belonged to William Horton. Early in the nineteenth century, Horton’s owner transported his slaves to a new farm in Chatham County, eight miles from the university. Horton’s father, who did not belong to William Horton, had no right to follow his family.

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<sup>129</sup>See, for example, “Campus Award Under Attack,” *Chapel Hill News*, March 30, 2004 and by John K. Chapman, “Seeking Historical Truth at UNC: Taking the Next Step to Become the 'University of the People,'" October 2, 2004, online at <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/Conferences/remembering%20reconstruction%20papers.html>>. On the renaming of a UNC dormitory for Horton, see “UNC-CH Dorm to Get Slave's Name: Poet was Known at UNC in 1800s.” *News and Observer* (Raleigh), April 6, 2006.

<sup>130</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, iii-iv.

For ten years, Horton worked as a “cow-boy,” a “disagreeable occupation.” During these years, Horton developed an interest in books and took up the radical notion of learning to read. He wrote that when “[my mother] discovered my anxiety for books, [she] strove to encourage my plan; but she, having left her husband behind, was so hard run to make a little shift for herself, that she could give me no assistance in that case.”<sup>131</sup>

Horton’s story of learning to read involves overcoming the numerous obstacles imposed by slavery. His master did not encourage learning among his own children, let alone among his servants. Thus, Horton had no access to books and no teacher. Many of the other slaves ridiculed his efforts. Some “strove to dissuade me from my plan, and had the presumption to tell me that I was a vain fool to attempt learning to read with as little chance as I had. . . . Nevertheless, did I persevere with an indefatigable resolution.” Horton described his studies, saying that “[L]ighting by chance at times with some opportunities of being in the presence of school children, I learnt the letters by heart.” Later, Horton’s brother became inspired by his example, and they competed to see which could make the most rapid progress. Horton claimed, “my brother never could keep time with me. He was indeed an ostentatious youth, and of a far more attractive person than myself, more forward in manly show and early became fond of popularity to an astonishing degree for one of his age and capacity. He strove hard on the wing of ambition to soar above me, and could write a respectable fist before I could form the first letter with a pen, or barely knew the use of a goose-quill. And I must say

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<sup>131</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, iv.

that he was quite a remarkable youth, as studious as a judge, but much too full of vain lounging among the fair sex.”<sup>132</sup>

During the week, Horton studied by night. Because he had “no candle, no lamp, nor even light-wood. . . I had to sit sweating and smoking over my incompetent bark or brush light, almost exhausted by the heat of the fire, and almost suffocated with smoke.” He therefore looked forward eagerly to his only free day. “On well nigh every Sabbath during the year, did I retire away in the summer season to some shady and lonely recess, when I could stammer over the dim and promiscuous syllables in my old black and tattered spelling book.”<sup>133</sup>

Eventually, Horton learned to read. At first he read the Bible, but increasingly, he found he was attracted to verse, including “Wesley’s old hymns, and other pieces of poetry from various authors.” “At length I began to wonder whether it was possible that I ever could be so fortunate as to compose in that manner. I fell to work in my head, and composed several undigested pieces, which I retained in my mind, for I knew nothing about writing with a pen.” Horton’s first poem expressed the deeply democratic and collective faith of enslaved African Americans.

Rise up, my soul and let us go  
Up to the gospel feast;  
Gird on the garment white as snow,  
To join and be a guest.

Dost thou not hear the trumpet call  
For thee, my soul, for thee?  
Not only thee, my soul, but all,  
May rise and enter free.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, iv-v. This evidence indicates Horton and his brother had formed a small clandestine learning group. It seems unlikely that over many decades, Horton and his brother failed to help some other slaves to become literate.

<sup>133</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, vi.

<sup>134</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, viii-ix.

George Moses Horton became “the colored bard of North Carolina” through continued struggle, yet this involved grappling with ideological obstacles perhaps more than material ones. The young man had to first overcome the racist assumptions that suffused the institutional culture of the university, as well as his own tendency to cater to these assumptions to gain approval from the students.

Horton explained, “Having got in the way of carrying fruit to the college at Chapel Hill on the Sabbath, the collegians who, for their diversion, were fond of pranking with the country servants who resorted there for the same purpose that I did, began also to prank with me.” In other words, white college men saw slaves from the country as objects of entertainment and ridicule because of their supposed ignorance. Horton explained, “somehow or other they discovered a spark of genius in me. . . which excited their curiosity, and they often eagerly insisted on me to spout, as they called it.” Horton remembered, “this inspired in me a kind of enthusiastic pride. . . full of vain egotism.” “I would stand forth and address myself extempore before them, as an orator of inspired promptitude. But I soon found it an object of aversion, and considered myself nothing but a public ignoramus.”<sup>135</sup>

Horton rejected the idea of playing the black fool and determined to remain true to his muse, his calling, and his humanity. “Hence I abandoned my foolish harangues, and began to speak of poetry, which lifted these still higher on the wing of astonishment; all eyes were on me, and all ears were open. Many were at first incredulous; but the experiment of acrostics

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<sup>135</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, xiv.

established it as incontestable fact. Hence my fame soon circulated like a stream throughout the college.”<sup>136</sup>

Horton’s personal triumph represented an effort to be true to himself, an embrace of self-determination rather than catering to others. His stand seemed to weaken the racist attitudes of the students, and some began to deal with him seriously, more as a human being and a poet, less as an object of their entertainment. Horton would compose poems “at the handle of the plough,” and when he arrived in Chapel Hill on Sundays, “I dictated, whilst one of the gentlemen would serve as my amanuensis.” These same “criticizing gentlemen saw plainly what I lacked, and many of them very generously gave me such books as they considered useful in my case.” One of these students, Augustus Alston from Georgia, was the first to pay Horton for a poem. “Mr. Augustus Alston first laid (as he said) the low price of twenty-five cents on my compositions each, which was unanimously established, and has been kept up ever since; but some gentlemen extremely generous, have given me from fifty to seventy-five cents, besides many decent and respectable suits of clothes, professing that they would not suffer me to pass otherwise and write for them.”<sup>137</sup>

At the same time Horton was challenging racial barriers, it is clear that all of his efforts to gain his freedom were blocked by the system of slavery. Although he published three books, they did not sell particularly well in the increasingly hostile southern environment and his profits did not allow him to purchase his freedom. Indeed, it is not clear Horton’s master was willing to sell him. He had become a source of considerable profit for his master, particularly

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<sup>136</sup>An acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line spells out a name, motto, or message when read in sequence. Horton, *Poetical Works*, xiv. The “experiment of acrostics” refers to Horton’s challenge to the young men that if they supplied the name of a young woman of their acquaintance, he would come back the next week with a poem in which the first letter of each line spelled out her name. See Horton, *Naked Genius*, Introduction by Richard Walser; Richard Walser, *Black Poet*.

<sup>137</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, xiv-xvi.

after 1843, when William Horton's grandson, Hal, raised the charge for Horton's time to fifty cents per day. This was perhaps two to three times the normal rent for a slave. Horton had to supplement his income from poetry by working as a UNC servant.<sup>138</sup> Finally, not all members of the university community were as supportive as some of the students. According to Richard Walser, Horton's biographer, President Swain secretly blocked some of Horton's attempts to gain his freedom. "During these years, Horton continued to seek some means by which he could obtain his freedom. He wrote to William Lloyd Garrison, to Horace Greeley, and doubtless other prominent personages of the day. Unfortunately, he chose President Swain to forward these letters to the great men; the savvy university president, in the troubled political climate of North Carolina, had no intention of becoming an intermediary in such a matter as traffic in slaves. On two occasions, the Sable Bard went so far as to ask Swain to purchase him, citing Hall Horton's figure of \$250, but the offer was politely declined."<sup>139</sup>

There is no doubt that Horton conceived of his calling as both personal and political. He understood that he represented a cause. He framed this cause in both broad democratic terms, "the cause of illiterate genius," and in racial terms, "an example to remove the doubts of cavilists with regard to African genius." He understood that his abilities were not in question, and that only the conditions imposed by bondage prevented the fulfillment of his potential. Speaking of himself in the third person, Horton wrote: "His birth was low, and in a neighborhood by no means populous; his raising was rude and laborious; his exertions were cramped, and his progress obstructed from start to goal; having been ever deprived of the free

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<sup>138</sup>Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 37.

<sup>139</sup>Ballinger, Helms, and Holder, *Slavery and the Making of the University*, 37.

use of books and other advantages to which he aspired. Hence his genius is but an unpolished diamond, and can never shine forth to the world.”<sup>140</sup>

In words that might serve as an epitaph for slavery itself, Horton wrote:  
Forbid to make the least attempt to soar,  
The stifled blaze of genius burns the more;  
He still prevails his drooping head to raise,  
Plods through the bogs, and on the mountains gaze.<sup>141</sup>

Horton’s story stands as a beacon of freedom. It demonstrates that African Americans contributed more to the university than their unpaid labor. They made important intellectual and cultural contributions as well, and their freedom struggle has been the most significant source of democratic renewal throughout the institution’s history. George Moses Horton’s story embodies all three of these contributions.

Although slavery thwarted all of George Moses Horton’s efforts to escape bondage, his striving bears witness to the humanity, dogged persistence, and creativity of African Americans during slavery that laid the foundations for the flowering of black freedom after Emancipation. The legacy of one “illiterate genius” suggests the revolutionary potential of all those who were limited and denied by unjust hierarchies of race, class, and gender.

Before African Americans could “grow together,” as Sam Morphis suggested, and overthrow legally enforced racial discrimination, long years of struggle lay ahead. After slavery came Emancipation and the possibilities of Reconstruction, then the setback of disfranchisement and Jim Crow. During these years, the leaders of the university remained fundamentally committed to white supremacy. Nevertheless, in the hundred years following Emancipation, the black freedom movement slowly gained strength and strategic allies. Yet

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<sup>140</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, xx-xxii.

<sup>141</sup>Horton, *Poetical Works*, xxii.

none of that could have happened if slaves had let go of their humanity or failed to raise their drooping heads to gaze upon the mountains.

CHAPTER 2  
BLACK STRIVING AND THE UNIVERSITY  
FROM EMANCIPATION TO 1875

An unintended consequence of civil war, emancipation confronted Abraham Lincoln like a gathering storm. Generations of slaves had risked everything to escape slavery and flee to havens in the North. With slim, but critical, aid from white friends, they had educated themselves, established communities, and published newspapers. Most important, many helped establish sanctuaries for escaped slaves, the Underground Railroad, and the Abolitionist Movement. In this way, African Americans in both the South and the North played a critical part in sharpening the contradictions that developed into civil war and led to Emancipation.

When war came, slaves ran away to Union lines by the thousands. Finally, Lincoln responded to the unrelenting pressure from black Abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, and the stark possibility of Union defeat by allowing African Americans to fight. They rushed to enlist.<sup>1</sup> In North Carolina, over seven thousand slaves joined the Union army. Eventually, 186,000 African Americans served in federal military units. Moreover, the

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<sup>1</sup>For the critical role of African Americans in the Abolitionist Movement nationally, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*. For a detailed discussion of antebellum abolitionism among North Carolina's black maritime workers, see Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, 121-42. On the role of Abraham Galloway and other black North Carolinians in recruiting and politically organizing black Union troops and escaped slaves during the war, see Cecelski, *Waterman's Song*, 179-201.

manner in which these black troops conducted themselves transformed the war and challenged many whites to rethink their racist stereotypes. According to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a white Abolitionist who commanded the first black troops, “Nobody knows anything about these men who has not seen them in battle. I find that I myself knew nothing. There is a fierce energy about them beyond anything of which I have ever read.”<sup>2</sup>

*To “Rise And Enter Free”: Emancipation In Chapel Hill*

The poetry of George Moses Horton, composed nearly forty years before Emancipation, did not merely reflect the aspirations of African Americans during slavery. Horton also spoke as a prophet, framing in religious terms his vision of a world in which not only the slave, but “all” would be welcome at “the gospel feast.” He challenged his people to “rise up” and heed “the trumpet call.” Although most white commentators have emphasized the love poems Horton wrote for UNC students (and he was a shrewd businessman), “the black bard of Chapel Hill” was focused on freedom. He shaped his poetry to be a cultural weapon in the struggle against slavery. Although he labored unsuccessfully to gain his own freedom, his vision had enduring power because it represented the deeply democratic sensibilities that African Americans developed in response to their own oppression. Following Emancipation, black freedom striving advanced a distinct black agenda, while also promoting a radical

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Wentworth Higginson quoted in McPherson, *Negro’s Civil War*, 166. On African Americans in the Union army and navy in North Carolina, see Cecelski, *Waterman’s Song*, 179-201. For the role of African Americans generally in the Civil War, see McPherson, *Negro’s Civil War*. For the response of African Americans in North Carolina to the war, see Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 70-5.

democratic politics that attempted to transform the world, so that “Not only thee, my soul, but all, may rise and enter free.”<sup>3</sup>

The defeat of the Confederacy finally allowed a flowering of black humanity in the South. African Americans in Chapel Hill openly challenged old limits all along the color line. They defied the established racist norms of personal conduct, organized for political action, legalized their marriages and reunited families, pressed for land ownership and fair labor contracts, established their own educational and religious institutions, and freed themselves, to the extent possible, from economic and personal dependency upon white people. Most leaders of the university, however, acted with their class to limit and deny black freedom.

African American slaves in Chapel Hill gained their freedom on Monday morning, April 17, 1865, when Union cavalry units entered the village. The Union forces met no resistance. The war was over. While the local gentry contemplated their defeat and worried about buried silver, black people rejoiced.<sup>4</sup>

Pauli Murray wrote in *Proud Shoes* of the jubilation that swept Chapel Hill’s black community at the coming of the Union troops. “Next morning at eight o’clock, General Smith D. Atkins, commander of the 9th Michigan Cavalry, rode into Chapel Hill at the head of four thousand blue-clad troops. The white people stayed indoors and watched the columns of soldiers ride past behind drawn shades, but the colored folk of the town met their

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<sup>3</sup>Unnamed poem in Horton, *Poetical Works*, viii-ix.

<sup>4</sup>For an account of the activities of white Chapel Hill residents in anticipation of the arrival of Union troops see Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 70-3. Thus far, no evidence concerning the reaction of white artisan families has come to light.

liberators with wild cheers and Union flags miraculously retrieved from places of discard where their masters had tossed them.”<sup>5</sup>

At Mary Ruffin Smith’s plantation just outside Chapel Hill, most of the slaves hid in the woods when the Union troops arrived. They had been told the Yankees would kill them. Yet Mary Smith sent one of her brother’s octoroon children, thirteen-year-old Laura, out to meet the soldiers. Pauli Murray wrote that the image of “little Laura, ‘pretty as a picture in a spick-and-span washed frock’ speeding down the lane with her long curls flying in the wind and a Union flag and white cloth of surrender held high above her head,” was her grandmother’s most vivid memory of the war.<sup>6</sup>

The gentry experienced Emancipation as more than an economic disaster. The world seemed turned upside down. They felt abandoned by their former slaves. Ironically, as the freed people left the plantations, their former masters, who had convinced themselves that slaves were their dependents, suddenly realized their own dependency. They resented the new order and found it profoundly threatening. While former slave mistresses felt the bitterness of doing their own housework, former masters considered how to maintain their profits and political power.

As the reality of Emancipation set in, Cornelia Phillips Spencer, the daughter of a UNC professor, described the despondency that gripped Chapel Hill’s former slave owners. “The whole framework of our social system is dissolved,” she wrote. “The negroes are free,

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<sup>5</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 162.

<sup>6</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 163. An octoroon is a person who is one eighth African American.

leaving their homes with very few exceptions, and those exceptions only for a time.”<sup>7</sup> This was shocking to members of the elite, who thought slaves should have been grateful to their former masters. Spencer wrote, “They seem to show no feeling or attachment for their owners—those who have raised & fed & clothed them.”<sup>8</sup> Large plantation owners, no longer able to compel the allegiance of their former slaves, felt particularly insecure. Paul Cameron spoke for other planters when he asserted that it was important “to teach the negro that we are *not dependent on him*.”<sup>9</sup> Ironically, on the Fourth of July, 1865, while African Americans in Orange County were celebrating their freedom in Hillsborough, a former Chapel Hill slave mistress acknowledged the sudden drudgery of her life. “[E]very lady here,” she wrote, “[has had] to learn to cook & most of them washing.” She added, “I dread the ironing worse than anything else & washing dishes.”<sup>10</sup>

Claiming independence from white households and from the legal restraints of slavery was one of the first acts of self-assertion engaged in by many African Americans after Emancipation. To some white observers, it seemed that African Americans had been seized by a frenzy. A Freedmen’s Bureau agent wrote from Charlotte, “the whole population of Blacks [was] . . . completely wild.” He believed that the “sudden transition from Slavery to Freedom had caused them to become a restless and wandering People Stragling [*sic*] over the

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<sup>7</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer Diary, 7 May 1865, CPSP, quoted in Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 105.

<sup>8</sup>Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 106.

<sup>9</sup>From Paul C. Cameron to George Mordecai, 20 November 1869, George W. Mordecai Papers, SHC #522, quoted in Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 106.

<sup>10</sup>From Eliza Thompson to Ellen Hedrick, 4 July 1865, Hedrick Papers, SHC #325, quoted in Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 107. Eliza Thompson owned twenty-seven slaves according to U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N.C. 1860, Schedule 2.

country in Search of Freedom.”<sup>11</sup> William A. Graham compared the freed slaves to “knights of errant in search of adventures.”<sup>12</sup> Yet none of the reasons that motivated former slaves to leave home were frivolous. Some left home to test the limits of their new freedom. Henry Bobbitt, a former slave from Warren County, walked to Raleigh to see whether he would be stopped.<sup>13</sup> Others left home to find wives, husbands, or children who had been sold away during slavery. Still others left to establish their own households. William Horn Battle, a university trustee and former Chapel Hill slave owner wrote to his son, “All of our servants seem to be possessed of a desire to go to housekeeping.”<sup>14</sup>

Reuniting family members, establishing households, and building the infrastructure of a free community were some of the most important activities of African Americans immediately following Emancipation. While former slaves did not wait on legislation to reunite their families, a law passed in March 1866 gave legal sanction to the “cohabitation” relationships established during slavery, when legal marriages had been forbidden. The information recorded when former slaves registered their marriages reveals that many of these relationships, while not enforced by law, were long lasting and the institution of marriage was highly valued.

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<sup>11</sup>From John C. Barnett to E. Whittlesey, 29 June 1865, Letters Received by the Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, National Archives, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 4.

<sup>12</sup>From William A. Graham to David L. Swain, 11 May 1865, William A. Graham Papers, SHC #285, quoted in Jones, “Opportunity Lost, 24.

<sup>13</sup>Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 24.

<sup>14</sup>From William H. Battle to Kemp Battle, 4 December 1865, BFP, quoted in Kenzer *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 106.

When the former slaves of Orange County registered 912 marriages in the years following Emancipation, nearly half of these marriages had been in effect over ten years. The number of marriages suggests that close to 70 percent of former slaves over fifteen years of age had been married during slavery.<sup>15</sup> In Chapel Hill, one of the first “servants” at the university, November Caldwell, married Chaney in 1833, and they registered their thirty-three year union on May 1, 1866. Jordan Weaver, a Chapel Hill farmer, married Easter Stone in 1846 and certified their marriage on June 11, 1866. Green Brewer, a Chapel Hill shoemaker married Nancy in 1854 and registered their marriage on August 13, 1866. Several fathers and sons came to register their marriages together. In April 1866, Anderson and Anderson Jr. registered their marriages in Orange County, along with Martin and Martin Jr. In Chapel Hill, Ben Battle registered his 1834 marriage to Jane, while Simon Battle registered his 1860 marriage to another Jane, both on July 2, 1866. Such evidence suggests that strong family ties were of great importance to generations of former slaves.<sup>16</sup>

During the years immediately following Emancipation, African Americans established their own churches, and these became the most important institutions in the forging of a free black community. In Chapel Hill, as throughout North Carolina, slaves and free blacks had been members of the various white churches. The Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians built balconies for their black members, though sometimes the white minister would conduct services exclusively for the African American members. Though black members participated in the same religious rituals as white members, they did not do so as equals. At the Chapel of

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<sup>15</sup>Table 1, Alexander, *Freedmen*, 60-1.

<sup>16</sup>For cohabitation bonds of Caldwell, Weaver, Brewer, and Ben and Simon Battle, see Mallard, “Marriage Records.” For information on Easter Stone, see death certificate for James Weaver, Orange County Register of Deeds office, Hillsborough, N. C.

the Cross, the Episcopal church in Chapel Hill, white children were identified in the church baptism records by name, age, and the name of both parents. The baptismal certificate identified black children by name of owner, first name, age, and sometimes name of mother. For instance, “Amy (about three years old) servant of Mr. Mickle,” or “Five servant children belonging to Miss Mary Ruffin Smith, viz. Julius Casar aged 12, Cornelia aged 10, Emma aged 8, Annette aged 6, Laura aged 2 (The mother’s name is Harriet).”<sup>17</sup> While it was customary in official documents to refer to slaves by identifying their masters, or simply by a first name, this usage in the Chapel of the Cross records highlights the fact that this church was responsible for the enforcement of black subordination, as well as the university and other institutions of slave society. African Americans understood this, and after Emancipation, most black churchgoers rejected the racism of white denominations and established their own churches.

African Americans in Chapel Hill established both Baptist and Methodist congregations in the years immediately after Emancipation, and these have continued as leading churches in the black community up through the present. It appears that the Baptists established their congregation in November 1865, although they continued using the white Baptists’ building for a time. Then, until 1871, they used the free school for African Americans operated by the Quakers.<sup>18</sup> The black Methodists may have established a congregation before the end of the war, meeting initially under a fig tree on the outskirts of Chapel Hill.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, baptisms for 1854, records of the Chapel of the Cross, illustration in *Proud Shoes* facing page 203.

<sup>18</sup>Brown, “Negro Churches,” 2.

<sup>19</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 82.

The revolutionary potential of Radical Reconstruction to transform the university into an institution that welcomed and served “all” is demonstrated by the visit of a black clergyman to Chapel Hill. In 1868, Bishop A. W. Wayman of the African Methodist Episcopal Church reported a large congregation of black Methodists in Chapel Hill. On October 20, 1868, he wrote, “The A.M.E. Church is the only colored organization here, and they number over one hundred. I was invited to preach in the College chapel on Wednesday night, October 31<sup>st</sup>—the invitation was accepted and the large bell sounded the note that there was to be meeting and the people gathered from all parts of the town.”<sup>20</sup> The letter from Bishop Waymon suggests that the Republican administrators of the university during Radical Reconstruction welcomed African Americans onto campus as participants in public life. Slaves built Gerrard Hall, the college chapel, but the university barred them from enjoying the fruits of their labor during the years of gentry domination. In 1868, the unprecedented openness of the Republican university administration to African Americans, even though UNC did not admit black students, illuminated the possibilities of liberty, bringing the practice of the university closer to its creed.

About 1870, the Methodists built a church not far from their initial meeting place. Soon after, around 1871, the Baptists built a church on property donated by white Baptist preacher and Chapel Hill’s former largest slave owner, George Purefoy. Nearly seventy years later, stories were still being told in the black community about school children “toting shingles from one end of the town to the other” to build their church.<sup>21</sup> This story of children toting

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<sup>20</sup>From Bishop A. W. Waymon, letter to the editor, *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, Pa.), October 30, 1868, published November 14, 1868, item #86210 in Accessible Archives.

<sup>21</sup>Brown, “Negro Churches,” 2.

shingles suggest themes that remained important in the black community. Lacking financial resources and denied a fair share of public resources, African Americans in Chapel Hill have relied on community solidarity and grassroots mobilizations to advance their cause. In this way, the community developed spiritual wealth to make up for its lack of material resources.

In addition to strengthening their families and establishing churches, black freedom striving also focused on obtaining education. The enthusiasm for literacy and learning manifested by former slaves was intense. A northern woman teaching blacks in Wake County, North Carolina, wrote, “Old and young are eager to learn.” She noted that laborers in the cotton fields snatched moments to study. She found them “sitting under a tree studying a Primer during the few moments of rest they are allowed after dinner.” Another teacher wrote that he “never knew anything like the craving the[y] . . . have to learn.” A Freedmen’s Bureau agent reported that in one school “a child of six years, her mother, grandmother, and great grand-mother, the latter being more than seventy-five years of age” were studying together.<sup>22</sup> All over North Carolina, African Americans organized community gatherings to establish schools. In Warren County, northeast of Chapel Hill, former slaves met in July 1866 to establish a school “to educate our poor ignorant children.”<sup>23</sup> Only five months after the end of the war, a newspaper advertisement in the *Hillsborough Recorder* stated that “the colored citizens of Hillsborough” were going to meet to lay plans to purchase a school building.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *African Americans in North Carolina*, 81.

<sup>23</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 152. For an in depth study of black education during Presidential Reconstruction in North Carolina, see Alexander, *Freedmen*, 152-168.

<sup>24</sup>*Hillsborough Recorder*, September 20, 1865, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 108.

Of all the former slaves in Chapel Hill, perhaps George Moses Horton best exemplified African Americans' love of literacy and the understanding that knowledge is power. While he was one of the few slaves who had been able to pursue literacy successfully, his example was now followed by the masses of freed people. Just as those African Americans who remained in Chapel Hill helped forge new power relations in the South by allying themselves with northern teachers and political activists, Horton now acted as a forerunner of later black migrations to the North that transformed power relations in the twentieth century. Yet he left a parting gift of prophesy to the cause of racial justice in the South—a book of poems that celebrated the genius of African Americans and black freedom striving.

Because of the literacy he had achieved under slavery, Horton understood that his opportunity for freedom had finally arrived in the guise of the Union Army. He introduced himself to the soldiers occupying Chapel Hill and soon formed a business relationship with Captain Will H. S. Banks of the 9<sup>th</sup> Michigan Cavalry. Together, they planned the publication of Horton's third book, *Naked Genius*. According to Banks, Horton worked "night and day composing poems for his new book and writing acrostics for the boys on their sweethearts' names."<sup>25</sup> In a show of solidarity, twenty Union officers endorsed Horton as the authentic author of *Naked Genius*, and their names were listed in the Introduction to *Naked Genius* when it was printed. In this way, Horton's work became a small focus for building support among northern supporters of black freedom. By July, Horton and Banks had secured the services of a Republican publisher in Raleigh, and Horton had assembled 120 poems, many newly written.

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<sup>25</sup>Horton, *Naked Genius*, Introduction.

The poems touched on a broad range of subjects, though prominent themes included emancipation, war, love, and friendship. “To the Fourth,” was an ode to July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1865.

Horton wrote, “To-day you make your choices, Lift up your hearts and voices. . . .”

What more can please by land or sea,  
Than that which sets the bond-man free,  
Lift ev’ry hand, bend ev’ry knee,  
Swell every heart with love.<sup>26</sup>

George Moses Horton understood clearly that for African Americans, literacy, emancipation, and collective struggle were all necessary components of the power African Americans needed to make their own choices. Black self-determination, however, was exactly what white plantation owners and Conservative political leaders dreaded and were determined to suppress.

Some former slave owners feared that education would undermine the control of employers over black labor. W. Roulhac, of Hillsborough, wrote, “All our old negroes have left . . . . It is very difficult to hire them at any price since the ‘cussed’ . . . Nigger School commenced.” William A. Graham wrote to David L. Swain, president of the university, that schooling caused African Americans to demonstrate in interest in “equality with whites, & other political topics.”<sup>27</sup> Yet other white leaders foresaw the potential for education to be a powerful tool of social control. The editor of the Fayetteville *News* wrote, “It has been objected by many that the acquirement of the mere rudiments of knowledge . . . would cause

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<sup>26</sup>Horton, *Naked Genius*, 107-8.

<sup>27</sup>From W. Roulhac to “Arthur,” 26 January 1867, Ruffin, Roulhac, and Hamilton Family Papers, SHC #643, and William A. Graham to David L. Swain, 16 October 1865, Hamilton and Williams, eds., *Papers of William Alexander Graham*, 4: 413-4, quoted in Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 109.

the blacks to become dissatisfied . . . . Their ambition and desire for elevation and equality is a natural consequence of their suddenly obtained liberty, but so far from its being increased . . . , we believe that education would be a powerful agent for its control and regulation within proper bounds. . . .<sup>28</sup> Against all these hostile white southern attitudes, African Americans pushed ahead to forge educational institutions suited to their own needs.

In Chapel Hill, as elsewhere, African Americans and their northern white allies organized schools in the first years after Emancipation. Before July 4, 1866, Philadelphia Quakers acquired land on the western outskirts of Chapel Hill from a white landowner and established a school for former slaves. The Quakers sent George Dixon, his wife, and daughter to establish the school. Dixon later became Professor of Agriculture at the university while it was under Republican control. By March 1867, each of the four towns in Orange County had a school for black students enrolling a total of 345 pupils.<sup>29</sup>

As soon as the Republican legislature established public schools in North Carolina, former university “servant,” Wilson Caldwell, applied to the Orange County Superintendent of Public Schools to take charge of a free school for African Americans in Chapel Hill. His salary was \$17.50 per month.<sup>30</sup> This school must have attracted a significant number of students, since it had three teachers, black and white from North and South. The frame structure stood on the corner of Cameron Avenue and Mallette Street and accommodated students through the sixth or seventh grade.<sup>31</sup> According to a 1944 study, this school lasted

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<sup>28</sup>*The News* (Fayetteville, N. C.), September 11, 1866, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 155.

<sup>29</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 165.

<sup>30</sup>Battle, *Wilson Caldwell*, 6.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Mrs. Anna Weaver, quoted in Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 58.

only a few years. At some point, Caldwell left to become principal of a school in Elizabeth City, returning in 1875 to take a position as janitor in the university when it reopened under Conservative control. When Caldwell's school closed, a "a one-room log cabin was built west of the Quaker school and used as a free school for several years."<sup>32</sup>

There were at least thirty-five black children from Chapel Hill enrolled in schools in June 1870, and 17 percent of blacks fourteen or older were fully literate. Another 13.6 percent could read, but not write, while 54.4 percent were completely illiterate.<sup>33</sup> Sixty-eight percent of African Americans in Chapel Hill over the age of fourteen could not write, and across the state, 25 percent of whites and 89 percent of African Americans over the age of ten could not write.<sup>34</sup>

The irrepressible black thirst for education forced plantation owners to establish schools on their land to keep their black laborers from migrating to towns where freedmen's schools were located. The desire of African Americans for higher education resulted in the establishment of colleges, like Fisk University in Tennessee, to train black teachers and Shaw University and other black colleges in North Carolina. The power of black demands for education in North Carolina eventually resulted in the funding of state normal schools in to train black teachers and the founding in 1891 of the first black state institution of higher

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<sup>32</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 58.

<sup>33</sup>Black school enrollment and author's literacy calculations based on U.S. Census MS, Chapel Hill Township, N.C. 1870, families 1-142.

<sup>34</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 168.

education, the North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical College for the Colored Race. Today, the name of this school is North Carolina A&T University.<sup>35</sup>

Black educational striving had political implications beyond racial uplift. At the beginning of 1866, Conservative Governor Jonathan Worth decided to abolish the entire white antebellum common school system rather than risk demands from African Americans and federal authorities that tax monies be used to educate black children. Graham was quite willing to tax both black and white North Carolinians to educate white residents. However, he opposed educating African Americans. In a letter to fellow university trustee, William A. Graham, Worth wrote that he feared the Freedmen's Bureau and federal military authorities would intervene, "if we make discrimination in education in Common Schools. I mean if we educate white children at public expence,—we will be required to educate negroes in like manner. . . . I think the Com. School system had better be discontinued. . . and thus avoid this question as to educating negroes."<sup>36</sup> Publicly, Conservative leaders such as Worth claimed that there was no money for common schools. Nevertheless, they pushed for and received \$7000 for the university.<sup>37</sup> The decision to abandon state supported common schools forced both black and white citizens to depend on schools funded and staffed by northern philanthropic institutions and the Freedmen's Bureau.

Many poor white North Carolinians believed that Conservative leaders like William A. Graham did not care about the education of their children. One Wilmington resident told a

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<sup>35</sup>Williams, *self-taught*, 175; Logan, "Movement," 171.

<sup>36</sup>From Jonathan Worth to William Alexander Graham, 12 January 1866, in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 1:467, quoted in Jones, "Opportunity Lost," 73.

<sup>37</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 158.

school teacher from Maine, “‘if the northern people did not help the poor, they would never be educated,’ for the rich did not care.” Within a few years, this northern teacher had over three hundred white students in three schoolhouses.<sup>38</sup> While many poor white North Carolinians anxiously opposed the rising educational status of African Americans, black gains may also have stimulated demands for public education on the part of poor whites.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, it appears that there was strong political support for public education among common white folk. When Radical Republicans gained control of North Carolina’s government in 1868, one of the most important legislative initiatives of the biracial legislature was the creation of a public school system, though segregated, for both blacks and whites.<sup>40</sup>

While George Moses Horton left Chapel Hill for good and settled in Philadelphia, most African Americans remained in the South. For those who did stay, Horton’s example was instructive. Literacy was not only a way to free the creative genius of African Americans and advance their individual prospects; it also was a weapon to lift up and inform the collective struggle that would be necessary to ensure the freedom that Emancipation implied. This was exactly the kind of sentiment that men such as William A. Graham feared. As the first collective expression of their determination to build a freedom movement, African Americans chose to celebrate the birthday of the Union.

July 4, 1865 was truly a day to remember as African Americans all across North Carolina held jubilant demonstrations to celebrate Emancipation and show support for the

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<sup>38</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 137.

<sup>39</sup>Williams, *self-taught*, 175.

<sup>40</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 144.

Union. The freed people of Chapel Hill gave notice of their own joy and determination by joining with African Americans throughout Orange County to stage a large Fourth of July celebration in Hillsborough. This event, repeated annually the first four years after the war, was a collective assertion of black identity and independence. It demonstrated the rapid politicization of the black community and reflected a significant level of county organization involving committees, marshals, publicity handbills, and a formal reading of the Declaration of Independence to open the festivities.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, it was a bold assertion of the right of African Americans to claim the nation's democratic promise for themselves and to occupy the public space.

This first expression of organized political activity on the part of African Americans in Orange County was followed shortly by two expressions of freedom striving in Chapel Hill. On August 23rd, the black people of the town sent a wedding cake to Ellie Swain, daughter of UNC President David Lowry Swain. This audacious act gained tremendous political force from the larger context of the wedding: Ellie Swain was marrying General Smith D. Atkins, commander of the Union forces occupying Chapel Hill. The local gentry were outraged, and many of the invited guests boycotted the wedding. Some even "spit upon" their invitations, according to Cornelia Spencer.<sup>42</sup> Yet, black people dared to intervene in a "white" wedding ceremony by sending "a large and handsomely decorated cake." Only a few months before, African Americans could only have related to such an event as servants. With this act they asserted that they were more. They claimed a place at the wedding and a place in society, even though they were not invited guests. Blacks in Chapel Hill spoke as a united people and

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<sup>41</sup>Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 109.

<sup>42</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer Diary, August 23-28, CPSP, quoted in Russell, *Bell*, 69-70.

gave their blessing to a union that they understood met with bitter disapproval from most of their former masters. More shocking still, the cake was openly displayed in the home of President Swain during the wedding dinner.

The little we know about this event suggests some provocative questions about black movement building and relations of power. For instance, where did the idea come from for black people to bake a cake and send it to the wedding, and who carried the project to fulfillment? Did the initiative arise from former slaves in the Swain household, probably women, who may have had personal relationships with Ellie Swain, or from elsewhere in the black community? In either case, what movement building activities and sense of collective identity gave rise to the distinctly political intent of the gift, as if it were a collective statement from all the colored people of Chapel Hill? Moreover, what process took place to insure that the cake found an accepted place at the wedding ceremony? Did black people approach Ellie Swain about the gift they must have known would be highly controversial, or did they deliver the cake without preliminaries? Certainly, Ellie Swain must have supported putting the cake on display, but what debate took place within the Swain household, and what role, if any, did Smith Atkins and the Union army play?

The marriage of Ellie Swain and Smith Atkins was both personal and political. In the context of the times, their decision to marry necessarily carried the implication of a new balance of power between Union and Confederate forces, the potential for reconciliation between North and South, and a repudiation by some whites of Confederate war propaganda concerning evil Yankees. Ellie Swain's defiance of her parents' displeasure and the sentiment of elite society suggests a loss of ideological control by the gentry over some of their children. Indeed, Ellie was not alone in her flaunting of Confederate sentiment. Several

of her friends also went riding with Union officers, including one of Professor Manuel Fetter's daughters and twenty-five-year-old Beck Ryan. Rumor had it that the professor's daughter planned on marrying a Union captain.<sup>43</sup> Some members of society, formerly held in line by the force of white supremacy, apparently now openly rejected the stereotype of the despised Yankee. At the same time, the bride and groom ignored racial norms that had branded African Americans as a despised caste outside of decent society. The couple's public endorsement of the legitimacy of a wedding gift from the black community was truly a break with traditions of slavery and the norms of white supremacy. It was a definite victory for black assertions of humanity and an equal place in society, as the bitter denunciations of white supremacists made clear.

Among those who voiced the most vehement repudiation of Ellie Swain's marriage were UNC students. During the wedding ceremony, students tolled the college bell and hung President Swain and Smith Atkins in effigy. Clearly, there was some leadership and coordination among these white youths that resulted in this carefully orchestrated protest. Only three weeks later, a similar sentiment seemed to motivate students to attack a political

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<sup>43</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 73. It is interesting to speculate about this community of rebellious young women. Ellie Swain, from a wealthy, slave owning family, was probably politically sophisticated, having associated with her father's many prominent visitors from childhood. Manuel Fetter owned a dozen slaves in 1860, and his daughters, Susan and Catherine, were no doubt part of elite Chapel Hill society, as well. Rebecca Ryan, however, while a close neighbor of the Swains, lived in a more modest household with her single mother and younger brother as well as two boarders, a tailor and a clerk. Rebecca Lucas, the sixty-four year old widow of an 1847 UNC graduate, headed the household and owned no personal property or real estate in 1860. According to the manuscript census, Rebecca Ryan had lived next door or across the street from two free black families and close to President Swain's large slave household since the time she was five years old. Tracking the correspondence of these women might reveal a great deal about the development of rebellious attitudes among young white women in Chapel Hill prior to the war.

meeting of African Americans assembled in the village to elect delegates to the historic first Convention of Freedmen, scheduled to meet in Raleigh in October.

On the night of September 13, 1865, a group of perhaps twenty African Americans met on the second floor of a building in Chapel Hill to hear a speaker from Raleigh and to select delegates to the Convention of Freedmen that was scheduled to meet in October. Although there may have been attempts to keep this meeting secret, at approximately ten o'clock, a group of UNC students rushed across the campus shouting and began throwing rocks at the meeting place. Soon, they tore down the outside steps that gave access to the second floor, trapping those within. Then, they replaced the steps with ladders and attempted to break into the building wielding sticks. Those inside repulsed this attack, bloodying the faces of some of the students. This vigorous self-defense on the part of former slaves seemed to enrage the crowd gathered outside. Cries of "fire to it" arose from the rabid mob. The threat was taken seriously by those inside, for they jumped from the windows and fled into the night.<sup>44</sup>

### *Presidential Reconstruction In North Carolina*

During the first two years after Emancipation, President Andrew Johnson controlled national Reconstruction. His policies allowed the former gentry to quickly reassert their power in North Carolina. For these men, black freedom was a threat to both profits and political domination. Emancipation threatened the tight system of labor control created

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<sup>44</sup>From Henry Clay Thompson to Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick, 14 September 1865, in Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers, Duke University Library, quoted in Jones, "Opportunity Lost", 47-8. For an account of this event that dates it in the same week as Ellie Swain's wedding, rather than September 13, see Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 76. For Cornelia Phillips Spencer's commentary on this event, see Russell, *Bell*, 76.

during slavery that ensured a plentiful supply of cheap, black labor. It also opened up the possibility, if black men gained the right to vote, of a biracial political alliance among black and white working people to oppose elite political control. Therefore, the ruling class of North Carolina moved rapidly to enact a new system of laws to control black labor and suppress black political rights. These laws were known as the Black Codes. Former slave owners throughout the South enacted similar repressive legislation. In response, outraged Radical Republicans in Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1867. By ensuring that black men gained the right to vote, as African Americans in the South had been demanding, Congressional Republicans planted the seeds of a biracial alliance of freedpeople and white farmers opposed to elite rule in North Carolina and other southern states. These Radical Republican legislatures wrote new, more democratic constitutions, began the rebuilding of their states, and attempted to enact sweeping reforms in education, elections, and economics. Confronted by this challenge to their profits and power, the Conservative Party organized a vicious white supremacy campaign to destroy the Republican alliance. Leaders of the university led this campaign of vitriolic propaganda and Ku Klux Klan terror.

Radical Republican control of the state legislature was brief in North Carolina, lasting from 1868 to 1870. Confronted by the war's economic devastation, the difficult task of rebuilding the state's infrastructure and enacting democratic reforms with limited resources, and the implacable hostility of the former gentry to biracial politics, the Republican alliance was unable to sustain its political power. After regaining control of the legislature in 1870, the Conservative Party (which later changed its name to the Democratic Party) steadily tightened its political control. The Conservatives won complete control of state government in 1876.

The September Chapel Hill meeting to elect delegates to the Convention of Freedmen had resulted from a statewide African American movement building effort that began shortly after Emancipation. The first organizations developed in towns with large black populations, mostly in the eastern part of the state. African Americans in Wilmington and Beaufort formed Equal Rights Leagues, while black residents of Raleigh, Kinston, and New Bern organized Union Leagues.<sup>45</sup> All of these groups were committed to the struggle for equal rights.

Little more than two months after Emancipation, the jubilation of freedom and the urgent need for group solidarity resulted in statewide Fourth of July celebrations. In addition to the event in Hillsborough, there were demonstrations of over 2,000 in Raleigh and Beaufort, as well as smaller events in New Bern, Kinston, and other towns. The movement building process continued to develop the following month. African Americans began circulating petitions asking President Johnson for equal rights, while meetings and rallies were held in several towns in the eastern part of the state. The August 22 gathering in New Bern issued a formal call for a statewide black convention in Raleigh at the end of September. On August 23 the call was published in the *New Bern Times*, and within two weeks it appeared in the Raleigh and Wilmington papers. The call began by outlining a plan for the democratic selection of delegates. It read, “Let the leading men of each separate district issue a call for a meeting, that delegates may be chosen to express the sentiments of the Freedmen at Raleigh on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September and let each county seat send as many delegates as it has representatives in the Legislature.” Then the conveners called on the generations to boldly stand forth and be guided by the spirit of their God. “Rally, old men, we want the counsel of

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<sup>45</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 14.

your years and experience, rally, young men, we want your loyal presence, and need the ardor of youth to stimulate the timid; and may the spirit of our God come with the people to hallow our sittings and wisely direct all our action.”<sup>46</sup>

A.H. Galloway, John Randolph, Jr., and George W. Price signed this historic call. During September, mass rallies were reported in at least ten communities, including Chapel Hill, though delegates attended the Raleigh convention from half the counties of the state, suggesting a great deal of unreported organizing. In the end, 117 delegates from 42 of the state’s 87 counties attended the Freedmen’s Convention of 1865.<sup>47</sup> Most were former North Carolina slaves rather than men who had been free before the war. Nevertheless, roughly half of these former slaves were literate and relatively few were farmers or farm laborers. Skilled tradesmen predominated, suggesting that they may have had a longstanding role in the leadership of black affairs. In many parts of the state, African Americans organized a formal democratic process to choose delegates to the Freedmen’s Convention. According to a special correspondent for *The Nation*, other representatives were sent by churches, prayer meetings, and “neighborhood conferences where a few men met together in secret.”<sup>48</sup> Evidencing a spirit of broad democracy, the convention voted to accept the motion by A.H. Galloway, a black Union soldier, to accept “delegates who were not able to obtain credentials from their constituents, on account of the interference of the whites in some counties.”

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<sup>46</sup>Andrews, *Since the War*, 120; Alexander, *Freedmen*, 17; Nowaczyk, “North Carolina Negro,” 5.

<sup>47</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 17.

<sup>48</sup>Dennett, *South*, 149.

Orange County sent four delegates to the 1865 Freedmen's Convention, despite efforts by UNC students and other townspeople to disrupt their organizing. William Payne, Marsh Henderson, Henderson Washington, and Jordan Weaver were the four delegates chosen by Orange County African Americans. Payne was a fifty-five year old Methodist minister from Hillsborough. Henderson was a forty-one year old laborer. Washington does not appear in the census. Weaver, from Chapel Hill, was a forty-five year old farmer, married, and the father of four. It is probable that Payne and Jordan were literate, while Henderson, at least in 1880, could not write. Although each of these men was listed as born in North Carolina, none of them appeared in the 1860 census for North Carolina, so they had all likely been slaves. In 1870, Weaver owned real estate, probably his farm, valued at \$750, which ranked first among Africans American in Chapel Hill. He was also a preacher, though that was not his occupation.<sup>49</sup>

Although none of the Orange County representatives spoke during the convention, according to the published "Official Proceedings," they were present. They had faced a white supremacist mob to get there. Their participation was historic and probably had long-lasting local significance, though they left no written record. Most of the outspoken leaders of the Freedmen's Convention were delegates from the majority black counties of the East. The tenor of their speeches and most of their resolutions were radical by the standards of white political leaders. That is, most delegates endorsed the demand for political equality, including the right to vote. An important piece of work accomplished by the convention was the drafting of an address to the white Constitutional Convention scheduled to meet in

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<sup>49</sup>The list of delegates for the 1865 convention appears in Convention, *Official Proceedings*, 2, in NCC. Sources for information on the Orange County delegates is from the U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N.C. 1860, 1870, and 1880.

Raleigh a few days later. The freedmen's address expressed "the wishes of this convention on the subject of Equal Rights." Although in tone humble and respectful, the address pointed out the abuses that freed slaves had endured at the hands of some planters. To remedy this situation, the freedmen called on the Constitutional Convention and the Legislature to draft protective labor laws guaranteeing their rights. According to a northern correspondent, the Raleigh newspapers considered the address "a wonderfully conservative document, undisfigured by the marks of leveling radicalism." Nevertheless, the correspondent pointed out, the freedmen included the following sentences: "We desire education for our children, that they may be made useful in all relations of life. We most earnestly desire to have the disabilities under which we formerly labored removed, and to have all the oppressive laws which make unjust discriminations on account of race or color wiped from the statutes of the state."<sup>50</sup>

African Americans in North Carolina had done hard organizing to bring off this first statewide gathering. However, they understood that the convention was only one significant step forward in a larger movement building process to achieve their goals. In fact, they used the 1865 Freedmen's Convention as a springboard to institutionalize their movement. Before concluding the Raleigh gathering, the group voted to "resolve itself into a North Carolina State Equal Rights League." The new organization elected officers and an eleven-man steering committee, established a headquarters in Raleigh, and recommended the formation of "sub-Leagues in every county." A committee established in anticipation of these actions proposed a constitution for the League. The document stated the group's "determination to

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<sup>50</sup>Dennett, *South*, 154. For extended discussions of the 1865 Freedmen's Convention see Alexander, *Freedmen*, 13-31 and Dennett, *South* 147-54.

organize more permanently” and to consolidate all efforts “to secure, by political and moral means the repeal of all laws . . . that make distinctions of color.”<sup>51</sup>

The 1865 convention was recognized widely as a historic event. Representatives of the northern media reported its proceedings and prominent friends of black rights sent letters of support. One solidarity statement printed in the Official Proceedings came from “The North Carolinians in the City of Cleaveland (sic) Ohio.” The message said, in part, “may you finally triumph in establishing in your State the great idea that all “governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Thirty-two men signed the letter, listing their former homes in North Carolina and their current occupations. Like the delegates to the convention, most of these men were artisans. They had formerly resided in the same towns that were most prominent in the North Carolina movements, such as New Bern, Wilmington, Kinston, Raleigh, and Fayetteville. Among these men was James T. Alston, a barber from Chapel Hill.

Like the Union soldiers who supported George Moses Horton, the black artisans of Cleveland who expressed solidarity with the Convention of Freedmen represented a coalescing of social forces in support of the freedom struggle of African Americans. In the coming months, the former masters whose word had been law in North Carolina would organize their own forces to insure the interests of their class. Yet the odds against black freedom were growing more slowly as African Americans built their freedom movement.

Rather than take any substantive action in response to the Address from the Convention of Freedmen, the Constitutional Convention appointed a committee to study the issues. This committee reported its view that control of African Americans must be assumed by the state,

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<sup>51</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 29; Convention, *Official Proceedings*, 15, 16, 22.

since “the freedman is ignorant of the operations of civil government, improvident of the future, careless of the restraints of public opinion, and without any real appreciation of the duties and obligations imposed by the change in his relations to society.”<sup>52</sup>

Such white supremacist views were the norm among white political leaders. William W. Holden, the provisional governor appointed by President Johnson in May 1865, made his view clear in his advice to the freedmen. Shortly after assuming office, he told them, “It is not expected that you can comprehend and appreciate . . . the wise provisions and limitation of the Constitution and the laws; or that you can now have that knowledge of public affairs which is necessary to qualify you to discharge all the duties of citizens.”<sup>53</sup> In 1866, both candidates for governor, Holden and Jonathan Worth, a conservative Whig and university trustee (1840-1868), agreed that African Americans should be denied the vote and the right to testify in court.<sup>54</sup> Former governor William A. Graham, also a trustee and Orange County resident, declared that “as to political liberty or power over the law, as comprehended in the right of suffrage, the safety and welfare of the community require, that this shall be jealously reserved to the white race.” President Swain wrote to Graham, “with reference to emancipation, we are at the beginning of the war.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, from the beginning of

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<sup>52</sup>*Raleigh Standard*, October 2, 1865, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 39.

<sup>53</sup>Holden, *Memoirs of W.W. Holden*, 49-50, quoted in Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 43.

<sup>54</sup>On Worth as UNC trustee, see Battle, *History*, 1: 824, 826. On political agreement of Worth and Holden in 1866, see Alexander, *Freedmen*, 37.

<sup>55</sup>From William Alexander Graham to Joseph Holderby and J. W. Burton, 6 February 1866, in William A. Graham Papers, SHC #285, quoted in Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 59. Swain letter to Graham, Hamilton and Williams, eds., *Papers of William Alexander Graham*, 6:324, quoted in Foner, *Reconstruction*, 123.

Reconstruction, UNC was in step with the leading white men of the state in opposing black freedom tooth and nail.

The university played no direct institutional role in the formulation of the new laws, called “Black Codes,” that established the separate and unequal place of African Americans in North Carolina following Emancipation. The dominant political role of the gentry in post-Emancipation society, leading men closely associated with the university made most of the crucial political decisions in North Carolina during Reconstruction. The writing of the Black Codes was no exception. Attorney B.F. Moore, a university trustee (1840-1868) was the leading member of the three-person committee appointed by the convention. Moore shared most of the work with William S. Mason, who received an honorary degree from the university in 1857. The third member of the committee was R.S. Donnell, class of 1839, one of the lawyers who handled escheats for the university and a leading politician in the state.<sup>56</sup>

These men presented recommendations to the Legislature on January 23, 1866. One of the proposed laws prescribed the death penalty for an African American convicted of assault with the intent to commit rape of a white female. For the same offense a white man would receive a fine and imprisonment. Another law allowed the testimony of African Americans in court cases where their property rights were involved, but in no others, unless the white parties involved gave their consent. Interracial marriages were declared void and prohibited. In the binding out of black children as apprentices, courts were to give preference to former masters. Black females could be bound out to the age of twenty-one, but white females only

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<sup>56</sup>On B.F. Moore, see Battle, *History*, 1: 824, 826; on Donnell, see Battle, *History*, 1: 459, 622; on Mason, see Battle, *History*, 1: 677. On B. F. Moore’s role in formulating the Black Code, see Alexander, *Freedmen*, 45.

to the age of eighteen. Persons of color could not contract for property valued at more than ten dollars without the witness of a literate white person.<sup>57</sup>

Some of these proposed laws generated much controversy among North Carolina legislators. What becomes evident in these debates was that many legislators were willing to endorse measures that would surely arouse the wrath of federal officers in North Carolina, as well as Northern public opinion. Others, particularly mature Whig politicians associated with the university, such as B.F. Moore and former Governor William Graham, wanted to construct a legal framework that appeared to compromise with the demands of northern Republicans. In fact, as Samuel Field Phillips noted, their aim was to rid North Carolina of federal supervision of its court system. Moore, Graham, and Samuel Field Phillips, another university trustee (1864-8), opposed efforts on the part of a large number of legislators to prohibit the testimony of African Americans in cases involving whites. Phillips, aware of the mounting demands of African Americans for equality before the law, argued that by giving African Americans the right to testify in cases involving their rights, the state would be creating “a valve for the escape of much ill-temper.” He further understood that African Americans already testified before courts operated by the Freedman’s Bureau, and the federal government would not be likely to return control of the courts to North Carolina authorities if the Legislature tried to deny this right. Thus, until North Carolina lawmakers passed a bill giving African Americans limited rights in court, “we shall not have done our part towards ridding ourselves of that Bureau!”<sup>58</sup> Graham, the most respected political leader in the state, responded to the Legislature’s request for an opinion by supporting Phillips, as did Governor

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<sup>57</sup>For an in depth discussion of the North Carolina Black Codes, see Alexander, *Freedmen*, 39-52 and Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 55-67.

<sup>58</sup>Samuel Field Phillips quoted in Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 58.

Jonathan Worth. The Raleigh *Sentinel* noted that legislators could not be charged with “indifference, or inhumanity, or injustice to the colored race, except that they do not propose to admit the colored man to the right of suffrage—a privilege which nine-tenths of them . . . would have no conception of using correctly.”

Like the attempt by the gentry to deny the humanity of African Americans during slavery, the attempt to portray the freedmen as too ignorant and irresponsible to exercise the franchise was an ideological mainstay of white supremacy. Black North Carolinians understood that this charge would be hurled against them as they pursued their freedom and they found many creative and effective ways to counter such ideological attacks. A correspondent from the North reported on the speech of one delegate to the 1865 Convention of Freedmen. The black man said, “Yes, yes, we are ignorant.”

We know it. I am ignorant for one, and they say all niggers is. They say we don't know what the word constitution means. But if we don't know enough to know what the Constitution is, we know enough to know what justice is. I can see for myself down at my own court-house. If they makes a white man pay five dollars for doing something today, and makes a nigger pay ten dollars for doing that thing tomorrow, don't I know that ain't justice? They've got a figure of a woman with a sword hung up thar, sir; Mr. President, I don't know what you call it—(“Justice,” “Justice”)—well, she's got a handkercher over her eyes, and the sword is in one hand and a pair o' scales in the other. When a white man and a nigger gets into the scales, don't I know the nigger is always mighty light? Don't we all see it? Ain't it so at your court-house, Mr. President?<sup>59</sup>

By such eloquent common sense, African Americans turned the disdainful arguments of their former masters against white supremacy. They spoke truth to power. Of course, they admitted, they were ignorant of many things. But they were not ignorant concerning the one thing that white supremacists seemed unable or unwilling to grasp, the most important thing—simple justice. African Americans raised this charge up at a time when they knew the

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<sup>59</sup>Dennett, *South*, 150-1.

whole world was watching. Yet the black delegate quoted above in the northern press was not simply attempting to influence political opinion outside North Carolina. He was speaking to his people, for his people, in the language of solidarity—“We know enough to know what justice is . . . . Don’t we all see it? Ain’t it so at your court-house, Mr. President?” Against the attempt by white supremacists to scorn and rebuke the efforts of African Americans to assert their rights, the delegate spoke the simple truth to give his comrades a sense of righteousness and to sustain them in their growing solidarity

The openly discriminatory aspects of North Carolina’s Black Code, like similar laws enacted in other southern states, were unacceptable to the federal government and angered many in the North. More importantly, they were unacceptable to African Americans who were indispensable allies for northern Republicans determined to organize statewide Republican Party organizations in the South. The federal Civil Rights Act of 1866, passed over the veto of President Johnson, overturned much of this discriminatory legislation and for the first time established a national standard of citizenship.<sup>60</sup>

At the heart of much of the legislation proposed by B.F. Moore’s committee was the gentry’s determination to control black labor. While the university as an institution was not directly involved in the formulation of the Black Codes, it is important to not lose sight of its indirect influence. Certainly, B. F. Moore and other prominent trustees were leaders in the effort to write new laws that would perpetuate the ability of the gentry, as a class, to profit and rule. These men also derived considerable power from their connection to the university. They were not simply isolated individuals, albeit with great wealth. Certain institutions allowed them to build their connections with each other and their sense of themselves as a

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<sup>60</sup>Goldfield, et. al., *The American Journey*, 2, (2001): 524-25.

class. The university was one of the most important of these institutions. At Chapel Hill, they established relationships that facilitated their exercise of power for years to come. They left UNC on intimate terms with future power brokers. They gained a sense of their collective strength and responsibility, beyond the plantation and the local community. They absorbed the teachings of the older generation and developed their own orientation to the world in a common space framed by the dominant norms of class, race, and gender. At the university, they met women of their class who came for social events from all over the state and they married them. These men, many of whom were both leaders of the gentry and trustees of the university, wrote the Black Codes for their class, just as they governed the university to perpetuate their dominant position in the social order.

Profit and rule were the two issues most fundamental to the concerns of the gentry as they considered revising North Carolina's fundamental law. Race prejudice, though it may have been an important factor in their approach, was not fundamental to the nine laws proposed by the Black Code committee.<sup>61</sup> Only the law entitled "An Act Concerning Negroes and Persons of Color and Mixed Blood" was overtly discriminatory. The other eight laws applied equally to white and black, yet they were designed to have a disparate impact on African Americans. In fact, legislators were primarily concerned with devising a labor system to replace slavery. B.F. Moore advanced legislation that would punish black workers who violated labor contracts by authorizing their sale for a term of years.<sup>62</sup> Laws on vagrancy, apprenticeships, legalizing payment of wages in kind, against "enticing servants from fulfilling their contracts," and providing for workhouses were all race neutral measures

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<sup>61</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 44.

<sup>62</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 45

aimed primarily at compelling African Americans to work and restricting their choices and opportunities.<sup>63</sup>

While white legislators were attempting to erect a legal framework to replace the labor discipline imposed by slavery, black workers were attempting to enforce their own vision of fair labor practices in the fields. It was because of this labor activism that white legislators were so intent on developing laws that would insure their control of black labor.

Once it became clear that freedom was real, many slaves returned to their former masters and began negotiating over terms of employment. Such negotiations were one of the first steps in the revolutionary transformation in relations of dependence that took place during Reconstruction. Though many masters initially acted as if Emancipation had not happened, the legal reality of black freedom enforced by federal troops eventually prevailed.

Like his father before him, Paul Cameron was a trustee of the university (1858-68, 1875-91). Following Emancipation he complained that his former slaves were “idle and indisposed to work.” Cameron’s black workers seemed determined to resist the kind of labor discipline he tried to impose on them. Cameron offered a modest, but not unusual, share of the crop in return for labor. However, he also demanded a continuation of the methods of labor and social control that had been in force during slavery. Laborers would work in gangs under the direction of overseers. The farm manager had the power to regulate the economic activities of all laborers living on the plantation, determine which preachers could conduct services, and fire workers who were not “perfectly respectable in language and deportment.” Large

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<sup>63</sup>Alexander, *Freedmen*, 45-7.

assemblies of African Americans were not allowed, except for religious purposes and Cameron prohibited all visitors without his permission.<sup>64</sup>

Cameron's laborers apparently refused to work according to this plan and, at the same time, refused to leave. "My old slaves seem determined to hold onto *me* or to my *land*," Cameron wrote a friend. There was talk among the workers of dividing up the plantation among themselves. They ate up large amounts of Cameron's food supplies. In retaliation, Cameron hired a butcher to kill all his sheep and cattle and sell the meat to keep it out of the hands of the freed people. By November 1865, Cameron's overseer reported that the workers had armed themselves and he was doing the same. By Christmas, Cameron decided to drive off his former slaves, nearly a thousand of them, despite the hardship this would create among the old and very young. The next year, Cameron toyed with the idea of using white immigrant labor or selling his property. In the end, he gave up management of his plantation altogether, leasing it in parcels to white farmers who, in turn, employed black laborers.<sup>65</sup>

Thomas Ruffin, like Cameron, was a prominent trustee of the university (1842-68). He kept his former slaves on as laborers, but paid them so poorly and abused their freedom to such an extent that the Freedmen's Bureau intervened on their behalf. Ruffin's policy of maintaining conditions as close to slavery as possible on his plantation were made clear in a letter from his overseer. He wrote, "I have driven off 2 since Christmas for neglect of duty and what is left no very well that have got to work and act slave fashion or they can't stay."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 120-2; Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 109-11.

<sup>65</sup>Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 109-11

<sup>66</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 122.

The actual implementation by local courts of the discriminatory apprenticeship provisions of the Black Codes seemed to be generating a new form of slavery. The new law gave preference to former masters when a black child was bound out as an apprentice.. In Sampson County, for instance, six hundred black youths were bound out, including many who were working and supporting themselves successfully. The courts did not consult the parents, but acted “merely upon affidavits of persons seeking possession.” Such abuses convinced Freedmen’s Bureau officials that the state courts were attempting to renew slavery under the guise of apprenticeships.<sup>67</sup>

It is not clear how widespread the militant activism of black farm laborers became. Certainly, there was, for a time, considerable hope among the freedmen that the federal government would confiscate the big plantations and compensate the former slaves for their unpaid labor with “forty acres and a mule.” It seems clear, as well, that some took it upon themselves to expropriate the property of their former owners. Although the freedmen failed in their efforts to obtain land in this way, their resistance did result in a forced compromise with plantation owners across the South. Resistance to gang labor and close supervision by white overseers resulted in a major shift in patterns of land tenure. Increasingly, landless black laborers gained a measure of independence from white control by becoming “sharecroppers.” Landlords provided tenants with land, farming supplies, and housing, while tenants provided their own living expenses. At the end of the growing season, the crop was divided into “shares,” with the tenant receiving one half to two thirds. At the same time,

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<sup>67</sup>United States 39th Congress, 2d Session, Senate Executive Document No. 6, 102, quoted in Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 67.

some African Americans were able to buy modest farms and gain an even greater measure of independence.<sup>68</sup>

In October 1866, African Americans assembled in Raleigh for a second statewide convention under the banner of the Equal Rights League. The freedmen had organized the League and planned this convention at the first Convention of Freedmen. The counties of the entire state were more evenly and widely represented at this convention, and Orange County sent five delegates. This convention was far more militant than the earlier convention, no doubt reflecting the intense black struggle elicited by the hostility of plantation owners and white legislators to black freedom during 1866. Black communities failed to return many of the delegates from the first convention to the Equal Rights League convention. Among Orange County delegates, only Jordan Weaver attended both conventions.<sup>69</sup> The convention issued an “Address of the Freedmen’s Convention to the White and Colored Citizens of North Carolina” outlining their grievances and “the outrages heaped upon us” resulting from “our long and unjust political disfranchisement.” The freedmen concluded, “We believe the day has come when black men have rights which white men are bound to respect. . . . Oh, North Carolina . . . will you treat us as human beings, with all our rights? It is all we ask.”<sup>70</sup>

These examples provide a framework for understanding the desperation of the gentry to maintain the practice of whipping. This punishment was traditional in North Carolina, and it was a form of discipline particularly adapted for slavery. Antebellum law prescribed that

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<sup>68</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 121; Alexander, *Freedmen*, 108-110; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 106-108.

<sup>69</sup>For a detailed account of this convention, see Freedmen’s Convention, *Minutes, 1866*; Alexander, *Freedmen*, 81-92; Jones, “Opportunity Lost,” 75-6.

<sup>70</sup>Freedmen’s Convention, *Minutes, 1866*, 26-7.

slaves were to receive thirty-nine lashes for minor offenses. More commonly, masters subjected slaves to arbitrary whippings, switchings, or thrashings for any type of subordination. Although white criminals might be whipped, it was a punishment that in the minds of both African Americans and members of the gentry was closely associated with labor discipline and the personal power of masters over slaves.<sup>71</sup> On December 17, 1866, when General Daniel Edgar Sickles, the Military Commandant of North Carolina, responded to widespread abuse by issuing General Order 15 making whipping illegal, Conservative leaders appealed his decision.<sup>72</sup> Governor Worth, Thomas Ruffin, David Lowery Swain, and Nathaniel Boyden visited President Johnson to ask that Sickles' order be rescinded, but to no avail. All of these men were associated with the university, Worth and Ruffin as trustees, Swain as President, and Boyden as an 1855 graduate.

The failure of a high level delegation of Conservatives to secure presidential intervention on the whipping issue was symptomatic of setbacks the gentry were incurring all along the line. Widespread and determined black labor activism and opposition to the Black Codes found support in northern public opinion and the growing power of Radical Republicans in Congress. By the end of 1866, much of the original Black Codes legislation had been severely modified by white legislators fearful of these forces. [cite secondary sources here]

### *Radical Reconstruction In Chapel Hill and North Carolina*

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<sup>71</sup>On whippings and beatings in North Carolina, see Trelease, *White Terror*, 189-225, 336-48.

<sup>72</sup>For a discussion of whipping in North Carolina during Presidential Reconstruction, as well as the gentry's appeal of Order 15, see Jones, "Opportunity Lost," 67-70 and Alexander, *Freedmen*, 146-7.

In March 1867, Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Acts over the veto of President Johnson, effectively ending the era of relatively mild Presidential Reconstruction. Congressional Reconstruction was generally known as Radical Reconstruction because it mandated a revolution in southern power relations. Congress appointed military commanders to register black men to vote, while excluding from the franchise and elective office former Confederate office holders. Eligible voters were to elect delegates to a state convention charged with writing a new constitution that guaranteed universal manhood suffrage. Upon ratification of these new constitutions and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed civil rights and equality before the law to all citizens, southern states would be readmitted to the Union.

The registration of voters in North Carolina under military direction proceeded through the summer of 1867. By October, the process was complete with nearly 180,000 voters registered. Approximately 40 percent of these voters were black men. Just before Thanksgiving, elections were held to determine the holding of a constitutional convention and the election of delegates. Though many white voters stayed at home, more than 64,000 went to the polls. Of these, half voted in favor of the convention. Virtually every black voter cast his ballot for the convention. Thus, approximately 30,000 white men and 60,000 black men joined forces to call a constitutional convention that would insure black civil rights.

The Constitutional Convention met from January 14 to March 18 1868. There were thirteen Conservative delegates and 107 Republicans, including 13 African Americans, 18 northern whites, and 74 native whites.<sup>73</sup> The document they produced was democratic, in the sense that it dismantled many of the institutionalized mechanisms of elite social control.

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<sup>73</sup>Nowaczyk, "North Carolina Negro," 34-6.

Education for the common people, which had been minimal during slavery, was insured by the creation of a public school system for both black and white. For the first time, county officials were to be elected by the people, thus ending one of the mainstays of local elite power. The constitution guaranteed manhood suffrage, provided that judges would be elected for eight years rather than appointed, and did away with property qualifications for governor and state legislators. In addition, though virtually all delegates understood that, as a practical matter, most white North Carolinians would not tolerate integrated public schools, they took a principled stand against including segregation in the constitution, refusing to endorse the segregation of common schools, the university, or the militia. These decisions were necessary for the Republican Party to maintain the goodwill of African Americans and the biracial political alliance that had brought them to power. In a similar vein, despite the small number of black delegates, at least one served on every committee of the convention, and some served as officers of the convention.

The two leading Conservative delegates, Captain Plato Durham and Major John W. Graham of Orange County, introduced a number of provocative resolutions. For instance, Durham and Graham objected to the offices of lieutenant governor, superintendent of public works, and superintendent of instruction being elective. Durham offered an amendment that would have prohibited all African Americans from election to any executive office. Graham proposed a resolution providing for a segregated militia with separate black and white commanders, and that no white man should have to obey the command of a black officer. Graham and Durham together proposed segregation amendments to the provision calling for a free compulsory public school system and a university. All of these white supremacy proposals were defeated overwhelmingly. Speaking in support of an elective office of public

instruction, one of the leading black delegates, James Harris, argued, “The gentlemen who opposed in his opinion could not be sincere. The very party they represented [the Conservatives] appropriated \$14,000 to keep up Chapel Hill [the university] through the last Legislature, in order to educate the sons of the aristocracy. . . . How then can gentlemen oppose this request of the people?”<sup>74</sup> Plato Durham later became of leader of the Ku Klux Klan. Graham, who was appointed a university trustee in 1877, was the son of William A. Graham and the son-in-law of Paul Cameron.<sup>75</sup>

The race and class tensions so evident at the Constitutional Convention were a warning of what was to come during the next several years. The democratic reforms enacted by the convention attracted many white farmers and laborers, long excluded from political power, to the Republican Party. The election reforms mandated by the Republicans resulted in a considerable number of local offices going to men who were not wealthy, including, in black majority areas, African Americans. Members of the gentry, accustomed to unquestioned authority, felt insulted and humiliated, especially because federal occupation troops enforced the new constitution. They shuddered as their worst nightmare—“an alliance among the lower classes of both races”—materialized before their eyes.<sup>76</sup> As a result, they believed their most fundamental economic interests were imperiled. Governor Worth worried that “the mean whites, cooperating with the negroes, may appropriate all the land.” Worth was not thinking so much of direct confiscation, which many African Americans favored. “If non-property holders are the ruling power in both branches of the Legislature,” Worth wrote,

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<sup>74</sup>*Raleigh Standard*, January 31, 1868, quoted in Nowaczyk, “North Carolina Negro,” 43.

<sup>75</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 787.

“land and property will be in much more danger of virtual confiscation from taxation than they are from the present Congress.”<sup>77</sup>

To prevent such an outcome, Conservative political leaders launched a massive campaign of propaganda and terror to overthrow Radical Reconstruction. Although they were temporarily excluded from political power, they controlled many influential newspapers and other public opinion outlets. They also moved quickly to organize paramilitary groups to subdue black movement building and Republican political mobilization. The gentry organized the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist groups and recruited thousands of white North Carolinians by appealing to white supremacy. In fact, one of the crucial battles of Reconstruction was a struggle for the hearts and minds of common white people. While Republicans tried to define the issue as one of democracy versus elite class privilege, Conservatives tried to make race the central question.<sup>78</sup>

Following the state elections of May 1868 that endorsed the new constitution, the U.S. Congress admitted North Carolina back into the Union. In July, Governor William Woods Holden, leader of the Republican Party, used the temporary authority granted him by the 1868 constitution to appoint county and municipal officers. These men were mostly loyal Republicans, including a number of African Americans. In January 1869, new local officials were chosen by elections. Democrats launched harsh counterattacks at the local level. The

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<sup>76</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 139.

<sup>77</sup>From Jonathan Worth to W.H. McRae, 9 September 1867 and Worth to A.M. Tomlinson, 26 September 1867 in Hamilton, *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth*, 2:1047-48, 1050-1, quoted in Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 140.

<sup>78</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 148.

struggle over power relations that unfolded in Chapel Hill and Orange County during Radical Reconstruction was violent ideologically, politically, and physically.

In Chapel Hill, the men holding office as town commissioners in July 1869 reflected the coalition of native black and white North Carolinians that formed the mass of the Republican Party. The Commissioners were Solomon Pool, President of the University; Green Brewer, a black shoemaker; James F. Craig, a white farmer; and Thomas Kirby, a black farmer. Hugh B. Guthrie, a white merchant, served in the powerful position of Magistrate of Police; James B. Mason, a young white lawyer, served as Town Clerk; and J.J. Riggsbee, a white farmer, served as Town Treasurer. James H. Boone was the Town Constable and Henry Jones, an African American, was Vice Constable.<sup>79</sup> Given the balance of political forces in Chapel Hill during this era, it is likely that all these men were Republicans. Roughly 40 percent of Chapel Hill voters were black, and while many of the “best families,” no doubt Conservatives, had left the community, all of the newly arrived professors were Republicans. Therefore, it is not surprising that a biracial coalition of black and white artisans and yeomen, together with sympathetic native white professionals and merchants, governed Chapel Hill for the first time in history.<sup>80</sup>

In later years, defenders of white supremacy tried to discredit Radical Reconstruction as the political rule of “carpetbaggers,” disreputable men from outside the state. From this perspective, it is important to note that all of the Republican commissioners in Chapel Hill

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<sup>79</sup>For a listing of these officers, see entries of August 20, 1869 and March 30, 1870, *Minute Book of the Chapel Hill Board of Commissioners*, 1869-1885, at Chapel Hill Town Hall, Chapel Hill, N.C. On the race of Henry Jones, see *Raleigh Standard*, n.d., quoted in Russell, *Bell*, 128. Information on James Boone does not appear in the U.S. Census MS, N.C., 1870 or elsewhere.

<sup>80</sup>Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 138.

during this era were native North Carolinians. Brewer at fifty-nine and Kirby at fifty-five were the oldest among the commissioners. Both of these former slaves were married and had accumulated some property since Emancipation. Kirby's farm was worth \$400. Brewer, a shoemaker, also owned \$400 in real estate valued at \$400. Pool was an 1853 UNC honor graduate who had taught mathematics at the university during the war. In 1860 he had owned four slaves. In 1870, he was one of the wealthier men of the village, worth \$10,000. Craig was a yeoman farmer, married with a small child and two elderly relatives living in his home. The value of his real estate was \$600 and he owned \$200 worth of personal property.

Fragmentary evidence suggests that during 1868, many Chapel Hill residents accepted the authority of these officials. This may have been in part because Governor Holden sent a contingent of black soldiers to Chapel Hill when he dismissed the former professors and briefly closed the university in the fall of 1868. In November 1868, several months after Governor Holden appointed local officials for Chapel Hill, Bishop Waymon of the A.M.E. Church wrote to the Philadelphia *Christian Recorder*, describing his recent visit to the town. After remarking that "more than half" of the police officers in Raleigh were African Americans, as well as sixteen of the officers in Wilmington, he described the situation in Chapel Hill. "The public offices are filled by colored men in the town of Chapel Hill," he noted. "There I was the guest of Green Brewry, Esq., who is one of the Magistrates of the town, appointed by Governor Holden. There are two other regularly appointed Magistrates beside him. They have their offices, issue warrants and try cases with as much dignity as any other Justice of the Peace, and their decisions are always respected."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Waymon, letter to the editor, *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, Pa.), October 30, 1868, published November 14, 1868, item #86210 in Accessible Archives.

Holden's seizure of the university and his appointment of Republican local officials reflected the social revolution that was sweeping all state institutions and most communities. Although many parts of the state experienced great turmoil during 1868, including clashes involving the Ku Klux Klan (organized by the Conservatives) and black organizations like the Union Leagues (organized by the Republicans), the fury of Reconstruction conflict did not reach Chapel Hill until the fall of 1869.

The university reopened at the beginning of 1869 with a Republican president and faculty. The new president was Solomon Pool, an 1853 honor graduate of the university, who had taught mathematics at UNC since that time, was appointed president to replace Swain. Although Pool had owned slaves before the war, he joined the Republican cause. His brother, John, also became a Republican and was one of the U.S. senators from North Carolina.

As the year progressed, attacks by Conservatives on the administration of the university and on Republican power in Chapel Hill intensified. Throughout 1868 and early 1869, the Klan engaged in hundreds of beatings and other attacks on African Americans and white Republicans in counties adjoining Orange. A virtual state of war existed between the Republican administration in Raleigh and thousands of Klan nightriders in central North Carolina.<sup>81</sup> In August 1869, coinciding with the fall term of the university, Klansmen began riding regularly in Chapel Hill. On September 2, fifty to two hundred Klansmen entered Chapel Hill, threatening black and white Republicans, breaking into the house of Henry Jones, the black constable, and throwing rocks into the home of freedman November Caldwell, whose son, Wilson, had been appointed by Holden as Justice of the Peace.

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<sup>81</sup>Russell, *Bell*, 128.

<sup>82</sup>Trelease, *White Terror*, 189-225.

According to the Raleigh *Standard*, this was the Klan's "fourth turnout for the last few months."<sup>83</sup> On September 22, 1869, Republican attorney James B. Mason wrote Governor Holden, "It has become no uncommon thing to see 40 to 50 . . . Ku Klux rowdying up and down through the streets of this village at the late hour of twelve o'clock." When Holden sent a detective to Chapel Hill to ferret out the Klan, a group of men tied him to the town pump and gave him sixty lashes on his bare back.

Republican authorities were helpless against such massive terrorism. Pool believed the Klan was trying to suppress his efforts to build up the university, and he went to Raleigh to seek protection from the state militia. Without the approval of the Orange County Commissioners to accept military intervention in the county, which he could not obtain, Holden refused Pool's request, knowing such a move would be political suicide. What we do not know is whether local Republicans organized themselves for self-defense, like countless numbers of their comrades under attack across the state and throughout the South. In any case, we do know that the efforts of the Klan did not force the university to close or end Republican political power in Chapel Hill.

Chapel Hill Conservatives like Cornelia Phillips Spencer and T.M. Argo had been attempting to discredit the Pool administration in the media since the reopening of the university. In September, this propaganda offensive against local Republican power reached new heights. On September 25, a group of "concerned citizens" met in Chapel Hill to express their indignation against Republican officials.

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<sup>83</sup>Russell, *Bell*, 128.

There is little doubt that the group in Chapel Hill that came together to oppose Pool and the Republican coalition were connected organizationally to the leadership of the Conservative Party and the Ku Klux Klan. Not only were most of the men who organized the protest meeting former Chapel Hill slave owners, but among them was Col. William L. Saunders, the state leader of the Ku Klux Klan and a power in the Conservative Party. T.M. Argo, a close friend of Klansman and Conservative leader Plato Durham, was also part of the group.<sup>84</sup>

These men objected to Holden sending a detective to the town and to his appointment of Wilson Caldwell as Justice of the Peace and Henry Jones as constable. Holden's appointment of black law officers, they claimed, created "an unnecessary antagonism between the two races." They charged Holden with appointing "a faculty obnoxious to the people of the state." They sent their resolutions to the newspapers of the state, including two resolutions that clearly indicated a connection with the Ku Klux Klan. These resolutions stated that if black organizations were disbanded, "all organizations entered into to ward off such oppression will also be disbanded" and that good citizens should not be condemned when they were forced to provide their own justice. One other resolution turned reality on its head, stating that if Holden sent additional troops to Chapel Hill, it would "put at hazard the peace and quiet of the community." While military intervention might well have precipitated armed conflict with the Klan, it was vigilante terror that was, in fact, responsible for disrupting the community. At least one participant in the Chapel Hill meeting, William L. Saunders, was an organizer of that terror. Perhaps, rather than making a straightforward complaint, the leaders

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<sup>84</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 84.

of Conservative protest intended to send a message to the governor that if he sent troops, there would be armed Klan opposition.<sup>85</sup>

In February 1870, building on the foundation prepared by terror and propaganda, this same group attempted to overthrow the Republican Board of Commissioners in Chapel Hill. The group organized a fraudulent election on February 28 and installed a new Board of Commissioners that included John H. Watson, David McCauley, J.F. Freeland, John R. Hutchins, and W.J. Newton. Four of these men had been organizers of the September protest meeting. They seized the town records and began meeting, appointing members of their group as Magistrate of Police, Town Constable, and Town Clerk. Nevertheless, this attempted takeover stalled in early April, following a meeting of the Conservatives with a committee headed by Solomon Pool. Pool reported to the Republican commissioners that the Conservatives had held their election without a written copy of “any Act of law authorizing it.” The men had acted “under informal notice from Mr. T.M. Argo that such an election should be held.” The takeover of Chapel Hill government by Conservatives collapsed completely on April 7, when their own attorney informed them that the February 28 election was not valid.<sup>86</sup>

The full story of this attempted coup in Chapel Hill remains to be told. Just as the Klan and the Conservatives were mobilizing their forces behind the scenes, we can be sure that the Union League and the Republican Party were exerting their power. Certainly, legal technicalities were not the only factors that determined the outcome of this high drama. It

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<sup>85</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 80-1.

<sup>86</sup>Minutes from February 28, March 3, 21, 30, April 1, 7, *Minute Book of the Chapel Hill Board of Commissioners*, 1869-1885, at Chapel Hill Town Hall, Chapel Hill, N.C.; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 83.

may very well be that African Americans in Chapel Hill, roughly least half the population, reacted to the terror and political provocations of Klansmen by arming themselves to defend their homes and Republican political power. Local grassroots mobilization may have tipped the balance toward the Republicans. Also, Republican legal and political power was still largely intact at the state level. Local Conservatives were clearly concerned about the possibility that the governor might intervene militarily. Once it became clear that he would have a legal basis for doing so, it may be that the would-be usurpers lost their nerve.

Although the Republicans maintained their hold on Chapel Hill and the university, that grip was tenuous. The inability of Holden to deal effectively with the Klan or Conservative propaganda, as well as a multitude of additional economic and political challenges, resulted in the loss of the General Assembly to the Conservatives in the elections of 1870. From that point on, though the Republicans held on tenaciously, Conservatives slowly regained their domination of the institutions of state power.

### *Robert Fitzgerald And The Struggle For Black Education*

There would have been no Republican Party in North Carolina if it had not been for the support of tens of thousands of laboring people, black and white. Likewise, the role of a small number of native white professionals and merchants like Solomon Pool, Hugh B. Guthrie, and James B. Mason was an important element of the Republican coalition. In addition, the assistance of black and white northerners who had come to live in North Carolina was essential to the cause of black freedom and biracial politics. In the context of

black freedom and the university, two of the more important members of this northern group were Robert Fitzgerald and Fisk Brewer.

Many free blacks from the North decided to come to the South and stand for freedom. Some who came to North Carolina were returning home. Others who had served in the Union army in the South decided to stay and help build the new freedom. Robert Fitzgerald, a northern free black who moved to North Carolina and married a freedwoman of Chapel Hill, was one such veteran.

According to Pauli Murray, her grandfather, Robert, “had known since his army days that he would return to the South.” He believed that the most urgent task at hand was the education of the freedmen. Murray believed that her grandfather presented a greater threat to white supremacy as a teacher than he ever had as a soldier. As she put it, “He was now on his way to arm the minds of the freedmen with bits of knowledge, with disturbing notions of dignity and human rights and with a gospel of thrift and independence.”<sup>87</sup>

In early January 1868, the Friends Freedmen’s Association in Philadelphia appointed Fitzgerald as an associate teacher at a school in Hillsborough, North Carolina at a salary of twenty dollars a month. Fitzgerald arrived in Hillsborough on January 21, 1868. He taught at the freedman’s school in Hillsborough for a short time, but soon received an appointment to become the principal of a school in Goldsboro small map of area? from George Dixon. At the time, Dixon was leading the Friends Freedmen’s Association schools in North Carolina, but he would soon become a professor at UNC under the Republican administration of Solomon Pool..<sup>88</sup> After the summer recess, Fitzgerald returned to the freedmen’s school in

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<sup>87</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 166, 170.

<sup>88</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 192, 194.

Hillsborough as principal where he also went into business as a tanner. In October, Fitzgerald wrote in his diary that he had met Miss Cornelia Smith, “a fine looking octoroon of Chapel Hill.”

Fitzgerald continued at the Hillsborough school through the spring term in 1869. After that, he joined his parents and other members of the Fitzgerald family who had moved from Maryland to a farm in Orange County, not far from Chapel Hill. Still, Robert was determined to continue his mission to educate African Americans, and he began work on a schoolhouse located on his parents’ Woodside Farm. He also married Cornelia Smith, one of the daughters of Mary Ruffin Smith’s slave, Harriet, and Mary Ruffin Smith’s brother, Sidney. This marriage inextricably connected Robert Fitzgerald with the Smiths of Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina. Sidney Smith’s father, James Strudwick Smith, had been a trustee of the university from 1821 to 1832. Sidney and his brother Frances both attended UNC in the late 1830s, but failed to graduate.<sup>89</sup> When Mary Ruffin Smith died in 1885 she left the Smith plantation to the university, thus providing one of the two largest nineteenth century gifts to the institution. Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, whose father had raped her mother, and who had been raised in the Smith household as virtually free, received a bequest of 100 acres and a share of Mary Ruffin Smith’s household furnishings. Pauli Murray wrote that her grandmother Cornelia “was never entirely satisfied with this bequest; she felt Miss Mary had robbed her of the full inheritance her father had intended for her.”<sup>90</sup>

On the very day that the Woodson School opened, the Ku Klux Klan launched one of its first attacks in Orange County. Robert Fitzgerald’s diary recorded the following:

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<sup>89</sup>Battle, *History*, 1: 823, 796.

<sup>90</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 242.

“Weds. Sept. 1st. The infamous Ku-Klux Klan has visited our post-town Hillsboro and kill’d a black man who was supposed to have burned a barn. They have also marched or paraded in Chapel Hill & are committing deprivations on Union men all around. They are unwilling to be governed by law and should therefore be considered outlaws and dealt with accordingly.”<sup>91</sup>

The KKK spread the word that they did not approve of the Yankee school for freedmen, and Robert Fitzgerald could muster only eight students during the first weeks. White men in Hillsborough asked Robert’s brother Billy what they would do if the “Kluxers” paid them a visit. As Pauli Murray tells it, “Uncle Billy hitched up his suspenders and laughed a bit. ‘Well,’ he drawled, ‘I don’t reckon there’s much we can do. We don’t have more’n nineteen or twenty guns and a few rounds of ammunition. But I can tell you one thing, if the Ku-Kluxers do come they won’t all go back. They’ll leave a few behind.”<sup>92</sup>

For a while, the Klan visited the Fitzgeralds nightly, circling the schoolhouse on their horses, but never launching an attack. After a while, the Klan seemed to lose interest. Perhaps they had no heart for a fair fight. Or perhaps Fitzgerald was lucky. In adjoining Alamance County, the nightriders dragged a lame white teacher from his bed, beat him with green hickory sticks and rawhide lashes, and left him unconscious in the woods to freeze. The next day, Robert Fitzgerald wrote in his diary, “I am going to make my school free—and it begins tomorrow. A free school for Rich and Poor, Black and White, high & low, supported principally by myself, the rental being paid by the F.B. [Freedmen’s Bureau].” By December, enrollment at the Woodside School had climbed to fifty.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 219.

<sup>92</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 220.

<sup>93</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 222.

Although Fitzgerald continued his educational work, he found it increasingly difficult after Conservatives regained control of the Legislature in 1870. In 1871, he ran on the Republican ticket for School Committee for Chapel Hill Township, but lost.<sup>94</sup> Like African Americans across the state, Robert Fitzgerald experienced the return of Conservative political power as a distinct loss. Yet he left a freedom legacy that could not be erased.

### *Fisk Brewer And The Peoples' University*

Although Fisk Brewer was wealthy and white, he also came to the South seeking opportunity and the chance to contribute to the cause of freedom and democracy. Brewer's father was a Methodist missionary to Africa, a leader in the education of women, and an Abolitionist. Fisk Brewer graduated from Yale in 1852 and taught there for ten years. His mother was the sister of U.S. Supreme Court justice Stephen J. Field and his brother, David Josiah Brewer, became a Supreme Court justice.

As early as 1863, Brewer wrote to the American Missionary Association (AMA) inquiring whether the AMA could find a teaching position for a female friend who was doing work with "contrabands" in the South. In 1864, he wrote to the AMA and offered to pay the salary of Hattie Cornelia Foote, who had been accepted as a teacher, but would not be sent South due to lack of funds. In 1865, Brewer wrote, "Do you know of any place in the South where the people want a teacher to give instruction in higher branches—where they would accept a Northern man and could support him? If I can find a good place away from the sea-

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<sup>94</sup>Murray, *Proud Shoes*, 235.

coast, I am much inclined to enter into that goodly land. My hope would be that I might also help in elevating and guiding the freedmen.”<sup>95</sup>

In 1866, Brewer moved with his family to Raleigh, where he and his wife began teaching in a freedman’s school sponsored by the AMA. Brewer initially tried to offer the services of his Raleigh school to white students as well as black. This effort failed because the white students withdrew and went without any schooling at all “rather than bear up against the ridicule that meets them for going to a freedman’s school.” Next, Brewer tried establishing a class for poor “white young men to prepare [them] for college.” As noted by historian Roberta Sue Alexander, “This too failed,’ he maintained, ‘when they found that I was so much engaged with ‘niggers.’”<sup>96</sup>

The North Carolina gentry had always feared any type of solidarity between African Americans and white laboring people and Conservative newspaper editors did not stand idly by when teachers like the Brewers offered classes to poor whites as well as blacks. The *Raleigh Sentinel*, leading organ of the Conservatives, ridiculed whites who would participate in such schooling. “None of our whites,” the Sentinel editorialized, “are so poor that they are willing to consent [to send their children to schools] where the colored children are taught.”<sup>97</sup> The cultural sanction of white supremacy was employed to beat down not only efforts to improve black education, but also to prevent education for poor whites, particularly

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<sup>95</sup>American Missionary Association Archives (Selections), Ashley Letters 1851-78 and Brewer Letters, microfilm, SHC #3743. The Brewer Family Papers are at Yale University.

<sup>96</sup>From Fisk Brewer to George Whipple, 6 February 1867 and 8 November 1866, in American Missionary Association Archives (Selections), Ashley Letters 1851-78 and Brewer Letters, microfilm, SHC #3743, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 157.

<sup>97</sup>*Raleigh Sentinel*, January 19, 1867, quoted in Alexander, *Freedmen*, 157.

integrated education, despite the apparent interest of some whites in attending freedmen's schools.

When the university reopened under Solomon Pool on March 3, 1869, Brewer began teaching Greek at UNC while his sister taught at the freedmen's school in Chapel Hill. At UNC, Brewer was finally able to pursue his interest in giving "instruction in higher branches" in the South, while also preparing poor white students for higher education. At the same time, he was an active supporter of black freedom. When Brewer left his home in Raleigh, he sold his property to a black man Gideon Perry, and in Chapel Hill, he actively promoted the magazine of the AMA. He sold subscriptions to freedmen Wilson Caldwell and Ben Craig. Craig was the former slave of Professor James Phillips, father of Cornelia Phillips Spencer. Brewer even brought political literature to church with him, and this so infuriated Spencer that she threatened to resign from the Presbyterian Church if he did it again.<sup>98</sup>

Spencer's threat to resign from her church was but part of the trench warfare waged by the elite white community in Chapel Hill and elsewhere against "disturbing notions of dignity and human rights" promoted by teachers from the North like Robert Fitzgerald and Fisk Brewer. Members of this elite in Chapel Hill shunned white women from the North who came to North Carolina to teach the freed people. Often, the bitterness of their reception by "good" white society was intensified by the anti-racist principles by which some of these teachers lived. In *Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel*, Kemp Battle excused ostracism of

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<sup>98</sup>Sale of Raleigh lot to "Gideon Perry (colored)," n.d., Folder 185, in Moore and Gatling Law Firm Papers, SHC #521; For subscriptions sold to Benjamin Craig and Wilson Caldwell, see letter from Fisk P. Brewer to *American Missionary Society Magazine*, 6 March 1871, in American Missionary Association Archives (Selections), Ashley Letters 1851-78 and Brewer Letters, microfilm, SHC #3743. On Brewer "distributing papers" at the Presbyterian Church, see Russell, *Bell*, 122.

Brewer and his wife. “One teacher, Rev. Fisk P. Brewer, soon after the war ended brought letters showing his good character and social position. . . . Later he was made a professor in the University by the Reconstruction regime, but he came to Raleigh as principal of a colored school endowed by a wealthy man in Connecticut. His duties, as he believed, required him to receive in his home visits from colored people. He and his wife may possibly have been socially recognized by friends of Governor Holden but by no others. He had my sympathy and I met him courteously but did not think it my duty to call on him.”<sup>99</sup>

As Battle reminded his readers, “it must be remembered that abolitionists at the North were peculiarly hated because they were regarded as having brought on the Civil War. The teachers who first came out were regarded as creatures of these abolitionists and shared their odium.”<sup>100</sup> Yet efforts to repress both northern influence and the freedom strivings of native African Americans and laboring whites was not motivated simply by personal feelings. The ostracism of white northern teachers, Klan attacks on black schools, and virulent opposition to Republican professors at the university were all of a kind. The varied attacks on Radical Reconstruction were the *de facto policies* of the gentry class and their organs of power, including the Conservative Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and newspapers like the Raleigh *Sentinel* and the Wilmington *Journal*.

Following their sweeping electoral victory in 1868, the Republican administration in Raleigh dismissed the current trustees and faculty of the university. A new board was appointed and began meeting in July. In addition to the new president, Solomon Pool, the new professors included Fisk P. Brewer, Professor of Greek Language and Literature, David

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<sup>99</sup>Battle, *Memories*, 219.

<sup>100</sup>Battle, *Memories*, 218.

Settle Patrick (UNC '56), Professor of Latin Language and Literature, James A. Martling, Professor of English Language and Literature, George Dixon, Professor of Agriculture, and Alexander McIver (UNC '53), Professor of Mathematics. All were Republicans.<sup>101</sup>

At the second meeting of the new Board of Trustees in November, the Trustees instructed the Executive Committee to report to the meeting in January whether a site could be obtained for a “department of the University . . . exclusively for the use of pupils of color.” This site was to be “at some place in the State other than at Chapel Hill or its vicinity.” This institution was to be developed “upon the plan set out in the donation of the land scrip by the act of Congress.” The act referred to was the Morrill Act of 1862, which gave federal land to states to endow colleges of “agriculture and mechanic arts.”<sup>102</sup> S.S. Ashley, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, offered the following amendment, which was adopted: “Resolved further that ample provision shall be made for affording the benefit of a University education to colored pupils, at some other place than Chapel Hill, which shall be equal in all respects to that furnished to white pupils at Chapel Hill.” As these resolutions suggest, the Trustees were united on the need to provide higher education to both black and white residents through a public university system, but there was disagreement over whether the education of black students was to be “equal in all respects” to that of white university students. Apparently, those demanding equal educational opportunity carried the day in 1869.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Battle, *History*, 2:7-11.

<sup>102</sup>Tindall, *America*, 2: 698.

<sup>103</sup>UNC Trustees Minutes, 20 November 1868, 42, 44, in UA.

Nevertheless, when the Executive Committee presented its report at the January meeting of the Trustees, it made the recommendation that the “colored” department of the university be open to all, without regard to race or gender. Members of the Executive Committee declared, “The University of North Carolina is entering upon a new era: it should consequently, avoid the defects of the old Universities, and combine the excellent and approved improvements of the new. It is desirable to make our University the leading literary institution of the South.”<sup>104</sup> The report concluded with these striking words concerning the proposed second campus of the university:

The Committee in closing this report respectfully suggest that if such an institution is established, instead of devoting it “exclusively” to the use and benefit of the colored residents of the State, it be open to all the residents of the State, who may be found qualified for admission.

Placed upon this basis invidious discriminations will be avoided and constitutionally disbursed. The necessity of apology and explanations will be obviated and the charge of injustice and proscription rendered groundless.<sup>105</sup>

The full Board of Trustees rejected the Executive Committee’s recommendation to desegregate part of the university. A resolution proposed by trustee Victor Barringer stated, “That the report of the Executive Committee in reference to the establishment of a school of Agriculture and Technology to be located near Raleigh, be adopted except in the particular of having such school open to all the citizens of the State.” Trustee Albion Tourgee offered a substitute resolution that was adopted after “being fully and ably discussed.” Tourgee’s resolution stated, “That the Board of Trustees respectfully petition the Legislature to so amend the charter of the University of North Carolina as to provide that the same shall consist of two departments, mutually equivalent in all educational facilities: having the same

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<sup>104</sup>UNC Trustees Minutes, 8 January 1869, 54 in UA.

<sup>105</sup>UNC Trustees Minutes, Report of the Executive Committee, 8 January 1869, 58 in UA.

schools, teachers of equal grade and merit, as near as may be, conferring the same degrees, subject to the same rules and under the control of the same Board of Trustees.”<sup>106</sup>

Despite the adoption of Tourgee’s resolution for “mutually equivalent,” though separate, branches of the university, no public institution of higher education for African Americans was ever established during Radical Reconstruction. Indeed, the Republicans were soon overwhelmed by a virulent white supremacy campaign that returned North Carolina and the university to control by elites antagonistic to black freedom, biracial politics, and democratic reform.

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<sup>106</sup>UNC Trustees Minutes, 7 January 1869, 48-9 in UA. The recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Trustees to establish an integrated, co-educational campus in Raleigh has not been acknowledged in university histories, even those written since the end of Jim Crow. Moreover, in his authoritative *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton acknowledged that integration of the university was debated in the legislature, yet he failed to report that desegregation of the proposed Raleigh campus was recommended by the Executive Committee of the Trustees and rejected by the full Board in January 1869. For a careful researcher like Hamilton, who reported that the trustees rejected co-education at UNC during their November 1868 meeting, the failure to report either the plan for a black UNC campus or the January discussion about desegregating that campus appears to be deliberate. As recently as January 12, 2005, Professor Harry Watson, Director of UNC’s Center for the Study of the American South, wrote to the *Raleigh News and Observer* stating, “Even under the Republican administration, the Reconstruction trustees never considered the admission of black students.” While the trustees apparently never considered the admission of black students to the Chapel Hill campus, they did discuss making the proposed black campus at Raleigh open to all qualified North Carolina residents. The proposal of the Executive Committee for a biracial campus that was to be part of the University of North Carolina is significant. Several historians have told this story accurately, including Miller, “Freedom and Freedmen,” 264-68 and Vaughn, *Schools for All*, 107-8. At least one southern school, the University of South Carolina, did desegregate during Radical Reconstruction, and the debate on integration that took place during those years in all southern states deserves careful consideration by scholars.

*Cornelia Phillips Spencer And The White Supremacy Counterattack*

The Conservative campaign to overthrow Radical Reconstruction and the Peoples' University in North Carolina was three pronged. It included terror, slander, and political maneuver. The university was a focus for the Conservative attack because it was a key state institution, and both Republicans and Conservatives saw control of the university as an important element of state power. At the level of state politics, Conservative leaders like Confederate war governor Zebulon Vance class of? and former Governor William A. Graham led the white supremacy movement. Col. William L. Saunders (UNC '54) led the campaign of Ku Klux Klan terror from his home in Chapel Hill. Cornelia Phillips Spencer was one of the leaders of the Conservative propaganda offensive, and her role was particularly important in relationship to the university and the Town of Chapel Hill where she lived.

Cornelia Phillips Spencer and the Conservative Party editors of newspapers such as the *Raleigh Sentinel* and the *Wilmington Journal*, led the public relations aspect of the campaign against the Republican administration of the university. While Col. Saunders guided the KKK to attack those who sided with the Reconstruction program in the streets, Spencer attacked them with her pen. She raged against Pool and his faculty, calling for "the overthrow of the foul gang that were polluting the University halls," and she demanded that, "the university be returned to its own."<sup>107</sup>

Spencer's father had been a professor at the university. She grew up in an intellectually stimulating environment with two brothers who attended UNC. Shortly before the war, she

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<sup>107</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer quoted in Powell, *First State University*, 95.

married an 1854 UNC graduate and moved to her husband's community in Alabama. In 1862, following Magnus Spencer's death, Cornelia and her young daughter returned to live with her family in Chapel Hill. Although Spencer's family was from New York, like most of the other professors, the Phillips family owned slaves. After the war, Spencer wrote to a friend in the North that she was glad the slaves were free. "They have always been an awful drag upon the prosperity and development of the South," she said, "& because I love the white man better than I do the black, I am glad they are free. And now I wish they were all in—shall I say Mass. Or Conn.? Poor things!"<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, before the war, like most others who had doubts about the institution of slavery, she held her tongue.

Spencer seemed to have no difficulty endorsing white supremacy after the war. For example, in an 1875 column in the *N.C. Presbyterian*, she denounced the principle of equality and the pending federal civil rights legislation, saying, "'All men created *free and equal!*' Never was there a greater misstatement. This Civil Rights Bill—you know about it—you know what it proposes—to place the colored people on a social equality with the whites—and you know what its effect will be if it is ever a law and is enforced:—to obliterate distinctions of color and race. I cannot write of it coolly or without a shudder."<sup>109</sup>

Deeply ingrained racist attitudes made it impossible for Spencer to endorse equal educational opportunities for African Americans. Despite her support for common schools in North Carolina, as well as higher education for white women (though not co-education at

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<sup>108</sup>From Cornelia Phillips Spencer to Miss Eliza North, 10 March 1866, in CPSP, quoted in Wilson, *Selected Papers*, 111.

<sup>109</sup>Young Ladies Column, *N.C. Presbyterian*, February 26, 1875, quoted in Wilson, *Selected Papers*, 128.

UNC), Spencer refused to teach young black women on the same basis as she tutored young white women.

Often, the hostility of the southern gentry to black educational aspirations was masked by smiles and patronizing gestures of support, for African Americans now had a share of political power. Privately, however, elite women such as Cornelia Phillips Spencer, revealed their true feelings. In a pattern that was characteristic of white racist paternalism, Spencer willingly helped African Americans, as long as she controlled the terms of her giving. As soon as a black person demanded something of her as a right due an equal, she became enraged. In a letter to her daughter, Spencer wrote about her encounter with an “uppish” black woman. “Miss Emma Davis called to ask me to teach her! Said she believed I was teaching school! I did not know if it was impudence or ignorance in her. I asked her why she did not go to the Free School. She said she “preferred to go to a private teacher” --where she could “go [and] recite, [and] then return home to prepare her lessons.” I did not even reply to her application to teach her--I ignored it, [and] talked to her about what she wanted to learn [and] gave her several school--books, [and] some advice about studying, etc, etc., [and] sent her away well-pleased.”

Spencer added these cautions about how to handle race relations in the new era: “It is never worth while to act as if you thought anyone meant to be impertinent--you ought never to seem conscious of the possibility of such a thing. I do not think she did mean it, though that family of negroes are very uppish you know--[and] she always acts as if she thought she had some claim on me, for joining our ch[urch]. I disarmed her, if she meant anything.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>From Cornelia Phillips Spencer to June Spencer, 24 January 1875, in CPSP.

Following the Republican dismissal of the faculty and trustees loyal to the ante-bellum regime at the university, Spencer initially despaired and thought about leaving the village. Her old friend, Governor Zebulon Vance, encouraged her to remain in Chapel Hill. He wrote, “somehow I want you, and all those who have labored to serve the dear old state, to feel toward North Carolina as I do—that we should not desert her in the day of her humiliation.” Vance added significantly, “I should be greatly pleased to hear that the way has been opened for you to remain here and abet us in watching for the better day whose dawning we do not doubt.”<sup>111</sup> Several weeks later, Spencer visited Vance in Charlotte. It seems likely that Vance talked with her about just how she might “abet us in watching for the better day.” He may also have helped open a way for Spencer to remain in Chapel Hill. She returned from Charlotte with a contract from the *North Carolina Presbyterian* to write a weekly column at a salary of \$400 per year. This enabled her to support herself by working at home where she could care for her mother. It also gave her a platform from which she could disseminate her views.<sup>112</sup>

After returning to Chapel Hill, Spencer arranged with Josiah Turner, editor of the leading Democratic Party organ, the *Raleigh Sentinel*, to publish a series of articles vindicating the antebellum university in his newspaper. These *Pen and Ink Sketches* began to appear in the *Raleigh Sentinel* shortly after the university reopened under the Republican administration. In the spring of 1869, Spencer described her sketches in the *Sentinel* to her sister in law, Laura Battle Phillips, as “a series of short spicy numbers . . . with, of course, poisoned arrows for

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<sup>111</sup>From Zebulon Vance to Cornelia Phillips Spencer, January 1869, in CPSP, quoted in Chamberlain, *Old Days*, 153.

<sup>112</sup>Chamberlain, *Old Days*, 155.

the present incomparable incapables.<sup>113</sup> In June 1869, Spencer asked her readers, “Into what hands have we fallen . . . what poor and beggarly pretense is this of a University? What daily farce is this upon which we are compelled to look?”<sup>114</sup>

Spencer and other Democratic journalists frequently resorted to race baiting to bolster their attacks on the university.<sup>115</sup> Spencer often wrote under pen names to hide her identity. In the following letter to the *Sentinel*, she demonstrates her keen understanding of ways that race could be used to split the bi-racial Republican coalition and destroy the possibility of a legislative appropriation for the People’s University. “As one of the tax payers of the State, I ask what this institution [the university] is to be re-endowed for, while the common school system of the State lies prostrate and no provision is made for the poor white children? I say nothing of the poor colored children, though I am equally willing they should be cared for, because their schools are going on by charitable aid from the North. What is the sum of \$400,000 wanted for at Chapel Hill? They already have \$15,000 a year to spend among that set of ex-negro teachers and scalawags, how much more do these gentry want? The Ex-Com. of the Board of Trustees have put in another negro teacher, an English Quaker, who like Brewer, made his entry on the stage of action a negro philanthropist.”<sup>116</sup>

Other Conservative journalists said much the same thing about Brewer. This makes clear that Spencer’s views were also the views of the Conservative Party, which controlled these

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<sup>113</sup>From Cornelia Phillips Spencer to Laura Phillips, 13 April 1869, in CPSP, quoted in Gwin, “Poisoned Arrows” 89.

<sup>114</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer, *Raleigh Sentinel*, June 3, 1869.

<sup>115</sup>Wright, “Grown-up Daughter,” 276.

<sup>116</sup>See letter to *Raleigh Sentinel*, Feb. 1, 1870, signed “Orange County,” in Wilson, *Selected Papers*, 642.

newspapers. The *Sentinel*, for instance, printed a letter that singled out Professor Brewer. “He is the embodiment of a New England Yankee: lank, cadaverous, and sharp-nosed . . . His gait is as rapid as if a silver dollar lay at the end of his every journey. He is a Congregationalist in faith and an ardent nigger-worshipper in practice.”<sup>117</sup> Racist, regional, and religious caricatures of northern Republicans like Brewer were designed to alienate them from native white North Carolinians as a way of undermining the fragile Republican coalition. Ultimately, for Cornelia Phillips Spenser, as well as leaders of the Conservative Party, virtually any tactic was acceptable to crush biracial political power and restore the rule of elites.

*William L. Saunders And The KKK Campaign to “Redeem” North Carolina*

The gentry did not believe that propaganda alone could destroy the biracial Republican coalition and return North Carolina to Democratic control. The most potent weapon in the assault on Radical Reconstruction was the Ku Klux Klan, organized by leaders of the Democratic Party. William A. Graham of Orange County, a leading UNC trustee and former governor, was the “chief architect of the white supremacy program.” Col. William L. Saunders of Chapel Hill directed the activities of the Klan and similar white terrorist organizations throughout North Carolina.<sup>118</sup>

William L. Saunders grew up in Chapel Hill and graduated from the university in 1854. During the Civil War, Saunders quickly rose to the rank of colonel. Following the war he

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<sup>117</sup>*Daily Journal (Wilmington, N. C.)*, June 6, 1869, cited in Gwin, “Poisoned Arrows,” 101.

<sup>118</sup>Olsen, *Carpetbagger’s Crusade*, 158-59; Hamilton, *Reconstruction*, 461.

returned to Chapel Hill where he lived from 1867 to 1870, the period of most intense Klan activity. Saunders served as North Carolina Secretary of State. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the university Board of Trustees from 1874 to his death in 1891.

In Chapel Hill, the Klan attempted to intimidate both assertive African Americans and whites sympathetic to black rights. The university president, Solomon Pool, believed that the Klan's activities were designed to intimidate his faculty and scare students away from the university. Klan terrorism, white supremacy propaganda, and the antagonism of the gentry for biracial Republican politics resulted in a "virtual boycott" of the university by potential students and an unwillingness to fund the university by the Legislature.<sup>119</sup>

In the end, the resurgent Democrats defeated Republican political power, regaining control of the legislature in the elections of 1870 and promptly impeached Governor Holden. Deprived of both finances and political support, the university closed in February 1871. In 1874 the Democrat controlled General Assembly elected a new Board of Trustees for the university. The new Executive Committee included President, William A. Graham; Secretary, Kemp Plummer Battle; and members W.L. Saunders, John Manning, W.T. Faircloth, John A. Gilmer, and Paul C. Cameron.<sup>120</sup> In March, 1875, the General Assembly voted to use public funds to support the university, and its reopening became certain. When students returned in September, 1875, UNC was led by white supremacists, including the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, the former largest slave owner in the state, and the former governor who believed that the right to vote must be "jealously reserved to the white race."

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<sup>119</sup>Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 81.

<sup>120</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 86.

African Americans built a powerful freedom movement following Emancipation by relentlessly pursuing education, strengthening their families and community institutions, and organizing collectively for labor and political rights. If they had not done so, there would have been no basis upon which to build the biracial electoral coalition that sustained the Republican Party in the South. The hopes of northern Radical Republicans would have come to nothing. It is important to recognize this critical role of black southern workers in securing the long lasting victories of Radical Reconstruction, such as federal legislation guaranteeing black civil rights and the North Carolina constitution of 1868. On the other hand, the biracial Republican coalition was tenuous. Unlike the Conservatives, the common folk of the state did not control great economic and cultural resources, despite control of the legislature. In the face of Ku Klux Klan terror and the political, economic, and cultural might of the gentry, Republican power withered. Nevertheless, despite the restoration of Conservative power over state government and key institutions such as the university, black freedom struggle and biracial insurgency had created a foundation to build on. During the next twenty-five years, black freedom striving and the resistance of white farmers and workers to elite domination would take new forms. Throughout this era, the state's failure to provide higher education resources to meet the needs of farmers and mechanics, African Americans, and white women would continue to be a focus of controversy. During the 1890s, when a new biracial uprising of common folk swept the Democrats from power once again, the demand for a more democratic system of higher education was once again a rallying cry among the grassroots.

CHAPTER 3  
THE ROAD TO JIM CROW: BLACK RESISTANCE, WHITE TERROR,  
AND THE UNIVERSITY, 1875-1900

The overthrow of Radical Reconstruction in North Carolina “redeemed” the state, returning it to the rule of the former slave masters who led the Democratic Party. Through terror, fraud, and white supremacist propaganda, these men seized control of state government and regained control of the most important state institution, the University of North Carolina. Propelled by his leadership of the white supremacy movement, the rising star of William L. Saunders’ career reflected these changes. In 1874, the legislature, now controlled by Democrats, appointed him to the university Board of Trustees, where he served until his death in 1891 as a member of the Executive Committee. In 1879, the legislature appointed Saunders to the office of Secretary of State, where he also served until his death.<sup>1</sup>

At the root of the gentry’s violent campaign to suppress biracial politics and regain state power was a concern for profits. The end of Radical Reconstruction opened the door to the wholesale exploitation of black workers. New forms of near slavery arose, typified by the large scale use and abuse of black convict labor. White supremacists enforced black subordination in everyday life by the common-place resort to brutality.

African Americans resisted these efforts to drive them back toward slavery through a kind of low-grade warfare against white domination. They fought back, emigrated from the

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<sup>1</sup>Battle, *History*, 2:51; Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, 5:286-87

state, left plantations where they were abused, and continued to organize politically through a weakened Republican Party.

African Americans once again seized the opportunity for political resistance and democratic reform when an agricultural depression and the resentments of white farmers against merchants and monopolies stirred an agrarian revolt in the 1880s. White farmers challenged the growing power of large corporations in the Democratic Party, and when the commercial interests turned a deaf ear to the farmers' class demands, they abandoned the party of white supremacy. In the mid-1890s, a biracial electoral revolt once again swept the Democrats from power in North Carolina.

Along with reform of economic policies and election laws, the control and allocation of resources for public higher education was an important area of concern for farmers and working class people in North Carolina, both black and white. This placed the university at the center of controversy. By 1891, the democratic insurgency had successfully challenged white, male elite control of higher education by establishing new colleges for the training of farmers and mechanics, white women, and African Americans.

Following the Republican-Populist "Fusion" victories of 1894 and 1896, leaders of the university once again took charge of efforts to crush grassroots efforts to reform society from below. They played a leading role in organizing the white supremacist "solution" that was intended to silence biracial opposition to elite rule. The success of these white supremacy campaigns at the turn of the century brought disfranchisement and segregation to North Carolina. This system of social control—known as Jim Crow—enforced adherence to a strict color line throughout society, restricted labor rights, and suppressed free speech and democracy for the next sixty years.

*Sam Phillips And The Transformative Power Of The Black Freedom Movement*

Despite the overthrow of biracial Republican power, the long term transformative power of the freedom movement during Radical Reconstruction helped sustain black struggle and other forms of democratic striving throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. During the intense years of Radical Reconstruction, thousands of grassroots activists joined the southern freedom struggle. In effect, the cause of freedom called to them and recruited them, and the movement transformed and trained them. Many African Americans like Robert Fitzgerald never abandoned their commitment to freedom, and they passed their knowledge and values on to their children and the many others they came in contact with throughout their lives. Pauli Murray, the grandchild of freedwoman Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald and Robert Fitzgerald, became one of the most renowned freedom fighters of the twentieth century. Ed Caldwell, Jr., the grandson of Wilson Caldwell, a university “servant,” continued his family’s tradition of political leadership in Chapel Hill as a School Board member in the 1960s during the years of desegregation. Though we know nothing of those who organized the gift to Ellie Swain of a wedding cake from the colored people of Chapel Hill, that freedom impulse endured in the lives of local black residents. Though there is little evidence concerning the movement building activities of Jordan Weaver, Green Brewer, or Thomas Kirby after 1870, subsequent events demonstrate that black women and men in Chapel Hill continued their tradition of activism.

The power of the post-Emancipation freedom struggle to transform lives is important to understanding history. If we focus simply on the overthrow of Republican political power at

the university and throughout North Carolina, the great undercurrent of historical continuity is lost. The freedom struggle persisted, though evidence of it is often sparse. We can see it in the transformation of Samuel Field Phillips, Cornelia Spencer's brother; in the ongoing resistance of black Republicans in the Legislature to the abuse of convict labor; in the resistance of young black people in Chapel Hill to racist depredations by white UNC students; in the exodus of black people from the state; and, particularly, in the rise of new biracial insurgencies of workers and farmers in the 1880s.

The freedom movement recruited many white North Carolinians to the Republican Party, including some Conservative leaders, such as Sam Phillips.<sup>2</sup> While the Republican cause during Radical Reconstruction attracted the vast majority of black people and tens of thousands of laboring white people, it also attracted a significant number of the gentry. In Chapel Hill, former slave owners like Professor Solomon Pool and merchant Hugh Guthrie became staunch Republicans. Even within the same family, divisions arose. While Cornelia Phillips Spencer and her brother Charles stayed loyal to the Democratic Party and white supremacy, their brother Samuel Field Phillips, a prominent lawyer and Confederate official, experienced a radical transformation. As Sam Phillips observed the struggle unfolding around him and interacted with the black and white men and women working for freedom, he also began to change. Eventually, he decided to join the Republican Party, supported the full range of black civil rights, undertook a dangerous prosecution of KKK members, and ran on the Republican ticket for state Attorney General in 1870.

No man as politically astute as Phillips could fail to realize the risk and likely cost of such decisions. With the defeat of the Republicans, Phillips realized his political and

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<sup>2</sup>Miller, "Samuel Field Phillips."

professional career in North Carolina was finished. He accepted a call from President Ulysses S. Grant to become Solicitor General of the United States and moved to Washington, D.C. In this capacity, he served for twelve years. During his tenure, he unsuccessfully argued in favor of the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 before the Supreme Court. In 1896, he joined with his old Republican ally, the famous Carpetbagger Albion Tourgee, in defending Homer Plessy in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Phillips lost this case as well, and the court's decision in *Plessy* became the legal foundation for Jim Crow. Nevertheless, Sam Phillips proved himself to be a true advocate of racial justice. In this respect, he stood head and shoulders above the reactionary white supremacists of North Carolina, including his brother and sister. The influence of the freedom movement provided Phillips with the motivation and opportunity to turn his life toward racial justice. It produced in him a powerful ally of civil rights in the South who remained active for decades. The story of Sam Phillips stands today as a witness against the popular mythology that "everyone back then was a racist."

### *Black Convict Labor Abuse on the State University Railroad*

One legacy of the white supremacy campaign that overthrew Radical Reconstruction in North Carolina was bitter race relations. Looking back in 1913 on the years following the reopening of the university, Professor Stuart Willis noted, "the negro question was 'full of dynamite.' The personal and moral influence of the white people did not obtain then in the way in which it did when the negro was in slavery. The satisfactory social and industrial

relations of slavery times had become strained and often broken.” Willis added that it was not unknown for university students to “whip Negroes” for impudence.<sup>3</sup>

The institutional culture of white supremacy so evident at UNC during slavery may well have become more vicious following the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction, given the widespread terrorist violence and racial hatred that the Democrats had encouraged in their effort to regain power. Leaders of the university countenanced practices that could only have encouraged students to feel justified in employing racial violence themselves. Nineteenth-century students no doubt were aware that a member of the Executive Committee of the Trustees had led the North Carolina Ku Klux Klan. Many white North Carolinians believed that racial violence provoked by black insubordination was justified. In 1869, following KKK violence in Chapel Hill, Cornelia Phillips Spencer had written in the *Raleigh Sentinel* that the people of the village were “rejoicing that a weapon has at last been found, keen enough to pierce the hitherto impenetrable armor of Radicalism.”<sup>4</sup> In her 1888 history of North Carolina, Spencer reflected the persistence of white supremacy norms when she wrote of the violence of the KKK, “Such things will be when people are goaded beyond their patience.”<sup>5</sup>

Yet racial violence was, in fact, a normal and necessary part of white supremacy, as was the exploitation of black labor. In 1880, nearly a hundred convict laborers, mostly African Americans, began laying track to connect Chapel Hill with the state railway system ten miles north of the village. This was a joint venture between the university and private investors

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<sup>3</sup>Willis, "A Glimpse at the Other Half," 276, quoted in Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 134.

<sup>4</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer editorial in the *Raleigh Sentinel*, n.d., published shortly after September 25, 1869, quoted in Wilson, *Selected Papers*, 635.

<sup>5</sup>Cornelia Phillips Spencer, *First Steps in North Carolina History*, 237.

who expected to reap profits derived from the Chapel Hill Iron Mountain Company iron mine near the town. The railroad would encourage the growth of the university and the town, and it would enable mine owners to bring their ore to market.<sup>6</sup> For these capitalists, the advantage of joining with the university was that the state institution could help obtain convict labor from the State Penitentiary on favorable terms.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Frenise Logan concluded that the tremendous increase in the African American prison population following the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction resulted from the demand for cheap labor. “The question may well be asked,” wrote Logan, “‘How is the increase of the Negro prison population to be explained?’ In addition to the white-held theory of natural criminality among Negroes was the growing demand for abundant, cheap labor brought on by the expansion of railroad construction in the state.”

The conditions faced by convicts forced to labor building North Carolina’s railroads were notoriously inhumane.<sup>8</sup> In March 1880, the *Chapel Hill Ledger* carried two reports of convict escape attempts. One attempt by a black prisoner was successful. Another effort to flee failed, and guards shot and killed a white convict involved in the biracial escape attempt.<sup>9</sup>

On March 27, 1880, one of the convicts working on the State University Railroad died from a whipping inflicted by the railroad overseer. On March 29, E.R. Stamps, President of the Board of Directors of the State Penitentiary, wrote to President Battle, who was also

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<sup>6</sup>*Chapel Hill Ledger*, April 18 and May 11, 1878 and January 11, 1879; From Governor Thomas J. Jarvis to Kemp Plummer Battle, 1 January 1880 and Paul Cameron to Kemp Plummer Battle, 5 January 1880, in BFP.

<sup>7</sup>From Gen. R.H. Hoke to Kemp Plummer Battle, 18 January 1880, in BFP.

<sup>8</sup>On the connection of black convict labor to railroad construction, see Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 19. For discussions of the convict lease system see, Zimmerman, “Penal Systems” and McKay, “Convict Leasing in North Carolina.”

<sup>9</sup>*Chapel Hill Ledger*, March 20, 1880 and March 27, 1880; Battle, *History*, 2: 250-1.

president of the railroad, “Andrew Fries, the colored man convict of whom we have spoken, died at the Penitentiary Saturday night. Please be so good as to send me the statement of the two guards who saw the whipping, & also that of the attending physician as to the condition of Andrew between the time of the whipping & the time he was sent to the Pen. The serious nature of this case will brook no further delay & hence I hope you will get the information & send me as soon as possible.”<sup>10</sup>

Following the death of Andrew Fries, the *Durham Plant* carried an article claiming that the convicts were being abused, based on reports by local citizens. Cornelia Phillips Spencer, at the time serving as editor of the *Chapel Hill Ledger*, came to President Battle’s defense. On April 3, she wrote, “The *Durham Plant* of last week says from information derived from citizens in the vicinity of the work, that the convicts are treated badly. Editors as well as individuals should be very careful what they publish, and not make false impressions on the public mind, and also impeach the character of private individuals. The convicts are well cared for, well fed, and not treated as inhuman creatures as *the Plant* affirms.”

On April 6, a week after Stamps’ initial letter, he wrote again to Battle warning that the verdict of the Coroner’s Court would be “embarrassing” to the Board of the Penitentiary because it spoke of “bad treatment” of convicts by the men employed by the State University Railroad to oversee construction. Stamps added, “would be glad to do anything to help

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<sup>10</sup>From E.R. Stamps to Hon. K.P. Battle, 29 March 1880, in BFP.

you . . . but hope you will not expect us to assume too much responsibility.” On the back of this letter Battle scribbled a note to General Hoke, president of the Chapel Hill Iron Mountain Company, “I intend to manage so as . . . not to admit that our Co is blameable at all .”<sup>11</sup>

The state authorities who investigated the death concluded that abuse had been a factor. On April 10, the *Chapel Hill Ledger* reported the indictment of a railroad supervisor, Charles F. Motz.<sup>12</sup> Probably around this time, Battle wrote letters to various prominent men seeking testimony regarding conditions at the railroad construction site. Since Battle had decided “to manage so as . . . not to admit that our Co is blameable at all,” we can infer that he hoped to assemble statements that would bolster his cause.

Battle was probably concerned about criminal liability in the death of Fries, but there was also the danger of adverse political consequences for the university. There were black Republicans still in the Legislature, and they were concerned about the abuse of convict labor. In the *Journal of Senate and House Special Session, 1880*, we find the following entry: “Mr. Ellison introduces a resolution to investigate alleged cruelties practiced upon convicts on the University railroad, to report to the Governor, which is placed upon the Calendar.”<sup>13</sup> Stewart Ellison was a leading black politician from Raleigh, a carpenter by trade. He was one of the delegates to the Convention of Freedmen in 1866, and he was carrying on the legacy of Radical Reconstruction in the limited ways available to him.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>From E. R. Stamps to Hon. K. P. Battle, 6 April 1880, in BFP.

<sup>12</sup>On the indictment of Motz, see *Chapel Hill Ledger*, April 10, 1880. On Cornelia Phillips Spencer’s defense of Battle, see *Chapel Hill Ledger*, April 3, 1880. For Battle’s discussion of the whipping of Andrew Fries and the history of the State University Railroad, see Battle, *History*, 2: 245-52.

<sup>13</sup>*Journal of Senate and House Special Session* [North Carolina], 1880, 140, in NCC.

<sup>14</sup>On Ellison’s advocacy with other black legislators of prison reform, see Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 194-95.

On April 14, testimony confirming the brutal treatment of the convicts building the University Railroad came from James Southgate, a prominent insurance salesman, as well as others. Southgate wrote in response to a request from Battle concerning the whipping of Fries. While waiting at the railroad station, Southgate engaged in conversations with some of the local men concerning the convict laborers. The men spoke of “the severe discipline and harsh treatment of the ‘Boss’ of hands.” Southgate wrote, “The first remark which attracted my attention was made by a man about 30 years of age, who said: ‘If I ever should steal anything and get in the Penitentiary I want that man to boss me for just one hour, and if I didn’t kill him it would be because he killed me first.’ Do you see that young man yonder near the bank, his pick going up and down very slowly? Well, that fellow has been sick enough for 2 days, to have a Doctor to him, & still he is trotted out to work and he is sick from a beating he got last week. He was brought up in a tailor’s shop and knows nothing about work. He asked the boss to tell him how he wanted a piece of work done that he had never done such before and the boss accused him by striking him with a green hickory stick knocking him down and kicking him when down.” When Southgate asked about the general treatment of the convicts, he was told, “they were all run like brutes, all last week, and when Saturday night came many had to be lifted into the shanty car from exhaustion and fatigue.” When asked why such behavior was not evident at the moment, the men replied, “[The boss] is on his good manners now while the train is here and gentlemen are looking on—but wait till the train leaves if you want to hear men cursed and driven. You can hear that big stick strike against the men nearly 1/4 mile.” Southgate told Battle he thought these stories were exaggerated, but there “must be some truth to it.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>From James Southgate to K.P. Battle, 14 April 1880, in BFP.

Following receipt of Southgate's letter, Battle made strenuous efforts to control adverse public reaction. On April 22, he wrote to H.A. London, editor of the *Chatham Record*, asking him to write an editorial critical of the verdict of the Coroner's Court. The next day, April 23, Battle received a report that contradicted Southgate's grim account from trustee Julian Shakespeare Carr. Carr wrote, "I took it upon myself to go up to University Station and spending a portion of one day watching the convicts work. . . . [I] don't think I ever saw a better managed set of laborers in my life. . . . I don't think it is within the province of the Company to procure the services of a more courteous & efficient and in every way thoroughly capable gentleman as Manager than Col. Holt."

Though for Battle, supportive testimony from one of the most powerful men in the state was surely welcome, London's refusal to criticize the verdict of the Coroner's Court was cause for concern. On April 26, London wrote, "and while I am very willing to publish any communication (either above your name or a nom de plume) that you may be pleased to make in defense of the RR authorities in re Fries' death, yet I cannot make the statement myself requested by you. It would surely be very improper of me to state that 'the evidence does not sustain the verdict of the coroner's jury.' When I have never heard or read the evidence: and for me to charge that these sworn jurors were 'misled' and 'prejudiced by their feelings' would be still more improper."<sup>16</sup>

Despite persistent reports in the following months of beatings and continuing investigations by prison authorities, Battle and University Railroad seem to have weathered the storm of adverse public opinion, thereby avoiding great political harm to the university.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>From H. A. London to Kemp Battle, 26 April 1880, in BFP.

<sup>17</sup>For evidence of ongoing abuse and investigations of abuse, see from S.M. Barbee to K.P. Battle, 11 June 1880 and from W.J. Hicks to K.P. Battle, 26 June 1880, in BFP. Hicks was warden of the Penitentiary and wrote to

Publicity about the treatment of convict laborers died down after Judge F.N. Strudwick, who had been a leader of the Ku Klux Klan in Orange County<sup>18</sup>, dismissed the charges against Railroad employees.

On October 8, 1880, as the railroad neared completion, the “ladies” of Chapel Hill organized a grand dinner for the convict laborers, the railroad construction bosses, and the investors in the project. Cornelia Phillips Spencer was the leading force in this event. On October 10, she wrote a letter to her daughter describing the convict dinner. “The long table for ninety-six convicts had tin plates and cups and spoons arranged on it. Beef and ham and chicken were piled on each plate, apple pie, potato custard, apple turn-overs, ginger cakes, light bread biscuit, apples, potatoes . . . . At some distance off a long table was set with knives, forks, plates, and tumblers, for Colonel Holt, and the guard, who were to eat afterwards. . . . When all was ready, the convicts were marched up, and ranged at the table. Mr. Cheshire said grace, and the poor things fell to. . . . When they were fairly full, Colonel Holt told them to fill their jacket pockets if they chose, and in a moment the board was cleared. Then they were told to sit down, and were guarded by a few rifles, while Colonel Holt and the rest of the guard sat down.”<sup>19</sup>

The convict dinner is a story that has become legend for those familiar with the history of Cornelia Phillips Spencer and the university after the 1875 reopening. The storey of the convict dinner deflects attention from the university’s connection to the abuse of black labor that was a hallmark of the North Carolina social order after the overthrow of Radical

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inform Battle of an investigation into additional allegations of abuse. For escape attempts, see *Chapel Hill Ledger*, March 20, 1880 and March 27, 1880 and Battle, *History*, 2: 250-1.

<sup>18</sup>Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, 462.

<sup>19</sup>From Cornelia Phillips Spencer to June Spencer, 10 October 1880, CPSP, quoted in Chamberlain, *Old Days*, 251-3.

Reconstruction. The harsh conditions of survival imposed on black workers in this era, whether they labored in the fields, in white homes, on North Carolina's railroads, or at the university is evident in the story of Andrew Fries' whipping. The tenacious efforts of African Americans to resist this treatment is also suggested by the very fact that instances of abuse were investigated by state authorities and perpetrators were forced to stand trial. Although the power of the Democratic Party was dominant, it was not unchallenged.

### *Low Grade Race War Across North Carolina*

The whipping death of Andrew Fries was symptomatic of the violent race and labor relations engendered by the white supremacy campaign that overthrew Radical Reconstruction. African Americans did not suffer such brutality passively, and intense conflict was evident throughout the 1880s. One form of black resistance to increasing racial violence was emigration out of the state. Coincident with the controversy over abuse of convict laborers on the State University Railroad, North Carolina newspapers carried anxious reports of African Americans leaving the state. The *Chapel Hill Ledger* reported a mass exodus from the Greenville area on December 6, 1879. "Between 60 and 75 negroes from the Black Jack and Haddock X Roads sections, in this county, have left within the past week for Indiana. The poor dupes sold all they had for less than half price to get the necessary funds to embark on this will o' the wisp expedition."<sup>20</sup> Despite such ridicule in newspaper accounts, the reality was that African Americans had good reason to leave North Carolina. Moreover, the significant loss of black labor to emigration concerned employers. By voting

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<sup>20</sup>*Chapel Hill Ledger*, December 6, 1879. Also, see *Chapel Hill Ledger*, January 17 and January 31, 1880. For a discussion of black migration from North Carolina to Indiana, as well as the flight of African Americans from other parts of the South after the defeat of Radical Reconstruction, see Painter, *Exodusters*, 251-5.

against white supremacy with their feed, black workers voiced their discontent and exerted pressure for better treatment.<sup>21</sup>

Eight years later, it appeared that the tensions between blacks and whites had only grown. In October 1886, the *Chatham Record* reported a threat of black insurrection in Haywood, North Carolina the previous summer. According to the *Record*, three men and a woman were lynched and hung from the same tree near Pittsboro that summer of 1885. On November 4, the *Chatham Record* announced, “Orange has gone republican,” and described large Democratic Party losses in the statewide elections. Another article in the same issue declared, “Insurrection Threatened.” The newspaper reported, “Incendiary speeches of a negro in Randolph county last week caused excitement and led to his arrest. There were current reports on Saturday of his lynching. This morning Governor Scales received a telegram from Capt. WE Johns of the Third Regiment State Guard, at High Point, that a negro insurrection was imminent and offering the services of his company.” The same issue announced the first public execution since 1867. Alliday Wrenn, a black man, killed his former master and the authorities ordered that he be publicly hung. On November 18, 1886, the *Record* reported under the headline, “Negroes Moving to California,” “there is a feeling of unrest, and a roving disposition taking hold of many of the colored people in this county, and about the city [Charlotte].”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 117-35.

<sup>22</sup>*Chatham Record*, October 28, 1886, November 4, 1886, and November 18, 1886.

*Black Community Self-Defense And The Whipping Of  
James Weaver By UNC Students*

African Americans waged many kinds of struggles against increasing repression and the growing use of violence to enforce white supremacy. Throughout North Carolina and the South, this conflict raged, almost like a low grade war.

The intense struggle over racial justice that gripped North Carolina during the 1880s was also evident in the relations between UNC students and the local black community. Nearly thirty years after the fact, Professor Stuart Willis claimed that during these years “The negro question was full of “dynamite.”

We find in the Faculty Council minutes the following for October 18, 1886: “Meeting called by the President to consider the cases of the students who are charged with whipping the negro, Jas. Weaver, on the night of Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, and of those who were engaged in a shooting affray with negroes on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Oct.”<sup>23</sup>

James Weaver was the son of Jordan Weaver, representative from Orange to the 1865 Convention of Freedmen and the 1866 Equal Rights League convention. In 1886 he was twenty-eight years old, married, with at least one child. On the night of October 1, 1886, Weaver was working at the Gymnasium Hall, where students had engaged him as an entertainer at a social event. Half a dozen students suddenly assaulted him and dragged him in front of South Building in the center of the campus where they “cruelly whipped” him,

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<sup>23</sup>Meeting notes, October 18, 1886, Faculty Minutes, UA.

according to a faculty report. At the same time, they threatened to whip Pat Brewer, one of Weaver's friends.<sup>24</sup>

On the night of October 9, some students got in a dispute with Pat Brewer and other local black residents. Returning to the university, William Fleming recruited Jacob Freeze and three other students to join him in returning to the black community. In the early morning of October 10, these students entered the community armed and proceeded to the home of Jack Barbee on the outskirts of town, where a group of black residents had gathered, apparently to defend Brewer.<sup>25</sup> There, a confrontation took place in which Fleming was wounded and Freeze was killed. Three of the black men involved, West Morris, Pat Brewer, and Jesse Harris, fled town and the university hired the law firm of Manning and Son to help in their prosecution. The next spring, after several of the black men had been sent to prison, Brewer for ten years, President Battle advised Fleming's father to withdraw him from the university to avoid prosecution for conspiracy to whip Brewer. He wrote, "as you know the law does not authorize a man to avenge insults by force of arms. . . . If I was in your place I would wish my son away and free."<sup>26</sup>

The background tension leading to the whipping developed the preceding April when students engaged in a "riot" with black residents. The root cause of the conflict seems to have been the harassment of black women by several of the students. Battle wrote to one student's father that in April 1886, when his son and others went to the house of a "notorious strumpet," the wife of Pat Brewer, they were confronted by the husband with an axe. Battle

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<sup>24</sup>U.S. Census MS, Orange County, N.C., 1880; Copy of Resolutions adopted by the Faculty 20 Oct. 1886, in UP.

<sup>25</sup>From Kemp Battle to Mr. T. A. Fleming, 4 April 1887, in UP.

<sup>26</sup>From Kemp Battle to Mr. T. A. Fleming, 4 April 1887, in UP.

reported that he had “ordered” Brewer to say nothing offensive to the students and had told the students to “leave the negroes alone.”<sup>27</sup>

Brewer’s wife and an older woman friend, in fact, went to see Professor Mangum in April, 1886, to complain about the students who had been bothering them. Mangum told Battle he believed she was a “real prostitute,” and so he tended not to believe her. The actual “riot” seems to have occurred later in April, when students went into the black community looking for twenty-five year old Mary Carr. An anonymous letter sent to Battle stated that Carr had been sexually taunting the students and they had gone after her to give her a “thrashing,” with the intent of driving her out of Chapel Hill. On their return to the campus, the students were “accosted & insulted by two big bucks.” The young white men called for help and half a dozen students responded. A “riot” ensued, in which the students were fired upon. The anonymous letter writer stated, “It was learned that Pat Brewer & Jim Weaver did the shooting.” In conclusion, the anonymous student wrote, “The original controversy was not over the sensual enjoyment of a rotten negro bitch but over the fact of her being here. We hope you at last understand the motives that prompted our first move whether you approve of it or not. Yours for decent streets, One of the rioters.”<sup>28</sup>

These events of April 1886 seem to provide the background needed to understand why students whipped James Weaver in October 1886 and threatened his friend, Pat Brewer. What this evidence suggests is that white students provoked anger among black residents when they entered the local black community looking for sex. While it is not possible to determine with certainty what the conflict was between Mary Carr and the students, it may be that Carr used taunting as a way of harassing the students. That interpretation indicates the

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<sup>27</sup>From Kemp Battle to Dr. S.A. Woodson, 21 October 1886, in UP.

<sup>28</sup>From unidentified author, April 1883-February 1884, Folder 456, Box 13, in UP.

possibility of a significant level of day-to-day conflict between students and black residents which is not reflected in secondary sources. On the other hand, the anonymous student who wrote to Battle about the incident may have been lying. In either case, the references to sexual taunting and “the sensual enjoyment of a rotten negro bitch,” as well as Battle’s reference to “a notorious strumpet” and Mangum’s dismissal of Brewer’s wife as “a real prostitute” tell us that student sexual involvement with the black community was nothing new or unusual. The stories of sexual taunting by Mary Carr and the axe-wielding defense of his wife by Pat Brewer, whether true or not, convey an expectation on the part of white students that faculty members would find stories of fierce black antagonism to students believable. This gives credence to the speculation that there was a high level of conflict between students and the black community during this period. The evidence that African Americans were not hesitant to resort to armed self-defense of their community seems incontrovertible.

Without political or economic power, African Americans resisted white supremacy. At the same time, university students clearly believed they were justified in defending their honor against insults with whips and guns, though this was against the law. As William Fleming wrote in a letter to the faculty, “I was engaged in the James Weaver affair. . . . Consider that I was justifiable in all I did as he had grossly insulted me before I had been here one week.”<sup>29</sup> Boiled down to their essence, such claims were the fundamental justification by white supremacists for Ku Klux Klan terror and lynching.

Although university authorities discouraged conflict with the black community, when it came, they defended the students to the extent that was politically possible. Just as in the

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<sup>29</sup>From William Fleming to Faculty of the University, 16 October 1886, in UP.

Fries whipping, lingering biracial political power combined with an outraged black community, limited what the university could do. The faculty expelled Woodson and Fleming, but Battle promised to help Woodson get into medical school and suggested that Fleming might return to the university in a few years.<sup>30</sup>

Nearly two years after the whipping of James Weaver, Fleming's lawyer wrote to Battle suggesting it might be time to let the young man return to college. Paul B. Means wrote, "it may be that, in the lapse of time since then, the feeling then existing 'among the negroes & their white friends' has very much modified."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the student's lawyer believed that the argument most likely to sway President Battle was an appeal to political considerations, rather than justice. A week later, Fleming himself wrote to Battle reflecting these assumptions. Suggesting that he return after the elections, the former UNC student wrote, "If I did [return before the elections], it might serve as political capital for the Republicans, and I don't care to be the theme of discussion during the canvass. After the election I don't think my returning would injure the university in any respect, because it could be done so quietly that it would not be known beyond the confines of Chapel Hill. If not providentially hindered, before another election I would graduate & be gone."<sup>32</sup> In August, Fleming wrote again, saying that he would like to "read law" as well as take normal courses. "If you think best," Fleming wrote, "I will spend the majority of my time within the campus walls."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>On Battle's offer to help Woodson, see from Robert Woodson to Kemp Battle, 19 March 1888, in UP. On Battle's suggestion to William Fleming that he might return in a few years, see from Will. J. Fleming to Kemp Battle, 26 July 1888, in UP.

<sup>31</sup>From Paul B. Means to Kemp Battle, 19 July 1886, in UP.

<sup>32</sup>From Will. J. Fleming to Kemp Battle, 26 July 1888, in UP.

<sup>33</sup>From Will J. Fleming to Kemp Battle, 16 August 1888, in UP.

It is clear that students like Fleming and Woodson believed they were justified in whipping James Weaver, going into the black community to thrash Mary Carr, and going to punish Pat Brewer armed. When their armed terror resulted in the death of one of their own, mainstream white opinion turned reality on its head by commending them for not resorting to lynch law. The *Chatham Record* noted, “The vigorous action taken [by the university] has reconciled the students to letting the law take its course.”<sup>34</sup> Neither the students nor President Battle seemed to think they had committed a moral outrage or serious crime, though all seemed to understand that “the negroes and their white friends” were an impediment to carrying on as if nothing had happened.

Though the young men involved in these events were punished, their behavior was not inconsistent with the cultural norms endorsed by university leaders. William L. Saunders had promoted violent terror against African Americans and white radicals who challenged white supremacy and the class power of the gentry. In 1886, Saunders served on the Executive Committee of the university Board of Trustees and held the office of North Carolina Secretary of State. The President of the university helped private investors secure convict labor to build the State University Railroad and covered up abuse of those convicts when black legislators attempted investigations and prosecutions. Is it unsurprising, therefore, that white students at UNC felt free to act upon the violent norms of white supremacy?

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<sup>34</sup>*Chatham Record*, October 14, 1886.

## *The Rise Of New Biracial Challenges To Elite Power*

Throughout North Carolina, disrespect for the rule of law and a more common resort to brutality by white supremacists were the long lasting results of the violent overthrow of Radical Reconstruction. Nevertheless, as the stories of black resistance in Chapel Hill suggest, black freedom striving did not abate simply because of the decline of Republican political power. Moreover, biracial class-based insurgencies rose from the ashes of Radical Reconstruction in the 1880s and 1890s in the form of the Knights of Labor, the Populist Movement, and Fusion politics, which ousted the Democrats from control of North Carolina government between 1894 and 1898.

Persistent black movement building created the black organizational strength that was a precondition for biracial alliance in the 1890s. In the period following the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction, black striving took many forms, both to resist encroachments on freedoms gained and to expand black opportunities.<sup>35</sup> Black legislators continued to serve in the General Assembly, and they spoke out for the needs of black people and greater democracy, though with limited success. These black legislators were particularly active on education issues, laws affecting African Americans' right to vote and serve in county government, convict labor issues, and labor contracts.<sup>36</sup> North Carolina also sent four African Americans to Congress during this era.<sup>37</sup>

In the economic arena, a lack of education and training opportunities, as well as racial discrimination that limited black workers' participation in skilled trades and industry forced

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<sup>35</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 179-85.

<sup>36</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 25, 27.

<sup>37</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 32.

most African Americans to work as agricultural laborers. In 1890, nearly half of all black workers were agricultural laborers. Black farm laborers' lack of political clout, as well as discrimination against them in courts of law, meant that they were forced to accept lower wages than white laborers. In particular, they resented the practice of payment for their labor with supplies rather than cash and the operation of the crop lien system, which kept many of them in debt and dependent on their employers.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, black farm laborers resisted low wages and discrimination. One method of resistance was "quitting the farm," sometimes in the midst of planting or harvesting. Such practices were apparently so prevalent that the North Carolina Commissioner of Labor felt compelled to comment on them in his 1887 report.<sup>39</sup>

One of the main concerns for African Americans during this period was maintaining and expanding educational opportunities. In 1883, Democrats in the legislature passed the Dortch Act that empowered local communities to vote on whether to divide tax revenues for schools on a racial basis. If the vote was in favor of a racial division of taxes, black schools would get only the taxes paid by black residents, generally a minuscule amount, since nearly all wealth resided in the white community. This white supremacy initiative threatened to devastate black public schools. Moreover, it was blatantly unconstitutional, since the Radical constitution of 1868, still in force in most respects, disallowed racial discrimination in the expenditure of public funds.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 76.

<sup>39</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 77.

<sup>40</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 121-22; Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 47-48.

As a result of this threat, black North Carolinians from all walks of life mobilized against the law. Black legislators spoke out against it, and black organizations, like the North Carolina State Teachers Association joined the fray. In the end, as the result of many legal challenges as well as grassroots pressure, the law was declared unconstitutional by the North Carolina Supreme Court.<sup>41</sup>

One of the weapons wielded by African Americans in the battle against the Dortch Act was the threat of emigration. A black newspaper, the *Star of Zion*, called the law “a monstrous enactment.” Black lawmaker, Noah Newby, predicted that African Americans would leave North Carolina “when such an injustice is done them.”<sup>42</sup> Quitting the state, like quitting the farm, was a weapon born of diminished power.

Thousands of African Americans did, in fact, emigrate from North Carolina and other southern states following the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction, so the threat of emigration carried considerable weight. In 1880, for instance, two North Carolina counties lost 6,000 African Americans to Indiana in a one-month period. An 1889 election law that threatened to disfranchise large numbers of poor black and white laborers precipitated the formation of the North Carolina Emigration Association. That year, approximately 50,000 African Americans emigrated from North Carolina to the southwestern states of Kansas, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma. Such losses of large amounts of cheap labor worried white employers and precipitated strenuous efforts on the part of the Democratic newspapers and politicians to discourage black emigration.<sup>43</sup> In assessing the image that the university and the

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<sup>41</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *History of African Americans*, 111.

<sup>42</sup>*Star of Zion* and Newby quoted in Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *History of African Americans*, 110.

<sup>43</sup>On the emigration of African Americans from North Carolina, see Logan, “Movement,” 45-65.

state have consistently supported of North Carolina and Chapel Hill being less backward than the rest of the South, it is meaningful to see evidence of massive numbers of blacks emigrating to other southern states from North Carolina.

In these ways, African Americans resisted encroachments on the gains of Radical Reconstruction, fought for greater opportunities, and maintained a vibrant freedom movement. When the discontent of white farmers and laboring people boiled over in the 1880s, this powerful black movement joined with white farmers in a potent class-based alliance against the domination of North Carolina elites.

The potential of biracial labor organizing in North Carolina was demonstrated by the rapid growth of the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor in the mid 1880s. This was a national labor organization with an interracial membership. The philosophy of the Order was to organize “all of the ‘oppressed,’ male and female, white and Negro.” Following a startling strike victory over Jay Gould’s attempt to cut the wages of railroad workers in 1885, the Knights grew rapidly throughout the nation.<sup>44</sup> In North Carolina, the Knights established their first assembly in Raleigh in June 1884. A white Massachusetts printer, John Ray, organized the Raleigh assembly and then organized two assemblies in Tarboro, a majority black town in eastern North Carolina. One of these assemblies was white and the other black. A third assembly for black women existed in Tarboro by 1889. In Wilmington, the Knights organized black female domestic servants. In 1888, the Knights claimed 1,600 members in Edgecombe County.<sup>45</sup> By 1890, the Knights claimed two hundred seventy-five assemblies in fifty counties of North Carolina, the membership being equally divided

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<sup>44</sup>Tindall, *America*, 803. On black workers in the Knights of Labor, see Foner, *Organized Labor*, 47-63.

<sup>45</sup>*Greensboro North State*, July 26, 1888, quoted in Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 102.

between black and white. Although some local assemblies may have been integrated, most African Americans were organized into separate assemblies.<sup>46</sup>

White employers and the Democratic media met the labor organizing of the Knights in North Carolina with extreme hostility.<sup>47</sup> From Raleigh, John Ray wrote to Grand Master Workman, Terence V. Powderly, “You have no idea of what I have to contend with [in] the way of prejudice down here. There is a continual cry of “nigger,” “nigger!!” . . . I believe that our Order is intended to protect all people who work, the poor ignorant underpaid and overworked as well as the skilled mechanic, and have tried to act up on that principle. And for this alone I have incurred abuse and social ostracism.”<sup>48</sup>

Just as African Americans flocked to black schools during the late 1860s, Ray reported that black workers were rushing to join the Knights of Labor in the 1880s. Despite considerable success in Edgecombe County and elsewhere, the Knights of Labor did not last as a national organization. It suffered from severe repression by employers, competition from the American Federation of labor, lost strikes in the late 1880s, and internal dissent and disorganization. Its national membership peaked in 1886 at 729,000, but by 1890 membership had fallen to 100,000.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, its success in North Carolina during the 1880s demonstrated the possibility and the potential power of biracial labor solidarity. As large numbers of farm laborers, tenants, and farmers left the land due to the agricultural crisis

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<sup>46</sup>Hinton, *Agricultural Labor*, 120; Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 102-3. Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 237-40.

<sup>47</sup>Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, 104.

<sup>48</sup>From Jno. R. Ray to Terence V. Powderly, 22 June 1885, Terence V. Powderly Papers, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., quoted in Foner, *Organized Labor*, 48.

<sup>49</sup>For a good discussion of the relationship of the Knights of Labor to other social movements of the 1880s, see Painter, *Armageddon*, 30-95. For membership statistics, see Painter, *Armageddon*, 44, 95.

of the late nineteenth century, many became industrial workers. While some African Americans found industrial jobs in tobacco factories, many more who emigrated from rural areas became laborers and domestic servants in the growing towns and cities of the state. At the same time, large numbers of white workers fresh from the land became urban workers in textiles and furniture manufacturing. Thus, by the late nineteenth century, the potential for biracial labor solidarity in towns and cities had greatly increased.

The potential for biracial solidarity developed in the countryside, as well, during this era. The backdrop for the growth of the farmers' insurgency that developed in the 1880s was the steady deterioration of conditions affecting yeoman farmers, tenants, and farm laborers in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This crisis was directly related to the growth of commercial agriculture and industrial development promoted by Democratic Party elites. The conditions that provided a basis for the revolt from below in North Carolina resulted from changes in economics and social relations wrought by industrial revolution.

After the Civil War, industrial development advanced rapidly, so that by the early twentieth century, North Carolina became the leading industrial state in the Southeast.<sup>50</sup> Industrial revolution produced a rising new class of merchants, industrialists, financiers, and urban professionals. In North Carolina, these leaders of North Carolina's industrial development supplanted the plantation gentry as the dominant elite by the turn of the century. During the 1880s and 1890s they became increasingly powerful in the Democratic Party. According to the leading history of North Carolina, the party "became the ally and guardian of the railroad and industrial interests. . . . With Hamiltonian devotion to an alliance between business and government, the Democratic party became the custodian and friend of the new

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<sup>50</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 581.

business order whose free enterprise would produce a New State and a New South.<sup>51</sup>

Through the Democratic party and the Board of Trustees, the urban-industrial elite also exercised control of the University of North Carolina.<sup>52</sup>

The growth of commercial agriculture was profitable for the leaders of industrial revolution. Railroad men, merchants, cotton and tobacco manufactures, and financiers, as well as commercial farmers, promoted “stock laws” to advance their interests. For generations, farmers had fenced their crops and let their livestock run free. This was a great advantage to landless agricultural workers and poor farmers, who often fed their families by raising pigs that foraged for food and drank from streams in the open range. This was the tradition of “the commons,” a resource for poor people. Stock laws proposed a reversal of this tradition: the laws required that animals, rather than crops, would henceforth be fenced. Stock laws were a cost saving measure for commercial farmers, while railroads and merchants, who stood to gain from the expansion of commercial agriculture, generally backed such measures. The loss of the resources of the open range, however, was a disaster for the rural poor. Fencing in pigs implied that poor people would have to spend money they did not have to buy feed. The result of years of struggle over stock laws, eventually resulting

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<sup>51</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 542.

<sup>52</sup>For example, the men who owned R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., one of the state’s dominant industrial corporations, played a pivotal role in the white supremacy movement that overthrew the biracial government of Wilmington in 1898, bringing Jim Crow to North Carolina. These families were also prominent on the UNC Board of Trustees throughout the era of segregation. Robert Hanes and James Gray were long time trustees, and Gordon Gray served as president of the consolidated university system from 1950 to 1955. As historian Robert Korstadt noted, “Even as the university, led by the crusading liberal Frank Porter Graham, gained a reputation as the South’s chief fountain of intellectual dissent, Winston-Salem millionaires, along with other members of the state’s industrial elite, continued to steer its affairs.” Korstadt, *Civil Rights Unionism*, 41, 67.

in the victory of commercial farmers, was a tremendous rise in bitter class-consciousness among the rural poor.<sup>53</sup>

The turn to commercial agriculture increased profits for railroads, merchants and industrialists who benefited from increased transportation fees, sales of farm supplies, low cost raw materials, and high interest rate loans. It also encouraged the overproduction of commercial crops, like cotton, which depressed the prices farmers received for their labor. Lowered incomes from the sale of commercial crops meant farmers could not afford high railroad transport fees and were unable to pay off their debts to merchants and bankers. Crop lien laws, which put debtors at a tremendous disadvantage in all credit relationships, proved disastrous for small farmers in this economic context. Agricultural depression resulted. In the end, the loss of the commons due to stock laws and the increasing reliance on commercial crops meant that many farmers lost their land to creditors. The dispossession of these farmers, both black and white, and agricultural depression led many rural people to seek employment in North Carolina's rapidly expanding urban areas, particularly in tobacco and cotton factories. In this way, industrial revolution in North Carolina created tremendous distress in the countryside and a rapidly growing class of urban industrial workers.<sup>54</sup>

The agricultural crisis of the late nineteenth century was not unique to North Carolina. The factors that led to the crisis in North Carolina were a common aspect of capitalist development throughout the agricultural regions of the United States. This laid the basis for the development of a widespread farmers' revolt that sought to challenge the power of large commercial farmers, railroads, merchants, and industrialists. While the initial efforts of

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<sup>53</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 188-90.

<sup>54</sup>For a succinct description of the relationship between agricultural depression and the creation of a pool of cheap industrial labor, see Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 224.

farmers were focused on cooperation and self-help, their struggle soon became political, as it became clear that the power of elites was arrayed against them.<sup>55</sup>

In North Carolina, the Democratic Party responded to the growing despair of rural people with indifference. Increasingly, farmers saw themselves as part of a larger laboring class oppressed by corporations, merchants, and banks. Many felt their very existence was threatened. Farmers all across the South and West were experiencing many of the same frustrations as farm families in North Carolina. The organization that most turned to was the Farmers Alliance, which grew rapidly in the late 1880s.

The university became a focus of controversy in the struggle for a more democratic New South in the 1880s, when white farmers, African Americans, and white women demanded their own public institutions of higher education. The common folk of North Carolina associated UNC with elite power, white supremacy, and male privilege in education. The same railroad men, commercial farmers, bankers, and merchants that small farmers, industrial workers, and African Americans associated with their own hardship controlled the university. Leaders of the university stood in opposition to many of the democratic reforms in education that appealed to most North Carolinians. These reforms became a focus of contention in the 1880s and 1890s.

Facing a financial crisis in 1880, with a rising enrollment and limited income, university leaders decided to appeal for the first time to the legislature for a regular appropriation.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>For an excellent general history of the farmers' revolt, see Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*. For a more recent discussion of Populism that focuses on the participation of African Americans, see Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 431-39.

<sup>56</sup>Wagstaff, *Impressions*, 39-40.

This brought the institution into conflict with both the denominational colleges and the rising agrarian insurgency.

The struggle of farmers for a separate state institution of higher education began as early as 1872. Leonidas L. Polk, a spokesman for farmers' interests, supported reopening the university under Democratic control, but he opposed giving the institution a regular appropriation of \$7,500 derived from the state's Land Scrip Fund. These funds were the income derived from the North Carolina's share of resources awarded to each state by the federal government in 1867 under the Morrill Act to establish agricultural and mechanical colleges. Polk wanted those funds to go to a new state college devoted to teaching practical agriculture.<sup>57</sup> In a narrow vote, the legislature awarded the funds to UNC in 1875, providing the means for the university to reopen. Despite the farmers' continued dissatisfaction with their failure to secure an institution that met their needs, the university gained increasing support from the state in the early 1880s. In 1881, the legislature voted an additional \$5,000 yearly for the institution and in 1885, it increased the regular appropriation to \$15,000.

In the 1880s, however, the growth of the farmers' insurgency gave them the political power to wrest control of the Land Scrip Fund from university supporters in the legislature. In 1887, Polk and the farmers took their revenge against the gentlemen of the university and awarded the \$7,500 income from the Land Scrip Fund to the newly established North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. This farmers' victory created greater democracy for white North Carolinians in higher education and fulfilled one aspect of the Republicans' educational reform program advanced during Radical Reconstruction.

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<sup>57</sup>Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 104.

The farmers' victory developed out of longstanding conflicts between the university and private religious colleges. The debate over reopening UNC following its closing in 1871 stirred conflict with supporters of the state's private denominational colleges, Wake Forest (Baptist), Trinity (Methodist), and Davidson (Presbyterian). Opposition to the university was both ideological and practical. Some religious leaders were critical because of the relatively weak representation of their denominations among trustees and professors at the state institution. Others feared the public institution would attract students away from their schools, if state appropriations were used to subsidize tuition.

Although the university won the funding struggle in 1875, it flared again when President Battle went before the legislature to seek enlarged appropriations in 1881. At that point, the rhetorical battle lines began to take on clear class dimensions. The denominational leaders emphasized that the state should meet the greater needs of the common schools rather than subsidize education aimed primarily at wealthier students. The university stressed its commitment to educate the poor young people of the state.<sup>58</sup> What the university could not afford politically, as it presented its case to the legislature, was the appearance that it was still an elite institution, or that it favored one religion over another. This had been a concern in 1875, but the political necessity became acute in the context of the 1880s grassroots revolt. When university leaders presented their case, they pledged to do all in their power to advance the cause of education "in the common schools [and] denominational colleges," as well as in the university, "regardless of class, locality, sect, creeds, denomination or party."<sup>59</sup> From the time of the 1881 appeal, university leaders insisted that the institution's mission was "to serve

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<sup>58</sup>Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 102.

<sup>59</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 205-213, quoted in Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 102.

the whole state.” It did everything it could to convince ordinary white farmers and working people that the university was intent on serving their needs. In the context of the university’s exclusion of African Americans, this appeal was meant to convince poor whites that they were part of a united white family, and that race, not class, would determine the distribution of political, economic, and educational privilege and opportunity in North Carolina. By the 1890s, the Democratic leaders of UNC adopted the slogan of their Republican adversaries during Radical Reconstruction who set out to transform the institution into “the peoples’ university.”<sup>60</sup> Henceforth, UNC leaders would increasingly describe the institution as “the University of the People.”

Despite the university’s efforts to proclaim its democratic commitments, the combined power of farmers and church groups resulted in the loss of the Land Scrip Fund in 1887. As the revolt from below gained even greater force, other groups traditionally excluded by Democratic leaders from higher education claimed a share of public revenues. Although the Alliance moved into politics nationally in 1890, electing thirty-eight supporters to Congress, many white farmers in North Carolina and other southern states hesitated to leave the Democratic Party due to the hold of white supremacy. Democratic newspapers in North Carolina declared that the electoral work of the Alliance would endanger the Democratic Party and warned of “Republican victory . . . the rule of the negro.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, in 1891, the North Carolina Alliance, still working within the Democratic Party, had marked success. The Alliance elected so many delegates to the General Assembly that it was able to enact reforms in banking, taxation, railroad regulation, and higher education. This “farmers’

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<sup>60</sup>Snider, *Light on the Hill*, 101

<sup>61</sup>*Greensboro Southern Democrat*, September 18, 1890, quoted in Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 243.

legislature” enacted much of the program for higher education envisioned by the Republicans in 1869, creating the Agricultural and Mechanical College for the Colored Race and the State Normal and Industrial School for white women, both located in Greensboro.<sup>62</sup>

While educational reformers schooled at UNC were key supporters of the creation of a women’s college, the political muscle to accomplish this goal came from the Farmers’ Alliance, the state Teachers’ Assembly, and women’s groups.<sup>63</sup> Educators wanted a state normal school for teacher training. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and a smaller service organization, the King’s Daughters, had previously petitioned the legislature to establish a vocational school for poor white women. In the end, the legislature combined these proposals by providing a single college for white women that provided both teacher training and vocational training.

The struggle for black higher education focused on the unconstitutional practice of restricting higher education at the University of North Carolina to white students. While there had never been a legislative requirement in North Carolina to provide higher education for women or farmers, the constitution of 1868 written by Radical Republicans prohibited discrimination in educational funding based on race. That provision of the 1868 constitution was still in effect. Although the Republican trustees of the university had voted in 1869 to establish a separate black campus “equal in all respects” to Chapel Hill, the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction destroyed this plan. African Americans, however, did not stop their agitation for a black institution of higher education. James E. O’Hara, a prominent black leader, put the demand clearly in 1879. He declared, “To the colored youth [of North

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<sup>62</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 546-47.

<sup>63</sup>Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 534. On the role of women’s groups, see Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 89.

Carolina] must be accorded an institution of learning, fostered and controlled by the State, of equal dignity of the State University at Chapel Hill.” In 1885, Charles N. Hunter, another black leader, wrote in the *Afro-American Presbyterian*, “Debarred the advantages of attending the Chapel Hill University, the State is bound by the Constitution to establish and equip a school which will be to the colored people what Chapel Hill is to the whites.”

At a convention of black educators in 1886, the North Carolina State Teachers Association petitioned the governor for \$10,000 to establish a college for black youth. Using the threat of desegregation agitation as leverage, one delegate caused a stir in the white media by proclaiming, “if the legislature refuses to provide for us, who can object to our knocking at the doors of the State University at Chapel Hill?”<sup>64</sup> In the end, it required additional pressure from the federal government to force North Carolina to create a publicly funded college for African Americans. The Second Morrill Act denied federal funds to colleges of “agriculture and mechanic arts” in states with segregated educational systems, unless they provided equal facilities for black and white students. Faced with the certainty that North Carolina would be denied federal funds for its new white agricultural and mechanical college, the “farmers legislature” relented. On March 9, 1891, the General Assembly ratified “An act to establish an agricultural and mechanical college for the colored race.”<sup>65</sup> This school eventually became North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro. In this way, African Americans and their allies built upon the gains of Radical Reconstruction and the farmers’ insurgency to gain one of their long term goals.

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<sup>64</sup>James E.O’Hara quoted in the *Journal of Industry*, November 19, 1879, quoted in Logan, “Movement,” 167. Letter from C. N. Hunter to *Afro-American Presbyterian*, 1 July 1885, Hunter Scrapbook, 1887-1928, quoted in Logan, “Movement,” 168.. On the teachers’ action, see Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *History of African Americans*, 110.

<sup>65</sup>Logan, “Movement,” 171.

The great danger for the university—as for the Democratic Party—was that white farmers would join with African Americans in a biracial alliance to pursue their common grievances. Although formal alliance had not taken place between African Americans and white farmers, the 1891 vote to establish a black state college was a harbinger of things to come. The increasing movement of the Democratic Party toward conservative business interests generated considerable disenchantment among farmers as early as 1890. In that year, Democratic Senator Zebulon B. Vance refused to support the farmers' economic reforms. Nevertheless, Alliance success within the Democratic Party resulted in the breakthroughs of 1891, when farmers elected to the legislature enacted numerous reforms. Business oriented conservative within the Democratic Party reacted with anger to the Alliance electoral victories of 1891. As a result of Democratic Party hostility to the Alliance program, the farmers fielded a separate slate of candidates in 1892 under the banner of the Peoples Party (Populists), a national third party formed a year earlier. In a three-way race, the Democrats won, though the combined votes of the Republicans and Populists exceeded the Democratic vote by 7,000. The victorious Democrats further alienated farmers by calling their leader, Marion Butler, the “Sampson County Huckleberry” and altering the charter of the Farmers Alliance in an effort to punish the Populists.

Populists and Republicans joined forces in 1894 in what has become known as “Fusion.” The road to biracial alliance had been built on the basis of parallel struggles to overcome the denial of educational opportunity and other common grievances against the Democratic leadership. While these efforts resulted in only limited interracial cooperation, they indicated the possibility of stronger united action. This kind of united action was the biggest threat to elite plans for a New South ordered according to their interests.

The Republican Party remained the main opposition party in North Carolina during this era. It was anchored by African Americans from majority black counties in the eastern part of the state and white farmers in the overwhelmingly white western counties. The rise of the Populist Party did not appeal to these long-term Republican constituencies as much as it did to white farmers and urban workers in the central piedmont counties. The existence of the Populist Party gave these voters an opportunity to oppose the business conservatism of the Democratic Party without crossing the color line to join the Republican Party. Nevertheless, Fusion represented real biracial cooperation as Republicans and Populists generally reached agreement to back a single candidate in each legislative and senatorial district. Following elections they hammered out a common legislative program. As a result of this cooperation, Fusionists won large majorities in both houses of the legislature in 1894.<sup>66</sup> The expulsion of the Democrats from control of state government was a virtual political revolution, on a par with the Republican electoral victories of 1868.

The Fusion legislature of 1895 restored local self-government to the counties, increased taxes on railroads and businesses, set the legal rate of interest at six percent, reformed election laws to prevent racial discrimination by Democratic registrars, restored the Farmers Alliance charter, and increased support for public schools, charitable institutions, and prisons. As a result of the fusion victory, African Americans once again were able to elect a significant number of local officials and their participation in politics gained tremendous energy. In 1896, the fusionists increased their control in the legislature and elected Daniel L. Russell, a Republican, as governor. Russell thundered against the “railroad kings, bank

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<sup>66</sup>Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 185; Lefler and Newsome, *History of a Southern State*, 548-9.

barons, and money princes.” In this, he did no more than reflect the economic radicalism of his constituents.<sup>67</sup>

The denominational forces renewed their attacks on the university in the wake of the Fusionist victory of 1894. In 1895 the leaders of Davidson, Trinity College, and Wake Forest launched all-out war on both the university and the State Normal and Industrial School for Women. They sponsored a bill that had broad support in the Fusionist legislature to deny all state funding to both schools. Part of the motivation for this legislation was denominational self-interest. The nation had entered a deep depression in 1893, and denominational schools were suffering enrollment declines, while the university and the Women’s College were experiencing increased attendance. However, there was more at work in the attacks on public higher education than institutional self-interest or narrow religious sectarianism. As historian James Leloudis has pointed out, “The Baptists embraced a vision of democratic localism championed by the Farmers Alliance, the Knights of Labor, and other late-nineteenth century insurgents who were alarmed at the widening gulf between individuals and the institutional and economic forces that shaped their lives.” At its worst, control of schools and other institutions by local majorities could be bigoted, narrow, and tyrannical. “At its best,” wrote Leloudis, “such a system acknowledged the authority of ordinary people and accepted their desire to establish institutions that served their own needs and aspirations.” At root, much of what Fusionist opponents of public higher education disliked was not public education per se, but a vast and complicated system of public schools that would be controlled from top to bottom by a bureaucracy of elite professionals far removed from the lives of the common people. In fact, fear of the credentialing of teachers

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<sup>67</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 247-9.

and the control of public schools by university men, was part of the larger concern of common folk about control of their lives by large corporations and Democratic Party politicians.<sup>68</sup>

### *The Road To Jim Crow*

In 1895, the university drew on all its powerful connections in the legislature and barely escaped with its funding intact. Yet the Fusionist message was clear. From railroad interests, to Democratic Party hegemony, to the university, the people were demanding a voice in decision-making. Class politics had replaced racial politics, and biracial insurgency threatened the unrestrained control of society by New South elites.

The response of the Democrats to the rise of biracial fusion politics was once again a furious resort to white supremacy, fraud, and terror. To regain political dominance in 1898, Democratic leaders organized a highly centralized, massive propaganda campaign emphasizing the dangers of “negro rule.” This was unprecedented, since Democratic politics up to that time had been highly decentralized. It necessitated a vast infusion of funds to finance publicity, massive rallies and picnics, and fraud. Democratic leaders raised these funds by appeals to railroad men and other business leaders, thus acknowledging the great interest of New South industrialists in defeating biracial insurgency and increasing the power of business interests in the Democratic Party. The class solidarity and interracial cooperation manifested by farmers made this new approach necessary. Moreover, the Democrats refocused their traditional appeal to white supremacy by emphasizing the necessity of “a

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<sup>68</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 109, 110, 115-6.

solid white political identity,” as well as an appeal to gender and class issues. Democratic propaganda portrayed black men as sexual beasts that would ravish white women at will if white men did not stand together in the Democratic Party. White women for the first time were given a prominent place in political rallies. In an appeal to class, the Democrats adopted several of the farmers’ demands, including the formation of a commission to regulate railroads, improvements in the public schools, and the direct election of senators. In addition, Democrats called for special rights for white workers, especially preferential hiring. Members of Red Shirt Clubs began riding in southern and eastern counties, breaking up Populist and Republican meetings and intimidating black voters. At election time, Democratic leaders insured that fraud padded their party’s totals. The result was a sweeping reversal of the popular verdict of 1896.<sup>69</sup>

After their 1898 electoral victory, the Democrats acted immediately to reverse the democratic reforms instituted by the Fusionists and silence black and white dissidents. They rescinded the democratic election law reforms of 1895, required all voters to register before Democratic Party election officials, and moved elections from November to August to avoid voting rights scrutiny by the federal government.<sup>70</sup> In addition, they restructured county government and county schools in ways that undercut local control, thus centralizing power in the state Democratic Party.

The Democrats’ ability to implement their draconian program was not simply because of their electoral victory on November 8, 1898. Reinforcing that political victory, and etching

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<sup>69</sup>Redding, *Making Race, Making Power*, 115-29. See also, Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 61-118.

<sup>70</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 135.

its lesson deep into living memory, the Democratic leaders of Wilmington, North Carolina engineered a racial massacre and political coup d'état unprecedented in American history.

On October 25, 1898 Colonel Alfred Moore Waddell, recipient of an honorary degree from UNC in 1895, told a pre-election Democratic rally, “We will never surrender to a ragged raffle of negroes, even if we have to choke the current of the Cape Fear with carcasses.”<sup>71</sup> On November 7, he told whites, “if they found ‘the Negro out voting,’ they should warn him to leave, and ‘if he refuses, kill him, shoot him down in his tracks.’”<sup>72</sup> On November 10, 1898, following the election, which the Democrats carried in the majority black city by resorting to fraud and terror, Waddell led columns of white business leaders and working men into Wilmington’s black neighborhood of Brooklyn, burned the printing press of the only black daily newspaper in America, and shot and killed unknown numbers of African Americans. After the massacre, Democrats expelled the biracial city government from office (municipal officers had not been up for election that year) and took control of the city at gunpoint. The federal government refused to intervene and Democratic newspapers across the state thundered their approval.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>*Wilmington Morning Post*, October 25, 1898, quoted in Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, 4.

<sup>72</sup>Waddell is quoted by John Hope Franklin in his Foreward to Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, xi. The date of Waddell’s speech is incorrectly stated as occurring during the 1900 election in Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, 368.

<sup>73</sup>For an excellent recent collection of essays on the Wilmington coup and racial massacre, see Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, including a concise and vivid summary of events, 4-6. The powerful, ongoing connection of the past to the present, as well as the impact of the growing national movement for an honest reassessment of the nation’s history of racial injustice, is documented in the 2006 report of the Wilmington Race Riot Commission. The General Assembly of North Carolina established the commission in 2000, charging it with developing a historical record of the event and assessing its economic impact on African Americans locally and throughout the state and the region. The full text of this exhaustive report, including a bibliographical appendix, can be accessed electronically at < <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/1898-wrrc/report/report.htm>>.

This single massive act of white terror reached into every community in North Carolina, intimidating African Americans and white Fusionists. More than Democratic election victories or white supremacist legislation, this event made clear that North Carolina was entering a new era of implacable white supremacy.

In 1899, the legislature passed North Carolina's first Jim Crow law, ordering segregation in railway and steamboat services.<sup>74</sup> Within a few years, Jim Crow had imprinted itself upon the social and physical landscape, hardening the color line in housing, employment, public services, and day-to-day social relations. Racial discrimination became enshrined in law and custom as the central, visible, enforced organizing principle of everyday life

Disfranchisement of black men was accomplished in North Carolina by way of a constitutional amendment submitted to the people for a popular vote in 1900. White supremacy leaders decided against calling a constitutional convention because they were unsure of their political supremacy. Despite their vicious campaign of fraud, demagoguery, and terror, the vote to oust the Fusionists from power in 1898 had been relatively close. Therefore, the Democrats' campaign in 1900 was just as bitter and violent as the 1898 campaign. Charles B. Aycock, running for governor, said whites who opposed the campaign were "'public enemies' who deserved the 'contempt of all mankind.'"<sup>75</sup>

The vote for disfranchisement was more decisive than the Democratic victory in 1898, but by then, a two year reign of terror and racist propaganda had discouraged many black Republican voters and Populists from going to the polls. Still, 67 per cent of African

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<sup>74</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 137.

<sup>75</sup>Aycock is quoted in Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 192.

Americans risked voting against the amendment.<sup>76</sup> In addition, many white farmers and working people voted against disfranchisement, since they understood that it would limit their voting rights and political power, as well.

The effects of disfranchisement on popular democracy were devastating. The number of eligible voters dropped precipitously as well as the percentage of eligible voters who went to the polls. In 1898, 84 percent of the electorate voted.. By 1904, with North Carolina effectively reduced to a one party state, only 50 percent of eligible voters, virtually all white, saw any reason to make the effort.<sup>77</sup> The powerful industrial and financial interests that had financed the white supremacy campaigns gained even more control within the Democratic Party. As historian J. Morgan Kousser noted, Tar Heel Democrats “elected the Southern Railroad’s candidate to the United States Senate in 1903” and “a corporation lawyer to the governorship in 1904.”<sup>78</sup>

Disfranchisement, wrote historian James Leloudis, “was the surest means of destroying ‘once and forever’ the coalition of blacks and disaffected white farmers that had challenged the direction of New South development.” The aim the segregation legislation that developed in the wake of disfranchisement “was to discourage interracial cooperation by setting blacks apart as a pariah caste.”<sup>79</sup> As historian Paul Escott noted, “The object of the white supremacy campaign, with its apocalyptic rhetoric, intimidation, and fraud was not

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<sup>76</sup>Crow, Escott, and Hatley, *History of African Americans*, 117.

<sup>77</sup>Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 188, 195.

<sup>78</sup>Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 195.

<sup>79</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 136-7.

merely to insure Democratic power but to make poorer whites and blacks remember that they should not challenge recognized power again.”<sup>80</sup> It was meant to be a lesson for all time.

By disfranchising African Americans and creating a black “pariah caste” through enforced segregation, Jim Crow hardened the “color line” in every arena of life. Both African Americans and white people had to obey its norms on pain of law or potentially violent reprisal. Indeed, memory of the violence that birthed Jim Crow was, in itself, one of the main characteristics of the color line and a guarantee of its effectiveness. No longer were recurrent white supremacy campaigns needed to whip up racial antagonism. No longer did Democratic Party elites have to organize groups like the Klan or the Red Shirts to enforce white supremacy. Segregation recruited a large part of the white population to enforce what soon became law and rigid custom. In this way, Aycock and other white supremacy leaders tried to teach black people “once for all that there is unending separation of the races” and they recruited most of the white population to “determine” that “no man shall by act or thought or speech cross this line.”<sup>81</sup> Paul Escott wrote, “the lower classes and reformers advocating their interests had been stripped of power, of influence, and almost of voice. . . . [the Democrats] demolished the remnants of an open, democratic political system in North Carolina.”<sup>82</sup> In these ways, New South elites successfully restricted free thought and action with regard to racial justice, labor organizing, and popular democracy, for the next sixty years.

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<sup>80</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 264.

<sup>81</sup>“Negro Problem Solved: North Carolina’s Governor So Asserts at Banquet: Partial Disfranchisement a Reason, He Says, for Lack of Trouble in His State,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1903, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup>Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 260-1.

The leadership of men closely associated with the University of North Carolina was one of the most striking features of the white supremacy campaigns at the turn of the century. Charles B. Aycock (class of 1880) was the Democrats' chief white supremacy spokesperson in 1898 and 1900. He served as a university trustee from 1887 to 1895, from 1901 to 1905, while he was North Carolina's "education governor, and from 1905 to 1912."<sup>83</sup> Josephus Daniels, a law student at UNC in 1884-5, led the white supremacy propaganda effort as editor of the leading Democratic newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*. His paper coupled strident calls for white supremacy with grotesque racist cartoons and lurid articles portraying black men as criminals and rapists of white women. In 1901, he was made a university trustee and later became Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson.<sup>84</sup> Francis D. Winston (class of 1879), the first student to enroll when the university reopened in 1875 and the younger brother of university president George Winston, was the "chief engineer" of the disfranchisement amendment. He authored the first statewide call for white unity in 1897 and organized white supremacy clubs in Wilmington. He served as a university trustee for more than twenty years beginning in 1887.<sup>85</sup> His good friend, educational reformer Charles D. McIver (class of 1881), wrote an early draft of the disfranchisement proposal. It differed from Winston's only in that it would have taken the vote from white illiterates in 1905 rather than 1908.<sup>86</sup> George Rountree, chairman of the Constitutional Amendments Committee in

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<sup>83</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 786, 789, 791, 807; Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 260; Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 188-9.

<sup>84</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 791; Edmonds, *Fusion Politics*, 141-2; Daniels, *Tarheel Editor*, 229.

<sup>85</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 789, 807; Powell, *First State University*, 96; Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 259; Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 191; Prather, "We Have Taken a City," in Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, 21; Gilmore, "Murder," in Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, 81.

<sup>86</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 807; Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 136-7.

the state house, worked with Winston to win legislative approval to put the suffrage amendment on the ballot in 1900.<sup>87</sup> Rountree was also a leader of the Wilmington racial massacre and coup d'état, as was Alfred Moore Waddell, who attended UNC in the 1850s.

Just as William L. Saunders leadership of the Ku Klux Klan had propelled him into leadership at the university and in state government, men like Rountree and Waddell who had led the massacre of African Americans and the overthrow of a duly elected government in Wilmington were rewarded for their crimes. In 1898, Waddell became mayor of Wilmington. Rountree became a university trustee in 1901.

Part of what explains the preponderance of UNC men in the white supremacy campaigns is simply the fact that, since its reopening, the university was an institution in the service of New South elites and the Democratic Party, “the party of white supremacy.” Yet it is also true that many of the leading white supremacists were “progressive” reformers, who believed that education for black as well as white, and for women as well as men, held the key to the region’s advance. They saw the university as the “dynamo” of an educational reform movement that would energize the public schools and produce graduates with the skills and attitudes appropriate for an industrializing economy.<sup>88</sup> In other words, they saw education as a way of promoting the vision of New South industrialists that required productive workers who would accept their assigned place in the social hierarchy. Some Democrats, such as the leader of the Wilmington massacre and coup, Alfred Moore Waddell, wanted to limit education for African Americans to the minimum. Often concerned about the danger of “spoiling” black workers for agricultural labor, these racial “exclusionists” were not

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<sup>87</sup>Battle, *History*, 2: 791; Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 191-2.

<sup>88</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 113.

dominant in North Carolina.<sup>89</sup> New South reformers associated with the university, along with the northern industrial philanthropists who were their allies, were racial “moderates.”<sup>90</sup> What this meant was that with one hand they gave, and with the other they took away. As John Hope Franklin points out, “if these [northern philanthropists] sinned as accessories in stimulating sharecropping, peonage, and convict labor, they did penance by offering pittance to educate the former slaves in ways that would not be offensive to Southern mores and predispositions.”<sup>91</sup> They were no less racist than men like Waddell, but they firmly believed that carefully controlled education for African Americans was a way to make black workers more productive and willing to accept their “place.” They saw educational opportunities for African Americans, managed by white bureaucrats trained at UNC, as an inducement to keep black workers from fleeing the South, a way of teaching blacks to accept their subordination, and an alternative to race war.<sup>92</sup>

Ordinary North Carolinians, however, both black and white, were not willing to be educated for subordination according to the vision of industrialists, commercial farmers, merchants, bankers, and urban professionals. Thus, they had resisted university control of public education. Fusion had momentarily given these common folk hope for increased control over their lives. The white supremacy campaigns of 1898-1900 destroyed the basis for biracial political movements. The disfranchisement amendment, which had been crafted by New South educational reformers such as Charles McIver, institutionalized the political

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<sup>89</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 177-8.

<sup>90</sup>On the tremendous influence of northern philanthropists on the New South educational reform movement and their support of “industrial education” for black subordination, see Anderson, *Education of Blacks*, 80-94; Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 145-150.

<sup>91</sup>John Hope Franklin in Cecelski and Tyson, *Democracy Betrayed*, x.

<sup>92</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 179, 184.

defeat of the common folk. As James Leloudis wrote in *Schooling the New South*, “With the passage in 1900 of a state constitutional amendment that disfranchised blacks and many poor whites, New South boosters crushed their opponents and cleared the way for the new education to take possession of the countryside.”<sup>93</sup>

The University of North Carolina was at the center of the late nineteenth century struggles over the meaning of democracy, questions of race, class, and gender justice, and the domination of giant corporations over the direction of New South development. Its sons played the leading role in crushing both Radical Reconstruction and Fusion politics. Thus, as the new century dawned, some of the most important factors limiting the development of the university as a powerful dynamo of the new industrial order had been swept away.

Nevertheless, the interests and traditions of the old agrarian order were still powerful, and if the university was to fulfill its mission of engendering dynamic industrial development, it would have to challenge the old order. This it increasingly did during the coming decades, earning for itself a reputation as a liberal, irreverent institution. Nevertheless, the new Jim Crow order, which university men had done so much to create, ensured that the university’s liberalism stayed well within the limits imposed by elites. UNC remained an institution of white supremacy, even though it increasingly embraced progressive reforms designed to nurture the vision of an urban-industrial New South.

Despite all of the setbacks that led to Jim Crow, black freedom struggle and Fusion politics had enduring power. In no other southern state did a biracial political insurgency have such success.<sup>94</sup> The grassroots revolt in North Carolina gave some indication of what might have been accomplished throughout the South if Fusionists had gained political power

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<sup>93</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, xiv.

<sup>94</sup>Kousser, *Shaping Southern Politics*, 182, 186-87.

as they did in the Tar Heel state. Black workers were the heart and soul of the freedom movement that made Fusion victories in North Carolina possible. During the struggle, common folk made it plain that they would not tolerate aristocratic pretensions or a complete dismissal of their interests by New South commercial elites. Like the Republicans during Radical Reconstruction, the late nineteenth century insurgents championed increased spending on the public common schools, demanding education from the bottom up, rather than a narrow focus on elite higher education. While the rural poor and small farmers may have lost access to the open range, they nevertheless demanded access to “the commons” of public resources. Heeding this message from the grassroots, Charles B. Aycock made improved public education, as well as white supremacy, the cornerstone of his campaign for governor in 1900. In these ways, black freedom striving and biracial democratic insurgency ensured that North Carolina would enter the twentieth century as a progressive southern state.

## CHAPTER 4

### “SHE DIDN’T NEED NO DAMN OLD COAT”: PROGRESSIVE WHITE SUPREMACY AND BLACK FREEDOM STRIVING IN CHAPEL HILL, 1898-1937

Jim Crow began in Chapel Hill with terror, as it did in Wilmington and throughout North Carolina. In late October, 1898, a few days before the statewide elections, newspapers reported that Maggie Lloyd, a white married woman with three children, “eloped” with Manly McCauley, a black field hand, while her husband was away. After four days, a posse overtook the lovers sixty miles from home. There, the white men hung McCauley from a tree alongside the road, then returned Lloyd to her husband.<sup>1</sup>

The *Chapel Hill News* reported this lynching on November 4 under the headline “A Shocking Affair! A Beautiful Young Married Woman Elopes with a Rough, Thick-lipped, Impudent, Repulsive Negro.” While such malignant language was typical of the white supremacy movement, with its focus on the supposed threat posed by “black brutes” to innocent white women, it was unusual for the media to acknowledge consensual interracial affairs. In this instance, however, there was an overriding political issue to exploit preceding the statewide elections. Maggie Lloyd’s father and husband were both Republicans. According to the Democratic newspapers, the Republican practice of relaxing interracial taboos inevitably led to miscegenation. The warning conveyed to both white Republicans and black men by the lynching and the inflammatory media coverage was clear: white men

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<sup>1</sup>“A Shocking Affair! A Beautiful Young Married Woman Elopes with a Rough, Thick-lipped, Impudent, Repulsive Negro” *Chapel Hill News*, Nov. 4, 1898; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 114, 272.

should vote the Democratic ticket if they wanted to keep their women safe and black men should stay in their assigned place.

UNC leaders actively promoted the racial and sexual stereotypes that stirred white men to racist violence in these years. Josephus Daniels, UNC trustee and editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, led the effort to whip up racist hysteria preceding the election of 1898. Other university leaders helped justify racist violence in North Carolina to academics, professionals, and politicians throughout the country. George T. Winston, former president of UNC (1891-1896), writing in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* in 1901, suggested that black sexual predations justified white resorts to vengeance. “When a knock is heard at the door,” Winston wrote, “[a White woman] shudders with nameless horror. The black brute is lurking in the dark, a monstrous beast, crazed with lust. His ferocity is almost demoniacal. A mad bull or tiger could scarcely be more brutal. A whole community is frenzied with horror, with the blind and furious rage for vengeance.”<sup>2</sup>

This comment, which gave cultural sanction to the stereotype of the black beast rapist, the most virulent ideological justification for lynching and disfranchisement, was an attempt to justify Jim Crow to elites within the academic community. Such evidence merely confirms what most African Americans in 1898 understood, that leaders of the university were tied to the Democratic Party and deeply involved with white supremacy. In the historical context of 1898, lynching and the justification of lynching were but two aspects of the same Democratic Party strategy.

It is important to read the story of Manly McCauley’s lynching as an example of black freedom striving, not only as one of the many forms of violence underlying white supremacy.

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<sup>2</sup>Winston, “Whites to the Negroes,” 108-9. For this and other examples of the “black brute caricature” visit the site of the Ferris State University Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at < <http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/brute/>>.

The story reveals the irrepressible desire of African Americans to lead fully human lives, as well as the willingness of some whites in the late nineteenth century to defy racist norms. Although some might believe that McCauley and Lloyd were naive about the consequences of their actions, it seems more likely that McCauley knew the extreme risk he was taking. It is doubtful that at the peak of the white supremacy movement, just days before the election of 1898, McCauley could have been unaware of the inevitable violent reaction of white men to his effort to escape with a married white woman. The most likely explanation for the desperate behavior of McCauley and Lloyd is that they were in love. McCauley and Lloyd took a stand in defiance of white supremacy and McCauley lost his life. Despite the effort of Democratic editors to spin the story as an example of black male bestiality, if we deny that interpretation, this story still stands as part of a countervailing tradition of freedom striving.

This alternative historical tradition reflects actual relationships of power at the turn of the century before the institutionalization of Jim Crow. The Democrats accomplished their electoral victory in 1898 only through deft political maneuvering, terror, and fraud. In itself, the propaganda aspect of the white supremacy campaigns—the promotion of virulent racism—did not sufficiently sway white voters or suppress the black vote. Even after the Democratic victory in 1898, the Wilmington massacre and coup, and the reversal of Fusion electoral laws in 1899, there was determined opposition to the disfranchisement amendment by both black and white voters in 1900.

While the overall vote in support of the amendment was 182,217 to 128,285, these numbers are misleading. In Orange County, where the black population was roughly 36 percent of the total in 1900, voters rejected the disfranchisement amendment, 1,493 to 1,406. In New Hanover County, where the black population was 51 percent of the total, the vote in

*support* of disfranchisement was 2,967 to 2. Four years earlier, the Fusion vote for governor in New Hanover had been 3,220, while the Democratic vote had been 2,218. Clearly, voter intimidation and fraud were responsible for the disfranchisement victory in New Hanover in 1900. The need for such repressive measures, as well as the defeat of disfranchisement in a majority white county like Orange, suggests that the potential of biracial political solidarity and opposition to elite rule in late nineteenth century North Carolina was powerful.<sup>3</sup>

As Democratic leaders began to consolidate their electoral victories by institutionalizing Jim Crow throughout North Carolina after 1900, the possibilities of black political resistance and biracial democratic reform decreased dramatically. The hardening of segregation and the preferential treatment of whites in employment, housing, and the allocation of public services further split North Carolina's working people along racial lines, undermining the possibility of class solidarities. New South industrial and commercial elites wielded political power based on the strategy of Jim Crow to impose low wages on all of North Carolina's industrial and agricultural workers.

### *Focusing Down On Chapel Hill*

Examining the development of Jim Crow and black resistance in Chapel Hill is a way of coming to grips with the history of black freedom and the University of North Carolina at the local level. In fact, New South elites made Jim Crow and African Americans resisted it at every level of society, but studying this history in a single community reveals dynamics that reflect the implementation of strategic visions and overarching policies in ways that broader

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<sup>3</sup>Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 225-33, Appendix, tables 1, 3, and 4.

studies cannot duplicate. It is particularly useful to study these dynamics in Chapel Hill, since the university was both a key state institution and the dominant power in the town. The university wielded institutional power throughout the state through the political process, the legal system, and through institutions, both public and private. Examining the statewide and regional influence of the university in depth is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I have chosen to focus down on power relations in the two areas where the institution's role was most direct, the campus and the Town of Chapel Hill. While a local study cannot take the place of a more comprehensive investigation of black freedom and the university, the relationships that developed between African Americans and the university in the institution's own backyard are significant in themselves and can be suggestive of larger patterns. When we look at the university from afar, it seems to have been a beacon of racial enlightenment in comparison with most other southern institutions. Yet when we investigate the history of black freedom and the university at the level of local employment and community relations, a more disturbing picture emerges.

In Chapel Hill, Jim Crow limited and denied the hopes of African Americans and their material well being, diverting privileges and resources to white people and to white institutions. White workers gained even greater preferential employment opportunities, while men and women of the elite hired servants at low wages, thereby gaining greater time to devote to leisure and to their careers. White neighborhoods gained public services at the expense of black neighborhoods and white institutions, like public schools and the university, advanced at the expense of black institutions. Every single white person, from the poorest laborer to the most powerful capitalist, gained the privilege of power over black people of whatever rank and the sense of superiority that flowed from membership in the white race.

Jim Crow blunted and reversed some of the progress black residents had made during Reconstruction. Black men lost the right to vote. Black people generally lost ground with respect to the rights gained during Reconstruction for equal access to public space. Black institutions, like schools, lost ground relative to white institutions due to the increasingly unequal distribution of public resources. Rigid segregation, unknown in Chapel Hill before 1900, was not simply a reflection of racial bigotry: it was part of a new mechanism of social control that slowed the black advance from slavery and reduced most African Americans to membership in a demeaned, racially defined laboring caste.

The institutionalization of Jim Crow in Chapel Hill took place in the context of rapid university expansion after 1900. The town was completely dependent on the university—UNC even owned most municipal services. By 1930, the university was the main employer of black labor. UNC professors and administrators were active in politics and exercised a critical influence in educational reform and public health. Thus, in the important years of Chapel Hill's transformation from a tiny village to a good-sized town, the university played a decisive role in virtually all areas of development. In each of these areas, the influence of the university ensured that the town adhered to Jim Crow norms.

As an institution of white supremacy that dominated the Town of Chapel Hill in every way, UNC set the limits against which African Americans asserted their freedom as they built families, institutions, community movements, and workplace organizations. The university *made* Jim Crow in Chapel Hill by embracing white supremacy as part of its institutional culture. It adhered to Jim Crow norms in its employment practices, its provision of municipal services to the community, and its influence on public health, housing, and education. In a town economically and politically dependent on the university, UNC's

decision to embrace white supremacy and Jim Crow ensured that Chapel Hill would also follow the same path.

From 1898 to 1937, many African Americans reacted to the shock of disfranchisement and the hardening of the color line by leaving Chapel Hill. Those who remained, as well as new residents attracted by employment opportunities at the growing university, resisted Jim Crow by strengthening the fabric of their community life and by organizing grassroots campaigns and organizations to advance their needs.

The first decade of the century saw a dramatic decline in the size and economic strength of the black population in Chapel Hill. Individuals and families survived by unceasing work, mutual support, and the creation of an affirming culture and spirituality. The black community gradually recovered from the initial shock of Jim Crow in the 1920s. During the years preceding World War I, the community showed its first signs of grassroots energy to challenge Jim Crow with a campaign for improved educational opportunities. After 1920, the black population grew rapidly, as work for the expanding university became the dominant source of employment for African Americans. The community showed signs of renewed energy beginning in 1923-24, with grassroots campaigns to support a black public health nurse and build a new school. By the end of the decade, the community had developed a political organization, the Negro Civic Club, and a labor organization, the UNC Janitors' Association. Nevertheless, although the New Deal inspired hope, the Great Depression wrought havoc in the black community. As anger and frustration mounted, the community struggled to find effective voice and organization. After 1937, African Americans in Chapel Hill once again seized the opportunity to build militant organizations and join in biracial class alliances to more effectively demand justice.

### *The Vision Of Progressive White Supremacy*

The institutionalization of Jim Crow after 1900, like the white supremacy campaigns that preceded it, reflecting an underlying vision and strategy of elite social control. In a 1903 speech, the president of the UNC Board of Trustees, Charles B. Aycock, stressed the need for Jim Crow and outlined its three main features. Aycock was convinced that North Carolina had found an enduring solution to “the negro problem.” He had been the foremost spokesman for White Supremacy in 1898 and 1900. In 1903, he stood before the North Carolina Society of Baltimore as a prominent New South educational reformer and Governor of North Carolina, ready to implement his vision with no apologies. It was Aycock’s opinion that “in my state. . . we have solved the negro problem.” As summarized in the *New York Times*, Aycock outlined the three crucial ingredients of Jim Crow. They were, “Disfranchisement as far as possible, the essential superiority of the white man, and the recognition by the negro of his own inferiority.”<sup>4</sup> Aycock explained how “the essential superiority of the white man” was to be made crystal clear through segregation and enforcement of the color line. “Let the negro learn,” he said, “once [and] for all that there is unending separation of the races; that the two peoples may develop side by side to the fullest, but that they cannot intermingle. Let the white man determine that no man shall by act or thought or speech cross this line, and the race problem will be at an end.”

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<sup>4</sup>The quote from Aycock as well as the summary of his remarks are from “Negro Problem Solved: North Carolina’s Governor So Asserts at Banquet: Partial Disfranchisement a Reason, He Says, for Lack of Trouble in His State,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1903, p. 5.

At the same time, the period following disfranchisement appeared calm compared to the vitriolic rhetoric, fraud, and terror that characterized the white supremacy campaigns. In fact, Democratic Party leaders had suppressed much of their political opposition. Disfranchisement silenced African Americans, and without their vote, disgruntled white farmers could not muster a majority against the Democrats. At least temporarily, commercial elites had created a new balance of power conducive to their visions of New South development. These visions were progressive in the sense that they aimed at creating an environment conducive to the progress of industrial capitalism, which required the suppression of black freedom struggle and Fusion politics. What remained to be done after 1900 was to transform North Carolina from a rural, agricultural society rooted in the past to a modern urban-industrial state.<sup>5</sup>

New South leaders shared a vision of the university's mission that called for it to become "the source of power to all below it," a "mighty social engine" to bring the state and the region into the new industrial age.<sup>6</sup> Implementing this vision of the university's mission involved a new emphasis on science and progressive reform. Without challenging the hegemony of Jim Crow, the university became a leading instigator of progressive reforms throughout the state. While UNC was a *product* of slavery and plantation agriculture, under the leadership of New South industrialists, it was also a cutting edge *producer* of men trained in the new values of entrepreneurialism and progressive reform. Francis Venable, who became president of the university in 1900, promoted scientific research as well as reverence

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<sup>5</sup>Kent Redding calls this culture "racist progressivism, while William A. Link uses the term "paradox of southern progressivism." Redding, *Making Race, Making Power*, 131 and Link, *Paradox*.

<sup>6</sup>E. A. Alderman quoted in Wilson, *University of North Carolina* 37-8; also see *North Carolina University Record*, 3 (Oct. 1899): 3, in NCC.

for the values of white supremacy. Harry Chase, who became president of UNC in 1919, elevated social reformers like Howard Odum and Frank Porter Graham within the university hierarchy during the 1920s and protected their work. While this reform agenda required the university to guarantee resources and “freedom of expression” for progressives such as Odum against attacks by reactionaries, that in no way implied that Chase and the trustees were soft on Jim Crow and North Carolina’s low-wage, anti-union industrial order. Indeed, the university itself promoted the low-wage, Jim Crow order in its employment practices, its relations with the local community, and its own institutional culture.

University histories have lauded the fact that when Frank Porter Graham was President, from 1930 to 1949, professors, students, and even administrators at UNC sometimes showed genuine concern for African Americans and working people. What has rarely been held up for scrutiny, however, is the slight impact of these concerns on the day-to-day functioning of the university outside of the sphere of discourse. The concerns of liberals rarely went as far as challenging Jim Crow or crossing the color line, at least until after World War II. Although Graham was a racial gradualist, unwilling to endorse federal intervention to end discrimination, he consistently upheld the rights of labor unions and campus radicals to organize black campus workers. Although he supported professors Guy Johnson and Paul Green when they came under fire for inviting Langston Hughes, a renowned black poet, to speak at the university in 1934, he would not admit Pauli Murray, a black woman, to the university in 1938.<sup>7</sup> Despite the countervailing democratic tendencies nurtured by Graham and others at the university during the 1930s and 1940s, the institution remained squarely within the Jim Crow camp outside of the classroom.

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<sup>7</sup>Hughes, “Color at Chapel Hill,” 405; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 136-38; Murray, *Autobiography*, 108-12, 115-29.

In its everyday practice, the university modeled racial injustice, teaching the university community to ignore and tolerate Jim Crow. This practical pedagogy had a profound impact on generations of students. As contention over racial justice mounted during the twentieth century, students learned that they should not see humanistic discourse as something connected to the everyday reality of black people. Though students were encouraged to study black life and help impoverished African Americans, they were discouraged from acknowledging racial injustice and critically assessing its causes, let alone taking a stand to end Jim Crow. In this way, the university promoted a culture of injustice and denial, despite its fierce defense of service and free speech.

### *Black Exodus From Chapel Hill*

The coming of Jim Crow to Chapel Hill seems to have prompted many African Americans to leave. Despite the steady growth of the university during the first decade of the century, the black population of the town declined, while the number of students and permanent white residents increased substantially. From 1900 to 1910, the permanent population of the town increased by only 50 residents to 1150. The percentage of African Americans in the permanent population, not counting the growth in university enrollment, changed dramatically for the first time since slavery. The black proportion of the town's population declined from 49 percent to 39.7 percent during this decade. The absolute black population declined from the previous census by roughly 15 percent, from 535 to 457, while the white population increased 23 percent, from 564 to 695. The university's enrollment during this period increased by roughly 60 percent to 801 students.

In 1920, the total permanent population of the town increased by 336 to 1486, made up of 989 white and 497 black residents <sup>8</sup> Student enrollment also increased to 1486, almost doubling in just ten years. The number of black residents increased during the decade by only 40 people, while their percentage of the total permanent population dropped to 33.4 percent. Thus, after twenty years of steady university growth, Chapel Hill's black population had not made up the losses it suffered after 1900, while the town's permanent white population nearly doubled.

During the 1920s, the black community rebounded. The university's enrollment more than doubled again, reaching 3,017 in 1930. During this era of explosive university growth, both the white population and the black population increased by roughly 80 percent. In 1930, the number of African Americans reached 891, and the black percentage of the permanent Chapel Hill population stood steady at 33 percent.

The most likely explanation for the decline in black population from 1900 to 1910 was emigration in response to the white supremacy campaigns. A hostile racial climate may have driven significant numbers of African Americans out of Chapel Hill. The deaf ear that the town commissioners turned to an urgent request from black leaders shows how Jim Crow politics operated locally to make Chapel Hill an unwelcome place for black residents.

In August 1897, the Democratic leaders of Chapel Hill's town commission demonstrated a marked indifference to the requests of long time black community leaders, Wilson Caldwell and Green McDade. These men spoke to the commissioners concerning drainage problems "of that portion of the village [near] The Col. Baptist Church." It seems unlikely that experienced black community leaders would have appeared before the Board in the midst of

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1920.

North Carolina's Fusion crisis without good cause. Nevertheless, at the next Board meeting the commissioners dismissed the request of the black community with the statement, "The desired change impracticable as the water would have to be diverted from its natural course."<sup>9</sup>

This hostile racial climate is clearly indicated by a statement printed in the *Chapel Hill News* on November 4, 1898. "How are you going to vote?" the *News* wrote. "White man or Negro? WHICH? Shame on the man who deserts his color in this crisis. Let White Men give preference to White Labor and extend the same preference in other patronage in the future. Some few white men are swinging between White Supremacy and Negroism solely to retain and gain colored trade. They are spotted."<sup>10</sup>

The demand for white employment privilege and other forms of "patronage" published in the *Chapel Hill News* is particularly striking when viewed in relation to the sharp decline in skilled jobs held by African Americans in Chapel Hill between 1900 and 1910. Not only did the black population drop during the first decade of Jim Crow, but the number of skilled and self-employed black workers dropped from forty to sixteen, while the percentage of African Americans employed in menial and unskilled laboring jobs jumped from 85 percent to 93 percent during the same period.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the language in the article—"shame" and "they are spotted"—reflects the increased coercion of both blacks and whites to adhere to a strict color line that was fundamental to the message of White Supremacy at the turn of the century. Since leading trustees of the university, such as Josephus Daniels, designed and

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<sup>9</sup>Meeting notes for August 2, 1897 and September 6, 1897, Board of Commissioners Minute Book 1, May 2, 1886-May 8, 1899, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C.

<sup>10</sup>*Chapel Hill News*, IV (Nov. 4, 1898), pp. 1, 4, quoted in Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 135.

<sup>11</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C., 1900, 1910. Black skilled workers did not simply shift to unskilled labor. The census suggests that many of them left Chapel Hill before 1910.

promoted this rhetoric, it is not surprising that Chapel Hill exhibited the same heightened emphasis on white privilege and black subordination that characterized the coming of Jim Crow elsewhere. The sharp decline in the black population after 1900, particularly the decline in self-employed and skilled occupations, may well reflect the implementation of Aycock's vision in Chapel Hill.

Evidence suggests that as a result of black emigration out of Chapel Hill at the turn of the century, an acute shortage of black labor developed. In 1899, a special meeting of the town commissioners was called to discuss "the matter of wages for street work." The suggestion was made that pay for road work should be increased from \$.75 per day, due to the "scarcity of first class hands and the difficulty of obtaining labor." In Chapel Hill, road work was almost exclusively carried out by African Americans. That the commissioners had to hold a special session to address a shortage of labor implies that they saw it not as a short-term problem, but as a major difficulty for the town that required an institutional response. Blacks in Chapel Hill were being pushed out of skilled trades, as they were throughout the Jim Crow south. Manual labor would be the primary source of income for black men living in the village. The problem was not that these men did not need the work or were withholding their labor, but that they were not there.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that Chapel Hill became increasingly segregated during the first decades of the twentieth century may also be evidence of a hostile racial environment. Although the manuscript census for 1890 is unavailable, the census for 1880 shows that black and white families were interspersed throughout Chapel Hill's neighborhoods, demonstrating that the more mixed antebellum pattern was still largely intact. By 1900 segregated housing patterns

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<sup>12</sup>The commissioners voted to keep wages at \$.75 per day, though their minutes do not offer an explanation of this decision.

were clearly developing and by 1920 only a handful of black families lived in white areas of town.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the proportion of white families employing live-in servants gradually declined from over 20 percent in 1880 to almost zero in 1910. White neighborhoods surrounded the university, while the main black neighborhood comprised a small area on the northwest periphery.<sup>14</sup> The segregated housing pattern of Chapel Hill and the locations of the black neighborhoods can be seen clearly on the map prepared by Charles Maddy Freeman in 1944(see Appendix).<sup>15</sup>

The black exodus from Chapel Hill immediately following the white supremacy campaigns was not unique. Historian William Chafe found another example of the connection between the coming of Jim Crow and the economic, as well as political, disfranchisement of African Americans in Greensboro, North Carolina. “Whereas, in 1870 nearly 30 per cent of Negro workers had been employed in skilled occupations,” Chafe wrote, “by 1910 the figure had dropped to 8 per cent, with four out of five blacks working either in semi-skilled service jobs or as unskilled laborers. In 1884 16 per cent of the black labor force had held jobs comparable to those of whites in city factories. By 1910 not a single black was listed as a factory worker. . . . [T]he vast majority of Greensboro’s Negro population struggled to survive through serving whites.”<sup>16</sup>

Historian Janette Thomas Greenwood wrote that the Charlotte *Observer* “noted the black exodus with concern.” Citing a report in the *Observer* from 1903, she described farmers in the countryside who were experiencing “acute labor shortages,” while people in the city were

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<sup>13</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C., 1880, 1900, 1920.

<sup>14</sup>In 1944 this neighborhood was called Pottersfield and occasionally, New Town. Today it is called Northside.

<sup>15</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” appended map. See Appendix, 359-60.

<sup>16</sup>Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 20.

paying “a hefty increase in wages.” The *Observer* blithely editorialized that African Americans were “leaving the best friends they ever had.” Black commentators, Greenwood stated, were “amazed by the assertions in the white press,” and she quotes J.W. Smith in the *Star of Zion*: “When Negroes leave a place by the wholesale, there must be some reasons for it. The bitter race feelings which the politicians worked up in the campaigns of 1898 and 1900 has [sic] much to do with the exodus.”<sup>17</sup>

Another factor that must be taken into account, particularly for the 1910-1920 period, is migration related to new job opportunities for African Americans in the North resulting from World War I. As a general phenomenon, African Americans increasingly left the South and Jim Crow in search of better life opportunities beginning around the time of the first World War. It is difficult to gauge the extent of migration in and out of Chapel Hill, but while new jobs in construction and service work must have drawn black workers to the town, many black workers undoubtedly joined the Great Migration and moved to other areas in search of better opportunities. In Chapel Hill, the growth of the university created economic opportunities of all kinds, yet Jim Crow ensured that very few black workers could take advantage of these opportunities to rise out of poverty. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that many migrated out of “the Southern Part of Heaven” in search of better lives.

Like evidence of the persistent power of biracial voting patterns through the election of 1900, it is important to appreciate the alternative reality that evidence of a black exodus from Chapel Hill suggests. Illustrator William Meade Prince learned to think of Chapel Hill as “the southern part of heaven” while he was growing up in the town during the early years of Jim Crow. In 1950, he wrote a book by that title, and ever since, Chapel Hill boosters have

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<sup>17</sup>Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy*, 217.

promoted the idea that Chapel Hill was “The Southern Part of Heaven.” Yet it was never that for black people. Particularly in the years following the terror of Wilmington and the lynching of Mathew McCauley, Chapel Hill was hostile to black freedom.

*Elizabeth Cotten: Welcoming The New Day In Jim Crow Chapel Hill*

“I was raised up to make a noise,” Elizabeth Cotten recalled, “joyful noise, go to church, people come to your house, pray, sing, you ring bells, beat on tubs, anything joyful, lord—toot horns. My father used to load the guns and let us shoot straight up. You bring in New Year’s Eve with joy, singing and praying. And letting the old go, see.”

Ella Nevill (whose married name was Elizabeth Cotten) was born in 1895 in Chapel Hill. In 1900, her father, George Nevill, worked as a farm laborer.<sup>18</sup> Later, he worked as a dynamite setter in the Chapel Hill iron mine. As an illegal side occupation, Nevill made stills and manufactured liquor. Louisa Nevill, Ella’s mother, kept house and raised the five children. By 1900, Elizabeth’s brothers, aged sixteen and fourteen, had left school and were working full time. They lived at home, one working as a farm laborer and the other as an errand boy. George Nevill died while Elizabeth was still a child, and her mother then went to work at several jobs. She took in laundry at home, did domestic work, and cooked at a boarding house for students. She also worked as a midwife. Elizabeth remembered that her mother “delivered a many a little child in Chapel Hill and all through the country.”

Cotten became one of Chapel Hill’s most famous daughters during the folk revival of the 1960s, years after she left the area. The world knows her music today, particularly the song

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<sup>18</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C., 1900.

“Freight Train,” but the world does not know the story of her childhood in Chapel Hill during the first decades of Jim Crow. By comparing her story with census data, it becomes clear that her life was, in many respects, typical of young black women of her generation. Her testimony reveals several of the main themes of black freedom that unfolded in the lives of African American families in Chapel Hill at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

Outside of cooking, taking in laundry was the most common occupation for black women in Chapel Hill in 1900. By 1910, with the increase in UNC’s enrollment and the corresponding growth in town population, laundering had become far and away the main occupation for black women.<sup>20</sup> As a small child, Elizabeth helped her mother do laundry. She recalled, “I was small and after [father] passed we would wash for the doctor to pay his doctor bills. There wasn’t much money in circulation then, and not much for the colored people anyway. . . and we washed for that man and they’d have the biggest old nasty wash. We’d just hate to see that wash come in.” Even though she loved school, Elizabeth quit after fourth grade to work full time.

The great passion of Elizabeth Cotten’s life during childhood was to learn to play the guitar. Musical ability ran in her family, and all of her uncles played music. Yet there was no money to pay for a guitar or music lessons. “I wasn’t 12 years old,” Elizabeth remembered, “and I went to work for this lady, her name was Miss Ada Copeland. She paid me 75 cents a month. I was a lot of help to her. . . so she said to my mother, “We’re going to raise little Sissie’s wages.” So they gave me a dollar a month. And if you think about it, it sounds like a little money, but in them days for a child it might’ve been a good price, I don’t know. ‘Cause

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<sup>19</sup>Elizabeth Cotten, Interviews by Alice Gerrard and Mike Seeger, December 13, 1977 and January 10, 1979 and by Mike Seeger, January 18, 1966, tape recording and transcript; quoted in album notes, Elizabeth Cotten Vol. 3, Folkways FA 3537. All subsequent Cotten quotes are from these interviews.

<sup>20</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C., 1900 and 1910.

my mother was one of the top cooks in Chapel Hill and she didn't make but 5 dollars a month."

Elizabeth Cotten quit school and worked at least four months to buy a guitar that cost \$3.75. Such sacrifice and hard work was the norm for black children, since their parents earned such low wages. As a single mother, making \$5.00 per month as a cook, Louisa Nevill struggled to feed her family. Elizabeth recalled the monotony and poverty of the family's diet. "Beans, black-eyed peas, collards, turnip salad, turnips. . . well, that's what I eat every day when I was growin' up—weren't nothin' else for me to eat. You didn't know nothin' about no market meat. . ."

For black men, even employment such as janitorial work, considered good jobs at that time, paid only \$15.00 a month. A single mother like Louisa Nevill probably could not make ends meet unless she worked several jobs and the children worked as well. If this meant that the children had to sacrifice their education, that was the choice that the southern economy during Jim Crow forced on African Americans. At the same time, hard labor, great sacrifice, and families pulling together were central themes of black freedom striving in Jim Crow Chapel Hill.

Another major aspect of black culture was teaching children how to survive and prevail despite Jim Crow. African Americans nurtured a historical culture through storytelling. Like many young black children, Elizabeth Nevill learned important lessons about life from stories about slavery times. Slavery was a constant shadow in the lives of the many African Americans in 1900 whose parents were born well before Emancipation. According to family lore, Elizabeth was descended from slaves on her father's side of the family, but her mother's

family had been free. Louisa Nevill told the children stories about slavery, teaching them critical survival skills as she passed on the traditions of generations.

Elizabeth remembered, “my mama used to tell me how my daddy’s mother was a slave and how she used to get whippings.”

She told the boss, “Now boss, I’m not gonna take a whippin’ this morning.”

“Come on out here Hannah.”

“Boss, I’m not comin’ out. I’ll do what I’m supposed to do, you don’t have to tell me boss. I’ll do everything I’m supposed to do, and I have not done nothin’ to get a beating this morning. And I’m not coming out, I’m not gonna take it.”

And she went on back to the kitchen and finished her cooking. And I don’t think he bothered her no more . . . How did they feel, whipping somebody hasn’t done nothin’?

Yes, and she didn’t go out. Granny Hannah did not go out.

Whipping was a metaphor for slavery throughout the South. As we have seen, African Americans struggled to abolish the whipping post in the early days of Reconstruction. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, incidents of whites whipping African Americans elicited public outcry and revolt in Chapel Hill and elsewhere. By telling such stories, Louisa Nevill was not simply teaching her daughter about the danger and suffering that was part of being black; she was also instructing her in the long tradition of resistance Elizabeth could draw on to persevere and prevail, despite injustice. Like the story of President Kemp Battle’s slave, who told him to “whip away,” Hannah’s story reflects that what black parents stressed and cherished in the memories they passed on to their children was how the ancestors kept their backs straight and denied the oppressor to his face.

White people attempted to teach black people the limits of the color line in a thousand ways. Elizabeth remembered, “There was an old woman living in Chapel Hill. She was from up north. . . she wouldn’t hire a black person to save your life. She’d hire my sister ‘cause she was lighter than I am. . . she just didn’t like black people.” Elizabeth recalled being taught the constant necessity of being aware of the limits of Jim Crow during her childhood.

She remembered that white people “would speak nice to me and act like they was alright.” But her mother taught the children great caution. “[M]y mother always tell us, ‘Children, know how far to go with anything . . . don’t go too far with it. Know there’s a stoppin’ place somewhere and stop before you get to the worst part of it.’ So we children would always stop and think, ‘Now they’re white and I’m black, is it alright to do so and so?’”

Nevertheless, Elizabeth was of a different generation and she was bothered by some of her mother’s ways around white people. Like all of the children, she had to sort out her feelings about how to deal with Jim Crow. That was her freedom. She remembered her mother as “very pleasant. Very nice, obedient. Mama was always kind of humble—just a little bit, you could see it—kind of pulled back act, you know what I mean? She wouldn’t go too far too quick. I used to didn’t want to see her do too much of that. But she seemed to get along alright . . . . See, she had to do that maybe a little more than I did. I don’t know why, ‘cause she was not a slave. But after she had to get out and work for herself and work around white people, maybe she picked it up then.”

In later years, Elizabeth traced the “humble” attitudes of some black people in Chapel Hill to slavery. She understood that it was not possible in Chapel Hill, or elsewhere, for African Americans to escape the shadow of bondage. “I know I’m black, see, and the old way back times, the way white people treated the Negroes . . . . I heard my mama talk about it . . . . And I think that growed up in the black people by hearin’ about it through their parents or maybe their godmothers or their godfathers, whoever raise them. And it makes them have that little drawback kind of feelin’.” In such ways, young African Americans growing up in Jim Crow Chapel Hill sorted out their feelings about how to engage the color line, how to make their freedom.

A final theme of black freedom striving illustrated by Elizabeth Cotten's testimony is the way African Americans nurtured an affirming culture to sustain them during Jim Crow. Elizabeth found resources in her own life, in the traditions passed on to her, and in the culture of her community that enabled her to persevere, to keep on walking forward, even when she felt discouraged.<sup>21</sup>

Music was an important part of black culture in Chapel Hill at the beginning of the century.<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth remembered her mother singing around the house. "I can imagine I see her sometime," Elizabeth recalled, "doing something, you know, and just singing. All them songs . . . 'Hallelujah T'is Done' — that's old, old." In church there would be more music. Elizabeth remembered, "You go to church every Sunday. You didn't miss . . . You go to Sunday school and stay the 11 o'clock service and sometimes mama would let us go back at 3 o'clock service . . . . All them songs that you play on the piano, I was raised up goin' to Sunday school singing them." Elizabeth's uncles played music, as well as her brothers and sisters. There were frequent music gatherings in the neighborhood.

The encouragement of music and dancing in the early decades of Jim Crow Chapel Hill was a way of building a sustaining culture that did not require great expenditures of money. "I'll never forget," Elizabeth exclaimed, "this man lived about a block from us. And he let the children come when he'd have this music, and dance in his yard . . . . If any of the children could play any kind of horn, or any kind of music, he'd let 'em come in and join the music, and we'd have a nice time. When we'd hear that bugle, ever what it was he'd blow,

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<sup>21</sup>On black gospel music as part of an affirming culture, see Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 174-89. On the cultural significance of the "call and response" of black blues and dance, see Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 168-186.

<sup>22</sup>For example, see "Colored People in a Big Sing: Well Trained Congregations from Five Counties Will Gather for Event: Hundreds are Expected," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 19, 1923.

we begin to worry our parents to let us go . . . . That's where I learned how to dance, waltz, and two-step, do the cakewalk, Frisco . . . buck dance.”

When Elizabeth joined the church at around age fourteen, Rev. Hackney convinced her to give up her worldly music and dancing. For many years she did, although eventually she came back to her guitar and became a world famous musician. Looking back, she believed she saw a unity between the church music and the worldly music that were both so popular, though seemingly at odds, in the Jim Crow Chapel Hill of her childhood. “They just feel like you're not trying to serve God if you run around and sing those songs,” she reflected, “but I declare I think about ‘em a lot and I don't [see] where there's so much sin in it. I say them words, they come to you just like song you make of the gospel. They come from inside of your heart, and you know why? Because you've been mistreated.”

### *Teaching Jim Crow: Institutional Culture and Commemorative Landscape*

Aycock and other New South leaders implemented their vision of progressive white supremacy at the university by enforcing Jim Crow norms in the training of students, employment practices, and relations with the local community. This enforcement was not done through censoring of faculty or written policies. In the main, it was accomplished by creating a strong institutional culture that affirmed the values of Jim Crow and discouraged deviation from these norms.

On June 2, 1913, the North Carolina Daughters of the Confederacy and the UNC Alumni Association unveiled a monument to the university's Confederate war dead at the northern entrance to the campus. This statue is known today as Silent Sam. President Francis P.

Venable accepted the monument for the university, while Governor Locke Craig delivered the principal speech. Other speakers included Major H. A. London, a student who left UNC for service in the Confederate army, Mrs. Marshall Williams, president of the North Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Mrs. H. A. London, chairman of the monument fund committee, and General Julian Carr, commander of the North Carolina Confederate Veterans, secretary of the UNC Alumni Association, leading industrialist, and UNC trustee.

Following a ceremony in Gerrard Hall, a procession filed past the Old Well to McCorkle Place, the university's most hallowed ground. There, sheltered by ancient oaks and the Davie Poplar, a crowd of two hundred and fifty or so gathered around an imposing bronze statue of a Confederate soldier astride a high granite base.<sup>23</sup> The Daughters were there in prominence, as well as many leading white citizens from around the state who had gathered in Chapel Hill for the university's graduation exercises. Perhaps seventy-five young men, no doubt recent graduates, stood in a group to one side gazing up at the "soldier boy" festooned with Confederate flags, listening to the band play "Dixie" and "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground." At the margins of the crowd, black servants stood respectfully, some tending strollers or small, white children. Looking out from behind a large tree, two black youths took in the proceedings.<sup>24</sup>

While this event is little remembered today, it was deeply meaningful to people of that day. The erection of the "Soldiers Monument" not only commemorated the sons of the

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<sup>23</sup>While the report in the *Alumni Review* claims 1,000 attended the ceremony, a photograph of the event suggests the number was closer to 250. Photo from UNC Photo Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

<sup>24</sup>"The Soldiers Monument Unveiled," *Alumni Review* 1 (1912-13): 184-185; *Daily Tar Heel*, June 2, 1913; *Raleigh News & Observer*, June 3, 1913.

university who died fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War; it also celebrated an ideal and a cherished interpretation of history that the men who led the university wanted to instill in future generations. In one of the hundreds of letters sent to UNC alumni seeking contributions to fund the monument, Venable wrote, “A fitting monument is to be erected on the campus this year to the sons of the University who heard the call of their country and served in the War of 1861-65. This will commemorate the heroic era in the history of the University and I believe the glorious record to be unparalleled among the colleges of this or any other country. Further, it commemorates the greatest lesson that a man can learn, namely, that the call of duty is supreme. The monument will stand as a lesson in stone and bronze to all succeeding generations of students.”<sup>25</sup>

The lesson Venable meant to teach was spelled out in the inscription that appeared in bronze on one side of the monument base: “To the sons of the University who entered the War of 1861-65 and whose heroism taught the lesson of their great Commander, that Duty is the sublimest word in the English language.”

Governor Craig expanded on these themes of duty and sacrifice, making it clear that the “great Commander’s” words pertained as much to the present as they did to the past. He proclaimed, “Answering the Supreme requisition, the University laid upon the altar of Dixie the fairest and the bravest of the world. This statue is a memorial to their chivalry and devotion. . . . We unveil and dedicate this monument today as a covenant that we too will do our task with fidelity and courage.”<sup>26</sup> While the identity of Venable’s “great Commander” may not be self-evident to those pondering the meaning of the monument inscription today,

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<sup>25</sup>From Francis Venable to Ed. Chambers Smith, 15 July 1911, UP.

<sup>26</sup>“The Soldiers Monument Unveiled,” *Alumni Review* 1 (1912-13): 184-185.

few among those gathered to view the unveiling would have been at a loss. Venable's "great Commander" was Robert E. Lee, former commander of the Confederate armies and a central icon of the movement to promote the "Lost Cause" mythology, which had become a powerful force throughout the South since Reconstruction.<sup>27</sup> This movement endorsed a set of values including duty to defend white supremacy, male chivalry to protect white womanhood, and pride in a heroic and patriotic southern military tradition. To justify these values, Lost Cause enthusiasts promoted a version of history that proclaimed the South's innocence with regard to slavery. The Confederacy went to war to defend freedom, not slavery, and, in any case, slavery was a civilizing influence on Africans.<sup>28</sup>

Venable's letter, Craig's speech, and the monument inscription all would have been understood by the white people gathered for the unveiling in 1913 as expressions of the central values of the Lost Cause. The erection of a Confederate statue on the campus of the university was but one more episode in the determined campaign of southern elites to defend these values, to defend what had not been lost—white supremacy. Patriotic organizations, particularly the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the United Confederate Veterans, were among the most important organizational vehicles employed by these elites to promote their most cherished traditions. The university was another.

The window on history provided by an examination of the unveiling ceremony opens onto a landscape of white supremacy. Like all landscapes established by an unjust social order, this is both a landscape of power and a landscape of denial.<sup>29</sup> If we try to read between

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<sup>27</sup> From John Wilson to Francis P. Venable, 9 January 1913, UP.

<sup>28</sup> Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 255-99; Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 1-42, 215-46.

<sup>29</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 20. Social critic, James Loewen, tells us that thoughtful visitors to historical monuments should not accept them at face value, since they often obscure as much as they reveal. Loewen

the lines of the unveiling ceremony, it is clear that the choice of speakers reflected the values of white supremacy. The main speaker was Governor Locke Craig, formerly an orator and leader of the White Supremacy movement of 1898-1900. Another speaker, General Julian Shakespeare Carr, also was a well-known advocate of white supremacy. The remaining speakers, other than President Venable, were leaders of white supremacy patriotic organizations.<sup>30</sup>

The Soldiers Monument gave emphasis to an already existing landscape of power and denial, a commemorative landscape that emphasized the values of the Lost Cause. In 1907, for instance, when the current president's house was built near the future site of the Soldiers Monument, white supremacy had reached a fever pitch across North Carolina. Many white Democrats believed that the long effort to suppress African American assertiveness and the constant threat of biracial insurgencies was at an end. They believed disfranchisement and segregation had solved "the Negro Problem," and they celebrated the victory. The magnificent new president's house, modeled after a plantation mansion, like the Soldiers Monument a few years later, was part of this celebration. A few years later, in 1912, the university built the Battle-Vance-Pettigrew Dormitories at the northern entrance to the "noble grove." Kemp P. Battle was known as the leading "redeemer" of the university during Reconstruction, while Zebulon Vance was credited as the foremost "redeemer" of the state. Pettigrew was a Confederate war hero. The university placed the Soldiers Monument at the entrance of the campus the following year. In 1922, the trustees named a classroom building in honor of Col. William L. Saunders, leader of the North Carolina KKK during

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suggests we "read between the lines" and "deconstruct the imagery" to more deeply understand historical markers. "Then these sites divulge important insights not only about the eras they describe but also about the eras in which they were built . . . They also point to unresolved issues in a third era—our own."

<sup>30</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 255-299

Reconstruction. In 1924 they named a dormitory for Charles B. Aycock, in honor of the foremost spokesman for the disfranchisement of African Americans in 1900.

While the landscape of power that confronted visitors to Carolina's "noble grove" during Jim Crow affirmed the values of white supremacy and a version of history that conformed to Lost Cause narratives, it also denied values of racial justice and the history of black labor and freedom striving. Framing the university campus, passing just feet in front of the President's house, the Soldiers Monument, and Battle-Vance-Pettigrew Dormitories, were fieldstone walls. Slaves built the rock walls that surrounded the university. They received nothing for the work of hauling the huge stones or the skill required to set them properly in place. The university paid their masters. The university educated the sons of slave owners, while slaves and the children of slaves, up until 1951, could not gain admission to UNC.

Although the rock walls had endured the test of time in 1913, lending their silent grace to the generations, they stood mute, like the fieldstone grave markers of slaves in the Chapel Hill Cemetery, or the slash marks denoting slaves in the manuscript census. While the President's house and the Soldiers Monument affirmed the virtues of slavery and the Confederacy, the debt to African Americans remained unacknowledged and unpaid. In this way, the university taught a culture of denial that was so essential to the maintenance of white supremacy in a nation that traded on its democratic creed.

The institutional culture of white supremacy persisted and remained of fundamental importance to university leaders throughout the Jim Crow era. Writing toward the end of the Jim Crow era, Louis Round Wilson gave evidence of both the intended importance of the Soldiers Monument in the life of the university and the uncritical acceptance of its message even after the beginnings of desegregation. Calling it a "splendid memorial," Wilson wrote:

Standing on the central axis of the campus between the Graham Memorial and the Battle-Vance-Pettigrew Dormitories---memorials themselves to University presidents, war governor, and fallen leader of the North Carolina troops at Gettysburg—the monument is the first object to catch the eye, as one enters this memorial setting from Franklin Street, and carries it on south to the monument of Joseph Caldwell, first President of the University, then on to the Old Well, and finally to the north entrance of South Building—points in the “noble grove” of President Swain and Mrs. Cornelia Phillips Spencer which are enshrined in the hearts of all who have known and loved the University.<sup>31</sup>

As the university grew after 1900, it defined its mission as social transformation in service to the entire state. Accordingly, the student body and the faculty became more diverse and the challenge of instilling normative values became more difficult. Many new faculty members came from outside the South, while the students, though mostly from North Carolina, reflected considerable economic diversity. Institutional white supremacy norms were the guidelines that ensured adherence to Jim Crow despite diversity. These norms shaped the university community. For students, professors, and campus workers, institutional culture was like the air they breathed, a powerful, yet invisible, presence.

The institutional culture of Jim Crow at the university taught students to see black workers not as human, but as stereotypical “faithful servants.” This led to paternalistic relationships between students and black university workers, and it often led to ridicule of these workers and a misunderstanding of their lives.

Evidence of Jim Crow attitudes among the students can be gleaned from their attitudes toward black campus workers. In the same year as the unveiling of the Confederate monument, several commentaries appeared in the yearbook. Under the headline “Vanitas Vanitorum!” (“vanity, all is vanity”), a student wrote an ode to Henry Smith, long time university janitor. With mock respect the student wrote, “I salute thee! Thou ringer of the

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<sup>31</sup>Wilson, *University of North Carolina*, 126-127.

bell and sweeper of the floors!” Next, the student ridiculed Smith’s physical appearance and poor dental health saying, “Whose head sitteth upon one side like a Judy, and of whose teeth there lacketh many that are needed! Hail!” Finally, the student made fun of Smith’s poverty. Saying “Behold thy trousers,” the student called for “the addition of another patch of a different hue to the worn and sadly showing aperture in your arrearage! Dulce et decorum est (It is sweet and fitting).”

Even in death, black workers could not escape the racist condescension and ridicule that characterized the institutional culture of the university during Jim Crow. Following Henry Smith’s death, the following entry appeared in the *Alumni Review*: “Horny-handed Henry Smith, janitor at the University for 21 years and ringer of the college bell 16 years, died January 30th. His familiar figure and shuffling gait have been missed on the campus since the opening. . . . The class of 1909 at its reunion during commencement of 1914 conferred upon Henry the degree of L.L.D.D. (Learned, Loyal Ding Donger).”<sup>32</sup>

Although ridicule of African Americans had been an important part of the university’s institutional culture since slavery, equally important was the image of black workers as “faithful servants.” This was a way of distorting and denying the true history, not just of individuals, but of the entire black freedom struggle. During the Lost Cause era, in addition to Confederate Soldiers Monuments, southern patriot organizations erected “mammy monuments” and “faithful servant monuments.”<sup>33</sup> Shortly after the 1898 death of Wilson Caldwell, a former university “servant” during slavery and long-time campus worker, the students erected their own faithful servant monument in his “honor.” After the university put

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<sup>32</sup>“Horny-Handed Henry Passes,” *Alumni Review*, 5 (October, 1916): 13, quoted in Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 138.

<sup>33</sup>Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 287-88.

up a new marble monument on McCorkle Place to honor UNC's first president, Joseph Caldwell, students took the old Caldwell monument and placed it in the African American section of the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery. On the red sandstone obelisk they engraved an epitaph for Wilson Caldwell. It read:

Here was laid the body of Wilson Caldwell  
The Student's friend and servant,  
An exemplar of modest merit,  
The best type of black man,  
Who he sought to elevate by labor;  
The solution of the race problem.  
Mindful Mainly of his duties,  
His rights were cheerfully conceded.  
Himself ever respectful, he was always respected  
Diligence dignified his service,  
Three generations of white men testify of his faithfulness.  
Let him rest here till he's ready for work again.<sup>34</sup>

Like the Soldiers Monument, this monument was meant to tell a story set in stone for generations to come. But whose story? Not Wilson Caldwell's story. There is no mention of Caldwell's work for black freedom as a Radical Republican during Reconstruction. He was the director of the first public school for African Americans in Chapel Hill in 1869 and served as the town's first black justice of the peace, appointed by Reconstruction Governor William Woods Holden. Such activities brought the Ku Klux Klan down on his head. Caldwell remained a steadfast activist in education, politics, and community affairs throughout the nineteenth century. No, the story told on the gravestone foisted upon Wilson Caldwell by UNC students was a racist insult, a Lost Cause myth that denied his freedom struggle and recast him as "the solution of the race problem." White Carolina students forced a hand-me-down gravestone on a dead black worker and inscribed it with words meant to

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<sup>34</sup>Transcribed by Kevin Dann. From Dann, "Walking Across Old Walls," unpublished draft in the author's possession.

affirm white supremacy and obliterate him from history. Clearly endorsed by university administrators, this act, no less than the erection of the Soldiers Monument, was part of forging the university's Jim Crow institutional culture.

The use of the old Caldwell monument by UNC students to inscribe their values and vision on the university's physical landscape, like the erection of the Soldiers' Monument in 1913, was part of an intensive effort by New South elites to shape a triumphant sense of the goodness of white supremacy and its rightful place in the American cultural and political mainstream. The hierarchies of race, class, and gender that had served elite interests so well during the antebellum era, and which Fusion politics had challenged so successfully in the 1890s, were now rehabilitated for use in the new era. This was done by a massive southern effort to rewrite history texts and to fill the commemorative landscape with images that reinforced the values of the plantation South, Confederate military heroism, and the contented passivity of "faithful" black servants.<sup>35</sup>

Like the commemorative landscape, the ubiquitous Jim Crow employment practices that UNC students witnessed every day taught habits of denial. The real message of Jim Crow employment practices was that African Americans were not fully human and, therefore, black subordination was not injustice. Black workers became merely "hewers of wood and drawers of water," servile creatures. This construction of blackness, this denial of black humanity, was a particularly important rationalization at an institution that prided itself on being free and democratic. Indeed, the increasing commitment of the university to democratic values and service to the people of the state required a powerful denial of institutional racism. Acknowledging that black workers were fully human would have made

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<sup>35</sup>Bishir, "Landmarks of Power"; Brundage, *Southern Past*, 105-11.

it impossible to sustain the absurd hypocrisy of claiming to be the university of the people while functioning as an institution of white supremacy.

*The Development Of Segregated Neighborhoods: Separate and Unequal*

The development of segregated housing patterns in Chapel Hill at the turn of the century led to the formation of distinct black neighborhoods. This, in turn, facilitated racial differentials in the allocation of public resources for housing and public utilities.

The black community of Chapel Hill was made up of five distinct neighborhoods going by the names of Pottersfield, Tin Top Alley, Southwest Lane, Sunset, and Windy Hill. Pottersfield, the largest black neighborhood, occupied the far northwest corner of Chapel Hill. Carrboro, the mill town adjoining Chapel Hill to the west, also contained a small black community that was essentially an extension of the Pottersfield community. Within these communities the quality of housing and public services varied considerably, with Pottersfield having the highest standard of living.<sup>36</sup>

Just to the south of Pottersfield, along the western ends of West Franklin St. and West Rosemary St. was the black business district. Pottersfield was also home to most of the black churches as well as the only black school, Orange County Training School. A 1939 study of housing characterized Pottersfield as a neighborhood of “unpainted,” frame structures situated along “winding, uneven lanes and narrow alleys.” While “loose boards” and “missing windows” were common exterior features, Pottersfield homes, though “overcrowded,” “showed an essential cleanliness.” The homes in Windy Hill appeared “sound,” but they were “actually on the point of collapsing at a number of fundamental

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<sup>36</sup>See map of Chapel Hill black neighborhoods in 1944, appendix 359-60.

points.” These homes were “badly overcrowded.” Housing in Tin Top consisted of “crude shanties with leaning chimneys, single rooms which once were constituents of real dwellings, open wells, no wells at all, one and two-room cabins with meager and make-shift furnishings—scattered at random about an open meadow and approached only by narrow footpaths.” Southwest Lane consisted of one short street with “a number of large, moderately well-kept homes.” Of twenty homes studied individually, half had town water and half used wells or springs, five had indoor toilets, and four had electricity.<sup>37</sup> By comparison, the eastern, white sections of Chapel Hill, including the university, had paved streets, running water, indoor toilets, and electricity.

If anything, the housing conditions in the black community were even worse than the Henry study implied. In 1937, the editor of the *Chapel Hill News*, seeking to explain an unprecedented outbreak of racial conflict in the community, cited as part of the cause desperate conditions in the black community resulting from the Depression. He noted, “in recent years there have come into being here slums which, in dirt and general indecency, resemble some of the worst slums in the large cities.” He then called for “an enlightened community effort” to rectify the housing crisis of the community’s “lowliest toilers.”<sup>38</sup>

### *White Reform And The Black Struggle For Educational Opportunity*

The institutional culture of Jim Crow at the university greatly influenced the development of Chapel Hill and local progressive reform. One of the most significant examples of the

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<sup>37</sup>Jones, “A Study of Housing,” 2-6, 10-11.

<sup>38</sup>“Negro Quarter Needs Police Protection,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, August 27, 1937.

university's enforcement of Jim Crow was in the area of education reform. In Chapel Hill after 1900, the university's influence enforced black subordination in the development of a system of public education.

While some at the university sincerely promoted concern for "the Negro," the reform impulses that grew from such paternalistic notions sought to ameliorate conditions for the disadvantaged group without challenging the overall framework of injustice. The promotion of better schooling during Jim Crow, without a corresponding concern for racial justice, actually increased racial inequality in education. The deterioration of black educational opportunities relative to white opportunities after 1900 are illustrated by historian Louis R. Harlan. "The rape of the Negro school fund," he wrote, "occurred every day and under the process of law. Whereas in 1900 the discrimination in favor of the white child was about 50 per cent, in 1915 it was about 300 per cent."<sup>39</sup>

In Chapel Hill, the university played a decisive role in establishing and supporting a public school system for white children. In Orange County, the public school system followed the Jim Crow pattern of segregated education mandated by state law. While support for black public education was pitifully small, support for the education of white students in county schools was apparently not up to the standards of the university community. Therefore, prior to 1900, white residents of Chapel Hill relied on private schools to educate their children. In particular, relatively affluent university professors found this option attractive. In 1896, for instance, "new UNC honors graduate John W. Canada opened the Canada School with the backing of concerned villagers and a who's who of the university

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<sup>39</sup>Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 131.

faculty.”<sup>40</sup> However, this school failed when Canada left the community in 1901. White residents then turned their attention to creating an improved public school system for their children.

The original five trustees of the Chapel Hill school tax district included three UNC graduates. Two of these men, Charles Herty and Nathan Walker were UNC professors. Walker, a 1903 graduate of UNC, was an educational reform leader who had been Superintendent of Schools at Asheboro, North Carolina (1903-‘05). At the time of his appointment as a graded school trustee, Walker was also Professor of Secondary Education at UNC, State Inspector of Public High Schools, and Director of the University of North Carolina Summer School for teachers.<sup>41</sup> William Roberson, the other UNC graduate, was a real estate developer and built a reputation as “the perpetual mayor” of Chapel Hill, serving a total of twenty years between 1903 and 1927. One of his daughters was married to UNC Comptroller, Charles T. Woollen.<sup>42</sup> William Temple and Robert Eubanks, the other two trustees, were long time Chapel Hill merchants.<sup>43</sup>

The trustees drew the boundaries of the Chapel Hill Special Tax District to exclude all of the black neighborhoods of Chapel Hill. This was possible because of the segregated housing patterns that developed in the wake of the white supremacy movement at the turn of the century. However, the trustees’ aim was not to set up a dual Jim Crow system of public education in Chapel Hill, but rather to establish a system of white public education, with no

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<sup>40</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 103. For a summary of white private education and the transition to public education, see Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 103-104.

<sup>41</sup>Harlan, *Separate and Unequal*, 127. Walker’s UNC salary was paid in part by Rockefeller’s General Education Board.

<sup>42</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 107.

<sup>43</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1900.

provision for black children.<sup>44</sup> The UNC community would provide no tax support for the education of the children of the menial laborers who staffed the university, maintained the streets of the town, laundered clothing, cooked meals, and raised the children of professors.

The establishment of the Chapel Hill graded schools was part of a massive educational reform movement waged by a coalition of northern industrial philanthropists through the Southern Education Board (SEB) and southern educational reformers. Men closely associated with UNC were among the key leaders of this movement. Nathan Walker's UNC salary, for instance, was paid by John D. Rockefeller's Southern Education Board to support his work with public high schools. According to historian William Link, "SEB leaders and local organizers alike excluded any mention of black education in these crusades; in their Herrenvolk [white man's] democracy, they encouraged the widening of black-white school disparities."<sup>45</sup> In many areas of the state, white residents were willing to tax themselves to establish better schools, but were unwilling to "divide with the negro."<sup>46</sup> Thus, in relation to both educational opportunity in Chapel Hill and statewide educational reform, the influence of the university came down squarely on the side of improving education for white North Carolinians at the expense of African American citizens.

The years preceding World War I give evidence of growing dissatisfaction among African Americans in Chapel Hill with these Jim Crow educational opportunities.<sup>47</sup> On the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, while the university unveiled its

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<sup>44</sup>On the history of black education in Chapel Hill, see Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 66.

<sup>45</sup>Link, *Paradox*, 131.

<sup>46</sup>Link, *Paradox*, 131.

<sup>47</sup>For the history of public education in Chapel Hill during this era, see Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 58-81; Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 199-201, 283; and Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 103-4.

Confederate monument, African Americans organized a mass meeting to protest the inadequacies of Jim Crow schools for their children.<sup>48</sup> If the Soldiers Monument stood as a metaphor for white supremacy, the African American struggle for education stood against Jim Crow as a central theme of black freedom.

From about 1900, Rev. L. H. Hackney, the minister of Rock Hill Baptist Church, later renamed First Baptist, served as the principal of the county school. However by 1913, discontent with the county system had become so intense that Rev. Hackney and others called a mass meeting at which the black community decided to establish a private school. This school was named the Hackney Training School and was located on Merritt Mill Road. It enrolled approximately two hundred students and employed two academic teachers and two music teachers, as well as Rev. Hackney.

In 1917, the county purchased the Hackney School and renamed it the Orange County Training School (OCTS). Attendance at this school grew rapidly. By 1920-21 there were six teachers, including three who taught high school students. In 1922, the Orange County Training School burned. This setback forced the black community to draw on its collective resources yet again. The following year, three hundred students and seven teachers carried on. One of the black fraternal organizations, the Odd Fellows, and one of the black businesses, the Guthrie Theater, allowed the lower grades to use their buildings. The county rented a two-story house on Rosemary Lane for the high school. The following year, the county added an eighth teacher.

Concern about problems in black neighborhoods that might impact students and white town residents sparked interest at the university in the local black community. Contagious

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<sup>48</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 63.

disease was a particular concern of the Chapel Hill Board of Commissioners after 1900. For example, the Board minutes for March 30, 1904 reported that Durham had been put under smallpox quarantine and travel to and from Chapel Hill prohibited. Throughout the early years of Jim Crow, concern about smallpox and other communicable diseases was a major topic at Board meetings.<sup>49</sup> For such reasons, leaders of the university launched a campaign in 1913 to encourage students to “study the Negro Question” and get involved with “settlement work” in the black community.

Acting dean of the university, Prof. M. H. Stacy lectured on “Why Study the Negro Question,” in which he “expressed the belief that the negro was too intimately a part of our life to not avail ourselves of the facts concerning his life.” Among others, professor Harry W. Chase, soon to become president of the university, “enunciated in positive terms that industrial education was the only salvation for the negro.”<sup>50</sup> Other professors spoke on “the major diseases that curbed the negro’s progress,” “the industrial life of the negro,” “industrial education,” and the “religious characteristics of the race.” Shortly thereafter, Professor Stuart Willis outlined the kind of work students could do to help—“learn to understand the Negro, assist in Sunday Schools, give illustrated speeches, and the like.”<sup>51</sup> In a *University Magazine* article about the same time, Willis apparently answered critics who feared the students’ attentions might arouse feelings of discontent among black laborers. Willis reassured white employers that the work of the Campus YMCA students would not arouse discontent with

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<sup>49</sup>For Durham quarantine, see meeting minutes, March 30, 1904, Board of Commissioners Minute Book 2, May 1, 1899 to September 2, 1907, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C. Issues related to communicable diseases are common in the Board’s minutes throughout these years.

<sup>50</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 61.

<sup>51</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 62.

the servile life. Rather, “[The Negro’s] awakened self-mastery, racial integrity and racial respect will create in him, not the scorn of a servant’s life, but will raise in him an ambition to be a more reliable servant, a more efficient janitor, a more responsible cook, a more consistent brick layer.”<sup>52</sup>

Students reacted enthusiastically to this call. One of their first projects was the establishment of a night school for some of the local black youths who could not attend school during the day because they had to work. Five nights a week, fifteen to twenty young black men came to the Quaker schoolhouse to participate in classes sponsored by the Campus YMCA. Subjects included spelling, reading, writing, history, mathematics, and grammar. Ten UNC students handled the teaching, while the black community paid the bills for wood and oil. This night school continued through the 1916-17 school year. Each year, it seemed, the black students and their white allies found ways to stretch the curriculum beyond the basics. In 1915-16, this night school added a “debating society.” The next year the YMCA sponsored the debating society, a Sunday School, “Negro YMCA,” and “janitors’ club.”<sup>53</sup>

Black youths clearly welcomed resources provided by the university to supplement their educational opportunities. That does not mean that they agreed to be educated for subordination. It seems evident that black youths were eager to learn skills appropriate to politics, community building, and labor organization. If UNC students were willing to provide such support, it only showed that some were not immune to the appeal of shared humanity, despite the dominant culture of white supremacy that defined their age.

It is also helpful to appreciate the irony of the students’ “settlement work,” as it reflects how successful the university’s institutional culture was at discouraging critical thinking

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<sup>52</sup>Willis, “A Glimpse at the Other Half”; also quoted in Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 137.

<sup>53</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 61-63.

about racial justice. In ways that would not seem unfamiliar to UNC students today, the YMCA students took up the ideal of service to *help* the less fortunate residents of Chapel Hill. The irony of these reform efforts is that they were aimed at alleviating problems that leaders of their own university had created by a consistent promotion of white supremacy since the era of slavery. In this sense, the promotion of community service by the university was somewhat like the promotion of educational philanthropy by northern industrialists—it was a way of giving back with one hand a small part of what they had taken with the other.

While university administrators and many reform-minded professors encouraged students to “learn to understand the Negro,” the need to understand white supremacy and fight injustice was not taught. In that respect, the university’s institutional culture was successful at suppressing critical thinking among students, denying allies to black freedom struggle, and making black subordination seem natural.

These examples of African Americans shaping white reform efforts to meet their own needs and the grassroots organization of the Hackney School, demonstrate that the black community asserted its needs and drew upon its own resources to meet the challenge of Jim Crow. Black residents were not passive, and black advances came primarily from the efforts of black people. When black residents did take advantage of white resources, as in the case of the Campus YMCA night school, they did not simply accept subordination; they challenged the paternalist Jim Crow framework.

Jim Crow forced African Americans in Chapel Hill to rely on the goodwill of individual white citizens, the county government, and northern philanthropic foundations to supplement their own efforts to build a new school for their children. John Henry Strowd, a local black man, sold six and a half acres of his land to the county “at a reasonable price” for the new

school. As always, the black members of the community had to cover every disaster and setback, even the loss of a so-called “public” facility, by giving up more of their own meager property and income. With black wealth severely restricted, and public funds for black education almost non-existent, the black community was forced into dependence on leading white citizens to help procure private funds. Forcing such dependence was, in fact, one of the principal social control mechanisms of Jim Crow. A committee of white citizens, professors M. C. S. Noble, Charles S. Mangum, and J. S. Holmes, aided the black community in getting grants for the new school. The county provided \$15,000 toward a new building, while the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$2,550. The Slater Fund and the Jeanes Fund, as well as the Rosenwald Fund provided money for teacher salaries until 1930. The local black community had to raise the funds to equip the school and for other necessities.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, African Americans succeeded in making Orange County Training School into a richly affirming and uplifting institution for their children and the entire community.<sup>55</sup> The effort that went into accomplishing this is exemplified by the black community’s grassroots organizing campaign for a new school.

The spirit of black community solidarity was evident in the months following the loss of the OCTS school building in 1922. As the *Chapel Hill Weekly* noted, “Since the destruction of their building by fire, the colored children of the training school have been in difficulties for a suitable place to go on with their work. At present the local branch of the colored Odd

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<sup>54</sup>“Negro School to be up by Oct. 1,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, July 3, 1924; Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 65.

<sup>55</sup>Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 199-201. For testimony from Orange County Training School students about their school, see an excellent study by Hill, “Local Histories/Local Memories.”

Fellows, of which organization John W. Johnson is the Noble Grand, are giving the use of the Odd Fellows' hall, free of charge.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite the recent devastation, twenty-four children trained by principal B. L. Bozeman performed a play at the Baptist church on April 4, 1923 to benefit the black farmers and the part-time and “project students” of Orange County.<sup>57</sup> The play was called a “seasonal sequence dialogue.” The *Chapel Hill Weekly* commented that the play “was a credit to the colored population of the town. The characters were skillfully costumed to represent the seasons and the various plants, and in their speeches they told of the best methods of cultivation, and how crops should be rotated.” With the theme and purpose of the play so clearly connected with the training of farmers and improvement of the black community, the teachers were encouraging the children to feel they were performing a valuable community service. The attention devoted to their costumes by parents and the direction they received from the principal himself encouraged these youngsters to feel valued. In fact, they were learning to become community builders, despite the system of Jim Crow that did not respect them or their community.

The great failure of desegregation in Chapel Hill in the 1960s was that this environment of affirmation was not reproduced for black students in the integrated schools. As Bettye King, a former OCTS student said, “Black kids were used to having an assembly every week or if not every week at least every two weeks. They would have an assembly where it gave

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<sup>56</sup>“Colored Children Give Play: Performance at Baptist Church Illustrates Seasons and Crops,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 5, 1923.

<sup>57</sup>“Project students” were OCTS students who performed agricultural projects at home based on what they learned in school. Under the close supervision of a teacher, students raised crops, such as alfalfa, or farm animals, such as cows, chickens, or turkeys. The students sold these products and kept the proceeds. Some entered contests at the “colored State Fair” and competed for cash prizes. In this way, OCTS also served as a survival mechanism for black families. See “Colored Children’s Poultry Profits,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, November 15, 1923.

the kids a chance to express themselves, any kind of talent they had. They could feel like they were excelling if they had a chance to express themselves. All of this was taken away from them [by desegregation]. Everything had to be academic. I think they lost a lot.”<sup>58</sup> Such commentary can help us understand the central importance of an affirming culture for black freedom during Jim Crow.

Six weeks after the student play, black educators once again highlighted the centrality of education for the black community and the importance of culture as a central component of black freedom. Orange County Training School held its commencement exercises, and they lasted a week. The speaker selected for the final exercise of the commencement was James B. Dudley, president of the Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro. OCTS was the only black school in Orange County with a significant high school department, and the selection of President Dudley surely reinforced the hope of black educators that many of their students would go on to college.

The next day, when the OCTS final exercises were held, the black community showed its enthusiasm by overflowing the largest black church in Chapel Hill. Black educators used the opportunity to publicize subtly the unmet needs of the black community to the white guests and media. Principal Bozeman declared the year of disaster as the most successful of his four-year tenure. He then praised the cooperation of both black and white citizens with the teachers as the formula for the “unusual success” of OCTS. Finally, he noted the inadequate number of teachers (seven) for the three hundred enrolled students, and called upon the

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<sup>58</sup>Hill, “Local Histories/Local Memories,” 62.

community to mobilize and contribute to the task of rebuilding the school in expectation of even more students.<sup>59</sup>

Representative of the grassroots efforts of the black community to raise funds was the “Negro Children’s Rally” held in December 1924. To celebrate the opening of the new building, the school children “made up a fund as a gift to the institution.” “The first count of the money contributed by the children showed that the first grade had given \$9.20, the second grade \$6.20, the third grade, \$8.45, the fourth and fifth grades, \$19.45, the sixth and seventh grades \$13.25, the eighth grade \$9.25, the ninth grade \$9.00, the tenth grade \$7, and the eleventh grade \$4.00. This made a total of \$85.80, but before night more gifts had brought it to \$105.00. More than 70 children gave \$1.00 each.”<sup>60</sup> In this way, the children stood together against the power of white supremacy. Despite material poverty, the spiritual wealth of the black community would fund a rising freedom struggle to overwhelm Jim Crow in the years ahead.

### *White Reform And The Black Struggle For Public Health*

Public health was another area where Jim Crow imposed hardships on the black community. To deal with the health needs of their community, African Americans had to rely primarily on their own collective resources, rather than public appropriations. When growing concerns about the impact of disease in the black community on white residents prompted

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<sup>59</sup>“F. D. Bluford Spoke: Final Event of Colored School Drew Big Crowd,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, May 31, 1923.

<sup>60</sup>“Negro Children’s Rally: They Make Contributions for the New School Building,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, Dec. 18, 1924.

reform efforts by town and university leaders, black residents seized upon these resources and reshaped them according to their own vision of black freedom.

As the institution that overshadowed all others, the university had a large impact on public health in the black community. In particular, this had to do with the failure of the university to provide clean water and sewers to black sections of Chapel Hill. UNC's power, in this instance, resulted from the fact that the university actually owned and operated most public utilities up until the mid-1970s. The dominance of the university was acknowledged in a comprehensive study of Chapel Hill's black community done by one of Howard Odum's students in 1943. Charles Maddry Freeman wrote, "The town of Chapel Hill cooperates with the University and divides responsibility for town affairs with it. This is particularly true in the administration of public services, where the University owns the water, light, and telephone systems, while the town owns the sewer system."<sup>61</sup>

Although the campus and surrounding white neighborhoods got electric lights by the turn of the century, as late as 1944 parts of the black community of Chapel Hill had no electricity.<sup>62</sup> This same pattern of skimping on the black community while developing services for the white community—essentially a transfer of resources from the black community to white residents—is evident in services that more directly affected public health.

"As early as 1906," wrote one Chapel Hill historian, "aldermen began discussing the extension of sewage lines into the black communities of Potter's Field, Sunset, and Tintop to the west of town, but it was after World War II before the lines extended to the entire western

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<sup>61</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 15; Jones, *Study of Housing*, 11.

<sup>62</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 19.

section.”<sup>63</sup> Water and sewer first came to parts of the black community in 1926. Action may have been provoked by a public health survey conducted by a UNC graduate student in 1925. The survey demonstrated that, “sanitary conditions were still poor. For the entire Negro community there were only 15 water connections and ten sewer connections. There were 144 outside toilets. Water came from 22 open wells and one spring.”<sup>64</sup> The year before, a study found, “nearly all the surface wells in Potter’s Field were polluted.”<sup>65</sup> In contrast, as early as 1913, “privies were prohibited between Rosemary and Franklin Streets from Church Street to the east boundary of town.”<sup>66</sup> Clearly, water and sewer lines were available to all residents of the designated area, which corresponded to the white business district and neighborhoods of Chapel Hill.

In 1926, “sewers were finally ordered on Church, Lindsay, McDade, and Cotten Streets, the sewers connecting with the west outfall which had passed through that section all the time.”<sup>67</sup> The reasons for doing this advanced in the Board of Aldermen meetings had nothing to do with racial justice and everything to do with the needs of white Chapel Hill. “In the discussion which followed,” minutes of the Board of Aldermen’s meeting declared, “it was brought out that the unsanitary condition brought about by not having sewerage in this section could be a real menace to the health of the community.”<sup>68</sup> The “menace” was

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<sup>63</sup>Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 103.

<sup>64</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 47.

<sup>65</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 47.

<sup>66</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 17.

<sup>67</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 18.

<sup>68</sup>Board of Commissioners, Minute Book No. 3, November 11, 1921, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C., quoted in Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 18.

emanating from unsanitary conditions in the black community, since white residents already had sewers and clean water.

For some time, there had been growing concern in the white community that communicable diseases in the black community were adversely affecting white residents. As early as 1913, the university YMCA students had conducted a housing and sanitation survey of the black community. In promoting this work, Professor Stuart Willis noted, “We are realizing that our economic and civic life is advanced or retarded by [the Negro’s] conditions of living. He washes our clothes in his home. Shall his home be sanitary and free from disease?”<sup>69</sup>

Until 1921, private voluntary organizations, including the YMCA and the Community Club, dealt with public health concerns in Chapel Hill. In that year, the town created a Board of Health. In one of its first investigations, the Board discovered that 30 percent of food handlers in Chapel Hill were active syphilitics.<sup>70</sup> The Health Department of the Community Club had hired white public health nurses prior to this time, but they were apparently ineffective in the black community. This led to the decision to hire Nurse A. D. Compton, a black professional nurse from Durham.

In November, 1923, at a meeting of the Health Department of the Community Club, Mrs. H. D. Carter, chairman, reported that she had raised funds to “engage a colored nurse who will go about among her people and spread the gospel of sanitation and health preventive

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<sup>69</sup>Willis, “A Glimpse at the Other Half.” For a discussion of health issues in the black community during Jim Crow, see Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 46-57; Smith, “Public Welfare Problems”; Vickers, *Chapel Hill*, 102-3. For the university’s management of public utilities 1900-30, see Henderson, *Campus*.

<sup>70</sup>Board of Commissioners, Minute Book No. 3, September 7, 1923, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C..

measures.”<sup>71</sup> Nurse Compton moved to Chapel Hill on New Year’s Eve in 1923. She had previously served as the assistant to the head nurse at Lincoln Hospital, the institution that served African Americans in Durham.

The conditions that led to the hiring of Nurse Compton were longstanding. When she arrived in 1924, “the Negro section had no lights or sewerage, and waste was taken away from houses by wagon.”<sup>72</sup> The university, which owned the power and water utilities, had never extended these services to the black neighborhoods. Although UNC piped water from its intake main through the black community, the water remained untreated until it got to the campus. It was then pumped back to most of the white sections of town, but not to the black community. Therefore, twenty-two open wells and one spring served the Pottersfield section. The town health officer surveyed these wells in 1924 and found that nearly all were polluted. Although representatives of the black community had “petitioned the town government more than once” to install water and sewer connections, sewers could not be made operational until the university extended water service to black Chapel Hill.<sup>73</sup>

Although the hiring of Nurse Compton came as a result of concern for the wellbeing of the white community, African Americans eagerly took advantage of her services. Their role in this arena exemplifies the leadership and grassroots community mobilization strategies that African Americans relied on to combat the effects of Jim Crow. During her first month of work, Nurse Compton launched a vigorous grassroots effort to engage the black

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<sup>71</sup>“Colored Folks Health: Discussed at Meeting at Home of Mrs. Durham,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, November 8, 1923.

<sup>72</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 51

<sup>73</sup>“Colored People Hope for Water: Mains and Sewers to be Installed as Soon as New System is Completed: Conditions now Unsanitary,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, Aug. 9, 1923. For the history of the university water works, see Henderson, *Campus*, 297-302. For assertions about the cause of failure to install water and sewer in “Water Service for West End,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, Nov. 8, 1923.

community and white allies in a public health campaign. She introduced herself to the community, began providing services, tapped the resources of black institutions, and solicited help from concerned members of the white community.

Her first organizing act was to learn about the community by going door-to-door to more than two hundred homes. In this way, she discovered a dozen undiagnosed cases of measles, whooping cough, and tuberculosis. She also visited the black schools of the area to give short health talks and enlist the support of black educators and parents in “a modern health crusade.” Finally, she began organizing a “clean-up campaign” to cover both the outside and inside of homes in the area. One focus of this effort was to improve the sanitary conditions of outhouses. Her plan was to “organize the people into committees to sell clean-up tickets at 5 cents each . . . to create a small fund for buying lime and other necessaries.” The aim was for this program to become a permanent feature of community life. Nurse Compton made herself available to the public at the home of Mittie Kirkland, where she was a roomer. She installed a telephone and set up an office next door as a place to receive patients.

Nurse Compton’s approach to public health work reflected the black freedom strategies of her era. She asked for help from public resources and private white service organizations and individuals, but she did not rely on these resources. She did her best to arouse and mobilize the entire black community to join the effort, beginning by enlisting the involvement of community institutions, such as black schools. She created ways for people to become involved, such as “tickets at 5 cents,” that even poor black workers could manage. She made herself accessible by installing a phone and setting up an office at her home. In all of these ways, Nurse Compton acknowledged and reinforced black freedom traditions that relied on the strength of African Americans in an age of disfranchisement and negligible

wealth. She mobilized the entire community in a campaign that emphasized black self determination and collective struggle. Later, in the 1960s, black communities from Birmingham to Chapel Hill would reach the conclusion that only massive grassroots mobilization could assemble sufficient force and moral authority to overthrow Jim Crow. Although the 1960s was a different era requiring different black freedom strategies and tactics, black youths built on longstanding traditions.

Members of the Health Department of the Community Club solicited contributions from the white community to help Nurse Compton's work. Mrs. H. D. Carter, president of the Community Club, appealed for "old sheets, pillow cases, or blankets, or clean soft cloths that could be used for bandages . . . . Furniture is also needed for the office—tables, chairs, rugs, wash-stand, couch, and a chest of drawers."<sup>74</sup> Just as white families had always contributed old clothes and left over food to their cooks and maids, rather than pay living wages, the white community asked for contributions of "old sheets" rather than press for public appropriations. By enforcing poverty in this way, white people retained paternalistic control of black lives.

In fact, although white residents promoted health work among African Americans primarily to safeguard their own community, financial support for Nurse Compton was grudging.<sup>75</sup> The initial funds for her salary included \$450 from the Red Cross, \$450 from the sale of tuberculosis stamps, and \$300 provided by the black community. For two years, the

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<sup>74</sup>For details of Nurse Compton's first month of organizing and solicitations by the Community Club, see "The Colored Nurse: Is Doing Valuable Work Among Her People," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, February 7, 1924.

<sup>75</sup>There is no doubt that concern for the white community was the primary motivation of the Community Club. In Freeman's 1944 thesis he summarized an interview he conducted with Mrs. H. D. Carter on August 15, 1943: "The club's first interest in the Negro community was shown in the suggestion that they hire a Negro nurse rather than a white one, since the colored community had a disproportionate share of disease and unsanitary conditions and since these affected the white community." Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 48.

Board of Aldermen declined to provide a \$450 annual appropriation for her salary. Finally, Alderman R.D.W. Connor, professor at the university, successfully argued for a public appropriation by framing his appeal in the language of white supremacy. Connor stated, “in so much as the work being done by the nurse in the colored homes was a protection to the white community and in so much as the negroes of the Town listed for taxes last year, property valued at more than \$200,000 and paid into the Town Treasury over \$1500 in taxes, and that in making this appropriation the expenditure for the direct benefit of the negroes would not exceed the amount they pay in taxes.”<sup>76</sup>

Although Nurse Compton became the first black professional employee of the Town of Chapel Hill, it appears that the town never fully accepted responsibility for public health in the black community. As late as 1943-44, the town budget called for a \$600 appropriation for her salary, yet an additional \$150 was to come from the sale of tuberculosis seals, \$30 from the Mary Baily Pratt Memorial Fund, and the rest of the nurse’s \$900 yearly salary—cut to that level in 1930-31—from funds raised by the black community.<sup>77</sup>

Although the black community struggled to raise funds to help with Nurse Compton’s salary, it also took on a larger role in guiding her work. In 1926, partly resulting from the difficulty of fundraising, a Negro Health Club was organized. Although the Club worked under the direction of Harry T. Comer, director of the university YMCA, it was composed of African American men and women. Moreover, it was officially recognized by both the Community Club and the Town Council and “empowered to promote other health programs

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<sup>76</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 48; Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen, Minute Book No. 4, Feb. 1, 1926, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C.

<sup>77</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 51.

in addition to the main job of raising money for the nurse fund.”<sup>78</sup> The club discussed its hopes to one day establish “a small hospital, day nursery, and clinic.”<sup>79</sup> In this way, despite disfranchisement, African Americans slowly increased their political voice in Chapel Hill.

The high level of black community support for Nurse Compton’s work is evidenced by the way the community utilized its resources to raise money for her salary. In 1929, for instance, the Negro Health Club organized a Negro Health Week. This began by mobilizing support through the black churches. Each minister gave a sermon at the beginning of the week announcing the goal of raising \$300 for Nurse Compton’s salary and explaining the organizing strategy. This involved a door-to-door canvass of the community by members of the Negro Health Club, including Kennon Cheek, chairman of the committee, John W. Johnson, Florence Edwards, Walter Hackney, and Sarah Caldwell.<sup>80</sup>

Despite these efforts, it became increasingly difficult for the black community to raise funds during the Depression. In 1931 the YMCA worked with the Negro Health Club to sponsor an annual fundraising football game between the Orange County Training School and a visiting black team. The principal of OCTS secured the teams, while athletic officials from the university refereed the games. In 1942, the last year of this effort for which records have been found, the football game raised \$115.46.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 49.

<sup>79</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 50.

<sup>80</sup>“Negro Health Week: Colored Citizens Raising Fund for the Support of a Nurse,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, November 29, 1929. Cheek (27, UNC janitor), Johnson (40, bricklayer), and Hackney (33, construction laborer) lived in Chapel Hill, while Edwards (56, sharecropper) and Caldwell (34, public school teacher) lived in the township. U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C., 1930.

<sup>81</sup> Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 50.

Despite Chapel Hill's growing image as the enlightened heartland of North Carolina, health problems in the black community were severe. The Depression made the slow gains that black residents had struggled for even harder to maintain. Yet, year after year, Nurse Compton persevered. In 1930 she organized three religious health clubs among women in different parts of the black community. As late as the early 1940s, two of these clubs functioned, involving seventy-five to eighty members. Before 1935, since there were no black doctors in Chapel Hill, Nurse Compton induced African American physicians from Durham to conduct baby clinics and perform reduced rate tonsillectomies.<sup>82</sup> Durham had a far larger black population than Chapel Hill and a relatively thriving middle class.

In addition to Nurse Compton's lectures and clinics at OCTS, she established a clinic room at the school furnished by contributions from the black community. There, in 1936, Erika Zimmermann of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* noted that Nurse Compton intended to teach a "training course in bedroom practice for the graduating class. A bed, cabinet, linoleum on the floor, await the class—but they need a mattress for which funds must be given."<sup>83</sup>

Zimmermann also made clear, possibly unwittingly, that for every effort Nurse Compton put forth, the refusal of white Chapel Hill to adequately fund her work and the poverty enforced by Jim Crow on the black community rose up against her. "Nurse Compton gives out sickroom equipment to those in need. But, because of lack of financial support, she must launder the returned linen herself, which takes up a good deal of the time which might be spent to better advantage."

Summing up the work that Nurse Compton did for thirteen years, the Zimmerman wrote, she "carried on her shoulders the main burden of health work among the Negro population of

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<sup>82</sup> Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 52.

<sup>83</sup> Zimmermann, "Seal Sale Aids Work of Nurse," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, December 4, 1936.

Chapel Hill.” While the Town of Chapel Hill never paid the full salary of Nurse Compton, as it should have, since her work benefited the entire community, the university, as an institution, apparently paid nothing at all.

*The Negro Civic Club Organizes A Black Election For  
Public Education In Chapel Hill*

The black community’s movement building experience gained through efforts such as the public health campaign and the school building campaign led to the formation of a more comprehensive black political institution, the Negro Civic Club. It was symptomatic of the dramatic growth of the black community during the 1920s that A. D. Clark, a relative newcomer, was among those who took the lead in this new organization.

Clark was born in 1890 and grew up near the tiny mill village of Bynum about fifteen miles south of Chapel Hill. After serving in World War I, he joined thousands of other black residents of rural North Carolina and migrated in search of a better life. Many moved north to urban centers like Philadelphia or New York. Clark moved only as far as Chapel Hill.

Expanding job opportunities at the university may have been what attracted Clark to Chapel Hill. Arriving with his new wife in 1919, he began working at UNC as “a yard hand.” For ten years he worked as a janitor in one of the dormitories. In his final years at the university, Clark worked as a janitor and a mail clerk in the library. All told, Clark worked thirty-six years for the university.

In a 1974 interview, Clark recalled that when he came to Chapel Hill, the black community was “Nothing. Just a few people here. It was just a little country town anyway. When I came here in 1919 there wasn’t nothing here much. They had about 700 students at

the University. It grew, of course, it has grown like everything since then.” Asked if there were “any black students?” Clark scoffed, “No. They weren’t allowed to come in the back door hardly. . . . We were just janitors and colored folks, black folks now.”<sup>84</sup>

In 1927, Clark was one of eight men who founded the Negro Civic Club. Three men were janitors at the university—Clark, Eugene White, and Charles Craig. Walter Hackney, also a member of the Negro Health Club, was a barber. The fifth man, Hubert Robinson, was the chauffeur of the university president. There were two ministers, Rev. J. S. Miller and Rev. J. S. Holt. Charles Maddox was a waiter at the university.

Clark explained that the group was formed to advocate for the black community before the town Board of Aldermen. “We organized [the Civic Club] and we were very active,” he remembered. “The only group here that had any power or any energy to go down and report the necessary things the Negroes needed here in Chapel Hill such as keeping up the town governments, protesting for street lights and any consideration we thought we needed. We would always go to the board.”

Charles Craig, the group’s long-time president, noted in a 1944 interview that the club was organized as the result of the “realization on the part of a group of interested citizens about the conduct of both the younger people and less thoughtful groups and the general condition in the Negro section, and lack of educational facilities and those things that have to do with the civic life of the people.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Clark interview, 1974. Even in 1974, A.D. Clark still felt the weight of Jim Crow. Perhaps caught by surprise, Clark replied honestly, if with harsh sarcasm. Immediately he corrected himself: “I mustn’t say that. You are recording what I’m saying.”

<sup>85</sup>Quoted in Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 103.

In both Charles Craig's statement and in later public actions, Civic Club members emphasized their concern with social control of disorderly elements in the black community itself, in one case referring to "the low moral practice of some of our people."<sup>86</sup> While this was probably a genuine concern of the established black leadership of Chapel Hill, it was also clear to these men that white leaders in Chapel Hill would be more likely to address the concerns of black Chapel Hill if they felt problems in the black community threatened their own power and privilege. While the proposals of the Civic Club were prefaced with concerns about low morals and disorder, issues of concern to white leaders, they focused on the fundamental needs of the entire black community. Civic Club members appealed to white self-interest to obtain improved municipal services, education, jobs, and recreation.

In one of its earliest activities, the Civic Club launched the first black electoral initiative of the Jim Crow era on behalf of black public education. In 1930, the trustees of the Chapel Hill Graded School District decided to include the black population in the special tax district. At that time, the black community was advocating for an extension of the Orange County Training School term from six to eight months. This was becoming an embarrassment to the university. Of all the black high schools in the state, OCTS was the only one operating on a short six-month term. "This is more significant," noted the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, "because in Chapel Hill is located the great University of North Carolina, making Chapel Hill an educational center and leader in one respect and entirely behind the whole state in the other."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>From Charles C. Craig, President, Negro Civic Club, to The Honorable Board of Aldermen, Town of Chapel Hill, N. C., May 10, 1943. Quoted in Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 105.

<sup>87</sup>"Fund for Negro School: Campaign Has Raised \$153 and Other Contributions are Solicited," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, Feb. 21, 1930.

The high visibility fundraising tactics employed by the black community increased pressure on the university. The black community had already secured a pledge from the Rosenwald Fund to give \$800 if the community raised the same. “The negro leaders themselves” had raised five hundred dollars, and to raise the remainder, renowned playwright Paul Green hosted a fundraising event at the Playmakers Theater at UNC. Publicity for this program appeared in the local newspaper. “A program of negro spirituals will be put on by the Colored Community Chorus, assisted by the Silver Tongued Colored Quartet, from 8:30 to 10:15 o’clock Sunday evening in the Playmakers Theatre. Paul Green will also appear on the program and will read his new play, ‘Potter’s Field.’”<sup>88</sup> The title of one of the spirituals, “Ain’t it a Shame,” seemed to mock Chapel Hill’s liberal pretensions. Worse, Paul Green’s play depicted life in a black slum with the same name as Chapel Hill’s main black neighborhood. In this way, black grassroots organizing recruited Paul Green as an ally, and together they focused public attention on the contradiction between UNC’s democratic rhetoric and the reality of Jim Crow.

Another factor that stirred political controversy was the offer of the Orange County Commissioners to take over the Chapel Hill school system. While this would relieve some of the tax burden on town property owners, it would mean loss of political control of the town’s white school system to the county. The *Weekly* posed this “danger” as a purely financial question. Yet there is no doubt that the leaders of Chapel Hill did not relish the idea of rural farmers being in charge of their elite schools.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>“Negroes to Sing Sunday: And Paul Green Will Read His New Play, ‘Pottersfield,’” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, March 7, 1930. The name of the black community was spelled Potters Field or Pottersfield, with Pottersfield the more modern usage.

<sup>89</sup>“County May Make Offer to Take Over Chapel Hill School,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, June 28, 1929.

The trustees of the Chapel Hill Graded School District eventually gave their approval for a special election to determine if the African American people of Chapel Hill would be willing to tax themselves to become part of the town's system of public schools. Given this opening, members of the Negro Civic Club went to work sponsoring voter education and registration rallies. On May 17, 1930 black citizens disfranchised in 1900 and excluded from the Chapel Hill special tax district because of their race, voted to tax themselves for public schools ninety-nine to four. The Civic Club registered one hundred forty-three new voters.<sup>90</sup> In this way, the black community won the principle of public town funding for black education and regained a significant voice in electoral politics, which men like William B. Aycock had hoped to eliminate for all time through disfranchisement and segregation.

### *UNC Employment Practices Make Jim Crow*

The most powerful way the university made Jim Crow was through its employment practices and its influence on employment in Chapel Hill. This influence increased as the university expanded throughout the Jim Crow era. During the 1950s, UNC played an important part in the development of a personnel system for state workers that impacted employment practices throughout the state.

As noted earlier, the university created Chapel Hill in 1793 and it remained the primary dynamic force determining the town's development. This meant that most economic opportunities depended on the growth and practices of the university. In particular, virtually all employment in Chapel Hill derived directly or indirectly from the university during this

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<sup>90</sup>“Enlarge District: New Territory Added to Special School Tax Area,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, May 23, 1930.

period. In ways just as extreme as the domination of Winston-Salem by R. J. Reynolds Tobacco, Greensboro by Cone Mills, or Durham by American Tobacco, Chapel Hill was a company town, and UNC was the company.

Although the university did not directly employ many black workers in 1900 due to its small size, most of the black employment opportunities throughout Chapel Hill were geared toward servicing the needs of the university. Many students found rooms in the town and dined at local eateries. Black workers staffed these establishments. Faculty members hired black cooks, maids, and gardeners, while both students and professors relied on black women to launder their clothes. Black workers built university buildings, graded roads, disposed of garbage, and did most of the other laboring tasks in Chapel Hill. During the Jim Crow era, some African Americans continued to work at skilled trades, and a small black business and professional sector developed in Chapel Hill as a result of segregation.<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, the trustees set employment standards for the university. Just as the Democratic Party represented the power of New South industrialists, the trustees appointed by the Democratic legislature represented capital. The power of these oligarchs to determine employment practices at the university during Jim Crow is revealed in a 1913 letter to UNC President Francis P. Venable from Julian Carr, a wealthy industrialist and university trustee. Carr's contribution of \$500 was the largest single gift to the fund for the UNC Soldiers Monument, and he spoke at the unveiling ceremonies in 1913. In 1900, the university named a building for Carr after he donated most of the cost of construction. On January 20, 1913 Carr wrote to the university president concerning the naming of "Venable, the factory town West of Chapel Hill. If I remember correctly, you were not especially pleased that the town

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<sup>91</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930.

had been named as a compliment to you. Since then my boys and I have purchased the other Tom Lloyd mill, and we now own about all of Westend, otherwise styled Venable, and I am thinking that if I had your consent, I would have the name changed from Venable to Carrsboro (sic).”<sup>92</sup>

Carr’s letter suggests the vast economic power that enabled him to have buildings and towns named after him, negotiate casually with a university president, and set the terms of employment in his factories. Like textile manufacturers across the state, Carr refused employment in his Carrboro mills to black workers, except in a few low-wage laboring positions. At the same time, as a university trustee, he helped maintain practices that restricted black workers to menial service and laboring positions at the university.<sup>93</sup>

The university made Jim Crow throughout the period 1900 to 1960 by consistently enforcing white supremacy norms of black subordination and white privilege in its employment practices. This did not mean that the university paid black workers less than white workers for doing the same work. “Equal pay for equal work” was never a racial issue at UNC during the era of Jim Crow. Instead, the university refused to hire black workers except in low wage laboring and menial job classifications, while it hired white workers only in higher wage, supervisory, and professional job categories. No law required this of the university. Rather, a disciplined adherence to the vision of Aycock ensured “the essential superiority of the white man” and the “unending separation of the races.” “Preference for white labor,” as the Chapel Hill News had called for in 1898 was the employment norm enforced by white employers during Jim Crow.

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<sup>92</sup>Julian Carr to Francis Venable, 20 January 1913, UP.

<sup>93</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1900, 1910.

The university's employment practices made Jim Crow both materially and culturally. Just as housing segregation allowed the university to shortchange the black community in terms of public utilities, job segregation allowed the university to confine black workers to distinct low wage job categories. This was a growing hardship for the black community as the number of white collar jobs at UNC steadily increased. The university completely excluded African Americans from any share in these jobs, regardless of their qualifications. While it may be that capitalism creates poverty as the necessary cost of wealth and privilege, the *racial* character of poverty in Chapel Hill was strictly due to the enforcement of Jim Crow. Culturally, the lesson by example of Jim Crow labor relations on campus, the university's practical everyday pedagogy, perpetuated the racial low wage caste system in three ways: it demonstrated to white workers that Jim Crow offered them privileges relative to African Americans, thereby promoting their allegiance to the Democratic Party and white supremacy; it taught students, soon to become North Carolina's leaders, that white privilege and black subordination were university sanctioned norms; and it taught, or attempted to teach, "the negro" the "recognition. . . of his own inferiority." These arguments can be more fully understood by examining the historical development of the university's job structure and the impact of its institutional growth..

### *Growth of the University and the Proletarianization of Labor in Chapel Hill*

During more than sixty years of Jim Crow, the university and its teaching hospital, completed in 1952, became ever more dominant in the employment patterns of Chapel Hill. Although the university had always been indirectly responsible for most local employment,

in 1900 UNC directly accounted for less than 6 percent of the jobs held by town residents. That proportion rose to 13 percent in 1910, 19 percent in 1920, and 37 percent in 1930.<sup>94</sup> Thus, the economic well-being of black workers, their hopes for better lives, and the viability of their neighborhoods and institutions were heavily influenced by the university's employment practices throughout the era of Jim Crow.

The university's turn-of-the-century job structure, reflecting the antebellum pattern, featured five black "servants" supporting twenty professors, six instructors, seven assistants, and just over five hundred students. All UNC employees were male, while approximately 13 percent of the university workforce was African American.

From 1900 to 1930 the university expanded its workforce from 38 to 425. Black workers held 79 jobs at the university in 1930, or approximately 19 percent of all jobs, despite their 33 percent share of the town's permanent population. One reason their percentage of UNC jobs was so much lower than their percentage of total population was that they were completely excluded from jobs above the level of common labor. In 1930 UNC employed thirty-six black janitors, twenty laborers, nine cooks, six waiters, five laundry workers, a housecleaner, a helper, and a maid. No white worker filled a laboring position at UNC in 1930.<sup>95</sup>

University Jim Crow employment practices excluded black workers from the middle and top levels of the employment hierarchy that developed after 1920. The middle level included a greatly expanded sector of skilled workers, lower level managers, and white-collar workers. This middle-income group of workers comprised roughly 37 percent of UNC employment.

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<sup>94</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C. 1900, 1910.

<sup>95</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1930.

At the top of the employment hierarchy, professors and administrators claimed about 43 percent of UNC jobs.<sup>96</sup>

Many of the new employment opportunities created by the university's expansion were white-collar jobs, including positions as secretaries, stenographers, clerks, book-keepers, librarians, cashiers, and others. In 1930 there were 214 such jobs listed in the census, mostly at UNC. Of these new middle-income jobs, black workers held two (.9percent) as insurance agents not employed by the university. White women were the beneficiaries of most of these new jobs and, therefore, showed up for the first time as a large proportion of white university employment.

The employment practices of professors, despite the diversity of their backgrounds outside the South, conformed, almost without exception, to Jim Crow norms. In 1930, for instance, every maid, washerwoman, servant, and all but 2 of the 125 cooks in Chapel Hill were African American.<sup>97</sup>

Not surprisingly, Chapel Hill exhibited employment patterns similar to the university. According to the 1900 census, 85 percent of black workers in Chapel Hill held menial and common labor jobs. In 1910, 1920, and 1930, the figures were 92 percent, 90 percent, and 87 percent respectively.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the predominance of laboring jobs for African Americans, and the complete exclusion of black workers from higher-level positions at the university, there continued to be significant numbers of skilled black workers in Chapel Hill and some black professionals.

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<sup>96</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1930.

<sup>97</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1930.

<sup>98</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930.

The 1930 census for Chapel Hill showed that African Americans in the professional category included ten teachers, one doctor, two managers, one merchant, one barber, a professional nurse, two contractors, and one dentist. Black skilled workers included eleven plasterers, ten brick and stone masons, one lather, two tailors, two barbers, one shoemaker, one dress maker, two plumbers, two carpenters, and one seamstress.<sup>99</sup>

The menial quality of black employment predominated in the Town of Chapel Hill. Most black workers labored as cooks, servants, or gardeners in the homes of white professors, staffed the boarding houses and eateries that catered to students, and performed virtually all of the hard, dirty labor around town.<sup>100</sup> Black workers *served* white people and worked for white employers at extremely low wages, while most white workers enjoyed the relative privilege of not being forced to labor at the hardest, dirtiest jobs or to work as menials. Although many white workers had hard lives, the system of white privilege encouraged all white people to see themselves as having a common white identity distinctly superior to African Americans as a group.

Although it is difficult to make precise comparisons due to changes in the census employment categories, basic employment patterns had not changed dramatically by 1960. Approximately 76 percent of black workers in Chapel Hill toiled as private household workers, service workers, laborers, or low wage industrial workers. In contrast, only 11 percent of white Chapel Hill residents performed common labor. Of traditionally “Negro jobs,” African Americans were 158 of 169 “private household workers” (93.5 percent) and 67 of 103 “laborers” (65 percent). The color line still restricted black workers to 1.4 percent

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<sup>99</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1930.

<sup>100</sup>U.S. Census MS, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1930.

of sales workers, .6percent of clerical workers, and 0percent of managers.<sup>101</sup> Of traditionally “white jobs,” African Americans were 44 of 1,765 “professional, technical, and kindred workers” (2.5 percent), zero of 315 “managers, officials, and proprietors,” 4 of 602 “clerical and kindred workers” (0.7 percent), and 9 of 179 “sales” workers.

The growth of the university changed the structure of Jim Crow employment demographics in two important ways. First, it broadened the impact of Jim Crow at the university to include the full range of modern job categories and a broader cross section of the white population. Second, it institutionalized the jobs of a large number of black workers who had formerly been self-employed or who had worked as servants in white families. These changes had important implications for the maintenance of Jim Crow and the development of black freedom struggle.

While employing a broader cross section of white workers as it grew, the university continued to confine black hiring to the lowest wage categories. These practices strengthened Jim Crow. At the beginning of the twentieth century, employment at the university included two groups of workers, white professors and black servants, all men. There were few, if any, skilled tradesmen or white collar workers directly employed by the university in 1900. By 1930, the university employed significant numbers of women, including some black menial workers and a large number of white clerical workers. White skilled laborers like electricians and plumbers now worked directly for the university, as did white men in white collar positions. While the university increasingly offered employment opportunities, as well as educational opportunities, to a broad range of the white population, it continued to restrict black workers to laboring or menial jobs and denied them any educational opportunity. In

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<sup>101</sup>U.S. Census, Town of Chapel Hill, N.C. 1960, census abstract table 78, 35-227.

this way, the university brought all white workers, as well as white students, under the umbrella of white privilege. This was part of the way the university helped construct a sense of common whiteness that crossed class, gender, and other divides. In the 1950s, when “equal pay for equal work” became a norm at the university, at least rhetorically, job category discrimination at UNC defined black opportunities as separate and unequal. Yet the university could claim that it did not discriminate racially because it did not pay white workers more than black workers for doing the same work. In fact, they did not do the same work. The power of the university within state government played an important part in setting these patterns in stone during the 1950s, when Jim Crow employment patterns became institutionalized statewide through the development of a state personnel system.

The growth of the university and its Jim Crow employment practices created new possibilities for black freedom struggle by proletarianizing the black workforce.<sup>102</sup> The university eventually organized hundreds of black workers together in a common work environment. By 1930, many African American operatives worked at the university’s laundry facility, while many others worked as housekeepers, groundskeepers, and dining hall workers on the university campus or at the hospital. Most of these institutional jobs had formerly been menial labor performed by black workers for white families. With the tremendous growth of the university and its teaching hospital, these jobs became institutionalized, but they retained their menial status and low wages. By 1960, although 44

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<sup>102</sup>Framing the discussion in terms of proletarianization helps emphasize the process of class formation and the formation of an urban, service industry working class. Class formation was fundamental to the new, more militant labor strategies that black Chapel Hill workers adopted after 1937. For another discussion of proletarianization, see Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee*.

percent of black women workers still toiled as private household workers in Chapel Hill, more than half worked as service workers, technicians, and operatives at the university.<sup>103</sup>

As the university became an ever-larger service industry providing public utilities, cafeterias, the Carolina Inn, and janitorial and health care services for thousands of people, it became the main employer in Chapel Hill.<sup>104</sup> Jim Crow employment relationships that had been personal became institutionalized. Black workers still did menial service work, but, increasingly, they did it for the university under white supervisors rather than for white families. The character of labor also changed. Black women, in particular, gave up their ownership of the means of production, the huge black metal pots in which they laundered clothing, and went to work in university cafeterias or the university's steam laundry. They lost nearly all control over their labor process and their schedules, becoming part of a large, institutionalized workforce laboring under factory-like conditions. As the university grew, therefore, black workers in Chapel Hill became proletarianized at the same time that Jim Crow employment practices became institutionalized at the university. Potentially, this gave black workers a great deal of leverage, if they could successfully engage in labor organizing to challenge institutional power.

*Black Workers And The Daily Reality Of Jim Crow: Bruce Caldwell, Edna Lyde, And John Horbet Johnson*

The harsh daily reality, let alone the occasional horror, of Jim Crow employment practices cannot be conveyed through statistics. Most contemporary white accounts are

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<sup>103</sup>U.S. Census, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1960, census abstract table 78, p. 35-227.

<sup>104</sup>For the history of the Carolina Inn, a hotel and boarding house that became part of the university in the 1920s, see Zogry, *Carolina Inn*.

unreliable, since many of these writers were white supremacists. Interviews with black workers give a more authentic picture of the times.

In 1923, Cornelia Spencer Love wrote a book called *When Chapel Hill Was a Village* in which she described a black worker, Minnie Caldwell. Love was the granddaughter of Cornelia Phillips Spencer, the Chapel Hill white supremacist who helped overthrow Radical Reconstruction and restore the university to “its own.” Love wrote, “Minnie Caldwell, [was] a very handsome mulatto who in 1917 was the town beauty parlor, going from home to home to wash (not set) ladies’ hair. Minnie used to come to my room to wash my hair but this ceased when I let her have an old winter coat which she was to pay for in shampooing. She never came any more. . . .”<sup>105</sup>

In an oral history interview conducted by the author in 1992, Ed Caldwell Jr. angrily revised Love’s account. “Minnie Caldwell is my grandmother. Let me tell you why Minnie Caldwell never came back. Minnie Caldwell had eleven kids. Man, you know, she was having a tough time trying to feed those eleven kids. She needed money. She didn’t need no damn old coat that you handed down out of your closet. She could not translate that into taking care of kids.”<sup>106</sup>

Ed Caldwell explained that Minnie Caldwell had been married to Bruce Caldwell, a janitor at the university, who was descended from November Caldwell, one of the first university slaves. She had just lost her husband to a racist joke. “My grandfather, who was Bruce Caldwell, my father’s father, had a drinking problem. He had a problem with alcohol. And he worked in one of the chemical labs.” Ed remembered how his father and uncles cried when they told him how they had gone out to get his grandfather, going blind, stumbling up

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<sup>105</sup>Love, *When Chapel Hill Was A Village*, 40.

<sup>106</sup>Edwin Caldwell Jr. interview.

the hill to his home. “But the thing that got me,” Caldwell continued, “was that [a chemistry] professor had a dinner party, and there was a black servant. And [the professor] was down there bragging that he had poisoned this guy that worked in his lab. He switched the alcohol and he made a big thing out of it. I was furious. It hurt me.”

This evidence helps us grasp that Jim Crow was much more than low wage jobs, inferior education, and no plumbing. Long after the Wilmington massacre and the lynching of Manley McCauley, just beneath the surface of the structural inequality that Jim Crow enforced there was always racist terror.

Another story demonstrates the disrespect and violence that black workers had to deal with at the hands of racist university supervisors. Edna Mae Lyde left South Carolina’s Cotton fields when she was twelve because of Ku Klux Klan violence. In 1944, she moved to Chapel Hill, where she experienced a different kind of Jim Crow intimidation.

Edna Lyde’s first job in Chapel Hill was as a maid at the Carolina Inn. She stayed there three and a half years until an incident with her supervisor caused her to quit. “Mr. Moses come up. I was puttin’ sheets on the cart,” she explained. “He went to raisin’ sand. ‘Put ‘em back in the closet! Don’t try to put none on the cart! And don’t punch no card in!’ That’s what he said. I said, ‘Don’t make me no difference whether I punch the card or put the sheets on there.’ I said, ‘They’re your sheets and your card. It don’t matter with me.’ So I just pushed the cart back in the closet, grabbed my coat and pulled off. I left.” Shortly after that, Lyde and Moses argued on Cameron Avenue, near the Inn. He told her, “‘I’ll knock your head up against these pillars, knock your brains out.’ I said, ‘No you won’t. Both of us brains a be settin’ up on the pillar.’ Just like that.” This incident, reminiscent of the defiance of President Battle’s slave who told him, “I can supply back as long as you can supply whip,”

demonstrates the persistence of the violent forms of labor control deriving from slavery at UNC in the 1940s.<sup>107</sup>

Like Elizabeth Cotten, John Horbet Johnson was another young person who got no schooling because he had to work full time. He labored from an early age for his father cutting wood in the forest outside Chapel Hill. Even with the whole family working, Johnson remembered, his father's income from selling firewood to UNC fraternities and professors was not steady. "Sometimes he'd sell, and sometimes he wouldn't. Lotta times we'd have food, and again, we'd have to do without 'till we could get a little wood sold to get some." He also remembered that his father wanted to send all the kids to school, but he just could not afford to do it.<sup>108</sup>

Johnson's lack of education, fundamentally caused by Jim Crow politics and employment practices, destined him for a life of hard labor with limited opportunities for advancement. After being rejected by the army during World War II as an illiterate, Johnson moved to Chapel Hill. There, he first worked washing dishes and scrubbing floors in a café. Then, he got a job at the Navy Hospital, an infirmary operated by the Naval Preflight School, which took over much of the university during World War II. He washed pots, cleaned floors, transported patients, set up trays, and served food. After the completion of work on North Carolina Memorial Hospital, where he had worked as a construction laborer, Johnson began working at the university Power Plant around 1953.

It wasn't long before the supervisors discovered Johnson could drive a truck, and they assigned him the "special" job of cleaning the boilers and hauling "ash." Ash was the black, soot-like residue from the coal burning furnaces that heated the three-storey-tall boilers. Just

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<sup>107</sup>Edna Mae Lyde interview. See page 60 above for "I can supply back. . ." quote.

<sup>108</sup>John Horbet Johnson interview.

like the ash from a wood stove, it had to be constantly cleaned out to keep the equipment working properly. Johnson would load about twelve dump truck loads of ash, three days a week. When he finished that job, he'd help shovel coal.

At the end of the day, Johnson would hose out the dump truck and the loading machine to keep dry ash from flying all over Chapel Hill. Inevitably, Johnson himself was the primary person at risk from ash. Although the university provided protective gear—hard hat, goggles, mask, raincoat, boots, and gloves—these didn't do much to stop the sooty dust. "It'd get everywhere, just about, all over you, in you, in your eyes, everywhere. Anyplace where it could land. It'd get up your nose, mouth, ears. It was awful."

Before the ash could be loaded for transportation to the town dump, it had to be cleaned out and off of the boilers and pipes inside the Power Plant. Johnson used high pressure steam to clean out the boilers and suck the ash out into the "silo," where it was stored for loading. "After we get through pullin' the ashes [out of the boilers]," Johnson explained, "we had to go up on top of the boilers and vacuum the dust. See, when the furnace go out, a big puff of the ashes would somethin' like blow out, you know, cover the top of the boilers." Johnson would climb a metal catwalk onto the huge boilers to vacuum ash off their tops, and then climb down inside to scrape them out. They were still hot. "So hot," Johnson recalled, "you couldn't hardly stand it. You'd be sweatin' just like, water be runnin' off, like somebody was pourrin' out of a bucket on your head. And your feet be so hot you had to put a board down walk across on."

After cleaning off the boilers, the tops would be removed from the boilers so that Johnson could get down inside them to scrape off the remaining residues. Then he would clean out the condensers. "They have thing they call condenser. We had to take little stoppers with a air

machine, water machine, to blow the stopper, to clean out those little, they call 'em valves. Where the water circulates in. Had to help clean them. And it's wet and damp in there. Small place to get in and out. Just about like a snake crawlin' in. You had to go in, just like a fish to get in there. [I was] kinda small. Big man couldn't get in there. And sometime I get in there, feel like I'm swellin' and I'm worried am I gonna get out of this hole."

Probably as a result of long term exposure to soot and extremes of heat and humidity, Johnson acquired chronic lung disease. He was still fighting the university for compensation during his retirement. Like Minnie Caldwell, Elizabeth Cotten, and Edna Lyde, John Horbet Johnson made a life for himself and his family. These black workers did not only toil and sacrifice. They also had success, joy, and meaning in their lives, and they passed on a freedom legacy to the generations. Yet, it is well not to gloss over the impact of Jim Crow on their lives or the university's responsibility for their hardships.

### *The University Makes A Town Of White Haves And Black Have-nots*

The university's Jim Crow employment practices had a decisive effect on the development of class and race relations in Chapel Hill. The focus of the university on teaching and research created extremely polarized racial population characteristics in Chapel Hill. Unlike most of North Carolina's industrializing towns and cities, professionals headed a large proportion of white families in Chapel Hill. At the same time, there were few low wage white laborers or industrial workers living within the town limits. While few white professionals lived across the tracks (literally) in Carrboro, large numbers of white workers, as well as a considerable number of black workers, called the mill town home. Chapel Hill

followed the antebellum pattern of black servants attending white professionals and students, rather than the new urban-industrial model. It became a town of white “haves” and black “have-nots” to an unusual degree.

During Jim Crow, black families in Chapel Hill struggled to make ends meet, while a large proportion of white families lived comfortable middle class lives. During this era, black workers made far less relative to professors than they do today. In 1904, university servants made \$180 a year, while professors made \$2,000. If the same relative rates of pay existed today, either low wage workers would make on average less than \$8,650 per year, relative to full professors’ 2002-2003 average salary of \$96,010, or, since low wage UNC workers’ pay ranges from \$20,112 to \$27,418, professors would make between \$223,243 and \$304,339.<sup>109</sup> While the reasons for these changes over the course of a century call for further study, it seems likely that the real wages of Carolina’s laborers have increased due to black freedom struggle, while the real wages of professors have declined, possibly due to demands by the public since the nineteenth century that the university not be an aristocratic institution.

The relative wealth patterns and population characteristics of Chapel Hill evident in 1900 persisted. In 1960, white families made up 98.3 percent of those earning greater than \$10,000 per year, accounting for 536 families (32 percent of all white families). Black families made up 1.7 percent of those earning greater than \$10,000 per year, accounting for nine families (3 percent of all black families). Although nearly 83 percent of black families (247 of 299)

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<sup>109</sup>For the salary of UNC professors and servants in 1904, see Report of the President to the General Assembly of North Carolina, December 31, 1904 Minutes of the UNC Board of Trustees, UA. For the salaries of full professors (nine month tenured) in the College of Arts and Sciences, see “2001-2002 Faculty Salaries by School,” Office of Institutional Research & Assessment, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <<http://www.ais.unc.edu/ir/reports.html>>. For the pay range of UNC’s low wage workers (sales clerks, laboratory helpers, property guards, laborers, housekeepers, laundry workers, and food service assistants), see “(SPA) / State Class Specifications - Sorted by Salary Grade,” Office of Human Resources, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <<http://www.hr.unc.edu/Data/SPA/paysystems/specs/spec-grade>>.

earned less than \$5,000 per year, the black median family income of \$3,033 was comparable to that of industrial towns like Greensboro (\$3,185) and Charlotte (\$2,977), while it was considerably higher than agricultural towns in the East like Elizabeth City (\$2,265) or Greenville (\$1,940). Map from leloudis These differences probably reflected the relatively steady work afforded by factories and the university, compared to the lower wages and seasonal employment patterns of the agricultural areas. On the other hand, Chapel Hill's median family income of \$6,173 was the highest in the state for urban places. It also had the highest percentage of white collar workers (65.2 percent) and the lowest percentage of workers engaged in manufacturing (3.5 percent).<sup>110</sup>

The polarized demographic pattern of Chapel Hill had a particularly destructive impact on the black community. The extreme differential between the incomes of black workers and the affluence of the white community encouraged African American dependency on white goodwill. This dependency, while it did reap some benefits for the black community, exacted a heavy price. It meant that white people, who, in the main, supported Jim Crow norms of black subordination and white privilege, exercised a great deal of control over black lives. The threat that help would not be forthcoming if African Americans stepped out of line helped keep black people in their "place," whether that was toiling long hours for low wages or conforming to the demeaning standards of behavior required by Jim Crow. Reliance on white help undermined the development of the kinds of attitudes and organizations rooted in a sense of self-determination and mass struggle that proved necessary to challenge Jim Crow.

Some white observers concluded during Jim Crow that the black community benefited to an unusual degree from university jobs and the goodwill of the white community. A 1939

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<sup>110</sup>Calculated by the author from data in U.S. Census, Town of Chapel Hill N.C., General Economic and Social Characteristics for North Carolina, 1960, census abstract table 78, 35-227 and table 33, 76 35-217 and 78 35-237.

study of black churches in Chapel Hill done under UNC sociologist Guy Johnson stated this viewpoint particularly clearly.

In some respects Chapel Hill is not a typical small Southern community. Life in this town centers around the University of North Carolina. This circumstance affords many benefits to the Negro population, not the least of which is the interest that the white community takes in the local Negro situation. . . . [E]mployment opportunities open to the Negroes are better than average. The majority of them work as janitors, waiters, maids, laundresses, and cooks. Others have jobs in the shops and stores as delivery clerks and on the campus as ground-tenders. These jobs pay a medium wage and offer little opportunity for the accumulation of wealth, but for the most part the work is of a steady year-round type, since the summer session at the University attracts almost as many students as are present for the regular school term.<sup>111</sup>

Median family income for African Americans was considerably higher in Chapel Hill than in most other “urban places” in North Carolina.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, UNC professors sometimes took on projects to help the black community in areas such as education, public health, and recreation. Student groups, such as the Campus YMCA, at times carried out “settlement work.” More radical student groups during the 1940s sometimes helped black workers organize labor struggles or electoral campaigns.

Nevertheless, the benefits that African Americans derived from UNC and the white community must be analyzed critically. There would have been no need for professors or students to help the black community if the university had not enforced black poverty.. The “better than average” wages of black UNC workers noted in the 1939 study were only better than the average wages of black family servants and black farm laborers. Phrases like “better than average” obscured racist norms embedded in the sociological thinking of white liberals unwilling to challenge Jim Crow. While a black UNC janitor might earn more than some

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<sup>111</sup>Brown, “Negro Churches,” iii.

<sup>112</sup>U.S. Census, Town of Chapel Hill N.C. 1960, census abstract table 78, p. 35-227. Median family income for non-whites in Chapel Hill in 1960 was \$3,033. Among larger cities, Durham was a bit lower (\$2,882) while Greensboro was a bit higher (\$3,183). Small towns closer to Chapel Hill’s population tended to have median non-white family incomes ranging from \$200 to \$1000 less than Chapel Hill’s.

black workers in North Carolina, he earned far less than a living wage and less than any white worker at the university.

*The UNC Janitors Association: First Stirrings Of Organized Labor In Chapel Hill*

While the Negro Health Club and the Negro Civic Club, along with other church, school, and fraternal organizations, struggled to organize the black community, the need for a black labor organization at the university became more pressing as the Depression deepened. The potential for labor organizing also increased as the number of black workers at the university increased during the 1920s, from 30 in 1920 to approximately 140 in 1930.<sup>113</sup>

Rising labor militancy in North Carolina may also help explain the formation of the Janitors' Association in 1929. Beginning in 1927, southern textile workers organized a series of militant strikes that drew the attention of the nation and the world to the dismal conditions endured by white mill workers in North Carolina.<sup>114</sup> At the same time, prompted by the Depression, North Carolina legislators cut the wages of state employees by 10 percent.<sup>115</sup> Both of these factors may have influenced the UNC janitors to act collectively to improve their conditions.

The strategy of the janitors was patterned on that of the Negro Civic Club, not the militant unionism of North Carolina textile strikers or the industrial unionism that emerged in the mid-1930s. The strategy of the UNC janitors was to advance their goals cautiously,

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<sup>113</sup>U.S. Census MS, Chapel Hill Township and Carrboro, 1920 and 1930.

<sup>114</sup>For a discussion of this labor revolt see Hall, et. al, *Like a Family*, 212-36.

<sup>115</sup>Alan McSurely notes in *UNC Housekeepers, "Sixty Years of Struggle."* As part of the housekeepers' lawsuit against the university, settled out of court in 1996, graduate students searched the University Archives seeking evidence about the history of black workers at UNC. Alan McSurely, the housekeepers' lawyer, then wrote introductory notes and compiled a documentary history covering the period 1930-1991.

respectfully, with proper deference to white authority and the norms of Jim Crow. A. D. Clark, who had been a leader of both the Janitors' Association and the Negro Civic Club, explained this approach in 1974. Contrasting black youths during the protests of the 1960s with his own generation, Clark explained, "These young people, they don't have any fear as it was back there. There were certain paths you cut around and get in and come in the back door. They don't have it now, you know that."<sup>116</sup>

In 1940, when the Janitors' Association published the first issue of *The Voice of the Janitors' Association*, Frank W. Hairston explained the historical origins of the group.

The year 1929 and early part of 1930 will long be remembered by the Janitors of the University of North Carolina, especially by four humble servants employed by this Institution; namely, Kenon Cheek, Frank W. Hairston, Elliott Washington, and Melvin Rich. Rich was the sprayer; Cheek, Washington and Hairston were janitors in Venable Hall. These men had been working for the University for several years and as they would often meet up with each other, they would always discuss the many different problems that confronted them in their daily work. . . . As these thoughts began to formulate more seriously in their minds the question as to what would be the best course or way to present these thoughts to the other janitors, and would they be able to see the good that in time to come they would derive from it by being more closely connected together.<sup>117</sup>

In 1932, following a second 10 percent cut in the wages of state employees and a reduction in the hours of the janitors, the Janitors' Association wrote to P. L. Burch, the superintendent of the UNC Building Department. Kennon Cheek, vice-president of the Association, notified Burch of the janitors' determination to maintain the standards of cleanliness in the buildings. Cheek wrote, "To do this several of us will have to come early and stay late."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>A. D. Clark, interview.

<sup>117</sup>Hairston, "History," in *Voice of the Janitors' Association*, 1 (April 1940), reproduced in UNC Housekeepers, "Sixty Years of Struggle."

<sup>118</sup>From Kennon Cheek to P. L. Burch, 10 June 1932 in UNC Housekeepers, "Sixty Years of Struggle."

Apparently, President Frank Porter Graham decided to discuss the wage cut with the janitors, explaining to them the necessity of belt-tightening throughout the university.

Writing in *The Voice of the Janitors' Association* in 1940, Eugene White remembered this meeting.

My mind goes back to the year of January 26, 1932 when Dr. Frank Porter Graham came to lecture to us concerning the financial conditions of the University, and said we would have to take a cut in our wages due to the depression, which will never be forgotten. I remember he said we would play ball together and would come through. During this time there was a loan fund being set up in the University whereby students could borrow money to stay in college. When Dr. Graham had finished his speech and reaching for the door to leave, there was a movement made by Mr. Kenon Cheek that we donate to President Graham \$5.00 for the loan fund which was seconded and carried by vote. This brought Dr. Graham back for another speech. Dr. Graham said we were the first organization to give a donation to the loan fund.<sup>119</sup>

Not long after this, President Graham extended the hours for which the men were paid “from 48-50 to 54-56 because. . . janitors were already working extra hours without pay.”<sup>120</sup>

Elliott Washington and Frank Hairston, president and secretary of the Association, wrote to Graham thanking him for his intervention, which was “like drops of water to a weary soul in a desert land.”<sup>121</sup>

The Janitors' Association also was successful in getting showers installed for the use of black workers and gaining access to the Hospital Care Association, a health plan available to white workers at the university. Unfortunately, few of the janitors were able to take advantage of the health plan. Elliott Washington wrote on April 19, 1934 thanking the administration for the opportunity and explaining why only three workers had joined. “As

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<sup>119</sup>White, “The Voice of the Janitors' Association,” in *Voice of the Janitors' Association*, 1 (April 1940), reproduced in UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle.”

<sup>120</sup>McSurely, introductory notes UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle.”

<sup>121</sup>From Elliott Washington and Frank Hairston to President Frank P. Graham “and the other Authorities of the University of North Carolina,” reproduced in UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle.”

president of the [Janitors'] Association I regret very much that more are not taking the advantage of this valuable offer. We realize that it will mean a decrease in the death rate of our people to join, but owing to the economical condition, and as a average we have to support a family of four and pay taxes out of a \$10.00 per week salary, we find it impossible for more to join.”<sup>122</sup>

The Janitors' Association relied on a strategy of deference. Publicly, the janitors emphasized that the Association was “a social group.” They spoke of the need for the UNC employee to love his work and to “be loyal to his employer if he expects his employer to be loyal in return.” The Association's adopted persona, however, should not be seen as evidence that black workers did not understand their condition or were not committed to fighting Jim Crow. In reality, given the dangers associated with opposing Jim Crow openly and the sympathy of some liberal white friends like Frank Porter Graham, the deferential organizing strategy may have been the most effective approach to black freedom in that place, in that time. Nevertheless, new conditions developing around the country and in Chapel Hill would soon lead black workers to conceive a radically different approach to struggle.

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<sup>122</sup>From Elliott Washington to R. B. House, 19 April 1934, reproduced in UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle.”

## CHAPTER 5

### “LET A PEOPLE LOVING FREEDOM COME TO GROWTH:” BLACK STRUGGLE AND JIM CROW IN CHAPEL HILL, 1937-1960

In the mid 1930s, a new black freedom struggle arose throughout the nation. In August 1937 a black rebellion shattered the summer calm of Chapel Hill. The discontent and energy of African Americans evident in this revolt led to ten years of labor insurgency among black workers at UNC. It also heightened the sense of Chapel Hill's white leaders that additional concessions to black freedom were necessary. In particular, this led to a biracial effort on the part of the Negro Civic Club and white elites to develop a black recreation facility, today known as Hargraves Center.

In Chapel Hill and elsewhere in North Carolina, a labor based civil rights movement developed after 1937 founded on the increased local and national power of black workers. Support for this movement came from courageous white allies willing to support black challenges to the Jim Crow order. At the University of North Carolina, this group of students and professors included religious radicals, members of the Communist Party and other leftists, and liberals committed to the New Deal. The President of the university, Frank Porter Graham, maintained a delicate balance between his responsibility to implement the will of the trustees and his sympathy for labor rights and gradual reform of Jim Crow. While he did not directly participate in the union movement on campus, he sheltered black workers and their allies from attacks by reactionaries, as long as he was able. The university trustees, on

the other hand, proved to be intransigent supporters of Jim Crow and the suppression of labor rights.

During the era of McCarthyism following World War II, the labor based civil rights movement of the early 1940s was crushed, both nationally and locally. In Chapel Hill, the 1950s did not give evidence of labor militancy or large scale black protest. Still, some of the conditions that had nurtured the black proletarian struggle of the 1930s and 1940s persisted. There were increasing numbers of black workers in Chapel Hill due to the university's continued growth, and Jim Crow became even more institutionalized because of the concentration of black workers at the university and the new hospital built in 1952. What was lacking was leadership and organizational support for the kind of grassroots struggle that could tap the power of black workers. In fact, because of the era of Cold War repression, the black freedom struggle had to create new leaders and new institutions.

Beneath the relatively calm surface of the 1950s in Chapel Hill, a second generation of black leaders was developing. African American youths, coming of age during the era of the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, were developing their own rebellious attitudes. With the support of progressive black church leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as seasoned radicals like Ella Baker and Floyd McKissick, black youths across the South took a stand for freedom in 1960. Black high school students from working class families led a sustained and powerful movement in Chapel Hill from 1960 to 1964. The audacity and determination of these young people broke through the barrier of fear built by leaders of white supremacy during the 1950s. The black youth sit-in movement, and all of the massive grassroots organizing that followed it,

overthrew Jim Crow in the early 1960s and demonstrated the power of “a people loving freedom come to growth.”

*Black Workers At UNC And The Proletarian Revolt In Chapel Hill*

Throughout the Depression, African Americans pressed on with community building. Yet these efforts could not stop the drastic deterioration in living standards caused by the combined effects of economic crisis and white supremacy. Nor did they speak to the rising hopes of African Americans sparked by the New Deal and militant labor organizing. It was in this context that a proletarian revolt developed in Chapel Hill.

The revolt was not only a protest against hard times and Jim Crow; it was also, to some extent, a rejection of black freedom strategies that relied on deferential relationships between “the better class of Negro” and elite leaders of the white community. The black revolt in Chapel Hill grew out of both local and national changes that reflected the growing power and radicalization of black workers. Increasingly, these men and women relied on their own organized strength. The uprising began with an unprecedented black rebellion and armed confrontation with the white mill workers of Carrboro in August 1937. It took institutional form with the organization of a local of the Congress of Industrial Organizations at the university in 1942.

Before the New Deal began in 1933, the Great Migration brought millions of black workers out of the South to the industrial centers of the Northeast and the Midwest. A million and a half African Americans moved north during the 1920s alone. Within the South, large numbers of black workers left farms for the rapidly growing urban areas. These migrations

resulted in the formation of a black, urban proletariat, which gave rise to labor organizing, black political influence, and a more assertive black culture.<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1928, African Americans in Chicago used their newfound political rights to elect the first black Congressman since 1900. Between 1934 and 1936, black voters throughout the nation deserted the Republican Party en masse and became an important component of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal coalition.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, black urban culture developed themes of racial assertiveness and militant struggle. Young black writers, many associated with the Harlem Renaissance, popularized such themes. In 1937, for instance, Richard Wright published his autobiography, *Black Boy*. In it he challenged southern Jim Crow and gave voice to the new black militancy. Wright asserted, "The white South said that it knew 'niggers,' and I was what the white South called a 'nigger.' Well, the white South had never known me—never known what I thought, what I felt. The white South said that I had a 'place in life. Well, I had never felt my 'place'; or, rather, my deepest instincts had always made me reject the 'place' to which the white South had assigned me. It had never occurred to me that I was in any way an inferior being. And no word that I had ever heard fall from the lips of southern white men had ever made me really doubt the worth of my own humanity."<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, white radicals joined with militant African Americans to denounce southern Jim Crow and join grassroots organizing efforts. Members of the Communist Party led the way with their work in the Gastonia textile strike of 1929 and the defense of the Scottsboro

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<sup>1</sup>On the Great Migration, see Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge* and Grossman, *Land of Hope*. On the usefulness of a proletarianization framework that emphasizes class formation, see Trotter, *Black Milwaukee*, 275-77.

<sup>2</sup>Leuchtenburg, *Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 185-87.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, *Black Boy*, quoted in Zinn, *People's History of the United States*, 438. For an examination of this trend of cultural rebellion see, Harding, *Hope and History*, 141, 126-153, 177-189.

Boys in 1931. After 1935, with the passage of the Wagner National Labor Relations Act, which guaranteed workers' rights to organize unions, much of this biracial organizing took place through the efforts of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the craft unions of the American Federation of Labor, the CIO organized black workers as well as white, women as well as men, and the unskilled as well as the skilled. It also employed militant organizers, including communists, CIO locals were the foundation for a "civil rights unionism" that developed rapidly in the South during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In North Carolina this movement was particularly strong among the tobacco workers of Winston-Salem, but it manifested itself in Chapel Hill and other communities, as well.<sup>5</sup>

Hard times bore down heavily on both black and white workers in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area. Yet neither Depression-era hardships nor the provocations of Jim Crow were new in 1937.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the participation of hundreds of African Americans in an armed revolt was something new. By bringing the masses of black workers onto the center stage of history, this event altered the dynamics of race relations in Chapel Hill, marking the loss of moral authority for longstanding strategies of gradualism endorsed by white liberals and some black leaders. In particular, the rebellion cleared the way for a new era of left-led, civil rights unionism in Chapel Hill.

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<sup>4</sup>On the Gastonia strike, see Hall, et al., *Like a Family*, 214-35. On the Scottsboro Boys, see Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*, 56, 118. On communists in the CIO, see Griffith, *Operation Dixie*, 140-50. For a North Carolina focus, see Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*. For other excellent discussions of communist labor organizing in the South, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*, and Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*.

<sup>5</sup>Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost." Korstad developed these themes in far greater depth in *Civil Rights Unionism*. For information on the CIO in Chapel Hill, see Sidney Rittenberg, Interview by author and Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 27-30.

<sup>6</sup>Barrier, "Handicapped Families," and Henry, "Study of Emergency Relief."

Vincent Harding reminds us that “dreams, imagination, vision, and hope are actually powerful mechanisms in the creation of new realities.” That advice seems particularly useful in trying to understand why the black neighborhoods of Chapel Hill and Carrboro erupted in violent rebellion in August 1937.<sup>7</sup>

In July 1937, Margaret Walker, an aspiring twenty-one year old African American poet working for the WPA Writers Project in Chicago, wrote a poem called “For My People.” Looking back on those days fifty-five years, Walker sighed, “It was an age of Depression.” Black people were “mired in despair and despondency. . . no jobs, no money, relief for food.” Nevertheless, the young poet sensed hopeful stirrings among the black industrial workers with whom she and her radical young friends associated. The massive organizing drive led by the CIO in auto and steel was challenging segregation in the labor movement. She recalled, “Black people were being included as never before.”<sup>8</sup>

In nine verses Walker evoked the bitter experience of her people’s struggle in America. She wrote, “For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and their blues and jubilees . . . never gaining never reaping never knowing and never understanding . . . filling the cabarets and taverns and other people’s pockets needing bread and shoes and milk and land and money and something—something all our own . . . tied and shackled and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh . . . trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people, all the faces, all the adams and eves and their countless generations.” In the end, Walker spoke of welcoming the new day, of the rising, militant mood she sensed, and of what she wanted for

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<sup>7</sup>Harding, *Hope and History*, 178.

<sup>8</sup>Margaret Walker Alexander, interview by author.

her people. In answer to their call, and in confirmation of their faith, she challenged her people to bring forth a new day.

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a  
bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a  
second generation full of courage issue forth;  
let a people loving freedom come to growth.<sup>9</sup>

The increasingly angry and hopeful mood of African Americans was a national phenomenon. Only a few weeks after Margaret Walker wrote *For My People*, as if embracing the same hope and aroused by the same martial spirit, black workers in Chapel Hill expressed their own longing in a less literary, but no less compelling, manner. On Saturday, August 21, tension along the color line crackled like high voltage electricity in the streets of Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

On Saturday afternoon, crowds of angry black and white workers faced off against each other on Main Street, between West Franklin Street and Lloyd Street, at the entryway to Carrboro. Junius Scales, a UNC student whose family lived in Chapel Hill and who later became a Communist Party organizer, got caught in the middle of the standoff. He and his friends were returning from the whites-only swimming pool in Carrboro when they came upon the scene. "The Negroes were silent, grim, defiant; the whites were raging, screaming, threatening," Scales wrote in his autobiography, *Cause at Heart*.<sup>10</sup> Scales attributed the disorder to an arrest the night before of a black man "on an unspecified charge because he had been 'uppity.'" It was not racial hatred but anger at Jim Crow police behavior that motivated black Chapel Hill workers to revolt.

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<sup>9</sup>Walker, "For My People," in *For My People*, 13-4.

<sup>10</sup>Scales and Nickson, *Cause at Heart*, 49. Except where attributed to Scales, all quotes are from "Better Police Protection Is Essential Step toward Remedy of a Bad Situation," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, August 27, 1937. Additional details of the event and the university's role are taken from Matt Robinson, "Race Riot," *The Independent*, July 31, 2002.

At about 11 P.M. an unidentified white motorist pulled into Yarborough's filling station on the corner of Franklin Street and Merritt Mill Road, near the boundary between Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Immediately, a rock crashed into the car windshield. Jumping out, the driver punched a black Chapel Hill man named Tom Atwater. Atwater attempted to fight back, but James Horne, a white attendant at Yarborough's, smashed a beer bottle over his head. The crowd swelled.

At that point, according to Louis Graves, editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, the police arrived and escorted Horne to the Carrboro jail. Chief Sloan took Atwater to a doctor, although the crowd reacted angrily, believing Atwater was under arrest. For a while, that seemed to be the end of it. Someone, however, rallied the crowd and marched to the jail. According to Graves, "a crowd of 40 or 50 negroes" gathered at the jail, "clamoring to get at the prisoner." Interpreting this as a lynch mob, white authorities took Horne to Hillsborough.

Word of the incident had by now spread throughout the black community. Along the main street leading into Carrboro, a large crowd of black residents gathered. According to Chief Sloan, the crowd of three hundred African Americans threw rocks and bricks at white passersby. The mob took over the street, blocking all traffic. Then, the wail of a fire siren blared in the darkness. Out of Carrboro, a truck barricaded with crossties appeared, and as the truck approached, white men in the truck began firing into the crowd of African Americans. According to Chief Sloan, "The negroes were returning the gunfire very promptly." Chapel Hill alderman P. L. Burch, estimated that one hundred to two hundred shots were fired and five to ten people wounded. Soon, eight officers arrived from Durham armed with tear gas and tommy guns, and by four in the morning, the streets were clear.

According to Graves, “never before has there been any such clash between the races as occurred at this week-end . . . . It serves to throw light on a situation that is unquestionably dangerous.” And so it was, from the point of view of the powers that ruled Chapel Hill. For this demonstration of racial assertiveness reflected more than hostility toward white mill hands. As events would show, it was an indication that black workers in Chapel Hill were fired up and willing to stand up for their rights.

As a result of the revolt, members of the white establishment in Chapel Hill initiated an unprecedented coalition with “the better class of Negroes.” They raised money to fund the purchase of land and the cost of constructing a Negro Community Center and they formed a biracial committee to carry the project through. This was an idea that had been discussed in the black community for some time, but there were no resources for such an undertaking. Wealthy whites now seemed to see the project in a new light, as a worthwhile investment to get young black men off the streets and pacify the black community.<sup>11</sup> UNC administrators considered proposals for increased support to the town police, the hiring of “colored policemen,” and increased educational services.

In addition to the social reform measures adopted or discussed, the municipal and university authorities took steps to strengthen their police powers to deal with future incidents. As early as Sunday morning, Chief Sloan, Chapel Hill Town Manager J. L. Caldwell, Carrboro Manager Winslow Williams, and Alderman Burch, a university administrator in charge of UNC’s Physical Plant, met to sum up events and explore methods of suppressing future disorders. Burch noted in a memo to his superior that Caldwell made plans to purchase a submachine gun with ammunition, twelve hand grenades, and “three gas

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<sup>11</sup>The history of the black community center is examined extensively in Mason, “The Negro Community Center of Chapel Hill.”

billies with twelve cartridges.” It was agreed that Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and UNC would split the costs for this weaponry. UNC’s share was \$164.50.<sup>12</sup>

The idea for a black community center appealed to African Americans in Chapel Hill. It was needed and they were willing to work and contribute to see that the project reached fruition. Over the next five years, the black community once again mobilized its resources under the leadership of the Negro Civic Club. In the end, the building was finished by the U.S. Navy during World War II and used to house the black Navy band until the end of the war, when it was turned over to the black community.

While it was the new militancy of Chapel Hill’s black proletariat that inspired action, white leaders saw the elite interracial coalition, like the idea of the recreation center itself, as a way of controlling disorder, not addressing racial justice. Although the recreation center was welcomed by the black community, its construction did not address the fundamental needs of black workers for economic and racial justice. It was not surprising, therefore, that black workers in Chapel Hill were attracted to the southern organizing drive of the CIO.

In remarks that reveal much about the motivations of white businessmen who pursued alliances with “the better class of Negro,” Louis Graves wrote several editorials denouncing John L. Lewis and the CIO’s southern organizing drive at about the same time he was exposing the “outrage on Franklin Street” and calling for a “Negro Community Center.” Following the lead of North Carolina governor, Clyde Hoey, Graves denounced the CIO’s militant tactics. A few months later, following the success of the CIO in organizing the steel industry in the North, Graves labeled the CIO a “lawless and ruthless minority group,” and called on authorities to “protect the majority of workers in their right to work” if the CIO

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<sup>12</sup>Robinson, “Race Riot.”

came to North Carolina.<sup>13</sup> Despite Louis Graves' attempts to discourage proletarian organizing, black workers in Chapel Hill formed a CIO local at the university in March 1942.

Black workers turned to the CIO because they had drawn lessons from their movement building experiences. Based on a 1943 interview with Elliott Washington, former President of the Janitors' Association, sociology graduate student Charles Maddry Freeman summed up the way black workers saw the difference in the two groups. "The Janitors Association . . . has been important more as a social and civic organization than as an economic force. It has had the power to recommend to the University what men should be hired as janitors, but as a bargaining group it has been weak. Just before the C. I. O. was organized . . . the Janitors Association had been trying for a year to get a raise and finally succeeded in securing an increase of only fifty cents a week."<sup>14</sup>

When the CIO came to Chapel Hill, it offered both risks and advantages over previous organizations. As a national union, the State, County, and Municipal Workers of America (SCMWA) had trade union experience to share and resources to pay organizers. As a left-led union, it could bring black workers in Chapel Hill into a closer association with a vibrant "Southern Front" of trade unionists, communists, socialists, religious radicals, and liberal New Dealers.<sup>15</sup> Other black workers, such as the tobacco workers of Winston Salem, were an important part of this solidarity network. The militant egalitarianism of the CIO was also compelling. Union organizers encouraged the leadership of black workers, including women. Most importantly, white CIO organizers opposed Jim Crow employment practices.

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<sup>13</sup>"When the C.I.O. Comes South," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 2, 1937 and "Gangsterism Wins Victories on the Labor Front," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, June 25, 1937.

<sup>14</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 27.

<sup>15</sup>Honey, *Southern Labor*, 115-21, 142-44.

At the same time, the radical associations and more militant style of the CIO might encourage reprisals. Nevertheless, black UNC workers had tried appealing to administrators through the Janitors' Association in traditional, non-confrontational ways, based on an implied promise to stay in their "place." Despite the apparent good will of men like Frank Porter Graham, this appeal to sentiment achieved very little. The fundamental issue, it seemed, was not human relations or race relations, but power relations. Black workers needed more power, so they joined the CIO.

By 1942, increasing numbers of students and faculty were ready to support black workers in their more radical course of action. In the spirit of the New Deal, many professors and students began looking for ways to support labor organizing in the late 1930s. When they appealed to their own university to improve conditions for black campus workers, they soon learned the limits of liberalism.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1937, for instance, Professor Wiley B. Sanders of the Division of Public Welfare and Social Work wrote a sharply worded letter to Frank Porter Graham criticizing the university's "failure to practice what we preach." Noting that despite the university's liberalism, "we have not seen fit to reward our faithful Negro janitors with a vacation anytime during the year," he called on Graham to grant them two weeks vacation with pay, saying he thought the faculty would support this.<sup>17</sup> Graham had L. B. Rogerson, Assistant Comptroller, write a long letter to Sanders defending the university's treatment of the janitors. While this letter indicated that Graham had made efforts to protect the janitors from the full impact of the General Assembly's Depression era wage cuts, it also revealed that

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<sup>16</sup>Dick and Fran Koral interview; Sidney Rittenberg interview; Junius Scales interview; Harvey Segal interview.

<sup>17</sup>From W.B. Sanders to Dr. Frank P. Graham, 8 September 1937, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division; Office of Director 1937-1939, UA.

black workers were still treated as second-class human beings at UNC. Rogerson wrote that while the university granted vacations with pay to workers “in certain units,” it “hoped” to extend such benefits to all employees “as soon as conditions permit.” While the university provided white employees with a club house and recreational programs including “lectures, dances, bridge, checkers, ping pong, soft ball, golf, and other tournament[s],” it “hoped” to provide black workers “the same type of social, recreational, and educational facilities which have been provided for the white employees . . . just as soon as conditions permit.”<sup>18</sup>

Through such experiences, increasing numbers of students and faculty became radicalized.

Charles Maddry Freeman believed that Harvey Segal and Frank Green, two UNC students, carried out the initial organizing efforts to bring workers into the union while members of the American Federation of Teachers assisted the students. Nevertheless, Segal recalled that most of the initiative for organizing came from the black workers. “It wasn’t anything that was hard to sell . . . . It seemed to me *they* were doing the [organizing] . . . . I just sort of functioned as an advisor.” Segal’s main job was writing leaflets.<sup>19</sup>

On June 29, 1942, shortly after the formation of SCMWA Local 403, President Graham wrote to Governor Broughton suggesting he either grant an “emergency adjustment” in wages for those in “the low wage brackets” or allow the workers to “on their own initiative, collectively, petition for adjustment.”<sup>20</sup> Broughton replied with vehemence, impressing upon Graham the longstanding antagonism of North Carolina’s ruling class to labor unions. “Certainly,” wrote Broughton, “I think it would be unfortunate and wholly undesirable for

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<sup>18</sup>From L.B. Rogerson to Prof. W.B. Sanders, 11 September 1937, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1937-1939, UA.

<sup>19</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 27; Segal interview.

<sup>20</sup>These quotes are from Broughton’s reply to Graham on 2 July 1942 in which he paraphrased Graham’s letter of 29 June 1942.

workers in the employment of the State to yield to any suggestion that may have been made that they form unions and affiliate with the C. I. O. or any other labor group. Such a step would be out of harmony with a long established policy and would be productive, in my opinion, of much harm rather than good.”<sup>21</sup>

On the same day the governor wrote to President Graham, the first discussions between the union and university administrators took place. In addition to Sidney Rittenburg, the CIO “field representative,” the different areas of the university were represented by the following black workers: Laundry—Rebecca Clark; Dormitory Janitors—Morris Hogan; Classroom Janitors—Raymond Perry; Dormitory Maids—Bessie Edwards; Carolina Inn Colored Employees—Robert Nicks; University Dining Hall Cafeteria Colored Employees—Clara Baldwin; the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Local Consolidated Union CIO—“Buck” Barnett; and Chairman of the Discussion Committee—Raymond Perry.” L. B. Rogerson, Assistant Comptroller and J. A. Williams, Personnel Officer, represented UNC.<sup>22</sup>

The organizing success of Frank Green and Harvey Segal appears surprising on the surface. They were both white students without trade union experience, who came to Chapel Hill with no knowledge of the local black community. Their success was probably due to the enthusiasm of long-time black activists, and possibly to the close connection the students shared with black workers through the network of labor activists associated with the Communist Party. Segal recalled that he functioned as an advisor and wrote leaflets. It is likely that veteran black activists, including communists, played the critical role in

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<sup>21</sup>From J. Melville Broughton to Dr. Frank P. Graham, 2 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA. Graham’s letter of 29 June 1942 is noted and paraphrased in Broughton’s letter.

<sup>22</sup>“Minutes of Meeting University and Employee Representatives,” 2 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA,

organizing the CIO in Chapel Hill. According to Junius Scales, the party recruited a number of black workers in Chapel Hill as early as 1936-37. By 1942, students, professors, and townspeople, including at least two leaders of the union, were organized into two party “clubs.”<sup>23</sup>

The other key institutional support for the union came from the black churches of Chapel Hill. As a result of his research, Freeman concluded that the union gained the support of the churches and others in the black community. Charles Maddry Freeman reported, “The union has received the support of the churches. The regular meetings have usually been held in Rock Hill Baptist Church and occasionally at St. Paul’s and the Second Baptist Church. Meetings are announced regularly from the pulpits. Union meetings are held at the Hollywood Theater whenever there is a conflicting religious meeting.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1944, the union had approximately two hundred members, representing a large majority of the black campus workers. Although paying dues was not a requirement of membership, there were eighty members who paid one dollar a month, although laundry workers, because of their extraordinarily low wages, paid only \$.75 monthly.<sup>25</sup>

It is evident, then, that the CIO had broad support among the university’s black workers, in the local black community, and among many students and professors. This strength translated into some victories on the labor front. While the Janitors’ Association won a \$.50 per week wage increase after a year of effort shortly before the organization of the CIO,

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<sup>23</sup>Junius Scales interview.

<sup>24</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 29.

<sup>25</sup>Freeman, “Growth and Plan,” 29.

Local 403 won a \$2.50 per week increase (16 percent) in March 1942.<sup>26</sup> After the first meeting with the union, the administration also agreed to limit arbitrary employment practices by dealing with lay-offs and promotions on a seniority basis; improve the food served to workers at the Carolina Dining Hall and the Carolina Inn; alleviate heat exhaustion by providing salt tablets for workers at the Laundry, the Dining Hall and the Inn; and decrease gender based wage differentials between maids and janitors by raising the wages of maids to \$.30 per hour for a forty-four hour week, or \$13.20 a week.<sup>27</sup>

Despite these small victories, a pattern emerged during these first negotiations that was to characterize labor relations at UNC during the next five years. While UNC gave small concessions with one hand, it took away with the other. Although janitors' wages climbed from \$.29 per hour to \$.375 per hour, the university cut janitors' hours from fifty-four to forty-eight hours per week. While the university raised the wages of maids, it cut out the free meals formerly given to maids in Spencer Dorm (the women's dormitory). Most disturbing of all, the university implemented a piecework system at the Laundry.<sup>28</sup>

On August 5, 1942 the union formally rejected the university's plan for piecework in the Laundry, saying it was an attempt to force workers to "accept a piece-work system as an assurance of improved conditions and earning power without an immediate guarantee of a substantial increase in wages." Union representatives pointed out that the largely female laundry workers had substandard and unequal wages, "even when compared to what small

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<sup>26</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," 29.

<sup>27</sup>Minutes of a Meeting, 13 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>28</sup>Minutes of a Meeting, 13 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA; Minutes of a Meeting, 21 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA; Freeman "Growth and Plan," 29-30.

advances the janitors have been able to make recently.”<sup>29</sup> UNC ignored the union’s critique of gender discrimination and empty promises and implemented the piecework system. The basic positions of the union and management can be seen in the minutes of their first meeting. In response to the union’s demand for significant wage increases, the following interchange took place:

[Mr. Rogerson stated,] “It is doubtful that the University should take the leadership in forcing wages up, particularly where laundries are concerned. If our laundry prices go up we will be requiring students to pay more for their laundry here than they would have to pay at a commercial laundry.”

Mr. Rittenburg made the observation that the State should not exploit the laboring man in order to keep prices low for students.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that UNC managers, despite President Graham’s liberal tendencies, were determined to maintain the norms of Jim Crow and resist union organizing. On August 11, 1942 the university summarily dismissed eight black women working in the cafeteria.<sup>31</sup> That same day, Abram Flaxer, the national president of SCMWA, telegrammed Graham, who was in Washington, D.C., concerning “unfair dismissals and other problems concerning union members” at the university.<sup>32</sup> The same day, saying he had called Chapel Hill long distance, Graham replied to Flaxer by telegram. “Report no dismissals but two day layoff for work adjustment to new conditions . . . . Wish to assure you there will be no discrimination.”<sup>33</sup>

Apparently, Graham had been misled. In a carefully worded statement to Graham some days

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<sup>29</sup>From Mrs. M. Morphis, Mrs. Rebecca Clark, Sidney Rittenberg to Mr. L.B. Rogerson, n.d., “rec’d Aug. 5, 1942,” Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>30</sup>“Minutes of Meeting University and Employee Representatives,” 2 July 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>31</sup>Conference Between L.B. Rogerson, C.E. Gooch, J.A. Williams, n.d., Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>32</sup>Abram Flaxer to The Hon. Frank P. Graham, telegram, 12 August 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>33</sup>Frank P. Graham to Abram Flaxer, telegram, 12 August 1942, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

later, Assistant Comptroller Rogerson, as well as the Manager of Lenoir Dining Hall and the Personnel Supervisor, acknowledged the layoffs but stated the action came in response to a request from the Navy. Their statement claimed, “The Navy has indicated its preference for white girls as ‘mess attendants.’ To meet this request, . . . the colored girls were laid off pending a final decision of the Navy as to the type of service it will standardize. This change also necessitated the laying off of two dishwashers and two mop boys.”<sup>34</sup>

Within a year, labor relations had become even more polarized. On July 26, 1943 the union issued a set of “demands.” Several of the union’s complaints reflected concerns about the way the university gave with one hand and took away with the other. Previously, for instance, janitors had received vacations if other janitors were willing to “double up” for them. These vacations cost the university nothing. However, after the janitors had become hourly employees, eligible for overtime pay, the university refused to grant any vacations. The union protested this “arbitrary and unfair” treatment and called for the reinstatement of vacations for janitors. In consideration of the unhealthy conditions endured by laundry workers, and because they had never received vacations, the union demanded ten sick days for laundry workers. Third, the union protested the practice of giving janitors hours off on the day following overtime work, “instead of overtime pay for the extra hours worked.” Moreover, the union asked for an explanation of why overtime was calculated on the old rate of pay rather than the new scale. Fourth, the union demanded equal pay for maids and janitors since the work of the women was “so nearly equal to that of the men.” Fifth, the union noted that, “In some buildings men are doing 50percent more work than they normally

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<sup>34</sup>Conference between L.B. Rogerson, C.E. Gooch, J.A. Williams, n.d., Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

perform.” In such instances, the union demanded that, “wages should be increased to compensate for the increased load.”<sup>35</sup>

The union’s efforts apparently bore some fruit. Following the July 26 demands, W. D. Carmichael, Jr., the university Comptroller, issued policies granting one week of paid vacation to every full time university employee, as well as twelve paid sick days per year.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, in clarifying his actions to President Graham, Carmichael noted that he had declined a written “set of regulations outlining working conditions” presented by the union because its wording suggested “a de facto recognition of the union as a bargaining agent, or at least having some say-so or control over the terms of employment.”<sup>37</sup>

It should be noted that Graham was away from the campus a great deal during the war attending to various New Deal responsibilities, and in his absence, the conservative Carmichael was in charge. Although Graham was sympathetic to unions, Carmichael was hostile, and his attitudes more nearly reflected the views of the trustees.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout 1944 and 1945, Local 403 advocated for both the human rights and material needs of black workers. On March 31, 1945 a memo from J. A. Williams to Graham demonstrated that Local 403 was tackling racial discrimination head on, as well as gender discrimination.<sup>39</sup> Williams reviewed the “complaints registered with the [Fair Employment

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<sup>35</sup>“Demands of Local 403, State, County, and Municipal Workers of America—CIO,” 26 July 1943, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>36</sup>Memo to Service Departments, “Personnel Regulations with Regard to Vacation Leave and Sick Leave,” summer 1943, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>37</sup>From W.D. Carmichael, Jr. to Dr. Frank P. Graham, 12 May 1944, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

<sup>38</sup>For the relative hostility of Carmichael toward the union, see Rittenberg interview.

<sup>39</sup>From J.A. Williams to President Frank P. Graham, March 31, 1945, Business and Finance Records: Physical Plant Division: General Files, 1940-1945, UA.

Practices Commission]” concerning wage discrimination between black and white workers at the Laundry. Williams noted that the University Laundry employed “both white and colored people.” “At present, we have 14 white men, 42 white women, 17 colored men, and 87 colored women.” Employees, however, were segregated by job description according to the norms of Jim Crow.<sup>40</sup> Several of the black women had complained to the FEPC that they were paid less than white women doing comparable work. Williams denied these claims. He wrote, “The contention that service operators or folders receive a higher wage than press operators because of race is untrue. Service operators receive more because their position requires more capable and responsible people . . . . We attempt to select persons best qualified for each type of job without regard for race, color, or previous nationality.”

Nevertheless, Williams’ memo makes clear that all press operators were black, while all “listers,” “checkers,” and “folders” were white. Laying aside the question of whether work performed by women in these different jobs was comparable, the fact that the university segregated jobs by race was an essential foundation of the Jim Crow employment system, much as Williams denied it. It is nevertheless significant, and a sign of the impact of the CIO and black freedom struggle, that the Personnel Supervisor felt the necessity of denying discrimination at all.

On May 14, 1946 Martin A. Watkins, Representative of Local 403, notified President Graham that the union wanted to negotiate a contract.<sup>41</sup> Graham responded to this escalation the next day saying he and other administrators would be glad to meet with union representatives to discuss the matter. He added, “Since we are a state institution, the

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<sup>40</sup>For evidence of the racial segregation of jobs in the Laundry as late as 1949 see Bain, “Study.”

<sup>41</sup>From Martin A. Watkins to Dr. Frank P. Graham, 14 May 1946, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

negotiation of a contract is subject to state policy through the Board of Trustees as the legally responsible agency of the state for making a contract binding the University.”<sup>42</sup> On May 21, administrators met with union representatives and informed them that they had no authority to discuss a contract but that they would refer the matter to Chancellor House to bring before the Board of Trustees.<sup>43</sup> In May, the Board of Trustees passed the following resolution:

“Moved that it is the sense of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina that neither the Board nor the officers of the university have the authority, in the absence of legislative declaration of policy, to recognize any organization of its employees or to enter into collective bargaining relations with them.”<sup>44</sup>

On June 4, 1946, Graham wrote to Chancellor House saying, “I feel very low that the full Board turned down the request that the representatives of the union be given a hearing by the Trustees Committee on the matter of a contract.”<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Graham wrote to George Farbman, Representative of the United Public Workers explaining the trustees’ decision. In light of that decision, Graham suggested that “some of the local workers go through the regular grievance procedure.” Graham explained, “Personally, I believe in

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<sup>42</sup>From Frank P. Graham to Mr. Martin A. Watkins, 15 May 1946, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

<sup>43</sup>From C.E. Teague to Chancellor R.B. House, 22 May 1946, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

<sup>44</sup>Quoted in a flyer distributed by the Executive Committee of the Chapel Hill Chapter of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, 8 August 1947, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

<sup>45</sup>From Frank P. Graham to Chancellor R.B. House, 4 June 1946, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

unionism and collective bargaining, but, as you also know, I am subject to the regulations of the Board of Trustees of the University.”<sup>46</sup>

All of this makes clear that the President of the Consolidated University of North Carolina had very little power over labor relations. The real power behind the university, the power of capital, moved inexorably to isolate black workers from all sources of support and suppress their collective organizing efforts. The decision of the Trustees, in conjunction with the gathering storm of anti-communist Cold War hysteria, would eventually end the work of Local 403 at UNC.

On June 25, 1947, Leroy W. Clark, the long-time black janitor who served as chairman of Local 403’s Negotiations Committee, sent Graham a copy of the letter the union had submitted to J. S. Bennett, Supervisor of Operations.<sup>47</sup> Clark told Bennett, “Our membership has asked me to bring formally to your attention a program designed to offer immediate, essential improvement of our pay and working conditions.” The letter sums up the struggle between labor and management, immediately prior to the decline of the union. It reveals both the plight of the workers and their hope for a fighting chance through the union. It expresses the essence of the relationship between black freedom striving and the university as an institution during the age of Jim Crow. Therefore, it is worth quoting at length.

We are all deeply disturbed by the failure of the University, over a long period of time, to improve a labor situation which is almost intolerable. We are shocked to learn that the University contemplates reducing even our present inadequate wages by dropping all or part of our war bonus and by increasing the amount taken out of our pay for the retirement fund.

We should like to remind you of the problems faced by some of our members. Workers in the dining hall, for example, take home about \$19 a week for a work-day that

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<sup>46</sup>From Frank P. Graham to George Farbman, n.d., Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

<sup>47</sup>From Leroy W. Clark to Dr. Frank Porter Graham, 25 June 1947, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

begins at 6:30 in the morning and does not end until 8:30 at night. Workers in the laundry get 33 cents an hour. With the bonus, which they may now lose, they have a take-home pay of \$22 or \$23 for a 45 hour week. Janitors, attendants and cleaners in the University buildings work long hours for about \$26 a week.

University workers now receive about one week of paid vacation in the entire year. Some receive one paid holiday, Christmas. Many, including over one hundred laundry workers, are not even paid for Christmas. Many others are forced to work on holidays with no extra pay.

After thorough discussion, our membership decided to put forth the following minimum program:

1. No pay reduction now. At present prices we cannot live decently on what the University pays us. The loss of any more pay is impossible.
2. The granting of two weeks of paid vacation, instead of one week, to all University employees.
3. The granting of eight paid holidays every year. Extra pay to workers forced to work on any of these holidays.
4. Formulation of immediate plans by the University to raise the wages of its employees. Money must not be spent on new highways and other expensive projects while we are paid starvation wages.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps in recognition that only a broader mobilization of the university community could enable black workers to have any hope of success, the union launched an appeal to students. A flyer distributed on campus exposed the administration's threat to do away with the war bonus before the state raise of 20 percent went into effect. Bold headlines proclaimed the "HIGHER MATH" of workers' wages including the bonus and the "LOWER MATH" of workers pay minus the bonus. The flyer summed up the history of the union's struggle with management over the previous five years. "With one hand the University is giving increases, with the other hand they are taking more back."<sup>49</sup>

Appealing to the students, the union harked back to the theme of hypocrisy raised by Professor Wiley Sanders ten years earlier. "WE ASK THE STUDENTS WHO DO NOT

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<sup>48</sup>From Leroy W. Clark to J. S. Bennett, 25 June 1947, Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

<sup>49</sup>Flyer, "Higher Math and Lower Math," n.d., Business and Finance: Physical Plant Division: Office of Director, 1940-1945, 1946-1947, UA.

WANT TO SEE THE UNIV. WORKERS LIVE IN THE VERY CONDITIONS CONDEMNED IN THE CLASSROOMS, TO SIGN THESE PETITIONS.” This June 1947 appeal to students is the last local union activity for which records have been found.

Almost certainly, what broke Local 403, in addition to the trustees ban on dealing with the union, was the anti-communism that gripped the university and the rest of the nation in 1947. The local environment became super-heated on October 29, 1947, when Junius Scales, a World War II veteran and graduate student in history at Carolina, revealed his membership in the Communist Party and the existence of a party chapter at UNC.<sup>50</sup>

The day after the revelation of communist activity at UNC, the *Daily Tar Heel* printed an editorial that stated that Scales had provided “uranium” to all the enemies of the university, who would now attack UNC as a “hotbed of communism.”<sup>51</sup> Chancellor House issued a statement explaining that since there were no laws against belonging to the Communist Party, the administration would take no action against Scales. Nevertheless, he issued no ringing endorsement of the right to free speech.<sup>52</sup> On November 2, in an article headlined “Cold War on Communists,” the *Daily Tar Heel* reported that the student government was considering a resolution denouncing communism and another to establish a committee to investigate all communist activity on campus.<sup>53</sup>

In the same issue of the *Daily Tar Heel* as “Cold War on Communists,” Scales wrote a letter responding to the red baiting.

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<sup>50</sup>“Chapel Hill Communist Party Openly Revealed by Circular,” *Daily Tar Heel*, October 30, 1947.

<sup>51</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, October 31, 1947.

<sup>52</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, October 31, 1947.

<sup>53</sup>“Cold War on Communists,” *Daily Tar Heel*, November 2, 1947.

That my announcement may be used against the University is quite possible. The air of enlightenment (sic), the liberal tradition and the relative freedom of thought here are red flags to those who habitually attack the University.

But if this freedom at UNC is only something to look at and not touch, pardon me for living, Mr. Editor, because I am frankly making use of the University's tradition of freedom to think as I please and say what I think.

Apparently you allow me only two alternatives: (1) to think what I please and keep quiet about it or (2) to take my opinions away [from] the University—otherwise, I provide “Uranium” for our enemies. Where do you stand, Mr. Editor, for real freedom of thought or for a hush-hush appeasement of a bunch of loud-mouthed reactionaries?<sup>54</sup>

Cold War repression overwhelmed not just communists, but nearly all progressives in the years ahead. In 1949, progressive causes at the university, particularly trade union organizing, lost their most powerful defender when Frank Porter Graham was appointed to fill the unexpired U.S. Senate term of J. Melville Broughton, who died on March 6, 1949. The next year, the reactionary tide swept over Graham as he lost his Senate election bid to archconservative Willis Smith. As John Egerton wrote, Graham's defeat “signaled the end of a season of modest social reforms and opened the floodgates of right-wing extremism.”<sup>55</sup>

North Carolina's anti-labor environment and Cold War repression imposed a high price on black workers. Their vulnerability and isolation is perhaps well illustrated by a brief article that appeared in the *Daily Tar Heel* in the fall of 1947. On September 26, an article headlined “Uncle Has Trouble” reported that the sixty-nine year old janitor of the Zoology building, Elliott Washington, had cancer and required an operation he could not afford.<sup>56</sup> The year before, Washington had spent his life savings on a cataract operation for his wife that restored her sight in one eye. Although Washington had worked for the university for thirty-

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<sup>54</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, November 2, 1947

<sup>55</sup>Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 554. On the right wing repression of labor and civil rights, see Honey, *Southern Labor*, 245-77. For studies of Frank Porter Graham, see Pleasants and Burns, *Graham and the 1950 Senate Race* and Ashby, *A Southern Liberal*.

<sup>56</sup>“Uncle Has Trouble,” *Daily Tar Heel*, September 26, 1947.

five years, he was “ineligible for retirement benefits.” Thus, without savings, health insurance, or retirement benefits, Washington was dependent on the goodwill of white professors, who were raising a fund for his operation. A year later, Junius Scales led prayers at his funeral.<sup>57</sup>

Despite UNC’s “relative freedom of thought,” it is evident that those who would speak out and act on behalf of black workers faced a decidedly hostile environment in the late 1940s. The purpose of this Jim Crow institutional culture, as it had been since the beginning of the century, was to enforce low wages on black workers by keeping them isolated from all support. This was part of the low wage strategy of North Carolina’s New South industrial leaders. They enforced their will on both black and white workers by keeping the working class divided and without power. These businessmen remained the dominant power at the university, despite the best efforts of black workers, progressive students, and liberals like Frank Porter Graham to create a democratic countervailing power.

The civil rights unionism of the CIO in Chapel Hill and elsewhere was part of a larger national upsurge of black labor militancy. Though many of the local labor organizations that came into being during this period, including the Chapel Hill union, did not endure, black workers played a critical role in creating a national employment standard of equal opportunity. A good example of this growing consensus is the 1945 assertion of UNC’s personnel manager that “We attempt to select persons best qualified for each type of job without regard for race, color, or previous nationality.” While still resisted by most southern politicians, the 1947 Truman Commission report, “To Secure These Rights,” is further evidence of this growing trend. Frank Porter Graham served on the committee that drafted

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<sup>57</sup>Junius Scales interview.

this report. Although he endorsed “the elimination of segregation as an ultimate goal,” he disagreed with the report’s recommendations to pursue that goal by means of federal laws and sanctions.<sup>58</sup>

The growing “fair employment” consensus was the context in which the state of North Carolina undertook a large scale standardization of state job classifications and pay grades. Despite superficial compliance with “equal pay for equal work” principles, Jim Crow employment practices were still firmly in place at the university and throughout the state. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the history of the State Personnel Act, a brief illustration will demonstrate that UNC did play an active role in the formulation of state personnel policy. The university did not advocate the dismantling of Jim Crow or justice for black workers and its recommendations in no way challenged the low wage, anti-union strategy of North Carolina’s industrial leaders.<sup>59</sup>

After World War II, North Carolina began to implement a standard job classification plan for state workers. In part, this was in response to a growing national consensus that pay should not vary arbitrarily or unfairly among workers doing the same job. This “fair employment” movement called for “equal pay for equal work.”

The State Personnel Act of 1949 established a process to classify all state jobs and establish uniform rates of pay among state institutions. Negotiations between the university and the State Personnel Department took place after 1954, when the classification plan was

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<sup>58</sup>Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 413-16

<sup>59</sup>On the anti-union, low wage strategic consensus in North Carolina, as well as the state “right to work” law, see Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 39, 71, 88, 85-101.

being put in place.<sup>60</sup> Frank Porter Graham had left the university in 1949, cold war McCarthyism had struck fear into the hearts of most liberals, the backlash against *Brown vs. Board of Education* had begun, and there were few people of influence at UNC willing to advocate for black workers.

In 1957, for instance, Business Officer A. H. Shepard, Jr., wrote a memorandum to UNC President William Friday and Business Manager W. D. Carmichael, Jr. describing a meeting between university representatives and State Personnel Department officials. The purpose of the conference was to discuss matters of personnel classifications and pay grades. According to Shepard, the university objected to the new pay scale proposed for certain black workers. “The University representatives,” Shepard noted, “submitted that the proposed new scales for janitors and maids were too high—that some increase might be desirable but that the new scale would throw University wages for this type of personnel out of line with prevailing rates in the community.”<sup>61</sup> The university also objected to raising the wages of laundry workers, reducing hours of “custodial, maintenance and utilities employees” to a standard 40 hour week and also paying the proposed higher rates, or being bound by any state standard for hiring “seasonal, casual or ‘spasmodic’” workers. With respect to state personnel reform, it appears that the university used its considerable influence to insure that wage rates for workers in the lowest pay classifications, i.e. black workers, remained as low as possible.

Another document from the university archives suggests the university’s philosophy toward the classification plan.

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<sup>60</sup>Many of the documents relating to the university’s implementation of the “equal pay for equal work” provisions of the State Personnel Act of 1949 can be found in Chancellor’s Records: R. B. House Series, Subseries 3: Administration, Personnel: General, 1952-1957, UA.

<sup>61</sup>Memo in UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle,” exhibit 4c Section 4. Original in Chancellor’s Records: R. B. House Series, Subseries 3: Administration, Personnel: General, 1952-1957, UA.

It is our feeling that rates of pay to employees in the several different occupational categories should likewise be competitive with those paid by the private business community. For them to be lower, as may be the case in the top management levels, puts us at a real disadvantage in recruiting and retaining the high caliber men who can assure us of an efficient, profitable enterprise.

On the other hand, when rates of pay for the lower echelon of workers are much in excess of those paid by our competitors in the community, our overhead costs are out of balance and our profits suffer unless the added costs are passed along to the consumer.

In addition, very delicate public relations problems arise as between the University and the private community, and we must be sensitive to these relationships.<sup>62</sup>

These examples suggest that during the crucial era when state personnel policy was being set, despite the legal overthrow of “separate but equal” in 1954, the university’s attitude toward black workers displayed no sensitivity in practice to racial justice. Resistance to the substantive elimination of Jim Crow employment practices went hand in hand with a rhetoric of fair employment during the 1950s. Therefore, desegregation of employment at UNC was characterized by half measures and tokenism during this period. As we shall see in the final part of this chapter, the same was true with regard to the university’s desegregation of student admissions. It was not until the civil rights movement of the early 1960s and the black urban revolts and labor struggles of the late 1960s that more rapid change developed at UNC.

*Second Generation: The Development Of Black Youth  
Leaders In Chapel Hill, 1948-1960*

The growth of cold war McCarthyism suppressed labor organizing and other progressive activism in Chapel Hill. Yet black freedom struggle continued, if it took different paths than those who suppressed the CIO and the progressive movement expected. With the CIO crippled in Chapel Hill, individuals and families carried on the struggle of black workers.

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<sup>62</sup>Undated memo in UNC Housekeepers, “Sixty Years of Struggle,” exhibit 4d Section 4.

Former union members and others kept alive the spirit of resistance and passed it on to the rising generation. This generation, born in the 1940s and coming of age in the era of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the rise of anti-colonial liberation movements overseas, answered Margaret Walker's challenge for "a second generation" to step forward.

The university, which stood firmly behind the principle of black subordination at the beginning of the Jim Crow era, reluctantly embraced the national rhetoric of fair employment and race neutral admissions in the 1950s. Yet, from the point of view of African Americans, the university's commitment to change was unconvincing and produced only token desegregation in both jobs and admissions. It was in this environment that black youths in Chapel Hill came of age. Among them were some who forged politically aware and rebellious personalities. These youths rejected both outright Jim Crow and the tokenism of the university, and they rejected what they called the "go slow gradualism" endorsed by many of their elders.

Building upon the struggle and sacrifice of past generations, while adapting this legacy to their own vision and temperament, black youths burst on the stage of history on February 1, 1960.<sup>63</sup> The lunch counter sit-in movement that began in Greensboro, North Carolina spread rapidly throughout the South. It initiated a period of intensive organizing to overthrow the twin legal pillars of Jim Crow, disfranchisement and segregation. By 1965, an unprecedented insurgency organized by African Americans and their allies had won equality under the law. *De jure* civil rights were a fact, and formal equality had become a national norm.

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<sup>63</sup>On Chapel Hill, see Chapman, "Second Generation" and Ehle, *Free Men*. On the southern black youth movement, see Carson, *In Struggle* and Carmichael, *Ready for Revolution*. For studies with a focus on local communities and the development of movement culture, Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*; Payne, *Light of Freedom*; Dittmer, *Local People*.

In the 1950s, there is no evidence that any militant grassroots organizations existed in Chapel Hill. How, then, did black youths learn to rebel? The story of how a core of rebellious black youths in Chapel Hill found each other and organized a movement involves the way black freedom traditions were transmitted to them and how they reshaped these traditions and made them their own.

Without the support of unions or civil rights organizations, black working people in Chapel Hill defended their rights with the aid of friends and family. One example of such family solidarity concerns Bessie Edwards, a long time university worker. In 1942, she served as the representative of the Dormitory Maids in the first meeting between Local 403 and the UNC administration. On April 9, 1947, Luther Edwards wrote to Comptroller W. D. Carmichael on behalf of his wife.

Dear Sir

Bessie Edwards has worked for the university for many years always trying to please. Recently there has come up some confusion about the time sheet and the boss came up cursing about how they should be filled out—instead of coming in a human way.

We are glad to serve. But how in the devil would you expect any decent person to give service under such evil boss.

I figured you should know this so you could remedy the same.

Thanks

Luther Edwards

The one I am referring to is Mr. Sturdivant.<sup>64</sup>

Women and men like Bessie and Luther Edwards bequeathed traditions of struggle to the rising generation. Fred Battle, for instance, who participated as a college student in both the Greensboro lunch counter protests and the Chapel Hill civil rights movement, soaked up this freedom legacy from an older friend, Jesse Robert Strowd, a long time critic of Jim Crow who worked at the Carolina Inn. Strowd is one of the few black workers who left a written

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<sup>64</sup>From Luther Edwards to W.D. Carmichael, 9 April 1947, General Administration: Comptroller & Vice President for Finance; Subgroup 1: General Files, Policies and Procedures: Personnel, 1944-1959; 1970, UA.

record through letters to the newspaper and to university officials. His story is particularly significant, since it illustrates the connection of the older generation of activists to the movement of the 1960s. The connection between Robert Strowd and Fred Battle still has force today, when Battle serves as the President of the Chapel Hill Carrboro NAACP.

Strowd worked at the Carolina Inn as a janitor from 1924 through the 1960s. He grew up in Pottersfield. Although it is not known whether he participated in the strikes at the Inn during 1937 or 1946, Strowd was outspoken during that period, as well as during 1960s, for his own rights and those of other African Americans. In 1961, he lost his job at the Inn “because of poor health and a dispute with manager L. B. Rogerson.”<sup>65</sup> Calling upon some powerful white acquaintances he had developed over the years at the Inn, he managed to get his job back. Although Strowd used traditional paternalistic channels in defense of his own livelihood, he had no fear of publicly criticizing racist institutions in Chapel Hill or denouncing paternalist traditions. In April, 1964, following months of civil rights demonstrations and mass arrests, Strowd wrote a letter to the editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* demanding dignity for African Americans in the courts. Saying that “Chapel Hill is not as liberal as people think,” Strowd demanded, “We must clean up the Chapel Hill Recorder’s Court. All Negroes are addressed as John or Lucy, or if they are an older person they are called Aunt or Uncle. Never Mrs. or Mr. The white people, no matter what crime they have committed, are called Mr. or Mrs.” Nor did Strowd stop there. Next he drew a lesson that compared Chapel Hill’s liberals and the town institutions with the KKK on the issue of paternalism. “I heard a Ku Klux Klan leader speak on TV a few months ago,” Strowd wrote, “and he said, and I quote, ‘Anytime a Nigger comes to my back door with his

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<sup>65</sup>Zogry, *Carolina Inn*, 89-90.

hat in his hand and says yes sir and no sir to me I will give him anything he asks for. But if he comes to my front door I won't give him a thing.'"<sup>66</sup>

From the point of view of understanding black freedom and the university, Strowd's statement is telling. Based on long years of experience as a low-wage campus worker and a native of Chapel Hill, Strowd indicted Chapel Hill liberalism and its institutions as being no different than the Ku Klux Klan on the fundamental issues of equal rights, justice, and respect for African Americans as human beings. No doubt, Strowd would acknowledge that liberalism existed in Chapel Hill. His words, like the actions of the black freedom struggle in Chapel Hill, nevertheless imply that liberalism was more sham than real, an expensive veneer over cheap wood. This stands in direct contradiction to the carefully cultivated media image of Chapel Hill as "the Southern Part of Heaven."

Just as Fred Battle absorbed lessons about freedom struggle on the street corner, talking with Robert Strowd, Granny Flack taught children the need to rebel from her front porch.<sup>67</sup> Although the textbooks provided to black students offered only a limited and biased account of black history, there was no way that Jim Crow could completely rob black children of their freedom legacy. Braxton Foushee was a case in point. Eventually, he became a leader in the local civil rights movement, but first, he learned about the freedom struggle. "Probably the most fondest memory I had was Church Street," Braxton recalled. There was an old lady—Grandma Flack. That's where I learned all my history, slavery.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Jesse Robert Strowd letter to the editor, *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 8, 1964.

<sup>67</sup>For the story of Granny Flack, see Chapman, "Second Generation," 122-25.

<sup>68</sup>Braxton Foushee, interview by the author. All quotes from Foushee refer to this interview.

Braxton was small, perhaps five or six, when Tempe Flack began teaching him. He and many other children would spend their days with the old woman on Church Street while their mothers were at work. Braxton recalled, “We used to sit on her porch late in the afternoon. . . . She’d always talk to us about slavery. Say, ‘Son, this is what it used to be like when I was growing up’ [Her father] was sold and she never saw him again.”

Granny Flack explained to the children how the slaves had resisted, the methods they used, and how they carried on the struggle for generations. Braxton remembered, “[She told us how the slaves used] religious songs, and how they sang them. And if someone was stealing something out of the big house, how they would let the people know that The Man was coming back at that time. . . . They were warned by songs. It was a tradition in the slave quarters that you had these messages that were tied up in hymns. . . that they just passed down from generation to generation.”

These stories, and Granny Flack herself, made a deep impression on Braxton. He felt that it was from her that he learned his people’s true history. What made the greatest impact was her endorsement of resistance to white power, her confidence that a new day was coming, and the example of her own perseverance. “I reckon that what impressed me the most,” Braxton noted, “was her survival, how she lived through all of that. And, her main word, her theme, was that you gotta fight for what you want. And she told us our day would be comin’”. And, “There are gonna be times, son, when you’re gonna have to stand up to the master.” And, in a sense, when the sixties rolled around, that’s exactly what we did. I mean, that was a vivid portrayal of standin’ up against the master, being the white man.”

Just a few years before the lunch counter protests began in Chapel Hill, Granny Flack’s health finally began to fail. By this time the children who used to sit on her front porch while

their mothers worked had become young men and women. Even as they moved to break with traditions of deference and accommodation to segregation, they also carried on the traditions of community solidarity and respect that had enabled black people to survive Jim Crow. Now, they took care of Granny Flack. Braxton recalled that taking care of Granny Flack was a community project. “Everybody in the neighborhood took care of her, you know, when she got really old and couldn’t do for herself. We’d build fires. Somebody had to go by and build her fire. Somebody had to cook for her. Somebody had to cut her wood. And all that continued until she died.”

Tempe Flack died in 1958, but more than thirty years after her death, strong memories of her persisted among those for whom she cared. It seemed she represented something of great importance to the community and to children in particular. She was the memory of people, a fountain of people’s history.

The history Tempe Flack passed on to the young was more than oral tradition. She embodied the essence of that history herself. It was flesh and blood, her house, her spinning wheel, her “old well.”<sup>69</sup> It was working until she could not, caring for the next generation, sharing her pain, her hope, what she knew because she had seen it with her own eyes. In the long reach of her life, Granny Flack embodied the black struggle for freedom and the kind of caring community that was the goal of the struggle. In that sense, she was a formidable threat to Jim Crow.

Black youths took the freedom legacy and shaped it to their dreams in the places they congregated with their friends, social spaces that were free from white domination and black

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<sup>69</sup>For the story of “the Rock Wall” in Chapel Hill, see Chapman, “Second Generation,” 125-29.

adult control.<sup>70</sup> It was in such gathering spots that the youths forged their own traditions, building upon the past, but taking it a step further. One such place in Chapel Hill was known as “the Rock Wall,” or simply “the Rock.”

During the 1930s, houses in the black community were often built with unpainted siding, no insulation, and no underpinning. The community itself was a maze of dirt roads and dead ends. Fannie Bradshaw worked for a white man who had a house built for her on the corner of Cotton Street and McDade in Pottersfield.<sup>71</sup> For years, she and her daughters worked for the white man to pay for that house. In the early 1940s, when Atlas Cotton was building a house near Mrs. Bradshaw, he had to blast away a lot of rock. He gave some of the rock to Mrs. Bradshaw and her husband so that they could underpin their house and build a rock wall. Just as the walls around the university were built to control stray animals, Mrs. Bradshaw hoped to keep people from walking through her yard.

The wall served its intended purpose, but it had an unexpected result as well. As soon as it was built, people began sitting on it. Older folks coming up the hill would stop and sit for a while. Neighbors would come by to chat and sit on the wall. As time passed, the Rock Wall became a favorite gathering place for young people. There were several teenagers in the house, including Carol Purefoy and Alton Purefoy. They were all popular, and their friends would come by and sit on the wall under the shade of a big tree during the day and under the street light at night. Harold Foster lived around the corner, William Cureton up the street, the Geer boys and the Foushee brothers nearby. These boys became friends, and as the 1940s passed into the 1950s, they spent more and more time hanging out at the Rock Wall. Mostly, the young men talked about their dates, sports, movies, and other social things. As the decade

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<sup>70</sup>On the function of “free spaces” as sights for movement building, see Evans and Boyte, *Free Spaces*.

<sup>71</sup>Fannie Bradshaw interview.

of the 50s waned and a new day began to break, they sat on the Rock wall late into the night and turned their conversations to issues like religion, their futures, and freedom.<sup>72</sup>

When the civil rights movement hit, these same young men became local leaders, and they met at the Rock Wall to talk through the events of the day and decide what to do next. They took what their parents' generation had built and turned it to their own purpose. Yet they also continued the long tradition of struggle and self-determination embodied in the wall. In this way, the Rock Wall, like Granny Flack's front porch, became a staging area for the black youth revolt of the 1960s in Chapel Hill.

The leadership of black youths developed unnoticed as part of the background to public events during the 1950s. Both white elites in Chapel Hill and older established leaders in the black community were taken by surprise when the sit-in movement led by black youths convulsed North Carolina in 1960. To an extent, the black youth revolt of 1960 was a reaction to the timidity and gradualism that characterized many communities during the 1950s, including Chapel Hill.<sup>73</sup> Locally, the elimination of the CIO and the suppression of radical political activity pushed economic issues and militant struggle into the background. Nevertheless, interracial cooperation and token desegregation in Chapel Hill developed gradually during the 1950s.

In the black community, resistance to Jim Crow was evident in the demand by black parents in 1949 that Orange County Training School be renamed Lincoln High School. When the new Lincoln High School was built on Merritt Mill Rd., black parents filed a lawsuit

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<sup>72</sup>Harold Foster interview by author, Braxton Foushee interview by author, William Cureton interview.

<sup>73</sup>On the tension in black Greensboro between "caution and activism," see William Chafe's discussion of the reluctance of Greensboro ministers to host Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at their churches in 1958 in *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 111-12. On the role of black ministers in the Chapel Hill movement, see Chapman, "Second Generation," 240-45, 248-51.

alleging that the school did not have adequate resources. Hubert Robinson, former chauffer to President Graham, became the first black alderman since the 1880s in 1953.<sup>74</sup> Rev. J. R. Manley followed him as the first black member of the school board in 1959. In 1960, with NAACP support, Lattice and Lee Vickers filed a lawsuit against the Chapel Hill-Carrboro public schools on behalf of their son, Stanley, to have him transferred to an all-white school. The story appeared in the *New York Times* as part of the article reporting the first Woolworth lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro.<sup>75</sup>

NAACP initiated court decisions forced UNC to desegregate its Law School and other graduate programs in 1951 and undergraduate admissions in 1955.<sup>76</sup> In 1959, students at the Campus Y initiated efforts to negotiate with businesses in Chapel Hill to achieve desegregation.<sup>77</sup> Thus, during the 1950s there was organizing to achieve desegregation in Chapel Hill. However, white liberals and black middle-class leaders guided these efforts, and they made no effort to mobilize the black community for a confrontation with Jim Crow or to organize black workers. Tokenism and gradualism was the order of the day. Black youths watched these developments from the sidelines as they entered their teenage years during the 1950s. As controversy developed over Jim Crow, some of the youths increasingly came to see segregation as a line in the sand. While most were complacent and obeyed the rules, some did not.

Just as black individuals bent to survive Jim Crow, black institutions generally accommodated as well. During the 1950s, African American youths often did not learn to

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<sup>74</sup>*Chapel Hill Weekly*, June 21, 1957 and December 12, 1972.

<sup>75</sup>*New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1960.

<sup>76</sup>Cheek, "Desegregation of the University."

<sup>77</sup>"Letter of Clarification," Pappy Churchill and Paul Wehr, *Daily Tar Heel*, March 3, 1960.

challenge Jim Crow from black teachers, black ministers, or from the example of black politicians. Black youth did learn to survive white authority in black institutions, but they were not often encouraged to question black authority. Since black institutions had to accommodate to white power to survive, black leaders had to depend on the goodwill of powerful white people to gain concessions for the black community, and black parents did not want their children getting in trouble with the law or lynched. For these reasons, there was a tendency for the training that black youths got in black institutions to be about how to survive and succeed in a white-dominated society. But the black youths who initiated the lunch counter protests in 1960 defied such training. They rebelled against both white authority and the cautious strategy embraced by most of their elders.

The young people who initiated the protests in 1960, at least in Chapel Hill, did not passively accept the leadership of black institutions, let alone the authority of white institutions. They were not the ones who did everything by the book. Some thought of themselves as rebels, renegades, or radicals. Many were deep thinkers and risk takers. These youths became the local activist core of the Chapel Hill movement.

In Chapel Hill's black community no issue stood outside the dynamic of the color line. Black children in the 1940s and 1950s learned from their parents and other adults at first, but increasingly they learned from their own experience and began thinking for themselves. In particular, young black men were taught that they were the main target of white hostility.<sup>78</sup> It was constantly repeated to them that their prospects, even their very survival, required learning how not to offend white people. Most of them learned, as well, that their role in life was to labor with their hands, although a lucky few could make it in the white man's world.

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<sup>78</sup>James Brittan interview and Gloria Williams interview.

Foster summed up his mother's attitude, for instance, as "tryin' to stay on the good side of white people." At first, he and his friends saw the question of black freedom as "how much of a troublemaker can some little nigger boys be before goin' to jail?"<sup>79</sup> Increasingly, however, the youths rebelled against adult black authority, not because it felt arbitrary or confining, but because it was out of step with the aspirations of their generation.

Thomas Mason felt that only a very few students were really "aware" during the late 1950s. William Cureton saw himself and his friends as more intelligent and less willing than other students to go by the rules of the establishment. "You had certain individuals in there," Mason recalled, "that did things by the rule; in other words, they came out valedictorian, and salutatorian and all that, but they were by no means the smartest, smartest individual. They did everything by the rule . . . They weren't in our group. If [our group members] had applied themselves, the people that got the awards and everything never would have gotten them."<sup>80</sup>

Thomas Mason agreed that members of the group were intellectuals, "in the sense of challenging the given norm. Critical thinkers. Good students. Read a lot. Questioned." By way of illustration, Mason noted that he had been suspended from Lincoln for two weeks because he defended use of the term "black" instead of "Negro." Later, he got in trouble for showing interest in the Cuban Revolution. He reasoned that, given the United States government's historically poor treatment of blacks, "If the government was so opposed to the Cuban Revolution, there might be something to it."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Harold Foster interview by Ken Hamilton.

<sup>80</sup>William Cureton interview.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas Mason interview.

Foster recalled that he initially tended to defer to the judgment of adults about the relationship of black history to Jim Crow. “I remember the Black History Months. We were always reading about black people, but what we read about—these people were presented as heroes and role models. . . . Well, you know, we thought it was a real pride thing that somebody came up out of slavery and became a good reader and orator and put out a paper, say, like Frederick Douglas. And we didn’t put any kind of—It wasn’t viewed as, ‘It never should have been that way in the beginning.’”<sup>82</sup>

In later years, Foster felt that his teachers did not probe the underlying reasons for historical events, as if things happened in a vacuum.

So we never questioned why we were championin’ this person, except to say, “Oh, he made it in a white world,” and being glad with that. We never went behind that and said that, “He never should have had to go through this anyway.” We never looked at it as him bein’ colonized and tryin’ to take on the values of the oppressor, and things like that. So I grew up respectin’ these people because other people respected them, in terms of sayin’, “Well, you can do it too and in spite of the odds, you can make it in a white person’s world. . . .” So, when I read at that time, I read with the intent of finding people who had met the challenge of becoming “good Negroes,” or people who had made it in this society despite the odds, but made it on white people’s terms.<sup>83</sup>

As these youths gained greater experience in the world, they began losing respect for the “good Negroes” of Chapel Hill who seemed intent on catering to white power and controlling black youths. As a result, they began reaching for a new identity that broke with that of the “good Negro.” This kind of critical thinking involved a break with all habits of deference to authority. Such rebelliousness was a necessary precursor to the sit-in revolt against Jim Crow.

The youths who initiated the protest movement in Chapel Hill were not part of the black establishment. Their parents were not teachers, businessmen, or preachers, but poor laboring

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<sup>82</sup>Foster interview by Ken Hamilton.

<sup>83</sup>Foster interview by Ken Hamilton.

people. Most of them worked for the university or for white professors. Charles Foushee, for instance, believed that the Foushee name was well known in the community, and that consequently he and his brothers and sisters had opportunities and experiences that other blacks might not have had. Nevertheless, college was not among his goals. "I did not think about even going to college," Charles remembered. Harold Foster's mother also had standing in the community as a PTA leader and an activist in church and civic affairs. However, she was a single parent raising three children in a small house that didn't belong to her and she worked at the university for minimal wages. She did not see either herself or Harold as part of the black middle class. This class awareness was revealed in advice she gave to her son in 1963. She told him to pull back before he got killed, and she predicted that the gains of the movement would not fall to all blacks equally: "When you all break the door down, it will be Mr. McDougal's daughter who goes in because she'll have the money."<sup>84</sup> James Brittian's mother was a domestic and his father was a gas station attendant. William Cureton's father was a plasterer and his mother was a domestic. Thus, the youths who led the civil rights struggle in Chapel Hill were the children of the same working class people who had looked to the CIO for a fighting chance.<sup>85</sup>

The Greensboro sit-ins that began on February 1, 1960 sparked a revolt. As wave upon wave of young people sat down at segregated lunch counters throughout the South, it was as if Margaret Walker's call of 1937 had been answered. The black youths who rallied to the movement were, in fact, "a second generation full of courage." They stepped forward in response to the yearning for freedom and the faith in a new day that was at the core of African American culture. By their choices, including even rebellion against their parents,

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<sup>84</sup>C. A. McDougal was the principal of Lincoln High School.

<sup>85</sup>Charles Foushee interview and Haddie B. Foster interview.

the youths had prepared themselves to lead in the 1960s. Yet the aspirations of their generation also reached back and embodied the broad democratic essence, if not the form, of the working-class militancy of the late 1930s. By their audacious acts they shattered the barrier of fear that had shielded Jim Crow for sixty years. In so doing, they became what the rulers of North Carolina feared most and would do their best to crush, “a freedom loving people come to growth.”

### *Desegregation of UNC Admissions—The Legal Battle*

Although a number of attempts were made by African Americans to enroll in UNC during the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until 1951 that unrelenting pressure from the NAACP and federal courts forced the university to desegregate its graduate schools. The trustees admitted Edward O. Diggs to the Medical School, but only because university attorneys believed they could not prevail before the Supreme Court, since no “separate but equal” medical school existed in North Carolina.<sup>86</sup> In this way, UNC became the first white southern university to “voluntarily” admit a black student without the requirement of a court order.<sup>87</sup>

The trustees’ decision, however, did not indicate that they supported the desegregation of public higher education or racial justice in North Carolina. Gordon Gray, scion of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco fortune and new president of the university, introduced a resolution to admit Diggs before the Executive Committee of the Trustees by stating, “I wish to say at the

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<sup>86</sup>The U. S. Supreme Court’s 1938 decision in *Missouri Ex Rel. Gaines v. Canada* put southern states on notice that they would be required to improve their graduate and professional schools for African Americans or face court ordered desegregation. North Carolina responded in 1939 by founding a law school at Durham’s black North Carolina College. The state did not build any facilities for black medical education.

<sup>87</sup>Cheek, “Desegregation of the University,” 145.

outset that I am frankly opposed to breaking down segregation in the public schools, and I am opposed to the admission of Negroes to our undergraduate schools or graduate and professional schools in cases where the State has attempted to provide such facilities for Negroes.”<sup>88</sup>

John Kerr, Jr. urged several members of the General Assembly to enforce complete segregation on the university by threatening to withdraw state appropriations. He wrote, “In view of the action of Executive Committee University Trustees, only way to meet situation is cut out appropriation to any schools that do not follow segregation. That has been done in Georgia and is going to be done in South Carolina. I have amendment if you want it. That will bring them around to some sense. People of North Carolina are opposed to this proposition.”<sup>89</sup>

Governor Kerr Scott, however, backed the Executive Committee. He characterized Kerr’s approach as “negative” and advocated, instead, a “positive” approach that conformed to federal law and upheld the ethic of equality of educational opportunity. As he was quick to point out, this approach would also demonstrate that North Carolina was willing to “meet the issue squarely,” while maintaining the most important aspects of a segregated educational system.

This contrast illustrates the debate among North Carolina’s New South oligarchs about how to rule at a moment in history when segregation faced its most severe test. Consistent with the dominant, forward-looking tendency among North Carolina’s industrial leaders, the university’s trustees remained true to the “progressive” image established by Aycock in 1900

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<sup>88</sup>Cheek, “Desegregation of the University,” 134.

<sup>89</sup>Cheek, “Desegregation of the University ,” 139. Also see, *Durham Morning Herald*, March 27, 1951 and *Raleigh News and Observer*, March 28, 1951.

and developed through UNC's close alignment with New Deal thinking. At a full meeting of the Trustees, the Executive Committee's recommendation was passed, though only after adding an amendment to make clear that recent Supreme Court decisions had forced the trustees to admit Diggs.

In fact, UNC's decision to desegregate its Medical School "voluntarily," as the *Raleigh News and Observer* pointed out, was "a conservative decision." While it was a rejection of the "fury and folly" of diehard segregationists, in essence, UNC's decision was an effort to resist the dismantling of Jim Crow for as long as possible.<sup>90</sup> The trustees had observed the pathetic charade attempted by the University of Texas in response to Heman Sweatt's application to the UT Law School in 1946. Since UT administrators could not claim any "separate but equal" law school facilities for African Americans in Texas, they hastily rented a building owned by a petroleum firm and established a law school for Sweatt in the basement. This did not pass muster with the Supreme Court, even after Texas pumped several million dollars into the school, so in addition to making themselves a laughing stock, the UT trustees were forced to admit Sweatt based on the unanimous Supreme Court decision in *Sweatt v. Painter, et. al.* rendered on June 5, 1950.<sup>91</sup> The UNC trustees, must have understood that trying to do as Texas had done was not only a losing proposition, but would seriously undermine the state's carefully cultivated progressive image.

Moreover, the intransigence of the UT trustees had resulted in the development of a strong desegregation movement among students and professors. Seventeen campus organizations affirmed their support for desegregation. Students even went so far as to

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<sup>90</sup>*Raleigh News and Observer*, April 5, 1951 quoted in Cheek, "Desegregation of the University," 144.

<sup>91</sup>Goldstone, "Shadow of the South,"41.

organize an NAACP chapter, the first on a white campus in the South.<sup>92</sup> Not least, the trustee's "progressive" stance would help deflect criticism and forestall the development of an active desegregation movement on campus.

Although voluntarily desegregating its Medical School, UNC took a hard line stand in an effort the trustees hoped they could win to prevent the desegregation of the UNC Law School. The UNC lawyers believed that North Carolina College Law School, which was no "basement college," might meet the standard of the Supreme Court for "separate but equal." This state supported law school for African Americans had been established in 1940, after the Supreme Court's 1938 decision in *Missouri Ex Rel. Gaines v. Canada*. *Gaines* put southern states on notice that they would be required to improve their graduate and professional schools for African Americans or face court ordered desegregation. North Carolina had spent millions of dollars to do just that. North Carolina lost its case in the Supreme Court in the spring of 1951, and four black law students entered Carolina during the summer. Their names were Floyd B. McKissick, Kenneth Lee, Harvey Beech, and James Lassiter. They were the first black students in history to attend UNC. Edward O. Diggs entered the Medical School at the beginning of the Fall term.

At the same time, university leaders attempted to discourage a large influx of black graduate students at UNC. The strategy was to ensure that the graduate programs at North Carolina College, particularly in education, were strengthened. If that could be done, the hundreds of North Carolina residents pursuing graduate studies outside the state because of segregation laws would have an attractive alternative to the university.<sup>93</sup> The university

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<sup>92</sup>Goldstone, "Shadow of the South," 36-37.

<sup>93</sup>Cheek, "Desegregation of the University," 153, 167.

committed itself to a policy of promoting programs that duplicated UNC's graduate programs at North Carolina College in order to limit desegregation. William D. Carmichael, for instance, was concerned that UNC would be "flooded" or "inundated" by black students. UNC's firm opposition to the elimination of such "program duplication" would later become a primary point of contention in the university's struggle with the federal government over desegregation in the 1970s.<sup>94</sup>

After "separate but equal" was struck down by the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, UNC again went to court to block the desegregation of undergraduate admissions. Once again, the university lost in court, and Ralph Frasier, John Brandon, and LeRoy Frasier became the first African Americans to enroll as undergraduates in the fall of 1955. Even in fighting a losing battle, UNC's leaders had sought to protect and enhance the state's progressive image. In a letter to the trustees concerning his thank you letter to the witnesses who testified for the university in its losing effort to block desegregation of the law school, William D. Carmichael, acting president of the university, noted the following: "The fact that so many gentlemen of this character, intelligence and caliber were in court with us, in my opinion, will go far toward putting into the record what the State of North Carolina has done, in good faith, to provide legal educational opportunities for Negroes at North Carolina College, equal to those provided for our white youth at the University. Irrespective of what the future may bring, witnesses on both sides in our case

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<sup>94</sup>William D. Carmichael quoted in Cheek, "Desegregation of the University," 168. For a study that discusses UNC's court battle with the federal government over "program duplication" and other desegregation issues, see Link, *William Friday*.

testified without stint that our State has done more for its Negroes in the field of higher education than any other state in America.”<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, the “separate but equal” achievements that Carmichael trumpeted could no longer be used as excuses to deny full citizenship and real equality in the 1950s. The law school at North Carolina College surpassed the “basement college” at the University of Texas by far, but it was in every way inferior to the legal education provided for white students at UNC. Carmichael’s claim that “separate but equal” facilities at North Carolina College were, in fact, equal, was not true. In fact, since disfranchisement at the turn of the century, North Carolina had only done for black education what was politically necessary to maintain Jim Crow and retain its black, low wage work force. If it had done more than other southern states, that was still not much. True to its history, as the end of Jim Crow darkened its horizon, the university would conform only to the letter of the law, seeking to maintain token, purely formal desegregation as long as possible.

### *Desegregation of the University—The Struggle at UNC*

The legal decisions of 1951 and 1955 that forced the university to admit African American students did not produce large numbers of admissions. As a result of the administration’s hostility to genuine racial justice, few black students actually attended Carolina until the late 1960s. During the first four years of desegregation, when only black graduate students were eligible for admission, the number of African Americans was six (1951), two (1952), three (1953), and four (1954). After black undergraduates began

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<sup>95</sup>From W. D. Carmichael, Jr., to members of the Board of Trustees, 6 September, 1950, “W. D. Carmichael Jr. Papers in the Southern Historical Collection,” summarized and quoted in Cheek, “Desegregation of the University,” 130.

attending UNC in 1955 the totals were ten (1955), eleven (1956), fifteen (1957), twenty-six (1958), twenty-three (1959), thirty-five (1960), forty-nine (1961), forty (1962), and sixty-three (1963). Most of these students were graduate students. The number of black undergraduates fluctuated between two and six from 1955 to 1960. Undergraduate numbers increased from ten (1961), to eleven (1962), to twenty-five (1963).<sup>96</sup> In 1967, the *Daily Tarheel* criticized the university's tokenism, stating, "when this University has only 75 Negro students—although Negroes constitute 25percent of North Carolina's population—there is obviously a racial imbalance."<sup>97</sup> By 1968, the percentage of black undergraduates had nearly reached one per cent—107 out of 11,010.<sup>98</sup>

During the first ten years of graduate level desegregation, the Law School and the Medical School admitted small numbers of black students. The Graduate School admitted no black students during the regular school year until 1955. Public Health had no black students until 1960, while the School of Pharmacy did not enroll a black student until 1962. As of the spring semester of 1964, the Dental School and the Nursing School had admitted not a single black student.<sup>99</sup>

What explains this glacial pace of desegregation at UNC?. The evidence suggests that the fundamental reason was that administrators at the university failed to use that power to establish an institutional culture or practice that affirmed racial justice. The first black law students were denied pool passes; they were required to live on a segregated floor of Steele dormitory, and white students were not allowed to occupy empty rooms on that floor; they

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<sup>96</sup>Data is from Blanchard, "Racial Desegregation," appendix. He does not list his sources.

<sup>97</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, December 7, 1967

<sup>98</sup>Manekin, "Moral Crisis," 8.

<sup>99</sup>All data from Blanchard, "Racial Desegregation," appendix.

were told to sit in the segregated section of Kenan stadium for football games. When the law students voted to go ahead with the annual Law Association dance in defiance of the wishes of administrators Chancellor House forced the dance to be held off campus in accordance with the trustees' Jim Crow regulations prohibiting mixed social functions.<sup>100</sup> For his part, McKissick resisted Jim Crow at UNC. Once, he jumped in the pool at UNC with his clothes on to defy the university's continued institutional racism. Later in life, McKissick became the national chairman of CORE and a prominent civil rights lawyer, defending demonstrators arrested in Chapel Hill and elsewhere from 1960 through 1964.<sup>101</sup>

When the Supreme Court struck down "separate but equal" in 1954, some African Americans hoped, even expected, that UNC would take the lead in voluntarily desegregating undergraduate admissions. Ed Caldwell, Jr., who was descended from November Caldwell, one of the first university slaves, told his classmates at Hampton Institute that he expected to be "the first Black to go to the University of North Carolina." His plans to transfer did not succeed when the university failed to desegregate immediately. Caldwell remembered the bitter lesson he learned. "I hate to use these words," Caldwell said, "but the Whites in power never had any intention of desegregating the university or the schools. Every loophole that they could find, they found to keep it from happening."<sup>102</sup>

In fact, the university admitted only a few students under court order and made them feel distinctly unwelcome. In particular, the university enforced segregation in many non-academic areas of university life. As noted earlier, the Morehead Planetarium and the Carolina Inn remained segregated until after the sit-in demonstrations began in 1960. The

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<sup>101</sup>Cheek, "Desegregation of the University," 172-181.

<sup>102</sup>Ed Caldwell, Jr. quoted in Hill, "Local Histories/Local Memories," 100.

North Carolina Memorial Hospital remained segregated until after a campus NAACP demonstration in 1963. Nearly all businesses in Chapel Hill remained segregated without university objection until passage of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Individually, desegregating UNC was a traumatic experience for many of the early black students. Edith Hubbard arrived at Carolina in the mid-1960s as a transfer from Bennett College, a private school for black women in Greensboro, North Carolina. Describing the cold reception she received at Carolina a decade after desegregation, Hubbard recalled, “You go from an environment that’s very nurturing, and people love you and care about you, and you move into an environment where all that is gone.” More than thirty years later, though now an active member of Carolina’s Black Alumni Association, Hubbard says, “I’m sure I wouldn’t do it again.”<sup>103</sup>

Ralph Frasier, one of the first three black undergraduates, recalled that “From the trustees to the administration, and to a lesser degree the faculty, [people] were hostile.” The trustees and the administration, embodying official power, were setting the example for continued Jim Crow at UNC. On the other hand, as other early black students reported, some students and campus organizations were very welcoming. Frasier noted, “We were welcomed by a number of students—the student leadership, I’d say, the newspaper—well, some of the newspaper staff. And particularly the Y.”<sup>104</sup>

When Karen Parker arrived at Carolina in the early 60s, she found that she was the only black female undergraduate on campus. Nevertheless, “a lot of white people were very friendly.” On the other hand, noted David Brown, writing about the experience of the first

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<sup>103</sup>Brown, “Grudging Acceptance,” 28.

<sup>104</sup>Brown, “Grudging Acceptance,” 24.

black students in the *Carolina Alumni Review* in 2002, the fact that “official Carolina treated them differently was unmistakable.”<sup>105</sup> During Parker’s first year, she was never assigned a roommate. The second year, she and a white female student from Wilmington, North Carolina, decided to live together. The administration demanded that both their parents sign a consent form before authorizing the interracial living arrangement. When Parker became friends with a classmate, a white male, the administration called the student in and questioned him about the nature of the relationship. The Dean of Women, Katherine Carmichael, called Parker into her office on several occasions to try to discourage her from participating in civil disobedience demonstrations. Parker endured arrest and jail twice.

David Dansby, the first African American to receive an undergraduate degree from Carolina in 1961, had experiences similar to Edith Hubbard’s. In addition, Dansby was a political activist, and his experience reflects the way outspoken black students became targets for white supremacists, while receiving no support from administrators. Dansby noted that applicants to Carolina were racially identifiable because the admissions people knew which high schools were black and which were white. UNC also required a photograph. In this way, black applicants were identified and they were called in for interviews, unlike most white students. Dansby requested financial aid and was told by the Director of Admissions, Roy Armstrong, “they didn’t have any financial aid.” Armstrong suggested “that I should, you know, attend one of the black schools.” Dansby left his application and was accepted at Carolina in 1957. Many black students, Dansby noted, were simply “scared to go.”

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<sup>105</sup>Brown, “Grudging Acceptance,” 27, 29

Moreover, as evidenced by the Director of Admissions' suggestion, Carolina was actively discouraging some black applicants.<sup>106</sup>

Like the hospital, the university at that time had a "Negro wing." Dansby shared a wing of Steel dormitory with the other four black male students attending Carolina. "There were two vacant rooms on our wing and they wouldn't let anybody occupy those rooms, any of the whites because the blacks were up there. We went to the man . . . that was in charge of housing . . . and requested that we be permitted to get assignments in other dormitories, but at that time they didn't permit us to be assigned to any other dormitories . . . . I think the following year, we were allowed to room in other places on campus." Thus, while the administration did everything it legally could to maintain Jim Crow traditions within the desegregated university, Dansby and the other black students protested segregated housing at Carolina and eventually forced the administration to change its policies.<sup>107</sup>

Dansby was probably the first Carolina student to participate in the early civil rights movement in Chapel Hill, which was led by black Lincoln High School students. Soon after the *Daily Tar Heel* reported his participation, white supremacists targeted Dansby on campus for harassment. Dansby answered a phone call and the caller said, "hello David. I hear that you are the leader." Dansby recalled, "And I said 'first place, who is this?' And they said, 'the boys.' And I said, 'what boys?' They say, 'the boys that are gonna get you if you don't stop being the leader.' Well, shortly after that . . . people began to throw cherry bombs at my window from the outside. Several cherry bombs were placed at my door."<sup>108</sup> Then an article clipped from a newspaper was put on the bulletin board in Dansby's hall. The article

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<sup>106</sup>David Dansby interview.

<sup>107</sup>David Dansby interview.

<sup>108</sup>David Dansby interview.

described the Sharpesville Massacre in South Africa, where white police shot and killed a large number of non-violent black protestors opposing apartheid. Dansby remembered, “In each instance when they said the article referred to a Negro, that the word, term, was underlined.”

The experience of Hubbard, Dansby, and other black path breakers at Carolina also had the effect of sending a message to African Americans back home and throughout the state that might be thinking of applying to UNC. In addition to using its political influence to establish duplicate programs at North Carolina College, Carolina hung out a big NOT WELCOME sign to discourage black applicants. In fact, not until urban rebellions and the gathering power of a more militant black freedom movement shook America’s power structure to its core did institutions like UNC pay more than lip service to desegregation.

In November 1958, the Campus Y Human Relations Committee launched an initiative to reduce discrimination in Chapel Hill restaurants and theaters directed against black UNC students. First, the students surveyed businesses in Chapel Hill to determine their racial policies. They found that both movie theaters and all but three Chapel Hill restaurants maintained strict segregation policies. After fourteen campus organizations signed a letter of support “requesting the granting of equal privileges for all U.N.C. students,” 40 Campus Y volunteers conducted a survey of 1,200 students. Sixty-seven percent supported equal privileges for all UNC students. With this evidence of support, four students approached the business owners. The student negotiating committee included Don Furtado, Student Body President, Patty Wall, Student Body Secretary, Pappy Churchill, and Paul Wehr. The business owners suggested at a meeting in September 1959 that they needed greater proof of student support for desegregation, but indicated that if that were forthcoming they would

seriously consider providing equal service for black Carolina students. On February 4, 1960, the Student Legislature passed a resolution by a 2-1 margin calling on Chapel Hill business owners to provide equal service to all Carolina students. On Friday, February 26, negotiations between the students and the business owners collapsed.<sup>109</sup> By then, however, the freedom struggle had made the issue of special privileges for black Carolina students obsolete. Lunch counter sit-ins in every major North Carolina city had made equal service *for all* the issue of the day. Two days later, on Sunday, February 28, black Lincoln High School students launched the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill by sitting in at John Carswell's Colonial Drug Store on the west end of Franklin Street in the black community.<sup>110</sup>

This episode reveals a good deal about the extent of white student support at UNC for an end to segregation. The evidence seems to suggest that this support was extensive and that some students were ready to put a great deal of work into challenging Jim Crow. This highlights the fact that if UNC administrators had taken the lead in promoting racially just policies, most students would probably have embraced those policies. In this way, UNC could have created a genuinely enlightened model of desegregation for the South and the nation. Instead, while UNC did not set the most reactionary example, its trustees and administrators implemented deeply unjust policies that scarred the lives of the first black students and set Carolina on a tragic path toward confrontation, even as they continued to promote the university's liberal image.

At the same time, some of the weaknesses of white student support for black freedom are illustrated by the fact that the Campus Y students were seeking an end to segregation for UNC students only, rather than for all African Americans. Moreover, their tactics involved

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<sup>109</sup>“Letter of Clarification,” *Daily Tar Heel*, March 3, 1960.

<sup>110</sup>Chapman, “Second Generation,” 203-07.

liberal methods of talk and more talk, with few results over a period of sixteen months. As Pappy Churchill and Paul Wehr noted, “We have labored and have received cooperation from many, yet there hasn’t been much success.” As would turn out to be the case time and again, good intentions and liberal methods would prove to be ineffective in the confrontation with power. However, many of the students had their hearts attuned to freedom, and they learned from their failed efforts. In particular, the bold actions of the black high school students seemed to stir many of them to thoughts of more aggressive action. Wehr and Churchill noted, “There is also active sentiment among some white Carolina students which may result shortly in a sympathy sit-down protest and/or a boycott of establishments which discriminate on the basis of race.” In this way, the black youths, by standing up for themselves and following their own wisdom, recruited more and better white allies.

In 1960, despite the repression of the 1950s, a core of black youth leaders in Chapel Hill took the first steps that resulted in a powerful local civil rights insurgency during the early 1960s. Their initiative created the conditions for a movement alliance with liberal white students and professors at the university, and with the networks and resources of the developing national civil rights movement.

Although southern institutions, including the university, implemented token desegregation during the 1950s, they did not make an affirmative commitment to racial justice or abandoned their antagonism to labor rights. In fact, they made strong efforts to resist full desegregation in both admissions and employment.

In 1960, to overthrow Jim Crow in Chapel Hill and throughout the state, black students rose up in open revolt. Because of the power of the university as the dominant local

employer, as well as the university's implementation of formal desegregation, the Chapel Hill civil rights movement did not focus on the university. It focused on the entire community of Chapel Hill by demanding that the whole town take responsibility for ending segregated public accommodations. Although the movement did not win this demand in Chapel Hill, the local struggle contributed to the overthrow of legal segregation and disfranchisement through national legislation by 1965.

While this was a great victory for black freedom and democracy, the end of Jim Crow did not mean the end of institutional racism. Formal equality did not mean racial justice. Racial discrimination persisted at the university, though denied and shrouded in the rhetoric of equality. To combat these more subtle, camouflaged forms of institutional racism, African Americans initiated a new era of contention over the meaning of black freedom in Chapel Hill and throughout the nation.

## EPILOGUE

### DIVERSITY WITHOUT JUSTICE—UNC’S UNEASY PEACE AT THE MILLENIUM

Throughout its history, the University of North Carolina has been heralded as a pacesetter, but for what and for whom? During the era of slavery it did more than any other state institution to spread and consolidate the rule of the slave owning gentry. Following Emancipation, leaders of the university spearheaded the restoration of elite domination through the suppression of black freedom and the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction. When biracial class insurgencies in the late nineteenth century once again challenged the power of New South industrial elites, UNC men took the lead in the white supremacy campaigns that suppressed these movements.

The most powerful economic class of each era dominated the politics of the university, save for the few short years of Radical Reconstruction. Both the slave owning gentry and New South industrialists used white supremacy to extract cheap labor from black workers and to suppress the biracial efforts of workers and farmers to challenge elite domination. The university was a key institution through which these elites exercised their power. Until the 1960s, the university promoted and enforced Jim Crow on campus, in the local community, and throughout the state.

In the years since the 1960s freedom movements, the university has adjusted to the demise of Jim Crow, though it did not lead the way. It has finally welcomed diversity in its student body, faculty, and staff. It has grown into an institution so large and pluralistic as to

be qualitatively different from its earlier configurations. Today, its educational programs encompass diverse and sometimes contradictory activities. Its academic offerings are militaristic and antimilitaristic, statist and antistatist, capitalist and anticapitalist. It is a cultural center that sponsors high art and supports vernacular and popular culture as well. Its medical programs and hospitals encompass progressive public health initiatives and profitable private services for the very wealthy. The university increasingly functions in a complex global framework in the new millennium.

Do these changes indicate that UNC is no longer controlled by a dominant economic class or that it now serves the whole state and all of the people equally? I argue that they do not. Today, the university functions primarily as a service industry for global capital, training students in the requisite technical skills and cultural sensitivities to enable them to implement corporate agendas in the global marketplace. Profits in the current world economy still depend on cheap labor and raw materials, so what the university does not do is train students to challenge exploitation and oppression. While individual professors and even academic programs may take the promotion of justice as their mission, it is not the dominant function of the university. The university's institutional culture promotes diversity, service, and free speech, but it discourages students from being sensitive to injustice or challenging power to right wrongs.

It will require a more comprehensive study to fully develop these themes. Here, I provide an overview of the university's transition from Jim Crow to new, more subtle forms of institutional racism. In the course of this transition, UNC accepted diversity in the academic arena, but rejected black demands for justice, particularly in employment. As a result, a colorblind ethic prevails at UNC today. This institutional culture encourages students to

pursue their individual aspirations, assuring them that there will be no limit placed on them due to race, class, or gender. At the same time, while difference is celebrated as an important part of the educational environment, the need to acknowledge and undo the injustices that have been so central to the university's history is ignored. In particular, the responsibility of the university for racial differences in wealth and well-being among its employees and in the local community is studiously avoided by administrators.

The white supremacist roots of the university run deep and its culture and hierarchy retain many aspects of the old Jim Crow order, though these are now disguised behind the rhetoric of equal opportunity and diversity. The best example of this is the fact that low wage workers of color still labor under conditions not far removed from the Jim Crow era. Such institutional racism does not require conscious intent by individual administrators. It merely requires their pragmatic acquiescence in long established patterns of racial injustice that determine the allocation of resources. One way to rationalize such acquiescence is to pretend that the past no longer influences the present and that we should simply move on into the future. Against such racial historical amnesia and willful denial of the continuing impact of past injustice, I offer a brief discussion of black freedom and the university during the transition from Jim Crow to the present.

While the university promoted and enforced Jim Crow after 1900, it also served as an advocate and base for the development of Progressive Era reforms essential to the advance of a modern urban-industrial economy. Carolina's progressive reformers did not advocate the end of Jim Crow, but wanted to soften its impact.<sup>1</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s, the university was a leader in New Deal reform efforts aimed at bringing North Carolina and the

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<sup>1</sup>Link, *Paradox*, 239-67; Singal, *War Within*, 115-52; Sosna, *Silent South*, 42-59.

South into the mainstream of the U.S. economy and social order.<sup>2</sup> National elites increasingly saw Jim Crow in the South as an impediment to U.S. global interests.<sup>3</sup> The reform efforts of men like Frank Porter Graham, who was closely connected with these national elites, created tension with elements of the state power structure that ruled the university. Even though Graham refused to endorse federal intervention to end Jim Crow, the Board of Trustees limited what he and other liberals could do to promote racial reforms and labor rights. With the onset of Cold War repression in the late 1940s, the influence of university liberals greatly diminished.

During the 1950s, despite the suppression of labor organizing and the silencing of many progressive voices, a core of rebellious black youth leaders developed at Lincoln High School in Chapel Hill. They came of age in the mid-1950s, when the Supreme Court overturned the legal basis for Jim Crow and Martin Luther King rose to prominence during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. When the lunch counter sit-in movement swept North Carolina and the South in 1960, these youths rejected the cautious strategies of their elders and launched a three-year campaign of protest and civil disobedience. The local civil rights movement, in concert with the national movement, helped overthrow Jim Crow and forced the town and the university to eliminate all explicit segregation policies.

During the early 1960s, the University of North Carolina discarded its remaining Jim Crow policies, while establishing a new system of *de facto*, subtle, “colorblind” institutional

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<sup>2</sup>Sosna, *Silent South*, 60-87; Singal, *War Within*, 265-301; Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 270-74.

<sup>3</sup>Following World War I, Anglo-American policy elites moved toward a rejection of open racial language from international affairs. By the end of World War II, racism was thoroughly discredited. For a summary of the way that British and American policy makers shifted “from a celebration of superiority to a formal acceptance of racial equality,” see Füredi, *Silent War*, 1-24.

racism.<sup>4</sup> Under mounting pressure from the black freedom movement, the federal government, professional academic organizations, accrediting bodies, discontented professors and students, and large foundations, the university reluctantly embraced an ethic of non-discrimination while refusing calls to pursue policies of affirmative justice.<sup>5</sup> The popular belief that the university desegregated voluntarily, in good faith, and with little conflict, is untrue. It is a celebratory myth built on a willful misreading of the evidence.<sup>6</sup> In fact, during the 1960s, more subtle forms of white supremacy played out in academic life and employment, forcing black workers and students to develop a more sophisticated political analysis and more aggressive methods of resistance. This epilogue briefly recounts the events of the 1960s at UNC that led to a massive campus revolt by black workers and students at the end of the decade. It summarizes events since 1969 and draws out some implications for the present.

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<sup>4</sup>For a critique of the ideology and practice of colorblindness, see Guinier and Torres, *Miner's Canary*, 37-66 and Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement." While these authors emphasize the right wing origins of the colorblind argument, I believe the history of UNC during the 1960s demonstrates that the resistance of liberals like Bill Friday to affirmative racial justice policies and practices left the door wide open for the right wing attack on affirmative action. While not denying the positive contributions of liberals to racial justice, it must be acknowledged that in a society with a long history of institutional promotion of white supremacy, only active anti-racism, rather than race neutral policies of equal opportunity or non-discrimination, can undo institutional racism. At this point in time, however, liberal UNC administrators, as well as the power structure of the United States, have rejected anti-racism as a policy alternative. For a recent critique of colorblind practices in the legal arena from a historian's point of view, see Kousser, *Colorblind Injustice*.

<sup>5</sup> On desegregation at the South's private universities, see Kean, "At a Most Uncomfortable Speed." For desegregation at UNC see Cheek, "Desegregation of the University." Other studies of desegregation at southern universities include Goldstone, "In the Shadow of the South," Cohodas, *Band Played Dixie*, and Cook, "Shadow Across the Columns."

<sup>6</sup>William S. Powell contributes to the myth that UNC desegregated voluntarily by omitting any reference whatsoever to desegregation or UNC's first black students in the 1950s section of his 1992 "revised and enlarged" pictorial history of the university. A few black students appear in his section on the 1960s, but there is no hint of the civil rights movement, Black Student Movement activities, or the cafeteria workers' strikes. Powell, *First State University*, 237-70.

### *The Academic Front In The Sixties*

By the time the sit-in movement broke out in Greensboro and across the South in February 1960, UNC's student body had been "desegregated" for nearly ten years. The University's adopted an "equal opportunity" admissions policy, which meant that from 1955 to 1960 there were never more than six black undergraduates on campus during the regular school year.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 1961, the Admissions Office stepped up recruitment efforts at high schools across the state, but these efforts actually encouraged applications from white students far more than from black students, and resulted in miniscule advances in black student enrollment.<sup>8</sup> As late as 1967, Chancellor J. Carlyle Sitterson was still saying, "Any increase in the number of Negroes will have to come slowly and gradually."<sup>9</sup>

In response to the university's failure to move beyond tokenism, black students took the lead in challenging university administrators to do more. Before the fall of 1963, when the number of black undergraduates on campus reached twenty, much of this activity was carried out by individuals and small, informal groups of black students.<sup>10</sup> During these years, white campus groups like the Campus Y sometimes lent support or launched efforts of their own to confront segregation, particularly as it affected student and academic life.

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<sup>7</sup>Blanchard, "Desegregation in Chapel Hill," appendix.

<sup>8</sup>For example, in 1963, admissions officers visited 150 white high schools and only one black high school. In 1965, UNC recruiters visited 220 white high schools and 20 black high schools. Such evidence offers support to the conclusion reached by Sarah Manekin in her recent study of UNC desegregation that "targeted recruitment of white high school students was the de facto policy of the University Office of Admissions beginning in 1961. Black students made up .3 per cent of the first year class in 1960 and only .5 per cent by 1965. Manekin, "Moral Crisis," 14, 15.

<sup>9</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, November 4, 1967; Manekin, "Moral Crisis," 9.

<sup>10</sup>Blanchard, "Desegregation in Chapel Hill," appendix.

In April 1963 the campus NAACP organized a demonstration against continued segregation at North Carolina Memorial Hospital, which was part of the university at that time. Apparently, the NAACP had been engaged in prolonged discussions with hospital administrators about desegregating the third floor of the hospital, as well as other civil rights issues. At that time, administrators still maintained one wing of the third floor, “3 West,” as the “Negro floor.” The hospital administration did not see this as segregation and had turned a deaf ear to the arguments of the students. As a last resort, the NAACP planned a demonstration to embarrass the university through maximum publicity. The *Chapel Hill Weekly* noted that “the picketing coincided with the dedication ceremonies of the new University School of Public Health building” and that Governor Terry Sanford and U.S. Deputy Surgeon General David E. Price were present.<sup>11</sup>

This demonstration promised to expose the university’s posture of being “fully integrated” as empty rhetoric. Moreover, it threatened to drag the university into the local civil rights controversy, something that UNC had strenuously avoided. Although UNC System President William Friday had desegregated both the Carolina Inn and the Morehead Planetarium by decree shortly after the sit-in movement swept North Carolina in 1960, the university maintained “separate but equal” policies at its teaching hospital.<sup>12</sup> Hospital administrators justified this continuation of Jim Crow by appealing to a definition of desegregation that would have pleased most white supremacists. Moreover, as the U.S.

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<sup>11</sup>“Marchers Protest Hospital’s Policies,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 10, 1963.

<sup>12</sup>Memo from William Friday to William Aycock, May 3, 1960, William B. Aycock’s Chancellor’s Papers, UA cited in Buchanan, “Testing of the Liberal Vision,” 41.;

Deputy Surgeon General told the demonstrators, the hospital was within the letter of the law.<sup>13</sup>

The arguments advanced by university administrators, however, did not rely on federal law. Dean of Student Affairs, Charles Henderson, called the students into Gerrard Hall and appealed to them “one last time” to “spare the University embarrassment.” “He said he had proposed to Dr. W. Reece Berryhill, Dean of the UNC School of Medicine, that patients be admitted to the Hospital “on an indiscriminate basis,” but with “fair warning” that the ward in which they were placed might be integrated, giving them an option to request placement in a segregated ward and also that integration should be up to the patients’ individual physicians. Dean Berryhill had declined to negotiate under pressure, Dean Henderson said, but had promised to ‘commence talks with the NAACP and other concerned groups.’”<sup>14</sup>

E. B. Crawford Jr., an administrator at Memorial Hospital, said the hospital had “no signs on the bathrooms or the water fountains or anything like that.” He told the *Chapel Hill Weekly* “the Hospital was desegregated to the extent of having both white and Negro patients on the same floors of the Hospital—not in the same room, but they use the same facilities.” Sixth District Congressman Horace Kornegay added, “you put somebody in the same building, you’ve got the same doctors . . . I don’t know how far else you can take it.”<sup>15</sup>

David Dansby was president of the campus NAACP in 1963. In a 1974 interview he described his negotiations with the hospital director, who told him “for certain medical reasons whites couldn’t recuperate well or heal in a situation where they have blacks.”

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<sup>13</sup>“Marchers Protest Hospital’s Policies,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 10, 1963.

<sup>14</sup>“Marchers Protest Hospital’s Policies,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 10, 1963.

<sup>15</sup>“Marchers Protest Hospital’s Policies,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 10, 1963.

Dansby responded “if they could do it in a military situation, if you take them north of the Mason Dixon line and they could do it . . . it won’t so different in Chapel Hill.”<sup>16</sup>

The NAACP students, both black and white, proceeded with their protest. They carried signs with slogans such as “Disease and suffering do not discriminate. Should hospitals?” “Consolidate 3-west into the University,” “Cure the sickness of segregation,” “‘Bury’ segregation on the ‘hill’.”<sup>17</sup>

Hospital administrators were under no institutional pressure from Chancellor Aycock or President Friday to desegregate. Institutional power at the university, in addition to individual prejudice, was still enforcing Jim Crow. Bill Friday and other administrators may have operated within the letter of the law, but they refused to mobilize their resources to eliminate Jim Crow, let alone take any affirmative action to remedy the generations of damage done to African Americans.

Phil Clay was among the black students who demanded that the university administrators do more to end Jim Crow. In his senior year at Greensboro’s all-black Dudley High School, Clay took note of university philanthropist John Motley Morehead’s undisguised racism and sexism. On television, while announcing the winners of the prestigious scholarships named in his honor, Morehead noted, “They’re all white. They’re all bright. They’re all male, and they’re all mine.”<sup>18</sup> Morehead’s statement made Clay determined to work to end Jim Crow when he got to college.

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<sup>16</sup>David Dansby interview.

<sup>17</sup>“Marchers Protest Hospital’s Policies,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, April 10, 1963.

<sup>18</sup>Phil L. Clay interview, cited in Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University.” The author confirmed this citation by telephone with UNC Professor Joel Schwartz, January 2006.

Clay enrolled in the fall of 1964 and he and other black students soon began meeting with Chancellor Sitterson and Cornelius Cathey, Dean of Student Affairs to discuss ways of increasing the number of black students. Clay recalled that the administrators were unflinching “nice, but they didn’t make promises . . . They didn’t promise to change at all.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, Clay joined other black students and leaders of the Campus Y in an independent effort to recruit black students—Carolina Talent Search. While Clay argued the necessity of “color consciousness” and pled for a historical reckoning with the legacies of Jim Crow, Chancellor Sitterson reaffirmed the sufficiency of “equal opportunity,” and meritocratic policies. He asserted, “No special assistance was due to any group.”<sup>20</sup> In this way, black students learned the limited value of free speech in an environment of unequal power.

Administrators used their willingness to talk as a way of stalling change. While the appearance of concern and openness enhanced the university’s progressive image, the image itself isolated black students seeking change from potential allies who believed the myth. UNC’s progressive image served as an impediment to critical scrutiny of its actual practices.<sup>21</sup> Black students soon concluded that if they relied on talk alone to change the university, nothing would change. Increasingly, they turned to independent initiatives and resorted to more forceful measures to achieve racial justice.

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<sup>19</sup>Phil L. Clay interview, cited in Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University”, 19, 20.

<sup>20</sup>Phillip L. Clay, “Year End Report: 1967-1968, A Summary of Programs and Activities of Carolina Talent Search of the University of North Carolina Student Government, in Archives of the Campus Y, cited in Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University,” 21.

<sup>21</sup>The UNC ethic of civility was apparently shared by administrators of differing ideologies. David Kiel, a white student leader, noted that Chancellor Sitterson was thought to be “conservative in style but slightly moderate in disposition,” while Dean Cathey was viewed as “blatantly racist and an impediment to any kind of progress.” The efforts of the black students met with the same response from both men—talk, no action. A few years later, the black women who toiled in Lenoir cafeteria would note the same kind of behavior from their managers. This attitude, then, seems to have been part of the university’s institutional culture during the 1960s. See Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University,” 19. For an extended discussions of the first cafeteria workers’ strike, see Williams, “It Wasn’t Slavery Time Anymore” and Goldstein and Shedd, “Food Service Employees’ Strike.”

As these events were unfolding, however, the black freedom movement was developing in ways that would make white complacency about racial justice impossible. At Carolina, black student attitudes underwent a rapid metamorphosis in line with the growing ethic of black self-determination, grassroots organizing, and militancy that was sweeping the nation. It was in the context of this national trend that black students at Carolina reacted to the hostile attitude of university administrators toward racial justice.

After 1964, the campus NAACP lost its momentum and a good deal of its student support. It was evident by the fall of 1967 that black students were ready for a new kind of organization. In November a group of thirty black students led by Preston Dobbins, a transfer student from Chicago with community organizing experience, walked into a campus NAACP meeting and called for a vote to dissolve the chapter. Kelly Alexander, Jr., the NAACP president, recognized Dobbins' motion to avoid looking "silly." The vote to dissolve prevailed. Dobbins recalled that he and his comrades viewed the NAACP as "awfully slow" because it held to "antique" and ineffective strategies. At about the same time, the *Daily Tar Heel* quoted Dobbins as saying, "The self-image of Black Americans, especially college students, is undergoing a metamorphosis which is so rapid and of such vast proportion as to make change inevitable." Following the vote to dissolve the NAACP, the Black Student Movement (BSM), with Preston Dobbins at its head, became the main black student organization.<sup>22</sup>

As the leader of the BSM, Dobbins projected a militant image, often outfitted with a black beret, black leather jacket, dark shades, and a walking stick. The BSM adopted the

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<sup>22</sup>*Daily Tar Heel*, November 8, 1967, quoted in Manekin, "Moral Crisis of the University," 34. For an excellent discussion of the development of the BSM, the BSM's role in the foodservice workers' strikes, and the BSM struggle for a Black Studies program, see Manekin, "Moral Crisis of the University," 24-82.

rhetoric and style common to many Black Power organizations, and used this image to political advantage. When Phil Clay and the Carolina Talent Search resubmitted their proposal to the Student Legislature, their request was granted—due in no small part to the presence of BSM members wearing berets and carrying walking sticks standing in the back of the legislature.<sup>23</sup>

As 1967 drew to a close, the administration gave every indication of holding to its policy of glacial gradualism. It refused to aggressively recruit black students, and rejected their proposals as undemocratic, “special interest” policies. Administrators told black students they would respond to their concerns with “a humane spirit and a compassionate heart,” but they added, there could be no “unique treatment for any race, color or creed.” Chancellor Sitterson held to the line that formal policies of “equal opportunity” were legal, fair, and sufficient.<sup>24</sup>

When the BSM formed in late 1967, black students felt the university had to make a stronger commitment to serving the state’s black population. A student body that was less than 1.5 percent black in a state that was 24 percent black, along with an administration that resisted aggressive black student recruitment, represented a clear lack of commitment in the view of the BSM. Moreover, BSM members were angered by the insensitivity of the administration to the needs of the few black students enrolled at UNC.<sup>25</sup> Events in the spring of 1968 fueled black students’ growing rage and steeled their determination. The February 8,

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<sup>23</sup>Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University,” 26. Clay once again sought administration support to secure seek federal assistance for the project. Though no university funds would be expended, the chancellor and the deans once again rebuffed Talent Search, noting that such recruitment activities were “not the proper function of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.” Manekin, “Moral Crisis of the University,” 27.

<sup>24</sup>Buchanan, “Testing of the Liberal Vision,” 60.

<sup>25</sup>Buchanan, “Testing of the Liberal Vision,” 61.

1968 police massacre of black students at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg—while largely ignored by the national media—deeply angered black students at Carolina and across the nation.<sup>26</sup> The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, as well as the subsequent eruption of black rebellions across the nation, only fueled the fire. It reinforced black students' determination to press ahead with a militant campaign to end discrimination. In late 1968, the BSM delivered a set of demands to Chancellor Sitterson that included affirmative racial justice measures in all areas of academic life, as well as demands to improve conditions for black campus workers.<sup>27</sup>

With the emergence of militant black student movements at UNC and around the state, conditions were ripe for an organized struggle of black workers.<sup>28</sup> In 1969, the power of organized black campus workers joined with the power of black students at UNC and across the state to force the university to publicly confront its longstanding Jim Crow employment policies. This would mark the high point of a decade of struggle and ushered in a new phase of black protest at UNC.

### *The Labor Front In The Sixties*

Since the 1960s, the University has embraced diversity and multiculturalism in the academic arena as a response to the black liberation movement as well as the imperatives of the global economy. What the university has refused to do is to adopt an active anti-racist

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<sup>26</sup>For a discussion of the impact of the Orangeburg murders and the King assassination in nearby Durham, see Greene, *Our Separate Ways*, 168-69.

<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of the BSM demands and Chancellor Sitterson's response, see Buchanan "Testing the Liberal Vision," 64-72.

<sup>28</sup>On the emergence of militant black student movements and their connection with black workers' strikes, see Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights* and Green, *Our Separate Ways*.

stance, acknowledging its unjust past and taking pro-active steps to repair the damage caused by its promotion of white supremacy throughout most of its history. In particular, the university has strenuously resisted demands from black workers for living wages, humane working conditions, and increased opportunities for training and advancement. The promotion of multicultural diversity in the academic arena has, therefore, resulted in the polarization of the university community along class lines. The university now appears to be committed to the training of multicultural leadership strata, while maintaining near sweatshop conditions for low wage workers of color. The history of challenges to the university's Jim Crow employment practices during the 1960s and UNC's response helps clarify the basis for the relative lack of improvement in the conditions of black campus workers in the recent past.

African Americans have never been barred from working at UNC as they were from the classroom between 1793 and 1951. Carolina has depended on black workers since the days of slavery. Thus, employment desegregation was not a matter of allowing African Americans to work at UNC; it was a matter of allowing black workers to gain access to job categories from which they were excluded by the norms of Jim Crow, such as skilled trades, clerical, technical, supervisory, and professional jobs. In 1960, out of a total of 853 black workers, UNC employed no black clerical workers or skilled trades workers, no black supervisors other than 5 "foremen" in the laundry, 8 black technicians at the hospital and the medical school, and 1 social worker. UNC employed no black staff nurses, doctors, professors, managers, or administrators. The total number of employees, excluding professionals, was

roughly 2,200.<sup>29</sup> The racist employment practices that produced this skewed ratio were the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

The fact that the university's employment practices were not targeted by the civil rights demonstrations of 1960-64, or by university workers themselves during that era, should not be taken as a sign of enlightened racial attitudes on the part of UNC supervisors and management. As Thomas Mason, one of the black youth leaders of the Chapel Hill movement, pointed out, it should be seen as a symptom of the overwhelming power of the university in Chapel Hill. When asked why the civil rights movement did not focus on employment at the university, Mason answered that UNC was "the real Invisible Empire."<sup>30</sup> As the editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly* observed in 1974, Chapel Hill "is just a great big mill town, and [UNC is] the mill."<sup>31</sup> The university was the stronghold of Jim Crow employment in Chapel Hill, and most black workers who considered challenging segregation or Jim Crow working conditions feared for their jobs.

Some black campus workers did participate in off campus civil rights protest. In a 1974 interview, Hilliard Caldwell explained why he was not afraid to be active in the movement. Both his reasons for a relative sense of security and his description of the fears of other workers are evidence of the prevalence of Jim Crow employment practices at the university. According to Caldwell, "our department chairman was a Northerner and he wholeheartedly

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<sup>29</sup>Memo from J. A. Williams, Assistant to the Business Manager to J. A. Branch, Business Manager, 25 March 1960 in Chancellors' Records: R. B. House Series, Subseries 3: Administration, Personnel: General, 1952-1957, UA.

<sup>30</sup>Thomas Mason interview.

<sup>31</sup>Schumaker interview, quoted in Buchanan, "Testing of the Liberal Vision," 35. Historically, mill towns were completely dominated by the owners of the mill. They owned the housing and often controlled the police, the schools, and other public facilities. The owners used their domination of the mill town to control mill workers, enforcing dependence, low wages, and deference to authority. Mill workers, like black workers in Chapel Hill, often used their community as a base from which to organize resistance to their exploitation.

gave us his support . . . . He made it clear that if we felt very strong about this that he had to give us support. There were times when there were other whites in the community who tried to pinpoint us being involved in a demonstration during a work hour. . . . We were getting off at four and I would never schedule to go on a picket line or participate in a demonstration ‘til at least four-thirty. That was to protect myself from those university administrators who attempted to [really thwart the movement].”<sup>32</sup>

“There were a large number of blacks who worked at the university,” Caldwell said, and “not a single university black employee would participate in these things.” Caldwell explained, “There were just certain elements of the university. . . your low income employees. They are not to participate because their immediate supervisor was [an] old segregationist from out in Carrboro and out in the county. So your maids and janitors . . . , [and] those people who had semi-technical jobs back in those days, dare not get involved. Ah, and dare not be seen in a picket line or marching in a demonstration on a Saturday or Sunday.”<sup>33</sup>

A 1989 study of the Chapel Hill movement also concluded that fears of retaliation by white employers, including the university and UNC professors, was the greatest obstacle to adult black participation in civil rights demonstrations. A black high school student told John Dunne, a UNC student active in the movement, “My mother says I can’t do it [demonstrate] because she says she’s going to be fired.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Caldwell interview, 1974.

<sup>33</sup>Caldwell interview, 1974.

<sup>34</sup>John Dunne interview, quoted in Evans, “Between the Idea and the Reality,” 127. John Dunne was a radical white UNC student and Morehead Scholar who became a staff person for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

Although further research is needed to provide broader support for these first hand accounts, it seems clear that African American participants in the 1960s civil rights struggle feared for their jobs at the hands of racist UNC supervisors.<sup>35</sup> Such evidence implies that the university wielded its institutional power to suppress the rights of black workers, whether in organizing for civil rights or resisting racist treatment on the job. These practices conform to the definition of institutional racism put forward by Torres and Guinier, “the acquiescence in and accommodation to racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution and resource generation.”<sup>36</sup> In these ways, the university continued to depend on Jim Crow traditions and racist white supervisors to keep its low wage black workers in their “place.”

In early 1963, North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford announced his “Good Neighbor Policy” to eliminate racial discrimination. In a front page article with a banner headline proclaiming “No ‘Exclusionary’ Hiring Policy Here: Good Neighbor Program Apparently Won’t Affect UNC,” the *Chapel Hill Weekly* explained that one of Sanford’s five points for implementation was calling upon state agencies, departments, and institutions to “formulate policies which do not exclude from employment qualified people because of race.” Chancellor Aycock commented, “We have no exclusionary policy. . . I don’t think we ever have had. I don’t think we’re affected by the Governor’s recommendation.” Of course Jim Crow had rarely used discriminatory *policies* to implement employment segregation as it had in housing and public accommodations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>A comprehensive study of the impact of black struggle and civil rights legislation on UNC employment practices is needed. Such a study could evaluate the way UNC has wielded its institutional power since the mid-1950s, as well as the impact of organizing by African Americans and community organizations on the persistence of Jim Crow job discrimination at every level of employment.

<sup>36</sup>Guinier and Torres, *Miner’s Canary*, 292.

<sup>37</sup>“No ‘Exclusionary’ Hiring Policy Here: Good Neighbor Program Apparently Won’t Affect UNC,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, January 23, 1963.

Other UNC administrators were quick to spin this story to deflect further scrutiny and criticism. The university personnel director stated that the institution was “currently employing about 840 Negroes of a total of about 3000 employees.” The issue, however, was the conditions under which black workers labored and in what occupations. Trying to put the best face on an embarrassing situation, Frederick B. Haskell added that while “Most of these are in the lower custodial jobs. . . we also have Negro nurses, lab technicians, and a few secretaries.” Haskell explained that the university itself had no responsibility for the job discrimination that some might suspect existed. Haskell noted, “it was natural, in a community like this one, to have a large pool of unskilled labor,” and that “unskilled Negroes ‘flocked’ to the University looking for jobs . . . as janitors, kitchen workers, hospital porters, and otherwise.”<sup>38</sup>

Although it was “natural,” in Haskell’s view, that Chapel Hill would contain a large pool of unskilled labor made up nearly exclusively of black workers, we have seen how this demeaned, racially defined laboring caste was socially constructed over a long historical era. There was nothing natural about it, and the university bore a large measure of responsibility for the exclusion of African Americans from good education and good jobs in the first place.

Pressure slowly began to build on the university to address its discriminatory employment practices. In August, the Chapel Hill civil rights movement, which up to that time had focused on public accommodations in Chapel Hill, held its first demonstration on the university campus. The *Chapel Hill Weekly* reported that, “Sixty-seven marchers—16 whites, 54 Negroes, and including many juveniles—filed down Cameron Avenue to the

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<sup>38</sup>“No ‘Exclusionary’ Hiring Policy Here: Good Neighbor Program Apparently Won’t Affect UNC,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, January 23, 1963.

campus shortly after noon, carrying anti-segregation signs.” Despite its public advocacy of freedom of speech, the university attempted to prohibit the march by releasing a statement that “the demonstration would not be permitted on the campus because classes would be disturbed and campus traffic disrupted.”<sup>39</sup> Reflecting their determination to challenge Jim Crow authority, the demonstrators went forward with their protest.

In December, Hilliard Caldwell appeared before the Chapel Hill Human Relations Committee to urge investigation of UNC’s employment practices. He noted, “UNC is the predominant source of employment for the Chapel Hill Negro. But, aside from the hospital, there is not a single Negro employed by UNC in a supervisory position.” The Human Relations Committee agreed to request a statement from the university on its employment practices.<sup>40</sup> During the same month, hundreds of demonstrators were jailed in Chapel Hill for almost daily acts of civil disobedience.<sup>41</sup> In January, Aycock refused to have the university support a boycott of segregated businesses, asserting that “such a policy would be fraught with dangers and pitfalls too numerous to discuss at this time.”<sup>42</sup> In February, following a massive civil rights demonstration that targeted both the university and the town by blocking traffic after a UNC basketball game, a panel sponsored by the American Association of University Professors once again addressed Jim Crow employment issues on campus. One professor noted the exclusion of black workers from skilled trades, noting that all the university janitors were black, “but every time someone comes to fix a window or put a lock

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<sup>39</sup>*Chapel Hill Weekly*, August 7, 1963.

<sup>40</sup>*Chapel Hill Weekly*, December 15, 1963.

<sup>41</sup>*Chapel Hill Weekly*, December, 1963; Useful histories of the Chapel Hill civil rights movement include Chapman, “Second Generation,” Evans, “Between the Idea and the Reality,” and Ehle, *Free Men*.

<sup>42</sup>“University Won’t Boycott Segregated Firms,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, January 29, 1964.

on, it's a white man." He concluded that, "there was a color bar in the skilled crafts on the campus." At this meeting, the question of hiring black faculty was also hotly debated.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, at the beginning of March, responding to the mounting criticism of the university's employment practices from students, faculty, and, most intensely, from the tumultuous civil rights movement led by black youths, Chancellor Aycock came forward with the long awaited statement on university employment. Speaking to a Faculty Council meeting, Aycock reiterated the university's claim that "no job classification is reserved for any race. All jobs are open to all races." Seemingly peeved that he had to say any more than this, Aycock added, "In most matters it would suffice to respond with assurances that the University is measuring up to its responsibilities, but I gather that to do so in this situation is not sufficient. This is related to the fact that there appears to be a wide variety of views on what constitutes discrimination. Consequently, I shall state the policies and provide facts on employment practices and leave conclusions to you."<sup>44</sup> Since Aycock released his remarks to the press, we can assume that his statement was meant for a wide audience and reflected a carefully crafted institutional position on a sensitive public policy issue. It reflects the thinking of university administrators at a moment in history when they were, for the first time, being called to account for their Jim Crow employment practices. Rather than an individual's response to "a few faculty members," Aycock's statement revealed the public response of institutional power to the demands of a grassroots movement for social justice. This response was historic in that it revealed the way the university would attempt to deflect

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<sup>43</sup>"The University's Role in Civil Rights," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, February 12, 1964.

<sup>44</sup>"No Employment Discrimination, Aycock Asserts: University Faculty Council Given Figures By Chancellor," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, March 8, 1964.

and contain the black freedom movement and its demands for racial justice, workers' rights, and real democracy.

Given the politics of North Carolina and the free speech traditions of UNC, the Chancellor could not, and would not, endorse white supremacy or threaten the university's critics, as was done in some other states. He might, however, have completely denied that a problem existed at UNC. He might have simply assured the faculty and the public that "the University is measuring up to its responsibilities." Although this seemed to be Aycock's personal preference, and while he did state that "no discrimination" existed at the university, the power structure at UNC must have understood that the Chancellor's moral authority was itself under siege and would no longer suffice to silence critics. Rather than a simple denial, the Chancellor tried to reframe the issues in such a way as to disclaim institutional responsibility for the legacy of Jim Crow employment. Consistent with that attitude, Aycock made no commitment to do anything at all.

Aycock asserted that there were "a wide variety of views on what constitutes discrimination" and then tried to endow his own definition with authority. The Chancellor stated that university employment policies were colorblind, therefore just, and that UNC's policy was to hire workers strictly on the basis of their qualifications. Aycock stated, in addition, "Race is not a qualifying or disqualifying consideration" for any job. He said, "If there is evidence of [discrimination], corrective action will be taken. Until such evidence is produced, I hope those persons charged with the responsibility for hiring will enjoy the presumption that they are fulfilling their responsibilities in accord with University policy."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>"No Employment Discrimination, Aycock Asserts: University Faculty Council Given Figures By Chancellor," *Chapel Hill Weekly*, March 8, 1964.

However, by the time he made his remarks to the Faculty Council, Aycock already had clear evidence of discrimination by university supervisors. Aycock's statement was based on an updated employment report prepared by Frederick B. Haskell, Personnel Director, submitted to him on February 28, 1964. A close comparison of Aycock's actual statement and Haskell's report reveals the fundamental dishonesty of the university's position as well as its strategy for containing the black freedom struggle.<sup>46</sup>

According to both the report and Aycock's speech, UNC's inability to make greater progress integrating its workforce was because the institution was the victim of impersonal supply and demand forces. That is, there were few qualified applicants for higher skill jobs. Despite this problem, Aycock asserted, the university had made considerable progress in hiring black workers in non-traditional job categories.

Haskell's report was far more detailed and straightforward than Aycock's statement to the faculty. The report began by noting that "The Chapel Hill area . . . contains a fairly constant reservoir of unskilled Negro men and women with limited education. . . . As a result, there has been available to us a relatively steady supply of Negro laborers, janitors, maids, kitchen helpers, hospital porters, etc." The report then goes on to explain why these low wage categories of workers are virtually all black and why black workers are rarely hired in better paying positions. "These types of jobs may be filled with individuals who have no previous related work experience and whose education has been limited to 8 grades or less. . . . Few of the Negroes [*sic*] who apply for these jobs possess the necessary qualifications for other types of positions nor do they indicate any desire to be considered for

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<sup>46</sup>Report prepared by Frederick B. Haskell and sent to the chancellor, February 28, 1964 in Chancellors' Records: R. B. House series, Subseries 3: Administration, Personnel: General, 1952-1957, UA.

them. On the other hand, few if any non-Negro applicants make application for or express interest in the maid, janitor, laborer, kitchen helper or food server positions.”

What the Business Office document reflects, if read in the light of history, is the very situation that the architects of Jim Crow hoped to create—black workers who, because they had been systematically denied education and higher level employment opportunities, would have no choice but to accept menial labor at low wages without complaint; white workers who would disdain any job identified in their mind as a “Negro job.” Haskell’s outlook reflected the success of Jim Crow at creating a false understanding among most white people that virtually precluded seeing such differences as anything but “natural.”

At the end of Haskell’s report, he acknowledged that supervisors were turning black applicants for certain positions away due to prejudice. While openly stating that he knew this was true, he emphasized that the Business Office would not demand nondiscrimination from supervisors. Haskell said, “Efforts are made by the Personnel Offices to overcome prejudices or discriminatory practices which may be detected concerning such factors as age, sex, lack of education beyond the high school level, and nationality as well as race. These efforts, although limited to argumentative and persuasive tactics, have had some measure of success. We do not propose to use authoritarian measures to force the hands of supervisors nor do we propose to simply remove them from the employment process with no voice in the selection of their employees.”

The obvious remedy for changing the university’s longstanding reputation as a racist employer would be to take affirmative steps to recruit and welcome black workers in non-traditional jobs. “Authoritarian measures” were most certainly required to end the Jim Crow practices of university supervisors. Only in this way could the university provide leadership

from the top down to convincingly demonstrate that it would not tolerate discrimination. Yet Aycock and the entire UNC hierarchy refused to do this or even admit that there was evidence of discrimination. Therefore, it was clear that power had no intention of voluntarily moving in the direction of real justice in 1964.

The report directly admits that black workers were attempting to desegregate employment at UNC and that racism in hiring continued to be a problem—a problem so serious that it had to be acknowledged by Haskell. Yet the Business Office asserted that it was unwilling to undertake any action to overcome the racist reputation of the university in the black community, to develop training programs for black workers denied the opportunity to learn skills during Jim Crow, or to implement any other affirmative action policy. In front of the faculty, however, Aycock claimed there was “no discrimination” at UNC when, in fact, he had evidence of discrimination from his own Personnel Director. That Aycock failed to acknowledge what he knew, while asserting both “no discrimination” and the willingness to take “corrective action” if evidence of discrimination came to light, was intentionally dishonest. The university’s policy was not to publicly acknowledge ongoing discrimination. This public posture did not address the needs of black workers or uphold values of critical thinking, open debate, or real democracy.

At this point in history, Chancellor Aycock had a choice to either endorse avoidance, obfuscation, and minimal change or lead the university to adopt more aggressive desegregation policies in employment. Taking such a position of moral leadership would entail both personal risks and risks for the university. Nevertheless, the university had taken strong stands unpopular with the public in the past. Unfortunately, the chancellor, UNC system president William Friday, and other leaders of the university adopted the path of least

resistance, complete with elaborate rationalizations to maintain the progressive mystique of UNC. In this way, the practices of Jim Crow employment became re-institutionalized under cover of new myths.

Those who sow the wind, reap the whirlwind. In response to the university's intransigence, the black freedom movement developed more militant methods of struggle and a more sophisticated analysis to meet the challenges of the new day. The result of the university's refusal to adopt an aggressive anti-racist stance resulted in a black revolt on campus in the late 1960s. The student protests at UNC were part of a powerful national black student movement. At UNC and elsewhere, this black student revolt resulted in the creation of a black studies curriculum, increased black student admissions, and increased hiring of black faculty during the 1970s.<sup>47</sup> In 1969, the Black Student Movement, as well as many white student and faculty allies, supported two month-long strikes by black cafeteria workers. Although the governor called out state police to occupy the UNC campus, the workers won many of their demands. While the cafeteria workers' strikes were important in establishing higher pay and more equitable employment policies for all state workers, the university suppressed labor organizing until the 1990s.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>The best source on the black student movement at UNC is Manekin, "Moral Crisis of the University." Other studies that provide historical context for the black student movement at UNC include, Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power*; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*; John Bunzel, "Black Studies at San Francisco State." For a good summary and organizational framework for Black Power studies, see Joseph, "Black liberation without apology."

<sup>48</sup> Williams, "'It Wasn't Slavery Time Anymore'"; Buchanan, "Testing the Liberal Vision"; Meroney, "Coming of Consciousness."

### *Diversity Without Justice At The Global University*

Although struggles over admissions, faculty hiring, and acknowledgment of black culture remained heated during the 1970s and 1980s, the university gradually accepted greater diversity in academic life. During this period, the Black Faculty/Staff Caucus joined with the BSM in agitating for increased black student admissions and faculty hiring.<sup>49</sup>

Two major black freedom struggles developed at UNC in the 1990s. Students demanded, and finally won, a freestanding black cultural center. That facility, the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History, opened in August 2004.<sup>50</sup> In 1991, the UNC Housekeepers Association initiated a sustained struggle to address the persistence of Jim Crow employment practices at the university. This resulted in a significant legal victory in 1996 that provided raises, increased training, formal acknowledgment of the contributions of black workers to the university, and other reforms.<sup>51</sup> Building off of this victory, the housekeepers, who were nearly all African Americans at that time, initiated the formation of a local of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America. Since that time, the UE Local 150 union has expanded to many public institutions throughout the state and is part of a larger coalition of organizations seeking an end to North Carolina's "right-to-work"

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<sup>49</sup>Newsom, "Black Faculty/Staff Caucus."

<sup>50</sup>Roseboro, "Icons of Power and Landscapes of Protest." Information about the Stone Center can also be found at the center's website at <<http://www.ibiblio.org/shscbch/>>.

<sup>51</sup>A useful brief history of the UNC Housekeepers Association and the formation of UE 150 can be found on the national website of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America. See "Sweeping Change in North Carolina: UE Local 150 Demands Justice on UNC Campuses" at <[http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/uen\\_0299\\_150.html](http://www.ranknfile-ue.org/uen_0299_150.html)>.

laws, legislation from the Jim Crow era that has made it almost impossible for public workers to organize unions.<sup>52</sup>

Although the labor organizing of the 1990s perpetuated the traditions forged by the CIO in the 1940s, justice for workers at the university, particularly for low wage workers of color, has improved little compared to the substantial advances made in diversity for students, faculty, and administrators. While low wage workers are now a more diverse group made up of large numbers of Latino/a and Asian workers, as well as black workers, conditions of work are not much different from the 1960s. Wages have increased modestly due to labor organizing, but workers continue to face intense management opposition to workers' rights.

These observations about the development of black freedom at UNC since 1960 prompt a question. If it is true that the university has replaced Jim Crow with a commitment to racial diversity in admissions, why are black low-wage workers at UNC still so dissatisfied? Why does it seem that more enlightened racial policies concerning students and faculty have not benefited low wameworkers of color to the same extent? While a comprehensive study of the impact of Jim Crow's demise on employment at UNC remains to be done, the anger and discontent of black workers has been publicly displayed on campus since the beginning of the Housekeepers Movement in 1991.

The ongoing protests of housekeepers today testifies to their deep discontent. Shouldn't the commitment to racial justice implied by the university's proud claim of being "the University of the People" have improved things for black workers as well as black students?

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<sup>52</sup>Information about the North Carolina Hear Our Public Employees (HOPE) coalition can be found on their website at <http://nchopecoalition.org/index.html>. A history of North Carolina's law that bans public employees from negotiating contracts can also be found on this website, as well as the text of the law. See Jason Burton and David A. Zonderman, "Where Did This Law Come From": A History of General Statute 95-98" at <http://nchopecoalition.org/page8.html>.

In my view, an understanding of the history of black freedom and the university from its origins in slavery to the sit-in movement of 1960 helps to answer these questions. Power, in the context of U.S. democracy, functions most efficiently when it operates invisibly. Understanding the long history of the university's open support for white supremacy and its transition to a subtle, colorblind form of institutional racism in the 1960s enables us to understand the relationship of the university to black freedom today.

Up to the 1960s, race relations promoted by white elites, whether slave owning gentry or New South industrialists, was designed to enforce the subordination of black labor and suppress the potential for biracial insurgency. Today, the university, along with much of society, has adopted a new norm, a new paradigm to frame relations of power. That paradigm can be expressed as *diversity without justice*. The acceptance of diversity by corporate elites has not altered their fundamental reliance on cheap labor or their need to suppress labor organizing, whether at UNC or throughout the international labor market. For these reasons, while black students and faculty find an increased measure of inclusion at UNC, black workers still find themselves exploited and oppressed. Yet history also teaches that black freedom struggle is irrepressible. It has persisted through all the dark days of slavery, the hope and repression of Reconstruction, the nightmare of Jim Crow, and up to the present. Martin Luther King Jr. believed the civil rights movement was about "saving the soul of the nation," and Langston Hughes wrote, "O, let America be America again, the land that never has been yet, and yet must be."<sup>53</sup> Black freedom striving has demonstrated surprising power to make the nation live closer to its highest ideals and best democratic traditions. It may yet lead the University of North Carolina to become, in truth, the "University of the People."

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<sup>53</sup>To "save the soul of the nation" was the motto of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again," quoted in Harding, *There is a River*, xxvi.

### *Our History Is The Present*

Except during the brief years of Radical Reconstruction, the university has advanced the interests of the dominant class. Yet it has always done so in contention with democratic insurgencies, particularly the struggle of African Americans for equal rights and justice. While black workers and students, as well as their white allies, have continually pushed the university to embrace racial justice and labor rights during the twentieth century, the university has thus far shrunk from the opportunity to live up to its professed creed. Jim Crow has been swept away, but the UNC housekeepers and other black, Latino/a, and Asian low wage workers are still at the bottom of the university's social hierarchy. Moreover, their separation from an increasingly elite, though multicultural, student body, is widening. The university, like the nation, has replaced Jim Crow relations of power with a more subtle, colorblind, equal opportunity multiculturalism. This new paradigm of diversity without justice ensures the continued exploitation and oppression of workers of color, as well as the training of a multicultural elite to manage global capital.

The new paradigm of diversity without justice ensures the power of the past to continue shaping the future. We have seen that during slavery and Jim Crow the university's institutional culture operated in powerful, often invisible, ways to promote and enforce the norms of white supremacy. While black campus workers, professors, and students sometimes challenged those norms, particularly during the twentieth century, they rarely defied the Jim Crow framework, the dominant power relations paradigm, until the 1950s. Yet they did

create a countervailing democratic tradition in opposition to elite power that continues to have force at the university today.

In the 1960s the university's institutional culture changed significantly in the transition from open defense of Jim Crow to acceptance of formal non-discrimination. These changes were forced by the black freedom movement, as well as by increasing pressure from national elites motivated by an understanding that Jim Crow hurt U. S. interests internationally. Although the university accepted formal equality in academic life, employment, and its relations with the larger community, it did not acknowledge or attempt to dismantle the institutional structures of white supremacy that it had helped to create throughout its history. Chief among these was the demeaned, low wage laboring caste defined by race. This system of racialized exploitation was maintained after the fall of Jim Crow by implementing colorblind policies without challenging the structures of inequality that had been created over generations. Formally race neutral policies thus had a profoundly racist impact, because they operated on a social order historically constructed by white supremacy.

The failure of the university to acknowledge or act upon its unjust history resulted in race neutral policies having a continued negative impact on black workers and the black community in the years after the fall of Jim Crow. Whether in university employment, in Chapel Hill's public schools, or in local black neighborhoods, though the university formally endorsed non-discrimination, it did not wield its institutional power to undo the poverty or educational deprivation it had enforced during Jim Crow. While some African Americans were able to take advantage of the greater opportunities created by the end of Jim Crow, rising to positions of relative wealth, influence, and even power, the mass of African Americans remain poor, with limited opportunities for advancement.

In local neighborhoods, the increased affluence of Chapel Hill property owners resulting from the influence of the university raised property values and taxes, forcing poor black workers out of the community. Developers, young professionals, and students moved into formerly all-black neighborhoods. This disrupted black community solidarity that had been a potent resource for black freedom in the past and diluted black political power in Chapel Hill.

In the town's top ranked public schools, integration destroyed the supportive environment of black public education, which. Though poorly funded, black schools had nurtured self-respect and achievement among black youths. After desegregation, black youths faced a far less nurturing, often hostile, environment in the schools. This statewide and national result of integration was made more difficult in Chapel Hill by the tremendous class differences between the children of poor black UNC service workers, who entered the public schools with tremendous disadvantages and deficits, and the sons and daughters of UNC professionals, who entered the schools with every advantage.<sup>54</sup>

Without active anti-racist efforts by UNC to dismantle the racially demeaned laboring caste it had helped to create, there was little chance that black workers could defend their neighborhoods from the pressures of development in Chapel Hill or prevail in the competition with the children of professionals for nurturing and resources in the public schools. While gentrification destroyed black neighborhoods, desegregation of public schools resulted in the demoralization of black youths and a huge racial achievement gap in education.

At the university, the end of Jim Crow modified, but did not fundamentally alter, the racialized system of exploitation in employment. Without substantial and sustained efforts by

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<sup>54</sup>For Chapel Hill, see Hill, "Local Histories/Local Memories." For North Carolina, see Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*.

the university to provide compensatory training and job advancement to black workers, few of these men and women could rise out of the low wage occupational categories. Without drastically raising the pay for the traditional “Negro Jobs,” there was no motivation for white workers, who still enjoyed better employment opportunities than African Americans, to overcome the racial stigmas attached to these jobs and seek employment as housekeepers, cafeteria workers, and similar laboring and menial occupations. In the years since Jim Crow, UNC has done almost nothing to enhance these job classifications or promote increased respect for low wage workers of color, though it eagerly sought out Latino/a and Asian workers willing to work for low wages. Today, the university supports severely limited forms of employee representation through its Employees Forum, while actively resisting unionization of its workers and other state employees. It professes support for workers’ rights while denying them in practice, just as it did during the 1960s.

As we have seen, the university’s institutional culture was a primary mechanism for promoting and enforcing white supremacy in the years of Jim Crow. How does institutional culture function at UNC today? While this question calls for further research and careful consideration, some initial observations are in order. The university actively defends free speech, while discouraging active organizing against injustice, particularly injustice at the university. This is similar to the way the trustees defended the right of Frank Porter Graham and other university liberals to speak out on social issues, while suppressing Graham’s power to negotiate a contract with the CIO. Along the same lines, UNC has increasingly encouraged and provided resources to students for service work in the local, state, and global community. It has never encouraged or provided significant resources for students to build movements to challenge injustice. This is similar to the university’s support for “settlement work” earlier in

the century. “Helping,” or service work, then and now, does nothing to right wrongs or challenge injustice and is compatible with liberal and right wing ideologies alike. In such ways, the university teaches rising generations to pursue their individual careers, ignore institutional structures of injustice, and shy away from speaking truth to power or actively organizing to right wrongs.<sup>55</sup>

In particular, these university policies, in concert with the increasingly elite profile of black students on campus, has led to the pacification of the Black Student Movement, which provided so much racial justice leadership during the past generation. Efforts to retrieve the history of black freedom struggle and labor organizing at UNC could help students, campus workers, and others to overcome the passivity taught by power and aid in the renewal of freedom movements. Such movements will have to challenge the university’s reluctance to go beyond tokenism in acknowledging its history of white supremacy and suppression of labor rights. This culture of denial is an important component of the system of social control that sustains the power of the unjust past to shape our future.

This dissertation is aimed at helping readers better understand that the present is directly connected with the past. Our history *is* the present. In the race and class inequalities of UNC employment, in the racial achievement gap in the local public schools, and in the destruction of formerly cohesive, all black neighborhoods, the legacy of Jim Crow and white supremacy is an active force. Although the power that sustains this legacy acts invisibly, it becomes visible when we scrutinize the history of black freedom and the University of North Carolina. If we do not understand this history and how the past creates, and continues to create, the present, we cannot recognize the place we are starting from. As historian Tim Tyson has said

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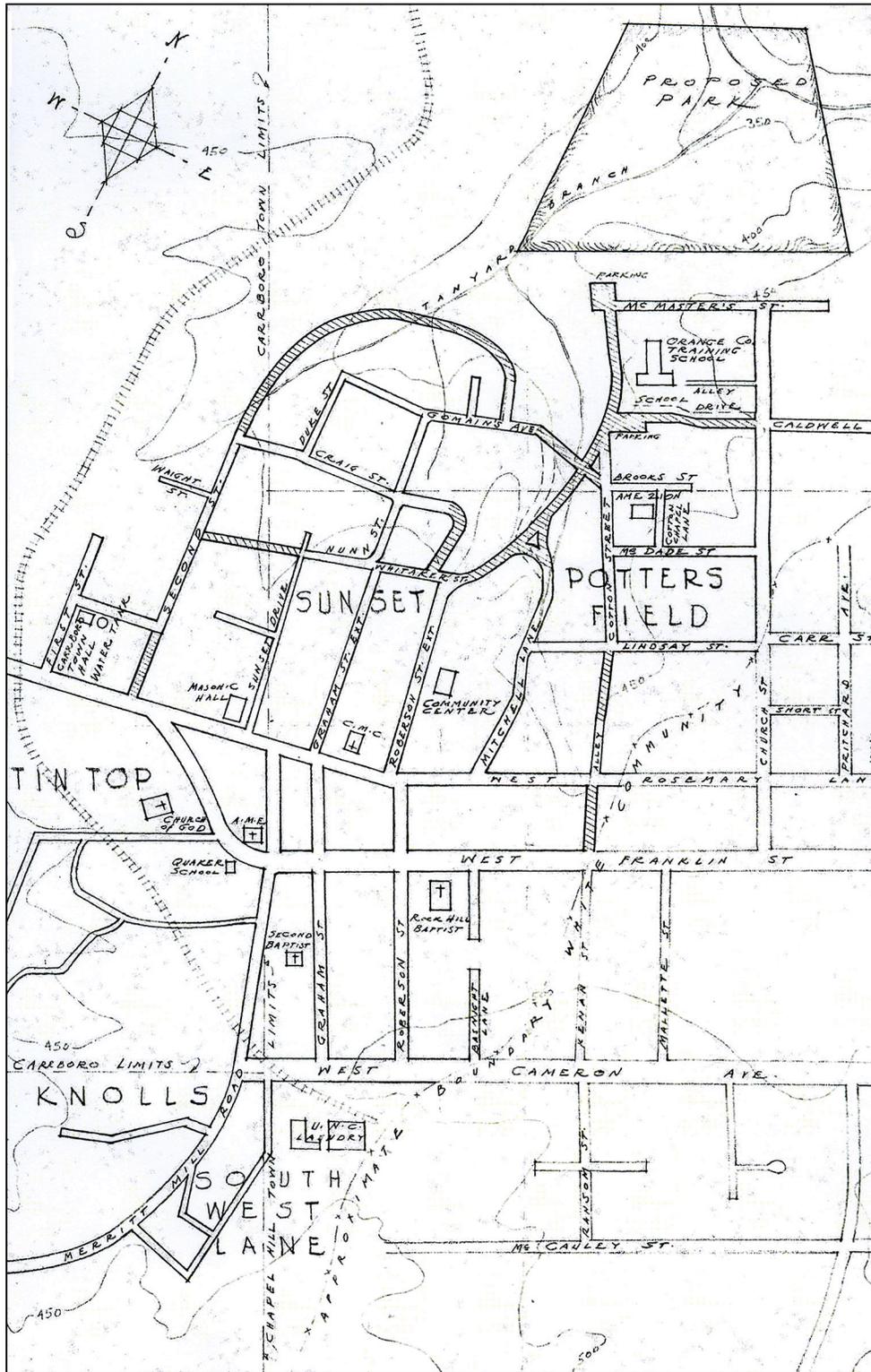
<sup>55</sup>The “self-conscious development” of a “differentiated” system of higher education as the primary vehicle to select leaders and promote the individual pursuit of careers is documented in Levine, *American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 21.

so well, “We cannot address the place we find ourselves because we will not acknowledge the road that brought us here.”<sup>56</sup> Yet understanding and acknowledging the “road that brought us here” is not enough to cure the virulent long-term illness of racism. In the workplaces, , neighborhoods, schools, and every arena of social activity, only an active movement to demand aggressive anti-racist policies can turn our institutions toward justice.

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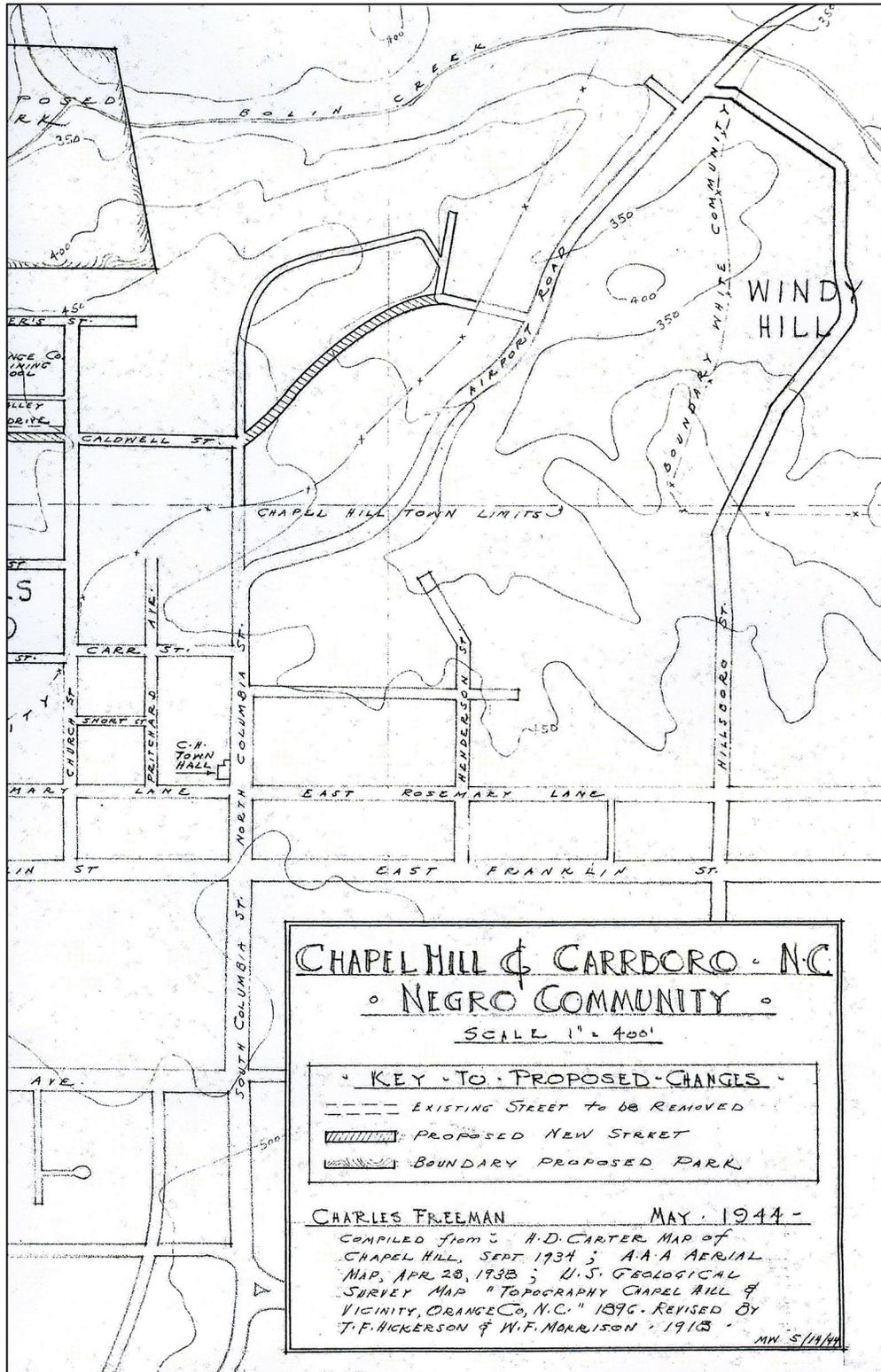
<sup>56</sup>Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, 318.

APPENDIX  
 MAP OF AFRICAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN 1944 (WEST)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Freeman, "Growth and Plan," appended map.

APPENDIX  
 MAP OF AFRICAN AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOODS IN 1944 (EAST)



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