

# A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL

# RIGHTS MOVEMENT THROUGH

# NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

THE RACE AGENDA, VOLUME 1

STEVE HALLOCK



From the cardinal *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling that desegregated U.S. public education to the demonstrations, marches, and violence of the civil rights movement, *A History of the American Civil Rights Movement Through Newspaper Coverage: The Race Agenda, Volume 1* traces the crusade for justice through the lens of major newspaper coverage to reveal the combating sectional press attitudes of the era. The book details attempts, blatant and subtle, to frame the major events of the movement in themes that have resonated from before, during, and since the Civil War. States' rights versus constitutional guarantees of freedom and equality, nullification versus federal authority, and regional social and cultural mores that buttressed the prejudices and political arguments of segregation and desegregation across the nation are some of the issues covered. This analysis of the press coverage of events and issues of that tumultuous period of U.S. history—by newspapers in the North, South, Midwest, and West—exposes perspectives and press routines that remain ingrained and thus relevant today, when journalistic treatment of political debate, ranging from traditional newspapers and broadcast platforms to those of cable, social media, and the Internet, continues to set an often volatile and oppositional political agenda.



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A History of the American  
Civil Rights Movement  
Through Newspaper Coverage



David Copeland  
*General Editor*

Vol. 15

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Steve Hallock

**A History of the American  
Civil Rights Movement  
Through Newspaper Coverage**

The Race Agenda, Volume 1



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*For Rebecca and Marvis*



*All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth.*

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE





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# Preface

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Back in the sixties, we rapped, to use the vernacular of the time, about vibes, auras, astrological signs—mystical jargon, conversation we labeled as heavy, cosmic, sometimes meaningful. Peter, Paul and Mary had a hit song, “The Great Mandela,” about the notion of fate, or coincidence, or what-goes-around-comes-around. This particular tune arises in this sentence because as I type this preface to my book about the civil rights movement of the sixties, my computer has randomly and coincidentally selected from my songs library Billie Holiday’s rendition of Abel Meeropol’s “Strange Fruit,” a dirge to the lynchings of the Jim Crow era—the fruit being the dead bodies of African-Americans hanging from trees. Nostalgia of the sixties—the Beatles, Stones, Joni and Dylan, free love, tooling the mountain highways in muraled VW vans, Jimi and Janis, body paint, mind-altering drugs—has become a popular and commercial pastime: Ah, what a strange trip it’s been, we of that era like to muse. And so much fun.

But nostalgia has this habit of coloring the past through rose-tinted granny spectacles, especially considering those who experienced the most brutal, ugly part of that decade—the lynchings, the beatings, the snarling dogs, the high-pressure fire hoses, the police clubs, the jammed jail cells, the promises of justice that were lies, the lofty language of law-and-order that was *1984* doublespeak for the white man’s law to keep the black man in order—the fear and courage of living a black life. The sixties were ugly times for those who marched in 100-degree humidity

down asphalt highways under a glaring sun toward an elusive goal, equality, that remained always just beyond the horizon.

I remember the news reports of those marches and riots, the flickering black-and-white television images in our west-side Denver house, the screen beaming footage of cops shoving and clubbing what we then called Negroes—"colored," in my lower-middle-class neighborhood where an African-American company emptied our trash barrels in our alley each week. It was like watching events in another country, the goings-on in this Southern nation of America. Wise, white, male television reporters objectively reported the vicious battles taking place on the campuses and streets of Alabama and Mississippi as their cameramen captured the bloody scenery accompanying the monologues.

As I conducted the research for this book—hours in Northern and Southern and Western libraries scanning microfilm images of newspapers that were the primary purveyors of information then—I traveled my own youth. It was an era without live, on-the-scene reports—the footage was filmed with video cameras and the film then sent to labs for development and editing for the nightly news programs. Newspaper and wire dispatches were dictated over expensive, long-distance land lines. No Internet. No cell phones—no phones at all, in many of these poor, Southern ghettos. The daily newspaper provided the tidings of the day, which were discussed, not in chat rooms or on Facebook, but in taverns, barbershops, cafes, beauty salons, as the television networks followed the newspapers' cues. The media's race agenda then was one reported on and set by print journalists and editors.

Poring over these microfilm images of those newspapers, I was struck by how much was going on then, and how the world was changing. Competing for front-page news space were stories of space exploration, the Cold War, McCarthyism and communism, war in Vietnam and anti-war war protests in the streets and on college campuses. Be-ins and love-ins. Looking at these old news pages, I relived my high school and college days, when I developed my passion for journalism; glancing at the ads for the nightclubs and movies of the era, the fashions and hairdos, the baseball races—Cardinals and Yankees, forever, it seems—and college football powerhouses—Nebraska, Alabama—I remembered many things I thought I'd forgotten. Reading the headlines about the marriages and divorces—Happy and Nelson Rockefeller, John and Yoko—and the music and arts festivals: Woodstock!—I remembered, as so many kin and children and friends must still remember.

And all the while, the civil-rights activists plodded through this happy nostalgia of ours, relentlessly demanding the right to sit in a diner for a cup of coffee, to bathe in a public swimming pool, to ride a public bus—and yes, to be properly



educated and have the right to walk into a voting booth and to safely stroll a neighborhood sidewalk on a summer evening.

So, while this book is the story of an era that many of us shared and remember fondly, it is, more importantly, a revisitation of a dark and stormy niche of American history, significant for the lessons it teaches us about what, today, seems like a replay of the same old arguments and passions on our national and cultural landscape as pundit debates and legal battles are fought yet again over voting rights, educational and work opportunity, criminal justice, economic and class inequality. As Sonny and Cher sang back then, the beat goes on.

The political landscape, though, has changed significantly over the past half century. The civil rights drama of the era covered by the research for this book and its next volume—the late 1950s through the 1960s—played out in a political system in which conservative, segregationist Democrats in the South split with their Northern party colleagues. Those conservative Democrats are now Republicans in a South swimming in political red, but the Grand Old Party, like the Democratic Party then, is split between moderates and alt-right, Tea Party Republicans. Yet questions of race and opportunity have not changed, raising the suggestion, posed by Santayana, that we are doomed to repeat the refrains of that dark past.

That proposition drove my interest in this research and this particular history. But Santayana's inference had a condition attached to it—that learning about the past might help us avoid repeating it. With signs of repetition abundant today—police beating and shooting African-American citizens giving rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, the U.S. Supreme Court partially nullifying the Voting Rights Act, voter-suppression across the South and parts of the North, the rise of white supremacy in the wake of and as a reaction to the election of this nation's first African-American president—I wanted to first learn about the intricacies of the civil rights movement of my youth and, second, as a journalist and now a teacher of journalism, to analyze the role that the press played in covering the movement. Through my research, I discovered not only how some of the nation's newspapers reported the movement; it also scrutinized the process of how the press helped shape it. I hope this writing project may play some small role in the learning process—to perhaps help deter a replay of past abuses and to combat the racist attitudes based in ignorance and inherited abhorrent cultural norms.

I want to thank Point Park University, particularly Provost John Pearson for his support and belief in this project, my editors Kathryn Harrison and David Copeland for their enthusiasm and counsel—with a special shout-out to Point Park University Library staffers Melanie Kirchartz, Margie Stampahar, Dev Albarelli, Brenton Wilson, Robert Stancampiano, Lauren Irvin, Phill Harrity, and Director

Liz Evans for their assistance in obtaining the research data I needed for this book. They, and the librarians at public libraries I visited across and up and down the nation, represent the best of the valuable access to archives and research sources found in private and public libraries. And finally, my wife, Joanne, encouraged me along the way and put up with extended absences while I traveled the South, West and North and worked on this book in my university office, primarily on weekends and early-morning hours so as not to detract from my university responsibilities. Any errors, faults or omissions in this book are mine alone.



# Foreword

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For those of us who became adults in the 1950s and the 1960s, the civil rights era remains a memorable and troubling time. I never saw nor was involved in the brutal ugliness of the period, which included snarling police dogs, water cannons, beatings and shootings of blacks on marches and bus rides, killings, and riots in cities, all of which I read about in newspapers and magazines and watched on television. But I still remember vividly various personal incidents with racial connotations that I experienced; they are like small slides of old snapshots that are quick-flashed from an internal projector in my brain onto a screen in my mind. They never fade away.

My oldest memory is from the early 1950s in Dallas, Texas, when I was about ten years old. I got on a city bus and noticed a black line, about an inch wide, that was painted on the roof about two-thirds of the way back. I asked my mother what it was, and she explained that blacks had to be behind it—in other words, at the back of the bus—or they would be thrown off. I recall thinking that was strange, but I sensed that I should not ask her any more about it. Then, in 1959, I entered Baylor University, the country's largest Southern Baptist institution, and was surprised to learn that there were no black students. The only blacks allowed to take classes were ministers, who could only go to religion classes at night, but they did not count toward a degree. Meanwhile, I had classmates who were Asians and Spanish-Americans (the term at the time for Latinos); somehow they were

acceptable and blacks were not. That quickly changed in the mid-1960s, however, when Southwest Conference universities decided they needed blacks if they were going to compete successfully in football on a national basis.

From 1964 to 1966, I was a sportswriter on the *Charlottesville* (Virginia) *Progress*. Previously I had a similar job for sixteen months on the *Big Spring* (Texas) *Herald*, which was in another former Confederate state, and I do not recall any racial issues surfacing, but that was not the case in Virginia. One day I laid out the sports section and used an Associated Press photograph of three blacks celebrating after a big win in the NCAA basketball tournament. The publisher called me into his office and informed me politely but firmly that he wanted no more pictures of blacks unless they were taken during a game. Meanwhile, while I worked there, the women's page editor was fired because she ran a story on a local black woman, who was widely known and loved in the black community, along with a large photo of her. She was immediately fired because that was viewed as too much publicity on a black person. And then there was the racial viewpoint of a white woman, who rented me a bedroom in her house because she did not want to live alone following the death of her husband. She belonged to a local country club, where she liked to play golf, and was incensed that it might admit its first black member. She told me that she could never be on a course when a black was playing at the same time, even if he was on a hole on the other side of the course and she could not see him. But she had no problem with black caddies. That amazed me.

From 1966 to 1967, I was a sportswriter on the *Atlanta Journal*. It was the only time that I have ever lived in the deep South, and I was unprepared for the invisible fog of racism that hung over the city and was far worse than in Virginia. While I saw no racism creep into the paper (other than the fact that every person in the sports department was white), I was stunned to see the reaction of readers when a story appeared about it. Baseball's Milwaukee Braves, which had some outstanding black players including Hank Aaron, who broke Babe Ruth's home run record in 1974, moved to Atlanta for the 1966 season. The paper had a sportswriter ask the Braves' players how the blacks and whites got along; the answer was that they had no problems playing together as a team, but when they left the stadium, the blacks and whites went their separate ways and did not get together again until the next game. All of us in the sports department read the story before it appeared in the paper and thought it was fine, but an immediate and unexpected tsunami of complaints was hurled at the paper by white readers. They claimed it was not like that in Atlanta—instead, they said the two races constantly did things together. I knew that was wrong from what I saw every day, and it helped reinforce my feeling about the city's extreme racism.

Then, in December 1970, I traveled as the sports information director with the University of Louisville's basketball team to a game at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. On the day after we arrived, a white sportswriter from the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and I took a cab to eat lunch. The white driver immediately told us that another driver had had problems with several black Louisville players the night before and said angrily, "If those niggers get in my cab and cause trouble, I will take care of them!" And he reached under his seat and pulled out a pistol. We did not say anything, much less admit that we were with the Louisville team, and were pleased to get out of the cab when it reached the restaurant.

Such memories are indicative of the racial climate in the South during the civil rights era and are useful in helping those born in the 1970s and afterward to better appreciate the period. Dark though that time was, I feel fortunate to have experienced it in a small way because it reinforced in my mind the ridiculousness of considering blacks second-class citizens because of the color of their skin. That view played a part later when I became one of the leading historians of the black press. My first book dealt with how the black press was critical of black inequalities during World War II, which resulted in some of those at the highest levels of the government considering an indictment of the press under the Espionage Act for hurting the war effort. When the book was published, my editor told me that she was astonished that I had been so non-biased given the racial nature of the subject. I still consider that one of the highest compliments that I have ever received, and my success at being fair was partially due to what I had experienced from the early 1950s until the early 1970s.

To truly understand the civil rights era, however, it is necessary to look at the press coverage of that period. The broadcast videos of the hatred and the violence, and the photographs of it in magazines and newspapers, were striking and sobering. You found yourself asking, "How can this happen in America? How did it come to this?"

But it was the newspapers that provided the most extensive and exhaustive coverage. Grinding on day after day, sometimes in highly dangerous situations, the reporters did their jobs admirably in an explosive atmosphere that mesmerized readers. Standing as a memorial to their work is the 2007 Pulitzer Prize winner for history, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*, by Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff. Relying on what reporters and historians had written about the civil rights era, and incorporating a large number of interviews, they discussed how the press covered that time period and the struggles it faced, some of which were extraordinary. For anyone wanting to understand the press coverage, this highly interesting book is essential. And because it was written by two former reporters, one of whom had covered the civil rights era, it opens up the intriguing world of newspaper reporting to those who have never experienced

it and helps them understand the decisions that were made and the actions that were taken before the stories appeared in print.

Now, Steve Hallock, in the first of what will be two volumes, has significantly extended the scope of their study by doing the most thorough examination to date of what newspapers wrote about the civil rights struggle. And not just what appeared in large northern papers, such as *The New York Times*, and in their southern counterparts. Making his book particularly noteworthy is that it closely analyzes civil rights stories in papers in every region of the country. This results in interesting comparisons, and it makes the point that this was a national story with important national ramifications.

The book also is valuable because of what it says about the press fifty to sixty years ago and today. Newspapers, magazines, and broadcast outlets in both time periods have operated with ethical codes that have determined their conduct and what they print and air. Bias, much of the time subtle, has always been present in news stories, but most of the mainstream press has been aware of it and tried to keep it to a minimum. Contrast that with today's social media revolution, which was not around in the civil rights era and which a number of people today primarily use for learning the news. The digital age has spawned a multitude of amateur journalists and publishers, who have no ethical codes governing what they write or say beyond maybe the realization that it is illegal to commit libel or slander. And as for bias, they frequently tell listeners what they think, as if someone would care, and routinely mix their "news" with personal beliefs and gossip. Some people have called this bloviating. The bottom line is that the mainstream press is responsible for breaking the news in periods of national importance, whether it was the civil rights era or the divisive presidential campaign of Donald Trump and his first year in office. While the mainstream press occasionally makes errors, which are almost never deserving of the derisive and sneering term "fake news," it keeps plugging along doggedly despite the efforts of demagogues to stop it. If it did not do this, Americans would be largely uninformed, and democracy as we know it might very well disappear.

So, enjoy Hallock's book and enjoy what it tells you about the civil rights era and the importance of a free press. You may not like what the mainstream press prints and broadcasts or says in editorials, but thank God that we have it.

*Patrick S. Washburn*  
*Athens, Ohio*

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# Introduction

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James Kilpatrick's warning to the U.S. Supreme Court chief justice and the U.S. attorney general was dire.

"Two things may be said today to the Earl Warrens and Herbert Brownells of this world, and to all their associates in high places," wrote Kilpatrick, editor of *The Richmond News Leader* and a future nationally syndicated conservative columnist and CBS television's "60 Minutes" pundit, in a September, 1957 editorial published after angry white mobs greeted African-American students attempting to integrate a public school in Little Rock, Arkansas, addressed to Chief Justice Warren and Attorney General Brownell. Both men were integral to President Dwight Eisenhower's decision to use federal force to integrate the public schools in Little Rock that month, and to other policies considered anathema to the pro-segregationist movement in the American South during that era.

"The first is said in no sense of pleasure at prophecy fulfilled," the editorial continued. "It is this: We told you so.

"And the second is said as no threat of specific ugliness ahead. It is this: The violence of September, 1957, is only the beginning."

The event referenced specifically by the editorial was the September 9, 1957 dynamiting of an integrated public school in Nashville; but the primary larger target of the editorial was the U.S. Supreme Court's May, 1954 public school desegregation ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*—a ruling promulgated by the Warren Court and enforced by Brownell and Eisenhower.

“Mr. Warren, Mr. Brownell, the Northern liberals of House and Senate, have not understood these things,” the editorial argued in an eloquent, lengthy diatribe that proclaimed a manifesto of the South and segregationists’ intent to serve notice to the rest of the nation that the South would not willingly comply with federal mandates designed to bring Negroes, as African-Americans were then called, into the American mainstream.

From the very beginning, they have failed to comprehend the elemental forces that underlie race relations in the American South. The sober warnings of decent men—men who have lived their lives below the Potomac—they brushed aside as not worth hearing. The remonstrances of able lawyers, seeking to explain the reasons that underlie State control of domestic affairs, they dismissed as empty words.

Sounding themes reminiscent of the debates preceding the Civil War, the editorial continued:

Heedless of consequences, deaf to argument, blind to law, they pushed forward with a plan that could mean to the South nothing less than social revolution. Mr. Nehru would be pleased. Ceylon could be impressed. The Eighteenth District of New York, East Harlem, might be contained. Or give them, if you like, credit for sincerity at least equal to their ignorance: Let it be assumed that Mr. Warren, in his heart, regarded segregation as dead wrong, and that it seemed to him truly more important to follow conscience than to obey his Constitution.

Thus, in one editorial, this newspaper revisited long-argued themes, such as states’ rights and nullification, common in the once raging national argument over slavery while also advancing legalistic precepts, such as deviance from constitutional mandates and the spirit of the document in deference to popular mood and personal beliefs, that continue to spice discussion of court rulings and judicial confirmation hearings today.

The editorial, in its concluding remarks, called the bombing in Nashville in 1957, “the faintest rumbles of far-off thunder,” and it warned of a looming “storm ... barely gathering. Injunctions, mandates, decrees, sweet homilies from the fifteenth green—these are paper screens to turn a hurricane. The stability of our institutions, it has been said, rests upon fidelity to law. When the Supreme Court in May of 1954 snatched away our law, our institutions shuddered. Now they fall.

“We gaze upon the chaos wrought by willful men, and we ask, dear God, to what end, to what good end?”<sup>1</sup>

*The New York Times*, in its editorial response to that same school desegregation ruling, also referenced historical themes in taking up the constitutional argument. The editorialist cited a principle of equality



inherent in the Declaration of Independence and never entirely forgotten, even in the days of human slavery.

This nation is often criticized for its treatment of racial minorities, and particularly of the Negro. There have been grounds for this criticism. Little by little, however, in the folk customs and in such decisions as the one rendered yesterday, we move toward a more perfect democracy. When some hostile propagandist rises in Moscow or Peiping to accuse us of being a class society we can if we wish recite the words of yesterday's opinion. The highest court in the land, the guardian of our national conscience, has reaffirmed its faith—and the undying American faith—in the equality of all men and all children before the law.<sup>2</sup>

Same subject; two viewpoints diametrically opposed. And here is the thematic dynamic of this book and its ensuing next volume, which offer an exploration of the history of the civil rights movement in the United States through an analysis of American press coverage—newspapers, the dominant journalistic medium of the era—of events and subjects beginning with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, referenced above, and ending with another court ruling aimed at desegregating public schools, the 1971 decision that a school bus is a legal and legitimate vehicle to bring about fair and equal access to public education.

## Echoes of History

The historical references cited in the above editorials are an apt window into this republic's national debate over the themes of states' rights and of state nullification of federal legislation and edict, the germ of which is found in the writings of John C. Calhoun, a Yale-educated South Carolinian who served in the House of Representatives, in presidential cabinets as war secretary and secretary of state, as a U.S. senator and member of the House of Representatives representing South Carolina, and as vice president under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. He was the foremost spokesman in defense of slavery on grounds that included two primary arguments: states' rights, and that slavery was advantageous not only to the agrarian economy of the South but also benefitted the slaves. All these elements surfaced in the pre-Civil War newspaper editorials arguing for and against slavery, but the source of this river of commentary can be found in Calhoun's "Selection from a Disquisition on Government," published after his death, that posited his doctrine of interposition, or nullification.

The necessary consequence of taking the sense of the community by the concurrent majority is, as has been explained, to give to each interest or portion of the community

a negative on the others. It is this mutual negative among its various conflicting interests, which invests each with the power of protecting itself;—and places the right and safety of each, where only they can be securely placed, under its own guardianship. Without this there can be no systematic, peaceful, or effective resistance to the natural tendency of each to come into conflict with the others: and without this there can be no constitution. It is this negative power,—the power of preventing or arresting the action of the government,—be it called by what term it may,—veto, interposition, nullification, check, or balance of power,—which, in fact, forms the constitution. They are all but different names for the negative power. In all its forms, and under all its names, it results from the concurrent majority. Without this there can be no negative and, without a negative, no constitution. The assertion is true in reference to all constitutional governments, be their forms what they may. It is, indeed, the negative which makes the constitution,—and the positive which makes the government. The one is the power of acting,—and the other the power of preventing or arresting action. The two, combined, make constitutional governments.<sup>3</sup>

It became common practice for the newspapers of the North and the South to take editorial shots at each other during the years leading up to the Civil War over issues that included nullification, states' rights, and the economic and cultural/social impacts of slavery. The Boston *Atlas* in a May 1849 editorial adopted the “yes, but ...” format of debate by agreeing with the South regarding its natural advantages enabling it to lead the North in “facilities for manufacturing, especially in the manufacture of cotton.” Having several agricultural and manufacturing advantages, the editorial argued, “what is to hinder the South from outstripping the North in the manufacture of cotton? Nothing but the very thing which our South Carolina friend [undoubtedly a reference to Calhoun] is so anxious to preserve and perpetuate, slavery.”<sup>4</sup>

To which the Augusta (Georgia) *Sentinel* responded that same month:

“The holders of slaves owe it to themselves to demonstrate, in a large way, that cotton can be picked, carded, spun and woven, as well as grown at the South. Nothing short of this will stop the ceaseless reproaches and unjust imputations cast upon the relation of master and servant, as it exists in this quarter of the Union. It is the duty of all cotton planters to take hold of this great question of manufacturing and mechanical industry in good earnest.” Further: “We must show by visible results that slavery is not incompatible with improvements of the soil: is not inimical to common schools and a high standard of general intelligence; and is not hostile to the most successful manufacturing, mechanical and commercial industry. We can influence and control public opinion on all these points if we will only set ourselves properly and steadily at work to attain the objects indicated.” The editorial concluded by invoking the ordination of slavery by a higher power, along with its obvious economic benefits. “Because God has given us much, it will

not do to say in practice that we need do nothing for ourselves. Our abundant means for labor, our great advantages of climate, soil, and waterpower, demand the most skillful use, the most profitable employment.”<sup>5</sup>

The New York *Plaindealer* took aim at Calhoun’s argument on the blessings of slavery in an 1837 editorial by invoking the senator’s claim “that slavery is not an evil, but ‘a good, a great good.’” Stating that Calhoun spoke of the “free laborers of the Northern States . . . in the most contemptuous terms as serfs and vassals, far beneath the negro bondmen of the South in moral degradation,” the editorialist harshly disparaged Calhoun’s stance on slavery,

for we do hold from the bottom of our soul that slavery is an evil, a deep, detestable, damnable evil; an evil in all its aspects; an evil to the blacks and a greater evil to the whites; an evil, moral, social, and political; an evil which shows itself in the languishing condition of agriculture at the South, in its paralyzed commerce, and in the prostration of the mechanical arts; an evil that stares you in the face from uncultivated fields, and howls in your ears through the tangled recesses of the Southern swamps and morasses.<sup>6</sup>

Five years before the Civil War, Southern newspapers intensified the argument on behalf of the economic benefits of slavery, often in grandiose terms, as the Richmond *Dispatch* did in a May, 1856 editorial claiming that the “whole commerce of the world turns upon the product of slave labor. What would commerce be without cotton, sugar, tobacco, rice, and naval stores? All these are the product of slave labor. It is a settled fact that free labor cannot produce them in sufficient quantities to supply the demands of mankind. It has been said that one free laborer is equal to five slaves. If this be so, why has not free labor been employed in the production of the above staples? It has been attempted, and in every case in which it has been introduced has failed.”<sup>7</sup>

The *New York Tribune*, though, dismissed Southern arguments regarding the economic benefits of slavery—particularly the popular Southern claim that foreign exports were a useful gauge by which to measure a nation’s wealth and power—as “dismal fallacy” because it is a specious argument to claim economic benefit on what, essentially, is a one-crop, or one-product, economy. The South, argued the editorial, “raises cotton, but she can neither eat nor spin it, and hence it goes abroad to buy what she wants to eat and to wear.

“But this is not all. A country where industry is not diversified, but where production is confined to one or two, or a very few staples, is constantly in a precarious condition. A failure of its chief crop for a single year spreads bankruptcy and famine. A threatened war fills it with dismay; an actual one with ruin. The country of large exports in proportion to its production is thus the weakest of countries rather than the strongest.”<sup>8</sup>

Such editorial differences will be seen in this book's analysis of newspaper articles and commentary during the civil rights era. Substitute topics such as education or voting rights for the subject of slavery, and the reader will discern in the pages of this book a remarkable similarity to the pre-Civil War press discourse in editorial differences and arguments. A discussion of how, and why, this variance in press coverage becomes necessary at this point. While it might be tempting to use the allegory of the three blind men who reach different conclusions of what constitutes an elephant upon touching different parts of its body (it is a snake, said the blind man who felt its trunk; it's a tree said the blind man who felt its leg; it's a wall said the blind man who touched the side of its body), a myriad of factors comprise the explanation for different viewpoints on single events, utterances, decisions or issues. Beyond the obvious fact that most of the sources of these different viewpoints—media pundits, reporters and editors, social and cultural peers, educators and opinion-shapers—are not blind, numerous dynamics formulate beliefs, information and opinion and, thus, forge a perceived reality.

## Theoretical Components

The newspaper debates cited above are an important element in this discussion for at least a couple of reasons. One is the role of the press—primarily newspapers, in the current analysis—and of the media at large, not only as keepers of the official historical record, but also as its molder and, importantly here, as a reflector of popular cultural, social and political opinion. The media—be they newspapers and their dominant role in much of the history of the civil rights movement, or the more modern platform of electronic and Internet distribution of information that often enjoys a less structured format—are a key component of the nation's culture and society, disseminating, rationalizing and maintaining its ideology, norms, beliefs and behaviors. A vital role of the media is as defenders—media scholars and analysts invoke the term “watchdog”—of an ideology and its culture.

For example, generations of families used to employing slave labor, whose children socialized with slave children, whose propertied families tended to the housing, welfare and medical needs of slave families, came to accept these relationships as normal. Over generations, slavery became part of their culture; thus, media arguments defending slavery and its economic and social benefits helped buttress, or “guard,” that culture and its beliefs. As journalism and communication scholars Dr. Kim Bissell and Dr. Scott Parrott suggest in a recent monograph on the role of the media in the development of social bias and prejudice, it has been noted throughout history that “acceptance of a bias against a specific ethnic/racial

group was embraced by the majority because it was what was known and very few counterarguments were presented. Those who were the target of the bias or the negative attitudes might not have shared this dominant belief about racism, but the attitude was one that pervaded culture and society on a broader level and thus represented a way of thinking.” Bias, the authors continue, “reflects a combination of implicit and explicit attitudes. One might continue to hold negative implicit associations without knowing it, but that individual would be hesitant or more willing, to express bias based on input from the dominant cultural ideology. While ideological bias is again difficult to quantify and operationalize, we would argue that it is a relevant factor of influence in the development of bias.” The authors note that numerous studies

have documented the importance of media portrayals in the development of a belief system about gender, race, class and age. The influence of the media may be particularly strong when an individual has little or no contact with a stigmatized group. With no individual experience, social feedback, or ideological guidance, an individual may rely more heavily on the media for information about another person, group, or issue. Furthermore, if an individual spends a substantial amount of time with media content that offers limited perspectives, he or she could be inclined to adopt the belief system presented via the media. While this line of thinking is the basis upon which cultivation theory was developed, we would argue that some of the main premises of this theory still hold true today.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the cultivation theory aspect of the authors’ observations, the phenomenon also speaks to the pictures-in-the-mind theory expounded by Walter Lippmann in his seminal *Public Opinion*, in which he put forth a scenario of folks who get their news and information—as most of us do—secondarily, from the reporting of others; it is information that becomes their reality. A popular expression of this phenomenon would be the utterance that “I read it in the paper.” Or, “I saw it on television, and pictures don’t lie.” This constructed reality, what Lippmann termed “pictures in our heads,” is accepted as fact-based reality, especially when it comes from authoritative sources as depicted in the media.

American sociologist C. Wright Mills built upon Lippmann’s theory some years later, writing that “very little of what we think we know of the social realities of the world have we found out first-hand.” Most of the “pictures in our head,” he observed, “we have gained from these media—even to the point where we often do not really believe what we see before us until we read about it in the paper or hear about it on the radio. The media not only give us information; they guide our very experiences. Our standards of credulity, or standards of reality, tend to be set by the media rather than by our own fragmentary experience.”<sup>10</sup>

Those “standards of reality” sometimes include inaccurate information that, argue Bissell and Parrott, “frequently appears in television programs, newspapers, magazines, novels, and other media outlets. For example, the media frequently portray people with mental illness as violent, dangerous, unstable, unpredictable, and socially undesirable. Stereotypes based on race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and other social categories are also prevalent in American television, newspapers, magazines, movies, and other forms of media content.”<sup>11</sup>

In the case of newspapers and other news media, the process of gathering or producing this content includes, as sociologist Mark Fishman has observed, “journalists’ routine methods for producing news—that is, the very process of ‘news-gathering.’” This process, Fishman explained, “constructs an image of reality. In this view, news is neither a reflection nor a distortion of reality because either of these characteristics implies that news *can* record what is ‘out there’” (italics by Fishman).<sup>12</sup>

In these routines of newsgathering we find the primary methods of determining not only what is news, through a process identified by media scholars as gatekeeping, but also how that news is presented—its context, or its spin, to use more modern, political terminology—defined by media scholars as framing. In the process of gatekeeping, a person or group of people, choosing from numerous available subjects, determine(s) what content will be presented on any given day by deciding what stories are to be assigned and what stories, available from in-house reporters or writers or from out-of-house sources such as syndicates and wire services, will be placed in the newspaper or magazine pages, broadcast on air, or posted on Internet and web sites.

Framing determines the information’s context and colors its meaning through such factors as display, or presentation. For example, where a story is placed in a newspaper is a key determination of its importance or significance to the gatekeepers. Page one, or the lead position in broadcast or Internet outlets, is reserved for stories that the media owners or content managers have determined are most important on any given day, or week or month in the case of magazines. Even on page one of a newspaper, or in a story’s ranking in broadcast play or Internet postings, framing plays a role by the determination of what stories go at the top of the page, or on the cover, or at the top of the site or opening of a newscast. Similarly, a story or information that is buried—relegated to a page deep inside the publication, or to the tail end of a broadcast, or on a lower rung of an Internet or web page content ladder—has been deemed less important or relevant.

Another important component of framing is the language used in telling the story. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs—each of these pieces of a written or verbal narrative flavors the meaning, or nuance, of a report. The use of language lends

context and connotation to narratives. For example, the words “freedom fighter” carry different connotations than the words “radical terrorist.” But either descriptor can be used to characterize a man or woman intending to bomb a facility.

One of the more important theoretical components of this book will be agenda-setting, a concept developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in a 1972 paper published in *The Public Opinion Quarterly* whereby, in their selection and presentation of news, “editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.”<sup>13</sup> Thus it is a process of media focusing attention on an issue or event, fostering its importance in the public arena of opinion and discussion using strategies that include story placement, volume of space allocated to a story, number of related stories published with the primary reportage, and repetition of stories. Agenda-setting is a deliberate, planned method of determining significance of issues or subjects in the course of newsgathering or, in several instances found in this book, newsmaking. The term “newsmaking” is used purposefully, because the agenda-setting processes of this book take in more than media decision-making; they include the extra-media setting of public-forum agendas by elected and appointed government and public officials designed to focus media attention on a subject or event, such as Alabama Governor George Wallace’s standing in the doorway of the University of Alabama to obstruct entry of African-American students, or they are set by event participants, such as pre-planned demonstration marches or sit-ins intended to generate media attention. Some agendas, such as Supreme Court rulings, are set by outside forces—much like earthquakes and hurricanes—beyond the control of the media or public officials. The agenda-setting routine is almost a chicken-or-egg proposition in our attempts to discover what came first. For example, it is clear that Martin Luther King, Jr. was participating in setting political and social agendas in planning protests and marches that he knew would provoke a response, frequently violent, from authority figures such as police and elected officials striving to preserve the segregated status quo—and from those working in its opposition. Newspapers and television journalists covering these events were not so much setting an agenda as participating in a theatrical production set in motion by other directors; they were setting a journalistic agenda, though, by deciding which of these stories to use or to omit, and where and how to publish them. But we will see other instances in this book of newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, hiring and assigning reporters specifically to set an agenda—to cover what journalism professor Gene Roberts and working journalist Hank Klibanoff termed “The Race Beat” in titling their groundbreaking 2007 book on newspaper coverage of the civil rights movement.



Indeed, the process of determining how to cover the movement, following what *Times* management and ownership decided was failed coverage of the Little Rock, Arkansas public school integration battle of 1957, was a lengthy and deliberative one, as described in a 2007 analysis of the book by *The Nation*, that puts forth a textbook case of a deliberate, thoughtful agenda-setting decision that is presented at some length here to offer a clear demonstration of how the agenda-setting process works not only at the *Times* but at other newspapers as well.

Sensing a long-term developing story on the race issue in the South,

*The Times*, anticipating conflict between returning black and white World War II veterans, set up its first Southern bureau in 1947, in Chattanooga. Its chief was Virginia-born Johnny Popham. Popham, who refused to fly, insisted the South was “strictly a grass-roots region and must be covered and reported as such; it can’t be done from railroad depots and airports; you just don’t get the flavor that way.” Far from rushing to the story, Popham dawdled. “As long as the South moved at a slow pace,” Roberts and Klibanoff observe, “Popham and the *Times* were fine.” It was only when the South exploded that the *Times* realized that Popham’s method of “driving everywhere from Chattanooga, then writing around the edges of the race matter,” had led the paper astray.

The turning point was Little Rock. After Popham led his editors to believe that Central High’s desegregation in September 1957 would proceed in peace and quiet, the *Times* sent only its education editor, Benjamin Fine, to record the event. But the historic armed showdown there dominated international headlines for the next two weeks. ... Fine was overwhelmed. He was also drawn awkwardly into the spotlight when he couldn’t bear to stand by while a mob threatened the black student Elizabeth Eckford. Seeking to shelter Eckford, Fine got on the wrong end of the camera, raising hackles about his objectivity.

Hit by “the wrenching realization that they had blown the coverage of Little Rock,” *Times* editors called Fine back to New York and sent Pulitzer winner Homer Bigart to accompany the federal troops who occupied Central later that year. In the spring of 1958, the paper also replaced Popham with Claude Sitton, the Georgia-born adventurer who’d spent the early 1950s working at United Press and hanging out in Greenwich Village. Released back into his native land after landing a job with the *Times*, Sitton became an inspiration and model for the new breed of investigative reporters. “Sitton’s byline would be atop the stories that landed on the desks of three presidents,” Roberts and Klibanoff write. “His phone number would be carried protectively in the wallets of civil rights workers who saw him, and the power of his byline, as their best hope for survival.”

The *Times*’ new efforts helped save its reputation but provoked the fury of white Southern editors, who felt robbed of their authority to interpret the region. While a few Southern papers, notably Little Rock’s *Arkansas Gazette*, “became their region’s conscience,” most Southern editors restrained their coverage, whether out of inertia, fear of inflaming violent racist rabble-rousers or a conservative desire to conceal precisely what black activists wanted to expose. Consequently, the “pack” of Southern



papers “never got hold of the whole story in front of them,” and some “served as adjunct investigative bodies for” local police.

Even with Sitton—and other bloodhounds like David Halberstam, Harrison Salisbury, John Herbers and Roy Reed—the *Times* was late to report on the sit-ins of 1960, which surprised older civil rights leaders as well as newsmen. The paper also missed the dramatic attacks on the Freedom Riders of 1961 in Alabama; *Times* lawyers had ordered Sitton to stay out of the state, since state officials were suing the paper for allegedly libelous statements in an advertisement for Martin Luther King’s defense fund. But generally black activists used the *Times* and its competitors to make their voices heard and to raise the movement’s profile. Sitton was sympathetic to his sources: He “felt more comfortable on the civil rights side, where there was an openness with the press that didn’t exist among the segregationists, who were defensive under the scrutiny of the national news scope.”<sup>14</sup>

The mention in this analysis of the effect of *Times* coverage on newspapers of the South raises one other pertinent point about agenda-setting of and by the press, particularly national newspapers such as *The New York Times* and, in that era, other publications that aspired to national prominence such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The Chicago Tribune*. As this author has noted elsewhere, newspapers of the late twentieth century played a prominent role in setting the news agenda for the nation, and for television journalists, with *The New York Times* leading the way. As *U.S. News & World* reported in 1998, the *Times*, “even in today’s media-soaked age,” played an immense role deciding what was and was not important news to the nation. “The front page of *The New York Times* is still the benchmark,” says Paul Friedman, executive producer of ABC’s *World News Tonight*. “Lots of (media) people who are insecure about their own news judgment ... go crazy if they see it in *The New York Times*.” Similarly, larger-circulation, dominant newspapers in states have played a leadership role in agenda-setting for their smaller, lower-circulation brethren throughout a state or region.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, Swedish Nobel-laureate economist Gunnar Myrdal, in his study of American attitudes regarding race in *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, published a decade before *Brown v. Board of Education*, “had a clear understanding of the Negro press’s role in fostering positive discontent,” wrote Roberts and Klibanoff of Myrdal’s findings. He saw, they wrote,

the essential leadership role that Southern moderate and liberal white editors were playing by speaking out against institutionalized race discrimination, yet he was aware of the anguish they felt as the pressure to conform intensified. There was also the segregationist press in the South that dehumanized Negroes in print and suppressed the biggest story in their midst. And he came to see the northern press—and the national press, such as it was—as the best hope for force-feeding the rest of the

nation a diet so loaded with stories about the cruelty of racism that it would have to rise up in protest. ...

The future of race relations, Myrdal believed, rested largely in the hands of the American press.<sup>16</sup>

A crucial element of agenda-setting is the use of editorials and editorial pages—or punditry, in broadcast and Internet platforms—in which media owners and content managers offer opinions and commentary on the information presented, in allegedly more objective, non-biased fashion, elsewhere in the pages or information segments. Here, in the opinion section, is where the media organization's power structure makes clear not only what the owners and managers consider to be the most important information of the day—selecting just three to five topics, for example, on which to offer analysis, explanation and opinion, of the hundreds or thousands of topics available to the gatekeepers during any given information cycle—but also *how* and *why* it is important and suggesting or even demanding, in some cases, what should be done by society's elite and power-brokers to deal with the problems or dilemmas that are the commentaries' topics.

Harry S. Ashmore, then-executive editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, discussed the importance of newspaper commentary and editorials, in an agenda-setting context, in the 1954 study, *The Negro and the Schools*, a book commissioned by the Ford Foundation and published just days before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. As Roberts and Klibanoff observed regarding where Southerners would obtain information about the race issue, Ashmore

knew they would rely on the single most important source of information at the time, their local newspaper, but that didn't give him any great comfort. ... he saw the significant distinction between what editors put on their editorial and opinion pages—which most readers understood as personal commentary—and what they put on their news pages. Ashmore had serious concerns about the cast and content of the front page and news pages, about the ingredients that went into the daily feeding of the public curiosity. For the most part, they treated Negro communities as a creepy corner of the world not worthy of their readers' time.<sup>17</sup>

But Myrdal also recognized that agenda-setting was a role undertaken not only by the press—or by government and elected officials, for that matter—but by those affected by government policies and newspaper coverage. “Myrdal reached the conclusion that would be uncannily prescient. Even before he got to the fiftieth page of his tome, he wrote, ‘*To get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people* [italics by the authors].’”<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it is important to consider information that has been omitted. In this scenario, the gatekeepers and/or content managers have determined that the

information is, if not less important, not worthwhile or justifiable at all—or, in the case of the editorial page, unworthy of notice or discussion. Thus, subtraction of information from the daily, weekly or monthly menu of stories or opinion by itself carries significant meaning and a perceived intent of deliberately ignoring, or snubbing, material for social, political, or ideological reasons—and to diminish the availability of often-important information from the public.

One other theoretical factor to be considered in this book's analysis is the factors that influence how and why the gatekeepers manage information and set national, regional and local agendas to be considered by their audiences, their sources, and by the social elites who wield societal power. In their 1996 book *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, media and communication scholars Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese identified five spheres of influence behind media content decisions. Ranging from the least powerful to the strongest, they are: the individual level, the media routines level, the organizational level, the extramedia level, and the ideological level.<sup>19</sup>

The least powerful, individual level, includes the gatekeepers at the point that information first reaches the media organization—at a newspaper, these would be the reporters who cover governmental meetings and news events such as press conferences, and who make individual decisions about what information should be in a story, how the story is organized, what language is used, what sources of information will be cited (i.e., documents, government officials), and they make recommendations to their supervisors about what information should be pursued—what stories need to be covered and what stories can be ignored or put off. Also at this level would be the desk editors who initially receive the stories, who peruse the daily inflow of press releases and wire stories, and who make decisions and recommendations about what stories should be pursued, how they should be framed, and where they should be placed (i.e., on the front page, in an inside section, on the back pages).

The second sphere of influence is the media routines level. Routines include content organization through beats, or specialty areas of coverage, such as government, education, business or political beats, sports coverage, feature stories, and so on. This level also would include, as does the individual level, what sort of sources to employ (i.e., official, authoritative sources, such as government or agency officials, designated spokespeople, seen as most knowledgeable or credible and therefore the most frequently used sources; documents or other written, published, posted or broadcast information; personal observation, such as attendance at meetings, events, or press conferences), and use of anonymous or unnamed sources (i.e., whistleblowers, knowledgeable insiders who will provide information for background or for publication without attribution and thus viewed by the audience members and by news organization management as less credible).

The organizational level is the third most powerful sphere, defining how information is processed and placed up the company hierarchical ladder. The owner, or publisher, represents the most powerful agent at this level, overseeing executive and managing editors, department editors, program managers in broadcast, each making decisions not only about what information is pursued and how it is sought but also whether certain subjects or events will be covered at all.

The next sphere of power that influences media content decisions is the extra-media level—influences beyond the organization that play significant roles in determining informational content. This would include government and agency officials, who set their own agendas through meetings, policy decisions, and pronouncements (including, as we have seen in modern contexts, social media tweets and Internet web pages); judicial officials and events such as trials; corporate decisions; advertisers, who historically have wielded considerable power over media content, particularly at smaller news outlets at the community and local level; natural forces responsible for tragedies such as droughts, earthquakes, fires, storms, airplane crashes and environmental crises; the media marketplace, in which competition among news and information companies—the seeking of news scoops and the efforts of in-depth investigative and enterprise reporting that raises new or previously unexplored topics—shapes content decisions; and the citizenry or participants, who set agendas through such events as protest marches and demonstrations. This latter sphere—social agitation through marches and protests—was largely responsible for sparking local and national news organization agendas during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, which is the subject of this book and its ensuing volume.

Finally, the ideological level is the most powerful because of its role in establishing and maintaining a society's culture. This sphere, in the United States, would include the capitalist economic system, and the democratic form of government that stresses participation, opportunity and equality—forces behind the laws and norms that maintain the nation's cultural beliefs, norms and practices. The arguments and battles over such issues as segregation, voter and citizen participation and other areas of constitutional governance, are waged in the ideological realm.

All of these influences came into play in press coverage of the civil rights movement and will be evident; many of them have already been invoked in this introduction's discussions of editorial feuds and news coverage routines, for example, such as editors at *The New York Times* making determinations about how to cover the emerging race story in the South.

Careful attention will be paid in this book's analysis to these influences and the resulting gatekeeping, framing and agenda-setting functions, with particular focus on the editorials and commentary, because this is where a newspaper's agenda and

political/social philosophy—and thus the perceived, or constructed, reality it offers its trusting readers—is most apparent.

## Method

While scholars and journalists have produced a plethora of books, articles and documentaries about certain aspects of the civil rights movement, such as biographies of participants in the struggle or examinations of specific events that include civil rights marches in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, other than Roberts' and Klibanoff's book, little book-length analysis has been published focusing on press coverage of the movement. This is somewhat surprising, considering the national importance and impact of the civil rights movement. Analysis of press coverage, particularly newspapers—the dominant media platform of most of this era—is important in understanding the dynamics of the civil rights activism because of the theoretical implications discussed above. The press, through gatekeeping, framing and agenda-setting—all influenced by factors ranging from individual reporters' decisions to ownership influence that sometimes resulted in omission of information and/or commentary and a segregationist ideology at war with constitutional guarantees of equality of participatory democratic practices—constructed a reality that in turn influenced the decisions, policies, opinions and beliefs of a national and regional citizenry.

In a 1975 dissertation for the Manship School of Communication at Louisiana State University, Craig Flournoy analyzed newspaper coverage of the Emmett Till murder and the Montgomery bus boycott. He found that “black-oriented publications produced the most accomplished journalistic coverage by providing a greater range of sources, broader context, more depth and a clear statement of the central problem.” He concluded that “mainstream news organizations largely ignored blacks or presented them as criminals”—a situation that changed during the Till and bus boycott coverage, in which publications that included *Life* and *Look* magazines and *The New York Times* offered new frames that presented African-Americans “as the innocent victims of deadly racial hatred and later as nonviolent protestors.”<sup>20</sup>

Roberts' and Klibanoff's book analyzed newspaper coverage by the African-American and Anglo press, primarily of the South, but included extensive analysis of *The New York Times*, recognized by professional newspapers and scholars as the newspaper of record and a national agenda-setter of that time and subsequently. Their exhaustive book, focusing on events ranging from the Till murder to the Selma and Montgomery marches, influenced this author in his focus and organization of this book.

As discussed above, U.S. Supreme Court decisions regarding education book-end the beginning and ending of the newspaper analysis of these two volumes. The analysis begins with the court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling desegregating public schools. Not only was this a landmark legal ruling, overturning the previous, prevailing "separate but equal" doctrine established by the court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, it also finally focused national attention on the race story. Certainly, other civil rights decisions, events and issues had emerged prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, going back to President Abraham Lincoln's January 1, 1863 proclamation that all slaves in so-called rebel states be freed. These would include ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guaranteeing equal rights and voting rights for African-Americans, the Civil Rights Law of 1875, the 1896 Plessy ruling referenced above, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1927 ruling overturning a Texas law barring African-Americans from voting in Democratic primary elections, the Supreme Court's 1938 ruling upholding the separate but equal doctrine at the university of Missouri Law School, the Supreme Court's 1940 decision overturning conviction of a Southern African-American because African-Americans had been barred from the jury, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's establishment of the Federal Fair Employment Practices Commission designed to eliminate discriminatory practices in industry, President Harry S Truman's Committee on Civil Rights 1947 call for an end to all segregation practices, Truman's 1948 executive order banning discrimination in the armed forces, and the U.S. Supreme Court's 1950 decision ordering an Oklahoma law school to cease segregation in classrooms and other facilities.

One other event, Jackie Robinson's smashing of the color barrier in baseball in 1947, sparked a national debate on the race and segregation issues—but as with so many other stories involving Americans of color, the mainstream press took little notice of this historically significant event. The African-American press, though, played it as a major story.<sup>21</sup>

So there had been and long and steady progression of court decisions and government actions eroding segregationist policies and practices; the school desegregation ruling, though, changed the agenda and, as Flournoy noted, combined with the Till and Montgomery narratives, altered the framing of the race and segregation narrative for some newspapers—though certainly not all, as this book will reveal.

This book and Volume II follow a chronological organization, primarily because this is a logical approach of a study of historical occurrences and subjects in which a common thread of racial events and themes wove a larger tapestry, but also because chronological consideration enables the reader, and the author, to observe if trends or attitudes changed over time. This chronological analysis will analyze press treatment of events that include, in order, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; the Emmett Till murder; the Rosa Parks Montgomery bus incident that

sparked that city's bus boycott; the Little Rock, Arkansas school desegregation crisis; the diner sit-ins ignited by the first one at a Woolworth's department store in Greensboro; the Freedom riders' saga; James Meredith's effort to enter the University of Mississippi; the Birmingham, Alabama Project C demonstrations; Alabama Governor George Wallace's grandstanding attempt to prevent the integration of the University of Alabama; the murder of civil rights activist Medgar Evers; the 1963 March on Washington; (Volume II) the bombing of a Birmingham church that killed four African-American girls; President Lyndon Johnson's push for the Civil Rights Bill of 1964; the murders of three civil rights volunteer workers in Mississippi that same year; the 1965 marches and demonstrations in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama; President Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965; the Los Angeles and Chicago race riots in the summer of 1965; the U.S. Supreme Court's 1967 ruling establishing the right of interracial couples to marry; the Detroit race riots of that same year; the appointment by President Johnson of Thurgood Marshall as the first African-American on the U.S. Supreme Court; the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.; and the U.S. Supreme Court's 1971 ruling ordering busing of public school students to help achieve school desegregation.

The author did not want to replicate the sampling of the Roberts and Klibanoff book, including its analysis of the African-American press, but wanted to build upon it to take in a more national sampling—an analysis focusing on key large-market newspapers along with some major presses of the South. To that end, newspapers were selected for analysis in three regions of the nation. Southern newspapers selected were *The Birmingham News* in Alabama, because this is where much of the civil-rights drama occurred; *The Clarion Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi, another dominant stage for the movement; *The News-Leader* in Richmond, Virginia, edited by one of the South's more erudite segregationist journalists but which was somewhat of an anomaly in that it did not publish a Sunday edition; *The News and Courier* in Charleston, South Carolina, a city that had served as port for a large portion of the South's slave trade, and *The Houston Chronicle* in Texas, selected as a possibly independent and therefore more objective Southern voice that, aside from the diner sit-in movement, was largely unaffected by the civil rights activism. In the North and Midwest, the author selected *The New York Times*, *The Pittsburgh Press*, *The Chicago Tribune*—cities where the nation's pre-eminent African-American presses published—and *The Detroit Free Press*. Western newspapers chosen for analysis were the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Denver Post*, and *The Seattle Times*—each a primary news source in its region. The sampling was not random, but rather was deliberative, with selection based partially on the author's preliminary research of books and articles dealing with press coverage of civil-rights era events and issues, with an eye toward offering a sampling of national press coverage that, while not



definitive or statistically significant, is intended to be representative. Content analysis is the primary research method, but not in the strict scholarly sense of developing coding sheets and seeking out certain words or phrases, which would be too limiting. Rather, the analysis took in overall coverage of events, beginning with their onset and continuing through their completion, such as the March on Washington, for example. This sort of analyses for the most part entailed more comprehensive investigation because of the planning leading up to the event, and its aftermath. Spontaneous events, such as the Emmett Till lynching, were more limited in range and thus generally less detailed and extensive in reportage. Attention was paid to volume and placement of stories, and to tone and word selection, rather than to pre-selected key words. Language and tone are pivotal in this analysis; for example, a person participating in a protest might be identified by several different nouns or adjectives with negative or positive connotations, such as terrorist versus freedom-fighter, or, in the case of the specific events analyzed in this book, an example would be descriptions of those protestors who boarded buses to ride into Southern states that segregated their buses and bus facilities: “freedom-rider” versus “invader” or “outside agitator.” Because the bulk of this book comprises excerpts of articles and commentaries, it relies almost exclusively on primary sources, with little dependence on secondary sources; hence, there will be no bibliography at the back of this book. Thus, this analysis is more qualitative than quantitative—and, as the expanse of the issues and regions analyzed suggests, with apologies and thanks to Roberts and Klibanoff, is intended as complementary research to the existing literature.

## Notes

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# The *Brown* Decision

## Separate Not Equal

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### ‘All God’s Chillun’

The Southern newspaper editors saw it coming.

One day before the unanimous U.S. Supreme Court’s May 17, 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, *The Birmingham News* in Alabama placed on its front page a New York-based Associated Press story that the newspaper deemed, in a subhead above the main headline, an “Important research report.” The story detailed the findings of an in-depth study of, as the main headline suggested, “The Negro And The Schools.” The study, commissioned by the Ford Foundation, found that if “Negroes and whites were immediately reshuffled throughout the South’s school system, ‘the same general deficiencies in physical facilities, teacher training, curricula and the like would exist.’”

In other words, the looming court decision likely wouldn’t bring much change in public education, at least in the South.

Of some significance to the editors at *The Birmingham News*—the second deck of the main headline trumpeted that “a Southern writer seeks the facts”—was that one of their own, Harry S. Ashmore, executive editor of *The Arkansas Gazette*, had authored the study, which was based on “research by some 50 educators, sociologists and economists.”

“In such a reshuffling of white and Negro students in the South, says the study, ‘abstract justice might be achieved, in that the deficit would fall evenly upon

members of both races,” the newspaper reported, “but the over-all standard of public education would not be materially improved.” But while the so-called educational “deficit” might be equal to the two races, the study revealed a troubling finding of inequality when it came to public education in the South. The region, the study found, “is only now reaching the point where there are enough classrooms for education. There has been general discrimination against Negroes, it is true, but it could have been corrected only by pouring additional money into the total system or by lowering the standards of white schools.’

“If at any point in the past discrimination had been wiped out by total integration the effect would have been that some Negroes would have gone to better schools and some whites to worse—but no appreciable economies would have resulted to make additional funds available for improvement of the total system.”<sup>1</sup>

Advance copies of Ashmore’s study had been sent to the U.S. Supreme Court. Whether it had any effect on the thinking of the court justices, they handed down their unanimous decision within twenty-four hours of the book’s publication. “The Ashmore book hardly made a ripple before the newest judge on the high court, Chief Justice Earl Warren, began reading the decision,” wrote Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff in their 2007 book, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*. “In keeping with Warren’s goal of producing an opinion that would be ‘short, readable by the lay public, non-rhetorical, unemotional and, above all, non-accusatory,’ the decision was neither long nor notably eloquent. It had no rousing passages that could be put to stirring John Philip Sousa oompahs. It provided no remedy, and it delayed until the following fall arguments about fashioning a timetable for the only obvious remedy: desegregation. But the decision shattered *Plessy*.”<sup>2</sup>

“Shatter” is the apt verb for what the *Brown* ruling did to *Plessy* and its driving “separate but equal” maxim in the realm of public education (the ruling did not apply to private schools). *The New York Times*’ May 18 front-page story, dated Washington May 17, reporting the court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*—“The Supreme Court unanimously outlawed today racial segregation in public schools” was the story’s terse lead—invoked *Plessy* high in its story, in the fourth paragraph, noting that the court’s ruling “set aside the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine laid down by the Supreme Court in 1896.

“In the field of public education,’ Chief Justice Warren said, ‘the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

Noting that Warren invoked the primary question behind the ruling, the newspaper observed that he answered it himself: “We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though physical facilities and other “tangible” factors may be equal,

deprive the children of the minority groups of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.” The court cited the Fourteenth Amendment in the ruling, concluding that school segregation “deprived Negroes of ‘the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.’”<sup>3</sup>

A second, major question regarding the decision centered not so much on the legalities at issue but on practicalities. How would the South react? John N. Popham, the *Times* reporter covering the race story in the South, answered that question in a companion front-page story. “The South’s reaction to the Supreme Court’s decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools appeared to be tempered considerably today,” Popham reported. This was because the court granted time for the states affected by the ruling to implement desegregation policies. The time lag, he wrote, “seemed to be the major factor in that reaction. Southern leaders of both races in political, educational and community service fields expressed comment that covered a wide range. Some spoke bitter words that verged on defiance. Others ranged from sharp disagreement to predictions of peaceful and successful adjustment in accord with the ruling.”<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, a third front-page story offered political feedback, observing that “Congress as a whole grappled with the profound political implications of the Supreme Court’s anti-segregation ruling. It became clear at once—and by both parties was accepted as inevitable—that the court’s action would figure importantly in the coming Congressional election campaigns.” But, the story added, regional political reactions were apparent. “The Republicans and the non-Southern Democrats on the whole maintained silence. The Southerners, all angry or sorrowing in one degree or another, were quickly articulate and split among themselves into at least three factions.” These were open defiance, seeking legislative redress to “check” the court, and a moderate view of grudging acceptance.<sup>5</sup>

On its inside pages, the newspaper offered a full text of the court decision, on page fifteen, capsule reactions of government officials from Southern states offering a range of the three stances summarized by Popham above, along with brief stories reporting such reaction as the ruling receiving applause at a meeting of Rotarians in Savannah, Georgia, and positive reaction from American Federation of Labor President George Meany. Elsewhere inside, the newspaper offered contextual and explanatory journalism—all produced on deadline. On page fourteen, staff writer James Reston offered a think piece observing that the court relied more on “hearts and minds” than on constitutional law. “‘To separate them (Negro children) from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race’ Chief Justice Earl Warren said for the court, ‘generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone,’” Reston wrote. “The court’s opinion read more like an

expert paper on sociology than a Supreme Court opinion. It sustained the argument of experts in education, sociology, psychology, psychiatry and anthropology in the Gebhart case, namely, that even with equal school buildings, segregated black children received a substantially inferior education.”<sup>6</sup>

The *Times* offered a full page of in-depth contextual pieces on page eighteen. One traced the history of segregation and race issues, beginning with an 1849 Supreme Court case “involving segregation in the public schools ... about fourteen years before the Emancipation Proclamation that released Negroes from slavery was issued.”<sup>7</sup> Another story explored the financial effects on the states affected by the decision. “It will cost the seventeen Southern States many millions of dollars to adjust from a dual to a single system of public education,” the newspaper reported. “The question of what to do with two sets of buildings, two sets of teachers and a duplication of administrative and supervisory personnel will call for considerable adjustment under a Supreme Court order making segregation illegal.”<sup>8</sup>

A third story analyzed the major legal issues of the case. “A wide range of arguments was advanced by each side. Only two major premises were involved,” according to this explanation. “Lawyers for the Negroes, who filed the cases with the high court, contended that segregation, in any form, was unconstitutional. The Fourteenth Amendment, they asserted, was intended ‘to proscribe all forms of state-imposed racial distinctions’ and give complete equality to the colored race. The basic argument of the states, spearheaded by South Carolina, was that laws providing for separate schools were constitutional under the police powers of the states.” School segregation, the story noted, “was not expressly proscribed by the Fourteenth Amendment, they contended, hence it came within the powers reserved by the states. If equal facilities were provided for children of the two races, they asserted, constitutional requirements were fulfilled.”<sup>9</sup>

Another story reported that four states—Kansas, Arizona, New Mexico and Wyoming—had laws on the books “permitting segregation on a local option basis. In these states, the communities themselves usually have decided whether to maintain separate schools or permit Negro and white children to go to the same classrooms. For the most part, segregation has been abolished. This may be partly due to the fact that there are relatively few Negroes in contrast to the total population of each of the four states.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the newspaper published, on the same page, an analysis of the decision’s effect on Washington, D.C., for which the court issued a separate opinion and where the public school system was “well prepared to make the transition to integrated schooling. Hobart A. Corning, Superintendent of Schools, who already had formulated principles and procedures of an integration plan, said today this work would go right on until the court decided the ‘how’ and ‘when’ of merging the schools.”<sup>11</sup>

In its expansive Sunday commentary section May 23, the newspaper offered analyses by Popham, reporting from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and correspondent Luthur A. Huston, writing from Washington, D. C. Popham observed that the “great problem confronting the South is how to attain conformity with the spirit and intent of the historic ruling,”<sup>12</sup> while Huston focused his commentary on Chief Justice Earl Warren as a “take charge guy”—the kind of leader who, on a baseball club, inspires teamwork among the other players.<sup>13</sup>

In its initial editorial on the subject, first referenced in the introductory chapter of this book, the newspaper borrowed from the realm of theatrical drama in a constitutional frame in support of the court ruling.

What the court is saying, in its formal but not complicated style, is a part of what Eugene O'Neill said in a play called “All God's Chillun Got Wings.” It is true, of course, that the court is not talking of that sort of “equality” which produces interracial marriage. It is not talking of a social system at all. It is talking of a system of human rights which is foreshadowed in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, which stated “that all men are created equal.” Mr. Jefferson and the others who were responsible for the Declaration did not intend to say that all men are equally intelligent, equally good or equal in height or weight. They meant to say that men were, and ought to be, equal before the law. If men are equal, then children are equal too. There is an even greater necessity in the case of children, whose opportunities to advance themselves and to be useful to the community may be lost if they do not have the right to be educated.

The editorial argued that it could not be denied that the “mingling of the races in the schools of the seventeen states which have required segregation and the three states which have permitted it will create problems.” But, the newspaper urged, in a Southern folkways, or cultural, frame, a sociological and attitudinal shift would be necessary. “The folkways in Southern communities will have to be adapted to new conditions if white and Negro children, together with white and Negro teachers, are to enjoy not only equal facilities but the same facilities in the same schools.”<sup>14</sup> This, clearly, was an opinion squarely in favor of the decision. This newspaper's owners and gatekeepers, through coverage offering analysis, historical precedent and progression, political and economic repercussions, with extensive front-page gateways to inside analysis and context, positively affirmed, with an exclamatory editorial favoring the ruling, this historic ruling. A second editorial, published about a week after the court decision, expressed satisfaction in a foreign-image frame that the story of the decision had been broadcast over the Voice of America, “in thirty-four languages, to all who would or could listen. This was one of the proudest messages the Voice has ever been permitted to deliver. It carried no threat to any country or to any Government. It said that

democracy is a part of our basic law and that it is growing among us in extent and quality. For this decision will not merely ease the burdens of a single racial minority. We are all of us a little stronger and more confident because of it. The future in this field will not be easy. But out of the struggle for righteousness comes the lasting glory of nations.”<sup>15</sup>

Other Northern newspapers followed a similar, if less extensive and thorough, route.

*The Pittsburgh Press* announced the ruling with a large banner headline across its May 17 front page, but the lead story was from a wire service rather than by a staff reporter. The United Press International dispatch offered a succinct lead similar to that of *The New York Times*, but added the context of history: “The Supreme Court outlawed racial barriers in education today with a unanimous and historic ruling that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional.” And the story introduced the overturning of the *Plessy* “separate but equal” concept sooner—in the third paragraph—while the fourth paragraph lent the story greater cultural and historic significance higher in the story: “The momentous decision came in a 12-page opinion which will rank in sociological significance with Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation which freed the slaves.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Press* published a companion front page story, also by the UPI, providing a glimpse into the Southern states’ possible reactions—a more severe response than that suggested in the *Times* coverage. It also was considerably less extensive than the state-by-state reaction snapshots published by the *Times*.

“The Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the nation’s schools will cause the most radical upheaval in the South since Reconstruction days,” the wire service reported. “Abolition of the public school system well may come in a few states, and is a possibility in others. Several states planned immediate special legislative session to decide a course of action.” Also, the UPI conducted a survey of Southern school districts to report that the “future of thousands of Negro teachers was left in doubt.” The survey “brought opinions from practically all that Negro teachers would not be allowed to teach non-segregated classes.” In Georgia, the wire service account reported on a possible plan that would enable Southern states to circumvent the court decision because of its omission of private schools from the desegregation edict. The state legislature there had “approved a standby plan to abolish the school system and reinstate it under supervision of ‘private’ operators. The state proposes then to pay a subsidy, so much per child, for education.”<sup>17</sup>

The Pittsburgh daily, which no longer exists, was an afternoon newspaper, enabling it to publish the decision on the same day it was handed down by the court—an advantage not available to *The New York Times*, which published in the morning and thus had to wait until the next day, May 18, to announce the news.



But the later publication also lent the New York newspaper the luxury of an extra day to put together a more thorough and comprehensive gathering of information, as noted above.

Given another day, though, the *Press*, which was part of the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain and its wealth of reporting resources, as opposed to the independent *Times*, offered little additional context. It did publish a follow-up story the next day on efforts by some Southern political leaders to resist the court ruling. Again, the source of the story was the United Press International. “Die hard Dixie segregationists pledged today to oppose to the bitter end the Supreme Court’s historic decision outlawing segregation in the public schools,” the wire service reported. “Gov. Herman Talmadge of Georgia, among the foremost opponents of mixing the races, pledged flatly that no classrooms in the state would have race barriers removed so long as he is in office. He hinted he is ready to back up the promise with troops if necessary.”

That promise proved to be an ominous warning, as future events in the Southern education landscape would reveal. Meanwhile, the United Press reported, the South did have the benefit of time. “No enforcement machinery to back up the Supreme Court decisions, nor any entry of Negroes into white classrooms of the South may be expected for at least a year. The court has scheduled further arguments for next fall on several vital issues, including the question of the length of a transition period.”<sup>18</sup>

Editorially, the *Press* called the “historic” decision “just and wise,” a ruling that will in time “be so recognized, in our opinion, even by those who are now troubled and shocked.” While the decision by itself “does not automatically bring to an end the long struggle of American Negroes for equality of opportunity,” the editorial board argued within a constitutional frame, “it does mark the beginning of the end.” The editorial veered into the realms of emotion and logic in appealing to a higher sense of humanity and understanding, while sounding themes and subjects—the Civil War, slavery—that would play throughout the looming civil rights struggles to come over the next couple of decades. “No court, however high, can rule out prejudice from a man’s heart, any more than it can rule out the color of a man’s skin,” the board surmised. “Given good will among all Americans, a little less than a century ago, the issue of slavery could have been settled by judicial and legislative processes. But lack of understanding and tolerance forced our nation into a fratricidal war, the scars of which are not yet completely healed.”<sup>19</sup>

*The Chicago Daily Tribune*—the predecessor to *The Chicago Tribune*—also a morning publication, published a front-page story on May 18 produced by its own Chicago Tribune Press Service, datelined Washington May 17. Its lead was similar in style and length to others discussed here: “The Supreme Court of the United



States today ruled unanimously that racial segregation in the public schools of the United States is unconstitutional.” The second paragraph of the “historic” decision cited the equal protection constitutional provision, along with the “lack of equal education opportunities.” The story also reported high in the narrative that the decision did not end segregation immediately, setting further hearings in the fall “to decide how and when to end the practice.” The story cited the *Plessy*-overturned precedent in its fourth paragraph: “Today’s ruling reversed the segregation doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ school facilities established by the Supreme Court 57 years ago. The opinion handed down today asserted this doctrine has no place in the public-education system of this country.”<sup>20</sup> The story was accompanied by an Associated Press Wirephoto, on the jump page, depicting Atlanta, Georgia high school students listening to news of the decision on the school radio. The newspaper also published a map and the full text of the court decision on inside pages.

Five days after the ruling, the *Tribune* published an Associated Press story on an inside page reporting that a school board in Sheridan, Arkansas had voted to desegregate, deciding “to integrate Negro and white pupils in the upper six grades of its school system next fall. It is probably the first southern school district to take such action since the United States Supreme Court ruled out racial segregation in public schools Monday. The vote of the five member board was unanimous. Twenty-one pupils are effected [sic].”<sup>21</sup> The next day, though, the newspaper reported that the same school board had reneged. “The Sheridan school board, which yesterday became the first in the south to vote to integrate Negroes into its schools since Monday’s United States Supreme court ruling, today became the first to rescind such an action.”<sup>22</sup> No reason for the reversal was reported.

On May 24, a local pastor penned a story for the *Tribune* lauding the court ruling. The story, buried deep inside the newspaper, reported that the ruling “has been received with great satisfaction by leaders of Negro higher education in the south, who believe education will be advanced for all races.” The writer offered a unique reverse-segregation angle in the next paragraph, observing that “lengthy legal processes will be needed before white students may be admitted to southern Negro colleges. Constitutions of several southern states permit segregation; in others the segregation is legislative. ... Most of the Negro colleges are chartered for the education of Negroes only but there are exceptions, such as Talladega, which is chartered ‘to the education of youth.’” The pastor wrote that the local United Negro College fund would be instituting changes at once, “but may have to await legislative or constitutional changes in southern states. This may require years. W. J. Stebler, Chicago area chairman of the United Negro College funds, said that 31 of the 32 colleges associated with the fund will welcome opportunity

to open doors to all qualified students without restriction. ... Stebler said there was a demand on the part of white students to attend the Negro colleges. He cited the widely esteemed veterinary department at Tuskegee institute, and the nationally known music departments in many of the schools, particularly Xavier and Dillard colleges in New Orleans.”<sup>23</sup>

In its first editorial on the subject, the *Tribune* noted that the decision “will make no difference at all, for segregation by law in the public schools is largely, tho not wholly, a southern phenomenon. It remains to be seen how the south will accept the court’s decision.” The editorial, heavy on analysis and context and light on opinion, suggested that the court’s unanimity “should help a good deal to discourage resistance to the finding or attempts to evade its plain meaning, for it is not likely that a unanimous court will change its mind.” The notoriously conservative newspaper, while not offering a full-throated endorsement of the court ruling, ended the editorial with tepid acceptance: “The principle established by this decision is not that anybody has to give up any of his prejudices, no matter how desirable it might be that he do so,” opined the newspaper’s editorial board. “The principle is the much simpler one that the state governments, north and south, must regard all men as created equal so far as opportunities at the disposal of the state are concerned. That idea may appear dangerously novel to some citizens, but the Supreme court didn’t invent it. Indeed, they can be said to have borrowed it from a distinguished Virginian named Thomas Jefferson.”<sup>24</sup>

The next day, the newspaper in a follow-up editorial commended the court for seeking “the advice of counsel on how and how soon to enforce the judgment that racial segregation in the public schools must be abandoned.” While stating that the court decision “was right,” the editorial added, “but ... that is not to say that the problem of giving effect to it is an easy one. The difficulty lies partly in the mental attitudes of some southerners and no less in the opportunity which some southern politicians will see in this situation to garner votes. The focusing of attention in the next few months on how the mandate is to be obeyed rather than on how it is to be disregarded or evaded should be helpful.” Recognizing the newspaper’s long-standing opposition to federal appropriations for public schools, the board, citing the enormous costs associated with implementing the court ruling, suggested “it might be well to explore the possibilities of federal grants or loans to ease the transition from segregation to non-segregation.”<sup>25</sup> This second editorial thus placed the *Tribune* squarely in the pro-decision camp.

Like the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *The Detroit Free Press* relied on wire services—United Press—for its primary coverage. But the lead on this story, displayed in one column with no banner head at the top of the page, varied from *The Pittsburgh Press* version, from the same wire service, in its more specific historical reference:

“The United States Supreme Court, in the most sweeping action of its kind since Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, ruled unanimously Monday that segregation of Negro and white children in public schools is unconstitutional.”<sup>26</sup> And the *Plessy* reference was moved down to the seventh paragraph.

The newspaper paired the main story with one sourced by combined wire services summarizing reaction from Southern government officials, datelined Atlanta, Georgia. “White political leaders in the Deep South reacted all the way from bitter criticism and near-defiance through milder anger and on to quiet caution Monday when the United States Supreme Court outlawed the area’s traditional segregation of races in public schools.” This story summarized the anger of officials, including Talmadge of Georgia claiming the court had “blatantly ignored all law and precedent and usurped from the Congress and the people the power to amend the Constitution and from the Congress the authority to make the laws of the land” and that the court had stooped to “common politics” in the ruling. Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice and South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes of South Carolina claimed the court had “time and again” upheld the “separate but equal” maxim and that he was “shocked” that the court had reversed this precedent. The story also included comment from “Negro spokesmen and liberal white groups” who “cheered the historic decision and expressed belief it could be made effective with a minimum of dislocation—given good will in both races. The border states where segregation is practiced appeared to take the decision calmly.”<sup>27</sup> Like *The New York Times*, the story offered capsulated briefs of reaction from different Southern states, but with far less space devoted to these summaries.

This newspaper offered its readers a local angle on the story, reporting the reactions of area officials. “Negro and white leaders of Detroit offered similar reactions Monday to the Supreme Court’s decision abolishing racial segregation in Southern public schools. Their comments, in capsule form said this: ‘It was inevitable.’” And in one other effort to lend a local voice to the coverage, the newspaper over the next couple of days assigned a writer from its Washington bureau to interview Southern politicians and assess their largely negative reaction to the ruling.

In its editorial on the subject, this newspaper joined others in citing, in a constitutional context, the ruling’s “reaffirmation of the American precept that all men are equal before the law. The court was not, primarily, concerned with the good or evil in a social system, but in a system of human rights. It held that these had been violated because a social system had been imposed, or rather had persisted, upon the basic framework of Constitutional law.” The editorial in its support of the ruling—U.S. citizens, the editorial began, would be “heartened” by the decision—concluded, again in a constitutional frame: “Regardless of intentions or the spirit of local laws, we seriously doubt if equal opportunity does exist in the facilities provided under segregation.”<sup>28</sup>

As the Northern newspapers indicated in various summaries of Southern reaction to the ruling, “Southern segregationist editors were remarkably calm on the first day,” observed Roberts and Klibanoff in their book. “Perhaps Ashmore’s book had had the restraining effect he had sought. Or perhaps the editors, in denial, were simply stupefied. ‘We receive the decision with distaste and apprehension,’ [The *News and Courier* of Charleston, South Carolina, editor Tom] Waring wrote in a front-page editorial the day after the decision. Saying that neither secession nor civil war would be practical, he called for ‘common sense and goodwill on all sides,’ then added, ‘Patience will be necessary on the part of both whites and Negroes.’” But by the third day, the authors wrote, “Waring had a plan. He urged that South Carolina refuse to comply as a way of provoking the NAACP to sue, providing the state an opportunity to tie the case up even longer. ‘Are we suggesting a delaying action?’ he asked. ‘Well, yes.’”<sup>29</sup>

The *New York Times*’ Anthony Lewis in his 1964 book on the civil rights movement, *Portrait of a Decade: The Second American Revolution*, wrote that the South had reacted to the decision as Hodding Carter, editor of the *Delta Democrat-Times* of Greenville, Mississippi, had foreseen in predicting, a year before, that a Supreme Court ruling striking down segregation in public schools would be “‘revolutionary’ in character. There was bitterness,” Lewis wrote, “and racism flowered in ugly new forms such as the Citizens Councils”—a network of white supremacists formed primarily in opposition to school desegregation efforts and, later, voting rights drives. “Politicians swore defiance of the Constitution and passed threadbare statutes in futile efforts to preserve the past. Southern police and even judges misused their power and manipulated the law to repress the Negro. There was mob violence.”<sup>30</sup> And many newspapers among the Southern press fueled the opposition.

The *News and Courier* of Charleston, South Carolina, likely was typical of many of the Southern newspapers in its coverage of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The story received heavy play on the front page of the May 18 newspaper, a morning daily. The lead story, provided by The Associated Press, was displayed below a banner headline, on the right-hand side of the top of the page—and related stories were numerous on four inside pages.

“For years,” The Associated Press reported in the story datelined May 17, “17 Southern and ‘border’ states have imposed compulsory segregation on approximately two-thirds of the nation’s Negroes. Officials of some states already are on record as saying they will close the schools rather than permit them to be operated with Negro and white pupils in the same classrooms.” This account of the decision waited until the eighth paragraph to invoke the “separate but equal”<sup>31</sup> precedent that had been overturned. The newspaper also placed prominently on the front page the Associated Press story already cited elsewhere in this chapter

summarizing the “mixed” Southern reaction to the ruling—with responses ranging from “bitter criticism and near-defiance through milder anger and on to quiet caution.”

Where this newspaper differed from other analyses so far, though, was in the heavy dose of local angles and staff participation (besides the substantial staff contribution of *The New York Times*) in a production of stories with a segregationist flavor. Packaged with the main story, for example, was an interview, datelined May 17, by a “special correspondent” with South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes, a former U.S. Supreme Court Justice, as noted above, who told the newspaper he was “shocked” by the ruling. Note the use of dark language in the lead paragraph of the interview. “South Carolina was plunged into gloom today by the news that the United States Supreme Court had flatly rejected the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine under which the state has maintained segregated public schools since Reconstruction days.” The story continued in similar fashion. “Along with the air of depression was a general silence on the parts of most public officials, broken only by a brief and temperate statement from Gov. James F. Byrnes. The governor said he was ‘shocked’ by the decision but added, ‘I earnestly urge all of our people, white and colored, to exercise restraint and preserve order.’”

Contrasted with the “disappointment voiced by white citizens,” the story continued, “was the happiness of officials of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the organization which initiated and supported the ‘Clarendon County Case’ attacking separation in South Carolina Schools. James M. Hinton, state president of the NAACP, had this to say: ‘Negroes, though happy, are most mindful of the seriousness of the decision and will welcome the appointment of a committee composed of leaders of both races to sit down and work out plans for the best interests of all of the citizens of South Carolina.’”

Educational and political leaders, though, “took some small comfort in the delay caught up in the Supreme Court’s decision,” the story continued. “Since a definite decree cannot come until some time after the October term of court hears further arguments concerning time and procedure, they see further opportunity for planning means of preserving racial separation.”<sup>32</sup>

So, this story suggests, despite the dark cloud cast over the state by this ruling, there remained some hope on behalf of segregation.

Another story, written by an unidentified “special correspondent” and also datelined May 17, reported the reaction of South Carolina members of the U.S. Congress. “Charges that the Supreme Court’s anti-segregation decision was a ‘shameful political’ move which might result in ‘violence and bloodshed’ unless Southerners exercise the ‘tact, skill and the patience of Job’ came from South Carolinians on Capitol Hill today,” stated the lead paragraph. Senator Burnet

R. Maybank “went on the Senate floor to denounce the decision in a brief statement, in which he said, ‘The Supreme Court’s decision shocked me. In my judgment it was a shameful political move, rather than a judicial decision.’” Maybank’s colleague, Rep. I. Mendel Rivers, “calling the decision a ‘tragic mistake,’ said it creates ‘one of the gravest problems to confront the white people of the South since the days of reconstruction.’” The representative accused the court of bypassing Congress “and rendered its own repeal of the constitution: therefore the matter now is placed straight before the governors and legislature of the Southern states, and the solution will require tact, skill and the patience of Job if violence and bloodshed are to be avoided.”<sup>33</sup>

Inside, a brief wire story pointed out that five of the nine justices who participated in the decision were Franklin D. Roosevelt appointees, and a host of wire dispatches filled page 10 summarizing the following: the jubilation of African-American leaders, who cited the ruling as “‘vindication’ of a 45-year fight”;<sup>34</sup> the likelihood of a long transition period; a report from Clarendon County, “where racial segregation in public schools was first legally challenged in South Carolina”;<sup>35</sup> a call by Democratic Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, “a Negro, ... for Southern white and Negro leaders to meet immediately to work out a plan for putting the Supreme Court anti-segregation decision into operation ‘with a minimum of friction’”;<sup>36</sup> a prediction by the editor of the African-American *Atlanta Daily World* that “‘the South will accept’ the segregation ruling” over time;<sup>37</sup> a rather eerie brief piece reporting that the court’s opinion was withheld “until Chief Justice Earl Warren finished reading the 12-page ruling”—an unexplained break with past court ruling announcements, when “copies of an opinion are distributed to reporters the moment a justice starts to read it”;<sup>38</sup> and another story, this one by The Associated Press, reporting “‘shock’” by Governor Byrnes—just in case readers missed the “shock” headline and story on the front page. Also on this page, the newspaper published the text of the separate, District of Columbia racial segregation ruling, along with a wire story reporting that the court decision “may cause the most radical upheaval in the South since Reconstruction days”<sup>39</sup>—a story also used in some Northern papers.

Also crammed into this newsy reaction page was an analysis by an Associated Press writer who wrote that it had been a long, long time—“many years since the United States Supreme Court handed down an opinion with such great personal impact on so many people as is produced” by this court ruling. “It may be many years before we know for sure whether the national conscience-clearing attempted by this caesarean method is worth the convulsions which it will immediately produce.” Perhaps, the analysis’s conclusion suggested, “it would have been best to let the natural forces of conciliation have their slow way, rather than revive at this point the bitterness with which many communities will receive this verdict.”<sup>40</sup>

Finally, as though to vindicate the “bitterness” the ruling might evoke, a local reaction story on this same page quoted a Charleston mother of two children attending a local public grade school calling the decision “horrid. . . . To me, children don’t have to be together to be equal. I think educational standards should be maintained for children of each race but I don’t think those children should attend school under the same roof.” Offered another mother of a public school child, “I am very much disturbed. I am very much concerned about the decision. I hope it won’t be necessary to have to buy the schools, but I hate to think of having to mix the races. I would like to see good schools for each race. I don’t think the South will stand for mixing the races in the schools.” Another mother agreed with that assessment and suggested that “private schools or something of that kind will be established. I don’t believe mixed schools will ever become a reality here.” However, one mother of public school children disagreed with these three. “The decision doesn’t alarm me,” she said. “I don’t think the system will be changed suddenly. I imagine it will take a lot of thought to work out a satisfactory solution but I image the school authorities expected the ruling and already have given thought to the situation.”<sup>41</sup> To that, most of the area school officials interviewed for this story either offered up no comments or a wait-and-see response.

On page eleven, the newspaper offered a full text of the court’s decision along with a long think piece by a staff writer summarizing the case’s legal background. “Yesterday’s Supreme Court decision in South Carolina’s Clarendon County cases (and in four other cases involving ‘segregated’ schools) gives judicial affirmation to the central contention of the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People: That segregation of itself is unconstitutional.” This analysis then traced the progress of the Clarendon County suit since it first went to trial in May, 1951, when “a group of Negro parents brought a suit in U.S. court seeking to require state and county school officials to provide buses for Negro students.”<sup>42</sup> A wire story on this page suggested that the decision would surely play a role in current statewide political campaigns, and a brief piece by a special correspondent reported the opinion by the U.S. district judge who first heard the case in 1951 that the ruling “has affirmed our belief in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and has finally killed the hypocrisy of those who practice a vicious form of racial bias under the sophistry of the so-called separate but equal doctrine.” For a long time, the retired judge said in a foreign-image frame, “we have suffered under the taunts of foreign enemies who have proclaimed that we did not live up to our protestations of true democracy. We are now freed from that charge, and democracy and decency prevail.”<sup>43</sup>

The next day, the newspaper published a follow-up story by The Associated Press, at the top of the front page, reporting that the court ruling, according to government lawyers, “covers also colleges and universities.” The decision, the



story reported, “dealt specifically with the rights of children in grammar and high schools ... legal authorities noted that the court made this general statement: ‘We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.’” Thus, argued the authorities cited in the story, “it would not seem possible to say that state-supported colleges are not part of the public school system.”<sup>44</sup> Southern segregationist editors likely shivered at seeing such a story, suggesting an unending slippery slope of federal intervention in local and state education policy—a subject that future chapters of this book will examine.

Meanwhile, an inside page of the May 19 edition offered capsulized summaries of editorial reactions of other Southern newspapers to the court decision—a useful sampling of Southern newspaper framing and agenda-setting that supports suggestions that the initial reaction in the South, at least among members of the press, was rather moderate:

- *Charlotte Observer*: “Time is on the side of the South. Time to weigh the verdict, time to consider a plan of action. Whatever the emotional forces involved, the order, when it comes must be complied with. To resist it with violence would be to beg inevitable grief.”
- *Raleigh News and Observer*: “Distasteful as it may be, Southerners will have the task of putting into practice the law, which the Supreme Court only put on paper. Quick expressions of anger by Southern leaders—precipitate acts of defiance by Southern legislatures or other officials—will only make more difficult the long job of the South under the law.”
- *Augusta Chronicle*: “The decision, in our opinion, is the culmination of a developing philosophy in Washington which gradually has subjugated the states, placed a yoke about their necks, and subjected them to rule by federal fiat. ... The Southern people owe it to themselves and to their children to face up to this crisis with the determination that it shall be resolved without tragedy, without any offense to the person of anyone, and without creating any rancor and unhappiness for our people.”
- *Florence Morning News*: “This is a time for dispassionate study and absolute statesmanship. This is no time for consideration of the mores established through the years, or for the ravings of extremists.”
- *Greenville News*: “What is at stake is the better training of our children regardless of race or place of residence. It has been stated over and over that this is the aim of South Carolina’s new school program instituted four years before the High Court’s ruling. For any one of either race to make a move calculated to upset the progress that has been made and to set race against



race would be a disservice of the vilest character not only to the state as a whole, but to the children who would suffer most because of it.”

- *Savannah Morning News*: “We cannot see it as leading anywhere but to trouble and to a further needless complication of educational problems already heavily complicated. ... In short, we can see no way in which the states of the South can possibly gain from eliminating segregation. Conversely, we can think of multiple ways in which we stand to lose.”
- *Columbia State*: “The State does not see how the court could ignore the powerful arguments made by Mr. Davis and others in the South Carolina cases, but the fact remains that the highest court in the land has spoken, and therefore the question is no longer academic, but what, in view of the decision, should be the procedure.”

Less moderate was the editorial response of *The News and Courier*, which, as noted above, offered an angry front-page editorial on the ruling. “In depriving the states of the right to administer public schools according to their own regional customs, the Supreme Court has cut deep into the sinews of the Republic,” proclaimed the newspaper’s editorial board. “While the court decision drove another nail into the coffin of states rights, it may have the effect of throwing a national issue into local school districts for individual solution. Thus, instead of centralizing public education, the court decree may result, at least for a time, in greater emphasis than ever on local administration.” The board invoked a sentiment often heard during the slavery/anti-slavery debates in the pre-Civil War years, of a dispassionate region in which the races get along just fine the way things are. “In most parts of the South, whites and Negroes live in harmony. We do not look for rupture of this harmony as a result of the court’s decision. Rather we look for readjustments, for some confusion and for eventual settlement into a pattern that will suit each locality. Unless both races are satisfied with the patterns, there can be no harmony regardless of what courts and politicians may say and do.” The editorialist, in raising “separate but equal” as a standard that should have been maintained, eloquently invoked a clock metaphor, much as a practicing Deist in Thomas Jefferson’s day might have done, to drive home the point that the ruling was disruptive. “In upsetting previous decisions, Chief Justice Warren has said the court has refused to turn back the clock. In the past, the Constitution has been in the center of the clock, undisturbed as the hours move through their twice daily circuit. It was a balance wheel against the fluctuations of morning and night. Now that balance has been upset and a new one must be established. In such a delicate task we shall need wisdom and tolerance on all sides.”<sup>45</sup>

The next day, in a follow-up editorial, the newspaper revisited the time-honored states'-rights constitutionally-based argument, lamenting that "it is a pity that there was no strong States Rights jurist on the court to write a minority, dissenting opinion. A large segment of the country believes that the unanimous decision was wrong." Rehashing at some length arguments already made—that legal precedent should not be so summarily dismissed, that the decision was a political rather than legal one made by a court packed with New and Fair Deal judges—the writer called "for moderation, for calm and wise decisions. The News and Courier is counting on good sense among the masses of white and Negro Southerners. We believe both sides will VOLUNTARILY follow a pattern that they have found to work. If it does not work perfectly, at least it works peacefully. Disturbance of that pattern will be done at serious peril, court decrees of the country notwithstanding."

The editorialist engaged in a bit of sarcastic word-play with the court: "What stupid justices we must have had between 1870 and the present time—not to discover a constitutional violation so obvious, so flagrant that every single member of the court today sees it as plainly as the nose on face!" This was followed by a variation of the pre-Civil War theme of the African-American being better off under the existing system of slavery, in which he and his family were housed, fed, cared for and loved by the owners. "The Court has ruled," this argument went in the case of desegregating the schools, "that segregation is bad for Negro children. It has not considered whether the lack of segregation is bad for white children. That leaves the welfare of white children up to their parents rather than to the state."<sup>46</sup>

One day later, though, the newspaper's editorial board was in a more devious, defiant mood, as suggested by Roberts and Klibanoff above, offering a strategy of delay and obstruct. "Numerous devices suggest themselves to us, as laymen. It has taken nearly four years to achieve theoretical victory in the NAACP's fight to abolish segregated schools," the editorialist suggested. "The same tediously slow legal process will be available to those in the South who believe that segregation is the natural and wise way of life." To that end, the writer called for "one of several methods of abolishing segregation, in compliance with the decree." But such methods might not meet with the NAACP's pleasure, which "would start another court action" by the NAACP. Yes, the editorial conceded, the newspaper was suggesting a delaying tactic. "The South, we believe, is far from licked."<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the newspaper invoked in a later editorial another pre-Civil War claim made in support of slavery—that the African-Americans knew what was better for them: slavery. "The only ones who are unhappy" with the desegregation edict "are the white Southerners in states where 70 percent of the Negroes live, and the rank and file of self-respecting Negroes, who are not interested in being compelled to associate with one another."<sup>48</sup>

James Kilpatrick's *News Leader* in Richmond carried the Associated Press story announcing the decision at the top of the front page of its May 17 afternoon edition. This version of the story reported up high—in the second paragraph—that “to ease the wrench on the 17 states where Negro and white pupils are separated, the high court withheld a formal order putting its history-making decision into effect. Instead, it called for further arguments this Fall on the question of how the decision shall be carried out.”<sup>49</sup> The discarded *Plessy* “separate but equal” precedent was reported in the sixth paragraph.

But of note in this newspaper's coverage was the announcement, also atop the front page and heralded by the second deck of the banner headline, that Virginia Governor Thomas B. Stanley announced he was calling a conference “‘as quickly as practicable’ of representatives of State and local governments to consider problems created by the Supreme Court's school segregation ruling.” The governor, a furniture manufacturer before embarking on a political career that also included a stint as a speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates and a seven-year member of the U.S. House of Representatives prior to his election as governor, also announced that a special session of the state legislature “probably would not be called ‘until we have further information.’” The prepared statement by this governor, who would oversee increases in state funding for mental health facilities and for public education during his tenure, said that views “of leaders of both races will be invited in the course of these studies. When this has been done and a sound program has been formulated, we will consider the appropriate steps required to put it into effect.” His statement added that Virginia's citizens “will receive the opinion of the Supreme Court calmly and take time to carefully and dispassionately consider the situation before coming to conclusions on steps which should be taken.”<sup>50</sup> Down-page, the newspaper published the Associated Press dispatch carried by other newspapers reporting “slow” comment on the ruling from Dixie spokesmen. “‘What happens now?’ That was the most general initial reaction in the South” to the ruling, the wire service reported. “Specific comment was slow in forthcoming as most responsible officials wanted more information on the decision which said public school segregation is unlawful, but laid down no decrees for ending it.”<sup>51</sup>

At the bottom of the front page, the newspaper reported that Virginia's U.S. senator, Harry F. Byrd, “lashed out sharply today” at the ruling. “The decision, he asserted, ‘is not only sweeping, but it will bring implications and dangers of the greatest consequence. It is the most serious blow that has been struck against the rights of the States in a matter vitally affecting their authority and welfare.’” The senator also chastised the court for reversing the “separate but equal” precedent.

The newspaper published the full text of the opinion, among other reaction stories, on two inside pages. In localizing the story, the newspaper reported on

the section of the Virginia Constitution that was “apparently invalidated by the Supreme Court ... which reads: ‘White and colored children shall not be taught in the same school.’ At the same time, the court declared contrary to the fourteenth amendment of the Federal Constitution, the State law that declares: ‘White and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school, but shall be taught in separate schools, under the same general regulations as to management, usefulness and efficiency.’”<sup>52</sup>

Another story reported that a copy of a letter released by the Virginia attorney general’s office informed the state’s education department that “the present law does not permit local school boards to lease school buildings to private organizations,” thus making a process of privatizing public education for the purposes of maintaining segregation more difficult. “Plans have been proposed in South Carolina and Georgia whereby a decision ruling out segregation might be circumvented by leasing school buildings to private groups—which, in turn, could hold classes for segregated pupils.”<sup>53</sup> *The News Leader* offered an historical perspective in a report that the school segregation case, “one of those affected by today’s ruling of the Supreme Court, had its origin in Prince Edward County in April, 1951.” The story recounted that a number of students had quit attending an African-American high school because “the school’s facilities were far below those in the county’s white high school.” In an ensuing court case, a three-judge federal court in Richmond ruled that “Negro school facilities were, indeed, inferior to the white facilities and ordered county officials to proceed forthwith ‘with all reasonable diligence and dispatch’ to remedy the inequality. But the three judges did not find that segregation in itself was unconstitutional. And because they didn’t, the NAACP carried the case on to the Supreme Court.”<sup>54</sup>

The newspaper ramped up its reporting on the impact of the court ruling in its May 18 edition, which included a front-page story on the scheduling later in the month of a special meeting of the governor and the State Board of Education “to discuss the impact on Virginia of yesterday’s Supreme Court ruling that public school segregation is unconstitutional and must be brought to an end. Next week’s meeting, he said, ‘probably will be followed by other informal conversations with various officials prior to calling a conference of representatives of various sections of the State—which it now seems should be deferred until early June to allow time for these preparations.’”<sup>55</sup>

Also on the front page, the newspaper reported that private schools had been deluged with inquiries. “White parents who may turn to Virginia’s private schools as a hedge against the eventual racial integration of the public schools will find only a few hundred openings immediately available, a *News Leader* survey showed today.” Though integration in public schools “may be months or years away,” the

newspaper reported, “numerous white parents already are looking to the future in the realization that some private schools had lengthy waiting lists of applicants before segregation ever arose as an issue. Requests for information on entrance requirement and costs were reported heavy throughout the area.” A spokesman at one school, the story continued, “said its telephone had to be taken off the hook when calls came in faster than they could be handled.” Catholic schools, along with some Protestant schools, “plan to accept students without regard to race.”<sup>56</sup>

And local public school construction would be affected, according to another front-page story. “The first major effect” of the court ruling, according to the story, “will be a slowdown in the construction of new schools, indications from several sources showed today. State education officials indicated that plans for new schools may have to be revised in the light of the ruling knocking out the South’s traditional laws of separate white and Negro facilities.” One state education official told the newspaper that “an entirely new procedure” likely would be necessary.<sup>57</sup>

Just below these stories, a United Press dispatch reported that “an actual end to segregation still is months and perhaps years away. There were those who said it would never come—that by one device or another the South would get around the Supreme Court decision. But others predicted a peaceful, if gradual, compliance.”<sup>58</sup>

A May 20 front-page story of local importance announced that Governor Stanley had sent invitations to governors of fifteen Southern states for a conference featuring “exploratory talks on the impact” of the court ruling. “Virginia’s chief executive suggested that such a meeting could be held here June 7 and 8 ‘or some date near that time’ and asked the other Governors to reply by next Monday if they could attend.” However, other developments indicated that such a conference might not be in the works, at least hosted by Virginia. Georgia’s attorney general had already scheduled a meeting of state attorneys general for such a discussion in Atlanta the following week, which Virginia’s attorney general planned to attend, and the chairman of the Southern Governors Conference told the newspaper that “he will not call a meeting of the conference as such at this time.” Members of the group, he told the newspaper, “are agreed that nothing could be accomplished at this time by an extraordinary session. ‘Each state has its own problems to consider in this,’ he said, adding, ‘At a meeting, about all we could do is tell what each state plans.’”<sup>59</sup>

But the Virginia governor persisted, and the next day, the newspaper reported on the front page that more than a third of the fifteen Southern governors invited to Virginia by Governor Stanley “already have indicated that they will attend or send a personal representative.” Those respondents were from Mississippi, Texas, Georgia, Louisiana and, “probably,” Tennessee. Two other governors, from Alabama and Kentucky, declined the invitation, and reaction from the others “was

uncertain.”<sup>60</sup> The important point here, though, is that a regional, concerted effort was under way to devise methods and means of either implementing, or avoiding, public school desegregation—an issue warranting front-page importance for Southern newspapers.

In a lengthy editorial the day after the court ruling was announced, the newspaper made clear its opposition. While accepting the decision as lawful, the editorial said it does not accept it “willingly, or cheerfully, or philosophically. We accept it because we have to, and we accept it in the profound and prayerful hope that the court, when it comes to writing a final decree many months from now, will exercise wisdom and forbearance in drafting a mandate that will preserve good race relations, encourage continued public education, and recognize that the States and localities should be left a wide area for local responsibility consistent with the court’s opinion.” Now was “no time for rebellion,” the writer opined. But, “It is no time for a weak surrender either. It is a time to sit tight, to think, to unite in a proposal that would win the Supreme Court’s approval. It is a time, if you like, for prayer. The profound implications of the court’s opinion are well understood in the South, and now that the basic opinion has come—now that the suspense has ended—we can ponder those implications and consider the best and wisest recommendation to offer to the court next Fall.”<sup>61</sup> Such commentary suggests that, even before regional efforts for conference and strategizing had gelled, this newspaper would welcome such a “united” approach—one that would ensure a strong voice and participation by the states, in the spirit of states’ rights.

At *The Birmingham News* in Alabama, a day after publishing the May 16 front-page think piece about Harry Ashmore’s book on “The Negro and the Schools,” editors the next day put together a four-story front-page package of local and national news about the court ruling. The lead story, at the top of the page under a five-column headline, was the same Associated Press dispatch published by *The Richmond News* in Virginia, but the Birmingham newspaper differed in placement of the text of the decision, placing it on the front page also. Localizing the newspaper’s coverage package, a staff-produced story reported that the ruling “would have no immediate effect on the state school system. ‘The cases under consideration at this time did not involve Alabama,’” State School Superintendent W. J. Terry told the newspaper. “As to possible long range effect of the precedent setting cases, Dr. Terry said that ‘I would like to study the Supreme Court’s decision thoroughly before making any comment. Not knowing what the decision would be,’ he added, ‘the state department of education has waited to consider any specific plans for the future.’” Alabama Governor Gordon Persons had no comment “‘until we get a copy of the order and the later final decree,’” but the president of the local county school board predicted a likely “test case in Alabama” of the ruling. “‘This is going

to be a very disturbing thing and it's going to take time and patience to work it out," the local official said. "If the government tries to force this thing on us too quickly, it's going to disrupt things so badly that feelings may get out of control, even beyond the power of law enforcement agencies to control. I don't see how it will be possible to make any sudden drastic changes in our school system without disrupting the present education system and hurting the present relationship between the races." The state education official told the newspaper that "Negroes must go through the formality of asking the courts to extend it to this state." To which one member of the legislature declared "emphatically that segregation in Alabama schools 'must and will be maintained.'" The newspaper also sought comment from the president of the local Negro Council of Parents and Teachers, who called the ruling "a fine thing, but the follow-through will be a gradual process, since there are so many factors involved in the whole question. It is gratifying to think of equal educational opportunities for all children, but the full force of these opportunities will come gradually as existing conditions are cleared."<sup>62</sup> In a small front-page boxed brief, the newspaper reported that because public schools in Birmingham were part of a state system, they would be guided by how the decision affects state schools. And a story down-page reported that a six-man legislative interim committee "has been studying ways and means of maintaining segregation in the schools." An upcoming meeting would focus on discussion and strategizing, but one proposal on the table, a state senator told the newspaper, would "abolish the public school system and establish private school corporations similar to those proposed for South Carolina and Georgia."<sup>63</sup>

This newspaper's coverage was scant, compared to the other Southern newspapers analyzed here. The next day, *The Birmingham News* offered two follow-up stories on the front page, one a national wire story discussing various issues associated with the ruling, the other a local report on the city commissioners' response to it.

"Against a backdrop of world interest, there were the first stirrings today toward grappling with the vast social and economic problems raised by the Supreme Court's holding against race segregation in the public schools," according to an Associated Press dispatch. A Democratic senator from Kentucky said the decision "makes it 'even more imperative' for the federal government to appropriate money to build schools. He addressed a Senate labor subcommittee considering various proposals for federal school aid."<sup>64</sup>

Birmingham city commissioners, meanwhile, "were on record today as being 'unalterably opposed' to the abolishment of segregation in the city's schools. Mayor James W. Morgan said the city will have to be guided by the attitude of the Legislature." It is too early, though, "to appraise the consequences to Birmingham and Alabama," the mayor said.<sup>65</sup>



One of those consequences, though, should not be abandoning the public school systems, the newspaper concluded in an editorial that nonetheless expressed deep “regrets” over the ruling. The newspaper expressed gratitude for the time granted by the court for implementation. “Admittedly, segregation has produced emotional reactions that have not always been good. But we are much concerned that the ending of segregation may produce feelings and problems far more difficult to deal with.” The editorial ended with an urging against violence and an expression of confidence in “the good sense and good will of our people, white and colored,” to avoid violence, which “could only make matters worse.” In the end, the newspaper declared, “Inflamed extremists of any kind can only menace the common good.”<sup>66</sup>

In Jackson, Mississippi, the main story at the top of *The Clarion-Ledger’s* front page the morning of May 18 but datelined May 17 in Washington, produced by a staff writer, offered the standard lead similar to the other stories in this analysis, but the second paragraph shifted focus to Mississippi. “In an historic decision the court told Mississippi that to exclude 271,856 Negro children from the schools operated for 272,549 white children deprived the colored pupils of rights written for them into the 14th amendment to the federal constitution. The court’s ruling was based on cases from other states but directly affects Mississippi.” The state’s attorney general, the story reported, was invited by the court, along with attorneys general from all of the segregated states, “for discussion over provisions of a decree implementing today’s decision.” Thus, the story continued, “it seemed here tonight that Mississippi’s segregated system which got a big boost toward equalization at the recent legislative session would maintain its status quo for the next school year at least. And there were hints without official substantiation, that the decree might well postpone effective date of the integration order for some time yet to come.”<sup>67</sup>

The accompanying Associated Press story, also datelined Washington, May 17, confirmed the main story’s reporting of a delay in implementation of the ruling; it was the same wire story offered in other newspapers, but the subhead focused on the overturning of the “separate but equal” clause of the *Plessy* ruling that had been reversed: “Unanimous Vote Upsets 58-Year Stand of Court: Tribunal in 1896 Says Equalized Schooling O.K.”<sup>68</sup> This story carried a small sidebar that summarized the meat of the ruling, along with a reference line to the full text of the ruling on an inside page.

A third front-page story, also from The Associated Press, focused on state reaction, reporting that Mississippi Governor Hugh White was urging a “go-slow” approach with an aim toward maintaining public school segregation. “We’re going to proceed very cautiously and slowly, and try to work out the problems that face us.’ The problems, his press interview showed, are to maintain segregation in spite



of the court decision.” The governor did not offer a stance on abolishing public schools “but indicated he did not favor it.” An early meeting of the Mississippi Legal Education Advisory Committee would be sought by the governor, according to the story. “The governor received the news of the court’s decision with the sad comment, ‘I’m really disappointed at the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court in striking down segregation.’”<sup>69</sup>

Inside, the newspaper offered a brief localization summarizing the reactions of parents contacted at random, ranging from caution to quiet surprise. The framing of these stories thus capsulizes the overall reaction, and strategy, of the Southern newspapers: gloom and anger over the ruling, dismay over the dismantlement of a long precedent that had maintained a concept of “separate but equal” educational opportunity for Anglo and African-American students, and an initial cautious approach aimed at delay or avoidance with an intent of preserving some modicum of state control over education that would include continued segregation if possible.

Beyond that first day of reports, though, this newspaper’s coverage of the story was relatively sparse. The next day, *The Clarion-Ledger* published on the front page a report that the Mississippi Association of Supervisors would discuss the effect of the court ruling, but the primary focus of this story was “the challenge of five senators to find out what Mississippi’s watered-down school equalization program will cost”—a program already under consideration to deal with equal education opportunity in the state.<sup>70</sup> Two days later, the newspaper carried a front-page story reporting that the court ruling would be discussed in the state’s new Legal Education Advisory Committee the following month. The governor “will place in the committee’s hands the problem of meeting insofar as possible the anti-segregation edict of the U.S. Supreme Court in the hope that equal but separate schools may be maintained in this state.”<sup>71</sup>

The *Clarion-Ledger* editorial, published the same day as its initial report on the court decision, framed the situation as a “crisis” in the headline. Note the tenor of the language; the editorial said the ruling “had been feared and foreseen for many weeks, but its impact shocked and benumbed the South.” The decision, the writer claimed, “kills the hope of Southern leaders that sincere and adequate moves to equalize facilities and salaries would encourage the Supreme Court to reaffirm its 1896 decision upholding segregation when ‘separate but equal’ facilities are provided. It apparently outlaws racial segregation in the public schools no matter how or for what reasons it is achieved.” The date of the ruling “may be recorded by future historians as a black day of tragedy for the South, and for both races,” the editorial concluded, “but we can conduct ourselves in such fashion as to cause historians to record that we faced that tragedy and crisis with wisdom, courage, faith

and determination such as our fathers would have applauded.”<sup>72</sup> A second editorial the next day, in the same pro-segregation spirit, commended state and local officials “on their intelligently restrained reaction to this decision of which they believe to be wholly wrong and potentially tragic and disastrous.” These officials, the editorial noted—some of whom supported nullification efforts—“understand the gravity of the threat this decision presents to our society and government, the scope of the problem confronting us.”<sup>73</sup>

In Texas, *The Houston Chronicle* played the story near the top of page 1 on May 17, but not at the top, giving it a four-column headline, “Segregation In Schools Illegal,” over a one-column story—the Associated Press account already discussed above. This was the only story found on the subject this day. The next day, the newspaper published an Associated Press dispatch down-page out front discussing social problems associated with the story in the South. “A momentous Supreme Court edict that segregation of Negro and white children in public schools is unconstitutional confronted the South and border states with vast social and economic problems,” the story reported, adding that “it may be years before school segregation ends in the South.” Problems the Southern states would encounter, according to the dispatch, included remodeling of school systems, reorganizing of school districts, readjusting and reassigning teachers, altering bus routes and constructing additional school facilities. One court justice “predicted ‘a generation of litigation’” if states, communities or school districts resisted compliance.<sup>74</sup>

On page eight, the newspaper described a muted reaction by local education officials. “Houston area schoolmen were apparently unexcited and calm Tuesday” over the ruling, the newspaper reported. “They were in general agreement that any change is sometime off and that it will pose no problems that cannot be met.” Houston’s school board president “agreed in the belief that the end of segregation is still some time off and that the problem must be studied thoroughly by board attorneys before any local action can be taken. We will have to depend largely on action on the state level. In addition public reaction must be considered.”<sup>75</sup>

The *Chronicle*’s editorial on the subject aligned the newspaper with its Southern brethren, calling the court decision “no great surprise,” but with an impact on Southern states that “will be tremendous.” Someday, the editorial predicted, “segregation in public schools will be abolished. The shock to the 17 Southern and border states where separate schools have been the rule will be mitigated somewhat, however. The court did not enter a formal order putting the decision into effect.” In its conclusion, the editorial took up the argument of states’ rights, which “have suffered another setback, and one of the most severe in the nation’s history.”<sup>76</sup>

Out West, the story was reported on the front pages of *The Denver Post*, *The Seattle Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, but in a decidedly lower volume. Beneath a banner, all-caps headline, *The Denver Post* on May 17 published the Associated Press account that has been cited earlier in this chapter, and inside the newspaper similarly carried an Associated Press summary of reactions from officials in the Southern states affected by the ruling. The next day, the newspaper carried on page six an Associated Press report quoting a Texas senator that the ruling may lead to “some intimidation” in certain areas. “The reason for segregation is to keep the peace. In some areas where we have hot-headed individuals of both races, we may have some intimidation.” Walter White, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, though, said simply that the South “‘is law abiding’ then forecast the decision would be accepted quietly ‘unless there is deliberately fomented trouble.’”<sup>77</sup> Another inside story, also by The Associated Press, recounted the possibility of political rebellion, particularly in Georgia, and yet another wire service dispatch reported that public schools and substitution of private school systems “is being studied by some southern states as a possible means of sidestepping” the decision. “Popularly known as the ‘South Carolina plan,’ this proposal generally would permit subsidy of the individual child rather than the school itself.”<sup>78</sup>

Editorially, this newspaper offered a single opinion, which opened by quoting from the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and then discredited any attempt by Southern states to circumvent the ruling. “Even before the supreme court had ruled on the school segregation issue, at least two states had threatened to turn their public schools into private schools if the decision went against them. The courts are without authority to force racial equality on private institutions. That would be a drastic attempt to forestall the inevitable. The American system of free public education is such an important part of our national foundation that it is inconceivable that any state would abolish schools rather than open them to all races.”<sup>79</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* also published the ruling story on its front page, the initial report appearing on May 18. It was written by the chief of the newspaper’s Washington Bureau but otherwise was similar in content to the wire service accounts, including mention, high in the story—the fourth paragraph—of the reversal of the “separate-but-equal” doctrine. This story, though, did include some unique context, such as “sure signs the long-pending segregation ruling was coming. Justice Jackson was in his seat for the first time since his heart attack seven weeks ago. Near the front of the lawyers’ section sat Thurgood Marshall, chief attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who represented the Negro school children in the appeals.”<sup>80</sup> Inside, the newspaper

relied upon a wire service to round up the variety of reaction from Southern leaders, from “bitter criticism” and “milder anger” to “quiet caution.”

The following day, this newspaper published a United Press survey of editorial reaction from national newspapers, which ranged from hearty applause of the ruling in *The New York Times* to *The Jackson Clarion-Ledger’s* vilification of the ruling as “a black day of tragedy for the South”—an observation noted elsewhere in this chapter. Elsewhere on an inside page, the newspaper carried the same United Press story as other newspapers outlining the forming of battle lines “in an effort to preserve the South’s traditional color barriers despite” the “historic decision” of the court.<sup>81</sup>

The newspaper demonstrated remarkable prescience in its editorial prediction that the ruling “is not going to lead to civil war ... will provoke a social and political revolution.” As to whether the decision would help public education in the states where segregation had been the rule, the newspaper was less certain. “The answer probably should be that it will not help it right away or in the near future. What the remoter future will bring, nobody, not even the court, could tell.” In conclusion: “The confusion of change in some areas could work to the disadvantage of at least one school generation, Negro and white unless mutual restraint and understanding are joined in resolving the issue.”<sup>82</sup> So the newspaper’s endorsement of the decision was less than ringing.

Similar to *The Denver Post*, *The Seattle Times* carried the Associated Press story beneath a banner headline on its front page of May 17, and inside, it compiled information from two wire services to report what can be summarized as moderate response from the Southern states—with no reporting on the uprising or possibility of defiance that had been reported in other newspapers. The newspaper did, however, take notice of the so-called Southern rebellion by publishing the next day, on its front page, a United Press report that segregationists in the South “formed battle lines today in an effort to preserve the South’s traditional color barriers despite yesterday’s historic decision of the Supreme Court of the United States that segregation in the public schools is unconstitutional.” Because the court had scheduled arguments the following fall, implementation of the ruling likely would be delayed “for, perhaps, many years.”<sup>83</sup>

No editorial on the subject could be found in *The Seattle Times*. And this is of some significance, in terms of newspaper agenda-setting. Lack of editorializing—of offering an official, institutional voice regarding such a major subject or event—signals one of two possibilities: indifference, or opposition. The first is hardly conceivable, in the instance of the Seattle newspaper, because through its gatekeeping and story placement, it was the lead story on the first-day report of the decision, and it was on the front page the next day.

Similarly, the number of editorials on a subject, along with the volume (in terms of number of stories and amount and length of coverage) of coverage and the category of coverage (i.e. local and regional reporting by staffs and newspaper bureaus versus wire service reportage) signals the importance that the newspapers' gatekeepers and agenda-setters, ranging from individual reporters all the way up to editor, publishers and owners, assigned to an event or topic. This is significant, in the case of newspapers that included *The New York Times* and other major Northern newspapers, along with the Southern press, but less so when it came to the distant, Western daily newspapers.

Further analysis of the gatekeeping revealed an interesting dichotomy in one area of story selection. With few exceptions, all of the newspapers reported the reaction to the ruling by Southern politicians, education officials and newspapers, but similar reaction from Northern officials and press was, at best, scant. The reasoning for this may seem obvious, but racism did exist in the North during this time, though obviously the focus of the court ruling on the segregated public school systems of the South necessitated the Southern focus.

A significant observation regarding all the analyzed newspapers was the framing of the coverage, evidenced primarily in the editorials, but also in story placement (i.e. front page versus inside pages), and in tone as demonstrated through choice of language and descriptors in the reporting and in the headlines, as has been pointed out at a couple of points in this chapter. Focusing on the editorials and tone, the takeaway of this analysis is that the Southern and Northern press exhibited distinct differences in framing of this subject. The dominant frames in the Southern press included nullification and states'-rights arguments that the nation's highest court had allowed politics and emotion to overrule constitutional precepts, the notion that education in African-American schools was equal to that in white facilities—and that African-Americans preferred the status quo, which actually served them better. The primary frames in the Northern press included constitutionality and equality as formulated by the nation's founders, the empirically demonstrated inferiority of African-American schools and educational prospects, the hypocrisy inherent in a nation founded on a concept of all persons being equal while actual practice in delivering educational opportunities is not equal or fair, and the negative image the United States presents to the world in a system of segregated, poor-quality schools based solely on race. All are concepts and arguments that will persist in press coverage of looming civil rights events and issues. But first, the next chapter takes up an entirely different sort of story—a lynching of an African-American in Mississippi, an example of an agenda set not by government or by newspapers, but by white supremacist killers.

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# The Lynching of Emmett Till; A Bus Seat Denied

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## 'Murder Most Foul'

The state of Mississippi experienced an eruption of civil rights-related murders, following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling, which led up to the most notorious crime of the era, the slaying of a Chicago boy, Emmett Till, in the summer of 1955—just over a year after *Brown*. On May 7, 1955, the Reverend George Lee, a prominent minister and cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Belzoni chapter and a voter-registration activist, was shot to death. "Later that year," wrote Cabrini College Associate Professor Darryl Mace in his 2014 book memorializing Till's murder, "Lamar Smith was lynched in Brookhaven, shot after casting his ballot in an election. These two deaths caused some uproar, but, unlike Till, both Lee and Smith were southern adult males who had a history of activism. Their murders did not reach the national prominence that Till's did because they seemed like cases of southern white men taking care of their Negro problem." Thus, no news sources beyond the Deep South "offered as much copy space to the Lee and Smith lynchings as they did to Till's murder."<sup>1</sup>

The slaying of Till placed the subject of African-American lynchings, or murders, on the national news agenda after a fisherman on August 31, 1955 came across Till's feet poking from the waters of the Tallahatchie River in the

Mississippi Delta. The body of the 14-year-old boy, who was visiting an uncle and aunt at their Money, Mississippi farm, was found about twenty-five miles north of Greenwood and twelve miles north of his relatives' plot. "Till had been shot in the head and severely beaten," reported the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in a front-page story published September 1. "The body was weighted down with a gin pulley, a cast iron wheel used to operate a cotton gin. The wheel, approximately a foot and a half in diameter, weighed 150 to 200 pounds. It was attached to the boy's body with barbed wire wrapped around his waist."<sup>2</sup> *The Nation* provided the garish details of the body in its coverage of Till's Chicago funeral. The boy was "badly beaten, his teeth knocked out, one side of his face nearly unrecognizable, [with] a small bullet hole through his temple."<sup>3</sup> But it was the publication of a photo by another magazine, the Chicago-based *Jet* (the self-described "Weekly Negro News Magazine"), that riveted national attention on the murder. "When Till's mother Mamie came to identify her son, she told the funeral director, 'Let the people see what I've seen,'" according to a *Time* magazine compilation of a hundred photos it termed "the most influential images of all time."

"She brought him home to Chicago and insisted on an open casket," the *Time* piece continues. "Tens of thousands filed past Till's remains, but it was the publication of the searing funeral image in *Jet*, with a stoic Mamie gazing at her murdered child's ravaged body, that forced the world to reckon with the brutality of American racism."<sup>4</sup>

In its initial, front-page report of the slaying, the *Tribune* reported that two men—Roy Bryant, a twenty-five-year-old Money grocer, and his thirty-five-year-old half-brother, J. W. Milam of Glendora—were in jail, charged with kidnapping Till, with an additional charge of murder pending. "Authorities previously have said that Bryant has admitted going to a home where Till was visiting and taking the boy to his store early Sunday. Bryant said he released the boy after ascertaining that he was not the one who made 'ugly remarks' to Mrs. Bryant at the Bryant store last Wednesday." The newspaper interviewed another African-American, sixteen-year-old Wheeler Parker, Till's cousin, who had been visiting Till's great uncle and aunt who said Till had "whistled at 'a pretty lady' at the store, and that this may have been the cause of the trouble." The relatives, Moses and Elizabeth Wright, told the sheriff "that three armed white men and a woman came to their home last Sunday and kidnapped Till." A law officer, though, "was unable to confirm or deny reports" that only two men were involved. "I think you're making a big to-do about this," the officer told a reporter "seeking to learn routine facts about the case."<sup>5</sup>

The next day, the *Tribune* reported on an inside page that Illinois Governor William Stratton asked for an investigation of the case, and Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley had "wired President Eisenhower asking federal intervention in the case."<sup>6</sup>

On September 3, after Till's body had been brought to Chicago for services, the newspaper revealed more details of the killing. "We knew they were out to mob the boy," the boy's aunt told the newspaper. "They came and took the boy and killed him. When I heard the men at the door, I ran to Emmett's room and tried to wake him so I could get him out the back door into the cotton fields. But they were already in the front door before I could shake him awake." Till's second cousin said his grandfather told the kidnapers that Till "didn't have good sense because he had polio when he was 3 years old and that his mind and speech had been affected." The two also asserted that a third man had waited at the door and that Roy Bryant's wife "was waiting in a car in front of the home." A crowd of more than five-thousand attended the wake, which was guarded by eighteen policemen.<sup>7</sup>

More than forty-thousand people viewed the body, displayed in an open casket, the afternoon of the funeral, where two-thousand waited outside the church during the services, reported the *Tribune*, which added a political flavor to its reporting of the event. "A communist handbill displayed a nurse holding the body of a child and was captioned, 'Punish the Child Lynchers.' It urged that demands be made for federal prosecution of 'Ku Klux lynchers and their accomplices, the Mississippi officials.'" Meanwhile, Tallahatchie County Sheriff H. C. Strider was reported claiming in Charleston, Mississippi, that "he did not think the body was Till's. He said 'the whole thing looks like a deal made up by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.' Strider said the body looked more like a young man's than a boy's and was more decomposed than it should have been. He said the boy's uncle was not certain of his identification." Relatives and friends confirmed for the newspaper that the dead body was Till; an uncle identified the boy's signet ring on a finger, and a barber "who had cut the dead youth's hair for years, identified him by his hair line." The story concluded with rumors in the South that "Chicago Negroes with machine guns' were about to invade the state. Authorities were setting up road blocks and stopping cars with Illinois license plates," the newspaper's source told the reporter. "He said Negroes were being detained and searched."<sup>8</sup>

The wrong-body angle notched up as the case headed to the grand jury in Charleston, with the newspaper reporting on page eight on September 6 that testimony would be heard questioning whether the body found in the river was Till's. Nonetheless, the grand jury indicted Bryant and Milam on charges of murder and kidnapping, crimes prompted after Till "allegedly whistled at a white woman while on a visit to the south." The newspaper reported that the indictments were returned by an all-white grand jury, "composed mostly of planters." Also, in this story, readers learned another detail about the funeral service—that Till's mother, Mamie E. Bradley, "insisted the casket remain open

during that time so that ‘they can see what they did to my son.’”<sup>9</sup> An Associated Press photo depicting the defendants getting a shave, published on the back page, accompanied this story.

The judicial process was moving swiftly. As the September 19 trial date approached, the district attorney prosecuting the case said he planned to “invite” Till’s mother to testify in the trial. In the telegram he would send to the mother, Gerald Chatham said, “I plan to express my personal regret and the regret of the state concerning the unfortunate death of her son.”<sup>10</sup> The Associated Press reported in a page-eight story. “I will tell her that I think it is important to the state’s case that she appear and certain evidence she can give would be very important.”<sup>10</sup> This particular trial plan carried special precautionary circumstances. The mother’s attorney asked that FBI agents be assigned to protect Mrs. Bradley during the trial, and she also requested two Chicago detectives to serve as bodyguards—steps that DA Chatham called “absurd,”<sup>11</sup> The Associated Press reported. “If they’re trying to make a farce out of this trial, that’s a good way to go about it,’ Chatham said. ‘We offered her any reasonable protection, she won’t need any at all, as far as that goes.’”<sup>11</sup> The newspaper also reported that the mother “is keeping her travel plans secret to prevent any trouble.”<sup>12</sup>

The day before the scheduled beginning of the trial, the *Tribune* published a front-page analysis, datelined Sumner, Mississippi September 17, setting the social and political landscape of the trial, scheduled to begin Monday, September 19, “before an all-male, all-white jury.” Tallahatchie County, wrote the Tribune Press Service’s Paul Holmes, is “a sunny, fertile flatland, cut into two judicial districts by the deep, swift flowing Tallahatchie river, where cotton fields stretch from horizon to horizon and opulent planters live a gracious, luxurious life in their feudal baronies.” It was a land of strict segregation, he wrote in the manner of a foreign correspondent describing a different country and culture. “There are separate schools, separate drinking fountains, separate washrooms, and separate restaurants. Segregation is the cornerstone of this region’s society and economy.” The way of life of the region, Holmes observed in presenting a Southern folkways, or cultural, frame, “is going on trial Monday along with the two men accused of murder. Inevitably the way of life will be projected into a spotlight of national publicity. The planters are downright worried about this. They think it is regrettable and they hope the people of the United States are not going to get what they call ‘wrong ideas’ of Mississippi law or Mississippi customs.” The fate of the defendants, along with national reaction, “are expected to be a sort of trial balloon in the region’s resistance to social change. Among the white residents of Tallahatchie county, a random sampling of public opinion produced no one who expects the

two murder defendants to be found guilty.” To that end, he wrote, their attorneys “are confident of a speedy acquittal possibly by a directed verdict as soon as the state’s evidence is completed, probably Tuesday night.”<sup>13</sup>

But events interfered with that speedy acquittal, at least temporarily. A day after the trial began, it was recessed among reports of so-called “shadow witnesses—mysterious, unnamed figures with as yet unknown evidence believed to be of ‘major significance,’” Holmes reported on page three. “They were searching the swamplands and the cotton fields tonight” for these witnesses, he wrote, adding that the witnesses had been found and were undergoing interrogation.<sup>14</sup> The witnesses were revealed in the next day’s story to be four or five “Negro residents of adjacent Sunflower county ... Unconfirmed reports that these persons might give testimony hearing on what happened to Till, after he was kidnaped [sic] and before he was killed have been current for two days.” But overshadowing the “mystery witnesses” was the confession by Bryant and Milam to Leflore county authorities “that they kidnaped the visiting Chicago victim, Emmett Louis Till, 14, but contended they ‘turned him loose’ because they had found he ‘wasn’t the right one.”<sup>15</sup>

Sheriff Strider, in the defense portion of the trial, repeated his contention that the body fished out of the river “could not have been Till,” according to the front-page September 23 account by Holmes. The defense “bolstered it with similar testimony from Dr. L. B. Otken, physician of Greenwood, Miss., and H. D. Malone, an undertaker who prepared the body for shipment north.” The most damning testimony, though, came from Bryant’s wife, Carolyn, who testified that she was tending the store alone at 8 p.m. August 24 when an African-American man she had never seen before entered, made a purchase, and then asked her for a date. “‘I jerked way from him,’ she said. ‘It took a lot of strength. Then he grabbed me around the waist with both hands.’ She said she struggled free while her assailant said, ‘What’s the matter, lady, can’t you take it?’” Another African-American came in and took her “tormentor” outside, she said, testifying that when she went to her car to get her pistol, the same man was outside and whistled at her.<sup>16</sup> A United Press photo of the defendants’ wives was published this same day on an inside page.

The *Tribune* reported the acquittal of Bryant and Milam, after jury deliberation that lasted just over an hour, on its front page the next day. The sheriff’s wrong-body claim convinced the jury, the newspaper reported: “The foreman said the jurors refused to believe that a body fished from a river Aug. 28 was that of the supposed victim, Emmett Till, 14.” The newspaper quoted the foreman, a farmer who lived a few miles from Money, saying the jurors “‘had a picture of the body with us in the jury room, and it seemed to us the body was so badly decomposed it could not be identified.’” Despite the testimony of Till’s mother, who was “dabbing

at her eyes” while on the stand, that it was her son’s body, the foreman was adamant. “If she had tried a little harder she might have got out a tear,” the foreman commented.

Bryant and Milam were driven back to jail to await trial on the kidnapping charge. The defense attorney, who had argued that acquittal “would preserve the way of life” and that the defendants “were victims of a plot by unnamed outside agitators,” contended that the kidnapping, “if it took place, was no more than an effort to administer a whipping, but that ‘outsiders’ had seized on the circumstances to simulate death.” He told the jurors in summation that it “was possible ‘outsiders’ had hidden Till, equipped a body with Till’s ring, and dumped the body into the Tallahatchie river in the hope its identification as Till would disrupt racial relations.”<sup>17</sup>

*Tribune* editorial response to the entire affair was negligible. About eight weeks after the acquittal, the newspaper commended the Illinois governor for “calling to the attention of Atty. Gen. Brownell the failure of Mississippi authorities to punish the murderers of Emmett Till, a 14 year old Chicago Negro boy who was abducted and killed on Aug. 28.” The editorial board, in a constitutional frame, cited that document’s guarantee of equal protection of citizens, “wherever they may be. If this can be invoked to punish the disfranchisement of citizens, it certainly should be applicable to murder.” The succinct, four-paragraph, editorial concluded: “There is nothing in the record of the Till case to indicate that the citizens of Mississippi acted in good faith toward a citizen of Illinois. The forms of law may have been observed, but the spirit of justice was silent.”<sup>18</sup>

This delayed editorial response, with no commentary found during the process of the ordeal or immediately afterward, combined with the placement of the bulk of the coverage—other than the initial murder report and the sensational trial—inside the newspaper prompts questions about the framing and agenda of the *Tribune*. Precisely, was the coverage of this story primarily driven by parochial concerns involving a local family, rather than social or cultural? Would the story have received as much play as it did if Till were not a Chicago native, if Chicago did not have a vibrant African-American press that competed vigorously with the mainstream press, and finally, what sort of play would the story have received if Till were not African-American?

The coverage of the Till story by *The New York Times* was extensive. The *Times* relied exclusively on wire services for the reporting up to the trial—all of it placed inside the newspaper. The initial report of the case appeared September 2, on page thirty-seven—a brief, seven-paragraph Associated Press account of the Mississippi governor urging an investigation, with the reference to the alleged whistle at a white woman in the lead sentence. Two days later, the newspaper published, on page nine,

the AP report on the throng of attendees at the Chicago funeral service. A brief AP story on page fifty-two September 6 said the grand jury report was due the next day, and on September 7, the AP reported the indictments of Bryant and Milan on kidnapping and murder charges. A September 8 wire story on page ten carried information that had not been reported by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in its wide-ranging coverage, a call by the NAACP for the U.S. Justice Department “to act immediately to halt what it labeled a ‘state of jungle fury’ in Mississippi. In a formal petition, the association said the Mississippi White Citizens Council had created an atmosphere of violence that had led to the murder of three Negroes, hundreds of threats, a drastic reduction in Negro voting and countless instances of intimidation.” The council, according to the report, “began generating an open reign of terror in Mississippi more than eight months ago. It said this had led to the ‘wanton’ killing of Emmett Louis Till, 14-year-old Chicago Negro, on Aug. 29; the ‘murder’ of the Rev. George W. Lee of Belzoni, Miss., last May 7, and the shooting of Lamar Smith in Lincoln County, Miss., Aug. 13.”<sup>19</sup> Two days later, the newspaper reported that the trial date for Till’s murder had been set for September 19.

The newspaper assigned its Southern correspondent, John N. Popham, to cover the trial, and his first dispatch, on page fifty September 18, a Sunday, reported that the defense attorneys “would press for the trial of both the murder and kidnapping indictments returned against two white men” accused of the murder. “If the defendants win acquittals on both charges in Tallahatchie County, the attorneys explained, they could not be tried again on the same set of facts in Leflore County, where the boy was kidnapped, because double jeopardy would be involved.”<sup>20</sup> But the striking aspect of the newspaper’s large Sunday edition was a think piece, published in its weekly *The News of the Week in Review* section by Popham, lending perspective and context to the story in a Southern folkways frame.

Similar to the analysis that Paul Holmes had written for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, this article, datelined Sumner, Mississippi September 17, opened in dramatic, novelesque fashion. “While hand-laborers and modern mechanized equipment move across the snow-white fields of Mississippi under the hot September sun, a sordid murder case has focused the glare of national attention on the intricate system of race relations which the dominant white group enforces in the name of stability.” In “several senses,” Popham wrote, “the real drama will concern the entire state and its role as a militant defender of racial segregation practices.” After providing the background of the case, Popham entered the realm of culture and politics. “In the course of waging an all-out fight to preserve the dual race system in the face of court litigation that has resulted in rulings adverse to Mississippi’s views, the state’s white leadership has often singled out those it regards as ‘enemies’ and has denounced them in strong language,” Popham observed in a Southern



folkways frame. “For many months now public speakers and writers of letters-to-the-editor have blanketed the state with assertions that the N. A. A. C. P. is a ‘Communist-led’ organization that seeks to ‘mongrelize’ the races and that the Supreme Court is composed of ‘political shysters’ with a predilection for Communist ideology.” Popham concluded: “However, there are those who hope that whatever takes place in Sumner’s courtroom, the swift sense of outrage that marked the state’s first reaction to the killing will be a lasting item in the race-relations struggles ahead over the public school matter. But at this stage that is only a hope.”<sup>21</sup> The page layout included two editorial cartoons. One, reproduced from *The New York Amsterdam News*, an African-American publication, showed a meat cleaver labeled “Mississippi” gashing the blindfolded head of Lady Justice. The other, from *The Atlanta Constitution*, depicted a Colonel Sanders-style Southern man, labeled “SOUTH,” in white shirt and bolo tie preparing to speak into a microphone. Spread out on the table below his arm and hand were scraps of paper with the words “Morality,” “Goals,” “Ideals,” “Social Progress,” and “Plans.” In wispy letters hovering behind him were the words “Mississippi Lynching.”

The next day, the newspaper published on page fifty yet another trial advance story, again raising the racism specter. “Mississippi’s defense of its racial segregation policies and an allegation that the slaying was motivated by a transgression of the local white-supremacy code have stirred widespread interest in the case,” Popham wrote. “Tension was mounting here on the eve of the trial.” Clearly, more than the lives of two men accused of kidnapping and murder was at stake here; the whole state was on trial.<sup>22</sup> Popham’s first-day trial coverage continued to focus on the racial aspect of the story, while adding a bit of descriptive color. “This deep South town witnessed today a courtroom session in which the touchy race relations subject received extraordinary treatment.” The occasion, he wrote in a page thirty-two story, was the opening of the trial, an event of which the “highlight ... concerned the activities that took place inside and outside the courtroom before the eyes of several hundred white persons who strongly support a strict pattern of racial segregation. Negro newspaper photographers moved freely about the building with their cameras in operation. Approximately 100 Negro spectators moved about the same area while chatting with white visitors. The prospective jurors were asked directly if they would abjure race prejudice in weighing testimony. For the most part there was an atmosphere of controlled hostility.” Accompanying the story was an Associated Press photo of Bryant and Milam conferring with an attorney.<sup>23</sup>

The next day’s story, on page twenty-four, featured the recess and rumors of mystery witnesses, as reported by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, followed on September 22 by a page sixty-four story that featured 64-year-old Moses Wright identifying the defendants as the kidnappers of his nephew. “In the dramatic

setting of a Southern courtroom packed with Negroes and whites occupying segregated sections, the cotton farmer twice rose from the witness chair and singled out the defendants, Roy Bryant, 24, and his half-brother, J. W. Milam, 36, with the words ‘There he is, that’s the man.’ Later, Popham quoted LeFlore County Sheriff George Smith testifying that Bryant had confessed to him “that he had gone to the Wright home to ‘get the little Negro boy’ but later had ‘released’ the youth.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally moving the story to the front page on September 24, the newspaper reported the acquittal dispassionately, reporting that the defendants “greeted the verdict by embracing their wives, lighting up cigars and posing for photographers while relatives and friends extended congratulations.”<sup>25</sup> The old South had won this round of the Civil Rights era battles. Popham followed up with another think piece the following Sunday, writing in a Southern folkways theme that the trial “afforded last week a view in microcosm of the social and racial problems that divide the Deep South. There were the elements of a Greek drama being played on two stages, one a courtroom in which two white men were on trial for their lives, and were eventually acquitted by an all white jury, the second the steps and corridors of the courthouse building, the tree-shaded lawn of the courthouse square and the sidewalks across the wide, sun-baked street from the square.” There, he wrote, “Playing out their roles on this second stage were the strolling players, ‘outsiders,’ some from a few miles down the road and some who had come from a far distance.” He concluded: “There is no way to assess what the acquittal will mean in Mississippi’s immediate future. Political repercussions are inevitable. Perhaps the clearest lesson of the trial is the need for improvements in law enforcement machinery.”<sup>26</sup>

No editorials were found in the course of the analysis of the murder and trial, but a News of the Week in Review published early-on, on September 11, recapped the details of the crime and arrests. Headlined “Murder Most Foul,” it noted that “there was disagreement among Mississippi authorities as to whether the body had actually been Till’s. The Tallahatchie County sheriff charged that the case was ‘all a plot’ perpetrated by the N. A. A. C. P.”<sup>27</sup>—the story bought by the jury.

The first mention of the Till murder in *The Pittsburgh Press* was a page-two wire story reporting on September 3 the massive turnout to the funeral service in Chicago, with details of the body discovery in the final two paragraphs. The next day, the newspaper published on page four a brief story quoting Mississippi authorities worried that “a mass demonstration of Negroes in Chicago might hinder the prosecution of two white suspects. The officers said both whites and Negroes are indignant over the brutal slaying,” adding that “any outside demonstration would tend to ‘build up resentment.’ ‘This is not helping the prosecution’s case at all,’ said LeFlore County Attorney John Fraiser Jr. He said local people resented ‘outside agitation’ in the case.”<sup>28</sup> The outside-agitator frame was buttressed the next day in a

page-two wire story reporting that a sheriff involved in the murder investigation—H. C. Strider, referenced earlier—“said he believes the whole incident was a ‘planned’ killing by the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People.”<sup>29</sup>

A September 6 wire story reporting, on page two, the indictment of Bryant and Milam revealed earlier than others that law-enforcement officials had an apparent kidnapping confession. “The two men, who are half-brothers, have confessed that they kidnaped the 14-year-old Chicago Negro. But they denied killing him, saying they released him unharmed when they decided he was not ‘the one’ who allegedly insulted Bryant’s wife with a wolf-whistle in a country store.”<sup>30</sup> On September 7 *The Pittsburgh Press* published a front-page mug photo of Bryant’s wife, and the caption referred to an inside story detailing the indictment and arraignment of Bryant and Milam.

The newspaper’s parent company, Scripps-Howard, assigned a staff writer to cover the trial for the entire newspaper chain. The writer, Clark Porteous, doggedly pursued the story, with a sensational flavor, discovering an item not reported elsewhere, in a page-two September 20 story datelined Clarksdale, Mississippi, reporting that two men last seen with Till “have been missing ever since. That is a new and dramatic turn affecting the murder trial at nearby Sumner of two white men accused of killing Emmett, 14, a Chicago Negro.” The story then moved on to “another dramatic element,” the so-called “mystery witnesses.” In a stark example of the individual-reporter level of influence in a story, Porteous added that the pursuit of these “new angles” was “a result of detailed information obtained by this reporter.”<sup>31</sup> The next day, he reported that the trial “has become a mystery within a mystery. Only in a movie script would the startling twists this case has taken be believable.” These “twists,” he reported, included “the disappearance of three key witnesses ... efforts to trace a mysterious 1955 green Chevrolet pickup truck ... the linking of four white men (although only two are on trial) to what could have been the fatal beating of the victim, Emmett Till.” The district attorney, he wrote, “has added a true-life Perry Mason touch by prosecuting the case during the day and racing across the rich cotton-growing countryside by night trying to unravel new leads”<sup>32</sup>—a mystery-plot gathering of elements that other news media covering the trial mostly failed to detect.

The newspaper moved the story to the front page, abandoning the news service’s correspondent to report the acquittal of Bryant and Milam in a wire story containing the details reported earlier in this chapter, and accompanied by a photo of the defendants celebrating with hugs and kisses for their wives. No *Pittsburgh Press* editorial was found for this story—a significant omission in a city that was home to one of the leading African-American newspapers in the nation at the time, *The Pittsburgh Courier*.

*The Detroit Free Press* relied almost exclusively on wire service accounts of the murder and trial, offering its first story on page nine September 2, reporting the Mississippi governor calling for a complete probe of the kidnap-killing, with background details provided at the end of the dispatch. Five days later, the newspaper played the indictment story on page eleven. Nearly a week and a half later in this newspaper's relatively sparse coverage of the Till story, a staff writer for the Free Press–Chicago Tribune Wire offered a page-two roundup of the case in a story previewing the trial's beginning the following Monday—a Sunday edition think piece similar to those published by the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The New York Times*, including a focus on the racial element of the saga. “Tallahatchie has a large group of White Hill people, who furnish the bitterest fanatics dedicated to keeping the Negro ‘in his place’” wrote James Devlin in his story, datelined Sumner, Mississippi. “Among these groups there was instant sympathy for Bryant and Milam. This sympathy has swelled. The boy’s mother, Mrs. Mamie Bradley, insisted on a burial in Chicago, where thousands viewed the boy’s remains. This stirred bitter resentment here, too.”<sup>33</sup>

The *Free Press* returned to standard wire service coverage already discussed here as the trial began, including *The New York Times* reporting of the mysterious missing witnesses; but the newspaper briefly veered from the national story to inject a local element, published on page two September 21. “A mass meeting to protest the ‘reign of terror which has been generated against Negro citizens’ of Mississippi will be sponsored Sunday by the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” the newspaper reported. “Medgar Evers, NAACP field secretary for Mississippi, will report on the organization’s desegregation fight in the state and steps being taken to obtain justice in the trial of the men accused of slaying Emmet [sic] Louis Till, 14, of Chicago.”<sup>34</sup> This same day, the newspaper published a series of photos deep inside, on page 38, showing the defendants playing with their infant sons while waiting for jury selection, a mug photo of the judge, and a crowd scene, shot from the back, of a packed court room.

Following a few days of routine wire service trial coverage, when the day of that Detroit protest arrived, the purpose of the demonstration had become to denounce the acquittal verdict of a couple days prior—a gathering of more than six-thousand “from all over the city to protest the verdict freeing two white Mississippians in the slaying of a Chicago Negro boy, 14.” Democratic U.S. Representative Charles C. Diggs, Jr., said he had “never witnessed such sheer perjury and fantastic twisting of facts.” He then related how he had to rescue two witnesses in the trial “for their personal safety. I spirited them out of there in the dead of the night, to the sanctity of Chicago,”<sup>35</sup> the newspaper quoted him. A photo of a suit-clad crowd

of African-American Detroit citizens outside one of two churches that hosted the rally accompanied the story, which was played on page three.

In its sole editorial on the case—one more than two of the other three Northern newspapers of this book's analysis—the newspaper addressed the contention by the defense, and supported by the jury, that the body pulled from the river was not Till's. "Till is still missing. Where is he? If the body recovered from the river is not that of Till, whose is it? Mississippi law enforcement authorities should not rest until they have these answers." The editorialist expressed disgust "with the defense's charge to the jury. The jurors were pointedly referred to as 'Anglo-Saxons all' and were urged to do their duty lest their 'forefathers turn over in their graves.' This was a vicious, bigoted slur on every American. It brought the ugly racial and nationality issues which long have plagued this Nation sharply into focus." The commentary expressed pity for "people who have this intolerant view of what makes a good American, or who use this approach to advance themselves or a cause. These people are dangerous, and they are sick." The editorial concluded: "A bigoted mind endangers this Nation's hope for a better future, whether it is turned against the Negroes, or other Americans descended from various nationalities—including Anglo-Saxons."<sup>36</sup>

*The Clarion-Ledger*, published in Mississippi's state capital of Jackson, relied almost exclusively on wire service coverage of the most notorious murder in recent years in the state. Its initial story on the Till murder was an Associated Press account published on the front page of the September 2 edition, datelined September 1, Chicago—an unusual source locale for a crime that occurred far away, in the Deep South. This dispatch offered much more eye-witness detail of the kidnapping than other accounts in this analysis, beginning with its lead paragraph. "A young Negro today told of watching helplessly while three white men and a woman roused his friend, 14-year-old Emmett Till, from bed, dragged him to an auto and drove away," the wire service reported. "I guess Emmett was killed because of the 'wolf' call he whistled at a pretty 27-year-old white lady in a store last Wednesday," said Wheeler Parker, 16, of Argo, Ill., the dead boy's chum who was visiting with him at Money, Miss. "After he whistled and the lady got mad, some of the local boys told us we'd better get out of town fast. We went home to the farm of my grandfather, Moses Wright, where we were visiting." Parker continued: "Later a girl down there told us we hadn't heard the end of it. But we heard nothing more till Sunday when the man came and got Emmett." Young Parker insisted three white men and a white woman were in the party that came for Emmett at the Wrights' tenant farm." A kidnap warrant had been issued "for the arrest of Mrs. Roy Bryant, the woman at whom Emmett allegedly whistled," the dispatch concluded.<sup>37</sup>

Rather than providing further details of the crime or its investigation, the focus of a front-page, un-bylined story produced by local staff the next day was, instead, on the nature of the crime and whether it qualified as a lynching. The story opened with a quote from an unidentified doctor who asserted that “now is the time for every citizen who loves the state of Mississippi, to “stand up and be counted” before hoodlum white trash brings us to destruction. The trouble in Mississippi is not the Negro but it is the white trash who, because they can vote, are given a pat on the back and a wink of the eye by our political leaders.” The story then veered away from the “white trash” angle into the nature of the crime and then to a claim that Mississippi was the victim of an anti-South crusade by the NAACP, as reported by its sister newspaper, the *Jackson Daily News*. After terming the murder a “brutal, senseless crime,” the newspaper reported, the “kidnap-killing must have been the act of a depraved mind or minds.” The *Daily News* took aim at the NAACP. Citing the case of a New York African-American who had been killed by four teenagers, the writer of the article complained that nobody had called that and another, related killing by the four teens, “anything other than useless, senseless acts of savagery. No one believed they were lynchings. NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins admitted Thursday that his organization did not classify the murder as lynching but said he did not know why.” Comparing the New York murder to the Till case, the *Daily News* reported, in reference to a murder in New York City and as cited in *The Clarion-Ledger*: “Just how he (Wilkins) terms this (Till’s) murder a lynching when the NAACP and Tuskegee Institute declined to label the New York City murder as a lynching is not made clear. What does come clear, by implication, is that any time a Negro is murdered by whites in Mississippi, it will be considered a lynching by the NAACP. That is because the NAACP is trying its best to inflame the nation against the South in general and Mississippi in particular. It serves only to arouse hatred and fear.” The Till murder, the *Daily News* concluded, “was not a lynching and when NAACP so says, it proves its cynical purpose of inflaming the Negro people of this state against the whites. Its reckless allegations must not go unchallenged.”<sup>38</sup> On an inside page the same day, the newspaper published a story datelined Grenada, again with no byline or wire service identity, quoting a North Mississippi pastor of the First Baptist Church in that community complaining of the NAACP’s treatment of the Till case. The pastor, who lived in “an adjoining county to that where the death of Louis [sic] Till, 14 year old Negro boy, has caused nation-wide publicity, has taken vigorous exception to the statement issued by Ray Winkins [sic], NAACP’s executive secretary in which he asserted ‘there is no restraining influence of decency, not in the state capital, among the daily newspapers, the clergy nor any segment of the so-called better citizens’ of Mississippi.” Because all clergy members were included



in the statement, the pastor told the newspaper, “my conscience demands it be refuted. God had made no one man the judge and jury of the taking of human life, be it in the “backwoods” of Mississippi or by hoodlums in a midnight mugging in the “jungles” of Harlem. Due processes of law and justice will be forthcoming in Mississippi.”<sup>39</sup>

A staff-produced story published on the front page September 6 lent support to Sheriff Strider’s claim that the body taken out of the river was not Till. “Testimony of a Greenwood pathologist may cause a dramatic turn in the grand jury investigation,” the newspaper reported. The district attorney “said the physician told him ‘it is doubtful a body could deteriorate as much in three days’ as the body relatives identified as the missing Illinois youth.”<sup>40</sup>

The bulk of this newspaper’s coverage of the Till case, from investigative findings and officials’ comments, to the acquittal, was left to The Associated Press, with a few exceptions of feature sidebars contributed by a staff writer sent to Sumner for the trial. These stories followed the narrative presented earlier in this chapter. A couple of wire service stories, though, carried information not reported by the Northern press. One was a front-page Associated Press report of praise of the state’s law enforcement officers “for their handling of the Emmett Til [sic] case” at the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc., “a Negro religious convention ... representing churches with a total of four million members,” being held in Memphis on September 9.<sup>41</sup> Also on the front page that same day, the newspaper published an Associated Press dispatch that a special assistant attorney general had been appointed to help with the prosecution.

Along with staff coverage of the trial, staff writer Jay Milner offered a couple of local sidebars, peculiar color pieces of observances and notes, during the trial. In one, a story placed inside, Milner reported of an “undercurrent of explosive tension” along with some rumors “getting as much attention as actual testimony in the wolf-whistle murder trial now moving toward its fourth day. Close checks are being made on a story that came out of the all-Negro town of Mound Bayou that two Negro men, seen with Emmett Till shortly before his death, have not been seen since.” This story, and others “that could cause sensational turns in the trial are being chased down by the half-hundred newsmen here,” wrote Milner. Competition, he observed, has made the reporters “temporary detectives, digging behind the slightest insinuation of a new angle to hang tomorrow’s story on.” As a result, he observed, closer friends “among the press corps now mistrust each other. A lone reporter leaves the hotel at night to buy a pack of cigarets [sic] and immediately the hotel switchboard gets a frantic flurry of calls from other reporters trying to find out where the smoke-hungry reporter might be going.” Finally, Milner reported, many nervous Deltans questioned the attendance of the trial by “Charles Diggs,

Michigan's Negro Congressman, and Mamie Bradley, mother of the Negro boy whose alleged death the trial is probing. Both entrances were dramatically staged due to the commotion they caused among the eager reporters and photographers. Many Deltans are convinced the two have hidden motives for being here."<sup>42</sup> In a story the next day, placed on page one, Milner continued the anti-NAACP drumbeat. The organization, he wrote, "has been sorely disappointed if it expected developments in the trial here of two men accused of killing a Chicago Negro youth to make legitimate ammunition for propaganda against Mississippi." The court, he editorialized, "has treated both sides in the case with marked fairness." And the sincerity of the prosecution's efforts, he wrote, "appears unquestionable, although their tangible evidence has been pitifully skinny. There certainly can be no acceptable logic behind any ridicule of the defense attorneys fight for the cause of their clients. There has been no 'circus' atmosphere in or near the court house."<sup>43</sup>

Milner had one other contribution, an analysis of the trial that accompanied the Associated Press report of the acquittal on the front page. Again, Milner's job was to report on the atmosphere of the case, not the news, while offering a summary of the defense and prosecution arguments in some detail. Noting that both sides used the entire allotted time for closing argument, Milner wrote that visiting newsmen "expressed admiration for the quality and enthusiasm of arguments presented by Prosecuting Attorneys Gerald Chatham and Robert Smith." Throughout the trial, Milner reported, "the defense tried to cast doubt on identification of the body and in the instruction given to the jury by the court at the request of the defense the panel was charged that 'the state must prove from the evidence, beyond every reasonable doubt, to a moral certainty, that the dead body taken from the Tallahatchie River as shown in the evidence in this case, was that of Emmett Till.'" The prosecution countered that "despite defense witnesses saying the body was too badly decomposed to identify as a white man or a Negro, 'officials immediately called a Negro funeral home to pick up the body.'" The special prosecutor conceded that while there "is no doubt that outside influences are trying to destroy our way of life ... once we take the life, liberty or pursuit of happiness from anyone we will be put on the defense and become vulnerable in trying to justify our stand. If J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant are turned loose it will service the purpose of the very organizations that have come down here to stir up trouble. If you convict them no one can use this to raise funds to fight us in our defense of southern traditions."<sup>44</sup> In other words, the prosecution argument was a political one and not solely evidentiary: To defeat the NAACP, a goal that is shared by all of Southerners, the jury must convict to avoid making a martyr of Till.

One other notable difference from the Northern press coverage was that every story relating to the investigation and trial for the Till case was published on the front page of *The Clarion-Ledger*.



The newspaper's editorials on the Till case progressed from a condemnation of the killing early-on to angry claims of victimization and abuse, at the hands of the NAACP, at the end. The initial editorial lamented the slaying, but the language came not from the newspaper; rather, the editorial used the words of the governor to deplore the kidnapping, and the state "certainly cannot condone it." But before expressing belief that the state's legal machinery "will service justice and reflect credit upon the good name of the state," the editorial writer took a jab at the NAACP, complaining that incidents such as this enable "such radical groups ... to raise money for expansion of its strife-breeding business."<sup>45</sup> The next day, the newspaper chastised the NAACP president for his allegation that the state had "no restraining influence of decency," by arguing that the governor demonstrated a bona fide effort to "see the criminals brought to justice" and that the prosecution team "pledged to work to the utmost of their abilities." It concluded that its argument on behalf of the system "just about takes care of all that NAACP President Wilkins said. He is labeled for what he is. He knew it when he said it. So does the rest of the nation."<sup>46</sup>

The NAACP again was the target of editorial wrath midway through the month, when the newspaper quoted from the editorial of a Southern weekly to argue that the state's race relations, "already nearing a precipice under pressure of the NAACP, are in far worse condition than before the delta slaying.' ... Crimes and violence of this nature give NAACP and Communist propagandists badly-wanted ammunition to use against Mississippi and the South in the current drive for racial integration."<sup>47</sup> The newspaper argued, in this victimization frame, that the South had "always served as a convenient 'whipping boy' for other sections," and the newspaper again borrowed the words of another newspaper's editorial—the Montgomery, Alabama *Advertiser*—to complain that the Till murder in Mississippi "is being front-paged all over the country" and that "Northern labor leaders and industrialists are currently blaming about 98 percent of their troubles on the South."<sup>48</sup> Actually, though, as this analysis has shown, the Northern papers played the bulk of the Till story on inside pages, while *The Clarion-Ledger* "front-paged" it. Finally, in its editorial on the acquittal, the newspaper crowed that the "cold fact" is "that the prosecution failed to prove its case. ... There was plenty of 'reasonable doubt' in the Bryant-Milam case, even though many may think it was a case of the old Scotch verdict, 'guilty but not proven.'" The NAACP, the editorialist argued, "cannot truthfully contend that a Mississippi court was guilty of 'an atrocious miscarriage of justice,' as its loud-mouth leaders are shouting." The editorial, though brief, was malicious in its personal nature, opining that the prosecution's case was strengthened "when an impudent, South-hating Negro Congressman from Detroit named Diggs journeyed all the way from his home city, accompanied by three lawyers, and squatted themselves in the court room

at Sumner as ‘spectators.’ They took no part in the case but the NAACP atmosphere they brought with them surely must have had adverse effect on the state’s case. Mississippi’s courts do not like covert attempts at intimidation. Diggs and Mamie Bradley, mother of the dead Negro, went from Sumner to Mound Bayou, where they were guests of Dr. T. R. Howard, arrogant leader of the NAACP in Mississippi.” Note the dark, negative tone of the modifiers in these sentences. In conclusion: “It is best for all concerned that the Bryant-Milam case be forgotten as quickly as possible. It has received far more publicity than should have been given.”<sup>49</sup>

From sloppy writing and reporting—the “alleged death” of Till, the misspelling of the NAACP’s leader, for example—to agenda-setting clearly intended to fuel anti-NAACP sentiment—the newspaper sought out a clergyman to denounce the organization, for example—to language selection intended to construct an us-versus-them perception, to outright editorializing in news columns about the fairness of the trial and the misbehavior of the NAACP, *The Clarion-Ledger* displayed an overt bias in support of an agenda of old South victimization and anti-NAACP, communist-supported sentiment while, in the process, committing journalistic fraud. And, of interest, a primary framing and argument of the Till case in this and other Southern newspapers was debate over the classification of the crime as a murder rather than a lynching—nuance clearly of importance to a Southern press feeling victimized by Northern attitudes.

As Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff observed in their 2007 book on newspaper coverage of the civil rights struggle, in some cities of the South, “Negroes were better served by no coverage from dailies than what they got. That was frequently the case with coverage by *The Clarion-Ledger* and the *Jackson Daily News*, the newspapers owned by the Hederman family in Jackson. They were journalistically the worst major-city newspapers in the South, not because the owners, top editors, and columnists were fervently segregationist—which they were—but because they allowed their zealotry to dictate the scope, depth, tone, and tilt of their coverage. The newspapers were vindictive, poorly written, and error-ridden. Their management of the news helped explain why Mississippi remained the most reactionary state in the South.”<sup>50</sup>

This is because, while *The Clarion-Ledger* and its sister paper performed lousy, racist journalism, they were in charge of the gatekeeping, framing and agendas for Jackson—the state capital—and for most of the state. The ability to place tainted, flawed and even false information before the public as truth is a most powerful asset.

Editors at *The News and Courier* in Charleston, South Carolina, shared the news judgment of *The Clarion-Ledger* gatekeepers and agenda-setters—story placement on the front page as opposed to inside is a significant component of

a newspaper's agenda-setting process—that the Till story belonged on page one. That is where the Charleston editors placed all of the Till stories except one, on jury selection being completed, which was published on page two. They relied on wire service coverage exclusively, assigning no staff writers to the story. Thus it will not be necessary here to recap analysis and information already offered in this chapter. Editorially, more than once, *The News and Courier* opinions jibed with those of *The Clarion-Ledger*. The initial editorial, on September 2, led with the observation that such a murder “would be tragic at any time.” This tragedy, though, came at an “unfortunate juncture because already it is furnishing unwelcome propaganda for the NAACP and other race baiters.” The writer pointed out the obvious, that brutality “is not the sole possession of any race, but”—echoing here the Jackson newspaper's fixation on terminology—while “race agitators will call it lynching, we believe that murder is the proper term.”<sup>51</sup> The next day, the newspaper termed the crime “racial killings” in the headline of its editorial arguing that Negroes also kill people. Claiming no apologies were being made that “two or more white Mississippians kidnaped and killed a 15-year-old [sic] Negro boy,” wrote the editorialist in convicting the defendants in print before they'd been tried—“we wish to remind our readers that a week ago in England an American Negro named Napoleon Green decided to go on a shooting spree.” This man, the editorial observed, “killed three persons, wounded seven and created a full-fledged international incident, since Britons as well as Americans fell in his hail of bullets.” The argument almost begs the sarcastic rebuttal that, gee, these two Mississippians only killed one person, and he was just a Negro at that. But no. The newspaper then moved on to share its Jackson brethren's distaste for the NAACP leaders alleging “no restraining influence of decency” in Mississippi. At this point, the newspaper laid claim to the Till story as more than a case of murder, viewing the backlash as an attack on the South and Southern culture in a Southern folkways frame and, in the tradition of North-South press debate prior to the Civil War, the editorial criticized the Northern press and the perceived attitudes there. “Few papers will have the courage to criticize the NAACP for making the statement. Few papers—except in the South—will spring to the defense of the rank-and-file of white Mississippians. Yet suppose that a Citizens Council or the Klan or—for that matter—The News and Courier—had even so much as intimated that Napoleon's shooting spree was because there was no ‘restraining influence of decency among Negroes’? Would such a statement have been carried without comment by the Northern press? Frankly, we don't think so.”<sup>52</sup>

The newspaper expressed editorial anger at the NAACP again on September 9 when it attacked the organization's threat to file a \$100,000 damage suit against Mississippi—information for which no substantiating news story could be found

but that is new material to emerge in this analysis. “The arrogance of this heavily financed pressure group has been apparent for some time,” argued the newspaper. “Its objectives have only recently become more obvious. A Negro attorney in South Carolina not so long ago exposed the NAACP’s hand in expressing the opinion that integration would result in the amalgamation of the races.” Many Southerners, the newspaper claimed, “concluded long ago that Northern radicals were interested in achieving a preferred position for the Negro more than in obtaining equality. . . . As the situation now stands, its arrogant threats against the people of Mississippi may have created an atmosphere charged with resentment so that proper meting out of justice for an inexcusable crime will be difficult.”<sup>53</sup> So, if the defendants in the Till case are found guilty—a conclusion this newspaper had already reached, inadvertently, in a previous editorial—blame the NAACP.

As did the Jackson newspaper, the Charleston publication claimed vindication in its editorial following the acquittal verdict, including one more attack on the NAACP for its board of directors’ statement calling the verdict “shameful and shocking.” “The jury in the Till case has spoken. It was charged with the duty to find verdict and it did so,” concluded the editorial. “In the long run, the jury system protects the lives and safety of citizens better than any other system that we now know. Those who would break it down on account of politics, or on account of race prejudice from either side, do not serve the best interests of justice or of our country.”<sup>54</sup>

*The Birmingham News* played the Till story less sensationally and visibly in its coverage and story placement, in what will be a brief analysis of this newspaper’s reportage on this subject. The wire service stories of the body discovery, arrests and other events leading up to the trial were placed on inside pages, some buried deeply. The story moved to the front page the day before the trial, placed in a banner position across the top. It was a scene-setting think piece and backgrounder. “A sensational trial rattles the quiet routine of this little farm town Monday when two white men face charges of murdering a Negro boy who whistled at a white woman,” the Associated Press story, datelined Sumner, Mississippi September 17, reported. “National attention centers on the dusty town built around the Court House Square, half a mile from a main highway. It centers on a county where Negroes outnumber whites 3–1.” The story, in summarizing the facts and events of the case, offered an interesting tidbit of little-reported information. Not only did the jury comprise all white men; women “do not serve on Mississippi juries.”<sup>55</sup> No editorials on the subject were found in this newspaper—a remarkable departure from the previous two Southern newspapers analyzed.

The coverage scenario was much the same for the Richmond, Virginia, *News Leader*—sparse, but more so. The information on this story, and in the others

found in this newspaper, has already been reported and analyzed in this chapter. The first story found on the subject was a wire service report on the indictment of Bryant and Milam, published on page two. The next story was also a wire service dispatch, also on page two, reporting selection of the jury. Trial testimony from Till's uncle was the feature of a page-two wire story published September 21, followed by a September 23 page-two wire story reporting the closing arguments of the state and the defense. The story finally went to the front page, for the acquittal. No editorials were found.

In Houston, the *Chronicle* downplayed the story, offering just four wire service reports: the finding of the body and filing of murder charges against Bryant and Milam on page five September 1, the innocent plea by the two men on page twenty September 7, the court testimony of Bryant's wife on page twenty-one September 23, and the jury verdict on the murder charge on page one of the B section September 24. No editorials were found on this subject in *The Houston Chronicle*.

Similar to other newspapers, the three major Western dailies relied exclusively on wire service reports and played the stories on inside pages. *The Denver Post* placed the story of the body discovery and the Mississippi governor's promise of a complete investigation on page eight September 1; six days later it reported on the innocent pleas by Bryant and Milam on page eight. No other stories appeared until the trial, with the jury selection story topping page eight on September 20; the testimony of the uncle identifying Milam as one of the men involved in the abduction of Till at the top of page eight on September 21; the closing argument of the district attorney, who "shouted Friday, 'The killing of Emmett Till was a cowardly act,'"<sup>56</sup>; and the acquittal story, moved up to page two on September 24. The newspaper in an editorial published during the trial rationally tied the murder of Till to the previous year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling desegregating public schools. Speaking to the state of Mississippi's decision not to seek the death penalty because "part of the state's evidence is circumstantial," the newspaper asked if this signaled a "reign of terror" against the state's African-Americans. "Does this begin the fulfillment of warnings that arose in the echoes of the supreme court's decision ordering gradual desegregation in the nation's schools: 'Blood will be spilled on the soil of Mississippi?' We choose to believe that it foretells no such thing. Somebody perpetrated a heinous crime on an innocent boy. We believe the 12-man jury and the Mississippi court will see that justice is done. However strong the people of the state feel about co-mingling of white and black, their basic sense of justice will surely not condone that which the law of man and the word of God condemn."<sup>57</sup> In its lead editorial following the acquittal, the newspaper mused that perhaps the jurors "never intended to punish the boy's murderers." The killing of

an African-American boy, “under the provocation of an ‘insulting’ act, may still be sanctioned in the minds of white people who are clinging to a crumbling supremacy.” In its conclusion, the editorial visited the “lynching” language debate that dominated much of the Southern press coverage. “But from the evidence produced in the case of Emmett Till, described by the Atlanta Constitution itself as a ‘lynching,’ a crime was committed in the name of justice at Sumner. And the people of Mississippi should be aggrieved and ashamed, as we imagine many of them are.”<sup>58</sup>

*The Seattle Times* published on page seven September 7 its first wire service account of the story, a later version of the Associated Press story analyzed earlier in this chapter, with a second-day lead revised from the lead paragraphs of the Northern and Southern press initial wire dispatches: “The drowsy Mississippi River Delta stirred uneasily today as the governors of Mississippi and Illinois called for an investigation of the slaying of a 14-year-old Chicago Negro.”<sup>59</sup> One other wire service story, describing the funeral service in Chicago, was placed inside. The newspaper took the story out front for the trial; its first trial story, on the recess for the search of the mystery witnesses, was published on September 20. This was followed by The Associated Press story on the fingering of Milam by the uncle at the top of page one on September 21. Carolyn Bryant’s testimony alleging that Till “caught her around the waist and asked her for a date”<sup>60</sup> drew a banner page-one headline. Likewise, a banner headline appeared above the story of the jury’s acquittal at the top of the front page. This newspaper published no editorials on the case, but its front-page coverage of the trial indicated a sense of much greater importance regarding this story—and thus a stronger race-subject agenda—for this newspaper.

The *Los Angeles Times* published eight stories on the case, all wire service accounts and all placed inside except its final story, the jury’s acquittal, which was published on the front page. This newspaper did not editorialize on the Till story.

So, the Western press demonstrated a varied response, in framing, gatekeeping, and in agenda-setting, to the racial strife in the South as it pertained to this particular story. The three Western newspaper gatekeepers selected different stories of the case, though all published the initial body discovery information, albeit inside the newspaper, and each published the acquittal decision, two of them on the front page. Because newspaper editorials indicate most clearly sentiments of newspaper owners and publishers, they are a more powerful expression of a news organization’s agenda-setting role than is story placement, which often is based on factors that include other elements of consideration than simply agenda, such as news judgment and competing stories on any given day’s news menu. Thus, *The Denver Post*, with two editorials on the Till case, one of them quite critical of Southern racist attitudes, demonstrated a much stronger race-story agenda here



than did the other two Western newspapers, which showed relative indifference to the Till killing in this analysis.

The most compelling agenda and framing differences in the Till coverage came in the comparison of the Northern and Southern newspapers—not only in terms of story placement, assignment of staff, resources and volume/space lent to stories, but also, more importantly, in the selection of language and the contextual framing of the stories. In this sense, a dominant theme of the Northern press, particularly in editorials and analytical commentary, was the pointed social and cultural differences between North and South, which the Northern newspapers viewed as an almost alien land with starkly different mores and attitudes in a Southern folkways frame. Another, obvious, leitmotif was the segregationist/racial divide of the North and South press; indeed, for the Northern press, the murder and trial served as metaphor for the racial strife throughout the South. Along these lines, the Northern press framed much of its coverage, particularly in the commentary realm, in a hope for eventual acceptance by the South of a changing culture—hence, the Northern press coverage focused intently on the constitutional segregationist frames.

The dominant refrains of the Southern press were primarily reactionary to what was perceived as an attempt by the North, and the Northern press, to impose Northern attitudes, beliefs and practices on the South—particularly the old South. Evidence of this stance came in several frames, including a sense of victimization at the hands of the NAACP and communist-inspired outside agitators bent on reforming the South. The Southern press invoked an us-versus-them attitude in arguing against the incursion of Northern culture—in a personification frame referencing an “arrogant” Michigan congressman sitting in on the trial, accompanied by another “outsider”—the victim’s angry and bereaving mother. And while offering a sort of token nod to the despicable nature of the crime, the Southern press, particularly in commentary, but also in alleged straight news coverage, heaped praise upon the state of Mississippi’s official law-enforcement and legal community in their handling of this case—taking great pleasure in what the Southern press viewed as a just and proper verdict rendered by a competent criminal justice system. These frames would play a dominant role throughout the newspaper coverage of the civil rights movement.

Mace, whose book (cited above) explored press coverage and the cultural and historical background of the murder, identified the manner in which newspapers from different areas of the country treated the Till story, in which they created “a new and temporary regional focus, *situational regionalism* [italics are Mace’s]. Unlike sectionalism (‘the idea of separatism and isolation; of separate units with special interests’), regionalism assumed that the United States is a ‘homogeneity of

varying regions' rather than a loose conglomeration of disparate and irreconcilable ideologies. Despite the backlash to integration and the growing schisms around civil rights, most Americans, regardless of regional affinity, did not lose sight of their desire for a strong and unified country." In addition to the "complexity, collective impressions of people's own locale as well as other regions of the country developed within a comparative framework wherein specific regions were defined with reference to other regions of the country. Espousing 'regional solutions,'" Mace writes, "for the social, economic or political problems illuminated by the Till lynching, print media outlets framed the saga by highlighting aspects that they felt spoke to their readers' disposition toward race relations. Certainly, the mid-1950s were a time of incredible social, political, and cultural turmoil, and this era engendered a new, fervent resurrection of regionalism."<sup>61</sup>

This concept of regionalism, combined with parochialism as a factor in news judgment, helps explain not only the stark differences found in the press of the North, South, and West, it also assists in understanding why some Southern newspapers differed in the placement and volume of stories about the Till case.

**Postscript:** Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam confessed to the murder of Till in a January 24, 1956 *Look* magazine article. A Leflore County grand jury in November of 1955 refused to indict Bryan and Milam on the kidnapping charge. Bryant's wife in a 2007 interview for a book on the Till case admitted that she lied in her testimony that Till had touched her inside her and her then-husband's grocery store.

## 'Harmful Agitation'

The Emmett Till story reportedly inspired Rosa Parks to refuse to give up her bus seat in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955, an incident that civil rights movement scholars and observers credit for sparking the year-long Montgomery bus boycott and launching the civil rights movement. Parks, Mace writes in his book on the Till case, "famously noted" that Till was "on her mind when she refused to give up her seat on the Montgomery bus. An active member of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, Parks doubtless followed the Till saga through the pages of local and national press outlets. She would have seen in Montgomery's NAACP office, and likely too in her home, issues of *The Crisis* in which were detailed the horrors that befell the fourteen-year-old boy as well as Mississippi's intransigence in the face of mounting criticism of its racial mores. For Rosa Parks, and for many other African-Americans in the South, coverage in national publications like *Jet* and accounts in local editions of the *Defender* and the *Daily World* publications proved impossible to ignore."<sup>62</sup>



The Rosa Parks story, though, seemed rather easy to ignore for much of the U.S. press, receiving scant play even in many Southern newspapers. The initial incident, her calculated refusal to give up her bus seat, will be analyzed briefly here not only because of the catalyst it provided in leading to the bus boycott and civil rights movement, but also because of its historic nature and the unexplainable failure of the press to adequately cover it—and, pragmatically, because the scope and volume of material of this book deter the author from offering a year-long analysis of the entire Montgomery bus boycott by the city's African-American residents. The boycott began on the day of Parks' court appearance and lasted more than a year leading, eventually, to the U.S. Supreme Court ordering integration of the Montgomery bus system and launching the civil-rights activist career of the young pastor that would become a prominent national leader of the movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Associated Press' initial report on Parks' refusal to relinquish her seat to a white man was datelined Montgomery, Alabama, and first went national on December 5, 1955. "A court test of segregated transportation loomed today following the arrest of a Negro who refused to move to the colored section of a city bus," the story published December 6 on page thirty-one of *The New York Times*, began. "While thousands of other Negroes boycotted Montgomery city lines in protest, Mrs. Rosa Parks was fined \$14 in Police Court today for having disregarded last Thursday a driver's order to move to the rear of a bus. Negro passengers ride in the rear of buses here, white passengers in front under a municipal segregation ordinance."

The wire service reported that an emotional crowd of African-Americans, estimated at five-thousand by the police, "roared approval tonight at a meeting to continue the boycott. Spokesmen said the boycott would continue until people who rode buses were no longer 'intimidated, embarrassed and coerced.' They said a 'delegation of citizens' was ready to help city and bus line officials develop a program that would be 'satisfactory and equitable.'" Parks was released under a \$100 bond "signed by an attorney, Fred Gray, and a former state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, E. D. Nixon," the dispatch continued. "Mr. Gray and Charles Lanford, another Negro lawyer representing the 42-year-old department store seamstress, refused to say whether they planned to attack the constitutionality of segregation laws affecting public transportation." The U.S. Supreme Court, the story continued, "already has before it a test case against segregation on buses operating in Columbia, S. C. The United States Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., has ruled in this case that segregation must be ended. If the Supreme Court sustains the decision, the effect will be to outlaw segregation in all states and cities." Parks, the story explained, had initially been charged with violating a city ordinance granting bus drivers police powers to

enforce segregation. “But at the request of City Attorney Eugene Loe, the warrant was amended to a charge of violation of a similar state law. The state statute authorizes bus companies to provide and enforce separate facilities for whites and Negroes. Violation is punishable by a maximum fine of \$500.” Meanwhile, other Negroes “by the thousands ... found other means of transportation or stayed home today in an organized boycott of City Lines Buses, operated by a subsidiary of National City Lines at Chicago. The manager, J. H. Bagley, estimated that ‘80 or maybe 90 percent’ of the Negroes who normally used the buses had joined the boycott. He said ‘several thousand’ Negroes rode the buses on a normal day.”

An editor’s note accompanying The Associated Press’s December 1, 2015 retransmission of the story on the 60th anniversary of Parks’ arrest, noted that the dispatch “got relatively little attention, initially. The Montgomery Advertiser noted it briefly the following day, and covered it in more detail Dec. 4 as protesters began to organize the boycott. The story went national Dec. 5, when The Associated Press wrote of the plan to make Parks the test case for laws segregating public transportation.”<sup>63</sup>

Among the Northern press, *The New York Times* published the AP story in its entirety on page thirty-one of its December 6 edition. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* published the AP report December 6 on page twenty-one. The next day, it published a second story, also by the AP, reporting the firing of two air-rifle pellets that “struck a Montgomery bus tonight as a Negro boycott over racial segregation continued. The incident occurred in a Negro district. Another bus was fired on last night and a rock was hurled at still another.” The dispatch continued that the “boycott relaxed somewhat during the day. Manager J. H. Bagley of Montgomery city lines said considerably more Negroes rode the buses today than yesterday when the protest started.”<sup>64</sup> No stories were found in *The Pittsburgh Press* or *Detroit Free Press*.

In the South, no stories were found in the Jackson and Birmingham newspapers. The *News Leader* of Richmond published on December 5 an Associated Press account, datelined Montgomery, with a different lead than the original dispatch cited above. “Every available city policeman was alerted for duty today in the event violence develops in the scheduled boycott of city buses by Negroes protesting a segregation arrest,” the wire service reported. While containing much of the background from the AP’s original account, the story also included a comment from the Montgomery police commissioner “that a number of Negroes have reported threats of violence by other Negroes if they ride the city buses today. He said the police would approach the situation ‘in an attitude of maintaining peace and enforcing the law.’ He emphasized that ‘anybody who wants to ride the buses can do so with the police department’s assurance they will be protected.’”<sup>65</sup> *The Houston Chronicle* also published a slightly rewritten AP account on page D-fifteen

the same day, leading with the fact that Parks had been fined ten dollars and costs and then reporting the pertinent background information.

*The News and Courier* in Charleston published the original AP story on page two December 5. The same day, it also published a commentary by its capital city correspondent in Columbia arguing that many white residents of the state “are laboring under the dangerous delusion that Negroes of the state do not want integration. The truth of the matter is that a large percentage of them, and an even larger percentage of their leaders, very definitely do want integration of the races as soon as possible.” The commentary warned: “For white leaders to proceed with plans based on other assumptions is foolhardy [sic], and involves the tactical error—which could prove disastrous—of underestimating the enemy.” The author then provided evidence that African-Americans and their leaders really did want to bring about integration. “In contrast to this incapacity of the white man to fathom the thinking of the Negro,” the commentary argued, “there is little doubt but that the Negroes know at all times what is going on in the white community. Call it what you will, the Negroes have an ‘underground’ organization which is constantly aware of the thinking and of many of the intentions of the white community. When that intelligence service is welded to a determined drive for integration the combination becomes formidable.”<sup>66</sup> Note the tone of this commentary, along with the language—particularly use of the word “enemy” regarding the African-American—that reveals a considerably dark frame applied to the integration debate.

In the spirit of knowing the thinking of the “enemy,” on the same day, *The News and Courier* published an editorial noting that a “well-known writer” for the African-American press “admits that the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People is ‘vulnerable’ to charges of communist connections.” Identifying *Pittsburgh Courier* writer George S. Schuyler as the author, the newspaper quoted him as writing: “Dangerous strategy developing in Dixie is Georgia accusation that NAACP is ‘subversive.’ Plan is to point out number of officials with Red-front connections. Here the association is vulnerable on the record. We warned the boys years ago to get clean but they didn’t. Now we’ll see.” Arguing that it “may be difficult to believe that some of the smooth, well-dressed spokesmen for various ‘causes’—of which race is only one—have communist leanings,” the newspaper asserted, “it is far from inconceivable.” The *Pittsburgh Courier* writer did a service to both the “white and colored people by honestly admitting a flaw in the NAACP’s record,” the editorial concluded.<sup>67</sup>

Three days later, this newspaper published an editorial decrying what it termed in the headline “harmful agitation.” In many cities of the South, the editorial observed, “including Charleston, a large percentage of patrons of city buses

are colored people. As a group, they are more dependent than white people are on buses to get to work.” So if the systems shut down, “Negroes would be the chief sufferers. . . . As a practical matter, they suffer no hardship by observing regulations that reflect prevailing customs of the community. Even if the laws were removed from the books, good manners call for respect of fellow passengers’ preferences.” The editorial then turned to a different, more local, news angle—rumors that the Ku Klux Klan had ordered the president of the Elloree, S. C. chapter of the NAACP to leave town. While noting that the president said he had received no such threat, the newspaper said it “defends his right to stay in Elloree and to protection of the law. We disapprove of both the Klan and the NAACP. We would not want any South Carolina community to put up with strongarm methods or intimidation by either group. . . . If hotheads and ruffians can be held in check, the good people of both races will get along all right.”<sup>68</sup> That would be true especially, apparently, if the Montgomery African-Americans would get back on the segregated buses—which, the editorial noted correctly, primarily served citizens of color without noting that the revenues and finances of the Montgomery bus system would therefore be severely damaged by an extended ridership boycott.

The Western newspapers treated the story in low-key fashion. *The Denver Post* published the initial Associated Press dispatch on page eight December 5. *The Seattle Times* on December 6 and the *Los Angeles Times* on December 7 published the identical AP story reporting that the Montgomery bus boycott was continuing, along with a report of a small-caliber rifle fired at a bus in Montgomery—as detailed above in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. The Western press, then, barely noticed the Rosa Parks incident. But the movement it and Till’s murder spawned will comprise the remainder of this book’s analysis, beginning with a major test in Little Rock, Arkansas, of the U.S. Supreme Court’s public school desegregation ruling, to be taken up in the next chapter.

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## *Brown's First Test*

### Riots in Little Rock

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#### **'The Face of Democracy'**

The first big national story of the civil rights movement came three years after the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling that public school segregation was unconstitutional, followed by a federal court's ruling a year later that school districts throughout the United States speedily desegregate their public schools. This chapter's analysis of the newspaper coverage of this story will be extensive, much more so than for other events of the Civil Rights movement, because not only did the Little Rock school integration crisis claim the national segregation agenda in a big way for the first time in the movement, but also because so many of the major frames of the civil rights crusade arose in this reportage and analysis—including states' rights, peacekeeping arguments used as justification for preserving integration, the South as victim of outside agitation, Southern folkways, and the nation's foreign image.

Little Rock, Arkansas, in September of 1957 was the stage for the story, with Democratic Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, as the star player, taking on Republican President Dwight Eisenhower, the federal government, the Little Rock school superintendent and the school board—which had created a modest school integration plan—and the Little Rock mayor, who supported the school district's blueprint for gradual desegregation. The plan initiated by the local school officials,



who had expressed a willingness to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, established a procedure whereby students of color attempting to attend white-only schools were subjected to demanding interviews to determine their suitability. Using this system, school officials conducted interviews with about eighty students for Central High School, the largest public school in Little Rock. Nine were selected. They arrived at Central High on September 3, 1957, only to be greeted by a mob of white students, parents and citizens trying to block integration. The governor ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine students from entering the school, and the "Little Rock Nine" gave up the attempt to enter Central High School, an ordeal that would become the center of a national civil rights and states'-rights debate.

The national press, not just the Southern newspapers, trumpeted this story on their front pages. But the battle was well under way before the September 3 arrival of the "Little Rock Nine" at Central High. Two days before that, *The Birmingham News* in Alabama published a front-page wire service story quoting Faubus complaining that the federal government "is cramming integration down our throats' but is unable to preserve order in case trouble develops over Negroes entering Central High School here Tuesday." Faubus' statement came in response to a *New York Times* report that he had met with a representative of the Department of Justice. "My main concern,' in that meeting, Faubus said, 'was to find out what, if anything, could be expected from the federal government in the way of assistance if disorder occurred.'"<sup>1</sup>

When the students showed up for class that Tuesday morning they were greeted by National Guard troops that had surrounded the campus, and The Associated Press reported on the front page of *The Birmingham News* that a crowd of about four-hundred spectators "dwindled by noon to less than 50 without incident. None of the nine Negroes scheduled to enter the 2000-pupil high school tried to attend classes today after the school board asked them to stay away until the 'dilemma can be legally resolved.'" The governor, the dispatch reported, had ordered the guard to occupy the school grounds the night before, and he "steadfastly refused to say that he sent the Guardsmen out to keep the Negro students away. Pressed by reporters to clarify his action, Faubus would not go beyond his previous statement that he called out the Guardsmen to maintain order. He did say he doubted that Guardsman would escort a Negro student into the school if one showed up. But he said, 'I deny categorically that I have sold out to the segregationists.'"<sup>2</sup>

The next day, however, the National Guard did act—to deny the African-American students entry to the school. The troops, The Associated Press reported in a page-one *Birmingham News* story, "forcibly prevented racial integration of

Central High School, and Faubus insisted at a news conference later that he is not defying a federal order. The soldiers, armed with rifles and carbines, turned back nine Negro students who tried to enroll at the 2000-pupil all-white school. The troops controlled a disorderly crowd which jeered the Negroes, who were led by a well-dressed unidentified white man." Again, the governor insisted that his purpose was to "maintain peace and order." Referring to a federal court order by Judge Ronald N. Davies, brought into the case from North Dakota because of a crowded judicial docket, the previous evening that the school board "proceed forthwith with integration," the governor said, "The governor of the state is the preservator [sic] of peace, not a federal judge."<sup>3</sup> A companion page-one story reported the attack on a 15-year-old African-American girl by a "band of white students and spectators" using rocks and sticks "as she left a high school after registering as the first student of her race" at a Charlotte, North Carolina school. The girl, who was uninjured, "also was spat upon," the wire story reported, adding that an 18-year-old man had been arrested on a charge of simple assault.<sup>4</sup>

The next day's reporting included news, via The Associated Press, that the NAACP had become active in the episode and that a *New York Times* correspondent's free-speech rights had been compromised by the National Guard. Troops were guarding the governor's house while the "largest, noisiest crowd thus far milled around Central High School today" as the nine students seeking admission "stayed away from the explosive scene on advice of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." National Guardsmen, the wire service reported, "broke up an interview of some of the white segregationists with Dr. Benjamin Fine, New York Times education editor, but that was the extent of their activity." Fine told the wire service correspondent that "a colonel told him if he continued the interviews 'you'll have to leave.' Fine continued and the colonel escorted him across the street. Maj. Gen. Sherman T. Clinger then told reporters at a hastily-called news conference 'You'll be arrested and fined if you do anything that might be inciting a breach of the peace.'" A White House spokesman "also labeled as untrue another report to the effect that U.S. marshals or their deputies have been ordered to escort Negro children to school at Little Rock."<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere on the front page, the newspaper carried a report that the federal government's integration orders were spreading in the South. A federal judge, The Associated Press reported, "today reluctantly ordered Dallas public schools to start integration after the Christmas holidays. 'It is difficult for me to approve this order, but this is a land of law and it is my duty to do what I have been ordered to do by a higher court,'" the newspaper quoted the 87-year-old "white jurist," adding that this judge "had been reversed two times in a suit brought by parents of 23 Negro pupils in 1955 against the Dallas independent school district. In a

recent reversal the Fifth Circuit Court in New Orleans ordered that Dallas schools integrate 'with all deliberate speed.'"<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, a front-page Associated Press analysis observed that "someone has to back down on this one: President Eisenhower or Gov. Orval Faubus of Arkansas. If Faubus succeeds with what he's doing—using National Guardsmen to keep Negroes from a school integrated by a federal judge—every Southern governor could do the same. This would make a farce of the Supreme Court's ban on public school segregation. It would mean a breakdown of the federal government's power to carry out the law. The court's decision have the effect of law [sic]."<sup>7</sup> One other page-one story labeled as false a report that federal authorities had discussed taking Faubus into custody.

The Little Rock story stayed out front in the Birmingham newspaper but moved down-page for two wire dispatches on September 6, one reporting that the governor had offered to show the FBI what he called "'certain evidence upon which I acted to preserve the public peace,' ... Presumably Faubus was answering President Eisenhower's request earlier this week that the governor cooperate with federal authorities."<sup>8</sup> The other story reported that the president was interrupting his golfing vacation to return to the nation's capital for conferences on the Little Rock situation.

The story moved back to the top of page one on September 7 for an AP report that a federal judge "ruled today that Central High School must integrate immediately. The decision left the cold war between Arkansas and federal authority uncompromised." The judge said that brief testimony of school Superintendent Virgil Blossom was "'as anemic as the petition itself.' Blossom had asked for an indefinite postponement of racial mixing on grounds that National Guard troops surrounding the high school were interfering with education in many schools." The judge responded that the "plan for gradual integration in Little Rock was 'originated and conceived by the citizens of Little Rock through their school directors,'" and he noted that, according to the city's own mayor, "the Little Rock police had not encountered 'a single case of violence' in connection with the planned integration of Central High."<sup>9</sup>

Still atop the front page, the reportage of the September 8 *Birmingham News* included a wire dispatch that the governor's orders to prevent African-Americans from entering the high school remained intact "seven hours after a federal judge refused to delay integration at the school." The governor, in a succinct statement when asked about his position, said: "It is unchanged."<sup>10</sup> A brief wire report just below this story carried the ominous tidings that *The Arkansas Democrat's* Washington correspondent was reporting that "President Eisenhower is considering the possibility of federalizing the Arkansas National Guard. The *Democrat*

story said the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended in a closed meeting that the president might take such action if Gov. Orval Faubus continues to use state militiamen in the integration crisis.”<sup>11</sup>

September 9 brought reports of increased tensions in Arkansas, and the school integration crisis was growing, spilling into Birmingham. The Associated Press reported “the first actual physical clash between whites and Negroes in Little Rock,” marking “a new front of tension in the worsening race situation in the Little Rock area.” According to the report, shouting “white students grabbed six Negro youths who tried to enter North Little Rock High School today and shoved them off the campus despite the efforts of the superintendent to escort them into the building.” North Little Rock, the story explained, is “an adjacent municipality of 50,000 just across the Arkansas River” from Little Rock.<sup>12</sup> In Birmingham, meanwhile, F. L. Shuttlesworth, a local minister and civil rights activist, was beaten by a gang of white men while trying to “enter his daughter and other Negro students at Phillips High School this morning. . . . Police said this afternoon that school officials had been advised that Negro students would be presented for enrollment at Woodlawn High School ‘before noon tomorrow.’” Three white men were arrested at the scene of the beating, and the pastor was being treated at University Hospital. He warned that another attempt at enrollment would be made the next day.<sup>13</sup> The story was accompanied by two photos, courtesy of a local television station, showing the reverend being pushed to the ground and policemen trying to control the crowd. An inside-page staff photo showed the reverend speaking from the stretcher at the hospital.

A second front-page story quoted the reverend from his hospital stretcher, speaking with “a big smile”: “I guess this is the price you pay for freedom . . . I am not angry at any of the men who attacked me. I would not accuse the police department of negligence, but except for one policeman, they did nothing to try to stop the mob.” He had sent telegrams to the police warning of his intentions, he told a reporter.<sup>14</sup> Another page-one story reported that following the incident at the high school, the city’s police commissioner ordered the police chief “to prevent any person who is not customarily connected with schools, or who has no lawful reason to be at schools, to be turned away. He said that since the Negroes have inaugurated petitions to gain entrance to white schools in lawful fashion, any physical effort now to enroll Negro students in white schools ‘could be only to create a disturbance and gain publicity.’ He said the police department’s job is to preserve law and order, and he ordered the use of all needed manpower to apprehend others who participated in ‘this unlawful act.’”<sup>15</sup> Yet another front-page local story reported that the Alabama attorney general had been in conference with city school officials “to discuss efforts to integrate schools here. The meeting had

been scheduled before today's attack on Negroes attempting to enter Phillips High School occurred." The attorney general said he had been monitoring the Arkansas situation "thoroughly" and warned that the "hand being played by Arkansas Gov. Faubus is a hand we in Alabama may have to play some day."<sup>16</sup> And as for Little Rock, a down-page wire story reported that should the federal government use force in Arkansas, "we will have lost our last right of local self-government," Gov. Orval Faubus said today.<sup>17</sup> One more front-page story reported that a thirty-four-year-old local African-American man had been emasculated, "done by a Klansman to prove himself 'worthy of becoming assistant exalted cyclops' of the robed and hooded order, officers said today. They added that they had learned after the fifth man was arrested for the act that it was done as a warning against school integration here."<sup>18</sup>

The local school integration strife took precedence over the Little Rock story on September 10's front page, but both stories dominated the top of the page. In Birmingham, the newspaper reported that Phillips High School's nearly two-thousand students had been evacuated "for about 40 minutes today while police searched the building for a bomb reported by an anonymous caller. Students marched to nearby Marconi Park and began returning about 10:30 a.m. after police failed to find a bomb." A second threat came in the afternoon, "but Dr. L. Frazer Banks, city school superintendent, ordered students kept in classes. Police searched the basement." At another city high school, "where Negroes reportedly intended to seek entrance," loud student demonstrations broke out. "No Negroes had appeared by late morning." The reverend who had been beaten the previous day "said he had abandoned plans to try to enroll any Negro children in white schools today. He said he was confined to bed, on doctor's orders, with a sprained arm and other injuries."<sup>19</sup> As though to demonstrate that bomb threats to schools should not be taken lightly, just below the local bomb-threat story the newspaper published a wire service account of a dynamite blast in Nashville, Tennessee, the day before that demolished an elementary school where "white and Negro first graders went to classes for the first time yesterday."<sup>20</sup> No injuries were reported.

The Associated Press, in a story datelined Washington, reported that Attorney General Brownell "petitioned the Federal District Court of Little Rock for an injunction to restrain Gov. Orval E. Faubus from using the guard to prevent entrance of eligible Negro students to Central High School."<sup>21</sup> In a separate story, datelined Little Rock, the AP reported that the federal government had ordered Faubus to appear in federal court September 20, regarding the government's plea "for a preliminary injunction against Faubus and two subordinates. It calls on them to stop interfering with a federal court order to enroll the Negroes in the high school."<sup>22</sup> Two inside-page wire service stories offered analyses of Judge Davies'

move toward a showdown with Faubus and a report out of the nation's capital that a U.S. senator was calling on the president to establish a civil rights investigating committee.

The next day's newspaper brought a lull in the local school integration effort, with the reverend who had been beaten announcing abandonment, for the time being, of integration efforts and a wire service report that Faubus was gathering evidence to demonstrate in court that racial violence would have exploded in Little Rock had he not stopped the attempted integration of the high school there. For the next few days, the newspaper carried wire service reports of events and political developments leading up to the September 20 court date, including:

- A September 12 page-one report that the president and Faubus would meet face-to-face the following Saturday;
- A September 14 front-page story summarizing that summit meeting, including Eisenhower saying that Faubus had assured him that he would respect the decision of the court when handed down. In a companion story, the governor pledged “that he will obey the law on school integration but he voiced hope the federal government ‘will act with understanding and patience.’ At the same time Faubus said he has a responsibility to protect his people from violence”;<sup>23</sup>
- A September 15 page-one dispatch that nobody in Little Rock was happy with the statements issued by the president and the governor following their meeting, and another brief report that *The Arkansas Gazette* would be publishing an editorial accusing the governor of capitulating in that summit meeting;
- A September 16 page-one story reporting that the governor was considering withdrawing National Guardsmen before the week's end. The governor's office had no comment on the rumor.
- A September 17 front-page local story supplanting the Little Rock reportage—a report that the Jefferson County school superintendent had raised the specter of abolishment of the free public school system in Alabama “as the alternative to integration of the schools.” The superintendent told a meeting of the county's Council of Parent-Teacher Associations that “the legislature is looking for ways to keep the public schools from being integrated, but added that the things the state is trying, have been tried in other states and have been overruled by the courts.”<sup>24</sup>

Then, on September 20, under a two-bank banner headline on page one, came the big story that dominated national headlines, as reported by The Associated

Press: Faubus had defied the federal court. “The emotion-ridden Little Rock integration struggle took another dramatic turn today when attorneys for Gov. Orval Faubus walked out of U.S. District Court saying ‘We’re through.’ They denied that the Federal District Court had jurisdiction over the governor of a sovereign state.” The “abrupt exit,” the story continued, “left unsettled the key question: What will Faubus do if—as is expected—U.S. District Judge Ronald N. Davies grants an injunction ordering Faubus to desist further interference with the integration of Little Rock Central High School.”<sup>25</sup> As the AP story had predicted, the judge did grant the injunction, and the next day, a Saturday, the wire service reported that Faubus, “in a lightning move, withdrew the National Guard from Central High School Friday night and President Eisenhower called it ‘a necessary step in the right direction.’” The Little Rock school superintendent announced that the schools “will be open to all children Monday,” but parents of the Little Rock Nine reportedly were unsure about what the next steps would be.<sup>26</sup> By Sunday, the barred students had made up their minds to return to the high school, with plans to attend classes Monday—a development that prompted Faubus to predict an outbreak of violence.

City segregationists made good on the governor’s prediction on Monday, when a “howling, shrieking crowd of men and women outside Central High School, and disorderly students inside, forced authorities to withdraw eight Negro students from the school today, 3½ hours after they entered it,” according to an AP report published on the newspaper’s front page. The three boys and five girls left the school “under heavy police escort” as crowds “clustered at both ends of the school set up a storm of fierce howling and again surged toward the lines of police and state troopers. Again, they were beaten back. The explosive climax came after the school had been under siege since 8:45 when the Negroes quietly walked through the doors. Police, armed with riot guns and tear gas, had the crowd under control”—though there were reports of African-American students “with blood on their clothes” and of white students attacking the African-American students in the building.<sup>27</sup>

The next day, the newspaper’s front page carried another banner headline reporting that the president had federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson to take charge of the Little Rock operation. And as Wilson did so, “Pentagon officials said regular U.S. troops probably would be used along with the National Guardsmen.” The president, who announced a televised address that night, “said he would use the full power of the United States—including whatever force necessary—to prevent any obstruction of the law in the Little Rock school integration crisis.”<sup>28</sup> Faubus, in a stopover in Birmingham on his way to Little Rock, told a *Birmingham News* reporter for an accompanying front-page story that he would “‘wait and see’ before deciding his



next move in the face of President Eisenhower's order federalizing the Arkansas National Guard. 'I don't know what I'll do, I'll just wait and see,' was his only comment."<sup>29</sup>

The Little Rock Nine entered school "quietly" on September 25, under the watchful guard of "hard-eyed paratroopers, in battle dress with bayonets at the ready. ... One man was clubbed and another stabbed in the arm by the soldiers in fights that followed. A few white students left the school after the Negroes entered, but there was no sign of a mass exodus. A school official said 1250 students were in class today, making 750 absentees. It was 50 more than yesterday when it was known the Negroes would not appear." The AP story reported that two African-American girls "came out with the white students" during a late morning fire drill, and that one of the girls "walked beside a blond white student. They were talking together and laughing." A reporter asked one of them if she was making any friends, "Quite a few' the girl called back, flashing a smile."<sup>30</sup> Another front-page wire story summarized the president's broadcast speech to the nation, in which he explained that "mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of the court." The president emphasized "that the troops are there 'solely for the purpose of preventing interference with the orders of the court.'"<sup>31</sup> Elsewhere on page one, Southern governors were reported passing a resolution during the Southern Governors Conference, in Georgia, to send a committee to Washington to ask for withdrawal of the soldiers from Little Rock, and an AP story paired with the main report of the school opening its doors reported that Alabama citizens "generally were sharply critical" of Eisenhower's decision to use federal troops. The 1954 Republican candidate for governor of Alabama, the wire service reported, "termed the president 'a tyrant comparable with George III of England.'"<sup>32</sup> On an inside page, an Associated Press analyst described the president, during the previous evening's televised address, as "a troubled, reluctant man." Eisenhower was on trial during the Little Rock ordeal "as never before in his presidency," the analyst observed. "He is a man who strives always for harmony. He made his reputation in war and peace as one who smoothes [sic] out difficulties. But on this issue he couldn't please everybody. Whatever his course, he would be damned if he did and damned if he didn't." In conclusion, the analyst wrote that Eisenhower's "watchword has been 'patience'—until Little Rock. Now it is 'obey the law.' Only time will tell how ready the South is to listen, and how many troops may be called out in the meantime."<sup>33</sup>

Two days later, the front-page dispatches out of Little Rock were of the African-American students continuing to attend school with no reports of disturbance, and of Faubus urging calmness despite what he called "unsheathed bayonets' and 'police state methods.'"<sup>34</sup>



*The Birmingham News* published several editorials on the Little Rock school integration crisis, beginning early-on when it invoked the states'-rights argument, a constitutional frame, in response to the Little Rock school board's decision to delay integration following the governor sending National Guardsmen to the school grounds. "It is evident also that peace and order is a primary state responsibility," the editorial argued. "The Supreme Court school decision raised a question of how far state police power goes in connection with integration efforts. It is a question of far-reaching importance and may be pressed in the Little Rock situation. Obviously peace and order must be the deep concern and basic objective of state authorities."<sup>35</sup> The newspaper again called for peace and order in an editorial two days later, in which it warned that federal action in Little Rock "would further intensify feelings and problems."<sup>36</sup> The newspaper underscored the argument of states' rights in a September 10 editorial on the subject of the local reverend's attempt to integrate a Birmingham school. The newspaper called Shuttlesworth's move "deplorable," arguing that "it was most unwise to take this action in advance of orderly handling of the matter"—orderly being, as the editorial concluded, "a way recognizing adequate authority for the states." Otherwise, "troubles and dangers in the school situation will increase."<sup>37</sup> A day later, responding to the Nashville school bombing, the newspaper noted that "serious disorder has actually developed in some places ... possibilities of this kind are far-reaching." With the Arkansas governor being summoned to a federal court date scheduled for September 20, the newspaper opined on September 11 that "we now may have an orderly procedure that will produce a clearer definition of respective state and federal rights in a situation of this kind. ... Meantime, there is urgent need for patience, for calmness and for support of all the methods and means that make for peace and good will."<sup>38</sup> Again, the states'-rights argument emerged in a brief editorial commending the Arkansas governor for seeking to meet with Eisenhower. "The problem at Little Rock is concerned with responsibilities and rights of both state and federal governments. More of clarity as to issues in that connection is urgently needed."<sup>39</sup> In an editorial published September 21, the day after the federal judge ruled that Arkansas must comply with the court's integration order, the newspaper observed that a decision "adverse to the governor's contentions as to his power" can be appealed to a higher court. "Whatever final decision comes in this case should be made in the light of thorough exploration of respective state and federal powers in such a situation. The means for such a decision are our legal processes. But those processes are not necessarily exhausted by the action of a federal district judge." The editorial concluded that "federal-state relations should be harmonious, fruitful and wisely maintained. Disruptive domination, unnecessary contests of power, are to be avoided."<sup>40</sup>

Of course, much of this language is code. The source of “disruptive domination” could only be the federal government. A ruling adverse to Faubus’ position not only could be appealed, but *should* be. A thorough exploration of respective state and federal laws, undertaken by “harmonious, fruitful” and wise overseers would, of course, recognize the proper authority of the state. To this end, the newspaper on September 24 “earnestly” hoped that the president would not call out federal troops. “Violence must cease, but force is not the solution to these problems. The President has recognized that in the past. It is still true.” Certainly, the editorial concluded—without offering an alternative to force in the event that a governor defies a federal court order—violence and lawlessness must not be condoned. “But the need for avoidance of unwise actions which would unnecessarily evoke community perils is now again underscored.”<sup>41</sup> Translated: Use of federal troops would be unwise and needs to be avoided. On September 25, the newspaper all but endorsed violent opposition to federal intervention in an editorial that argued against the federalization of National Guard troops. “Great numbers of Southerners doubtless have come to believe that strong public resistance by demonstration, perhaps even to the point of resort to force in some cases, offers the only alternative to the onward march of integration,” urged the newspaper. “Good citizens certainly do not want violence, but many do not see how their deep convictions can be served, their opposition to integration made effective, merely by verbal protest and legal maneuver. The Supreme Court’s school desegregation decision goes against the profound and fervent beliefs and feelings of a vast majority of white Southerners. That decision calls for action by compulsion repugnant to intense convictions and deep-seated traditions.” The editorial’s conclusion advising “good sense, the constructive moderation, the mutual consideration, the good will which, in all such situations, are essential to saving people from the worst—from new disaster and despair”<sup>42</sup> hardly muffled the editorial’s earlier nod to action on behalf of conviction. The newspaper again stoked the oppositional fire in an editorial the next day that began: “In time of deep and intense feeling, it is natural for people to express themselves in vigorous, even emotional terms. Feeling in the South about the situation in Little Rock is deep and intense. Strong expressions mostly in sharp opposition to the stationing of federal troops there are being voiced in many ways.” In this case, though, the editorial board—showing evidence of second thoughts about its more inflammatory language the day before—argued on behalf of restraint. “Certainly we can’t give up on efforts to achieve the highest levels of which we are capable. That challenge is crucial now.”<sup>43</sup> But then again, the next day, the newspaper decried the use of force by the federal government—as “unwise . . . to impose school desegregation.” Such force, the writer argued, “can only intensify feelings and difficulties. Violence in opposition to federal court orders complicates these problems and may accelerate rather than delay integration efforts.” Such

opposition, then, plays into the hands of the federal government, so what “we must seek is a course within the law in line with realities, with the deep convictions and feelings of the people directly affected . . . broadly, the aim should be to move in ways that are feasible, that are voluntarily accepted, that are in accord with the law and community acceptance.”<sup>44</sup> So, opposition to segregation should be carried out wisely rather than in a way that, in the end, defeats the purpose because of its association with mob rule and lawlessness. The newspaper ended its five-day series of editorials with a defense of Faubus, arguing to those who “maintain that the President had no other choice than his troop order, it is to be pointed out that Gov. Faubus has consistently emphasized peaceful action and respect for the law on the part of all in Little Rock; that he yielded to the federal court order calling for withdrawal of troops he had stationed at Central High School in Little Rock; that he could have been given opportunity to put down any violence that developed following entrance of Negro students into the school. The presidential order came swiftly before local and state authorities had had adequate time in which to get the situation in hand.”<sup>45</sup> Given time, this sentiment argued, state and local authorities would have taken care of this situation if left to their own devices—overlooking, conveniently, that Faubus and local officials had every opportunity to follow the law of the land rather than use armed troops to disobey the Supreme Court edict and federal court orders to integrate the public schools in all due haste.

In Richmond, Virginia, *The News Leader* prefaced the Little Rock reportage with an inside-page wire story published September 2, datelined Little Rock, reporting that Little Rock ministers “pleaded for calmness and order in the scheduled integration of a high school here tomorrow while Gov. Orvan [sic] Faubus watched for ‘anything that might occur’ in a city where surprises have occurred recently.” Rather than the reported Little Rock Nine, this dispatch claimed that “about 15 Negroes are expected to enroll in Central High School, which has about 2,000 students. They gained final legal clearance Friday when a federal court told the school board to go ahead with its gradual integration plan and ordered segregationists not to interfere.”<sup>46</sup>

When the scheduled integration date arrived, this newspaper published the Associated Press account of the proceedings as reported above, summarizing the governor’s placement of National Guardsmen at Little Rock’s Central High, where the Little Rock Nine did not show up. Of interest locally, though, the wire story was accompanied by a local account of a white seventh-grader being sent home from a Falls Church school “because the parents had refused to sign state pupil placement forms.” These forms were part of a process that some Southern states adopted to avoid the U.S. Supreme Court’s public school integration order, as explained in some detail in a 1960 *Commentary* magazine article.

“In its efforts to circumvent the Supreme Court’s ruling and prevent or retard integration,” Ralph Lee Smith wrote for the magazine, “the South has tried many approaches: school-closing laws, ‘interposition,’ scholarship aid for those parents who preferred to send their children to all-white schools, anti-NAACP laws, economic reprisal, intimidation, and violence. But only one technique—the pupil placement law—has met with substantial success in the courts. The technique is now clearly emerging as the South’s major weapon in maintaining school segregation.” Placement laws removed references to race in creating processes for student placement in schools. Smith continued:

The placement laws are designed to perpetuate segregation by integrating the fewest possible number of Negro students whenever federal action forces the issue. The first law was enacted by North Carolina on March 30, 1955, and refined by amendments the following year. Virginia passed the second placement law on September 29, 1956. And in 1957, after the North Carolina law had withstood a major court challenge, the other Southern states rushed to get on the bandwagon. At this writing, the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, and the city of Atlanta, Georgia, have all adopted placement laws, and it appears that other states and cities will follow suit.

The specifics of the law “vary widely from state to state, but the purpose is the same everywhere: the establishment of machinery that will control the school assignment of pupils in such a way as to prevent Negro children from transferring to white schools, or that will limit such transfers, whenever total segregation becomes untenable, to a token number,” the article continues. “Theoretically, the laws apply to the placement of all pupils, black and white, in all schools; but actually, intended as tools of racial discrimination, they are not invoked until a Negro pupil applies for a transfer to a white school.”<sup>47</sup>

On an inside jump page, *The News Leader* packaged related stories on one page, ghettoizing, in a fashion, stories of race, a process of conglomerating stories on this subject taken up by other newspapers of all regions found in this book’s analysis. The stories on this day in the *News Leader* were brief wire accounts of African-American students entering a high school in Clinton, Tennessee; Anglo and African-American pupils attending the same schools in Greensboro, North Carolina, and the enrollment of seventeen African-Americans at a previously all-white high school in Sturgis, Kentucky.

This newspaper over the next several days published the same Associated Press reportage as that offered by *The Birmingham News*, but with a few twists. On September 4, for example, *The News Leader* published a series of photos across the top of the front page showing, left to right, a student of color entering a school in

Charlotte, North Carolina; white students jeering a car carrying African-Americans to school in Sturgis, Kentucky; and National Guardsmen enforcing segregation in Little Rock, all under a banner headline reading: "Integration Proceeds in North Carolina and Kentucky, But Is Stopped in Arkansas." A local story on the front page this day reported that more than thirty-seven-thousand students were expected to attend a full day of school the next day, but for the first time, "the chance of Negro pupils showing up at white schools appeared likely. Nobody connected with the city school system would say publicly what will happen if they do."<sup>48</sup> Sure enough, the newspaper reported on its front page the next day that eight "Negro students were denied admission today at white schools in Arlington county while public schools in Richmond, Chesterfield county and many other localities in the state opened their 1957-58 term with clock-like smoothness. No Negroes showed up at any of Richmond's public schools today, school officials here reported. Some pupils in Chesterfield county schools signed pupil placement forms 'under protest,' school officials there said." In Arlington, "all eight of the Negroes were promptly sent away. Three showed up at Stratford Junior High, two at Washington-Lee High, one at Thomas Jefferson Junior High and two at Swanson Junior High. Police, most of them in plainclothes, were stationed at the four schools, but there were no disturbances. White students watched curiously as the Negro students walked to the principals' offices. There was no jeering or signs of trouble during the brief time the Negro students were inside."<sup>49</sup> On an inside page, *The News Leader* published the same wire service analysis as had *The Birmingham News* regarding the showdown between the president and Faubus, observing the need for one of the two elected leaders to back down.

The local school district experienced its own difficulties this week, as nearly thirty Richmond African-American students were absent from school on September 6 "because their parents refused to sign pupil placement applications. More than 60 Negro pupils were refused admission to local schools yesterday. About half of them returned today with the signed application. However, indications were that more students would be told late today [Friday] not to return Monday." Some of the absent students were "out-right refusals," according to the front-page story. "Most, apparently, stem from confusion and uncertainty about the forms."<sup>50</sup> The newspaper published the latest report from Little Rock at the bottom of page one. On page three, the day's designated race-story page, the newspaper published a collection of brief stories reporting, in order, an African-American publication in Little Rock denouncing Faubus; ten Presbyterian ministers in Huntsville, Arkansas, opposing the actions of Faubus; the winding up of the first week of integrated classes in Sturgis, Kentucky; the assertion by U.S. Senator Herman Talmadge in Atlanta that Faubus was within his rights, and a report of no integration protests in a Maryland community.

On September 9, next to the daily Little Rock wire report and two wire photos of white students blocking students of color at North Little Rock High School and of National Guard troops at Central High in Little Rock, the newspaper reported that yet another fifty-four African-American students had been barred at local schools “because their parents refused to sign pupil placement forms and about 50 were to be sent home from one school this afternoon. No one, the superintendent of schools included, had any precise idea of how many Negro parents here are fighting the anti-integration Pupil Placement Act.”<sup>51</sup> This story developed further the next day, when the newspaper reported that conflict between the state’s pupil placement act and its compulsory school attendance laws “appeared to be in the making here today.” Attendance laws required children aged seven to sixteen to attend school “or be taught by a qualified teacher,” the story reported, which would cause problems for those students whose parents refused to sign the placement forms. The denouement was uncertain, but a meeting of the Pupil Placement Board had been scheduled.<sup>52</sup>

On September 12, the newspaper carried the wire story about the upcoming meeting of Faubus and Eisenhower on page 1, but below a wire service story reporting an attack on the state’s placement law. “Virginia’s Pupil Placement Law was criticized as freezing school segregation and defended as a valid act in United States District Court today,” reported The Associated Press. “The arguments were on a request by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for an order by Judge Albert V. Bryan directing that seven Negro pupils be admitted to white schools in Arlington county.” This same judge had ruled earlier in the year that Arlington “must desegregate its schools this semester,” the report continued. “However, Arlington, working under the state’s placement law, is operating segregated schools.”<sup>53</sup>

The newspaper continued to publish on its front page wire service reportage on the Little Rock crisis, but the local pupil placement story was back on page one on September 17, when the newspaper reported that the federal judge had requested “that a compromise be worked out to keep in school Negro children whose parents have not signed pupil placement forms.” Asked to grant a temporary restraining order blocking enforcement of the act, the judge “suggested that the Negro plaintiffs sign the forms under protest or that the Pupil Placement Board and the Richmond School Board grant them an additional period of grace in which the children may attend school without the signed forms. A 15-day grace period expires today.” Lawyers for both sides were to meet later that day, the newspaper reported.<sup>54</sup> The judge signed the restraining order the next morning, the newspaper reported on its front page, and “Negro children previously barred from public schools here for lack of a pupil placement form began attending classes

today. An undetermined number presented themselves for class on the strength of a federal judge's order restraining the enforcement of the state's Public Placement Act in Richmond's schools." Richmond, the story explained, "is the second locality in Virginia in which enforcement of registration requirements of the Pupil Placement Act has been restrained by a Federal judge."<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, a U.S. judge in Alexandria stayed his order of integration of four Arlington County white schools, granting the school board's request for the stay, "largely on the ground that great damage would be done if the admission of Negro pupils proved only temporary." The judge, "in part at least," agreed with the school board attorney's argument "that a stay would be of 'minimal' harm to the seven Negro pupils and 'certainly out of all proportion to the injury to every public school child in Arlington county."<sup>56</sup> On this day, local school integration tidings took precedence over the Little Rock story, about the pending appearance by Faubus in federal district court, which was placed below these two local stories on the front page.

But the Little Rock wire service story about the attempted entry of the African-American students to Central High School claimed top placement the next day, September 23, and the events in Little Rock dominated the newspaper's front page in dramatic fashion—photos of guardsmen with drawn bayonets behind female high school students laughing at them, of airborne troops escorting students of color entering the school—for the duration of this crisis. But this analysis found that when the local integration story intervened, the gatekeepers at the Richmond newspaper showed clear preference for the Richmond and regional developments in their story placement.

Like *The Birmingham News*, *The Richmond News Leader* published several editorials on the Little Rock story. Unlike the Birmingham newspaper, though, these showed remarkably more defiance of federal intervention in language starker and less compromising. In its first editorial on the subject, published the day after the guardsmen took up their stations at Central High, the newspaper editorialized in a constitutional, states'-rights frame, that the Democratic candidate to be Virginia governor "late yesterday said all that needs to be said on the crisis in Little Rock. ... 'The first obligation of the Governor of any State,'" the newspaper quoted the candidate, "'is that peace is kept and to preserve law and order. As long as the State does that, it's certainly no business of the Federal government.'" The editorial closed by quoting the Constitution: "'A well-regulated militia,' we are advised in the Constitution, is 'necessary to the security of a free state.' In protecting the security of the free State of Arkansas, Governor Faubus is standing on a solid foundation of bedrock law. He is keeping the public peace. Let Judge Davies keep his own peace."<sup>57</sup> The newspaper followed up the next day with an editorial underscoring the same theme of peace-keeping, arguing that Faubus ordered troops to



Little Rock not to block a federal court order, “but to preserve public peace ... The question is whether the right of the people of Arkansas to domestic tranquility is superior to the right of seven [sic] Negro students to enter a white high school.” The editorial concluded by urging Faubus “to carry on. These things have to be tested, and may as well be tested in Arkansas right now.”<sup>58</sup> Invoking an early version of what had become the popular notion of the liberal elite media setting the public agenda, a September 9 editorial cited television network commentators “garbed in the sincere ties of Madison Avenue” who had decided that “Faubus the exponent of ‘defiance,’ would have to go.” Yes, the editorialist wrote in urging the South, as the Birmingham newspaper had urged, to make its segregationist stand at Little Rock, “let us talk of defiance! And if there is to be defiance let it come now. Let it come bravely. Let it come with a sureness of conviction that the South is right and our oppressors are wrong. We do not conceive it ‘defiance’ to hold to what is lawfully ours. We count it, rather, loyalty, fealty, obedience to law that was law before Earl Warren was born. On that certainty, whatever the consequences may be, let us take our stand. And pray God, let us never surrender.”<sup>59</sup> Less than a week later, the newspaper again cheered Faubus, noting that it would be “disappointing indeed if the conciliatory tone of Governor Faubus’s telegram to Mr. Eisenhower means that the Governor of Arkansas is backing down in the position he has taken at Little Rock.” The governor, said the newspaper, “is entitled to the presumption that he exercised his power lawfully. In the court of public opinion he is entitled to the presumption of innocence until proved guilty. The Governor has a strong hand. He ought not to pitch in his cards now.”<sup>60</sup>

The newspaper offered one locally-oriented editorial during the Little Rock narrative, publishing a chart showing enrollment by Anglo and African-American students in September of 1957 to discuss racial trends in the schools. The purpose of this discussion, and the aim of the editorial, was to support the cast-aside separate-but-equal concept of *Plessy*. The wisest educational policy for Richmond schools, the editorial argued, “is simply to make available the best possible schools for each race. This newspaper is not yielding in the slightest in its prayer to see complete separation maintained in the schools of every county and city of Virginia; and if, after the most prolonged and resourceful legal fight, one of the State’s 128 localities should topple, then we would fight to hold the other 127. ... While the struggle goes on for the maintenance of separate schools, we should keep in mind the necessity for keeping them equal, too.”<sup>61</sup> Finally, in response to the president’s decision federalizing the troops and ordering paratroopers to Little Rock, the newspaper took on a sarcastic stance, suggesting that the decision “presumably will gratify Negro voters, and cause more of them to vote Republican or alternatively, fewer of them to support Democratic candidates in key congressional districts.”



So, wrote the editorialist, “we begin the Second Reconstruction of the South. So descends the military heel. Today the guns of our own soldiers are turned upon our own people, and to achieve what end? It is to compel the intimate mingling of white and Negro children in the same classroom; it is to enforce the lawless decree of a Supreme Court that raped the Constitution—and now is being helped by the President in getting away with it.” But, the editorial concluded, the president’s actions would backfire. “He has not ended the South’s resistance to integration; by this step he has magnified and intensified it. If there had been any hope of widespread acceptance of race mixing, he has blighted it now.”<sup>62</sup>

As the Birmingham and Richmond newspapers had done, *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi, relied on wire service reports to inform its readers of the Little Rock standoff, and, like those other newspapers, it applied its own, unique frame to the narrative. For example, on its September 4 front page, below the AP report of a federal judge ordering the Little Rock school board to integrate “forthwith,” the newspaper warned of school integration’s onward march—“march,” as in military movement, was the active verb chosen for this story’s headline—throughout the South. “While the eyes of the nation were focused on the school situation in Little Rock,” observed a story compiled from the newspaper’s wire services, “school integration continued on several other southern fronts despite angry resentment and occasional threats of violence, though showdowns were temporarily averted in Birmingham, Ala. and in Florida.” In Birmingham, the newspaper reported, “a Negro man told police he had been kidnaped, [sic] beaten and sexually mutilated by a group of white men. In serious condition in a Birmingham hospital, the Negro quoted the whites as saying ‘This is what will happen if Negroes try to integrate the schools.’” Also seventeen African-American students had enrolled in an all-white high school in Sturgis, Kentucky; five African-American students enrolled in a junior high school in Greensboro, North Carolina “despite more than 100 heckling adults”; racial integration “began quietly with 23 Negroes attending classes with hundreds of white students” in Van Buren, Arkansas; and in Florida, “public schools opened with no efforts at integration.”<sup>63</sup>

The next day, the newspaper again complemented the AP story on events in Little Rock with a roundup of wire stories, also on page one, detailing education integration battles elsewhere. “Shouting, gesticulating white students and spectators hurled rocks and sticks and spat at a Negro girl today after her first day as a student in a previously all-white high school” in Charlotte, North Carolina, reported one wire dispatch,<sup>64</sup> while in Kentucky, state police “today arrested a woman and a teen-ager outside integrated Sturgis High School. Inside the school, 17 Negro and 239 white students mingled without incident.” The arrested juveniles, the wire service reported, “were seen throwing ‘objects.’”<sup>65</sup> The September 6 front page

of this newspaper provided more evidence that the gatekeepers at this newspaper were trying to construct a frame of rampant school-integration marching—again, language that suggests troop movements engaged in invasion. Below the AP story detailing the Eisenhower-Faubus showdown, the newspaper published the wire service report of court-ordered integration in Dallas. The next day, the newspaper published on page one, below the wire reportage out of Little Rock, an AP dispatch reporting that newspapers worldwide were devoting space to “school integration troubles” in the United States. “Stories and pictures of troops barring Negro children from entering schools in Little Rock, Ark., were not always carried on front pages, however, and there was not much editorial comment,” the AP reported. “Headlines and photograph captions, however, set the pitch of newspaper reaction”—which included front-page play and big headlines throughout Europe.<sup>66</sup> Again, the dominant theme was of widespread school integration efforts in a frame of negative publicity for the South along with a negative foreign-image frame.

The September 8 front page carried an “alarming”—again, the language of the story’s headline—story down-page, below the Little Rock wire service tidings. Because a federal judge had resigned in a district that served North Mississippi, the newspaper sounded “a special note of alarm for residents of North Mississippi. As headlines belched forth demands by the Federal Government for immediate integration of Little Rock Schools, the North Mississippian was made acutely aware that his own position has become highly vulnerable to Federal exploitation.” With the federal bench at Oxford unoccupied, the story reported, “many Mississippians are asking, ‘What will keep the Eisenhower administration from sending an unsympathetic judge to us if an integration case arises?’” Also, the story reported, attempts by the Eisenhower administration to do so would encounter numerous political impediments based on the integration controversy.<sup>67</sup>

Coverage of the Little Rock crisis was sparse beyond this. The newspaper’s September 25 front-page wire service account of the president’s televised message explaining his decision to use federal troops in Little Rock was the next big page-one story published by the newspaper. The following day, beneath the wire service dispatch reporting that the president would meet with a committee of Southern governors to discuss withdrawal of federal troops from Little Rock, the newspaper published a report that U.S. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, in a speech at Belzoni, “declared here tonight that the president has violated the Constitution of our country by sending the army into Little Rock, Ark.”<sup>68</sup>

Undoubtedly, the newspaper’s ownership and management agreed, judging from its two editorials on the Little Rock crisis. The first, published September 7, argued that Faubus “has acted in strict accordance with the obligations of his office. He was entirely within his rights in calling out the state guard to halt impending

violence in the face of the integration threat. Other states including our own will be equally justified in the same course, if and when the same danger presents itself in areas where integration is not wanted and will not be accepted by the majority.”<sup>69</sup> Note the particular frame of this editorial—that the use of the state guard by Faubus was to halt violence as opposed to denying entry by students of color to public schools, that the governor’s intentions were on behalf of preserving public order rather than preserving the segregationist status quo. In a September 26 editorial, the newspaper called the use of federal troops in Little Rock the “South’s darkest day since Reconstruction I.” Mimicking the editorial on this subject by *The Richmond News Leader*, this newspaper dubbed the situation “Reconstruction II.” The editorial argued, in a constitutional frame: “A sociological and political decision by a Supreme Court, headed by a politically-minded Chief Justice, is being used to take the freedom of school control from the sovereign states. Washington has indeed reduced the states to satellites of the overruling federal mind. If Arkansas is a satellite section, Mississippi is also. If integration of schools provided by Little Rock taxpayers can be accomplished by federal interference, is Jackson next?”<sup>70</sup>

The treatment of the story was much the same in *The News and Courier* in Charleston, with one notable exception. This newspaper published editorials, including one on the front page, almost daily as the Little Rock events developed, and it placed the bulk of its wire service reportage on page one, with a few regional or local, staff-written, angles thrown in. For example, on September 6, a front-page un-bylined story reporting “almost blanket approval of South Carolina’s political leaders” of Faubus’ stance and calling for “similar action in South Carolina under similar circumstances”<sup>71</sup> accompanied the wire service reportage of the Little Rock crisis. But the political reaction in the nation’s capital differed; the newspaper’s Washington, D. C. correspondent reported that the “ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee told *The News and Courier* today that if Gov. Orval Faubus of Arkansas persists in his ‘utter defiance’ of the Federal court in Little Rock, he ‘should be seized bodily.’”<sup>72</sup> This newspaper buried the report of the federal court order in Dallas on page B-seven. The newspaper published another staff report on the September 7 front page, with its statehouse reporter in Columbia writing that Eisenhower, should he decide to “invoke his federal military authority in the Arkansas situation,” could “simply order the National Guardsmen to ‘about face’ and start taking orders from him instead of Gov. Orval E. Faubus.” The reporter cited two sections of Title 10 of the Federal Code of Laws to support his analysis.<sup>73</sup> Three days later, *The News and Courier* carried a “special” report on the cover of its state news section reporting that a Baptist church in Sumter had adopted a resolution “expressing unalterable opposition to the action of the southern Baptist Convention” approving the Supreme Court’s desegregation ruling. “The resolution also

deplores action of trustees of Southeastern Seminary to admit Negroes in 1958 and any similar action by other institutions owned or controlled by the convention.<sup>74</sup> In a reverse-integration frame, the newspaper on September 12 published a wire story, datelined Columbia, on the front page of its state section reporting that a young Hungarian refugee “busied himself with orientation tests today as he prepared to go through with plans to enroll at a Negro university.” The 24-year-old’s attendance at Allen University “would mark the first time a white student has entered a public or private Negro college in South Carolina.” Meanwhile, the story reported, the State Board of Education had withdrawn recognition of Allen graduates “for public school teacher certification.”<sup>75</sup>

The newspaper summoned on September 15 a frame, or theme, that would gain popularity in the Southern press as the civil rights movement grew over the years—that of an elitist, outsider, Northern press imposing its agenda and framing on a victimized South. Reporting out of New York, a writer asserted that the New York press suffered “smug hypocrisy” in its coverage of news, “or what passes here for news,” of the school-integration crises in “Little Rock, Nashville and other hot spots.” For example, the writer claimed that New York *Daily Mirror* photos of Anglo and African-American pupils attending their first day of school at a New York school were part of “a carefully posed publicity photograph having little relation to actual situations existing in New York schools. Anybody who can read a newspaper knows all is far from sweetness and light in the New York school system.” As for the “liberal” *New York Post*, this newspaper “is most vociferous in its denunciations and loudest in raising the cry of ‘Lynch Faubus!’” The writer wondered if columnist Murray Kempton, covering events from Nashville, allowed his own children to attend mixed schools in New York. “No. Kempton doesn’t even live in New York. He commutes from Princeton, N. J., where the race problem is as near the zero point as anywhere in the eastern U.S.” The writer cited other examples of smugness and hypocrisy, arguing—on a news page in a column without benefit of being labeled analysis or commentary—the Southern press frame of a biased, unfair Northern press censuring Southern beliefs and folkways. “With all this going on in its own backyard, New York’s pious protests about Little Rock and Nashville have a somewhat hollow sound.”<sup>76</sup>

On September 22, *The News and Courier* published as its lead front-page story a wire service dispatch out of Little Rock that that city’s mayor “said flatly tonight that Little Rock police would arrest any and all troublemakers around central High School Monday morning—but would not prevent integration of the school”—a story that had been downplayed, or not published, in other Southern newspapers. “Our policy is one that will permit orderly compliance with the law instead of obstruction,” the newspaper quoted the mayor, acting in obvious

disagreement with the policies of Faubus.<sup>77</sup> After Eisenhower's troop decision, the newspaper's statehouse correspondent, on the scene for the Southern Governors' Conference in Sea Island, Georgia, reported on the cover of the state section that "though the 12 governors present at the conference differ widely in their attitudes and action on school desegregation, they showed universal concern today over the President's decision to federalize the Arkansas National Guard. Their comments ranged from charges of dictatorship and tyranny from the governors of South Carolina and Georgia to one lone endorsement of the President's action by Maryland's Republican Gov. Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin." The correspondent reported that Tennessee Governor Frank G. Clement had "proposed informally that a special committee" be put together to meet with Eisenhower to discuss the crisis.<sup>78</sup> Below this story, a wire service dispatch from Washington reported that one of South Carolina's two senators, Democrat Olin D. Johnston, blasted Eisenhower's troop decision as causing "the most serious division among the American people since the Civil War." Accusing the president of caving in to pressure from the Southern segregationists' bogeyman, the NAACP, Johnston said the president "has acted unwittingly to serve the purpose of Communists in this country and in Russia."<sup>79</sup> The next day, the newspaper statehouse correspondent's coverage of the governors' conference in Sea Island made the front page with a story that five Southern governors would be meeting with Eisenhower and Faubus "in an effort to bring about the early removal of federal troops from Little Rock."<sup>80</sup>

The newspaper's twenty-two editorials on this subject carried the same basic themes—states' rights, federal unconstitutional overreach, applause for Faubus, red-baiting, victimization of the South and its press—as the commentary of other Southern newspapers. Its first editorial on the subject, September 4, framed Faubus' decision to post troops at the high school as intended to keep the peace in commenting that the federal government, if not bluffing, "will meet force with force. If it is bluffing, Gov. Orval Faubus will have shown the way for other Southern states to protect their schools from racial mixing and their people from disorder and possible bloodshed."<sup>81</sup> The next day, its editorial bewailed that "the full measure of human agony is yet to be wrung from the drama of forced integration of races in the South." As metaphor for this agony, the editorial described the tears falling from the eyes of "a Negro girl in Greensboro as she started to her homeroom"—an example of the "tragedy" visited upon "the colored pupils."<sup>82</sup> The newspaper argued in a September 7 editorial that Faubus was acting on behalf of the federal and state Constitutions and "is just as honest, just as patriotic and just as determined to do his duty as President Eisenhower," and it jabbed the NAACP as "dismayed by the resistance in Arkansas, a state where 'voluntary integration' already had occurred in three communities."<sup>83</sup>

The newspaper's September 9 editorial adopted a more militant tone, arguing that something's "got to give in Little Rock" and that the crisis there "could be a turning point in American history. It indicates that the decisions confronting Southerners in the near future will be tougher than any they have yet had to make. It's easy to talk resistance to attacks on one's rights; it's very difficult to resist if it means fines or imprisonment or loss of employment." But, the editorial concluded, in a tone suggesting the possibility of confrontation, "Southerners should ask themselves whether they are willing to go all the way and do whatever is necessary to defend their rights."<sup>84</sup>

On September 10, *The News and Courier* engaged in a bit of journalistic jousting with one of its in-state rivals, *The Charlotte Observer*, by quarreling editorially over the *Observer's* suggestion that Faubus "may be emotionally and mentally upset by the situation in which he finds himself." Mental illness, *The News and Courier* argued, "is a favorite expression used by integrationists to describe people who want to separate the races. The *Observer's* special writer at Little Rock is a member of the staff of the Detroit Free Press, another link in the Knight chain that owns the Charlotte newspaper." Pointing out that another Knight newspaper had editorially attacked Faubus, the Charleston newspaper argued that nothing "will stand in the way of the integrationists in their mania to force mixture of white and colored races. The suggestion of 'mental sickness' implies readiness to lock up opponents."<sup>85</sup> Thus did this newspaper visit a common theme during the Civil War era and the burgeoning civil rights movement—that the "integrationist" Northern press was victimizing the Old South, in this case using a Northern-affiliated Southern newspaper to engage in journalistic battle over segregation. The newspaper continued its feud with the Northern press, *a la* Civil War-era journalistic warfare, by dubbing the Northern "Paper Curtain"—its pet phrase, playing on the theme of the Soviet Union Iron Curtain—reporters as pawns of the communists. *New York Times* education editor Ben Fine, covering the Little Rock story, "has been writing integration propaganda for years," the newspaper argued in a September 11 editorial. "As a young man, he has confessed, he belonged to The Communist Party." And William Hines, of *The Washington Star*, "was one of a panel of newspaper men who quizzed Gov. Faubus last Sunday night on a TV program. We have heard many listeners criticize his aggressive and hostile manner."<sup>86</sup> So this newspaper, which had some difficulty with negative innuendo concerning Faubus, had no qualms about using the same sort of technique to smear reporters of the Northern press.

In its front-page editorial of September 15, *The News and Courier* commended Faubus for his stand on "high, firm ground when he met with President Eisenhower to discuss the position he took at Little Rock." Responding to the



governor's confidence in the federal judiciary, the newspaper argued that it did not share the governor's trust in the courts. "Federal judges, unlike presidents, are not answerable to the people."<sup>87</sup> Following the governor's announced withdrawal of the National Guard, the newspaper commended Faubus for his strong stance that set an example for other Southern leaders. A few days later, the newspaper departed from the hard-line states'-rights arguments of most of its editorials to this point to attack African-American entertainers and athletes in a personification frame—Louis Armstrong, Eartha Kitt, Jackie Robinson and Nat King Cole, all of whom had spoken out on the integration subject—to suggest that President Eisenhower had been put on notice "that the 'civil rights' bloc expects him to keep on delivering the goods."<sup>88</sup> And when the president did "deliver the goods" by federalizing the guard, that decision signaled "the death of the American Republic as we have known it" should the practice "become general in the South. . . . The first act of a dictator is to use armed forces to suppress opposition from the people." If the South "again becomes an occupied country, as it was for 10 years after the Civil War," the newspaper argued, "the U.S. government will have its hands full. Repercussions may affect foreign policy as well as domestic tranquility."<sup>89</sup>

The *Chronicle's* coverage of Little Rock for its Houston readers relied, with a few exceptions, almost completely on wire service reports of information already presented here—with a few differences. For example, the newspaper's initial report of Faubus calling in the troops had a second-day lead on it, reporting that the U.S. attorney general began on September 3 a study of the school integration ills at Little Rock shortly after the governor had called out the National Guard troops. The rest of the information in this story was essentially the same. On September 5, the newspaper published a front-page AP story containing information found in only one other Southern newspaper—that Faubus alleged that federal agents "are considering his arrest for balking integration" at Central High School, "but this was promptly denied by the White House" and no further information on this allegation surfaced.<sup>90</sup> The remainder of this story dealt with the National Guard preventing a *New York Times* reporter from interviewing crowd members, as reported above. Beneath the Little Rock story, the newspaper published the AP report that a federal judge had ordered integration to begin in Dallas public schools at the beginning of January—again, as reported above. Also on the front page, *The Houston Chronicle* published a roundup of one- to two-sentence briefs about the South's "integration troubles" elsewhere.

The newspaper offered a local angle on an inside page, where a reporter with the Austin bureau penned an analysis of what the integration order in Dallas portended for Texas. The order, wrote E. L. Wall, "threatens Texas with a crisis similar to the one Arkansas is undergoing in Little Rock. Dallas school authorities are in

a crossfire between federal court and state law. If they obey the order to integrate they forfeit \$6,000,000 a year in state financial aid and make school board members liable to fines of \$100 to \$1,000. The district also would lose accreditation under terms of the law enacted by the 55th Legislature (House Bill 65) which forbids abolition of the dual system unless approved at an election called on petition of 20 per cent of the voters.<sup>91</sup>

On September 9 *The Houston Chronicle* combined a significant civil rights story with the Little Rock coverage, an AP report that the president had signed “the history-making civil rights bill empowering the federal government to enforce the right to vote with court injunctions. The President put his signature to the bill—the first such legislation in 80 years—at his desk at his vacation headquarters here” in Newport, R. I. The “quiet signing” the story noted, “came against the background of the tense school integration crisis at Little Rock, Ark. However, the civil rights measure is primarily a right-to-vote measure which has no direct bearing on that crisis.”<sup>92</sup> While true that the civil rights bill was separate from the education crisis that was the subject of the Southern newspapers’ race-issue focus at that time, the Houston newspaper’s gatekeepers nonetheless wisely viewed these two separate issues as one and the same in the larger issue of civil rights and race relations in the South—especially in the context of federal authority exerted over states not only in matters of education but also in elections. The other Southern newspapers analyzed here downplayed this important story. On an inside page September 9, the newspaper published an AP story reporting remarks from Adlai Stevenson, a Democrat twice defeated by Eisenhower in presidential elections, that the Little Rock situation “‘has supplied grist for the Communist propaganda mill. ... My friend Gov. Faubus’ action’ will have a ‘serious and sad impact’ on the colored nations of the world,” the former Illinois governor said on a televised panel news program.<sup>93</sup>

The newspaper on September 11 published at the top of its front page information, reported by the INS (International News Service) and not previously reported elsewhere, that the FBI in a 501-page report had “found no substantial indication of possible violence if Little Rock’s Central High School had admitted Negroes as scheduled”—a sharp refutation of Governor Faubus’ claimed reason for the stationing of troops at the school, to maintain peace. Officials said the report “clearly establishes that Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus’ professed fear of violence had no ‘solid factual basis’ and he was not justified in calling out National Guard troops to prevent the Negro students from entering the school,” the INS reported.<sup>94</sup> Note here the professed reason in this story for the calling out of the troops—to prevent school entry by students of color.

Along with front-page coverage of the president’s ordering of troops into Little Rock, the INS put together a story based on interviews with four of the



African-American students who had withdrawn from Central High School as a result of the integration riot. "If the adults left the children alone, integration would be accomplished peacefully and without hatred and violence," one student told the news service. "The students said they were neither harmed nor threatened while at the school—but admitted they would not return until mob rule in Little Rock was ended. 'The adults are acting more like children than the children are,' insisted Thelma Mothershed, 16, an 11th grade pupil. 'It's a small minority of parents that are causing all this trouble. Most of the kids are friendly.'"<sup>95</sup>

In its one editorial on this subject, *The Houston Chronicle* accused the president of being softer on a communist nation than on his own fellow citizens in Arkansas, arguing that Eisenhower's lack of restraint "can only result in widespread criticism. ... In Little Rock he seemed unwilling to spend a little time trying to persuade the people to accept the federal court decision before smashing down with the mailed fist," while with Russia, "he has been willing to negotiate endlessly and compromise on every issue." The Little Rock mayor, the editorial asserted, could have preserved order with the city police. "If Eisenhower had shown a little more patience and made more of an effort to persuade rather than force compliance, he would have made much more progress, not only in Little Rock, but throughout the states with integration problems." Joining its Southern brethren in adopting an historic frame, the editorial concluded that the "whole picture is reminiscent of the Reconstruction era which left deep scars on the South."<sup>96</sup> So, for this newspaper, states' rights or federal overreach was less a problem than what this editorial board viewed as the chief problem: sloppy tactics. Overall, this newspaper demonstrated more thorough, balanced coverage on its news pages than the more reactionary, often paranoid framing of the other Southern newspapers in this analysis. But it differed from them another significant way; it did not offer daily, blow-by-blow accounts of the developing story in Little Rock, with a noticeable coverage gap between the initial reporting of Faubus ordering guardsmen to prevent African-American student enrollment and the dispatching of federal troops to Little Rock by the president.

The Northern papers, though, did provide consistent coverage of the South's integration crisis—making clear along the way that this was a distinctly Southern problem. This analysis of the Northern press coverage will not repeat information already reported above but will note where and how stories were played along with deviations from the standard reportage previously analyzed.

In Detroit, the *Free Press* recognized from the start a story in the making with national implications. Its editors got out ahead of the impending Southern crises by sending a staff writer to Dixie to interview African-Americans, Anglos, school officials and politicians and investigate the progress of public school integration in

the South. A three-part series publishing his findings began on September 1, the “fourth September since the Supreme Court outlawed school segregation.” Little suspecting that Little Rock would provide the first national school integration laboratory in such an explosive manner, the reporter’s first installment concentrated on Tennessee’s Nashville, where “racist agitator” John Kasper was organizing a parents’ boycott of first-grade classes targeted for first-time integration; on Alabama, where the student placement ploy was being tried; and on North Carolina, where the grand wizard of the state’s Ku Klux Klan stated that “we will not stand for integration voluntarily or any other way. If the Pearsall Plan (North Carolina’s pupil placement law) doesn’t block integration, the Smith and Wesson will.”<sup>97</sup> In the second installment, the reporter, James M. Haswell, cited Little Rock as one of five cities where school integration was scheduled to begin in the fall. “This will be token integration to be sure. It will involve only 13 Negro first graders in Nashville, 12 Negro children in all North Carolina, and not many more in Arkansas.”<sup>98</sup> The city was not mentioned again in this story or in part three, which focused on Atlanta. One curious aspect of this series, which was done with considerable investment in resources and time, was the placement of these three stories on inside pages.

When the story broke in Little Rock, the newspaper relied on The Associated Press for its September 4 front-page story. But the newspaper took the extraordinary step that same day of offering a front-page analysis by a staff writer who, an editor’s note pointed out, had reported on public schools in Arkansas as that state’s correspondent for the Southern Educational Reporting Service before joining the Detroit newspaper less than a month before. The reporter, Tom Davis, wondered if Faubus was trolling for votes in calling out the guard. “His friends say he is not a segregationist at heart. He grew up in the Arkansas hill country where the people are less prejudiced against Negroes than they are in the Arkansas flatlands. But he thinks that most Arkansans are against integration. Before seeking a second term in the 1956 primary, he got a survey that ‘85 percent of Arkansas people are against immediate and total integration.’” Davis noted that Faubus had refused to intervene when violence occurred at a small school district in 1955, dismissing it as a “local problem. Several weeks ago, the White Citizens Council of Little Rock asked Faubus what he was going to do about Little Rock. Faubus delayed his answer and the word was that he was stalling until after school opened, probably at the request of Little Rock school officials.”<sup>99</sup> Also on this day, the newspaper published a full page of wire photos on the strife in Little Rock. The next day it published another picture page—this one contrasting the dismal scene in Little Rock with a happier depiction of students, including children of color, enjoying their first day of school in Detroit—to accompany its front-page wire coverage of Little Rock. On September 6, complementing

its continued front-page Associated Press wire coverage, the newspaper published a page-twelve analysis by *New York Times* writer Anthony Lewis questioning if Faubus would be willing to force a constitutional and military test of the federal government's power to intervene in local school affairs, and on page sixteen a *Free Press* staff writer reported that the National Urban League had closed its convention by asking the president to intervene in Little Rock. Davis was on the scene in Little Rock to provide sidebar coverage to the wire service stories. His page-four dispatch reported that Faubus "is acting strangely, to say the least. Nothing in his past has indicated he was the kind of man who would pit himself and his State against the Federal Government. It's true that he has many of the rugged individualist qualities found so often in the mountain country of Northwest Arkansas, where he was born. But in the past, he has not been a states-rights Democrat. On the contrary, he's been aligned with the more liberal faction of the Arkansas Democrats and against the conservative states' righters."<sup>100</sup>

Davis followed up with a page-one analysis the next day questioning whether Faubus was a fool or a political hero. A Baptist segregationist told the reporter that Faubus had a tidal wave in favor of his stance. "Of course the Negroes and the newspapers are against him. But the people are for him. If the Governor wins, and I think he will, it will put steel in the backbone of the other governors of the South." But a Little Rock barber told Davis that he thought Faubus had "flipped. He ought to know he can't get away with this stuff. But I'm afraid Ike hasn't got the guts to slap him down."<sup>101</sup> On the newspaper's Sunday, September 8 front page, Davis—in the piece referred to above in an editorial published in *The News and Courier* of Charleston that cited a Knight newspaper chain reporter—wrote that many in Little Rock "believe that Arkansas' Gov. Orval Faubus may be emotionally and mentally upset by the situation in which he finds himself. Since he retired to the Governor's Mansion Wednesday afternoon, he hasn't made a public appearance. Even his closest friends have been repulsed by him." If the governor was upset, Davis wrote, "he's not without company since Arkansas decided to defy the Federal Government. Many of the principals in the great conflict here are showing the physical and mental strains of the past hectic week."<sup>102</sup> The next day, Davis reported on page one about a nationwide television appearance Sunday night by the governor apparently out of hiding, but showing "the physical strain he has been under for a week. Mentally, he appeared a little less sharp and agile than usual. But no more than could be explained by the physical strain." The diagnosis noted that the governor "did much to counteract reports from those who know him closely that he might be undergoing an emotional and mental upset."<sup>103</sup>

On September 10, Davis reported on a personal interview he'd conducted with Faubus, in which the governor expressed hope for a compromise or armistice

“this week. . . . Obviously the situation can’t continue as it is now while that legal action is going on”<sup>104</sup>—this, in conjunction with Judge Davies ordering injunction proceedings against the governor, as reported in the main front-page wire story. On September 11, the newspaper reported in a front-page wire story that John Kasper, the Nashville “racist agitator” quoted in the newspaper’s three-part series previewing the fall school year’s looming integration battles, was one of twenty-seven persons arrested “hours after a blockbuster dynamite blast wrecked a newly integrated grammar school” in Nashville<sup>105</sup>—a story that accompanied the AP’s running page-one AP coverage of the Little Rock story. Davis, relegated to an inside page, observed in an analysis that Faubus “still rules the roost. . . . He has shown the nation it’s no minor point that he has raised. Apparently he has convinced President Eisenhower and the Justice Department that Faubus may have some legal justification for what he’s done.” The federal judge, Davis observed, “by delaying 10 days a hearing on the Federal petition for a temporary injunction, has indicated that the Faubus case is not one which can be settled quickly. He could have ordered an immediate hearing or issued a restraining order.” The governor, he wrote, “will remain in charge of the situation for weeks and maybe months.”<sup>106</sup> On page eleven, syndicated columnist Thomas L. Stokes in an op-ed column penned a sympathetic nod to the federal judge, Davies, whom he lauded as a man of courage in his challenge of Faubus. “He spoke out to break the great pall of silence that hangs over other southern public officials, including members of Congress and southern leaders of congress,” Stokes wrote. “Until an Abraham Lincoln comes along to give national leadership in this civil rights crisis—and none appears now—we must depend on the brave figures whom we know we can count upon to rise out of the rank and file of democracy here and there to meet the crimes as they arise locally.”<sup>107</sup>

Davis was back on the front page the following day, this time reporting the newspaper’s main story, that Faubus and the president would hold a “dramatic face-to-face meeting Friday or Saturday in an effort to compromise on militia-enforced segregation at Central High School.” A condition of the negotiations, Davis wrote, “is that Faubus do all he can to calm down the situation.”<sup>108</sup> The front-page wire story on this day dealt with the follow-up to the bombing in Nashville, where police roadblocks “protected integrated schools in Nashville from outside interference Wednesday.”<sup>109</sup> Meanwhile, conservative syndicated columnist David Lawrence responded to letters from readers wondering whether “in view of his criticism of the Supreme Court’s decision of 1954, he himself [referring to himself as this correspondent] believes in segregation in the schools.” His response, couched in states’-rights reasoning, was that “questions of education and community life are matters for the states and local governments—not for the

Federal Government in far-off Washington—to regulate.”<sup>110</sup> And that, judging by the Southern states opposed to segregation, should answer that. An interesting aspect of this day’s editorial page was the placement of a cartoon, directly to the left of Lawrence’s column, depicting a huge boulder, labeled “Racial Intolerance,” crushing an Uncle Sam figure holding a scrap of paper labeled “School Integration,” with the question posed above, “Little Rock?” A brief story on page two of the newspaper’s September 17 edition revealed a national political rift over what Democrats, along with some Southern anti-segregationists, viewed as the Republican president’s hesitant response to Faubus. This AP story reported Eisenhower administration anger over a statement by “15 members of the 24-member Democratic Advisory Council that the President ‘has lost an opportunity to exert leadership in behalf of law and order.’” These Democrats, said an Eisenhower spokesman, were politicizing the issue. The president, he said, “is concerned with solutions, not with political speeches. I think it would be funny if it were not so pathetic.”<sup>111</sup>

The next day, a prominent African-American Dixieland entertainer stepped into the fray, buttressing the Democrats’ criticism in a story published by this newspaper that hadn’t been heavily reported in the Southern press. “Trumpet player Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong said he’s given up plans for a Government-sponsored trip to Russia because ‘the way they are treating my people in the South, the Government can go to hell.’” The president, Armstrong claimed in joining the reported criticism of Eisenhower from some in the Democratic Party, has “no guts.” Faubus, the jazzman said, is an “uneducated plow boy” whose use of National Guard troops “to prevent school integration in Little Rock was ‘a publicity stunt led by the greatest of all publicity hounds.’ He said such things have had a bad effect on relations with other countries.”<sup>112</sup> Four days later, Armstrong’s manager said in a story on page twenty-four that the trumpeter’s criticism “was made in a moment of exasperation and that Armstrong ‘loves Eisenhower and feels he is doing all he can’ in the Little Rock school crisis.” Armstrong, though, discounted his manager’s statement, calling him a “flunkie and a menace to the colored people.” He said no one speaks for Satchmo except Satchmo.”<sup>113</sup> Front-page wire coverage continued through the president’s September 23 warning to Faubus that he would use force if necessary, but on September 24, the newspaper on page sixteen offered a feature-story sidebar dealing with the atmosphere at the Little Rock high school that was the center of the crisis. The story painted a picture of contrasting scenes inside and outside the school, where the students of color had managed to enter until being forced out. “OUTSIDE: the bell rang, and, as if on signal, someone shouted: ‘the niggers are coming.’ The crowd raced down a side street and chased four Negro men. One man was ridden down from behind, pummeled and kicked ...

police did not seem eager to jump in the melee and it lasted for a block. **INSIDE:** Nine Negroes walked swiftly through the side entrance and then drew a crowd of students as they strolled to the main office to register ... Some white students disrupted classes with their yells when they spotted the Negroes. ‘They shouted,’ said Melba [Pattillo, an African-American student]. ‘Well, they shouted words I can’t repeat ...’ Other scenes, though, offered a different picture. “**INSIDE:** A small, shy 16-year-old Negro student, Thelma Mothershed, walked into a biology class and sat in her assigned seat in a back row. ‘A white girl smiled at me,’ Thelma said. ‘I didn’t have any trouble.’”<sup>114</sup>

The newspaper on September 25 carried on its front page a wire story summarizing the president’s televised speech to the nation explaining his decision to send federal troops to Little Rock, decrying the mob rule that he said “menaced the very safety of the United States and the free world.” The enemies of the United States are “gloating,” he said.<sup>115</sup> On an inside page, a story compiled from wire services summarized national reaction to the president’s decision that was a microcosm of the racial, cultural rift in the nation. The Texas governor wired the White House telling the president his order sending in the troops was “reminiscent of the tactics of Reconstruction Days” and asking Eisenhower “if he intends to ‘occupy with troops every non-integrated school in the South. If so, your action will destroy the public school system and good will among the races which most of us in the South have labored so hard to preserve.” Michigan’s senior senator, Republican Charles Potter, though, lauded the president’s decision as one that “means effective enforcement of constitutional rights of all citizens.” In Georgia, Democratic Senator and ardent segregationist Herman Talmadge raised the communist specter: “We still mourn the destruction [of] the sovereignty of Hungary by Russian tanks and troops in the streets of Budapest. We are now threatened with the spectacle of the President of the United States using tanks and troops in the streets of Little Rock to destroy the sovereignty of the State of Arkansas.” The governors of Tennessee and North Carolina suggested a committee of Southern governors be formed to meet with the president.<sup>116</sup>

The *Free Press* applauded the president’s decision in editorials published September 25 and 26—two of several editorials on the Little Rock crisis published by the newspaper during the course of the story’s narrative. Citing “ample precedent” for the president’s action, as far back as George Washington’s use of federal troops during the Whiskey Rebellion “to enforce revenue laws in Pennsylvania,” the September 26 editorial argued that some Southern politicians “fail to put President Eisenhower’s action in its proper perspective. They lost no time in resorting to sheer demagoguery with howls about a return to Reconstruction, dictatorship, and the employment of bayonets to oppress the people of the South. That is utter rot. The



issue is and has been the observance of Federal law.”<sup>117</sup> Early on, the newspaper dismissed the Arkansas governor’s deployment of troops “to bar Negro students from the school” as “nothing more than a grandstand play. . . . From all accounts what happened in Little Rock was a manufactured incident primarily intended for political purposes. The school board of that city had adopted a policy of gradual integration which was to start with the beginning of the current term.”<sup>118</sup> The next day, the newspaper decried the demagoguery of Faubus as evoking “shades of Huey Long of Louisiana. . . . If it wasn’t for the ridiculousness of the set of circumstances that Gov. Faubus has set in motion, we might conclude that he is a badly frightened man . . . so frightened that he felt it necessary to call out the National Guard, superseding the Little Rock police, to prevent nine Negro kids from entering a high school under a policy of integration approved by the school board and, assumedly, by a majority of Little Rock’s citizens.”<sup>119</sup> In response to National Guardsmen threatening newspaper reporters trying to interview students and others outside the high school, the newspaper questioned the use of “a military organization which is employed to aid local officials to defy the Federal laws and Constitution.” The guard, the newspaper argued, as “a branch of the armed forces of the United States . . . overstepped the bounds when it threatened reporters, following their lawful pursuits, with arrest.”<sup>120</sup> Of the coming meeting of Eisenhower and Faubus, the newspaper warned of a “diplomacy fraught with considerable hazard” for the president, observing that the prestige of the federal government and “the cause of integration”—which this newspaper clearly supported—could be damaged “should Mr. Faubus be able to swagger back to Arkansas in the role of the conquering hero.”<sup>121</sup> And following that meeting, the newspaper wondered if perhaps the president had weakened his hand if he allowed the governor “to back down gracefully.” If no agreement were reached, “we’re afraid the President may regret that he didn’t apply strong and unyielding pressures where circumstances certainly invited them.”<sup>122</sup> As for a majority of the members of the Democratic Advisory Council’s criticism of the president’s handling of the crisis, the newspaper bought into the White House’s characterization of this as politicizing the crisis and dismissed it as “comical . . . The spectacle of Democrats taking a Republican President severely to task for not swiftly and forcibly giving a Democratic governor his comeuppance strikes us as something more for laughter than tears.”<sup>123</sup>

*The New York Times*, also recognizing a big story in the making, differed from its counterparts in the press by devoting staff resources, reporters stationed in the nation’s capital as well as in the South, almost entirely to its coverage. Editors assigned the newspaper’s education writer, Benjamin Fine—referenced above as a reporter threatened by the guard, and as an alleged communist sympathizer in a Charleston *News and Courier* editorial—to provide the front-page September 3



story, datelined Little Rock, reporting on the deployment of militiamen and state police to Central High School. The next day, Fine reported on the previous night's order from Judge Davies for immediate implementation of integration, while staff writer Anthony Lewis provided a companion story detailing the Justice Department's monitoring of the Little Rock dispute, but no plans were afoot for federal intervention as yet. As has been the case in previous press coverage evaluation in this chapter, the following analysis will focus on reportage and commentary that offers new, or different, information. It must be noted at the outset of this particular analysis that this newspaper devoted by far the most space, in terms of daily newspaper inches, to the Little Rock story on those days that it covered the story—including extensive analysis along with routinely publishing in full the official statements of the president and other officials, along with related documents. But there were some gaps in its reportage following the initial, climactic events of the president sending in the troops. In sum, this newspaper demonstrated an extremely strong commitment to set a national journalistic agenda on the integration/segregation conflict.

The *Times* shared with its Northern press colleagues language that framed the governor's deployment of National Guard troops as barring pupils of color from school entry, rather than as a keep-the-peace effort. The first three sentences of September 5's page-one story, read: "The state militia barred nine Negro students from the white high school here today. Fully armed, the troops kept the Negroes from the school grounds while an angry crowd of 400 white men and women jeered, booed and shouted, 'go home, niggers.' Several hundred militiamen, with guns slung over their shoulders carrying gas masks and billy clubs, surrounded the school."<sup>124</sup> Two other front-page stories, both staff-written, rounded up anti-integration efforts that came close to riot in North Carolina and, in a report out of Washington, D. C., details of the Justice Department's opening of an investigation into the Little Rock circumstances. The September 6 front-page coverage included a report regarding the turning away of African-American pupils from white public schools in Arlington, Virginia, where the state's pupil placement act was in effect, and a federal judge ordering Dallas to begin integration at the next, midwinter, term. Inside, the newspaper published a roundup of varying editorial comment from Southern newspapers. On September 7, the newspaper, in keeping with its reputation as the nation's newspaper of record, included among its front-page school integration stories a report that a federal court had found unconstitutional a new, voluntary school segregation law in Tennessee. On page seven the newspaper reported that the official newspaper of the Vatican, "in one of its rare comments on the situation in the United States, dealt severely today with racial discrimination," which, *L'Osservatore Romano* argued in its editorial, "cannot be

excused from any point of view. Anyone who professes racist principles should be deprived of all his political rights and be forbidden either to vote or to stand for any office 'just as is done for the most serious crimes,' it added." Newspapers worldwide, the dispatch reported in continuing this foreign-image frame, "are giving space to reports of school integration troubles in the United States, according to The Associated Press."<sup>125</sup> On the same inside page, the newspaper published a report that legal action was in the works on behalf of the nine African-American children rejected by white schools in Arlington County, Virginia.

In its Sunday, September 8 coverage, the newspaper included among its front-page stories a Southern folkways-themed dispatch from its Southern correspondent, John N. Popham, observing that despite the desegregation controversy, it was business-as-usual in Little Rock. "Main Street is bustling with white and Negro shoppers, the interrelationships of trade service are harmonious. Passengers board the city's desegregated buses and both races order freely at the several desegregated lunch counters in the downtown section."<sup>126</sup> The cover of the newspaper's influential *The News of the Week in Review* commentary section on this day was dominated by day-by-day summaries of the week's events in Little Rock, along with an in-depth description of Little Rock's voluntary desegregation plan and another roundup of the varied editorial responses of Southern newspapers. The newspaper on September 9 published, on an inside page, a Popham analysis of the Little Rock situation as an "unexpectedly" first "major test" of school desegregation. "This is not just a situation peculiar to Arkansas," Popham wrote. "This is a broad regional struggle of opposing philosophies on how to respond to the historic Supreme Court decision in 1954 outlawing school segregation. Whether Arkansas was chosen by design as a battle ground is not yet known. High-placed politicians believe it was no accidental selection."<sup>127</sup>

The next Sunday, in its *The News Of The Week In Review* commentary section, the newspaper called on Popham for more analysis—a lengthy explanation of the social and political forces behind the Little Rock crisis. The public school problem in Little Rock, Popham wrote in a Southern folkways frame, "as in other urban areas beginning integration, is essentially one of balancing forces of conflicting views, of achieving an equilibrium among people with confused emotions on many subjects affecting their daily lives." The analysis included a look at Little Rock's history and demographic make-up, background on the school district's arrival at its gradual integration plan, providing a chronological foundation leading up to Faubus's defiant stand that dealt a "sledgehammer blow" to the "'image' of acceptance and temporarily wrecked the community 'balance.'"<sup>128</sup> A companion analysis, a constitutionally-themed piece by staff writer Anthony Lewis, observed that the "conflict of state and Federal power that has erupted" in Little Rock "has

antecedents as old as the Constitution. The very form of government fashioned by the Constitutional Convention in 1787—a federal system—made conflict inevitable. It had to come as boundaries were worked out in practice between the authority of the new national government and that left to the states.”<sup>129</sup> Sandwiched between these two commentaries was a roundup of desegregation progress—as opposed to segregation progress that might be featured in some Southern newspapers—as reported from seventeen states. And packaged above all of this were three editorial cartoons reprinted from Southern newspapers. One, from *The Jackson Daily News*, depicted a man, labeled “School Integration,” falling flat on his face after tripping on a small stone labeled “Little Rock.” Another, from the more moderate *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, showed a blood-drenched arm and fist, labeled “Mob Rule,” holding a sign with the letters “DIS” in front of the words “Integration of Schools.” The third, from *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, pictured men carrying briefcases labeled with the names of Southern cities, lolling about on courthouse steps, hesitant or refusing to enter the courthouse door, which was labeled “Desegregated Schools,” with an Uncle Sam figure as doorkeeper.<sup>130</sup>

On September 16, the newspaper published a laudatory profile of a Southern newspaperman, dubbed a “voice of the new South” in the headline—Harry Scott Ashmore, editor of *The Arkansas Gazette* and editor of a book-length study on “The Negro and the Schools,” financed by the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation and discussed in the Introduction section and first chapter of this book. This piece serves as another example of the North-South press debate of the civil rights era. As Southern newspapers routinely criticized the Northern papers, accusing these members of the “Paper Curtain” of agitating the Southern racial strife, of being “integrationists” and communist sympathizers, the *Times* here was taking an opposite tack to praise a member of the Southern press for his moderation. “The 41-year-old executive editor of *The Arkansas Gazette* has shown that a responsible press can help promote calm and tolerance in times of bitter antagonisms,” the profile asserted. “He has become a spokesman for those who want to prevent violence and who want to end the Federal-state clash that has disrupted this community”<sup>131</sup>—praise that would not earn Ashmore many friends among the segregationist newspaper editors of the South but that, at the same time, pointed to an ideological rift among Southern newspapers that often pitted editors such as Ashmore and Ralph McGill of *The Atlanta Constitution* against their more strident colleagues at the Jackson, Richmond, Birmingham and Charleston newspapers. Also, while Southern newspapers questioned why the Northern press had not publicized incidents of racial violence or incidents in Northern cities, the *Times* on September 20 published a front-page story reporting that “100 Negro and Puerto Rican parents picketed near City Hall yesterday morning to protest conditions in schools their children attend” in New York City.<sup>132</sup>

On Sunday, September 22, in the newspaper's *The News Of The Week In Review* section, Arthur Krock offered an analysis suggesting that the federal-state clash in Little Rock was a harbinger. "The legal collision of asserted powers between the Federal judiciary and the Governor of Arkansas makes it apparent that this can be the overture of the most serious Federal-State controversy since 1861," Krock wrote. Commenting on the decision by Faubus to withdraw the troops he had posted at Central High School, the columnist suggested—wrongly—that the crisis in Little Rock had been defused. Nonetheless, he concluded, the "outcome in Arkansas may create a legal precedent for enforcement. But that may be its principal contribution to a continuing and alarming controversy."<sup>133</sup>

This newspaper more than matched its Southern counterparts in number and volume of editorial response to the Little Rock crisis, publishing sixteen editorials up to the day following the federalizing of the troops by Eisenhower, beginning with its initial editorial, invoking a Southern folkways theme, on September 6, commenting on the difficulty of changing "long-established folkways. Most sensible Northerners realize this and, as we firmly believe, most public-spirited Southerners of both races are doing their best to make the transition possible and peaceable." What the U.S. Supreme Court cannot order, the editorial concluded in shifting to a constitutional frame, is that "people who don't like each other of whatever race they may be, to be on calling terms. What the court did order, and the ideal toward which we must move, is equal opportunity under law. In the end we believe the heaviest battalions will be those unarmed persons and forces that move toward justice."<sup>134</sup> Avoiding the states'-rights and constitutional issue, the newspaper on September 8 focused the argument elsewhere, invoking a personification frame: "It is about children. It has to do with the coming generation on whose intelligence and information a large part of our future welfare at home and abroad may depend. ... this is not primarily a constitutional question with which we are dealing." Rather, it is a "human question."<sup>135</sup> But the newspaper, in a display of national agenda-setting, adopted the theme of states'-rights versus federalism, while raising that of the country's foreign image, in its September 11 editorial. "The country and the world are now witness to an extraordinary test of strength between the Governor of one of the sovereign states and the Government of the United States. There can be only one outcome, and it is as inevitable as the Union is indestructible," read the editorial's lead paragraph. The editorial concluded by calling on the president to "express himself more clearly on this subject than he has yet seen fit to do. It is not enough to issue statements through his press secretary. The American people are confronted by a confused and potentially dangerous situation."<sup>136</sup> This is a frame—critical of presidential restraint—this newspaper would evoke again, repeatedly. Following the president's meeting with Faubus, the newspaper argued that "as the president should have made more clearly evident

before Governor Faubus got out of hand, it is manifestly the meaning of our Constitution and the intent of our people that progress toward this degree of justice should be made. We cannot let ourselves be intimidated by the violent, hateful and stupid outbursts that have occurred in Little Rock and in one or two other places. We must stand by the children of all America and of all races in their desire for an education.”<sup>137</sup> The newspaper called the president’s use of federal troops in Little Rock “the sad but logical sequel to his clear warning of the previous day that he would use ‘the full power’ of the Federal Government if he had to. . . . The wounds resulting from a prolongation of Federal military force would add to those already suffered as a result of the shrieking hatreds of the extremists, the incredible folly of Governor Faubus, and the disappointing slowness of the President himself to assume the strong attitude of leadership that he has finally shown in the nick of time.”<sup>138</sup>

This newspaper closed out its editorial commentary on Little Rock with a frame that became a prominent one during this North–South journalistic debate: the image of the United States abroad. Asking what is the “true face of democracy in America,” the newspaper answered that a newspaper in Moscow “says that it is disclosed in Little Rock, where the brutal forces of racism have held the town in turmoil for three weeks. The Communist press throughout the world, and even some of the non-Communist press, has seized upon the disgraceful incidents in Arkansas to defame and ridicule the image of American democracy. Our profession of freedom and equality are a sham and a mockery, they say, and they flaunt pictures of savage attacks by white bullies on defenseless Negroes to prove it.” But the real face of American democracy, the newspaper argued, was in “Louisville and Nashville, in Baltimore and Washington, in hundreds of Southern communities from Delaware to Texas, [where] Negro students are peacefully attending schools that until a few days or a few months or a few years ago had been exclusively reserved for whites.” These are the people, the editorial concluded, “who will have to reassert themselves in Little Rock and throughout the South to restore the good name of democratic government which a howling hysterical, ignorant rabble has done its best to destroy.”<sup>139</sup> This concluding editorial, then, was couched in a frame of ideology—the most powerful influence on newspaper content, and the agenda, along with foreign image, that this newspaper, in the end, deemed most important.

In Chicago, the *Daily Tribune* relied on wire reports for its initial coverage of the Little Rock standoff, but it sent a staff writer to Little Rock, who stayed in the city providing dispatches on a daily basis. The *Tribune* placed the story on its front page every day from September 3 through the end of the crisis with the dispatch of federal troops by the president. None of these stories differed from the coverage of the other major newspapers and wire services, but this newspaper’s ownership

and top editors clearly saw this is a major story, and they claimed an agenda-setting role by stationing a reporter in Little Rock, by the story's prominent placement, and by the large volume of space and number of stories—and photo packages, which were also extensive—devoted to it. The newspaper published numerous wire stories, but whereas other newspapers in this analysis relied on wire services for their primary coverage and used staff writers to provide ancillary coverage, this newspaper's approach was opposite. Its staff writers—including correspondents in Washington, D. C. and Newport, Rhode Island—provided the primary stories, while wire services were used for ancillary reportage, such as the Nashville school bombing, the governors' conference in Georgia and school integration stories in other locales.

The newspaper published nine editorials on the Little Rock crisis. The first, published on September 4, questioned the plausibility of the explanation by Governor Faubus for deploying the National Guard—to keep the peace. “Why didn't Mr. Faubus stop the sale of knives and guns if he thought it was imperiling the peace? And why, if he had reason to fear violence at the school, didn't he instruct his national guard officers to protect the Negroes whose right to go to the school has been established beyond any question? ... We await with interest the cries from southern senators expressing their alarm over Gov. Faubus' ruthless use of the military, but we are not holding our breath until we hear them.”<sup>140</sup> On September 11, a *Tribune* editorial reported that the Massachusetts governor had proposed appointment of a committee of five governors to “work out a solution of the segregation problem in Arkansas.” Calling the proposal “silly,” the editorial argued “there is nothing to arbitrate. The right of Negro children in every state to go to public school with white children has been declared a constitutional right by the Supreme court of the United States.”<sup>141</sup> Regarding the Democratic Advisory Council's criticism of President Eisenhower's slow response to the crisis, the newspaper asserted that there “is an irreconcilable conflict within the party on this fundamental question” of segregation, pointing out that “nearly all the segregationists are in the Democratic party tho [sic] all Democrats are not segregationists.” The newspaper dismissed this episode as one “in political press agency, which is to say, hypocrisy.”<sup>142</sup> After the president federalized the National Guard and sent in the paratroopers, the newspaper argued that Eisenhower “has done what his oath requires him to do. The nation, north and south, white and Negro, will pray that the lawless minority will not persist in its program of disobedience, for lawlessness is contagious. All men of good will must hope that the false declarations and the partisan-inspired acts of leading politicians have not made a prompt ending of the crisis impossible.” So, this newspaper, for the most part, avoided the major frames of this issue, from states' rights to foreign image, in its editorials, calling the president's response legal and



constitutional, if not moral and right. Hardly a ringing endorsement of desegregation from this Northern, albeit conservative, newspaper.

The initial report of the Little Rock crisis in *The Pittsburgh Press*, placed on page one September 3 beneath a banner headline reporting race fights in Dixie, did not lead with Little Rock. The story, which summarized school woes throughout the South, began with events in Kentucky before referencing Little Rock. “Negro students were stoned in a Kentucky town and the governor of Arkansas called out the National Guard to prevent expected violence as the segregation battle erupted anew today with the opening of schools. Thirteen Negro pupils attempting to enroll at Sturgis, Ky., High School were greeted by a shower of pebbles from a crowd of some 200 white children and adults gathered outside the school.” The United Press reported that catcalls and profanity “also were hurled at the students as they walked into the building” before turning to events in Little Rock.<sup>143</sup> On the jump page, the newspaper carried a companion wire story reporting that Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr. was investigating the use of National Guard troops “to prevent school integration in Little Rock, Ark.”<sup>144</sup> Note the frame in this story—that the troop deployment was to prevent integration, not to keep the peace. The next day’s story, also by the United Press, included elements not contained in the Associated Press accounts detailed earlier in this chapter. This included a reported statement from Arkansas Adjutant General Sherman Clinger that “U.S. marshals will try to escort eight Negro children through the ranks of the guardsmen, who for two days running have stood firm against integration at Little Rock’s Central High School.” The U.S. Justice Department told the wire service “there is no basis for the Arkansas adjutant general’s statement. U.S. Marshal Beale Kidd said he had not received any orders to take the Negroes to school. Other Federal officials in Little Rock said they had not been consulted about such action.” This was the first reference found in this analysis to the possible use of federal law enforcement officials being ordered to the scene, leading to a dramatic observation by the United Press: “For the first time in the South’s fight against desegregation, forces of the State and Federal Government were directly opposed in a situation that threatened open violence.”<sup>145</sup> The next day, the newspaper coverage mirrored that of other reportage elsewhere, except for an inside-page story by a staff writer with the Scripps-Howard News Service penning a profile of Federal Judge Ronald N. Davies, who had received threatening phone calls and angry telegrams “which forced him to cut off his telephone at night so he could get some sleep. ‘Please don’t publish the name of my hotel,’ he asked earnestly. ‘I’m not keeping it a secret. But things are stirred up enough around here as it is.’”<sup>146</sup>

A September 6 front-page story offered insight into the mood of Little Rock, with a Scripps-Howard News Service man-on-the-street feature involving city



residents who, “regardless of how they feel about integration, are appalled by the plight in which their town has been cast by this week’s ruckus over letting Negroes into Central High School. This reporter has yet to find one person—white or Negro—who agreed with Arkansas Gov. Orval E. Faubus that ‘violence’ was imminent if the school board’s plan to start gradual integration was carried out.” The city, these residents felt, “just isn’t that kind of place. It was not cut out to be the Fort Sumter of 1957—which is what Governor Faubus has tried to make of it.”<sup>147</sup> Similarly, the next day the newspaper published a report that the *Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock differed with the governor’s version of events. “Dozens of local reporters and national correspondents worked through the day without verifying the few facts the governor offered to explain why his appraisal was so different from that of our local officials—who have asked for no such action.” The Little Rock newspaper agreed with the Little Rock mayor who said “a great majority of the people of Little rock share my deep resentment at the manner in which the governor has chosen to use this city as a pawn in what clearly is a political design of his own. If any racial trouble does develop the blame rests squarely on the doorstep of the governor’s mansion.” These comments were part of a roundup of response from Southern newspapers—some supportive, some opposed—to the action by Faubus.<sup>148</sup> The Little Rock story remained a primarily page-one menu item, offering the same reportage as the other wire services and staff reports as above, but intermittently over the next several days and through the climax of the racial saga.

Editorially, this newspaper offered a dispassionate commentary in its first reaction to the Little Rock crisis, arguing that the stationing of troops by Faubus when there was “no persuasive evidence” that violence was threatened, “seems, rather, a clumsy maneuver to delay integration with the hope that a court order may be circumvented.” But, the editorial argued in a Southern folkways theme, “something more discerning is necessary than abrupt enforcement of law against bitterly resentful people. ... School integration requires a change in long-established custom in the South, and suspicion of change is common among humans—not just a peculiarity of the South. But eventual accommodation to changing ways and times also is human.”<sup>149</sup> After Eisenhower sent in the federal troops, the newspaper opined that while it might be interesting to point out that the president had “reversed his own viewpoint” or easy to “tear the hide off the ‘demagogic extremists’ on both sides who perpetrated the violence which caused the President to act,” the newspaper instead embraced “the confidence of the President that the citizens of Arkansas will assist in bringing to an immediate end all interference with the law under the Supreme Court decision. ... Now is Arkansas’ opportunity. And, likewise, the nation’s opportunity.” In conclusion the newspaper urged implementation of Little Rock’s own desegregation plan, which “was in

accord with the Supreme Court's conclusion that the states must proceed with all 'deliberate speed.' If it now will permit its own plan, a grass-roots plan, to take effect—without the force of Federal soldiers being imposed—the city, the state and the nation well may reap the benefits."<sup>150</sup>

The Western newspapers followed the generally same pattern as those in the South and North (with the exception of *The New York Times* and *The Detroit Free Press*)—front-page placement for the most part, at least of the primary stories, and heavy reliance on the wire services. The analysis that follows will focus on unique aspects of coverage and on citation of stories or information not yet included in this chapter's analysis.

The story also received front-page placement in *The Seattle Times*; one interesting treatment early in this newspaper's coverage was the placement on the front page of its September 5 edition of the federal court order in Dallas that public schools there must begin integrating after the Christmas holidays, with the Little Rock tidings carried beneath this story on the front page. Two days later, the newspaper carried on an inside page a United Press report asking in its lead just what Faubus was up to before observing that the "47-year-old former plow boy contends that only through his open defiance of the United States government has violence been avoided at a school" in Little Rock. Those who oppose his stand, the wire service reported, "say he has seized an explosive firecracker to blow himself into a campaign for an unprecedented third term as governor."<sup>151</sup> On its September 8 editorial page, the newspaper summarized comment from various regions of the nation, ranging, predictably, from condemnation of Faubus' Little Rock handling by the Northern press to general support, with a few exceptions, in the South—indicating a less-than unified, homogenous segregationist South among Southern newspapers. On the same day, on page twenty, the newspaper published a United Press story quoting the Little Rock mayor as charging Faubus with creating "a powder keg to be ignited by a planned incident at the school," adding that a "state of anarchy existed." The governor asked the state's attorney general if he could "order his police force to clear the streets around the school of all persons, including the National Guard."<sup>152</sup>

The newspaper localized the story with a September 10 page-four report that many Seattle-area residents "believe Gov. Faubus of Arkansas 'has gone too far' in using national guardsmen to back up his defiance of federal school-integration rulings." Those who agreed with the governor's stance said they "deplored the governor's heavy-handed tactics," the newspaper reported.<sup>153</sup> Playing the foreign-image theme raised by the Northern press, a September 11 op-ed column by Marquis Childs claimed that an estimate of "damage done to America's position in the world by Arkansas Gov. Orval E. Faubus is evident in reports now coming in to various

government agencies on the way in which the governor's rebellion has made page-one news in Europe, Asia and Africa. The propaganda advantage the governor has given the Communists by throwing troops around a Little Rock high school to keep out Negro students is immeasurable. It could not possibly be bought with money, in the view of officials who are appraising these reports, no matter how much gold was circulated through the Communist apparatus in North America."<sup>154</sup> The next day, the newspaper offered dueling thoughts on the subject with two op-ed columns abutting each other. Syndicated columnist Walter Lippmann argued that Faubus had staged a show "not in order to prevent disorder, but in order to nullify the decision of the Supreme Court."<sup>155</sup> David Lawrence, a conservative columnist cited earlier in this chapter, spoke to the states'-rights issue by asking: "Are we witnessing the beginning of the end of state government in America, and the emergence of a supreme dictatorship over the states by the federal government in Washington?"<sup>156</sup> A September 17 front-page wire story reported that the Little Rock mayor had asked the governor to withdraw troops from the high school "in the interest of 'compliance with law and order'"<sup>157</sup>—the mayor's resistance to the governor's action had been reported elsewhere in this analysis, but not a specific request of troop withdrawal.

*The Seattle Times* published two editorials on the Little Rock crisis, both after Eisenhower had sent in the troops and the students of color had been admitted. The newspaper used a foreign-image theme in its argument that the governor had created the crisis at Little Rock, asserting that the Little Rock events led to "one of the most disgraceful episodes in the history of public education. Negroes were beaten on the streets of Little Rock. To Moscow, to Jakarta, to Tokyo, to Berlin, to all the world was transmitted a story of violence and unreasoned race prejudice in a state capital in the heart of the United States of America." The governor, the editorial concluded, "had warned of a crisis in law-enforcement. And he knew whereof he spoke. The governor had created the crisis himself."<sup>158</sup> The next day, the newspaper argued that history had been made on that day and that, invoking the foreign-image theme again, the world was watching the president take "the proper and only course open to him to support the Constitution which he has sworn to uphold." As the president made clear in his televised message the previous evening, The United State has "a government of orderly legal processes. If these are broken down by mobs or through the incitement by officials such as Governor Faubus, we will have only anarchy."<sup>159</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* opened its coverage of Little Rock with a page-two AP story reporting the deployment of National Guard troops at Central High, but on another inside page deeper within the newspaper, as *The Detroit Free Press* had done with a staff writer enterprise series, published an Associated Press analysis

of the school-integration scene in the nation, reporting “some notable progress toward integration in the South. Much of the change is gradual and more often than not, bitterly resisted.” The story went on to offer an update on states and cities that included Little Rock, which was one of the focal points “of more recent moves to integrate.”<sup>160</sup> The story moved to the front page the next day, where it remained for some time. On September 6, the newspaper published on its front page an historical analysis by its Washington, D.C. bureau chief to accompany the wire story out of Little Rock. After a brief discussion of opinions on the legality and precedents of the Little Rock troop deployment, the correspondent compiled a lengthy list of such cases, without drawing a conclusion as to their bearing on the Little Rock case, to provide historical context for the crisis there. There were no attempts to bring a local angle to the story, and no newspaper staffers other than those in the Washington bureau contributed to its coverage. The Washington bureau chief’s front-page story of September 25 led with the president’s televised address to the nation the evening before, in which the correspondent observed that the president seemed to speak “more in sorrow than anger” in calling upon the citizens of Arkansas “to assist in bringing to an immediate end all interference with the law and its processes.”<sup>161</sup> Giving the story a foreign-image frame, the bureau chief the next day reported on the newspaper’s front page that two primary “considerations catalyzed President Eisenhower’s reluctant decision to crack down swiftly and with overwhelming force” in Little Rock. “Most compelling was the rising chorus of spite and scorn echoing back across the oceans from Europe and Asia. This, particularly the criticism of free world friends, grated sharply on the President’s ears although he tries not to hear most domestic political abuse.” The second consideration, “which tends to explain his sudden leap from persuasion to paratroopers without halfway intermediate experiments—evidence amassed by FBI agents and other on-the-scene investigators apparently convinced the Chief Executive that Monday’s riot was expertly stage managed by persons closely identified with the conveniently absent Gov. Faubus.”<sup>162</sup>

In a September 11 editorial, the newspaper suggested that Faubus “called out the National Guard to create an incident rather than to prevent one” and asserted that the governor, rather than a “shoddy politician, a demagogue, a leader of the rabid racists” was, in fact, just “simple-minded.” But the editorialist took the side of state-rightists in arguing that “law, not psychology, is presumed to control when the U.S. Supreme Court hands down an opinion. In this case sentiment or sensibility broke through the barrier of the law and commanded the States to surrender their constitutional sovereignty.” Nullification, the editorial concluded, “pertained to Federal statutes, not to Supreme Court decisions.”<sup>163</sup> After Eisenhower federalized the National Guard and sent in the paratroopers, the newspaper

editorialized that the president “made the best possible retort to Sen. Talmadge of Georgia, who likened his interference at Little Rock to the Russian suppression of Hungary.” Whatever is now done regarding the court’s integration order, the newspaper concluded, “should be done by law and not by violence. At the same time, we doubt that the mob action in Little Rock has any substantial support among the people of Arkansas or even the people in Little Rock. A few unrepresentative hot-heads are probably the origin of the disorder.”<sup>164</sup> So, score a tepid editorial win for Eisenhower with the newspaper, along with a nod to states’ rights—an editorial response, and thus a mixed-agenda priority, from a newspaper that was counted among the conservative ranks at this juncture in American press history.

*The Denver Post*, largely adhering to the menu of prominent front-page display of wire service coverage of Little Rock, dispatched Managing Editor Mort Stern to Little Rock a week after the story broke to provide on-the-scene reportage. This coverage, similar to *The Detroit Free Press*’ use of the stories filed by its on-the-scene correspondent, often provided sidebar stories to accompany the main wire service reportage. Stern’s September 9 page-one story, focusing on the crowd “that came to watch and perhaps be entertained by a governor’s blockade against nine Negro high school students Monday,” accompanied the AP story reporting on the mob violence against the African-American youths scheduled to enter the high school. “The Negro students did not show up, for the obvious reason that this was the wrong time to do so,” Stern wrote.<sup>165</sup> An inside story by Stern the same day, offering an historical look at the governor, reported that while the governor’s use of the National Guard was seen as a surprise by some, a close look at the governor’s record “seems to indicate that his action—and his statement that he was doing this to preserve law and order—need not have come as such a surprise.”<sup>166</sup> The next day, Stern wrote a lengthy history of what was to have been a more quiet effort to integrate Little Rock, beginning with the school board’s May 23, 1954 announcement of “its intention to admit Negro students to the city’s schools,” followed by school Superintendent Blossom’s May 24, 1955 report detailing a plan to bring about integration—a plan supported by the school board. The city’s schools “would have been completely integrated not later than 1963,” Stern wrote.<sup>167</sup> The following day, the newspaper published on an inside page an analysis suggesting that “whatever happens on the National-Guard patrolled street in front of Little Rock Central High School will be just side show. The main event in the fight to forestall integration in Arkansas (and perhaps to provide a precedent for the rest of the South) has moved inside—to the courts.” This reportage came in response to the U.S. District Court issuing the summons for Faubus to appear before the court on September 20.<sup>168</sup> The newspaper called on the chief of its Washington Bureau for a September 12 story, published inside, lending some historical precedence

to the case. The correspondent reported that a case decided one-hundred-forty-eight years prior “is certain to play an important part in the injunction proceedings instituted by Attorney General Herbert Brownell against Gov. Orval Faubus of Arkansas.” In that case, *United States v. Peters*, “Chief Justice John Marshall laid down the rule that a state legislature could not annul a judgment of a federal court,” the correspondent wrote. Similar to the historical piece the *Los Angeles Times* bureau chief wrote for that newspaper, this one proceeded from that point with a lengthy, chronological summary of court cases without drawing any conclusions.<sup>169</sup> On the same day, the *Post* published a piece by Stern analyzing Faubus’ political calculations in the Little Rock scenario suggesting, as other newspaper stories elsewhere had, political motivation. “Persons who have talked to Faubus recently, and also politicians of varying convictions, have concluded that the governor is going to try for a third term in 1958 and that he wants the financial and vote producing support of the influential segregationists of Southern and Eastern Arkansas.”<sup>170</sup> On the bottom of page one of its September 17 edition, the *Post* published a rumor-based wire story (INS) reporting that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover “emphatically denied Tuesday that FBI agents will be used to escort Negro children to school in Little Rock, Ark.”<sup>171</sup> That story went nowhere in ensuing days. The newspaper on September 25, following the president’s order sending federal troops to Little Rock, in a brief page-one box accompanying the main wire story reported that Eisenhower had regained the support of Louis Armstrong. “If you decide to walk into the schools with colored kids take me along, Daddy’ the trumpeter wrote in a telegram to the president. ‘God bless you.’”<sup>172</sup> That same day, the newspaper played the red angle, reporting on page five that communist newspapers had “seized on the Arkansas integration story Wednesday for attacks on the United States. There was evidence of the foreign gloating President Eisenhower mentioned in his speech Tuesday night to the American people.” The communist pitch, The Associated Press reported, “was that Eisenhower acted too late with too little. That was the theme of Rome’s *l’Unita*, organ of the Italian Communist party, largest outside the Iron Curtain.”<sup>173</sup>

Finally, the newspaper closed out its Little Rock coverage with a feature story from that city reporting on student experiences the first full day of classes after the African-American students had begun attending. “They are anxious to find out what we are like,” one student of color told the reporter of Anglo student reaction to her presence. “They are torn between their parents and their own minds. They just don’t know what to do.” Another student said she had a “good time. . . . The only incidents were very, very minor.”<sup>174</sup>

In its initial Little Rock editorial, the *Post* sided with other newspapers that framed the Arkansas governor’s ordering troops to the school as an attempt to



“bar Negroes from attending a Little Rock high school” rather than as an attempt at peace-keeping. “The governor’s actions appear to have been impulsive, unwarranted and deliberately provocative. He has revealed himself as a stooge of militant minorities aligned with bigots to trample civil rights in a phony defense against imaginary evils. Arkansas deserves better.”<sup>175</sup> The newspaper drew literary analogies, beginning with the era of Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* in a September 10 editorial arguing that the “test of this new ‘Integration Generation’”—as opposed to Hemingway’s “Lost Generation,” followed by the “Depression Generation” and then Kerouac’s “Beat Generation”—“is a social test just as severe as was the battlefield test that left one age maimed and ‘Lost,’ or the survival race that had another grasping at straws of philosophy and looking to government to take care of everything for them. Out of this experience they are getting a lesson in values, specifically the values of education and justice, that a lot of their elders never really learned.”<sup>176</sup> The newspaper invoked the foreign-image theme in a September 18 editorial commenting on negative foreign press comments in newspapers of U.S. allies on the integration debate in the United States. “These are attitudes expressed by America’s friends, not the Communist critics who are making so much more of a situation which can only please them immensely. ... Like the Japanese, some of us, too, are mystified but more indignant. We don’t like being assumed to have Little Rock minds like a small minority of our countrymen.”<sup>177</sup> On September 23, the *Post* accused Faubus of prostituting his office “by assuming authority to interfere with a mild school integration plan which had been worked out by local school authorities in Little Rock. He insulted the mayor of Little Rock, the Little Rock police department and the people of Arkansas by pretending to believe riots and bloodshed would occur unless he resorted to military force.” The governor, the editorial concluded, “looks like a bungler who never should have been entrusted with an important office.”<sup>178</sup> After Eisenhower sent in the troops, ending the crisis, the newspaper opined that had Arkansas authorities “dealt swiftly and justly with leaders of the mob which raised the first obstacle to the enforcement of law in Little Rock, there would have been no federalization of the state guard or the imposition of federal troops in that state today. Nor has anyone, from the president on down, sought to impose on Little Rock a solution with respect to modest integration of that city’s schools *which the school board of Little Rock, the municipal authorities there and presumably a majority of the community’s sober citizens had not themselves earlier approved only to be stymied by their own governor!* [italics by the newspaper]. This is not, in other words, an act of unprovoked and irrational interference on the part of the president of the United States. And southern politicians will serve neither their own societies nor their country by trying to condemn it as such.”<sup>179</sup>



The Western newspapers joined with their Northern brethren in largely condemning the actions of Faubus and, in a larger context, the Southern segregationists and racists in coverage and commentary that saw several dominant frames emerge—some that had already been invoked in the race issues discussed in previous chapters, some new. Limiting these observances to only the newspapers included in this book's analysis, in the Southern press, the dominant frames included a vehement argument on behalf of law and order that became almost a mantra—but that largely defined law and order as adhering to the laws and order established not by the federal government but by a segregationist-inspired local, state authority supported by the Tenth Amendment. Part of this framing was the newspapers' support of Faubus' justification of the use of troops for the purpose of maintaining peace, as opposed to preventing integration. States' rights was a dominant theme, backed by arguments for nullification or avoidance strategies, such as student placement policies. The Southern press invoked a theme of regionalism in an us-versus-them narrative depicting an oppressive North and its press imposing on the victimized South a new version of the Reconstruction era, but with a conspiracy theory, red-baiting, outside-agitator component. Another dominant theme was that of excessive executive authority at the federal level—while ignoring the executive power wielded by the governor and his lieutenants at the state level. Components of this framing included agenda-setting exercised through placement of stories, editorializing usually vigorously supporting the frames discussed above, choice of language such as that depicting integrationists as “marching,” like an invading army, through the South, and allotment of resources, such as volume of space devoted to the coverage and assignment—or lack thereof—of staff writers to a story, which often was sparse or non-existent in the Southern newspapers. Headlines helped some newspapers in their framing; particularly stark examples of headlines injecting clear bias were found above news stories, as opposed to editorials, in the *Clarion-Ledger*: “Preserving Law And Order Is A Basic, Imperative Responsibility” topped a page-four news story in this newspaper. Gatekeeping played a crucial role; information not reported to a readership that relies almost exclusively on these newspapers for knowledge of the world—for a constructed reality—is knowledge deliberately withheld. One example is the failure of some newspapers in the South to report on the actions and words of Louis Armstrong, an African-American icon with considerable sway in the African-American community of the time, and of other African-American entertainers and celebrities. Withholding information, of whatever degree, is a wielding of considerable power.

The rule of law and order also was a dominant frame in the Northern press, but in a different context. The law invoked in the Northern and Western press was that of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment, and of the Declaration of Independence's equality argument; law and order, as invoked by the federal government, was helped considerably by the courts at various federal levels of jurisdiction. The mob riots and official disregard of court orders were the infractions of law and order in the eyes of the Northern and Western press. Another Northern, and Western, press frame was the image of the nation displayed to the world by mob violence and defiance of the rule of law as interpreted by the courts, seen not only by Eisenhower but by the Northern and Western press as endangering the nation's international reputation while empowering the ability of communist nations to propagandize against the United States. Yet another frame of the Northern press, one of personification, depicted Faubus and the Southern segregationists and nullification advocates as outliers who, in Little Rock, even were out of sync with that city's educational and political leaders and a substantial portion of its citizenry. Similarly, the Southern press hailed Faubus as a hero standing firm for the South and its customs while making a villain of the president. Finally, the Northern press called on a Southern folkways theme, arguing that the old ways of the South and its racist, segregationist culture were the wrong ways.

Agenda-setting in the Northern Press was apparent not only in the continuous placement of the Little Rock story prominently on the front page and the frequency of editorials supporting the president and criticizing Faubus, the segregationists and nullifiers, but also in the considerable resources, including a large volume of news hole, along with staff members devoted to covering this story on-site by not only *The New York Times* but also by the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *The Denver Post* and *The Detroit Free Press*—the latter a newspaper that demonstrated a strong agenda-setting effort by sending a reporter to the South to investigate and write an extensive series of stories previewing the looming integration crisis (a series the newspaper then inexplicably buried on inside pages after this large expenditure of resources). Another facet of this agenda-setting was all of these newspapers' efforts to get into the Southern communities to report on the moods and attitudes of the communities and citizens, and to profile the histories and personalities of some of the key players and legal policies in this drama. The Northern and Western newspapers thus expanded the size of their informational gates.

A North-South newspaper feud surfaced in these newspapers' coverage, evoking the editorial battles leading up to the Civil War. These editorial combats took in similar frames of keeping the peace and maintaining law and order, but with different interpretations of peace-keeping—on behalf of old "folkways" and segregationist customs in the South versus upholding law and order on behalf of the

rights of children seeking an education in the face of violent, loud, racist mob action from the segregationists who were abetted by their own governor and other political leaders. Also, these editorial differences gave far different interpretations of Faubus' use of troops—to prevent integration, in the Northern frame, but to prevent disorder in the Southern frame.

The next chapter will explore efforts by the victims of racial suppression to claim the agenda-setting process for themselves—to become partners with the press in narrating the Southern racial and civil rights narrative in a prelude to the rise of the sort of national civil rights hero that Thomas L. Stokes envisioned in his *Free Press* column, a leader of the civil rights movement who had cut his civil rights teeth during the Montgomery bus boycott that arose from Rosa Parks' courageous refusal to give up her bus seat: Martin Luther King, Jr.

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## Activists Set the Table at Lunch Counters

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### 'Laws and Folkways'

On the afternoon of February 1, 1960, four male African-American North Carolina A&T College students entered the F. W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina, shortly after 4:30. They took seats at the store's whites-only lunch counter and ordered coffee. Denied service, they were ignored by the wait staff until they were asked to leave. They remained at the counter until the store's 5 p.m. closure, when they returned to campus and began recruiting fellow students and planning for a repeat performance. The next day, twenty-five men, including the original four, returned to the store. They sat at the counter from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., where they were heckled by white store patrons as they sat and studied for classes. Wait staff still refused to serve them. This time, the episode was witnessed by reporters from the community's two newspapers, a local television station, and Greensboro police officers. Inspired to conduct the sit-in by one of the students' experience at a Greyhound bus station where he had been denied service, these four students thus launched a national protest movement hatched in a dorm room in January.<sup>1</sup> The Greensboro lunch-counter sit-ins, which would last for several days and force Woolworth's to desegregate its lunch counters on July 25 of the same year, were a deliberately orchestrated campaign. Inspired by the protest model of Mahatma Gandhi and the freedom rides initiated by the Congress of

Racial Equality in 1947, the sit-ins were designed by these four students to generate press and local publicity. It worked, sparking national attention and similar demonstrations throughout the South.

The Greensboro lunch-counter demonstrations, like the freedom-riders' excursions that will be the subject of analysis in the next chapter, provided the first example of civil-rights era activists, of victims of racist segregation—different from the year-long Montgomery bus boycott, which, while a purposefully organized effort, grew out of a single, unpublicized, spontaneous decision by a sole person—setting an agenda on behalf of their cause. The press followed along, but the producers and directors of the sit-in drama were the African-American civil-rights activists.

While televised broadcast of such incidents spread more rapidly than—by 1960 about ninety percent of American households had televisions—the national non-broadcast press was slow to catch on, though the movement gained momentum. *The New York Times'* first published account of the Greensboro sit-ins was an inside-page wire service account of the second day's sit-in that in its lead described the college students as "well-dressed" and reported that the group "vowed to continue" what the newspaper termed a "sitdown strike" in "relays until Negroes were served at the lunch counter." A group spokesman explained the reasoning behind the demonstration. "We believe since we buy books and papers in the other part of the store we should get served in this part." The store manager told the wire service: "They can just sit there. It's nothing to me." He declined to say whether it was the policy of the store not to serve Negroes." The newspaper reported that after the protesters left the store that afternoon, they "stood on the sidewalk in this city's busiest downtown street. They formed a tight circle, threw their hands into a pyramid in the center and recited the Lord's Prayer. The spokesman said that 'another shift' of students would carry forward the strike and it would continue 'until we get served.'" The newspaper's gatekeepers kept their eyes on this still relatively small story. On February 7, the newspaper published a story on page thirty-five reporting that the Woolworth and S. H. Kress & Company stores in Greensboro had been closed following a bomb threat there the day before. The next day the *Times* published on page fourteen a wire service report that protesters there had called for a two-week armistice; but the Greensboro Four had sparked a movement.

On February 11, the newspaper's new South beat reporter, Claude Sitton, reported in a page twenty-two story datelined Raleigh, North Carolina, that the lunch counter demonstrations "spread today to variety stores in this state capital. It is the sixth North Carolina city to be affected." No major incidents were reported, Sitton wrote, but "eggs were tossed at demonstrators at one store here. Another closed after a crowd of white onlookers had become unruly. Officials expressed fear that the movement might build up to violence, which would mar

the state's tradition of even racial relations." The story identified the target stores as S. H. Kress & Co. and F. W. Woolworth & Co.<sup>3</sup> Two days later, the protest had spread and become violent—and the story had moved to the front page. "Demonstrations by Negro students against segregated lunch-counter facilities spread to South Carolina today amid minor outbreaks of violence and mass arrests," Sitton reported from Rock Hill, South Carolina. "A Negro was knocked from a stool by a white youth, another was struck by an egg and a bottle of ammonia was hurled into a drug store. Two variety stores here closed their doors after receiving bomb threats." And in Raleigh, North Carolina, "forty-one Negro students were arrested on a sidewalk outside an F. W. Woolworth & Co. store in a shopping center. ... and charged with trespassing and were released on bonds of \$50 each."<sup>4</sup> A lengthy front-page February 15 analysis by Sitton, datelined Charlotte, North Carolina, observed that the student demonstrations "against segregated eating facilities have raised grave questions in the South over the future of the region's race relations. A sounding of opinion in the affected areas showed that much more might be involved than the matter of the Negro's right to sit at a lunch counter for a coffee break." The demonstrations, Sitton reported, "generally dismissed at first as another college fad of the 'panty-raid' variety," had "spread from North Carolina to Virginia, Florida, South Carolina and Tennessee and involved fifteen cities."<sup>5</sup> Sitton followed up with a lengthy think piece in the newspaper's Sunday, February 21 *The News of the Week* in Review commentary section observing that the "focal point of the Southern Negro's struggle against segregation has shifted from the narrow confines of the legal arena to the market place." Many Southerners, he wrote, "have watched apprehensively as student demonstrations against segregated eating facilities spread in five states. ... The Deep South is braced for similar protests." The growing national lunch counter protest movement, he suggested, was the result of two factors. "One is a growing dissatisfaction bordering on anger at the slow pace of public school desegregation." This, he wrote, "apparently has given rise to the second factor involved: a mounting determination by Negroes to employ every means at their disposal to bring a speedy end to segregation in all fields." Citing one more trend, Sitton noted a dynamic in movement leadership—a "shift in leadership and technique to the younger, more militant Negro group, and to new and flexible uses of the non-violent protest," according to Harold C. Fleming, executive director of the southern Regional Council. The most prominent member of this new leadership, according to Sitton: "the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., of Atlanta. He led the Montgomery bus boycott and now heads the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a group of Negro clergymen who seek to end discrimination. Dr. King popularized Gandhi's principles of passive resistance and non-violence among Southern Negroes."<sup>6</sup>

The “so-called ‘sit-in’ demonstrations by Negroes,” the *Times* observed in the lead sentence of a February 16 editorial, coincided with the beginning of the civil rights debate in the Senate and thus “call for serious study by all of us, North and South.” With reference to the long segregationist tradition in the South, the newspaper noted in a Southern folkways frame that in “one instance, of course, we are dealing with folkways, whereas in the other we are dealing with laws and with political situations which may or may not be consistent with the Federal Constitution.” Citing the non-violent nature of the demonstrations, “inspired by what the Negro leaders regard as the philosophy of the late Mahatma Gandhi,” the newspaper questioned “the outcome of this strategy ... The danger of clashes between the races has already appeared.” Returning to the civil rights “battle” in the U.S. Senate, the burgeoning movement, the newspaper concluded, “will almost certainly” bring “improvement in the machinery for guaranteeing the Negro’s right to vote. It may be noted that when the Negro does vote, his civil rights are safer than when he does not.”<sup>7</sup>

So, the African-American civil-rights activists behind the sit-in demonstrations succeeded in setting not only a local or regional agenda, but a national one—with the assistance of the nation’s newspaper of record now actively setting its own agenda on behalf of voting and civil rights. But despite the agenda-setting by the *Times*, the sit-in movement didn’t gain much traction in the other Northern newspapers—partly due, perhaps, to a lack of similar protests in those regions. Other than publications aspiring to national prominence, newspapers tend to be parochial organizations when it comes to coverage of seemingly isolated or regional—i.e. Southern, in this case—incidents.

The *Chicago Daily Tribune’s* first story on the subject was published February 6, on page ten. The story was a wire service report of members of the Ku Klux Klan and white teen-agers showing up on a Friday “at a dime store lunch counter” in Greensboro “where Negro college students are staging a protest against discrimination.” The Klansmen, the wire service reported, “members of a splinter Klan group, and the teen-agers tried to prevent the Negroes from getting seats at the counter where they have been sitting during business hours for the last three days, still refused service by the store management.” Several Anglo college students had joined the students of color, according to the story.<sup>8</sup> Three days later, the newspaper published a brief story deep inside, on page twenty-five, a wire service account of a similar protest at the Durham, North Carolina Woolworth store, which had closed “shortly after noon while police searched the building after receiving a telephoned report that a bomb had been placed in the basement of the store.” Police placed one of four white students from Duke University, who were part of the forty-person demonstration crowd, into protective custody, while demonstrators



at Greensboro “have agreed to a two week cooling off period,” The Associated Press reported.<sup>9</sup> The next day, the story moved up to page ten. The story source, identified only as “Special” and datelined New York, reported that a passive resistance movement had been “revealed behind the wave of sitdown protests by Negro college students against lunch counter discrimination in stores in North Carolina. Disclosure of use of the technique of Mahatma Gandhi, late Indian leader, into the American racial controversy was accompanied by predictions that the demonstrations spreading thru North Carolina soon would be extended into other states.”<sup>10</sup> A sixth city had been hit by the protests, the newspaper reported on an inside page February 11. “Lunch counters at three downtown variety and drug stores in Raleigh, the state capital, were closed when Negro college students followed the protest technique used earlier in Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Charlotte, Fayetteville, and Durham and took seats at the counters which serve white customers only,” reported United Press in a story datelined Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>11</sup> And on February 13, the newspaper published on page nine a United Press dispatch reporting the arrest of forty-one African-American college students in Raleigh, as reported above.

The first found mention of the sit-ins in the *The Detroit Free Press* was February 7 on page seventy-six, an Associated Press report of the closing of the Woolworth store in Greensboro due to a bomb threat. “The announcement of the closing was made over the public address while white youths carried Confederate flags, and Negroes paraded carrying American flags.”<sup>12</sup> Nearly a week later, the newspaper published on page twenty-eight the Claude Sitton *New York Times* analysis regarding the future of the South’s race relations. On February 21 the newspaper placed on page twenty-nine a United Press dispatch reporting new protests in Richmond, Nashville and Tallahassee, while tensions had reportedly eased in Raleigh, North Carolina, where pickets were called away from “a five and dime store after a number of Negroes were given ‘stand up service’”—meaning they could not sit down while drinking their coffee—and at Greensboro, “students at A&T College voted against further demonstrations,” signaling the upcoming desegregation agreement there.<sup>13</sup> The situation had not calmed elsewhere, though, as the newspaper reported, via the AP, on page eight February 24 that interracial fighting “broke out in the South Tuesday as Negro students stepped up their demonstrations against segregated lunch counters in variety stores. Six white persons were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct after a free-for-all with Negro demonstrators in an S. H. Kress & Co. store in Chattanooga, Tenn. In the Carolinas, the demonstrators resumed after a lapse of several days—apparently triggered by a statewide strategy meeting of Negro student leaders.” Police arrested twenty-one student protesters in Winston-Salem, North Carolina—“12

Negroes and 9 whites—as they sat at a white lunch counter, and in Charlotte, two Negroes were arrested on assault charges and a third on a charge of violating a fire ordinance.”<sup>14</sup>

Two stories on the sit-ins were found during the same time period in *The Pittsburgh Press*. On February 8, the newspaper published a two-sentence, two-paragraph UPI story on page eleven reporting on the opening of business at the Woolworth store in Greensboro, while the lunch counter was kept closed. On page twenty-one February 23, the newspaper published a United Press analysis. “Three weeks ago today a ‘bull session’ in a college dormitory supplied the spark for what may become the first full-scale assault by southern Negroes on the nerve center of racial segregation in the South,” began the analysis. “The attack is on southern customs and southern habits—not southern laws,” wrote Lowry Bowman in framing the situation in a fashion remarkably similar to that of *The New York Times*—that Southern folkways were butting up against constitutional legalities. “There are no laws requiring segregation at the lunch counters of drug, dime and department stores in the South. There only is long-standing form. Negroes long have been accepted customers at such stores—but never at the lunch counters.”<sup>15</sup>

No editorials on the subject, other than in *The New York Times*, were found in the Northern newspapers—a quiet that speaks loudly of a low agenda.

The Western newspapers’ coverage of the sit-ins was similar to that of the Chicago, Detroit and Pittsburgh newspapers: scant, but even more so. Two inside stories were found in *The Seattle Times*, a three paragraph wire story on page eighteen February 3 reporting the Greensboro story, and a four-paragraph item by the AP near the bottom of page one February 6 reporting the bomb threat in Greensboro. No stories or editorials were found in *The Denver Post*—somewhat surprising, after the depth of coverage by this newspaper of the Little Rock school crisis—or in the *Los Angeles Times*. Clearly, the agenda for the Western press on this issue was a relatively empty one.

The Southern press, however, was a different story—several stories published, actually, with more prominent placement. *The Richmond News Leader* coverage was extensive, though belated—the first story was found February 12. The newspaper published a wire story that day, reporting on page three that a lunch counter had closed in Hampton, Virginia, after two dozen African-Americans, identifying themselves as students at Hampton Institute, a local African-American college, occupied all the seats at a five-and-ten shop. The brief story ended with a short mention that similar demonstrations had occurred in Florida and North Carolina in recent days. The newspaper missed, or withheld, a report, published by *The New York Times*, of a lunch counter demonstration in Portsmouth, Virginia that ended in a parking lot fight “in the worst outbreak of violence in the South’s two weeks

of demonstrations at lunch counters.”<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Hampton demonstrations ended “abruptly” on February 19, reported the AP on page four, after an assistant dean at the Hampton Institute “asked the students to leave. Sixteen male students and one coed from Hampton Institute occupied seats at the F. W. Woolworth after it opened at 9 a.m.” It was the first Virginia demonstration against segregated lunch counters, “similar to sitdowns which have occurred in more than half a dozen cities in several Southern newspapers,” the wire service reported.<sup>17</sup>

When the lunch counter sit-in movement hit Richmond on February 20, the newspaper carried the story on the front page. “About 150 Negro students from Virginia Union University, armed with pens, books and papers, brought a spreading sitdown movement to the lunch counters of two downtown Richmond variety stores today,” the newspaper reported. “Thirty-four took seats reserved for whites at the Woolworth store at Fifth and Broad sts. about 9 a.m., and a few minutes later 74 sat down at Murphy’s a block away at Fourth and Broad. Later, the Negroes filled all 35 seats at Woolworth’s and 88 at Murphy’s reserved for whites.” The police stationed “several officers in both places,” and a spokesman for the demonstrators said they intended to “sit all day.” Meanwhile, Murphy’s served its white customers at the facilities “ordinarily reserved for Negro customers.”<sup>18</sup> Two days later, the newspaper reported on page one the arrest of “at least 25 Negroes today in connection with a sit-down demonstration at Thalhimers. Those arrested refused to leave when asked at the Richmond Room or the main floor fountain.”<sup>19</sup> The next day, the newspaper published a front-page story reporting that Virginia Union University African-American students had “set up a picket line today urging a boycott of Thalhimers department store, where 34 students were arrested yesterday. The pickets—never more than 10—showed up about 10:45 a.m. carrying signs reading: ‘Turn in your Charge-a-plate,’ ‘Don’t Buy Where You May Be Arrested’ and ‘Can’t Eat, Don’t Buy.’” Police were told “not to interfere with them as long as they were orderly, and police officers with dogs kept the watching crowd moving.” A demonstration spokesman said it was “entirely a student movement here” when asked by a reporter if the NAACP was involved with the demonstration, but, “I’m sure the NAACP stands available, but we haven’t asked for help.”<sup>20</sup> On February 25, the newspaper published a story at the top of page one reporting that the demonstrators, who had staged a “mass protest meeting” the previous evening, “met here today and agreed to expand their picketing demonstrations to other Richmond stores. A spokesman for the group, who asked that he not be identified, said a time table for the expansion had not been set, but that 2,000 support pledges signed at last night’s meeting ‘shows we’ll have plenty of help.’” For the time being, the spokesman said, “it was agreed to concentrate on Thalhimers.” Several paragraphs later, the story reported that three anti-trespass bills aimed

at stopping the demonstrations had “moved swiftly through the Assembly’s two houses yesterday.”<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, a story placed directly beneath the picketing piece reported that state troopers had been posted at the state Capitol building, apparently “as a result of last night’s mass meeting of Negroes, at which Oliver W. Hill suggested a picket line at the state Capitol. There were no pickets at the Capitol.”<sup>22</sup>

No other Richmond demonstration stories were found, though more protests apparently took place, because the newspaper reported on an inside page April 12 that a spokesman “for groups participating in the lunch counter demonstrations here denied receiving any aid whatever from CORE [Congress for Racial Equality].”<sup>23</sup> On April 18, the newspaper published a wire service story on an inside page reporting that the sit-in demonstrations “are dramatizing the position of the Negro in the South,” according to an Atlanta Baptist pastor of color the wire service identified in its lead sentence as a “Negro integration leader” appearing on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” “The expressions of confidence in the protests came from the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at the start of the 11th week of the Negro campaign against segregated lunch counters,” the story reported. “The man who led the successful bus boycott in Montgomery, Ala., in 1956, reasoned that if and when local laws against sit-ins reach the Supreme Court they will be held to be in violation of the basic guarantees of the constitution.”<sup>24</sup>

But *The Richmond News Leader* disagreed, arguing in a constitutional frame in its only editorial on the sit-ins that the protesters “are mistaken in believing they have some ‘constitutional’ right to be served at Woolworth’s or Murphy’s or Grant’s or the Soup Bar; they have no such right at all. The constitutional rights in this matter belong entirely to the restaurateur, the innkeeper, the store owners, and violent invasion of those rights cannot be countenanced without jeopardy to personal freedoms as precious to Negroes as they are dear to whites.” The editorialist cited federal court cases to defend this argument, which concluded that the “Negro students engaged in these spreading ‘sitdowns’ assuredly have rights of free speech; they can complain to their hearts’ content. They have constitutional rights of petition also; they can seek, by political means, to obtain State and local laws to suit their ends. But willful trespass upon private property invades the plain constitutional rights of others; and in the end this deliberate abuse of the rights of others is bound to lessen respect for the rights they seek themselves.”<sup>25</sup>

While the sit-in crusade moved to the front page of *The News Leader* when it came to Richmond, *The News and Courier* in Charleston buried the story inside—on the front of its local news section—when the movement came to that city in a big way, with massive arrests. “Charleston city police arrested 24 Negro demonstrators at a downtown lunch counter yesterday when they failed to leave seats they had occupied for more than five hours at the S. H. Kress Co., 218 King Street,” the

newspaper reported on the front of its local news section April 12. “Police Chief William F. Kelly ordered the building cleared at 4:45 p.m. after an anonymous caller told police a bomb was scheduled to go off any minute.” The story identified the group leader as the head of the Charleston Branch of the NAACP, who paid two-hundred-sixty-four dollars for the release of the sixteen boys and eight girls who were arrested and charged with trespassing. The story ended by listing the names and addresses of the arrested youths, identified as primarily local high school students. “A recent City School Board demonstration ban barring students from participating in demonstrations during school hours was not applicable yesterday. City Negro schools were closed due to a teachers meeting in Columbia.” The ban apparently was in force after that, however, as this demonstration turned out to be only a one-day occurrence in Charleston. No reports of the Greensboro sit-ins were found in this newspaper.

An April 4 editorial expressed “embarrassment all around” regarding the city’s sole lunch counter sit-in. “The management of S. H. Kress Co. store was embarrassed at the presence of 24 well dressed colored students at a counter reserved for white patrons,” the editorialist wrote. “The store did not wish to offend either the students or the other customers. But it had little choice and so it closed the counter.” The newspaper argued that the demonstrators “are not winning friends for themselves and their race,” suggesting that “their aggressive tactics create fears of what may be coming next.” The editorial concluded by expressing happiness “that white people refrained from interfering with the demonstration. We urge continued patience while new patterns are emerging through the emotional haze.”<sup>26</sup>

In Birmingham, the *News* relied exclusively on the wires to report the initial sit-in stories, placed on inside pages, beginning with Greensboro—a February 5 brief report of the initial sit-in there, a February 9 story about the one-hundred-fifty-student sit-in at four variety stores in Charlotte, North Carolina, and a February 16 story that featured a report of the first outbreak of violence at a sit-in, in North Carolina. The story moved to the front page as the movement spread. On February 17, the newspaper published a wire report of violence in North Carolina and Portsmouth, Virginia (referenced above), datelined Portsmouth, where an “eruption of tempers and fists here yesterday turned previously passive sitdown demonstration by Negro students at a segregated lunch counter into a short but bloody brawl.” In High Point, North Carolina, “police broke up a rock, bottle and brick-throwing scrap between a group of Negro and white youths,” the wire serviced reported, and as Anglo and African-American youths battled in Portsmouth, “the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. told a Negro rally in Durham, N. C. that his race must be willing ‘to fill up the jails of the South’ if it takes that to break down racial barriers.”<sup>27</sup> Four days later, a front-page story reported that

roaming “bands of Negro students protesting segregated food service staged sit-down demonstrations in scattered areas of the South Saturday”—followed by brief synopses of events throughout the South.<sup>28</sup>

The lunch counter story grew in proportion and inches when the movement hit the state later that month, and staff writers joined the reporting effort. A February 25 story at the top of page one, reported by a staff writer and datelined Montgomery, reported that the lunch counter sit-ins had come to the capital city, where a group of “about 35 young Negro men staged a brief sitdown in the grill of the new Montgomery County Courthouse today [the headline, though, reported that twenty-five were involved in the protest].” The counter was closed and the demonstration ended quietly with no arrests, the story continued, but it “was the first of its kind reported in Alabama, although they have been widespread in other Southern states.” The state attorney general “revealed for the first time after the demonstration that such an incident had been anticipated in Alabama” and that plans to deal with it had been made.<sup>29</sup> The next day, the demonstrators, identified as college students and numbering “several hundred” now, returned to the capital “for the trial of one of their number on a perjury charge. Their arrival at the Montgomery County Courthouse at first appeared to be an attempted renewal of yesterday’s sitdown demonstration in the now-close courthouse lunchroom,” the capital correspondent reported, adding that the governor had threatened to end funding for Alabama State College for Negroes if the sitdown demonstration was renewed. The demonstrators, though, told reporter Allison Stanton that they were there “to ‘show our allegiance’ to Harold Stoutermire. He pleaded guilty to an attempt to commit perjury in registering as a voter and was fined \$100 and costs.” The demonstrators then left “quietly,” with no arrests.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Birmingham’s public safety commissioner, Eugene “Bull” Connor, issued a statement placed on the front page warning “against any food counter sitdown demonstrations or other activities in Birmingham similar to those which have occurred in other Southern cities.” The Department of Public Safety, the story said, “will guarantee the rights of all citizens to go about their affairs and their businesses in a normal and proper way. It will not permit organized, planned and deliberate efforts to foment violence and interfere with the rights of others.”<sup>31</sup> The statement did not explain how ordering food at a lunch counter interfered with the rights of other counter patrons or just what ordinance might be involved. Things were heating up in Montgomery, where staff writer Trudy Cargile reported on February 27 that white men “armed with small baseball bats assembled outside two downtown variety stores which have lunch counters here Saturday afternoon.” Police were on alert, she reported, while reporters had said that “some of the white men had been seen at an earlier gathering near the city baseball park. A group of white men had



collected there in about 18 cars, some with Montgomery, Jefferson and Sumter County license tags,” and they were waiting near the department store entrances in anticipation of the protesters arriving.<sup>32</sup> The top story on the February 27 front page was an Associated Press report that U.S. Senator Richard B. Russell, a Georgia Democrat and “quarterback for Dixie senators” had found a conspiracy theory, claiming that “efforts are being made to spark race riots in the South in hopes of winning support for passage of civil rights legislation.” The senator “said direction for recent Negro demonstrations at lunch counters and other traditionally segregated public services in the south came from New York City. Shouting, he fingered CORE, claiming the group was behind the movement and fomenting ‘mass efforts by young Negroes to get into segregated places. They fostered, planned and incited these incidents that could lead to a great tragedy in some cities,’ Russell told the Senate. ‘It demonstrated to me that they were anxious to start a race riot of terrible proportions.’” Referencing the civil-rights legislation, he warned, “this is no time to be going down there and trying to promote a race riot. Gentlemen you are playing with powder and I hope the match won’t catch fire to set off a disaster.”<sup>33</sup> Back in Montgomery, staff writer Cargile reported on page one that a woman of color had been hit in the head by a miniature baseball bat in the previous day’s melee and that racial tension “remained high here and in Tuskegee Saturday afternoon.” The woman was struck “by one of about 25 white men” who had gathered downtown following a “pushing and shoving match which lasted about a minute. ... Meanwhile, an estimated 300 to 400 Negro students at Tuskegee Institute made an orderly protest march around Tuskegee’s city square,” where a demonstrator and a white man had been arrested following a scuffle.<sup>34</sup> A companion wire story, published under the same headline as the Montgomery story, reported that seventy-five African-Americans had been arrested in Nashville “in efforts to stem violence after fights broke out in two or five stores where Negroes staged lunch counter demonstrations.”<sup>35</sup> On March 1, the newspaper published a front-page dispatch from Montgomery that an estimated “400 to 500 students of Alabama State College for Negroes marched to the State Capitol Building but left after a brief demonstration.” The students, marching two-by-two, “went up on the Capitol steps and sang ‘The Lord’s Prayer,’” Cargile reported. “The line of marchers extended for blocks. There was no disorder as city police and state highway patrolmen kept watch.”<sup>36</sup>

No editorials on the sit-ins were found in this newspaper, but during this period it did take the occasion to feed the burgeoning Southern press feud with Martin Luther King, Jr., in an editorial on a sham income-tax-evasion allegation on which the newspaper had reported in a page-ten story February 25, during the ongoing lunch counter demonstration coverage. According to the story, written by a



capital city *News* staffer, King “may be in deeper trouble with the Alabama law than some may think.” Citing “well-informed sources,” the reporter wrote that King had been indicted the previous week “on a perjury charge, allegedly for failure to report under oath his entire 1956 taxable [sic] income.” The civil-rights movement leader “may be hard pressed to prove in the Montgomery Circuit Court that he filed a formal protest at the time he paid the 1956 back tax claim,” the story continued. The editorial, published March 2, accused the Northern press of allowing King to portray himself as “a martyred saint. King is a shrewd man with brains. He knows how to ‘operate.’ And the national press clutters his quarter whenever he wants to speak. He is ‘the word’ and it gets to the public with dispatch.” The newspaper cited an editorial in *The Minneapolis Morning Tribune* that called the arrest of King on tax-related charges “an incident which is regrettable to say the least. It has, as Dr. King says, all the marks of plain harassment for the notable role the Negro leader has played in the civil rights struggle. . . . It is not completely clear what Alabama is now seeking to lay at Dr. King’s door. . . . It will be surprising if it (the case) has any substantial basis.” The *News* editorialist dismissed this defense of King as “typical. . . . How little understanding of our people the Northern press thus shows itself to have.” Perhaps if King had “failed to pay his proper taxes, if he lived in Minnesota, that state would wink. Alabama won’t.”<sup>37</sup>

*The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson relied exclusively on wire service coverage of the sit-ins, reporting the Greensboro protests in a front-page story February 6, beneath a rather curious headline reporting that white girls had joined in the protest there—information that was not reported until the third paragraph of the five-paragraph story. The next day, the newspaper carried a story of the Greensboro bomb threat beneath another odd headline that read: “Race Riot Averted Only By Closing Carolina Store.” The accompanying AP story, though, reported the closing of two downtown Greensboro variety stores in the midst of what police called a “powderkeg’ of racial tension brought about by Negro efforts to obtain service at a lunch room counter.”<sup>38</sup> That story contained no mention of a riot being avoided. The next report of a sit-in demonstration found in this newspaper was an inside-page wire story of the Durham, North Carolina demonstration. The sit-in movement was back on the front page February 16, when the newspaper reported the High Point, North Carolina brawl, and again the next two days—wire accounts of high school students battling in a Portsmouth, Virginia parking lot (already cited, above) followed, the next day, by more demonstrations in that city. The newspaper picked up the wire accounts of the Richmond demonstrations, which it published on the front page February 21, followed by a page-one story February 26 reporting implementation of tough anti-trespass laws in Virginia “aimed at curbing the recent outbreak of Negro sitdowns in white restaurants and

other places of business.” A later paragraph made clear the intent of the legislation: “Sen. Fred Bateman of Newport News, who handled the bills for the administration, said the stricter laws weren’t designed to imply that the state would seek to enforce segregation in the stores and eating places. Rather, he said, they would protect the rights of the private property owner to conduct his business as he might legally choose. He said the property owner could serve either or both races segregated or integrated as he saw fit.”<sup>39</sup> On February 28, the newspaper published a story at the top of its front page reporting racial violence in two Southern cities, with “more than 80 persons arrested Saturday as violence erupted in the South where Negroes are pressing their campaign for equal service at lunch counters.” The story included the report of a woman hit in Montgomery by a miniature baseball bat, and the arrest of seventy-five demonstrators in Nashville, where two fights were reported. The dispatch also referred to Senator Russell’s allegation of CORE instigating riots to garner support for civil-rights legislation.<sup>40</sup> The next day, also on page one, the newspaper reported that an “uneasy truce prevailed Sunday on the Southern segregation front.” In Montgomery, though, “Negro ministers ... reportedly asked their congregations to support peaceful student sit-in demonstrations against racial discrimination.” But the Montgomery Citizens Council unanimously endorsed Gov. Hugh Patterson’s demand that Negro demonstrators be expelled from Alabama State College for Negroes. The White Citizens Council blamed Saturday’s violence on the demonstrators.<sup>41</sup>

In the only editorial found on the subject, the newspaper chose a distant news event to make its anti-sit-in argument, commenting on a group of “do-gooders” in University City, Missouri, who had proposed a bill forbidding restaurants and other businesses from refusing service to African-Americans. “This is a tired refrain but one which never seems to weary the ‘liberals,’” the newspaper commented. “The University City situation is interesting because the suburb has few if any Negroes,” the editorialist observed. “It is such communities throughout the nation whose residents favor forcing integration down the throat of the South but who prefer not to have any themselves.”<sup>42</sup>

No story on the Greensboro lunch counter demonstrations—or those elsewhere—was found in *The Houston Chronicle*, but the newspaper took notice of the movement when it came to Houston in early March, when for five days straight the newspaper published front-page stories chronicling the spread of the protests there. On March 5, the newspaper reported that “Negro student demonstrators Saturday spread their sit-down tactics to a drugstore soda fountain in the Riverside area.” In the third paragraph, the newspaper brought its readers up to date by reporting the initial sit-down had begun the day before “at a white lunch counter at Weingarten’s No. 26, 4100 Almeda. This was the first spot hit as the South’s latest racial problems

spread to Houston.” One participant identified himself as a Texas Southern University (TSU) senior, “the state-supported Negro institution here,” the newspaper reported. “‘We just want to be served,’” one of the protesters told the newspaper. “‘We will sit for two weeks, two years. We will sit until we are served.’ The Negro student demonstrators would not give their names.” The Weingarten lunch counter was closed, and no police officers were sent to either demonstration, the newspaper reported.<sup>43</sup> The next day, the newspaper reported that a man had been stabbed outside the Weingarten store where the demonstration had taken place. He was not a student or a demonstrator, and the newspaper provided no details about any connection between the demonstration and the stabbing, which the newspaper called “slight,” other than to report that the fight between the stabbed man, who was African-American, and an Anglo man took place in the store’s parking lot.<sup>44</sup> The sit-downs spread to a third store, the newspaper reported on its front page March 7—a supermarket, where the counter area “immediately was roped off and ‘Closed’ signs were posted. However, a group of about 25 Negroes, including 11 young women, occupied counter stools and seats at tables.” Several of them “read textbooks, magazines or newspapers”<sup>45</sup>—activities, including studying for courses, that sit-down protesters had done in other Southern demonstrations.

Yet a fourth store was hit by the demonstrators the next day, the newspaper reported on its front page March 8 in a story that included a bold-face bulletin that a “white youth was arrested at the Walgreen store at Main and Elgin. He was taken to the police station. He had a razor in his possession.” The main story reported that a group of “48 Negroes entered the Walgreen store at Main and Elgin and took seats at the soda fountain and at booths.” Most of the participants were TSU students, according to one of them interviewed by the newspaper.<sup>46</sup> Directly beneath this story, the newspaper published a report that police and FBI agents were seeking four white youths “after a 28-year-old Negro said he was beaten and left hanging from a tree.” The victim said a car stopped as he was walking home and that two armed, masked white youths beat him and forced him into the car, which contained two other youths. Doctors treated the victim for bruises and cuts, “including two sets of Ku Klux Klan symbols—the initials KKK—across his chest and stomach.”<sup>47</sup> The initials had been carved into the man with a sharp knife, the victim said. The connection of the arrest of a white youth to the sit-down story was unclear at the time, but the next day, in a front-page story reporting that the demonstrations had spread to a fifth store, a Woolworth’s at 3210 Main, the newspaper added more details of the beating, reporting that a 21-year-old student barber had been arrested during the Walgreens sit-down and had been taken into custody “after he was seen flashing a straight razor.”<sup>48</sup> He was charged with carrying a prohibited weapon, but no other details were offered.

The story went quiet for a few days, until the *Chronicle* published a March 14 front-page report that the Harris County Council of Organizations, which comprised an estimated sixty African-American groups, had endorsed the recent sit-in demonstrations at city lunch counters. The next day, Tuesday, March 15, folded into a page-two story about the likelihood of sit-ins in San Antonio, the newspaper reported the reopening of some lunch counters and soda fountains in Houston and Galveston that day following a sit-in at the Walgreen's on Main Street that had led to its closure. Though the sit-ins continued, the story again went quiet in the newspaper for a few days until, on March 25, the newspaper reported in an un-bylined story that Houston Mayor Lewis Cutrer announced that he "will not appoint a committee to study the question of segregated lunch counters until Negro students stop their demonstrations." Three organizations, the mayor said, had told him they were "ready to cooperate if he decides to create a committee."<sup>49</sup> The next day, the manager of the cafeteria in Houston's city hall told the newspaper for a front-page un-bylined story that though African-Americans had been served there the day before, "we will not integrate." The African-Americans had been served, he explained, "because we didn't want to embarrass the ambassador"—the Argentine ambassador had been at city hall to visit with the mayor that day. "Thus, what appeared to be the first Negro breakthrough at an all-white lunch counter turns out as a hollow, short-lived victory for the sit-downers," the newspaper reported.<sup>50</sup> A couple of days later, the newspaper published on its front page an un-bylined story reporting that the city attorney had ruled that truck-mounted coffee bars attempting to serve city employees on the street were operating illegally. The employees patronizing the trucks, the newspaper reported, "appeared to be boycotting the cafeteria which served Negroes Friday."<sup>51</sup>

The newspaper reported a breakthrough on its Tuesday, March 29 front page, in an un-bylined report that the mayor had announced plans to appoint a biracial committee "this week 'to study biracial problems as it sees fit.' This is an about-face for the mayor. He earlier had said he would not 'bargain' with the Negro sit-down demonstrators. They had offered to end their sit-downs if the mayor would appoint a committee. No sit-downs were reported Monday. Did the lack of sit-downs Monday lead him to change his mind about naming a committee? 'It could,' said the mayor. 'There has been some evidence of good faith.'"<sup>52</sup>

The story went dark in Houston after that, due to an unusual arrangement reached by city leaders, including some conservative members of the civil-rights movement, who, with the complicity of the city's news media, entered into a news blackout agreement, delaying or burying coverage. A September article in the press section of *Time* magazine reported that the agreement was reached to bring a quiet end to lunch counter sit-ins. "The stores wanted to integrate

the lunch counters at the least possible cost,' explained one Houston editor lamely," according to the magazine in reference to an event involving a mass march of students to the city hall cafeteria. "They wanted to lose neither Negro nor white business. They felt that not publicizing the event was their safest course of action." Other newspapers in the South "have buried or ignored integration stories before," the magazine reported, "but seldom have they met such angered reaction."<sup>53</sup> *The Texas Observer*, a respected weekly published in Austin, was highly critical of this agreement. "We are still blinking our eyes—can't believe it!" the newspaper claimed in a September 2, 1960 editorial. "The entire Houston press—newspaper, radio, and TV—entering into an overt conspiracy to suppress a major news development they had covered fully up to the time of its climax! The integration of lunch-counters in the largest city in the South is a fact the citizens of that city are entitled to know. Inflammatory reporting is one thing, but truthful reporting is another, and in abandoning that function when the sit-ins succeeded in Houston, the Houston media committed an act of really incredible dereliction."<sup>54</sup> Also, no editorials on the subject were found in the *Chronicle*—another journalistic dereliction, some might allege: a frame of silence on the biggest racial story of the day in that city.

The spotty coverage of the lunch counter demonstrations in some of the Northern or Western press can be explained partly for parochial reasons—this was a Southern issue with no effect on their readers and no real news value beyond the sensational. But different explanations may be behind the reluctance by some Southern newspapers, besides the rationalization of out-of-sight-out-of-mind. One reason might be to avoid lending publicity to the demonstrations—publicity the organizers clearly sought. Another is that Southern editors, used to setting the civil-rights movement agenda themselves, were unsure of how to respond to news events of an agenda set by a population many of them viewed as the enemy; thus, their coverage response often was confused. When they did address the movement, the stories were framed editorially and in the news pages and editorials in legalistic terminology that, while recognizing freedom of speech and assembly, saw no constitutional authority behind what they viewed as unlawful trespass or gatherings—even though the sit-ins took place in facilities open to the public. Or the Southern press couched its coverage in a context of embarrassment or shame. And one frame, which had emerged in previous press coverage, was that of conspiracy theory undertones. In the North, the legality frame also was a commonly occurring one, but in this case the Constitution was on the side of the demonstrators claiming their First Amendment rights of speech and assembly. Another frame was that of legalities versus Southern norms and folkways, which, if not justifying resistance to segregated eating establishments, at least explained it.

The February 1 sit-in staged by four college students at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, besides spawning national similar demonstrations, also planted a seed of strategy for the entire civil-rights protest activity to come. A little more than two months after that sit-in, a young African-American civil rights leader identified by *The New York Times*' Sitton in his February 21 think piece called for a national "selective-buying" campaign, or boycott, as a tool in the struggle. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., urged the campaign, Sitton reported on April 16, "against businesses that practice segregation. He also urged the training of an elite group of volunteers for demonstrations against racial barriers. They would go to jail rather than pay fines levied because of their activities." This would become the model for future demonstrations in Birmingham and other Southern cities. "Dr. King made his recommendations in a statement at the conference of Negro student leaders of the sit-in movement." The conference, at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, Sitton wrote, was "under the auspices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which King heads." The cooperating organizations at the conference were activist groups that would be involved, with King's group, in future civil-rights and Vietnam War-protest movement activities: the Congress of Racial Equality, the American Friends Service Committee, the National Student Association and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. "In his statement," Sitton wrote, "Dr. King said that since the sit-in demonstrations began Feb. 1 in Greensboro, N. C., 'more Negro freedom fighters have revealed to the nation and the world their determination and courage than has occurred in many years. They have embraced a philosophy of mass, direct, non-violent action. They are moving away from tactics which are suitable merely for gradual and long-term change.' Consideration of a nation-wide campaign of selective buying was termed a 'must' by him. 'Such a program is a moral act,' he said." Volunteers trained to go to jail, King contended, "should be seriously considered."<sup>55</sup>

The Greensboro sit-in also brought about a more practical outcome. Eating establishments in that city, *The New York Times* reported on its front page July 26, "were desegregated today [July 25] in Greensboro, where Negroes first started anti-segregation lunch counter 'sit-ins,' and Norfolk, Va. Since four Negro college students touched off the demonstrations against segregated eating practices here Feb. 1, the idea has swept through the South and into some non-Southern cities. The demonstrations, often coupled with boycotts of businesses that clung to segregated practices, have led to hundreds of arrests and general racial tension." The demonstrations also, reported the United Press in this dispatch, "have brought down the color bars at lunch counters in at least fourteen Southern cities."<sup>56</sup>

The civil-rights leaders would continue to set the national, and Southern, civil-rights agenda when they took to the Southern highways by the busload the next year.



**Postscript:** Between 1961 and 1964, various U.S. Supreme Court rulings overturned trespass and disorderly conduct convictions, and in January of 2015, a South Carolina court vacated the convictions of a group of lunch counter sit-in protesters stemming from the January 31, 1961 Rock Hill, South Carolina lunch-counter sit-in.

An all-white Montgomery jury in 1960 acquitted Martin Luther King, Jr. of tax evasion.

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# Taking Freedom on the Road

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## ‘Nothing to Lose’

The leaders of the civil-rights movement wanted to build upon the successes of the lunch counter demonstrations that saw some cities—Houston is an example, Greensboro another—moving, albeit gradually, toward desegregation of eating and other facilities. Clearly, the power of the boycott—wielding the economic axe—was strong, as was the ability to control the narrative in an agenda-setting process that the activists could employ to generate press, and thus public, understanding and support. The next phase of the non-violent, agenda-setting strategy laid out by Martin Luther King, Jr. at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in April of 1960, would be the freedom rides—an initiative conceived by CORE that targeted segregated public transportation by testing the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1946 *Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* decision finding interstate bus segregation unconstitutional. Inspired by CORE’s 1947 “Journey of Reconciliation” freedom-ride campaign, seven African-American and six Anglo bus riders participated in the first ride, launched May 4, 1961, leaving Washington, D.C. and bound for the Deep South. The riders encountered “only minor hostility” the first few days, according to CORE, “but in the second week the riders were severely beaten. Outside Anniston, Alabama, one of their buses was burned, and in Birmingham several dozen whites attacked the riders only two blocks from the sheriff’s office.”<sup>71</sup>

*The New York Times* reported in a wire service story on the front page of its May 16 edition, datelined Birmingham, that the bus carrying the riders was “stoned and set afire by a group of about 100 white men just outside Anniston yesterday afternoon. Some of the passengers had to climb through windows to escape the burning bus. One Negro was reportedly beaten on the head with a chain. An angry crowd of about thirty white men met another bus carrying other Freedom Riders here yesterday afternoon. A Negro and two newsmen were beaten.” The riders, the newspaper reported, had to abandon the ride “for lack of a driver.” They flew to New Orleans after Alabama Governor John Patterson refused a request by U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy “to give the group safe passage through Alabama. Governor Patterson said ‘the citizens of the state are so enraged I cannot guarantee protection for this bunch of rabble-rousers.’”<sup>2</sup> On May 19 a federal circuit judge in Montgomery, at the request of the Alabama attorney general and Governor John Patterson, issued an injunction “forbidding ‘freedom riders’ from testing bus segregation in Alabama,” the newspaper reported on page one of its May 20 edition. The injunction “prohibits them from entry into and travel within the State of Alabama, and engaging in the so-called ‘freedom rides’ and other acts or conduct calculated to provoke breaches of the peace,” the newspaper reported in a wire service story.<sup>3</sup> A companion story reported that the governor “was not available” to take a phone call from President Kennedy to discuss the matter.<sup>4</sup> Back on the bus the next day, the freedom riders were attacked in Montgomery, Alabama by a “mob of white persons” in a melee that lasted two hours, the newspaper reported. “At least twenty of the riders were beaten.” The federal government ordered four-hundred federal marshals “and other armed officers to Alabama ... to restore order in areas that were torn by racial violence,” the *Times* reported on its front page May 21. Attorney General Kennedy told reporters he would ask the federal court in Montgomery “to enjoin the Ku Klux Klan, the National States Rights Party, certain individuals and all persons acting in concert with them from interfering with peaceful interstate travel by buses.”<sup>5</sup> A companion wire story detailed the beating, reporting that the mob, “which at times numbered 1,000, attacked the white and Negro bus riders within an instant after the Greyhound bus pulled into the downtown station from Birmingham at 10:15 A.M.” A wire photo showing a student of color being beaten by white men accompanied the story.<sup>6</sup>

The newspaper reported in a wire story on its front page the next day that Montgomery was under martial law, ordered by the governor, after rioting involving “hundreds of white persons here last night.” National Guardsmen wearing steel helmets and carrying bayonets, the story continued, “scattered a howling mob that tried to overwhelm Federal marshals protecting a Negro church mass meeting.” The presence of the federal marshals in Alabama “provoked an angry

protest from the Governor,” the story continued. “He told Mr. Kennedy’s chief assistant, Byron R. White, that the Federal officers might be put in jail if they tried to exert their authority before local officials asked for their help.” Meanwhile, the federal judge in Montgomery granted the injunction sought by U.S. Attorney General Kennedy.<sup>7</sup> A companion story reported that Alabama officials had “changed their previous attitude of criticism of Federal intervention” and had “called on the Federal Government last night to help put down a new eruption of racial violence in Montgomery,” asking the Justice Department “to send any men it had, because ‘this is an ugly situation.’”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, King, speaking by telephone from a Montgomery church where he was “besieged” with fifteen-hundred other people, reported “there was no panic, despite the threat from a mob that was held off by National Guardsmen, United States marshals and the police,” the newspaper reported elsewhere on its front page.<sup>9</sup> Another two-hundred federal marshals were ordered to the state on May 23, the newspaper reported on page one that day, with Robert Kennedy warning state and local officials “that the Federal Government ‘will take whatever action is necessary.’ He did not exclude the use of Federal troops but he made it clear that there was no present intention of sending in soldiers.” This report included the names of four men jailed by the FBI agents—“their first arrests in Alabama today in connection with recent racial violence”—at Anniston. The four were charged under federal law with throwing a fire bomb into an interstate bus.<sup>10</sup> In a companion story, Claude Sitton reported from Montgomery that National Guardsmen “are enforcing an uneasy truce here under martial law following renewed racial violence. Bomb threats, two attempted house-burnings and minor incidents kept tensions high in this first capital of the Old Confederacy in the wake of efforts to end segregation on interstate buses and in waiting rooms.”<sup>11</sup>

That same day, King, invoking stark language to underscore how seriously the civil-rights activists took this issue, alerted the Deep South that this was just the beginning. “I’m sure that these students are willing to face death if necessary,” he said in announcing, in a front-page story, that the freedom rides would continue “across Alabama and go into Mississippi and Louisiana.” The announcement, Sitton wrote from Montgomery in a story published May 24, “stirred renewed concern in this city of 136,000 persons, where rioting greeted the arrival of the group last Saturday.”<sup>12</sup> Sure enough, the next day, Sitton wrote from Jackson, Mississippi, twenty-seven of the riders had been arrested and jailed there, “coming here from Montgomery, Ala., in buses under armed military escort.” Sitton reported no violence in his page-one story, but “Mississippi National Guard officers reported that a threat had been made to dynamite the first bus as it crossed the state line. The threat was not carried out.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, integration leaders in

Montgomery “rejected” an appeal from Robert Kennedy for a “cooling-off period” by the ‘Freedom Riders,’” as the newspaper reported that the Justice Department was seeking a federal court injunction for police in two Alabama cities “prohibiting any interference with interstate travel.”<sup>14</sup> Stressing his opposition to the attorney general’s proposed cooling-off period, and to the pleas of some “liberal Southerners of both races” along with “moderates and others today asserting that the Freedom Riders should be halted,” King was reported in a front-page May 26 story as standing firm behind a continuance of the freedom rides. “He said that, despite a series of setbacks, the riders would resume their efforts ‘in full force’ next Monday or Tuesday, with this Deep South capital remaining as the chief target,” Sitton reported from Jackson.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere on the same day’s front page, a wire service dispatch from Montgomery reported that a “Negro integration leader was wounded by a shot from a passing motorist” and that eleven more riders, “including three from Yale University,” who had been planning to ride to Jackson, had been arrested. Robert Kennedy, meanwhile, apparently applying a “cooling-off” to his own office, had “reduced the number of Federal marshals in Alabama from 666 to 100. He acted apparently under a policy of toning down the Justice Department’s police role in the dispute.”<sup>16</sup>

The riders were arrested upon entering Jackson, the newspaper reported on its front page May 27. Twenty-seven of them “were found guilty today of ignoring a police officer’s order to leave the white waiting room of a bus terminal here,” Sitton wrote in a story datelined Jackson. They were fined two-hundred dollars each and given suspended sixty-day jail sentences, he wrote, adding that in Montgomery, five of the riders arrested there had been released on bond.<sup>17</sup> On page eight, the newspaper offered a feature profile of James Farmer, identified as one of the leaders of the freedom-ride campaign, and a story datelined Washington reported that Robert Kennedy, in a broadcast to the world, “acknowledged the United States’ imperfections in the area of equal rights for Negroes” while predicting that “in the next thirty or forty years a Negro can also achieve the same position that my brother has as President of the United States.”<sup>18</sup>

The next day, the front page of the *Times* reported in a wire story that, with the departure of freedom riders from three Southern cities, the next move of their coordinating committee was a plan for “fresh assaults ... on the segregation laws of Mississippi and Alabama. The group planned its movements to coincide with the return of thousands of Negro college students to their homes this week-end.” And in what appeared to be somewhat of the cooling-off period the attorney general had sought, King “indicated there would be no immediate attempt by the Freedom Riders to integrate facilities on their arrival in the capital cities of the two Deep South states. He said they were postponing such efforts until they could arrange signals with ‘persons on the scene.’”<sup>19</sup>

In a May 22 editorial on the freedom riders, the newspaper decried “the deplorable state of events in Alabama” that “lends irony to the nation’s observance of the hundredth anniversary of the Civil War.” The *Times* in a law-and-order frame accused the Alabama governor of exacerbating the situation “by denouncing the ‘Freedom Riders’ as ‘rabble rousers,’ by threatening to arrest the Federal marshals and by obtaining an injunction in state courts in conflict with a Federal injunction. His attitude has directly encouraged the kind of mob violence that last night got so clearly out of hand that the State was finally forced to appeal to the Federal Government for additional aid of the very type that the Governor had rejected only a few hours before.” Invoking a constitutional frame citing the “Gandhian spirit of idealism” of the civil-rights campaign carried out by the freedom riders, the newspaper argued that the issue in Montgomery and in Birmingham “is not school segregation, as in Little Rock. It is the right of American citizens, white and Negro alike, to travel in safety in interstate commerce, without being segregated in contravention of the Constitution.”<sup>20</sup> The next day, the newspaper, adopting a foreign-image theme, cited the detrimental international image of the Southern scene, arguing that the United States “has lost another battle in the global cold war. The hoodlums, the screaming women, the citizens who stood and watched have done much to aid the Communist cause throughout the world.” The editorial concluded: “There has been much said and written about the prestige of the United States in the last year or so. What price American prestige if things can happen such as we—and the whole wide world—have seen in Alabama?”<sup>21</sup> The *Times* again invoked the Civil War in a May 28 editorial, calling it “ironic and tragic that now a century after the beginning of our Civil War, the battle for full freedom and equality of our Negro fellow citizens must still be fought.” Repeating the foreign-image theme, the newspaper observed that “once again front pages all over the world have carried stories and pictures telling how some white Americans have made a mockery of our belief in freedom and equality.” In conclusion, though, the editorial called on the freedom riders, having “made their point,” to move on. “Now is the time for restraint, relaxation of tension and a cessation of their courageous, legal, peaceful but nonetheless provocative action in the South.”<sup>22</sup>

*The Detroit Free Press* differed significantly from *The New York Times* in its story placement, publishing the initial reports—all mirroring what the *Times* had reported—on its inside pages. The *Free Press* gave the story a local spin by publishing a wire service account, datelined New Orleans, on page fourteen. “The trouble-marred southland tour by the racially mixed ‘Freedom Riders’ was the ‘most significant thing done in race relations in years,’ a former Michigan professor said Tuesday,” reported the UPI. “Dr. Walter Bergman, one of the ‘Freedom Riders,’



said at a news conference that the trip ‘pricked the conscience of the country and gave Americans a new concept of the depth of segregation and degradation in the deep south. We expected arrests when we left Washington earlier this month,’ he said, ‘but not attempted murder.’ Dr. Bergman is a retired Detroit school official and university professor.”<sup>23</sup>

The freedom-ride story moved to the newspaper’s front page, where it stayed for the duration, to report the decision by Robert Kennedy to send four-hundred federal marshals to Alabama, accompanied by a front-page photo—the same one published by *The New York Times*—of an African-American rider being beaten, one of the many photo and television broadcast images that stirred a nation and the world in baring the violence aimed at unarmed African-American bus riders daring to proclaim publicly their right to ride an unsegregated bus into the Deep South. On May 22 the newspaper, invoking the foreign-image theme, published on an inside page a UPI dispatch from Moscow reporting that the “Soviet press Sunday criticized Alabama racial violence as another example of ‘wild, bestial mores in a country pretending to teach others how to live.’ A report of the attack on 21 ‘freedom fighters’ Saturday in Montgomery, Ala., was accompanied in the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* by a photograph of Negroes sitting beside a burned-out bus”—the same photo that had been published by U.S. newspapers.<sup>24</sup> Lending the story a political frame, the newspaper on the same day published, on a separate inside page, a UPI story datelined Washington reporting that the U.S. Senate “plunges into debate on an anti-segregation amendment to the 2.5-billion-dollar school aid bill against a backdrop of racial violence against the ‘freedom fighters’ of Alabama. The Alabama incident was almost certain to figure in debate on the amendment sponsored by Senator Prescott Bush (R., Conn.). But Senate Democratic leaders expected the amendment to be defeated despite the Alabama incidents.”<sup>25</sup> On an inside page, the newspaper published a wire story datelined Nashville reporting that college student freedom riders from Nashville “were hand-picked volunteers from an anti-segregation movement which has scored some striking successes in the last 15 months.” These students, the wire service reported in following the thread of the civil-rights movement from lunch counter demonstrations to freedom rides, “won integration of Nashville dime and department store cafeterias. This year it was integration of downtown movies. Many have also taken part in demonstrations elsewhere, notably Rock Hill, S.C.”<sup>26</sup>

The newspaper again gave the story a local angle on May 23 with a front-page interview with the Detroiter featured in the previous, UPI dispatch from New Orleans. “When you are 62 years old, there are not many significant things you can do,” Bergman told the newspaper in the interview, conducted this time in Detroit, to where the retired educator had returned, with his wife, from New

Orleans. “I feel that this is the most significant thing I have ever done in my life.” Bergman “brought back not only a black eye and a jaw reddened by the heels of a mob, but a detailed picture of how the movement began, how he and others were trained for it, what its objectives are and what its future may be.” The students, Bergman told the newspaper, “will go on and on, and if they are beaten down, they will go on again. They have nothing to lose, you know.”<sup>27</sup> On an inside page in that same edition, the newspaper scored a journalistic coup by obtaining an interview with Martin Luther King, Jr., as reported in a story by staff writer Don Oberdorfer on the scene in Montgomery. Oberdorfer wrote that African-American protest leaders in the South “are preparing to step up the tempo of their activity after a weekend of disorders against them which they think will make history.” King, “the central leader of the passive resistance movement in the South, believes the Montgomery riots will be as important in their way as the Little Rock school crisis was in its way. ‘Montgomery is the Little Rock of passive resistance,’ King said in an interview. ‘This development will cause the Federal Government to see that it must act firmly and forthrightly to deal with the violent forces seeking to block freedom for the Negro.’”<sup>28</sup> On this same day, on page fourteen, the newspaper followed up on its political frame from the previous day, reporting in a wire dispatch from Washington that the anti-segregation rider to the school-aid bill had gone down. On May 25, Oberdorfer offered an on-scene page-one sidebar to the wire coverage, reporting from Jackson, a “citadel of segregation” that “greeted two busloads of ‘Freedom Riders’ with curiosity Wednesday—but no violence. Hundreds craned their necks and milled on the streets in a circus-like atmosphere, but there was no public disorder.” However, Alabama Guardsmen did stop the convoy “across the street from a pea patch . . . During the stop, more than 100 Guardsmen lined both sides of the bus, bayonets at the ready.”<sup>29</sup> In a political sidebar, the newspaper published a wire dispatch on page two quoting Attorney General Kennedy, from the same worldwide speech referenced by *The New York Times* above, that “the United States—despite Alabama violence—is moving so fast in race relations a Negro could be president in 40 years.” The story had a foreign-image twist to it, as the newspaper compiled information from wire services to report, in the second paragraph, that Kennedy’s remarks were made using Voice of America transmitters, in an attempt to rebut recent Soviet Union propaganda, to tell the people “of more than 60 countries that the mob of white people who beat Negro and white ‘Freedom Riders’ in Montgomery last weekend represented only a tiny minority of Americans.”<sup>30</sup>

At the tail end of its freedom-ride coverage, the newspaper engaged in some palpable agenda-setting by sending staff writer Judd Arnett to the South to report, in a six-part front-page series, on the sentiments and civil-rights developments

in the region, from Nashville to Atlanta—where advancements in race relations made Georgia a model of progress—and then on to Montgomery, where martial law, he reported on the front page June 1, “ended in this ‘cradle of the Confederacy’ the other midnight, with the last of the National Guardsmen leaving the posts they had manned as unobtrusively as possible for eight long and nerve-wracking days.” And now, he wrote in a Southern folkways theme, Montgomery, “a pleasant, old-mixed-with-new community in the true Southern style, has returned to its own devices. I find it a city gripped by revulsions.” Some of that revulsion, he observed, is “to the ‘freedom riders,’ who came loping in by interstate bus on May 20, determined to carry the banner of integration to this extreme Dixie outpost. Montgomery won’t forget—or forgive—they for a long, long time to come.” But mostly, he wrote, “there is revulsion against mob violence.”<sup>31</sup>

In the only *Free Press* editorial found on this subject, the newspaper questioned the wisdom of the integrationist leaders to reject the appeal by the U.S. attorney general for a “cooling-off period. Having achieved at least the first step toward their goal of breaking down travel’s racial barriers in the Deep South by focusing public attention on them, the desire to press on to full victory is quite understandable. The question is whether the crusaders will sooner achieve the ends they seek if further violence flares up under created incidents.” Court cases are now to be tried, the editorial argued, “testing the laws, and these can be more effectively carried out in an atmosphere of calm.” And in a foreign-image theme, the editorialist wrote that the president’s work at upcoming conferences in Europe, including a meeting with the Soviet Union leader, “will be made easier if he has the appearance of solid American support.” So, the newspaper commentary, while supportive of the cause, urged a different tactical course of the freedom-ride leaders from this point on.<sup>32</sup>

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* placed its freedom riders stories on page one—with a couple of exceptions—and it relied almost exclusively on wire service reports (except for a couple of dispatches provided as “specials”)—until May 26, when it published on page three a report from the Chicago Tribune Press Service that the Senate, after debate, “deferred action on a resolution declaring congressional support of President Kennedy’s actions in the Alabama racial disorders. The debate was confined to one hour by agreement of leaders who feared days of oratory from southern Democrats if the resolution was pushed to a vote.”<sup>33</sup> On June 6, the newspaper localized the story, publishing a page-one report from Jackson that a white minister from Chicago, “who came down south and joined the ‘freedom riders,’ announced today he is disillusioned and is severing all connections with the movement.” The story quoted the 24-year-old Rev. Richard Gleason advising “anyone thinking of joining the riders to look them over carefully.” Gleason,

among thirteen riders arrested in Jackson, told the newspaper that he was “shocked when he discovered the backgrounds of some of his companions on the ‘freedom ride’ and their attitudes toward communism, atheism and police records.”<sup>34</sup> The next day, the newspaper published a retraction of sorts from the minister—on page three—in a story reporting that Gleason “said he will return south soon ‘to do all I can to help the desegregation movement.’ ... The minister said that he believes the freedom riding is ‘a great part of the answer to desegregation.’”<sup>35</sup>

In a May 23 editorial criticizing the segregationists, the newspaper called Alabama’s governor “grievously misguided” and hoped that he “will not try to use his militia as a counter to the federal government’s men. If that should be attempted, President Kennedy will have to do, as President Eisenhower did in Little Rock: order the militia into federal service to take it away from the governor.” Suggesting that the freedom riders “were likely to give offense to many people in Alabama and knew it when they boarded their buses, the trips were lawful, the riders conducted themselves peaceably, and no statute of the state of Alabama that would have forbidden the trip is valid. The federal law in these matters is supreme, as the governor well knows, and it is his sworn duty to enforce it. He can hardly pretend that, with the militia at his command, he was unable to do so.”<sup>36</sup>

The first mention of the freedom riders found in *The Pittsburgh Press* was a page-nine stand-alone UPI photo, published May 15, depicting white and “Negro” freedom riders “who set out to crash deep South segregation barriers” and “were attacked by white men in Anniston, Ala., and Birmingham, Ala. Members of the group at Anniston are shown outside their bus which was attacked and burned. The FBI announced in Washington it is waiting for the facts. The ‘riders’ planned to defy segregation customs in bus terminals.”<sup>37</sup> This is the same photograph, referenced above, that the Soviet Union press used in propaganda critical of race relations in the U.S. A UPI dispatch from New Orleans offered on page twenty-five May 16 a slant on the story not yet found elsewhere, that the riders, “forced to abandon an anti-segregation bus ride through the South, flew here last night and immediately went into hiding. The group ended their violence-marred bus caravan when drivers refused to chauffeur them any farther.” Met by reporters at the New Orleans airport, members of the group “refused to disclose where they would stay. ‘We don’t know who to trust anymore,’ Herman K. Harris, of Englewood, N. J., said.”<sup>38</sup> The next day, with the riders still in New Orleans, the UPI reported for a story placed on page sixty-three that a White Citizens Council spokesman had called “for officials to run the ‘Freedom Riders’ out of town and state ‘before violence erupts.’” The riders “ignored” the threats, the story reported, adding that the riders “planned to be on hand tonight for a rally marking the seventh anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision banning public school segregation.”<sup>39</sup> The story

moved to page one on May 21, for a UPI report—this newspaper relied almost exclusively on the UPI for its coverage of the primary freedom riders stories—of the dispatch of federal marshals to Montgomery. On page eight, the newspaper published a primer on CORE, an international racial organization at “the center of the Montgomery bus riots,” listing its leader (James Farmer), headquarters (New York, with 50 chapters throughout the nation), mission (“Social, economic, religious and political equality for Americans no matter what their race”) technique (“Non-violence and demonstrations”) and membership (twenty-five-thousand “dues paying members”).<sup>40</sup> On May 26, the newspaper published the UPI report of Robert Kennedy predicting the possible election of an African-American as president within the next 40 years, a brief item on page twelve, and the next day the newspaper published its first non-UPI coverage, reporting the conviction in Jackson of twenty-seven riders for failure to obey a police officer “under circumstances when a breach of the peace may be occasioned thereby.” The riders, reported the Scripps-Howard News Service, “remained today in what Jackson’s mayor calls ‘the happiest jail in the country’ after being found guilty yesterday of breaching the peace by invading a bus station ‘white only’ waiting room. The 25 Negroes and two white men had a tough decision to make last night,” the newspaper reported on its front page. The choices were post bond and be freed while waiting for trial, pay two-hundred-dollar fines and go free, or remain in jail to work off their fines at three dollars a day. They chose “to remain behind bars for the time being before making a final decision.”<sup>41</sup> Two days later, twenty-two of them were put to work on a prison farm. A follow-up story by the Scripps-Howard News Service, on an inside page May 29, reported in a Southern folkways frame from Birmingham that the South’s “thinking people”—forty-three newspaper editorials surveyed in the region—“remain fiercely devoted to Southern race traditions. But they are disgusted with, and ashamed of, the mob violence that has occurred.”<sup>42</sup>

In the first of two editorials found on this subject, the newspaper, in observing that the “right of an American citizen peacefully to travel through his own country has been challenged again by mobs in Alabama,” argued that the Alabama governor was in “a poor position to protest” the dispatch of federal officers to the state when Alabama “has the means” to keep the peace. “The question is whether Alabama has the will” to do so. Siding with the federal government in that states’-rights versus federal-authority dispute, the editorial maintained: “There’s no question as to the right and duty of the Federal Government to intervene to protect peaceful interstate travel.”<sup>43</sup> A May 24th editorial wrapped the freedom-riders narrative in a foreign-image mantle, asserting that the riots in Alabama “would be disgraceful at any time. They are particularly harmful to American pride and prestige in a period when American world leadership is being challenged in Laos and

the Congo among other places.” Citing Western European newspaper coverage, the newspaper worried that “the racial trouble will weaken President Kennedy’s position” with the Soviet Union leader, Nikita Khrushchev. “How much the Alabama Ku Klux mobs and the race-conscious politicians who failed to control them have handicapped the United States in its effort to stem the tide of communism and avert the menace of the H-bomb is hard to tell. The harm certainly has been substantial.”<sup>44</sup>

Following a developing pattern among Southern newspapers of tending to downplay stories of racial protest or civil-rights demonstrations until the demonstrations, or events, such as the lunch-counter crusade, hit home—to be fair, a form of parochialism that is not unique to Southern newspapers but that became more noticeable during the civil-rights crusades of this era—*The Birmingham News*’ May 15 front page burst with race-issue ink when the freedom riders came to Alabama. Stories on the subject, most of them staff-written, dominated the cover, along with photos of the bus burning in Anniston and fisticuffs at the Birmingham Trailways Bus Depot and a top-of-the-page editorial—more on the editorial response of this newspaper in a later discussion. These stories carried much of the same information as the wire accounts of other newspapers, only magnified through a local lens; three front-page stories were published along with the editorial on this day. The only non-freedom-riders story on the front page was a wire report of a possible meeting between the president and the Soviet Union’s premier. One staff writer reported the main story on the beatings, focusing on the events at the Birmingham bus depot with only one sentence of reference high in the story to the second bus, halted and burned at Anniston. Beneath a bold-face, all-caps banner headline, the story set an eerie, lull-before-the-storm scene employing a feature-style lead that delayed the real news: “Mother’s Day had passed quietly, happily in Birmingham until the moment the huge, dusty bus arrived at the Trailways depot. Passersby—the public in general—knew nothing of what was to follow. But seconds later a seething undercurrent of bitterness, suddenly overflowed with terror, smashing fists and pipe, and blood. At least nine persons were reported injured.” The story reported that a gang of nearly twenty rushed the riders. “A giant of a man, bloody from slugging individuals while his gang held them, led the attacks, crazily swinging blackjacks and lengths of pipe, about eight of them pounded a white man and a Negro to the concrete floor of the bus station.”<sup>45</sup> Another staff writer reported that Robert Kennedy was “making a personal effort to assist the group on their bus rides through the south to test segregation laws. Kennedy aides said he had been keeping in telephone contact with Alabama officials ‘and others’ today. They said he had also talked on the phone with some members of the integration group here. An FBI investigation has already begun of two incidents of mob violence in



Alabama yesterday.”<sup>46</sup> A boxed brief at the bottom of the page carried one of the primary Southern frames of this story—a statement from Public Safety Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor blaming out-of-towners for the trouble. “From reports from our policemen, it seems that both sides were from out of town—the ones who got whipped and the ones who did the whipping.” As Martin Luther King, Jr., had urged demonstrators to fill the Southern jails, Connor promised that, “if necessary, we will fill the jail full,” and he warned “these meddlers from out of our city the best thing for them to do is to stay out if they don’t want to get slapped in jail.”<sup>47</sup> Another cover story reported that a meeting between the president and King was likely. On inside pages, the newspaper provided a wide array of sidebars. One was a personal account of a local television news correspondent reporting the scene for radio transmission from inside his car when three men—one of whom the reporter had seen beat an African-American man—smashed his window, pulled him out of the car and assaulted him. Another story featured an interview with a freedom rider from New York, an editor of *Crusader* magazine, who vowed, from an emergency room table, that he would continue the fight. A brief item reported the arrest of an armed man, race unreported, at the bus station. Another reported the stripping and flogging in Sylacauga of a white woman and two companions the assaulters had accused of dealing with African-Americans. An inside picture page carried ten photos of events in Anniston, along with a wire story describing the violence and bus-burning there. A roundup of stories was published on page three, including comments from a shocked King and from a freedom-rider volunteer worker.

The next day, the freedom-rider narrative again dominated the newspaper’s front page. The main piece reported that a Ku Klux Klansman had admitted to being at the bus station mob scene but denied hitting anyone, while a companion story reported that the “traveling integrationist group”—*The Birmingham News* stories refrained from using the term “freedom riders” in its massive coverage of this story—had flown to New Orleans after unsuccessfully trying to get out of town for eight hours when the Greyhound bus driver refused to drive them. Interviewed by a staff reporter, one of the demonstrators claimed victory. “We have proven there is discrimination and that violence can be brought about without protection from the law,” said spokesman B. Elton Cox.<sup>48</sup> Editorial commentary claimed much of the front page on this day, while another story reported that CBS reporter Howard K. Smith and his producer, David Lowe, had protested to the newspaper about what they saw as an inference, in its front-page editorial the previous day, that they had “received inside information from the CORE integrationists.” The CBS crew, Lowe stated, “did not receive information from the integrationists, that instead their tip that something might happen came from a Dr. Edward R. Fields.”<sup>49</sup> On



May 17, along with what now must have seemed to readers like the obligatory page-one editorial on the subject, the newspaper reported a bomb threat at the Greyhound Bus Terminal in a bulletin above the main account that another group of riders, this one from Nashville, had “integrated” the bus station “as swarms of police dispersed a large crowd in the area. The young Negroes were allowed to roam the bus station but they failed to obtain service at the cafeteria, which was closed, or the snack bar, which remained open”—but they were refused service there as, for one brief moment, the lunch counter and freedom rider narratives merged.<sup>50</sup> Given second-story status on the front page this day was a report that three suspects had been charged in the beatings of two days before. Farther down in the story, the FBI was reported to have the “matter” of the Birmingham events under investigation, along with the Anniston bus burning.<sup>51</sup> The front page also featured the wire story of the governor’s plans to fill the jails with the out-of-state troublemakers, identified not as freedom riders but as “agitators.”

Progress apparently was being made in filling the jails, according to a front-page report the next day that ten student freedom riders, who normally would have been released “within 30 minutes of their arrest if they had been willing to leave,” according to a police inspector, chose to remain behind bars “until they have a definite passage out of the city.” Trouble was, Greyhound bus drivers kept refusing to carry the riders—police took them into custody the day before, on charges the newspaper failed to report, after two drivers refused to take them out of the station. “These students came here to ride out on a regular scheduled bus, and that’s what they still hope to do,” the Rev. F. L. Shuttlesworth, Birmingham Negro integrationist, said.” The newspaper reported that “police dogs, paddy wagons, meter scouts and numerous superior officers were in service at the depot” to provide protection of the riders and citizens.<sup>52</sup> Across the top of the page, the newspaper reported that enlargement of a Birmingham civic study committee, in response to international reports of the Birmingham situation, had been approved by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce directors. Approval also had been given, in what the story’s lead termed “tangible action” by the group, to expand the committee’s duties to include “the study of means of creating better relations of all groups, regardless of their race or religion to the end of promoting the civic, economic, industrial and social welfare of the people of the Birmingham territory and to suggest or promote courses of action by civic and governmental agencies to accomplish this end.”<sup>53</sup> The newspaper editors liked the governor’s promise to fill up the jails with agitators so much that they republished that information on an inside page.

The newspaper’s May 19 front page carried a staff story with a lead, and the main headline, reporting information that had been buried in the newspaper’s wire

stories—that the governor had snubbed the president’s telephone call to discuss the Alabama racial strife, with a *Birmingham News* reporter in the governor’s office to witness the snubbing for the record. As for that strife, the same story reported, farther down, that the riders who had been held in prison “for their own protection were taken to North Alabama”—to the Tennessee border—“in the dead of night.” But twelve Nashville recruits, ten African-Americans and two Anglos, had arrived in the meantime “prepared to join in the test of segregation laws.”<sup>54</sup>

Strife followed the freedom bus rides to Montgomery, where beatings at the bus station by “howling mobs of white people—numbering in the hundreds—tore a bloody path of race violence through this Deep South city today,” reported The Associated Press in a narrative far more vivid than *The New York Times* description of the same event that had injured twenty. “Even after police arrived about 10 minutes after the fighting broke out, the battle raged on—mobs of white people chasing, catching, clubbing and stomping any and all targets of their anger.”<sup>55</sup> Staff writer Tom Langford wrote a first-person front-page on-scene account of the scene that was equally detailed. “Mob rule swept horror through this historic city Saturday, and I was an eye-witness to men mad with hate. At mid-afternoon, the thirst for blood was stronger than ever here. . . . I saw officers calmly directing traffic while near them men were unmercifully beaten. I saw a Negro man stab a white man two blocks from the police station. The Negro was mobbed and his clothing set afire. A Negro companion with him was trampled under the feet of a group of men. . . . I stood at the side of Don Uhrbrock, a photographer from Life magazine, as he was beaten with sticks, lead pipes and fists.”<sup>56</sup> And so on and on and on. The governor, meanwhile, pledged to maintain order but without outside help, as reported in a story down-page, and another front-page dispatch reported that the director of the state’s Department of Public Safety had rescued, at gun-point, a television newsman and an African-American man who were being beaten by a mob. A photo spread on page twenty offered visual imagery of the scene in Montgomery.

The next day, accompanying the main page-one story reporting federal marshals entering the state, the newspaper published another first-hand account of the Montgomery scene by Langford, who had gone undercover, dressing like the mob, where again he witnessed attacks on members of both races “beaten unmercifully while law officers nearby calmly directed traffic. I saw attacks on at least six reporters, photographers and television cameramen. Cameras were smashed against concrete pavements, film ripped out and exposed. I saw an administrative assistant to Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy—John Siegenthaler—lying almost unconscious in a gutter from a head wound. I heard women shriek encouragement to the savagery of their men: ‘Get those niggers.’”<sup>57</sup> And on and on and on in

detailed, non-partisan description. On an inside page, accompanying a photo array of the violence, a staff story reported that “Freedom Riders”—the terminology used in quotes—were facing arrest for ignoring a court order to stay away.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere inside, the newspaper reported from a telegram sent to the president by the city’s public safety chief that it had obtained, urging the president to apply pressure “to stop the deliberate attacks of misguided integrationists on the law and order of Alabama”—this, in the face of first-hand witness evidence of the beatings being administered to, rather than by, those “misguided integrationists.” Law enforcement “has not broken down in Birmingham,” Connor had written. “There were regrettable minutes that it got away from our police,” he wrote, urging Kennedy to call the leaders of CORE and the NAACP into his office “and instruct them to stop the deliberate attacks of misguided integrationists on the law and order of Alabama.”<sup>59</sup>

Montgomery reportedly calmed, according to stories published in the newspaper’s front page May 22. On an inside page, with the governor still reportedly protesting federal intervention, a staff report described federal marshals and National Guardsmen cooperating to maintain order. However, another inside-page story reported that fire bombs had been tossed at two Montgomery homes—indications of a shaky peace. Meanwhile, a wire story published inside the May 23 edition indicated that Mississippi’s governor, Ross Barnett, was preparing his state for the freedom-rider incursion, telling the National Guard to be ready. And a May 24 *Birmingham News* page-one story reported that Mississippi police and National Guardsmen “escorted two buses carrying ‘freedom riders’ through Mississippi today under orders by Gov. Ross Barnett to arrest them ‘if they step out of line.’”<sup>60</sup> Alabama had handed off the baton of the freedom-rider predicament to its Deep South neighbor.

During the course of its coverage of the visit by the freedom riders to Alabama, *The Birmingham News* did something unprecedented, in the modern press era, by publishing nine nearly successive front-page editorials in an extraordinary display of aggressive agenda-setting—especially when considered in combination with the expansive staff coverage and news-hole space on page one, and inside, devoted to this story. It also is a telling display of bigotry and race-baiting, accompanied by praiseworthy calls in the editorials, summarized below, for locating and punishing the perpetrators of the violence in that city, as the following excerpts demonstrate.

May 15: “Sunday, May 14, was a day which ought to be burned into Birmingham’s conscience. Fear and hatred did stalk Birmingham’s streets yesterday,” the editorial noted in four columns spread across the top of the page before taking aim at what it will become clear the newspaper viewed as the real victim—Birmingham and by association the South—and the genuine villain—the freedom riders, whom

the newspaper in its coverage identified as “integrationists” or “segregation testers.” “What was up was the advance on Birmingham of a group of Negroes and some whites who gave themselves the title, ‘freedom riders.’ These people were moving through the South to create racial trouble to make headlines not only here but in every city in the United States and in quite a few foreign capitals.” The lengthy editorial, which required an inside jump page for its completion, alleged that the whole scene at the bus station had been a “‘set up’ in a variety of ways. The CBS people had their camera ready, aimed at part of the Greyhound terminal,” alleged the newspaper, suggesting the network had the inside word from CORE. “The camera, with a constantly-attending operator, was in a brilliant red convertible. It stuck out. Thus Birmingham yesterday afternoon was a drugged turkey—a city ready to be plugged.” The Ku Klux Klan, which the newspaper recognized favorably as trying to “‘defend’ the South,” instead had “‘invited every imaginable weapon to be trained against us.” Finally, the newspaper contradicted the attempt by its police commissioner to shift blame for the violence to outsiders. “And the police of Birmingham did not stop the trouble that did develop. The Birmingham News wonders why. The police knew what was up—the presumed two buses, one a Greyhound, one a Trailways, carrying the ‘freedom riders’ from Anniston where they already had run into trouble—with a Molotov cocktail type of bomb being tossed into one of the buses. ... Today many are asking ‘Where were the police?’ THE NEWS asks that, too.”<sup>61</sup>

May 16: The newspaper reversed course a bit on its criticism of the police department, commending Commissioner Connor in the lead for moving into action Monday, handling the “so-called ‘freedom riders situation’ ... well. It remains a sad fact that this was not the situation Sunday.” The newspaper pressured the police to “bring to justice the men who stopped and burned a Greyhound bus outside of Anniston in the same show of violence that erupted later that afternoon in Birmingham.” But, while urging fair treatment on all fronts, the newspaper argued that all of the state “will be looking to Gov. John Patterson to see what he is going to do about these men who ride the highways, invade the towns in show of force and who are a threat to peace and order by their very movement in force.”<sup>62</sup>

May 17: “Birmingham police are properly rounding up suspects in the Sunday race beating in this city. That is a highly commendable action. But the forces which created the trouble in the first place—the CORE integrationists and the hoodlums who took the law into their hands—are still in existence. The CORE type agitators are well heeled, still anxious to make integration headlines.” The issue, the newspaper argued, “is and will be law and order. Outsiders can be handled but they must be handled by police and responsible elected officials.”<sup>63</sup>

May 18: “Police Commissioner Connor late yesterday properly jailed the latest group of so-called ‘freedom riders’ because arrangement could not be made to

get them out of the city. Mr. Connor in a statement said he was going to check with attorneys to see if Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth could be charged with inciting to a breach of the peace. The commissioner should certainly do so.” The newspaper cited precedent: “Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes decades ago described the situation. Justice Holmes in an opinion defended the right of free speech but such right, he said, gives no one the privilege of crying ‘Fire!’ in a crowded theater. Whatever rights Negroes may have or claim to have, Rev. Shuttlesworth in Birmingham, Ala., yesterday morning was in the equivalent of a crowded theater and he cried ‘Fire!’” The editorial concluded: “The city of Birmingham should prosecute him. Shuttlesworth cannot be allowed to threaten this city with turmoil.”<sup>64</sup>

May 19: The newspaper hailed the decision by the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce to expand a study committee “to probe the over-all community situation and suggest positive action to reduce present tensions. THE NEWS has emphasized that events of last Sunday—and since—should prod us to new action in this field.” Because, the editorial concluded, the “misguided, who dedicate themselves to sit-ins, mix-ins and other integration agitation will take full advance of such statements as that of Gov. Patterson when he said that the state of Alabama will not baby-sit agitators. They will be back.”<sup>65</sup>

May 21: In response to federal marshals ordered into the state, the newspaper argued that it had received the federal aid it asked for—but would it be the sort of assistance sought, or would they side with the integrationists? Are the people of Alabama “going to marshal their spiritual strength against hatred? Are they going to demand that the force of the law be exerted fully against race agitating visitors and ‘interested citizens,’ those who use the night, the lead pipe and the gang attack to bring about a condition that takes the due process of law out of the hands of good Alabamians and put it in the hands of federal enforcement agencies? We, the people, asked for it. As we wail in our anguish, let us not forget it.”<sup>66</sup>

May 22: In an editorial written as an open letter to Attorney General Kennedy, the newspaper posed the following questions. “The people of Alabama and the people of the South want to know why it isn’t just as important to stop those who provoke violence as it is to stop those who commit violence. This, Mr. Kennedy, is a direct question. We are sure you will want to answer. Martin Luther King flew into Montgomery. For what, Mr. Kennedy? Are you pressing him for an answer? Why don’t you put him under some control?” The lengthy editorial, an anti-King diatribe designed to demonstrate that his visit to the city and his words prompted the violence and misery, concluded in the same vein: “The people of Alabama, Mr. Kennedy, would feel more secure in your efforts to guarantee the rights of all citizens if you found a way to stop those who came here to foment trouble by their actions in the midst of already highly charged situations.”<sup>67</sup>

May 23: “Since the federal government has intruded itself into Alabama’s tragic difficulties, and the immediate needs are maintenance of law and order, The News wants to say again it believes it is the duty of the federal government to help keep the outside agitators from fomenting further trouble. . . . We call once again upon U.S. Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy to move against those of all degrees of opinions who seek to bring strife and discord into a state struggling to regain and maintain order and regard for law.”<sup>68</sup>

May 24: “The ‘freedom riders’ have gone from Alabama. . . . The ‘freedom riders’ are gone today from Alabama. But they will be back. Or others like them will return. And we, the people of Alabama, must be on guard not to be provoked into such shameful violence as took place in our state last week.” The newspaper, “once again,” reminded Robert Kennedy “that the full moral force of his office should be used to persuade the outside agitators in deliberate gang groups to remain outside the troubled Deep South at this explosive time.” Meanwhile, “regardless of who comes or what, the people of Alabama must be patient and keep the peace.”<sup>69</sup>

Translation: Whew, they’re gone; now let’s do what we can to keep them gone. As this series of editorials demonstrates, despite language on behalf of keeping the peace and maintaining law and order, on behalf of prosecuting and preventing acts of violence, the culprits here were not the thugs who pummeled and thrashed peaceful, law-abiding citizens simply riding buses into Deep South communities—instead, in the eyes of these editors, they were the bus riders who dared to agitate the genteel South, to challenge unconstitutional and thus illegal laws and ordinances preventing them from riding the buses. The appeal to the government was to maintain an antiquated norm of law and order that upheld established customs rather than to support the constitutional authority brand of law and order that guarantees equal access and protection. The solution, rather than integration, was exile—please, federal government, just keep these troublemakers—code for freedom-seeking African-Americans and their sympathizers—out of sight and therefore out of mind.

In Mississippi, following *The Clarion-Ledger’s* front-page wire service reportage for its Jackson readers of events in Birmingham that had began May 15, a writer for *The Clarion-Ledger* several days later boarded the bus in Montgomery for the ride into Mississippi, reporting that it “rolled into Meridian late Tuesday without incident, and we found a quiet city here” he wrote in a Wednesday, May 24 front-page story datelined Meridian. “But there were undertones of watchful waiting on the part of local police, and there was some evidence that Highway Patrol and National Guard strength is on hand and watching for an invasion Wednesday morning.”<sup>70</sup> A wire service story below this reported the vow of African-American leaders to move on to Mississippi, “the hard-core center of segregation

in the South.”<sup>71</sup> Next to these stories, a signed message from Governor Barnett announced that he had “ordered the Highway Patrol and the National Guard to support local law enforcement officers in maintaining order. They will be on hand to fulfill my obligation as Chief Executive of the State of Mississippi, which obligation is to enforce all state laws and to protect life and property of all persons. . . . The laws of the State of Mississippi must be enforced.”<sup>72</sup> Assumably, the law to which he referred included local anti-segregation ordinances. Elsewhere on page one, the president of the Jackson Citizens Council urged city residents and his membership to let law enforcement officials handle any incidents, and the same writer who was on the bus posted a report from Montgomery that “hundreds of telegrams have been pouring into the governor’s office from all over the United States expressing both approval and disapproval of the action taken by Gov. John Patterson.” Patterson’s press secretary told the reporter that ninety percent of the telegrams “applauded” the governor’s stand; a few, though, had been “highly critical of the actions taken” by Alabama. The headline above the story, though, reported only a “Flood Of Laudatory Wires.”<sup>73</sup> On page five, a wire story datelined Washington, D.C. but with no reporting source identified, informed the newspaper’s readers that Senator John Stennis of Mississippi was introducing a bill “that could make trips such as the so-called ‘freedom riders’ a federal offense. The bill, intended to preserve the Constitution, Stennis said, would make it a federal offense to travel in any part of the nation in interstate commerce with the intent to incite riots, or to create breaches of the peace.”<sup>74</sup>

As for the governor’s vow to arrest any lawbreakers entering the state, a front-page story the next day reported that Jackson police arrested twenty-seven bus passengers when they stepped off the vehicle at the Trailways bus station, and the riders had been charged with “refusing to obey an officer and committing a breach of the peace.” If found guilty, the riders “would receive up to six months in jail and fined \$500,” the city’s prosecutor told the newspaper. “James Farmer, national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was among those arrested,” the newspaper reported.<sup>75</sup> A photo next to the story showed an African-American rider disembarking from the bus, and a brief boxed story below this one expressed the governor’s thanks for the law enforcement handling of the incident. Below these stories, a staff writer reported that the “heralded ‘freedom riders’ integrationists group making what they call a ‘full scale assault’ on Southern integration, arrived at Jackson’s Continental bus depot at 2 p.m. Wednesday and were whisked to jail minutes later.”<sup>76</sup> Another front-page staff-written story, datelined Meridian and repeating the information regarding the arrest of the riders, reported—much as a story of a war prisoner exchange might be framed—details of the handoff of one of the two buses by law enforcement officers from the two states.



“The double-decked Dallas-bound bus carrying the 13 ‘riders’ arrived at the Alabama-Mississippi line under heavy escort of Alabama Highway Patrolmen and National Guardsmen. At the state line they were turned over to Mississippi Guardsmen and Highway Patrolmen and whisked into Jackson after being informed that the bus would bypass Meridian. Armed Guardsmen and Patrolmen waited for more than an hour in the rain for the bus’ arrival from Montgomery Ala., scene of recent mob violence sparked by the ‘riders’ deliberate crashing of segregation laws.” At the exchange point “just inside the Mississippi line eight Mississippi Guardsmen boarded the bus, relieving Alabama Guards. Traffic was halted in both directions shortly before the exchange. Patrolmen ordered civilian motorists and curiosity observers from the area. There were no incidents.”<sup>77</sup> A story on page sixteen revealed that the newspaper’s reporting staff had done its investigative due diligence, reporting that nearly “every member of the so-called ‘freedom riders’ who were arrested when they attempted to use white facilities at the Trailways bus station Wednesday admitted having past police records.” Identifying the riders by name, the reporter learned that these criminal records ranged from charges of participating in a sit-in (dismissed) to handing out racial pamphlets (dismissed), a traffic ordinance violation (fined \$25) and participating at a stand-in at a movie theater (dismissed). The newspaper’s gatekeepers liked the previous day’s report of proposed federal legislation banning interstate commerce to future freedom riders; they published another story with the same information—again, with no identified reporting source—on page seven.

On May 26, the newspaper’s front page carried a wire story at the top reporting the arrest of some freedom riders in Montgomery after the riders tried to eat at a lunch counter at the bus station—but while things seemed to have quieted down in Jackson, “the assault on the Deep South’s segregation showed little sign of weakening Thursday.”<sup>78</sup> But wait. A two-paragraph, boxed item just beneath the main story’s headline offered rumors of another planned invasion—“conflicting reports” Thursday night “of efforts at New Orleans to organize another so-called ‘freedom rider’ expedition to Jackson. The reports came mostly from New York, and denials came from New Orleans. CORE headquarters was believed putting out the reports, partly as a propaganda move in the current war of nerves. These rumors were carried over national TV programs and circulated by the United Press International.”<sup>79</sup> Down-page, a local dispatch reported that the Jackson situation had garnered national and international attention; media representatives from Canada, England “and all part of the United States will be present Friday for the trial of 27 so-called ‘freedom riders’ arrested here Wednesday.”<sup>80</sup> Another front-page story invoked the states’-rights frame in reporting that the governor “maintained here Thursday to a battery of newsmen and television and radio commentators from the

major services of the nation that Mississippi is legally within its rights to enforce state laws. He declared under questioning that since this state's laws are on the statute books and have not been stricken down by court edict, that they stand and are enforceable"—despite, as one reporter pointed out in questioning the governor, being out-of-sync with federal law.<sup>81</sup> A front-page story out of Washington—again, with no identification of the reporting source—quoted Mississippi's other U.S. senator, James O. Eastland, calling the freedom riders "a part of the Communist movement in the U.S." CORE, which "has long been known as the war department of the pro-Negro and Negro organization in the United States." The senator, "with his colleague, Sen. John C. Stennis of Mississippi and other Southerners, joined in denouncing the demonstrators and praising the people and the officials of the state for their reaction to the invaders."<sup>82</sup>—reaction, it should be pointed out, that included an Alabama stabbing and beatings and, in Mississippi, immediate incarceration for the crime of riding a bus.

The lead story on the front page of the May 27 *Clarion-Ledger* reported the conviction in municipal court of the twenty-seven freedom riders for breach of the peace, but the "so-called 'freedom riders' ... elected to remain in jail rather than post bond or pay \$200 fines. A Negro attorney for the group, Jack Young, told newsmen after conferring with his clients that they voted unanimously to remain in jail 'at least for the present.'" Meanwhile, the story reported a few paragraphs later, "a much publicized mass rally held Friday night sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People apparently was a dismal flop. An actual count by this reporter totaled 137. This number included participants on the program. The 'riders' of course did not attend."<sup>83</sup> A companion page-one wire story reported that five freedom riders, including four white university professors, had posted bond and were released from the county jail in Montgomery, where martial law remained in force. *The Clarion-Ledger* also published a brief front-page wire service dispatch May 27, in a box below the main headline reporting the conviction of the freedom riders, telling of Robert Kennedy's prediction of an African-American president within forty years.

In a brief front-page editorial of its Sunday, May 28 edition—the only editorial on this subject found in *The Clarion-Ledger*—the newspaper claimed that "Mississippians from the governor on down are proud of the manner in which our officers of state and city have handled the so-called 'freedom riders' in our midst." But, "Reports say the second wave of misguided young people is on the way. Let's permit the officers of the law handle [sic] this group without hindrance. If the new crop of CORE visitors tries to create a violent incident, let's do not be provoked by their unlawful acts into lawlessness of our own. Let's just let the officers show the invaders quietly to our jails."<sup>84</sup> The previously reported rumors of more riders

heading to Jackson proved true, as a second and third wave arrived that same day, to be met with the same results, as the newspaper had urged.

In Charleston, *The News and Courier's* first freedom-rider report—all of this newspaper's stories on this subject but one were wire service dispatches—was placed on the May 15 front page. Subsequent stories were buried inside until the federal marshals were ordered into Alabama, when the story returned to the front page, where it remained. The sole non-wire reportage found was a front-page story by a special correspondent in the nation's capital reporting that Senator Strom Thurmond, a notorious South Carolina racist, had accused the Kennedy administration “and a large part of the press of responsibility for racial violence resulting from the invasion of Alabama by agitators bent on inciting trouble.” Note, here, the language choices of the correspondent: “invasion,” “agitators,” “inciting”—all words, similar to the framing in the Jackson newspaper, carrying negative connotation. The junior senator, the story continued, “called on all involved in the Alabama situation, regardless of race, for restraint, avoiding further violence ‘whatever may be the extent of the aggravation.’ Thurmond said ‘violence plays into the hands of the agitators, for the horrors created by the picture of an angry mob effectively shield from the public all the evil instigation which lies at the root of the trouble.’” The freedom riders, “Thurmond charged, set out deliberately to create trouble at all costs and in this ‘were encouraged by both the large part of the press and the administration.’”<sup>85</sup>

This newspaper took great interest in the freedom-rider saga on its editorial page, publishing several editorials on the subject—indicating a strong hunger by ownership and management to claim a large agenda-setting role for this newspaper. On May 16, the newspaper used the same frame as other Southern newspapers, claiming the Alabama whites had “swallowed the bait in a trap set by the Congress of Racial Equality,” which had found “what they were seeking in the South”—namely, “retaliation from Southern white men.” In its conclusion, the editorial offered a new frame in this particular discussion by Southern newspapers—that Northern African-Americans inflict more frequent and greater pain on whites. “Every day, more and worse racial violence occurs in Harlem, Washington, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston and other big centers than was recorded on Sunday in Alabama. White people venture at their peril into the streets of America's cities. When white and Negro agents flaunt their disregard for customs in the Deep South, they invite trouble.”<sup>86</sup> Two days later, in a lengthy lead editorial, the newspaper suggested that despite the U.S. Supreme Court's school desegregation ruling of 1954, students of color were not swarming to public schools in the South, with “only 776 Negro children attending previously all-white schools in seven Southern states.” The civil-rights movement, though, was becoming a leftist

crusade, the newspaper asserted. The leader of the NAACP, it argued, “visited Red Cuba and became involved with the Fair Play For Cuba Committee.” It is only a matter of time, the writer claimed, “before they adopt revolutionary goals.”<sup>87</sup> On May 19, the newspaper adopted a false equivalency stance, arguing that the violence spawned by the freedom-rider movement had encouraged hooliganism on both sides. “When hoodlum meets hoodlum on an explosive issue someone is likely to be hurt. The News and Courier cautions respectable members of both races to calm down the ruffians on each side.” It concluded, though, while overlooking the non-violent stance of the freedom riders who were on the receiving end of the mob beatings, by blaming them for setting a “pattern of violence that will incite the worst elements of both races. If federal authorities do not recognize these facts, they are blind.”<sup>88</sup> A brief May 20 editorial, adopting a victimization frame, accused CBS of a “hatchet job on the City of Birmingham” with a recent airing of “CBS Reports.” “By sly innuendo and by skillful choice of spokesmen, the program portrayed Birmingham—and by inference white Southerners generally—as a brutal, depraved race of men.”<sup>89</sup> On May 23, the newspaper skewered Attorney General Kennedy for his support of Martin Luther King, Jr., while praising, in a states’-rights frame, Alabama’s governor for showing “real character” for resisting “federal encroachment on a state’s police powers. The President’s ruthless young brother is capable of withholding patronage and resorting to other political tricks. But Gov. Patterson has set an example of state rights and responsibility that should be hailed. The rights of a state are no stronger than the character of the man elected to serve as governor.”<sup>90</sup> The next day, the newspaper suggested in a lengthy editorial that the racial cold war had turned hot in Alabama and then again criticized the North for its own racial strife. “Every day race violence takes a worse toll of injury or death in racial conflict in Northern cities. Such incidents receive routine or silent treatment in the paper curtain press.” Portraying the old South as victim, the newspaper suggested that “Southerners might as well face it. They are out-numbered in their own country and overseas. They are misrepresented before the world. They cannot secede from the Union or start a new civil war.” The newspaper urged a thorough investigation of CORE. “Now is the time to move against these groups by a searching state investigation.”<sup>91</sup> Following the quick arrest and conviction of freedom riders in Mississippi, the newspaper asserted that the contrast between the Alabama and Mississippi freedom-ride episodes “is a valuable lesson for Southerners, white and colored, in the racial crisis now being stirred with the blessing of the U.S. government. Patience and firm policing are the order of the day.” Southerners of both races “understand each other,” this editorial concluded. “They will find the way back to peace and harmony despite political pressures and the antics of misguided reformers.”<sup>92</sup>

*The Houston Chronicle* used wire services for its reportage, which for the most part was relegated to inside pages with a few exceptions. It sent a staff reporter to cover one of the stories, the conviction of the riders, for a May 27 dispatch it bannered across the top of its front page. No editorials on this subject were found in this newspaper. In Richmond, *The News Leader* relied exclusively on wires for its coverage, which was spotty, with three of the major stories being placed on the cover and a couple inside. One editorial was found, published May 23, aptly recognizing that the freedom-ride leaders had set this agenda. The newspaper observed that the angry mobs in Alabama—who “rose to the bait dangled by ‘freedom riders’”—were “deliberately stirred up.” The crowds of rioters, the editorial asserted, “were landing giant knock-out blows full in their own face. They walked into a carefully laid trap, triggering flash bulbs; they posed for Herblock cartoons mocking the South.” The newspaper advised other Southern states not to fall into the same “trap.”<sup>93</sup>

The Western newspaper coverage of the freedom riders was less extensive and almost exclusively by wire services, with the major events, such as the federal government dispatching federal marshals to Alabama, placed on page one but other stories either not published or placed inside.

At *The Denver Post*, the initial wire story was published May 15 on page seven. The next story, reporting the bloody street brawl in Montgomery, was published May 20 on page one, which is where the newspaper placed the next day’s story reporting the dispatch of U.S. marshals. From here on, it was a front-page story—all wire service reportage—through May 26. This newspaper demonstrated a strong agenda-setting inclination on its editorial page, publishing four editorials about the freedom-rider saga—beginning with an editorial the day after its first story on the subject. Focusing on the South’s states’-rights claim, the newspaper argued it was “obvious, however, that when U.S. Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy finds it necessary to ask local authorities to protect from any future attacks the victims of Sunday’s bus burning, the South’s business has, of necessity, become the nation’s business.” There is no state right “and there never has been—to refuse to arrest and prosecute those who gather in gangs to injure or intimidate persons who are exercising privileges which are theirs under the law of the land.” Because of the “Alabama mobsters,” the newspaper concluded in invoking the foreign-image frame, the freedom bus tour “is likely to become another cause celebre, making understanding between North and South more difficult, resulting in new demands for more federal legislation ‘with teeth’ and further damaging the image of American democracy in the eyes of the world.”<sup>94</sup> In its next editorial, following the sending of federal marshals into Alabama, the newspaper, citing a U.S. Supreme Court decision against segregating bus-station waiting rooms, argued on behalf of

federal law overruling state or local ordinances. The newspaper not only endorsed the president's use of the troops in this instance but also the arrests of the mobsters, four of which had already been made. "It would be better, of course, if the arrests could be made by the legally constituted authorities of Alabama. But these authorities, on three separate occasions, have failed miserably to carry out their responsibilities."<sup>95</sup> In its final editorial on this subject, the newspaper responded to the Southern argument that the freedom rides were "a mission of provocation designed to stir up trouble rather than improve Southern race relations." That argument fails "to understand the over-all strategy of American Negro leaders and the factors that support the logic of that strategy," argued the newspaper, giving a nod to the African-American agenda-setting method. "Someone had to hold up a mirror to the nation so that it could see itself as it is seen by millions throughout the world who must choose between our way of life and the Communist way."<sup>96</sup>

Like *The Denver Post*, *The Seattle Times* relegated the early wire service coverage to inside pages, moving the story to the front page when rioting broke out in Montgomery, where it stayed (along with the report of Robert Kennedy predicting an African-American president within forty years). One editorial was found on this subject in this Northwest daily, a May 23 argument on behalf of federal—and constitutional—legal authority outweighing local and state laws, along with a nod to foreign attitudes. "Many Americans naturally are concerned about the impact abroad of these ugly outbreaks of racial violence. But there is another side to the picture. The spectacle of the federal government acting vigorously and without compromise to uphold human rights in the face of mob violence should improve the American image abroad."<sup>97</sup>

*Los Angeles Times* reporting on this subject was quite sparse. Twelve stories were found, played inside until the federal marshals were dispatched. Of the Western newspapers, this one demonstrated the least interest in the story, covered completely by wire services, though one editorial was found—when it all was over. The editorial, in its lead, put the states'-rights issue in perspective by arguing that the rioting Alabamians violated not only federal law, but "their state laws as well. . . . This was not a local affair. The rioters broke a federal statute which binds people everywhere in the United States. It gave the critics of America another opportunity to mock the pretensions of a government which makes plans for the world and can't manage its own house." The Alabamians, the editorial concluded, "have lost the hard way, and if the rest of us have won something the victory has cost us more than was necessary, as the Civil War did. The moral is pretty clear; the Supreme Court wrote it in advance."<sup>98</sup>

The Western press attitude on this affair was almost as a distanced, third-party observer of a long-boiling feud, a North-South dispute akin to the Civil War



in its logic and arguments. And indeed, this is what it was. The Southern newspapers echoed Calhoun in summoning the nullification and states'-rights arguments. A dominant frame used language of conspiracy theory involving outside, communist-inspired agitators, and suspicion of arrogant Northerners and their presses that victimized the Southern citizens and their way of life, or their "folkways"—mores and customs that butted against constitutional legalities. Another common frame, noticeably in the freedom-ride coverage, depicted the riders as invaders and outside agitators—all described in language of war and battle against foreign invaders—the enemy in this combat—intent on stirring up unrest in scenarios that made the rioting mobs of violent white supremacists defenders of Southern folkways and customs, and victims of a Northern culture bent on destroying the Old South. The perceptions created by these frames are important: an innocent rider peacefully disembarking from a bus, only to be beaten and jailed and depicted as a marauder intent on fomenting violence, becomes a powerful truth in the minds of the readers.

Frames of foreign image and law-and-order were used by the newspapers of all regions, but in different ways. In the Southern press, the picture of the federal government riding roughshod over states and local "freedoms" offered a vision to the world of undemocratic process, while in the North and West, the picture presented to Europeans and Africans was of Southern mobsters trouncing on human rights in such a violent way that the democratic process required government intervention. Law and order also carried a double-edged frame—one in the South of invading hordes of African-Americans and Anglo sympathizers disturbing the established white-supremacist, segregationist rule of Southern law that governors and police agencies found necessary to uphold in a process of keeping the peace, but one in the North of maintaining the authority and law of the land as spelled out in the Constitution and interpreted by the highest federal courts in a process of protecting legal human rights and activity—also intended to keep the peace. Personification frames were rampant, with the Kennedy brothers wearing the villain's hat in the Southern press, which viewed the Alabama and Mississippi governors, lawmakers and lawmen as the heroes of this civil-rights drama, while the Northern press reversed these personages and their roles.

Agenda-setting was abundant in the newspapers of the North—particularly *The New York Times* with its assignment of race-story beat writers in the South, and *The Detroit Free Press*, which sent a couple of staff writers to the region for first-hand accounts and enterprise reporting—and South, in the amount of space allocated for the freedom-ride narratives, and prominent front-page story placement, especially in the newspapers of the Southern cities most affected, Birmingham and Jackson. But newspapers of both North and South demonstrated strong



agenda-setting in their assignment of staff reporters to the centers of violence and protest—to offer, along with primary coverage in some cases, sidebar, feature-like coverage and analysis in the Northern press, and to claim story ownership in the South, where locally produced front-line coverage superseded, or in some cases at least complemented, wire service reportage.

But, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the primary agenda-setting was by the African-American civil-rights activists who seized upon the freedom rides, as they had with the lunch-counter sit-ins, as methods of publicizing the plight of the citizen of color in the South. The Southern newspapers were correct in that these stories were a case of agitation, of intentionally-staged demonstrations and protests to bring attention to the nation, and the world, of the African-American struggle for equality and freedom. A glaring example of the success of this sort of agenda-setting—besides the resulting intervention of the federal government and the extensive press coverage that feature televised and newspaper images of mob brutality against the African-Americans—was a simple triumph of language, or framing, won by the activists in the major newspapers' and wire services' acceptance of "freedom riders" as nouns and freedom-ride as adjectives. Even more evidence of this success was the refusal by some in the Southern press to adopt this language except in quotes, using words such as "integrationists," "testers" and "invaders" instead. But the biggest victory of all by the movement was the personification of the civil-rights crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., as the hero and leader of the movement, but as nemesis to the Old South.

**Postscript:** On November 1, 1961, an Interstate Commerce Commission policy—prodded by Robert Kennedy—banning segregation on buses, trains or at terminal lunch counters took effect.

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## Civil War II in Oxford

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### ‘Sophocles in Mississippi’

The civil-rights movement returned to the public-education stage a little more than a year after the freedom-riders upheaval, when once again federal troops, deployed under presidential order, intervened to guarantee students of color the right to an education. But the movement had graduated to the higher-education realm in Mississippi in 1962.

The University of Mississippi integration battle, described by some as the greatest constitutional crisis since the Civil War, became a national story when James Meredith arrived at the Ole Miss Oxford campus in the fall of 1962 to enroll in courses there. Following his arrival on September 30, a white mob attacked U.S. marshals who were on the campus to protect Meredith; “the arrival of federal troops ended the violence in the early hours of 1 October 1962; two bystanders were killed, 206 marshals and soldiers were wounded and 200 people were arrested during the riot,”<sup>1</sup> according to University of Mississippi library archives. Meredith had been attending the all-African-American Jackson State College from 1960 to 1962 and had applied repeatedly to Ole Miss, unsuccessfully, though African-Americans had begun to be admitted to other white universities and colleges in the South.

Meredith was born in 1933 in Kosciusko and attended public schools there, finishing his senior year in Florida. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force following graduation from high school, serving from 1951 to 1960. According to a biographer, Meredith was driven to apply for admission at Ole Miss “in a calculated move” because he was unhappy with race relations in the South. After several rejections of his admission application, based on “administrative technicalities,” Meredith wrote to attorney Thurgood Marshall, the head of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund—the lawyer who spearheaded the *Brown* lawsuit that led to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that found segregation in public schools unconstitutional. “Marshall and his organization backed Meredith wholeheartedly,” according to the U.S. Marshals Service, but “the same could not be said of Mississippi’s governor, Ross Barnett. In a statewide television broadcast, Barnett stated, ‘(Mississippi) will not surrender to the evil and illegal forces of tyranny ... (and) no school will be integrated in Mississippi while I am your governor.’”<sup>2</sup> After seventeen months of legal battles, the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals ordered an injunction “to force the all-white University of Mississippi to admit James H. Meredith, a 29-year-old Negro Air Force veteran,” *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson reported on its June 26, 1962 front page. “It will be the first federal court desegregation order aimed at Mississippi.”<sup>3</sup> After the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the ruling on September 10, Mississippi and Barnett continued to resist. A September 18 front-page story in *The Clarion-Ledger* reported in a United Press International bulletin that “U.S. marshals will escort James H. Meredith when he goes to enroll as the first Negro student at the University of Mississippi this week.”<sup>4</sup> This bulletin was inserted above a staff-written story reporting that Mississippi’s State Institutions of Higher Learning’s board of trustees had taken no action on the matter following a three-hour closed-door meeting that included the governor. The next day, the newspaper reported in an un-bylined story on its front page that the governor, in an appearance before a joint session of the Mississippi House of Representatives and Senate, “assured Tuesday afternoon that he is ‘standing steadfast all the way,’ in his determination to prevent the integration of state universities.” The legislators gave Barnett “a standing ovation as he entered the House chambers,” the newspaper reported.<sup>5</sup> An accompanying staff-written report said the state’s House and Senate approved a resolution “commending the governor and censuring the federal government as violating the United States Constitution,”<sup>6</sup> and placed above this story was a wire service report that that U.S. Justice Department “won federal court permission Tuesday to launch contempt of court action if the University of Mississippi defies a federal court order to desegregate.”<sup>7</sup>

University and state officials amplified their defiance of the U.S. Supreme Court decision the next day, according to two *Clarion-Ledger* front-page stories published September 20. One reported that Mississippi Chancery Judge L. P.



Porter had issued, the previous day, a temporary injunction enjoining university officials from admitting Meredith, based on a petition “signed by 47 persons who protested Meredith’s enrollment would violate the Mississippi Constitution.” That night, the State College Board “huddled in a closed-door, unannounced session here.” The story, dispatched by The Associated Press, reported that Meredith “is expected to arrive on the university’s Oxford campus Thursday [today].” The injunction, according to the story, “left federal authorities on one side and state authorities on the other with the state college board caught in the middle.” Porter’s injunction, according to the wire service, “came five days after—and in direct opposition to—a federal court order directing the all-white university to end years of traditional segregation.”<sup>8</sup> The story did not question the legality or reasoning behind the decision for the state board to meet in secret, unannounced. Meanwhile, a staff writer reported that the Mississippi Legislature met “in an unusual post-midnight session” and completed action on a bill early Thursday, September 20, calling for Meredith’s arrest and removal from the campus “as soon as he has presented himself for registration at Oxford sometime Thursday.” The bill “provides refusal of entry to state schools on the part of anyone with a criminal record or facing criminal charges. Meredith is under charge of false voter registration in Hinds county. He is alleged to have made false statements about his place of residence.”<sup>9</sup> The next day’s front-page headline reported, under a staff-writer byline, that Governor Barnett had kept his word to the state’s citizens by keeping Ole Miss segregated “despite the most serious threat yet of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the federal government.” Meredith arrived on campus “with a Highway Patrol escort about 3:15 p.m. Thursday and was immediately ushered into the Continuation Center building,” the newspaper reported. “There Gov. Barnett and Lt. Gov. Johnson waited about an hour for his appearance. A cordon of Highway Patrolmen ringed the front of the building refusing to allow unauthorized persons nearer than 50 feet.” The story continued: “The slim, bespeckled Negro was hissed, booed and cursed on his arrival, and again when he left for Memphis, according to police.” He had been accompanied by three unarmed federal marshals onto campus.<sup>10</sup> A wire service bulletin placed above the main story reported that a U.S. District Judge Thursday night “ordered three University of Mississippi officials to appear in federal court here Friday and show cause why they should not be cited for contempt for failing to desegregate the 114-year-old institution.”<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere on the front page, a staff writer reported that Thursday afternoon’s mail had brought “a threat against the life of Gov. Ross Barnett. The vilely-written letter was postmarked Vicksburg and told the chief executive that Barnett would be killed within three weeks. ‘You won’t live more than three weeks,’ the hand-written message said.”<sup>12</sup> The Ole

Miss trio was cleared of contempt charges, according to a front-page wire dispatch published the next day, while a companion wire service story reported that federal government officials said they would take any necessary action to enforce the court order that Meredith be admitted. Legal tensions mounted when a Monday, September 24 page-one, un-bylined story reported that “Jackson legal circles were agreed the Monday contempt proceedings [involving Barnett and State College Board members] in New Orleans constitute the most serious legal threat the state has faced in its fight to maintain sovereignty over its schools without federal interference.” State college board members faced “the brunt of the federal attack,” the story reported.<sup>13</sup> A wire dispatch at the top of the page reported that Meredith was expected to enroll “despite a registration deadline if the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rules favorably for the Negro.”<sup>14</sup>

State officials, though, put forth a divided face when the circuit court gave the Mississippi State College Board until 4 p.m. September 25, a Tuesday, to enroll Meredith or face a contempt ruling—and the board agreed to let him enter the university, according to a front-page September 25 wire story. The governor, though, who had sworn to go to jail rather than enroll Meredith, “issued a public proclamation, read to a cheering legislature, interposing the authority of the state against invading federal marshals and prescribing their arrest for interference in the administration of state laws,” according to a companion, front-page staff report.<sup>15</sup> On an inside page, The Associated Press reported that the governor announced he had obtained an order from Chancellor W. T. Horton of Jackson “to prevent the state college board from registering Negro James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. The order also forbids Meredith from registering as a student at the school.”<sup>16</sup> Stirring the racial pot, the newspaper that same day published, on page twelve, an Associated Press report datelined New York that a 35-year-old New Yorker claiming to be a “light-skinned Negro said Monday he had attended the University of Mississippi as a full-time student in the 1945–46 academic year.” The man told his story to a *New York Times* reporter, saying he had attended Ole Miss as a Navy V-13 student. The program combined academic and officer-training courses, and the man said his Navy personnel records had erroneously listed him as white “because of his fair skin.” When the man, named Barry S. Murphy, Jr., heard he was going to Ole Miss, he said, “I must confess I was damned concerned.” But he wanted the chance the V-13 program offered, “so I decided to go ahead with the thing.” The *Times*, the AP reported, “said it checked with the University of Mississippi,” and the files there “showed Murphy had been a student there in 1945–46.”<sup>17</sup>

As tensions escalated, the newspaper devoted considerably more news hole and staff resources to the story. A staff writer on the front page of the September

26 edition reported that, armed with his chancery order, the governor on Tuesday, September 25, for “the second time in six days ... turned back the bid of a Negro student to enter the University of Mississippi, and the chief executive stood ready Wednesday morning to fly to Oxford to make a third refusal effective.” In his continuous defiance, “the governor is facing up to the wrath of the federal judiciary, which has now called him to appear in New Orleans Friday to show reason why he should not be cited for contempt of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Observers freely predicted Gov. Barnett will ignore the summons, since it would take him outside state borders.”<sup>18</sup> A down-page wire story reported that the U.S. Justice department had declined comment on a published report “that the Federal Government is prepared to send troops into Mississippi to enforce federal court orders.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere on the front page, the newspaper reported that both houses of the Mississippi Legislature had met the previous evening, and while no action was taken, “several senators spoke out against the invasions of the state by federal marshals.”<sup>20</sup> At the bottom of the page, a staff writer described the scene on campus. “James Meredith, a Negro blown from the obscurity of an Attala County farm to international attention by the South’s explosive racial strife, paraded by 2,000 booing, cursing white people Tuesday afternoon to be turned down again in his bid to crash the state’s color bars. Meredith, grinning as he walked along, arrived at the state office building in downtown Jackson at 4:34 p.m. and was whisked to the 10th floor of the building by three federal agents and Mississippi Highway Patrolmen. A crowd, which had grown steadily since noon, numbered 2,000 when the Negro’s three-car convoy arrived. A small group of Negro students cheered wildly as Meredith stepped from the car to the curb in front of the building.”<sup>21</sup> An inside photo spread of the scene at the federal building and the state capitol building in downtown Jackson was accompanied by a staff-written narrative describing the events in Oxford, where reporters “gathered in groups to talk of past assignments. One story of a recent South American revolt was told by an AP man. Telling of infiltrating enemy lines to gather material for his story, he spun an exciting tale. Tuesday this story became a reality in Oxford, as this writer and Van Savell, AP staffer from Jackson, actually walked some two miles and crawled more than one hundred yards through sage to gain entrance to the campus.”<sup>22</sup> Another staffer reported, on the same page, that the university chancellor had returned to campus, urging against panic and praising student behavior to date. A wire story buried deep inside the newspaper reported that the executive board of the National Governors Conference would be asked to take some sort of formal action against Governor Barnett. “Gov. Albert D. Rosellini of Washington, chairman of this governors’ group, said the executive board would meet Oct. 4 in Miami to consider a demand by Gov. John B. Swinson of Michigan that it censure Barnett for his ‘outrageous conduct.’”<sup>23</sup>

As the court pressure increased, so did Barnett's obstinance. The front page of the September 27 *Clarion-Ledger* reported in a wire dispatch that the governor had refused to accept a telegraphed copy of an order from the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans that he appear the next day, a Friday, to face contempt charges. And Lieutenant Governor Paul Johnson, the newspaper reported in an un-bylined staff story, had joined what *The Clarion-Ledger* called the "honor roll" of defenders of the state's rights of Mississippi" by being ordered by the same circuit court to "show cause why he should not be cited for contempt of the court" following his denial of Meredith's third attempt to enroll at the university.<sup>24</sup> An accompanying wire story reported that Mississippi's two U.S. senators, James O. Eastland and John C. Stennis, had come out in support of the governor's stance, while another wire service reported that U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy repeated his assurance that the federal government would take whatever steps were necessary to enforce the court-ordered admission of Meredith. On page six, The Associated Press reported that seven Oxford-area ministers had telegraphed the governor asking him not to close the university. On the next page, United Press International reported that Alabama governor nominee George Wallace and his lieutenant governor running mate, James Allen, praised Barnett for his defiance of the federal government. "All who believe in constitutional government and in fighting for principle should be proud of the fact that the chief executive of a great southern state is willing to keep faith with his people," the UPI quoted Wallace.<sup>25</sup> On page eight, an un-bylined staff story reported that Governor Barnett's office had been "swamped" by thousands of congratulatory telegrams "from all sections of the nation" and that Western Union offices were so "choked down" it could not handle "even press copy." The lengthy story went on to quote excerpts from the telegrams, all gushing approval.<sup>26</sup> A wire story on the same page offered a follow-up on the "light-skinned" African-American man who claimed to have attended Ole Miss, reporting that he was "a 'very popular' student who enjoyed dancing with white coeds in the campus canteen."<sup>27</sup> So, the picture emerging from this day's reportage was of a determined governor, along with his segregationist "honor roll" lieutenant governor, standing up for a cause popular among the masses, with the political leaders of the South circling the wagons against the invaders from the North—while an African-American man had once been right in their back yard dancing the "jitterbug" with their women. All of which caused quite a stir to the Southern folkways.

The crisis continued to escalate, with the newspaper reporting in a staff story on its front page the next day that Meredith had failed in a fourth attempt to enroll when the twenty-five federal marshals escorting him turned back after being greeted at the campus by more than "a hundred steel-helmeted highway patrolmen

with gas masks and long night sticks ... stationed at every campus approach. They were reinforced by more than 70 sheriff's [sic] representing all sections of the state." The governor, according to the story, along with the lieutenant governor and the state's highway safety commissioner "personally commanded the state officers. Gov. Barnett who received cheer after cheer from thousands of students who lined University Avenue from the campus hallway to Oxford appeared pale and tired." A bulletin at the top of the story reported that three barracks buildings, "each capable of housing 200 men were being filled by degrees as additional U.S. marshals from all over the nation were gathering in Memphis Thursday night."<sup>28</sup> An accompanying wire story reported that it was Robert Kennedy's decision to postpone Meredith's fourth enrollment attempt "lest there be major violence and bloodshed. But he underscored the administration's determination to enforce court orders for Meredith's admission with this flat declaration: 'Mr. Meredith will be registered.'"<sup>29</sup> At the same time, more Southern political leaders—Governors John Patterson of Alabama and Orval Faubus of Arkansas—declared their support of Barnett, according to a front-page wire report. And at the bottom of the front page, an un-bylined staff report datelined Washington suggested that the NAACP was dictating "to senators the course of their actions. Telegrams to all senators were sent by Clarence Mitchell, head of the Washington branch of the NAACP, requesting action against Mississippi, and saying that Senators Keating of New York and Douglas of Illinois were introducing a resolution to that effect. Shortly afterward, the two senators did just as the NAACP had predicted."<sup>30</sup> According to an inside-page story, five Mississippi congressmen had voiced their support for Barnett; and the newspaper claimed first-name status with the governor and lieutenant governor, claiming in a page-eight headline that "Legislature Protects Ross, Paul In Seizures" above a story reporting that the legislature enacted a bill to protect the two should the federal government attempt to seize their property in connection with contempt proceedings.<sup>31</sup>

On another inside page, The Associated Press reported in a story datelined Dallas that former Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, "who commanded the troops that forcibly integrated Little Rock's Central High School in 1957, called Thursday for massive resistance if soldiers are sent to enforce federal court integration orders in Mississippi."<sup>32</sup>

On Saturday, September 29, The Associated Press reported on the newspaper's front page that Barnett had been convicted of contempt; the court gave the governor until the following Tuesday to comply or he would "be committed to the custody of the U.S. attorney general and fined \$10,000 a day until he complies." The governor was not in court, nor was his lawyer.<sup>33</sup> An accompanying page-one UPI story told of the Mississippi congressional delegation urging President John F.

Kennedy to withdraw troops from Memphis to avoid violence. At Oxford, meanwhile, state highway patrolmen were on the surrounding highways, and sheriff's deputies were on the watch—but all was quiet. It was the calm before the storm.

The Meredith story dominated the front page of the Sunday, September 30 *Clarion-Ledger*. The lead story reported that President Kennedy—taking his cue, perhaps, from Eisenhower's action at Little Rock—had federalized the Mississippi National Guard “to provide whatever enforcement measures are necessary to carry out desegregation of the university,” according to The Associated Press. At the same time, the AP reported, the president signed a proclamation ordering “all persons engaged in such obstruction of justice’ as may interfere with the execution of court desegregation orders to desist immediately,” and he signed an executive order “authorizing the Secretary of Defense to take whatever steps are necessary to enforce the court decree.”<sup>34</sup> A staff writer reported elsewhere on page one that the recessed state legislature had been placed on stand-by alert and that any sign of federal intervention at the university “or attempted arrest of either Gov. Ross Barnett or Lt. Gov. Paul B. Johnson is said to be a signal for reconvening of the lawmaking body.”<sup>35</sup> Johnson, meanwhile, had been held in contempt by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, according to another page-one story, from The Associated Press. Yet another front-page wire story was describing a “lovely fall day in Oxford” as the “gently spreading campus was awaiting a test of bald force between national and state authorities over a Negro’s attempt to attend the university.” A subhead described the campus as gentle, but awaiting, “In Eye Of A Hurricane.”<sup>36</sup> In Montgomery, Alabama, the UPI reported that Barnett’s executive secretary had urged a Montgomery group of volunteers planning to come to Mississippi “not to come immediately.” The thirty-seven member group, reported by the headline to be armed, was planning a motorcade to Mississippi “to lend moral and physical support to Barnett in the governor’s stand against the federal government,” according to the wire service.<sup>37</sup> At the bottom of the cover page, The Associated Press reported that a joint committee of the Mississippi Legislature had found that Meredith “does not possess the necessary qualifications under the rules of the university” and that his entry into the university “would have set the University of Mississippi up for expulsion from accrediting association.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, another bottom-page story, by the UPI, reported that the governor had received a telegram “signed by about 700 University of South Carolina students endorsing his stand in the Ole Miss situation” and that nearly “500 armed men, members of the Florida white Citizens Council, have been offered to Gov. Ross Barnett to help fight a federal court integration order.” The story listed similar shows of support from other areas of the South, including a report from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, that the Ku Klux Klan “was to meet here Saturday night to



show support for resistance of integration efforts at the University of Mississippi.”<sup>39</sup> On page eight, a story—apparently by a freelance correspondent—reported that the “courageous stand of Governor Barnett for the rights of the States and for liberty and freedom of the people has electrified the South, and in fact the entire nation. The response of the public was remarkable if not sensational.” The column, posing as a straight news story with no “analysis” logo or anything identifying it as an opinion, ended in an anti-United Nations diatribe: “The people should rally behind Governor Barnett in his gallant effort to preserve the fundamentals of freedom. Not only are our schools at stake, but our homes, our churches and community life, else we will awaken to find ourselves, a God fearing people, with a Godless government, shamelessly surrendering our liberty and sovereignty to a God hating atheistic, death trap—the so-called United Nations.”<sup>40</sup> On page twelve, an Associated Press analysis offered a rare bite of opposition to this day’s dominant segregationist, states’-rights frames in a column—still with no “analysis” or opinion identification, though—questioning Barnett’s “right” to separate the races in the state school system in broad effect, to control its minorities as it sees fit, regardless of what the federal courts may say about it. And many—though not all—Southerners agree with him.” But, argued this writer, “the federal government, carrying out the law of the land as established by the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution, says state’s rights do not include a right to deny any citizen equal opportunities and equal treatment in such matters as voting and use of public schools and other tax-supported facilities.” The resistance to the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown* decision “has been effective only as a delaying tactic,” the writer concluded, as evidenced “by the fact that only Mississippi, South Carolina and Alabama remain without some integration of schools.”<sup>41</sup> Another Associated Press analysis, on page sixteen, observed that Mississippi’s sister state, Arkansas, “is watching the integration crisis at Oxford with bitter memories of five years ago. Much sentiment is with Gov. Ross Barnett as he defies federal authority. But many Arkansans feel, from experience, that Barnett is fighting a losing battle.”<sup>42</sup> An un-bylined article at the top of the same page evoked a troubling frame from the Civil War, suggesting that the president’s order federalizing the National Guard “has the ironic possibility of pitting Mississippian against Mississippian and even brother against brother in the current federal-state crisis.”<sup>43</sup> The cover of the newspaper’s classified ad section carried a UPI analysis of a step-by-step chronology of the Ole Miss crisis from Sept. 13, when the governor called the situation “the ‘gravest crisis’ since the Civil War” through the September 29 contempt ruling against the lieutenant governor, when the campus was “quiet. Nearly everyone had gone to Jackson for the football game with Kentucky, first of the season.”<sup>44</sup> And a short piece by a staff writer claimed that the governor had support from all



quarters of the city of Jackson. On the op-ed page, a staff writer offered an analysis comparing this crisis to the Civil War, writing: “Our people, faced by the full forces and power of an unfriendly federal government, a government reverted to the hatreds of the Civil War, become ‘insurrectionists’ when they try to defend their rights. Practically every male citizen of the state over 21 years of age and many of our women have worn the uniform of the U.S. military, yet there is imminent possibility that we may see that uniform come against our people within moments or hours. Ignored, intentionally, are all of the reasons for Mississippi’s stand for protection of its state’s rights.” And for what? “Nobody suggests that the Negro be held back as he travels in his own sphere, in his own race.” But: “Why the Negro is so anxious to go where he isn’t wanted, to gain for himself the uncomfortable position of the intruder is more than the people of goodwill can comprehend ... unless it be that ignorance is brash. Whatever comes of this, the Negro in Mississippi may well find in the long run that he has not profited himself, for the hand of friendship reaches far deeper than the hand of force.”<sup>45</sup>

The hurricane struck within hours. The front page of the Monday, October 1 *Clarion-Ledger* carried several stories related to the Sunday night rioting at Oxford, in which two people died as federal marshals accompanied James Meredith to the university, where the governor—“To avoid bloodshed”—allowed Meredith onto campus “with the reluctant sufferance of state patrolmen,” according to a staff-produced summary of events. The summary identified the two fatalities as a foreign newspaper correspondent, “and a youth from near Oxford, Ray Gunter, 23, ... killed in the Ole Miss rioting Sunday night.”<sup>46</sup> The main story was datelined UNIVERSITY, with no byline or wire service listed as the source. “Mississippi officers late Sunday night were succeeding in quieting down a crowd of mixed students and non-students, including former Major General James Walker, after violence had greeted U.S. marshals’ presence on the campus,” according to the report. “They came with and remained to guard Negro applicant James Meredith.” Two paragraphs down, the correspondent described a gloomy scene. “In the darkness and confusion which existed Sunday night, it was difficult to say exactly what happened on the violence front, but it was known the marshals, hitherto kept off the campus by the Highway Patrol and police and sheriffs’ deputies from over the state, were the targets of taunts and pranks by the students. And the marshals responded with waves of tear gas shells.” An Associated Press bulletin atop the story reported details of one of the two fatalities: “Paul Guihard, identified as a reporter for the London Daily Sketch, was shot and killed during Sunday night’s rioting at the University of Mississippi. Guihard’s body, ‘with a wound in the back,’ was found beside a woman’s dormitory.”<sup>47</sup> An accompanying story, based in Jackson, opened with a quote from the governor that read like a war-time message of surrender: “We are now completely surrounded

by armed forces and we are physically overpowered ... I know that our principles remain true, but we must at all odds preserve the peace and avoid bloodshed.” The story, with no byline or other identifying source of reportage, described the governor in glowing terms as a man “who has gone far beyond what any American governor has done in modern history in resisting federal encroachment.” Men, women and youths, the story continued, “carried Confederate battle flags and placards. Some wore Confederate caps as they stood and strolled around the stately baronial white residence of Mississippi’s governor.” And rumors were rampant; a spokesman of the local Citizens Council warned at a rally of an estimated one-thousand people on a street next to the governor’s mansion that his group “had information the federal government will try to seize Gov. Barnett today.”<sup>48</sup> The primary story out of the nation’s capital was an Associated Press account, placed beneath a wire photo of federal marshals ringing a building on the campus, reporting that President Kennedy had announced in a televised address that federal “court orders ‘are beginning to be carried out. Mr. James Meredith is in residence on the campus of the University of Mississippi.’ He said this had been accomplished thus far without the use of troops, adding that he hoped the faculty and students at Ole Miss could now return to their regular pursuits with respect for the laws of the United States. Before Kennedy went on the air, Gov. Ross Barnett had virtually thrown in the sponge in his struggle to prevent Meredith from enrolling in the university. Shortly before Kennedy started speaking students were reported to be rioting on the campus at Oxford. Marshals retaliated with tear gas.”<sup>49</sup>

The rest of that day’s front-page comprised a hodge-podge of wire and staff reports, all telling the saga of a night of rioting in a tense climax to what had been a long and passionate state-federal confrontation. Placed next to the story reporting Kennedy’s speech was a wire dispatch datelined Memphis, Tennessee, reporting that more than four-hundred U.S. marshals were flown and driven to Mississippi. Below that story was a brief report of rioting at State College, where a crowd, estimated at more than a thousand, many of them Mississippi State University students, had gathered, displaying a Confederate flag and burning a dummy said to represent Meredith. At the bottom of the page, The Associated Press reported that Kennedy administration lawyers had cited strong legal precedent for the authority to deploy troops, dating to the administration of George Washington during the Whisky Rebellion of 1794. In an adjacent story, a staff writer described the presence of the National Guardsmen on the scene, quoting one of them, “Isn’t this Hell?’ The sleepy-eyed National Guardsman who had been Federalized just after midnight Sunday was making a statement even though it was in the form of a question. He was almost echoing the statement of a famous Civil War soldier who is said to have made the statement, ‘War is Hell,’ in Jackson a century ago.”<sup>50</sup>

Finally, on the front page, the newspaper published a boxed, verbatim statement from the governor announcing that Meredith had been “placed on the campus ... by means of government helicopters,” urging all to “do everything in their power to preserve peace and to avoid violence in any form.” But, he offered a parting shot at the federal government and the courts in the conclusion of his statement: “Gentlemen, you are tramping on the sovereignty of this great state and depriving it of every vestige of honor and respect as a member of the union of states. You are destroying the constitution of this great nation. May God have mercy on your souls. Mississippi will continue to fight the Meredith case and all similar cases through the court to restore the sovereignty of the state and constitutional government.”<sup>51</sup> This statement was placed at the top of the page, beneath the main headline, and above the wire story relating Kennedy’s national address—placement clearly showing how this newspaper’s gatekeepers rated the priority of the previous evening’s events in a frame that placed the governor above the president and in harmony with Mississippi’s congressional delegation, reported in a companion, un-bylined story out of Washington to be in disagreement with the president’s decision. The delegation warned that “the liberty-loving people of other states may well take heed that some other pretense may soon be used to invade their rights.”<sup>52</sup>

But the deed of integration of Ole Miss was accomplished, and Meredith was on campus, protected by federal marshals. Over the next few days the newspaper published several stories of continuing coverage, including more name-calling of federal agents in a televised speech by Barnett; the announcement of an investigation into events of that Sunday night by U.S. Senator Eastland, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee; aftermath photos; reactions of other Southern government officials; an announcement of the withholding of federal loan and grant funds to the university, and a continuance of demonstrations at the governor’s mansion in support of Barnett. Five days later, a front-page story reported that seven-thousand of the federalized National Guardsmen would be released from federal duty that midnight. This was followed by another page-one report, by the UPI, that a contingent of federal troops and marshals would be with Meredith for the duration of his planned year-and-a-half at Ole Miss. The newspaper published a short report of Meredith sitting in the campus cafeteria enjoying his first cafeteria meal, during which “one of the white servers began crying.” But, as he ate, “a white male student approached him, shook his hand, and conversed with him for several minutes.”<sup>53</sup> The harassment of Meredith continued during his stay at the university, with his federal bodyguards “enduring the same taunts and jibes, the same heckling, the same bombardment of cherry bombs, water balloons, and trash, as Meredith did.”<sup>54</sup>

In its first editorial on this subject—oddly, unsigned, but written in the first-person voice—the newspaper revived the segregationist argument that had been raised following the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown* decision, that the “separate but equal” standard of *Plessy* “did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment.” The main issue, proclaimed this September 28 editorial, “is state’s rights.” But, asserted the newspaper, invoking the slippery-slope theme in an argument that ignored that desegregation had largely been accomplished at public schools throughout the nation including the south, “The broader picture is that entrance of one Negro to Ole Miss will lead to breakdown elsewhere, in other colleges, in junior colleges, in high schools and in elementary schools.” Arguing on behalf of interposition, the editorialist took up the dare by Governor Barnett to arrest him. “He can be pretty certain they won’t. I wish they would. I’ll bet Ross Barnett wishes they would. But Mama Kennedy raised no fools. They may be sort of unprincipled, but they aren’t fools. ‘Interposition’ is the second smart strike-back of a fighting Deep South. The U.S. Government is put in the position of not wanting the real ‘culprit.’ It’s the same idea as not winning the war, isn’t it?”<sup>55</sup> In an editorial on the subject of contempt charges against state officials, published two days later, the newspaper complained that communists get better treatment from the federal government than do the “dedicated public officials” of Mississippi. The newspaper asked two questions at the conclusion of this editorial, referring to the 1960 enactment of the Subversive Activities Control Act and the 1961 executive order creating the Subversive Activities Control Board, under the auspices of that act, a year later: “1. Why has the Federal government delayed for more than one year initiating contempt proceedings against the officials and members of the Communist Party of the United States in this matter? 2. Why, in view of the above, did the Federal government feel it necessary to institute contempt proceedings against the Board of Trustees and certain officials of the University of Mississippi within forty-eight hours after the appearance of the NAACP’s pawn, James Meredith, on the campus of Ole Miss this semester?”<sup>56</sup>

The wounds of the Meredith case festered for a long time in the minds of this newspaper’s owners and editors; and, in keeping with the red-scare mood of the times, so did the conspiracy theory that the Communist government of the Soviet Union (along with its U.S. ally, the NAACP), supported the integrationist plot. The next year, on April 9, 1963, the newspaper argued in an editorial that the United States “is today operating as a ‘police state,’ even though Americans are quick to criticize Russia as a police state. Mississippi has been a victim of Krushchev-like, strong arm tactics in the Ole Miss situation, which finds federal troops occupying the Oxford campus, despite lack of constitutional authority.” Assuming that Meredith’s admission to the university “was morally justified, despite the

university's ruling that he had not fulfilled the requirements for admission, the question arises as to whether a proper objective in free America should ever be sought by unconstitutional means." Every day that the troops remain on campus, this editorial concluded, "the United States stands in the position of having again condoned the ways of a 'police state' by invoking the age-old doctrine that 'the end justifies the means.'"<sup>57</sup>

*The Clarion-Ledger* made this story its own, mixing wire service coverage with staff reports throughout, with front-page placement throughout, demonstrating a strong agenda-setting role in its news pages if not on the editorial page, where commentary was quite sparse for a local story of this magnitude. But then, the newspaper's "straight" news reporting contained pro-segregation opinion galore, with headlines and stories departing from the fair, unbiased reporting norms of journalism. For example, *The Clarion-Ledger* several times identified Governor Barnett as "Ross" in headlines over stories friendly to the governor, indicating that the newspaper itself was on a first-name, friendly basis with Barnett. The framing, the language choices in headlines and news stories and the gatekeeping process of story selection along with editorial commentary, depicted a situation of invasion by outside, federal sources, of a state at war in which reporters infiltrated enemy lines along with reporting from the front lines of a states'-rights battle. The governor was framed as defiant and as popular, in a heroic stance in which he kept his word to the people and stood up to the attacking federal agents. The newspaper's reporting and editorials invoked frames of conspiracy theory by a federal government adopting authoritarian rule that preferred even the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the law-abiding, Constitution-respecting leaders and citizenry of a state besieged by a communist-backed NAACP, perhaps leaving no choice but interposition and nullification.

In Birmingham, the *News* followed the same script, but with a heavy reliance on wire service stories, which were placed on the front page throughout the run of the Meredith saga. The newspaper's Washington, D.C. correspondent began to offer ancillary coverage on September 25, and its Mississippi correspondent contributed front-page stories from Oxford beginning on September 27. Before that, Mississippi correspondent George Metz contributed an analysis, on an inside page and datelined University, for the September 19 edition, when he asked in a column what would ensue if Mississippi defied the federal court mandate. "Will Attorney General Robert Kennedy order Federal troops or a large force of U.S. marshals to this historic citadel of law to enforce the court's injunction restraining the University against refusing Meredith admission? Or will he act now?" The police presence on campus had been bolstered by arrival of enforcements "from as far away as Clarksdale," Metz wrote. He speculated that Barnett "may have already

placed himself in contempt” of the court order by urging Mississippians to resist the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling; rumors persisted, he wrote, “that Gov. Barnett will come to the campus Thursday and personally refuse Meredith admittance.”<sup>58</sup> On September 20, the newspaper published on page 10 a brief story, datelined Oxford but with no identified author, that was an off-beat observation that the journalists visiting Oxford—including the Yankee section—never had it so good as they converged on this university town to report the showdown between state and federal government. Southern hospitality is flowing thick and sweet like the heavy perfume of the magnolia trees, and the reporters are eating it up. Beautiful girls smile on everyone; the boys are so polite it hurts and the drawling ‘Sorry, no comment’ take all the sting out of the words.” The “red carpet treatment,” the author of the dispatch mused, “is reminiscent of the City of Jackson during the freedom rider arrests. Newsmen from over the nation were smothered in Southern kindness and went away singing the praises of Mississippi’s capital city.”<sup>59</sup> On this same day, Metz reported that the mood on campus was quiet, though the replacement of an American flag, “torn by the wind and not by rebellious students,” on a campus flagpole “did not patch up the split between the state of Mississippi and the federal government, coming to a head here at this historic 114-year-old institution.” Metz suggested that should the issue end up back at the U.S. Supreme Court, nobody “here questions what that court’s decision will be. Then Ole Miss will be right back where it is today. Admit Meredith or close. Ole Miss students we talked to say they do not want the University closed.”<sup>60</sup> In an analysis published on page four the next day, Metz wrote that the arrival of Meredith on campus “ended in something of an anticlimax. It culminated a frantic day of activity on the University of Mississippi which saw events occur which probably haven’t been duplicated here since Mississippi seceded from the Union in 1860.” Metz summarized the scenario of Barnett personally turning Meredith away. “Meredith strode from the continuation center flanked by marshals. He climbed into the back seat of a green sedan, and sitting between two marshals, was driven away, booed and jeered at by students.”<sup>61</sup>

On September 25, alongside a page-one wire report that the Mississippi State College Board had agreed to admit Meredith, Washington correspondent James Free wrote an analysis suggesting that Attorney General Kennedy was opposed to jailing Barnett or “any other governor” for contempt. Alabama’s Democratic governor nominee to replace John Patterson, George Wallace, “has said repeatedly that he will be willing to go to jail to preserve racial segregation in Alabama.” And the reason, Free wrote, “is not political but legal.” He then spent the rest of the piece explaining the legal reasoning behind Kennedy’s wish to avoid a “head-on clash with the Mississippi governor for political reasons.”<sup>62</sup> On the next day’s front



page, Free wrote that federal troops “are virtually certain to be in Jackson before the day is out.” The governor, he wrote, “has just about ruled out any other course of action, according to reliable sources here. Barnett has ordered state police and other state officials to resist federal marshals who try to arrest any Mississippi official in the controversy. . . .”<sup>63</sup> The newspaper, though, continued to add an offbeat, feature flair to the crisis in a Southern folkways frame, bannered a quirky piece across the top of the same page accompanied by an illustration of the university’s “Col. Rebel,” a white-bearded gent bearing the Confederate flag hanging from a rifle, with the words “REBS ARE BEST IN MISSISSIPPI: Col. Rebel symbolizes team spirit” at the bottom of the drawing. “They call it Ole Miss,” wrote a reporter with the Herald Tribune News Service. “And the name illuminates the character of the 114-year-old school. Ole Miss on the early Southern plantation was the title of the matriarch, the wife of the plantation owner. The daughters would be Miss Mary or Miss Nancy, but the mother would be, to all plantation people, even to her own husband when he spoke of her to those out side the immediate family, Ole Miss—a term of respect and affection. A Dixie version of Alma Mater. Thus the language of the slavery era lingers at the hilly, grass carpeted and oak-shaded campus of the University of Mississippi in Oxford. In a state with no large cities and the lowest per capita income in the nation, this campus is a mecca of social life, culture and intellectualism.”<sup>64</sup> And thus did this newspaper, evoking the old, Deep-South language and culture, along with an illustration sure to offend its African-American subscribers, remind the segregationists among its readers of what they stood for and what was under attack in the Magnolia State.

On September 27, as tensions in Mississippi increased, Free reported from Washington that Mississippi’s governor had the support of Alabama’s congressional delegation, while Metz, writing from Oxford, observed that federal government aircraft and cars had been scouting “an army of helmeted, club-carrying sheriffs and state highway patrolmen who have ringed the University of Mississippi. The massive force of law officers was thrown around Ole Miss early this morning by Gov. Ross Barnett amid reports federal marshals would try to force their way onto the campus to enter Negro James. H. Meredith at the university.”<sup>65</sup> The *News* added a local, Alabama flavor to the crisis by publishing with these two front-page stories a wire service report from Montgomery that Alabama’s governor “asked President Kennedy today ‘if troops are sent into Mississippi, I ask if you are prepared to invade Alabama as well?’” The governor, in a telegram to the president, said “Alabama and Mississippi stand united ‘in this fight and will continue to resist all unlawful encroachments by the federal government.’”<sup>66</sup> Free replaced the wire service as primary reporter for the September 28 front-page story reporting that the Justice Department had denied that Attorney General Kennedy and



Barnett had come to a truce, at least for the weekend, while two reporters from the Mississippi bureau wrote in an adjacent story that Barnett had not shown up for the federal court contempt hearing and was being tried in absentia. On page two, a brief wire story reported that seven Mississippi congressmen sent a telegraph to President Kennedy requesting withdrawal of federal troops from Memphis, Tennessee, warning of a “holocaust in the South.”<sup>67</sup>

Accompanying the front-page October 1 wire story of Meredith’s enrollment, campus riots, the arrest of one-hundred-twelve people along with the two fatalities, was a report—without a byline or identified source—that Meredith had been “snubbed by white students in his first class at the University of Mississippi today.”<sup>68</sup> On the scene in Oxford, Metz reported that he had witnessed “a mob take over Oxford this morning. It was enough to make a grown man cry. Stoning every car with Negro occupants which passed by the intersection of University Drive and Highway—the main street—a mob filled the street. I saw a lone Negro in a new car report the assault to Oxford police standing on the Courthouse Square some 300 yards away. A white man standing with them laughed and told the Negro: ‘Go on and get out of here.’ The officers did not say anything.” At one point, Metz wrote, “the white men were observed chasing a lone Negro on foot. I do not know if they caught him.” A group of fifty to seventy-five “roughly-dressed young men” were shouting “‘Get out of here, Nigger,’ but they weren’t doing so much jeering as they were rock-throwing. Their targets were mostly Negroes who appeared to be following their usual routes to work. I saw at least a dozen cars stoned.” Metz asked a patrolmen if he was going to stop it. “He shrugged his shoulders and said, ‘We don’t have any orders to stop it.’ Then he added, ‘Do you know what they did to us a while ago? They (the troops) moved us off the intersection with fixed bayonets.’”<sup>69</sup> Metz and colleague Tom Lankford reported that federalized Mississippi troops had fired shots over the heads of rioters and arrested many “as a brief pitched battle broke out in downtown streets here today.”<sup>70</sup> And in Washington, Free reported that former Army General Edwin Walker had been arrested at an Oxford roadblock “on charges of inciting a rebellion or insurrection at the University of Mississippi.”<sup>71</sup>

Events of the previous evening claimed much of the newspaper’s inside news hole on October 1. An Associated Press writer on page seven described the scene in Oxford, quoting student reaction to the events—many of them similar to Metz’s eyewitness account on the front page. Another wire story on page seven reported that a “Negro editor and publisher asked Gov. Ross Barnett Sunday for assurance the University of Mississippi desegregation case would not result in vengeance against Negroes. Perce Greco, editor and publisher of *The Jackson Advocate*, a Negro weekly newspaper, said he made the request in a telegram to Barnett.” The

editor said he wanted to make white residents of Mississippi “aware ‘this is not a contest between the white people and Negroes ... and that vengeance against Negroes will be unchristian and undemocratic and a patented acknowledgement of the complete lack of rights of Negro citizens in this state.’”<sup>72</sup> The newspaper published a two-page spread of staff and AP photos of the violence of the previous evening, and on page nineteen it published an Associated Press analysis of the busy September 30 Sunday at the White House, where there “was no lull before the storm. The high-voltage hours of Saturday flowed right into Sunday, and the lights of the Army section of the Pentagon blazed past dawn. ... As the hour hand bit deeply into Monday morning, the President and the attorney general waited in the office receiving reports of a crisis that was far from over.”<sup>73</sup> A wire service political analysis reporting splits along section lines was placed at the top of page twenty-five, and a wire account at the top of page thirty-one provided more description of the events in Jackson, where citizens formed a human wall around the governor’s mansion “to prevent his seizure by the federal government” while people carried Confederate flags and placards.<sup>74</sup> Below this story, the newspaper published the text of President Kennedy’s executive order; and another story, by The Associated Press, reported that Harold Wilson, chairman of the British Labor Party, “today called the fight by Mississippi segregationists to bar James Meredith from the University of Mississippi a ‘blot on Western civilization.’”<sup>75</sup> On page thirty-two, the newspaper offered another eye-witness account, from one of its reporters, datelined On The Ole Miss Campus. “I was sitting in my car in Oxford early Sunday afternoon with News Photographer Norman Dean,” wrote Tom Lankford, “listening to my short wave radio carry messages back and forth, when we heard that the first contingent of marshals was ready to roll through the gate. We headed for the campus, were turned away, and slithered through heavy weeds to get in. Then we mingled with the students.” About two-thousand people stood outside the administration building in the afternoon, he wrote. “Students and persons in the crowd were armed. There were rocks, Molotov cocktails, bottles, bricks, weapons. The students heaved barrages of insults at the marshals, but there was a line of highway patrolmen between them and the marshals.” As dusk fell, he wrote, snipers climbed trees, shooting out lights, then shot at the marshals. “One marshal was reported shot in an eye, but this was unconfirmed. One sniper stood only a few feet from me, firing a .22 rifle. Oxford city police arrested one in a tree. They said it took two hours to find him. Shots boomed across the campus—people just shooting, firing at moving figures.” The reporter saw no apparent leader, “everyone seemed to be operating on his own. About 4 a.m. I got back to my car. It escaped the torch because I loaned it out to carry a wounded student to the hospital.”<sup>76</sup> The same writer reported that Meredith had signed up for classes

and had attended his first one. He found Meredith for an interview. “This is not a happy occasion,” Meredith told the reporter.<sup>77</sup>

*The Birmingham News* on September 18 began a three-part editorial series titled “Facing Facts: Race And Reality,” parts I, II, and III. The “fact” laid out in the initial editorial was that, as evidenced by articles in a couple of Northern newspapers, prejudice and segregationist sentiments were not unique to the South. Segregation “isn’t confined to the South,” the newspaper argued. “It is absolutely essential in dealing with race in this nation, North or South, to deal in facts. It is dangerous and pitiful illusion to do otherwise. As *The Birmingham News* has said again and again, few whites anywhere in the land want integration. But,” the editorial concluded, “there are other facts”—to be dealt with in future editorials.<sup>78</sup> The next installment discussed ongoing school desegregation controversies in Virginia, in Mississippi (the Meredith case) and, soon, in Birmingham. Two options seemed apparent to the editorialist: buckle under to the orders of the courts and integrate, or close the schools—an experiment that had been tried in Virginia, but likely to no avail with a court order pending. “The issue already is other than abstract in Mississippi. Within the next year it also is likely to be very real in Alabama.”<sup>79</sup> In the third editorial, the newspaper reasserted the “fact” that U.S. citizens North and South preferred to avoid race-mixing, but the courts were moving in a different direction. So, of the choices—obedience or closure—the newspaper begrudgingly chose the former. “*THE NEWS HAS SAID* it sees no future in Gov. Ross Barnett’s course in Mississippi. It would similarly see no future to Gov. Patterson or Gov.-Nominate Wallace leading an equivalent ‘interposition’ or parallel effort in Alabama. It is impossible for *The News* to see how desegregation orders by the courts will be forestalled in this state.” Citing current demonstrations in Albany, Georgia, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., the newspaper noted that when King arrives in Birmingham, “and he has formally ‘announced’ he will,” then “Birmingham citizens of all walks will keep their temper, pay as little heed as is possible to these sessions of integrationists. Any other course will only give the ‘visitors’ what some of them, at least, can use profitably.” The key, the newspaper concluded, is “adherence to law, maintenance of order, and a dedication to *both*” when the inevitable occurs [*italics by the newspaper*].<sup>80</sup> So, a common mantra of the South during the civil-rights movement—law and order, keeping the peace—was the essential message of this editorial series. But, again, who defines law and how order is to be carried out remained open to definition—the dominant Southern frame so far being law and order as defined by segregationists on behalf of opposing efforts by the federal government and the courts to impose their own brand of law and order upon the South. In a September 24 editorial, the newspaper defined the Mississippi governor’s stance on the Meredith case as “‘interposition.’ This is an attempt of a state to declare its authority superior to the federal

government's." Interposition, the editorial argued, had a long history, "as does its failure." The lengthy editorial summarized historical cases concerning, and arguments for, interposition. Part of this summary included a legal explanation of interposition, based on the constitutional amendment that was the foundation for the entire argument of the South throughout the civil-rights movement: the Tenth Amendment reserving to the states powers not delegated to the federal government (as opposed to the amendment supporting the Northern argument, the Fourteenth). The editorial quoted from the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court's ruling in *United States v. Peters*: "If the Legislature of the several states may, at will, annul the judgments of the courts of the United States, and destroy the rights acquired under those judgments, the Constitution itself becomes a solemn mockery." The U.S. Supreme Court, though, "reviewed the New Orleans case decided by the Fifth Circuit. Of the appeal by New Orleans the Supreme Court said: 'The main basis for challenging this ruling is that the State of Louisiana "has Interposed itself in the field of public education over which it has exclusive control." This objection is without substance. ...'" Thus, the editorial concluded that Barnett, should he persist, could "of course" be jailed. "A governor in jail could claim sympathy; that he would get it to extent of a congressional act to reverse the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board*, the basic school case, or to reverse the Mississippi action, is pure fantasy. People should not allow their 'druthers' to obscure the facts. If ever Congress 'overrules' the Supreme Court, it would not be because either Gov. Barnett or George Wallace is in jail."<sup>81</sup> Again, the message of this newspaper—though a bit stronger than before but still framed as in opposition to federal oversight and avoidance of "facts"—was to succumb. *The News* repeated this message following the admission of Meredith to Ole Miss and the rioting in Oxford, in an editorial, titled "Lesson Of Mississippi." The newspaper cited from its own previous editorial on the subject, in which it warned of the outcome. "The violence and bloodshed, including loss of life, have brought a Mississippi tragedy which will require years to ease," observed the newspaper. "Defiance cannot be proclaimed as policy without hundreds or even thousands taking leaders at their word. When the leaders make the final and inevitable turn to compliance with law as Gov. Barnett ultimately had to do in face of full federal force, the hundreds and thousands may be slow in following them. This leaves a leadership vacuum for bloodshed and tragedy and pain long to be suffered by a whole people. May Alabama be helped to avoid errors so obvious in Mississippi from the beginning."<sup>82</sup> The frame, then, continued to be one of begrudging acceptance of a policy that goes against the natural sentiment of the citizens.

In South Carolina, *The News and Courier* relied exclusively on wire service reports of the Mississippi drama, initially on inside pages, until its final days, when

a staff writer was sent to Mississippi. The story moved to the front page, where it remained, on September 21 with the story of the U.S. judge ordering three Ole Miss officials to appear in federal court to show why they should not be held in contempt. The first effort to put a local frame on the story came October 1, when the newspaper published, on page six, a wire report that South Carolina's governor-elect, Donald S. Russell, approved of Barnett's stand. "However, the Spartanburg attorney emphasized that he was speaking as a private citizen and not as an official spokesman for South Carolina when he said Barnett's position demonstrated the 'strength of Southern conviction about the whole issue of school segregation.'" <sup>83</sup> But this sentiment was not unanimous in the South; on the next page, a story carrying no byline or source identification reported that Southern governors of Louisiana, Texas, Delaware and Missouri "have declined to either support or oppose Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett's fight to retain segregation at the University of Mississippi. They say the fight to bar a Negro, James Meredith—which has precipitated a clash with the federal government—is Barnett's own problem." <sup>84</sup> On the cover of that day's local section, an un-bylined story reported that a majority of the county's legislative delegation had come out "in opposition to the federal government's tactics in trying to force the admission of a Negro to the University of Mississippi." In the same story, the state's lieutenant governor chimed in that his "sympathies are wholly with the state officials in this case." <sup>85</sup> The newspaper sent a staff writer to cover the October 1 rioting in Oxford. Anthony H. Harrigan wrote for the October 2 front page that the night of Sunday, September 30, "will remain fixed in this reporter's memory as a night of dread and terror." He then wrote a blow-by-blow account of the scene, similar to those already reported elsewhere in this chapter. He wrote that he heard a voice emerging from a pocket of tear gas. "'I'm going to kill one of those guys,' I heard a youthful voice say. I couldn't see his face as I stumbled under the overhanging branches of a big tree. Maybe he did 'get one,' for two people died." <sup>86</sup> Following the rioting in Oxford, Harrigan filed an on-scene report of Meredith attending classes and living in a two-room campus apartment "with a kitchenette. He is under heavy guard." <sup>87</sup> The next day, the newspaper bannered an on-the-scene analysis from Harrigan atop its front page. The piece, with an Oxford dateline, asked how long the federal government could keep Meredith at the university. "Will it be possible for him to remain there without the presence of U.S. troops and marshals? You won't find many students, townspeople or reporters who will bet that Meredith can remain on the Ole Miss campus without constant protection from government forces" <sup>88</sup>—which, of course, is precisely what happened.

In a brief editorial published September 23, *The News and Courier* invoked the foreign-image frame—but in reverse from Northern newspaper use of this theme.

“For years white Southerners have been scolded because their racial customs might present an unfavorable image of America abroad,” observed the newspaper. “What kind of image does the United States present with Negro hoodlums terrorizing great Northern cities and Cuban gangsters letting Russia set up a base at our national doorstep? Does Uncle Sam’s weakness at home and abroad invite confidence among ‘neutrals’ who are watching to see which way the international cat will jump?”<sup>89</sup> The newspaper chose the story of the “fair-skinned” African-American man who had attended Ole Miss passing as a white to assert that “most Southerners are well aware that many persons with a trace of Negro blood are passing every day for white. Whenever a legal definition is sought of a Negro, it is necessary to fall back on this formula: A person who is known as a Negro by the people among whom he lives.”<sup>90</sup> A September 28 editorial, anticipating the use of federal troops in Oxford, argued that the federal government could best any state in the union in “a showdown of brute force.” But, in “contest of principle and courage, the Governor of Mississippi so far is well ahead on points. Had all Southern governors been willing from the outset to take his firm position the situation would be different today.”<sup>91</sup> The next day, the newspaper, using one of its favorite catchwords, chided the Paper Curtain (Northern) press for deliberate “distortion of the issues in the attempt to force integration on the Southern states.” The editorial urged armed revolt: “The only antidote for tyranny is revolution. This country was founded in revolution by men who believed that liberty from time to time had to be nourished with the blood of patriots.”<sup>92</sup> Where *The Birmingham News* saw two choices—acceptance of a repugnant law, or school closure—this newspaper suggested a third: violent, blood-spilling revolution. Finally, after the mob scene in Oxford and the successful admission of Meredith to campus—a process *The News and Courier* defined as “smuggling”—an October 2 editorial complained, in a Southern folkways frame, that had the rioters in Mississippi been “Algerians fighting the French, or Congo savages slaughtering white Europeans, American ‘liberals’ might have cheered them on. But they are free born white Americans. Though their anger erupted with the same senseless violence that sweeps through any mob, their resentment has deep foundation in the history of the Republic.” The editorial urged other states to “continue to resist the encroachment on constitutional rights which has become a fixation of the present rulers of the country. Race is not the only issue, nor even the most important, though it is emotionally the most explosive.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, this newspaper’s position was to carry on the fight rather than accept U.S. Supreme Court fiat.

In Richmond, *The News Leader* depended entirely on wire service reportage, which was played prominently on the front page throughout the ordeal—with no attempt at localizing the subject. On September 26, in the first editorial found



on the Meredith controversy, the newspaper picked up a refrain that had been raised by *The Birmingham News* in a Greek tragedy-style struggle unfolding “like so many scenes from Aeschylus or Sophocles.” That refrain, in this “struggle from which none can withdraw,” was facts. “Facts have ceased to matter in this clash of the State and Federal will,” asserted the editorial, adopting a states’-rights frame. “If facts mattered, the credentials of James H. Meredith as a senior transfer student needing only six hours for a degree, would be coolly regarded by any college registrar in the land.” But that fact was but a minor “wedge by which a long-established order could be cracked and destroyed.”<sup>94</sup> That long-established order, of course, would be the customs and folkways of the South and its segregationist traditions—a frame put forth consistently in the Southern press. In an editorial correspondence from Oxford published September 29, editor James Kilpatrick sounded another theme that had been played by *The Birmingham News*: Southern hospitality. The one-hundred-eighty-two correspondents packing the small college burg “are being treated with every courtesy the Old South can muster,” wrote Kilpatrick, by far the most eloquent of the segregationist editors and writers covering the unfolding civil-rights story and whose future would include a regular column with *The Washington Post* and a pundit stint on CBS News’ “60 Minutes.” “On Thursday, as the Federal marshals were organizing their feeling-out expedition, the Governor’s aides were passing out box lunches for the press. Mississippi is on her best behavior. There isn’t an honest demagogue in town.” By the time of the column’s publication, Kilpatrick mused, “the story may have outrun this peaceful afternoon. Lulls end and battles too, and neither the Governor nor Mr. Kennedy can back down now without disastrous loss of face.”<sup>95</sup> In another signed dispatch, this one from Jackson and published on the newspaper’s front page October 1 along with the wire reportage of Ole Miss carnage, Kilpatrick observed that what had been a peaceful, “strangely dreamlike atmosphere” of the Mississippi crisis, had “turned to nightmare: A French newsman dead, a highway patrolman wounded, an acrid stench pervading old magnolia groves. Today, with disorder at least temporarily suppressed, University of Mississippi students were waiting tensely for whatever the day might bring.”<sup>96</sup> The essay was a long saga summarizing Meredith’s background and other historical and cultural anecdotes and feature-story snippets of local life and custom. Kilpatrick took advantage of the two hats he was wearing—columnist with full freedom of opinion, and reporter armed with facts and observation—to complement the hard news of the wire services with a splash of humanistic color. So, as had been the case with other Southern commentary on this subject, the historic folkways and mores of the Old South were displayed like a painting that is fading with time and change. On the same day’s editorial page, Kilpatrick published a signed editorial correspondence, claiming that the



newspaper had long ago “sought to warn the apostles of coerced racial integration that they were sowing the wind. Changes in race relations, we said repeatedly, had to come by the slow process of evolution, if they were to win a sound acceptance. In the Old South, at least, court decrees could achieve no more than superficial reform. Last night in the lovely little town of Oxford, the hurricane was harvested. And sad to report, the harvest is far from finished.”<sup>97</sup> Editorial prescience, that.

*The Houston Chronicle's* coverage of the Ole Miss crisis was pedestrian, at best—wire service reportage, placed on the front page on September 20 and 21, with a lapse until September 30, when the newspaper published a front-page wire report of the president ordering three-thousand Mississippi National Guardsmen to head for Oxford. On October 1, the newspaper filled its front page with an all wire service package of stories that included a report of Meredith's enrollment at the university, the president's appeal to Mississippians to obey the law, Barnett announcing that he would not surrender, and that congressional reaction to the crisis was split along regional lines, while foreign newspapers headlined the crisis, forcing local news inside. The only staff-produced coverage found of this crisis was a September 30 inside-page story out of Hollywood, Florida, reporting that governors arriving for the Southern Governors Conference there “carefully avoided passing judgment on Gov. Ross Barnett's stand against integration in Mississippi”<sup>98</sup>—just as this newspaper carefully avoided an editorial stand on the subject; the only *Chronicle* editorial found on this topic, published September 30, disagreed with the other Southern newspapers analyzed here. It proclaimed that the real issue in Mississippi “is not whether James Meredith, a Negro, is admitted to the University of Mississippi. He will be, for the United States courts have said he will be.” The governor of Mississippi, the editorial concluded, “had defied more than a court order. He has defied the government of the United States of America. He is wrong and such defiance cannot be permitted.”<sup>99</sup> For this Southern newspaper, in the states'-rights frame, the federal government trumped the states.

Turning now to the so-called Paper Curtain press of the North, *The New York Times* relied on a wire service for its report of one of the initial stories in this civil-rights saga, the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals June 25 order that the university admit Meredith, which the newspaper published on page eighteen. But when the September events began to unfold in Mississippi, the paper consistently placed the evolving story on the front page, and editors called on the newspaper's Southern race-beat correspondent, Claude Sitton, for the coverage. Sitton reported from Jackson in a story published September 20 on the move to block Ole Miss desegregation by Barnett in the unfolding narrative that followed the same reportage line already presented above. Staff writer Hedrick Smith joined Sitton in the South, when the newspaper published on page one the story, datelined Meridian,

of a federal judge dismissing contempt of court citations against three university officials.

The Meredith story made the newspaper's Sunday commentary section on September 23 in a lengthy analysis, datelined Washington, by staff writer Anthony Lewis, who noted that the "tide of integration, moving slowly but with gathering momentum over the last eight years, beat this week at the shores of that most deeply Southern of all states, Mississippi." The essayist noted the contrast between the "first great crisis over school desegregation" at Little Rock five years previous, when the Justice Department "was a mere onlooker . . . and a surprised onlooker at that. Only later, and somewhat gingerly, did the department work its way into the case as a friend of the court"—followed by President Eisenhower's commitment of troops. "But this time the Justice Department took over real management of the case before the crisis." The significance of federal intervention "on this scale, and in this detail, is difficult to exaggerate," wrote Lewis, couching his commentary in what had by now become the classic states'-vs.-federal rights frame. It was a frame that Lewis enlarged in this discussion to take in federal anti-segregation efforts that included the Justice Department bringing, that same week, "a novel suit to end segregation in schools receiving general aid under 'impacted areas' legislation. This is the large and popular program, operating in every Southern state, that provides funds for school construction and maintenance in areas where there are military bases." The pressures, Lewis observed, "are growing on both sides—the increasing weight of the Federal Government pushing for desegregation, the ferocity and tenacity of the last-ditch defenders now threatened."<sup>100</sup>

The newspaper had three staff writers on-scene for its Sunday, September 30 front-page coverage of Kennedy federalizing the Mississippi National Guard—one in New Orleans reporting on the contempt charge against the state's lieutenant governor, one in Memphis reporting on the massing of federal troops near that Tennessee city, and one in Washington reporting on the failed telephone conversations with Barnett and the president's plan to address the nation that evening on television and radio. A staff writer reported on a deep inside page, in a story datelined Jackson, Mississippi, of a campaign by the State Sovereignty Commission "to flood President Kennedy with postcards protesting Federal insistence on desegregating the University of Mississippi." The postcards "denounce the 'unnatural warfare' of the Federal Government against this state and urge that more attention be given to Communists and Cuba," according to the story.<sup>101</sup> A companion story, dateline Washington, reported that if the U.S. Court of Appeals in New Orleans fined Mississippi's governor and lieutenant governor, their property could be seized.

The Mississippi crisis dominated the newspaper's bulky Sunday, September 30, commentary section, with a summary of events in Mississippi—headlined in a purely states'-rights frame: "Showdown: U.S. vs. Mississippi,"—claiming all of the cover and ranging in frames from foreign image to the doctrine of interposition. Inside the section, Lewis, writing from Washington, and Sitton, based in Jackson, offered lengthy commentary. Lewis asserted that the Kennedy administration's aggressive commitment to civil rights had brought major gains. "Twenty years ago the white primary kept Negroes out of the election that counted in the South. The Supreme Court struck down that barrier in 1954. Congress added its weight in 1957 with the first civil rights act in 80 years. It empowered the Justice Department to bring civil suits to win Negroes the ballot." Today, Lewis wrote, "It is clear that the movement is toward equal opportunity for the Negro. How fast the process will work will depend on a combination of government and private action."<sup>102</sup> Clearly, though, in this writer's mind, desegregation and civil rights had, by now, become a movement. Sitton, meanwhile, wrote that the "tide of racial change" rolling "slowly southward" had been met with cries of "never" in Clinton, Tennessee, Little Rock, Arkansas, and New Orleans—cries that had gone "unheeded, or unheard. Their state, they said, would remain the stronghold of segregation, secure from the efforts of Federal courts to bring practice into line with constitutional principle. Saying it, they came to believe it, even those who had their doubts at first." Sitton cited John C. Calhoun, the segregationists' "patron saint from South Carolina ... who held that a state could 'interpose' its powers between its citizens and the Federal Government." These Mississippians, he wrote, "became convinced that theirs was an island of tranquility in a sea of racial chaos, except on those occasions when 'outside agitators' such as the Freedom Riders crossed the border." This controversy, he concluded, "is undoubtedly the most crucial one yet faced by the Federal Government over the racial problem." If Mississippi were successful, he wrote, "this probably will arouse new resistance in the surrounding states."<sup>103</sup> The frame here, of both Lewis and Sitton, was the strongest frame of the civil-rights movement: states' versus federal rights in the context of constitutional authority that, as we have seen, experienced opposite interpretations in Northern and Southern presses. Following the fateful rioting in Oxford that night, the newspaper's October 1 front page offered the same blanket, staff coverage from the critical sites as it had on September 30.

In a September 23 editorial, the newspaper argued that Barnett's battle "is a senseless fight—a fight doomed to futility." If the governor had any doubts on this after the defeats of his fellow segregationists in other Southern states, "the resolution the Justice Department is showing in Mississippi must by now have persuaded him that he is leading his forces to inevitable humiliation." The newspaper

concluded, in a constitutional frame: “Out of the contempt that Mississippi officials are now exhibiting for the nation’s basic law will come eventually a beneficial reaffirmation of the inviolability of legal process and the equal protection of the law.”<sup>104</sup> After the president’s decisive action of September 30, the newspaper on October 1 lauded, in an editorial titled “Mississippi Rejoins the Union,” Barnett’s “course of honor and of wisdom in ending his rebellion against the constitutional authority of the Federal Government” and observed, again in a constitutional frame, that the “issue in Mississippi was always a simple one. It was not the merits of segregation versus integration. It was the integrity of the Federal Government and its survival as a Government of laws.” A university campus, argued the editorial, “ought to be a shrine to the supremacy of lawful process which is the mainstay of all justice and all order. When the United States stands as the chief defender of the rule of law on a global battlefield, such a campus was the last place where retreat was thinkable.” Ole Miss, the editorial concluded, will have the nation’s respect “if Mr. Meredith is permitted to be just another student.”<sup>105</sup>

In Detroit, *The Free Press* at first relied on wire services to inform its readers of the Ole Miss events, beginning with a page-six story on June 26 reporting on the federal circuit court ruling out of New Orleans ordering the university to admit Meredith. The Meredith story moved to page one—where it stayed for the duration—on September 20 with a wire service report about Mississippi state officials’ efforts to thwart Meredith’s planned enrollment. The newspaper published a brief, six-paragraph, localization of the story on page two September 22 in an un-bylined story reporting that Meredith’s brother, Emmitt, who lived in Detroit, supported his brother, as did their two sisters, also of Detroit. “Jimmy feels he’s the one to do what needs to be done,” Emmitt said,” according to the story, which reported that Meredith had visited his family about two weeks prior. “He didn’t talk much about it, but I know he feels strongly about it. He’s been thinking the problem over for years.”<sup>106</sup> The newspaper showed increasing interest, broadening its agenda beyond wire coverage, as the story developed. *Free Press* contributing editor Jack Manning devoted a page-six op-ed column to the subject on September 24 in which he lent the “shameful deadlock” in Mississippi a political frame. Manning observed that President Kennedy, during a recent “campaign talk” in Pennsylvania, “threw a number of sharp punches at Republican policies under former President Eisenhower with ‘the nation’s engines idling.’” Yet, the columnist didn’t see any aggressive action from the Kennedy administration in response to Barnett’s defiance. “From here,” he wrote of the thirteen members of Mississippi’s state college board facing contempt charges in federal court, “they look like fall guys. They did not originate the primeval opposition to letting a Negro student enter their college. They merely followed the brutal orders of the ward-heeling

state governor. Why has Attorney General Bob Kennedy allowed Gov. Barnett to get away with his illegal rebellion? This corner doesn't know."<sup>107</sup> On September 25, a page-two wire story reported that Michigan Governor John Swainson, a Democrat, had telephoned Meredith to inform him that he supported his effort. He said he told Meredith "I don't want him to give up his fight because what he is doing is important—but I said if he was unsuccessful for any reason and if he wants to go to school I assured him he could enter one of our Michigan state schools."<sup>108</sup>

The Civil War refrain, a common one in papers of both the South and the North during this national controversy, dominated a front-page September 27 analysis by a United Press writer, who asserted that the "impending test of strength between Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett and the Federal Government poses the gravest constitutional crisis the United States has faced since the Civil War." The Little Rock crisis of five years before "posed no problem of such magnitude," wrote Louis Cassels. "When United States troops went into Little Rock, Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus stopped short of a final showdown. He never personally defied a Federal Court order. In contrast, Barnett has defied United State Courts by personally blocking the entrance of Negro student James H. Meredith to the University of Mississippi. . . . Furthermore, the governor has ordered state police to resist Federal marshals and to arrest them if necessary."<sup>109</sup> Also on this day, the newspaper published a wire photo spread of events in Mississippi on page sixty. The newspaper's Washington bureau chief complemented wire service coverage with a page-two story on September 28 profiling James J. McShane, the "well-liked" chief U.S. marshal who had been put in charge of "the hard ones" by the attorney general but who faced "a real crisis" in Mississippi. "It will evolve when the United States government either forces the University to accept a Negro student, James H. Meredith, or seizes Governor Barnett to carry out an order of the United States Court of Appeals at New Orleans."<sup>110</sup> On page fifty-six this same day, staff writer Judd Arnett mused about events in Mississippi after receiving a phone call from a friend in Jackson, Mississippi. Arnett was the reporter that *The Free Press* had sent to the Deep South during the freedom-rider crisis to write a six-part series on integration and civil-rights activity there, lending him an aura of knowledge and authority on the subject. The "'Mississippi Mind,' how to change it, to bring it into the 20th Century, is one of our gravest problems," Arnett wrote in a Southern folkways theme of his friend, Bill, who agreed with Barnett's stance. "The trouble is that Bill's way of thinking is not confined to just one isolated state. At the least, he represents a sectional opinion. And getting James Meredith into Ole Miss, and keeping him there, unharmed, is fraught with danger. Even so, I am convinced it must be done." What was to come, Arnett concluded in a statement that pertains to the Southern folkways, "will be more difficult for Bill than what has happened

in the past. But his way of thinking—“The Mississippi Mind”—is an anachronism in the pathway of all that is now judged decent and honorable.”<sup>111</sup>

As the federal troops gathered in Memphis for the looming Mississippi incursion, Arnett was sent to Jackson, from where he filed a front-page report for the September 30 edition, an exploration of the states’-rights theme in a story beneath a headline proclaiming Barnett as Johnny Reb’s hero. “Now we come to one of the last unviolated strongholds of states’ rights, and it is significant that the most popular rallying cry at the moment is—‘There are no Quislings in Mississippi!’ In other words there will be no surrender because of internal ‘weaknesses.’ United States Marshals may be massed and Federal troops may be on their way, but it is still ‘Mississippi Against the World!’”<sup>112</sup> Washington Bureau Chief Edwin A. Lahey also contributed to this day’s front-page mix—again with a Civil War reference—observing in a story beneath a headline predicting defeat for Barnett, that the South had already lost one war a hundred years before, and “Only a fool would predict a rematch, even with former Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker of Texas calling for volunteers to defend Mississippi in the current racial crisis. More so than in 1861, the Federal Government has the muscle and the money.”<sup>113</sup> On page twenty-two, staff writer Mark Ethridge, Jr., wrote of his relatives in the Mississippi city of Meridian, who were “typical Mississippians. They are not loud-mouthed ruffians or conspirators with the devil. They are good people. They’re kind and they’re generous, and they are church-going Christians, mostly Baptists and Methodists.” These people were ready to go to jail to defend segregation at Ole Miss, and they supported Barnett—not because “these people are bad. Nor is it that they believe so vehemently in the doctrines of states’ rights, and are opposed in principle to what they consider outside encroachment. Actually, they aren’t. They use states’ rights as a catchword, an argument to support their feelings and then become convinced that it’s a good argument.” The truth is, Ethridge wrote of his segregationist relatives in a Southern folkways frame, that segregation “is a way of life. They believe in it just as we believe that the dawn will come tomorrow. The subject isn’t discussed there is nothing to discuss [sic]. They never think about it”—until James Meredith came along and “the people of Mississippi were forced to think about it. ... They are trapped, and the only way out, they felt, was to fight.”<sup>114</sup>

Arnett was on the scene to provide descriptive color of the riot scene Sunday night—as a complement to the main, wire service reportage. The riots, he wrote, “were an inevitable result of what started as the ‘Oxford incident’ and came close to developing into a national tragedy. What we witnessed at ‘Ole Miss’ Sunday night was one of the frightening consequences invariably attendant when emotionalism is substituted for hard common sense.”<sup>115</sup> An inside story summarized the split reactions of Detroit residents on the use of troops in Mississippi. The next



day, Arnett and colleague Rick Tuttle offered first-person accounts of a night of “terror” (Tuttle) and a day of “violence” (Arnett).

Wrote Tuttle: “The United States Marshal lay on the tile floor bleeding from an artery in the neck. He was hit by a shotgun pellet and was in danger of bleeding to death. ‘Somebody get a doctor here.’ ‘What is it? What is it?’ ‘They have a shotgun now, by God, they’ve got a shotgun.’ We were inside Ole Miss’ administration building. Outside in the darkness the mob howled and the shotgun roared from beyond a screen of tear gas set down by white-helmeted marshals who hid behind parked autos. I had never been shot at before. It isn’t pleasant.”<sup>116</sup>

Wrote Arnett: “If you have been through the South then you have seen a duplicate of this pleasant little city (pop. 5,283) for it is a county seat planned in what amounts to the Dixie custom. . . . But on Monday, ‘normalcy’ fell apart in Oxford: The United States Army came to town. Now, hours later, helmeted troopers, bayonets fixed to their carbines, have imposed ‘unofficial’ martial law. The emotional binge against integration, fanned for days by state leaders who were not on hand for this invasion, had been deflated, at least for the time being. Mississippi is learning the hard way that you can’t beat Uncle Sam.”<sup>117</sup>

This newspaper’s editorials, like others in the North, came out four-square for federal intervention, beginning with a September 22 commentary observing the Northerners have their “prejudices, but we also have our principles”—suggesting that Southerners are unprincipled. The editorial urged ending federal grant funds to the South, an end to highway funding, canceling federal research contracts at Mississippi universities, and beyond that, “we could do far more to punish as well as retaliate. But retaliation would be no answer. The downtrodden Negro would be the first to suffer. White Mississippians would get their schools and hot lunches and agricultural education.” But the newspaper also opposed tanks or weapons, “nor generals standing there with swagger sticks and arms akimbo.” The nation, the writer observed, “wants no repeat of Little Rock, but a repeat should not be needed. If we must send in Federal officials, they should not be battle-armed paratroopers to inflame the citizens even more, but Federal marshals, or military policemen trained to combat riots with a minimum of damage.”<sup>118</sup> Commenting on the story of the fair-skinned African-American man having already broken Ole Miss’ color barrier, the newspaper called the information a “shock” to Barnett. After this revelation, “Ross Barnett is not even fighting for a principle any longer. He is just fighting blindly, determined only that nothing has changed in the past 100 years. He cannot be stopped from fighting. He can only be beaten. So be it.”<sup>119</sup> And after Barnett was beaten, rather than congratulate Mississippi for rejoining the union, as *The New York Times* had done, the newspaper called the Ole Miss story “a tragic case of too little too late. His surrender came too late to save lives



and property, too late to save the governmental dignity of Mississippi, too late to save part of our nation's image before the court of world opinion." The lesson of Oxford, the editorial concluded, was "learned the hard way as it always is, that a little tampering with mob emotions, a short excursion into force as opposed to due process, is the sure formula for shame and disaster."<sup>120</sup> This newspaper, then, as it had done for previous civil rights movement narratives, showed a strong commitment to agenda-setting, especially as the crisis deepened, through story placement but, more significantly, by expenditure of newspaper staff and resources and with editorial commentary framed, like the editorials of its Northern brethren, primarily in arguments of constitutionality and foreign image.

In Pittsburgh, the initial coverage by *The Press*—all exclusively by United Press International except one story, by Scripps-Howard's own wire service report out of Oxford the day of but preceding the Oxford rioting—was on an inside page with a September 14 wire report datelined Jackson that the governor had ordered state officials to go to jail rather than cave in to the federal government. "We will not drink from the cup of genocide," he told a state-wide television audience. "There is no case in history where the Caucasian race has survived social integration."<sup>121</sup> The editors took the story out front the next day, where it stayed for a week before being relegated to inside pages on September 23. Reports of Barnett's plan to again personally block Meredith from entering the university warranted placement on page one again on September 25, and this is where it stayed. No unique, or differing, or staff reports of the Ole Miss crisis were found in *The Pittsburgh Press*.

Editorially, the newspaper stood staunchly on the side of the federal government in this state-versus-federal-rights showdown. In a brief, three-paragraph editorial published September 23, the newspaper commented that, in seeking contempt charges against university officials and members of the Mississippi State College Board, "the Justice Department made a smart move in coping with Governor Barnett's grandstanding. It simply ignored him."<sup>122</sup> On September 30, with federal troops massing, the newspaper asserted that citizens "insecurely balanced on the ragged edge of emotional stability are being prompted to hysterical acts which may bring harm to themselves as well as to law-abiding citizens." The person behind that prompting, argued the newspaper, was Barnett. It urged federal officials to "act decisively" if Barnett "cannot understand the whirlwind he is sowing. ... Tolerance and patience with dissent are among our worthiest traditions. But the limit is fast being reached."<sup>123</sup> After the Kennedy Administration did act decisively, the newspaper commented, similar to *The New York Times'* sentiments, that Mississippi, despite the defiance, "is accommodating itself to social change, and mainly with good grace" to join the likes of other Southern states—Virginia,

North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas and Kentucky—where African-Americans had been enrolled in public universities. Mississippi then, had become part of “the steady progress of desegregation, in conformance with the law of the land as expounded by Federal courts.” But, this editorial concluded, “even such ugliness as the campus riots of last night must pass. Oxford must take its place in the historic list of sore trials which have molded and are continuing to mold the character of this nation.”<sup>124</sup>

Of the Northern papers, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* demonstrated only perfunctory interest in the Ole Miss story—a bit of a surprise, in light of the existence in Chicago of what, along with *The Pittsburgh Courier*, was one of the nation’s premier African-American newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, which posed a formidable competitive threat to the *Tribune* for African-American readership and African-American-oriented advertising. The *Tribune*, except for a couple of stories, depended entirely on wire service reportage and showed no inclination at attempting to make the Ole Miss story relevant to Chicagoland—as the *Tribune* came to identify its readership. The strongest evidence of this newspaper claiming any agenda-setting in this story was the placement on the front page of reportage. Two stories were handled by the Chicago Tribune Press Service, but neither of these offered information unique from the narrative that we have seen in other newspapers. And just one editorial on the Ole Miss story was found in the *Tribune*, early in the story’s development, published September 22. The editorial argued, in a constitutional vein, that if Barnett were allowed to “get away with this usurpation, the Constitution may be reduced to a scrap of paper. If there is no binding force in the rights it confers upon the citizens or the limitations it places upon government, all the great freedoms—of religion, of press, of speech, of habeas corpus, and all the rest—will be at the mercy of 50 state administrations.” It concluded by arguing, in an odd frame not seen in any of the other newspapers in this analysis, that the university “may yet have a chance to recruit eminent scholars for its faculty if it ceases its resistance. It may even attract gifted students from outside the state.”<sup>125</sup> Hardly a ringing desegregationist, or constitutional, argument, that.

Of the Western newspapers, *The Denver Post*, as it had during previous civil-rights struggle coverage, demonstrated by far the greatest desire to make the Ole Miss story part of its national journalistic agenda, finding ways to make the story its own. *The Post* relied on wire services for its primary coverage, placing the story prominently on page one throughout; but as the story developed, *Post* editors sent a staff writer to the scene.

The first non-wire reportage in the newspaper was published on page five September 21, but it was an important story because of the perspective it provided on the background of the Mississippi governor and what Barnett labeled the

“Southern way of life.” Datelined Jackson, the story depicted Barnett as a young lawyer when “the biggest power in Mississippi politics was Theodore G. Bilbo, a little rooster of a man who may go down in history as the most strident racist the United States ever produced.” Barnett, wrote special correspondent Reese Cleghorn, was one of Bilbo’s “great admirers,” and Barnett won election as governor in 1959 campaigning as an “unreconstructed segregationist” and accusing his segregationist opponent of being a moderate.” Soon after taking office, Barnett “declared he would take the offensive to preserve segregation. ‘I am going to put forth every effort to organize Southern governors, to create and crystalize public opinion throughout the nation with reference to our traditions and Southern way of life,’ he said.” The governor’s militancy, wrote Cleghorn in casting Barnett as the embodiment of the Old South and its segregationist culture, “was little different last week when he told a statewide television audience that he was interposing the state’s power to block court-ordered integration at the University of Mississippi. He said the Kennedy administration had teamed with ‘a motley array of un-American pressure groups’ to assault Mississippi.”<sup>126</sup> An inside-page wire story offered a bit of background along with a Civil War frame not seen elsewhere in this analysis—that were Barnett to keep his vow to go to jail rather than desegregate Ole Miss, “he would not be the first governor imprisoned in a clash of state and federal authorities.” Three confederate governors had been arrested by the federal government and confined as “prisoners of state” following the Civil War. Another governor, of Indiana, had been jailed in 1924 for misuse of the mail. This information was obtained from precedent-seeking “government lawyers searching far into the night to see whether any other governor had ever been the defendant in contempt-of-court proceedings.”<sup>127</sup>

As federal-state confrontation loomed, the newspaper sent a staff writer to Oxford, to provide on-site reporting to buttress its wire service coverage. John Rogers arrived to find a campus that he described in a page-one September 28 story as “a ghost battlefield in the civil war of nerves.” There was no doubt, he wrote, “that the storm of state vs. federal power was far from over. Rather, the calm eye of the storm seemed to be centered over the campus with more turmoil to come.”<sup>128</sup> Rogers interviewed a group of Ole Miss students for a front-page story the next day. They all spoke “with one voice,” Rogers wrote: “Barnett is right in what he is trying to achieve—or prevent—and the white people of Mississippi are being grossly misjudged for their support of Barnett by those outside the state.” Rogers earlier that day had found a Denver native, Eddie Howsam, who was attending Ole Miss because he “wanted to see something of the rest of the country,” said Eddie. ‘I was particularly interested in seeing for myself how things were in the South.’” The student told Rogers that the Meredith controversy was

“none of my business. I’m here to get an education. As for the Meredith thing, I’ll just wait it out. None of the southern students has tried to involve me in it, and I haven’t done anything on my part to become involved in it.” He added that he would not object to attending class with students of color.<sup>129</sup>

On the front page of the September 30 edition, as federal troops were gathering in Tennessee and the campus was bracing for the invasion, Rogers reported that he had been threatened with arrest “for talking to a Negro reporter on the steps of his rooming house here. The charge? Inciting a riot. James Hicks, 47, a reporter for *The Amsterdam* (N.Y.) *News* and representative of the National Newspaper Publishers Assn., which he says represents 35 Negro newspapers in the country, is the only Negro reporter covering the University of Mississippi’s integration crisis.” When the African-American reporter intervened and said he would accept responsibility for the incident, the policeman—Police Chief James Jones—cut him off and “reminded the Negro that he had been barred from campus, that he was still barred, and that as far as Jones knew he would be barred forever. The confrontation dissolved as the chief drove off to check with the city attorney on the validity of the charges.”<sup>130</sup>

On the front page of its October 1 edition, *The Post* published a top-of-the-page banner account by Rogers of the previous evening’s rioting rife with Civil War imagery: “The stately pre-Civil War Lyceum Building, the administration building of the University of Mississippi, was the no-man’s land of a very un-civil war Sunday night and Monday morning—a savage, sordid insurrection against the U.S. government.”<sup>131</sup> Down-page, Rogers provided the primary coverage of the arrest of former Army Maj. Gen Edwin Walker on charges of rebellion, insurrection and seditious conspiracy. Rogers was a busy reporter that Sunday. On an inside page, the newspaper published a story under his byline describing the scene at the airport as observers awaited the arrival of Meredith. “Cars crammed both sides of the road leading from Oxford out past the Ole Miss campus and down the 1.3 mile route to the airport. Many treated the marshals’ convoys with a picnic air, with children sitting on hoods and frolicking on the roadsides while many parents and adults booed and jeered.”<sup>132</sup> A companion, wire story on the same page reported that the editor of the Ole Miss student newspaper “told her fellow students Monday they are bringing ‘dishonor and shame’ to their university and state by participating in riots.” The article reprinted an editorial appeal from the newspaper castigating students for participating in the riot.<sup>133</sup> Two pages later, the UPI reported that Barnett’s son, a lieutenant of the Mississippi National Guard, “was mustered into federal service to take action against his father’s stand in the case of James H. Meredith.”<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile, back in Denver, the newspaper reported on page seven that members of the Denver chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality

had begun a sit-in at a construction company's display home because the company had refused to sell a house to a couple of color.

Rogers' byline was back atop the front page on October 2 for a report that Meredith attended class, accompanied by an escort of federal marshals, who did not enter the classrooms with the new student. "Some students have left the campus entirely," Rogers reported. "There is no way of knowing just how many, since there is much confusion over class rolls in the present campus picture." Interviews with some of the students revealed, however, that "they were going home not because Meredith is among them but because 'we are tired of smelling tear gas, and we are sick of having MPs open our car trunks, tell us where to go and generally treat us like a bunch of Russians.'" <sup>135</sup> On page seven, Rogers reported that Walker was awaiting possible psychiatric evaluation in his cell of a federal prison in Springfield, Missouri.

*The Denver Post* published five editorials during the Ole Miss crisis. The first, dated September 17, took on an anti-states'-rights frame in urging that Barnett be cited for contempt of court and calling on the federal government to use whatever force necessary to insure Meredith's entry into the university. "Segregationists throughout the South will be watching carefully to see just how much Barnett can get away with," wrote the editorialist. "The federal government should show them that Barnett will not get away with one thing." <sup>136</sup> On September 27, the newspaper summoned a Civil War frame—a hundred years ago "this nation was convulsed by a bitter war in which 498,332 lost their lives"—to argue that Barnett is "now trying to fight the battle that has already been fought to resurrect an idea that was laid to rest along with the corpses of half a million Americans." Arguing that the courts had repeatedly found "the cob-webbed legal device known as interposition" invalid—"as if the Civil War hadn't already clearly settled the issue"—the newspaper said it would prefer the use of federal force in Mississippi to "allowing Barnett to ignore the law of the land and to defy the federal authority constituted to enforce that law." <sup>137</sup> On October 1, the newspaper declared victory for the federal government, arguing in a rather ironic twist to the state's-rights contention that rather than the federal government slapping down the state of Mississippi, the nation's "family of states had to discipline one of its members, which persisted in refractory defiance of the family rules despite all pleas and threats and demands. The disciplinary action was necessary lest other members of the family should begin to think they, too, can with impunity ignore the rules which govern—and make possible—the family's existence." <sup>138</sup> Finally, as the Southern newspapers had lauded Barnett as a hero of the segregationist stance, *The Denver Post* cheered Meredith, whose whole future "and indeed his life—is in jeopardy," for his stance. If Meredith could succeed, "if he can endure the rigors of the life of a marked man

at Ole Miss, he will have made an important contribution to freedom. He will have made freedom mean a little more not only to his fellow Negroes but also to all Americans.”<sup>139</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* depended on the wires for the bulk of its coverage—which was lean. *Times* editors placed the stories on the front page, but not on a daily basis. Events in the faraway Southeast did not make for heavy agenda-setting at a notably conservative newspaper on the West Coast. This newspaper had entered into a rather unique partnership with *The Washington Post* in which reporting duties for some national stories, such as the integration crisis in Mississippi, were shared. In this case, reporter James E. Clayton offered coverage from Mississippi, which frequently was the primary reportage and was labeled as an “Exclusive to The Times from the Washington Post.” Such a story appeared on the second page of the newspaper on September 20 to report the Mississippi Legislature’s passage of a bill to prevent Meredith from enrolling at Ole Miss. On September 23, Clayton offered *Times* readers an analysis, datelined Oxford, remarkably similar in its lead to the UPI’s Louis Cassel’s analytical column referenced above: “The crisis arising over efforts to desegregate the University of Mississippi is rapidly producing the greatest struggle between a state and the federal government since the end of the Civil War.” As *The Denver Post* had editorialized about Meredith’s life being in jeopardy, Clayton went so far as to suggest that there were “few persons in this town today who believe that Meredith will live to graduate from this university even if he is enrolled.” And as Cassels had argued, Clayton described the situation at Little Rock, where Governor Faubus “never put himself squarely in position to be sent to jail for contempt of court. Faubus gave way. Gov. Barnett has yet to budge an inch.”<sup>140</sup> The *Times* used its own wire service to report on page one on September 30 the deployment of federal troops in Memphis, Tennessee. And, in a page-two story published on October 2, the newspaper offered a summary of world newspapers headlining the Oxford rioting—combining the foreign-image frame with the constitutional one in a lead that again described the Ole Miss confrontation as the most serious constitutional crisis since the Civil War. But besides expending little space and extremely limited editorial resources to coverage of this important story, this newspaper offered no editorial commentary on it that could be found. It did, however, offer a lengthy summary of the Oxford story, in a primarily states’-rights versus federal-authority frame, in its Sunday, September 30, commentary section.

Similar to the *Los Angeles Times*’ scant coverage, *The Seattle Times* used wire service reports for all of its coverage of the Ole Miss story, but unlike its down-coast counterpart, its initial reporting was buried inside. Its first report was an AP brief calling Meredith a “man with a mission” as part of a “People In The



News” roundup on page ten of the June 26 edition. The report of the State College Board resisting Barnett’s order to bar Meredith’s entry was the lead item in a page-thirteen roundup of wire service integration stories on September 16. Similarly, the Mississippi Legislature’s vote in support of Barnett’s stand was the second-to-last item of a five-brief collection of race stories on an inside page, Mississippi Judge Porter’s defiance of the federal court was published as a short dispatch inside, and the federal court order prohibiting the arrest of Meredith was a lead story on an inside page September 20. The newspaper published a series of Ole Miss-related briefs on page nine September 21, and the report of three Ole Miss officials ordered to appear at a contempt hearing in New Orleans headed a series of race-related briefs on an inside page September 23. Barnett’s threat to jail federal officers, reported by The Associated Press, made the September 24 front page—three paragraphs at the bottom; but the story went back inside the next two days—a September 25 dispatch reporting that Meredith would be making another attempt to enter the university, and the UPI’s excellent Louis Cassels analysis, cited elsewhere, on page four of the September 26 edition.

*The Times* editors placed the story on page one September 27, reporting Meredith’s latest attempt to enter the university, and it stayed out front for the duration—again, all exclusively wire dispatches, though the newspaper was by now devoting more inside news hole to related stories as the narrative neared its denouement. Reports of the impending troop invasion of Oxford, this one provided by the New York Herald Tribune News Service, was placed at the top of the September 30 cover, with a couple of related stories inside. The story dominated the October 1 front page plus several inside pages, including a photo page and the full text of the president’s speech to the nation and the same summary of international coverage offered by other newspapers.

The newspaper finally localized the story on October 2, publishing a story on page seven promising in its headline reaction of Seattle “Negroes”—a city where race riots “are unknown”—to events in Oxford. The story, though, offered an interview with only one man, a local reverend. His first reaction, the reverend told the newspaper, “is, I ought to catch a train to Mississippi and help out. My second reaction is—well, what good would it do? And my third reaction—why not stay and do something right here?”<sup>141</sup> Not only did Seattle have a paucity of race riots, it must also have had a shortage of citizens of color or African-American reverends to interview; a companion story on this page, by the newspaper’s religion editor, featured an interview with the same reverend agonizing over how to tell his son he is a “Negro. . . . He’s 5 and just starting school. One of these days somebody is going to call him a “Nigger” and he is going to come to me to find out what the word means. I am trying not to hasten that day when I have to tell him about his race. I would rather not face it.”<sup>142</sup>



The newspaper published three editorials on the Ole Miss strife, all late in the narrative. A September 27 commentary adopted a foreign-image frame, noting that Americans abroad “still are taunted by the name ‘Little Rock’ five years after the events that gave global prominence to that Arkansas city.” The editorial suggested that use of federal troops “would appear to be the only recourse” if Mississippi authorities continued their defiance. “Little Rock provided Communist propagandists with a great opportunity. . . . We hope that Americans as well as the chronic critics abroad will keep in mind that such incidents as Little Rock and now Mississippi, however regrettable, are manifestations of the progress being made in this country toward the goal of providing equality to all.”<sup>143</sup> On October 1, the newspaper published a brief, four-column editorial denouncing demagoguery and arguing, in a states’-rights versus federal-authority frame, that it was “inevitable that the United States Constitution would not be successfully defied.”<sup>144</sup> Returning to the foreign-image frame, the newspaper on October 3 wondered what India’s ambassador to the United States and a recent “welcome visitor to the Seattle World’s Fair” might think about the events in Mississippi. “All thoughtful Americans hold deep regrets at the occurrences in Mississippi. Our image abroad, we know, would not have been impaired if James Meredith had not applied for admission to the university,” wrote the editorialist, apparently at least partially blaming Meredith’s decision to challenge the segregationist university; the writer then went on to blame the receptor of the troubling news for misunderstanding the situation: “If our country’s image has been impaired anew it is because too many foreign observers are inclined to criticize our country as a whole on a basis of the hold-out pockets of discrimination which are being liquidated with full support from the determined majority of our citizens.”<sup>145</sup> So, foreign perceptions of U.S. culture and politics was the main concern of the Seattle newspaper ownership and management in a series of editorials that, in the end, seemed to confuse victim and reader with perpetrator.

The Western newspapers, which, other than *The Denver Post*, placed a rather low agenda priority on the Meredith narrative, invoked political, constitutional and foreign-image frames in aligning themselves pretty much with the Northern newspapers on these themes. But the Northern organs also played up the Southern folkways frame—as a cultural phenomenon to be overcome on behalf of equality and opportunity—and a personification theme that vilified Governor Barnett and other Southern demagogues as political symbols of a backwards, racist/segregationist South, while extolling the virtues of Meredith and his courage. Newspapers of the North also played up the Civil War theme, framing events in Oxford as replays of the debates and violence of that war, which was being re-prosecuted on the campus of Ole Miss and the streets of Oxford. The ideological divisions

of the constitutional arguments—the Southern press invoking a Tenth Amendment frame on behalf of preserving segregation; the Northern press calling on the principles of equality sanctioned by the Fourteenth Amendment—became more pronounced in the Meredith narrative. The Southern newspapers also played, heavily, the Southern folkways refrain, but in this case as a way of life and culture under attack, with the South as a victim of a Northern “Paper Curtain” press and government intent on demolishing not only the institutional segregationism of the South, but also the region’s beliefs and mores. The Southern newspapers also personified the events of the Meredith narrative, depicting Barnett along with Southern members of Congress as heroes of the South for a courageous stance, departing from so-called “objective” reporting standards to argue on behalf of these heroes and the segregationist cause in news columns, and vilifying the Kennedys and the Kennedy administration, along with the courts that ruled against Barnett and his lieutenant governor. Most alarming of the South framing, though, was the editorial push for violent opposition to the federal government and courts, almost urging the undertaking of a second civil war—a combat referenced several times and that sometimes played a theme in the reportage. A headline used by *The Clarion-Ledger* above one story, for example, invoked the theme: “Call Up May Pit Brother Vs. Brother.” Such language selection helped frame coverage in a scenario that painted the victims of segregation and targets of riots and brutality as the perpetrators of disorder and disruptors of law and order—another dominant frame. These newspapers also adopted a foreign-image frame, citing the image in Europe and elsewhere of a democracy’s leaders, at the federal level, dictating to the states policies that, they argued, belong in the realm of state governance.

This foreign image would again be tested in what the Western press seemingly viewed as a distant, alien South—where events in Alabama in the spring and summer of the next year would produce a lot more fodder for foreign readers to ponder.

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# Martin Luther King, Jr., Orchestrates Protest Model

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## 'The Meaning of Birmingham'

In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., went to Birmingham, Alabama, notorious as one of the most segregated cities in the South, to implement a model of demonstrations, boycotts and marches, including voluntary jailings, that he had outlined at a conference of Negro student leaders of the lunch counter sit-in movement at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina in April of 1960. Law enforcement in Birmingham in 1963 was overseen by the “pugnacious Public Safety Commissioner Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor,” wrote Jeffrey Aaron Snyder in a 2013 fifty-year *New Republic* remembrance of King and his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” King had gone to the city, Snyder wrote, “to help lead a campaign to integrate the water fountains, lunch counters, and restrooms of the downtown.”

Snyder continued:

Attempting to reenergize a flagging boycott campaign, King successfully courted arrest on Good Friday by violating a court injunction against marches. Instead of placing King in a cell with his colleagues, Connor put him in solitary confinement, prompting King to remark, “He’s a smart old cracker.” Over the weekend, King’s attorney passed him a copy of the *Birmingham News*, which featured an open letter signed by eight of Alabama’s leading white clergymen under the heading, “A Call for

Unity.” In the open letter, labeling King as “an outsider who favored ‘extreme measures,’ the eight ‘moderate’ clergymen derided the campaign as ‘unwise and untimely.’ The letter jolted an otherwise despondent King, and he began to craft a response by writing in the margins of the paper itself. When the margins filled up, he wrote on the coarse prison-grade toilet paper.<sup>1</sup>

In the letter, the most significant written document of the civil rights movement, King explained that he was behind bars in Birmingham “because injustice is here.” He then articulated his non-violent philosophy as a weapon to battle injustice:

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.<sup>2</sup>

The letter, Snyder wrote, citing the author of a book on the subject, Jonathan Rieder, “reveals two crucial sides of King, ‘the diplomat’ and ‘the prophet.’ King opens the letter by patiently responding to the charge that he was an outsider, building to the famous resolution that ‘injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’”<sup>3</sup>

The Birmingham incident was not King’s first time behind bars. His first arrest—of a total of twenty-nine arrests—was January 26, 1956, in response to a campaign to intimidate Montgomery bus boycott participants. The year previous to his arrest and jailing in Birmingham, he and the Reverend Ralph Abernathy had been jailed in Albany, Georgia, in July of 1962, on a charge of violating an assembly ordinance for leading the previous December a street protest without a permit. He and Abernathy were in Albany to participate in The Albany Movement—an anti-segregation crusade by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the NAACP, the Ministerial Alliance, the Federation of Woman’s Clubs and the Negro Voters League, joined by King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in December of 1961. They chose the forty-five-day jail sentence over paying a fine of \$178 each.

The Birmingham demonstrations, which had begun on April 3 with little newspaper coverage, moved to front pages across the nation the first week of May 1963. The New York *Daily News* in a May 3, 2012 retrospective on the events in

Birmingham, termed the civil-rights demonstrations highlighted by the May 2, 1963 children's march on city hall as eight days "that tore at America's conscience." On that day, "King launched the final—and most controversial phase—of what they called Project C, the c standing for confrontation. ... King sent children ranging in age from six to 18 marching through the streets for freedom." From then to May 10, the *Daily News* recalled, "the nation bore witness as police in Birmingham, Ala., aimed high-powered hoses and sicced snarling dogs on African-American men, women and even children who wanted just one thing—to be treated the same as white Americans." Led by the "unapologetic racist" Connor, "Birmingham cops brazenly attacked protestors—and the television cameras covering the drama broadcasted their brutality to the rest of the country." Connor "became a living symbol of Southern bigotry and Birmingham became ground zero in the struggle for civil rights."<sup>4</sup>

The Birmingham demonstrations came in conjunction with the election of a moderate city regime. Mayor Albert Boutwell and a new city council were sworn in April 15 pledging a "new era of economic and cultural growth"—though Connor contested the results of the election, delaying the full establishment of the new administration as dueling city leaders claimed the mantle of leadership. Still, most of the citizens of the city, wrote a *New York Times* special correspondent for the April 16 front page, "white and Negro—are believed to be hoping that the new, moderate group of city leaders will bring a diminution, if not an end, to racial tensions that have grown alarmingly the last few days."<sup>5</sup>

*The New York Times* was covering the marches on its inside pages during the early days of Project C. An April 8 story on page thirty-one reported a peaceful prayer march on city hall April 7 that turned violent when police used dogs to clear several hundred African-American onlookers at a small city park. Twenty-six of them were arrested and charged with parading without a permit, creating a disturbance and loitering. The newspaper reported King's arrest on its front page April 13. It was here that King wrote his letter. The next day, also on the front page, the *Times* reported the arrest of six more African-Americans during the continuing demonstrations. An April 15 front-page story reported that protesting African-Americans threw rocks at police and that several of the demonstrators were clubbed in what the newspaper reported as "the most serious incident since the beginning of a direct-action campaign against segregation here twelve days ago."<sup>6</sup> The newspaper reported the swearing in of the new city regime on its April 16 front page. Meanwhile, events elsewhere in the South continued to contribute to the on-going race narrative of the era, as Anthony Lewis reported from Washington on the April 17 front page that the Civil Rights Commission had urged President Kennedy to consider holding back federal funds from Mississippi "until the state ends its 'subversion of the Constitution.'"<sup>7</sup>

Back in Birmingham, the *Times* reported on page nine April 19 that King had received a visit from his wife—an episode possibly abetted by intervention by President Kennedy that would be widely reported—during which they communicated “through a glass partition in a door at the Birmingham city jail. ‘He was in very good spirits,’ she said. Dr. King and the Rev. Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy, secretary of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Atlanta, Ga., which Dr. King heads, were arrested Friday while leading an integration march here.”<sup>8</sup> King and Abernathy were released after eight days; a friend had posted bond.

The racial unrest continued for the ensuing days, much of it relegated to inside pages—including the murder of a white postal worker, staging a one-man pro-integration hike, on a remote highway in Alabama. *The New York Times*’ first story of the slaying appeared on page nineteen of the April 24 edition—a brief United Press International report that twenty-five-year-old William L. Moore, a Chattanooga native using his vacation to protest segregation in the South, “was found lying in a ditch with a bullet in his forehead.” The Baltimore mailman, UPI reported, “was shot and killed tonight while hiking to Mississippi to urge Gov. Ross R. Barnett to accept desegregation.”<sup>9</sup> The newspaper published a lengthier story the next day, by The Associated Press, reporting that Alabama authorities had begun a massive search for the killer and correcting Moore’s age to thirty-five. President Kennedy, the wire service reported, “described the slaying as an ‘outrageous crime,’” and Alabama’s governor termed it a “‘dastardly act.’ He offered a \$1,000 reward for the arrest and conviction of the killer.”<sup>10</sup> The next day’s story, also buried on an inside page but written by a newspaper correspondent based in Birmingham, reported that two suspects for the slaying had been apprehended and were being held in the county jail at Gadsden. A brief editorial published on April 26 called on Alabama local authorities to “apprehend and punish the perpetrator of this crime.” Something “very much like a state of barbarism is reached when murder on a public highway is used as a political weapon,” the newspaper commented.<sup>11</sup>

The civil-rights reportage of Project C was back on the front page on May 3, when the newspaper called again on the special Birmingham correspondent, Foster Hailey, to report the events of the children’s march in that city. Hailey estimated that hundreds of “young Negroes, many of them in their teens or even younger, demonstrated through the streets of Birmingham this afternoon [May 2].” The police, he wrote, “confined most of the demonstrations to the Negro business, church and residential district west of City Hall and north of the main downtown business area.” But a group of twenty “penetrated almost to the steps of City Hall” before police stopped them. “There was no resistance to arrest by the laughing, singing groups of youngsters, although some of the smaller participants dropped

their signs and ran when the police approached. Most of the marchers fell to their knees and prayed as the police stopped them.” Six fire engines were deployed “at strategic corners after the first hour of demonstrations. Hoses were strung at one point, but the water was not turned on. The city’s squad of police dogs was not used.” Five-hundred demonstrators were arrested.<sup>12</sup>

The police restraints were removed the next day, though, when fire hoses and police dogs “were used here today to disperse Negro students protesting racial segregation,” the newspaper reported on its May 4 front page. “Three students were reported to have been bitten and to have required hospital treatment. Two firemen and a newspaper photographer were injured by bricks and broken bottles thrown from the top of a Negro office building near the major encounter, at 17th Street and Fifth Avenue North.” Under a headline reporting that two-hundred-fifty of the marchers had been seized, King and the Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth—the same civil-rights activist who had been beaten trying to enroll his daughter and other students in a Birmingham high school in 1957—announced that they had “no intention of relaxing the pressure,” which would increase in intensity, “until there were both ‘promise and action’ from the city authorities and white merchants to start to end segregation.” The two told the newspaper that “there was no lack of recruits from among the Negro community of 140,000 persons here. If there ever was any division within it over the timing of the campaign, it now has disappeared, they declared.” In Washington, Hailey reported in the same story, “Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy warned that ‘increasing turmoil’ would be made inevitable by a refusal to grant equal rights to Negroes, United Press International reported. But he questioned the timing of the demonstration.”<sup>13</sup> Photos showing a police dog lunging at a demonstrator, of a high-pressure hose turned on demonstrators and of helmeted cops dragging a demonstrator away, were published next to the story on page one.

The attorney general dispatched two Justice Department officials to Birmingham on May 4 “in an apparent attempt to bring about a truce in the tense racial situation,” the newspaper reported on its May 5 front page. Meanwhile, the demonstrations “continued with fierce intensity. Firemen again used fire hoses, turning them on groups of Negro spectators who disregarded police orders to disperse. When the water was turned off, rocks and broken bottles were thrown at the firemen.”<sup>14</sup> The city had calmed somewhat the next day, with several hundred demonstrators marching peacefully followed by a demonstration in a small park near the city jail—one of the larger such events in the five-week-old campaign against segregation in the city—with only a few arrests reported. Claude Sitton had arrived on the scene to report on the May 7 front page that talks between the Justice Department officials and demonstration and white community leaders had

stalled—“In fact, they never really got started,’ a Negro leader asserted.” An estimated one-thousand African-American demonstrators had been arrested on May 6 “as wave after wave of marchers chanted challenges to segregation.” The arrest total “was the highest for a single day in the five-week racial crisis in this Southern steel center. The authorities said about 40 percent of those arrested were juveniles.” Nearly a hundred policemen “held a sullen crowd of more than 2,000 Negroes in check at the 16th Street Baptist Church, departure point for the marchers.” Sitton described five policemen wrestling to the pavement a “Negro woman who resisted a policeman’s attempt to force her off a sidewalk.” Comedian Dick Gregory, Sitton reported, “led the first group of 19 marchers from the church. They were quickly arrested.”<sup>15</sup> A page-one photo showed demonstrators being loaded onto a school bus for transport to the jail, and an inside photo showed the woman who had resisted an officer being held on the ground, a patrolman’s knee pinning her neck.

The street battle resumed in full force on May 7, with Sitton reporting on the May 8 front page that “2,500 to 3,000 persons rampaged through the business district in two demonstrations and were driven back.” The police and firemen again used high-pressure hoses—so strong that “the water skinned bark off trees in parks and along sidewalks”—and an armored police car was brought in to force people off the streets and onto the sidewalks. An undetermined number of injuries resulted, but “only 28 persons, including four juveniles, were arrested as compared with some 1,000 yesterday.” The Reverend Shuttlesworth was one of the injured and was taken away by an ambulance, prompting a comment from Connor, the public safety commissioner, that he had “waited a week to see Shuttlesworth get hit with a hose. I’m sorry I missed it.” Informed that the reverend had been taken away in an ambulance, Connor responded, “I wish they’d carried him away in a hearse.” The commissioner, told that several policemen had been injured, said the fight had just begun, “if that’s what they want. We were trying to be nice to them but they won’t let us be nice.” Governor George Wallace, meanwhile, ordered two-hundred-fifty state highway patrolmen to the city and told the opening session of the legislature in Montgomery that he would “take whatever action I am called upon to take’ to preserve law and order. ‘I am beginning to tire of agitators, integrationists, and others who seek to destroy law and order in Alabama.” The NAACP called for national demonstrations in support of the Birmingham movement, while *The Birmingham News* had published on its front page the text of a telegram it had sent the president asking him “to persuade Negro leaders to halt the demonstrations.”<sup>16</sup> A companion front-page story out of Washington reported that President Kennedy was pressing for city officials to find a solution. To that end, an inside-page story, by staff writer Hedrick Smith, stationed in Birmingham with Sitton, reported that a group of “prominent business leaders pressed an urgent



effort tonight to pull this city back from the brink of a racial explosion. A spokesman reported some progress and voiced ‘high hopes’ of a break in the negotiations with Negro leaders in the next 24 to 48 hours.”<sup>17</sup> At the bottom of the same page, United Press reported that the Birmingham jail was so “jammed with Negro racial demonstrators today it took more than four hours to serve breakfast—grits and gravy, applesauce and bacon.”<sup>18</sup>

The talks among community and demonstration leaders began bearing fruit, with the newspaper reporting on its May 9 front page, in a story datelined Washington, that President Kennedy had announced that business leaders in Birmingham had “pledged ‘substantial steps’ to begin to meet ‘the justifiable needs of the Negro community.’” The president added that demonstration leaders had agreed to a temporary suspension of protests, and the newly-elected mayor of the city had indicated a desire “to resolve the city’s problems of racial conflict.” However, the jailing of King, Abernathy and twenty-six others in Birmingham raised “serious doubts” about the sustainability of the tentative agreement.<sup>19</sup> King and Abernathy had been jailed briefly after being convicted in Recorder’s Court on charges of parading without a permit. They were sentenced to one-hundred-eighty days in prison and fined three-hundred dollars each, but a local African-American financier posted two-thousand-five-hundred bonds for their release. “It appeared for a time that their imprisonment had virtually ended hope for a settlement,” Sitton wrote from Birmingham. But Robert Kennedy persuaded Shuttlesworth to delay any more demonstrations “while efforts to set Dr. King free were being made.”<sup>20</sup> The newspaper reported on its front page the next day that an agreement had been reached “for settling this city’s racial crisis after Negroes had scaled down their demands.” King, wrote Sitton, “and other leaders accepted promises of progress from white business and civic leaders in lieu of immediate action.” According to a source, “the provisions include pledges to desegregate facilities in large downtown department and variety stores in 90 days, to promote qualified Negro employees and to name a biracial committee. The whites also promised to recommend to the city government that charges not be pressed against 2,400 Negroes arrested in mass protest and picketing. The more than 1,000 who remained in jail tonight were expected to be free on bonds tomorrow.”<sup>21</sup> At the bottom of the page, the newspaper reported that Malcolm X, new leader of the Black Muslim movement, had arrived in Washington to take the reins of the group.

Meanwhile, the NAACP plea for nationwide protests was bearing fruit. In New York City, a newspaper staff writer reported on the same day, demonstrators called for the federal government to intervene in the Birmingham crisis, and The Associated Press reported that two New York members of Congress, a senator and a House member, made a similar demand. A UPI story reported that the

“Communist press throughout Europe attacked the United States today for racial troubles in Birmingham, Ala. In Moscow, the Communist party newspaper, *Pravda*, ran the story under the headline ‘Monstrous Crimes Among Racists in the United States.’”<sup>22</sup> And next to that, the newspaper published an in-depth profile of one of the Justice Department negotiators, Burke Marshall, who, in Birmingham, “has provided an essential line of communication between the protesting Negroes and the white community. Before he arrived there, it is reported, white leaders did not even know what the Negroes wanted.”<sup>23</sup> Down-page, UPI reported that Dick Gregory had accused police of brutality in the jail, while, on the same page, the newspaper published a photo of two more celebrities—Jackie Robinson and boxer Floyd Patterson—heading to visit Birmingham in support of the demonstrators.

All appeared resolved when the newspaper reported, on its May 11 front page, that a “full agreement on a limited desegregation package plan apparently brought an end today to this city’s five-week racial crisis.” The agreement, wrote Sitton in a story datelined Birmingham May 10, “commits white business and civic leaders, but not city officials, to pledges of action. Those who announced it conceded that it represented only a beginning, although a significant one.”<sup>24</sup> The pact called for creation of a biracial panel and release of the jailed demonstrators. A companion story, dateline Washington, reported that Attorney General Kennedy was pleased with the settlement, calling it a “tremendous step forward for Birmingham, for Alabama and for the South generally.”<sup>25</sup> An inside story profiled Shuttlesworth, calling him one “of the most articulate and fastest talking, leaders of the Negro drive for equality in the South.”<sup>26</sup> Another inside-page story offered a roundup of African-American leaders’ statements praising the accord, including a comment from King, who said he had been “deeply impressed by the quality of the white persons of the community who worked so diligently for just solutions to our mutual problems. They must also be given real credit. They are men of good will.”<sup>27</sup> Staff writer Hedrick Smith, on page nine, offered a descriptive piece detailing the lengthy talks leading up to the agreement—which almost ended in failure with King’s brief jailing. But another story on the same page, out of Washington, revealed a growing rift in the African-American community, reporting of Malcolm X’s denunciation of the use of African-American children in the Birmingham demonstrations. “‘Real men,’ he said, ‘don’t put their children on the firing line.’ The Black Muslim leader criticized the campaign of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as an exercise in futility and an erroneous approach to the problem of race relations. The Black Muslims advocate the complete separation of the Negro and white races as the only rational solution.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, one more story on this page, by a newspaper staffer also dispatched to Birmingham, detailed the financial cost that Birmingham’s retailers had experienced as a result

of the African-Americans' boycott—undoubtedly one of the reasons behind the accord's approval. "Persons close to the situation here say retail sales have been off 30 percent or more."<sup>29</sup>

An act of terrorism brought it all tumbling down. Hedrick Smith reported in a front-page Sunday, May 12 story that the bombings of an African-American motel—the A. G. Gaston, where King was staying in room 30 and which had served as a makeshift headquarters for the activists—and of the home of the Rev. A. D. King, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s brother, "touched off widespread rioting on the edge of this city's business district early today." Smith wrote that "thousands of Negroes poured into the streets and engaged the police, firemen, state highway patrolmen and Jefferson County deputy sheriffs in a running battle that raged through four or five blocks. One policeman was stabbed in the back, at least three others were struck by missiles and an undetermined number of Negroes were injured."<sup>30</sup> In that same day's commentary section, Lewis from Washington and Sitton from Birmingham—writing their pieces in advance of the bombing and thus unknowing of the renewed strife—offered analyses of the Birmingham turmoil. Lewis observed, ironically considering his use of the adjective "explosive," that the week of "explosive racial tension in Birmingham has posed the most acute problems for the Kennedy Administration—problems of law, of policy, of politics." The only real solution, in the long run, "as the Justice Department sees it," he wrote, "is to change the ruling white forces there—change their understanding and their actions." The African-Americans in Birmingham had showed, he asserted, "the power of mass protest, outside of strictly legal channels. The Federal Government demonstrated how effectively it can arouse latent moderate opinion among white leaders, again without lawsuits."<sup>31</sup> For his part, Sitton observed that the week's events in Birmingham "and elsewhere in the South, leave no doubt about the need for urgency. Demonstrations plague Raleigh, N. C., and Atlanta, and have led to violence in Nashville, Tenn. The surface issue is restaurant segregation. Underneath, lies the bitterness and frustration felt by Negroes over the slow pace of racial change as well as the higher expectations aroused by the change that has come." Voting rights, too, were among the list of items on the African-American leaders' to-do list, he wrote. "Bitterness and militancy have become increasingly apparent among Negroes indicating that any peaceful solution must come quickly."<sup>32</sup> So, despite the agreement reached in Birmingham, patience remained thin in the African-American community in the South—and also among those in the Kennedy administration in the North, according to these writers, framing the situation as one that still pitted Old South customs and folkways against the progressivism of a Northern federal government increasingly willing to intervene to crack the segregationist mindset.

That same night, just how that patience had run out was demonstrated when President Kennedy dispatched federal troops to Alabama, near Birmingham, while fifty persons were reported injured in rioting following the blasts. Air Force transports, carrying troops and equipment, had begun arriving at Maxwell Air Base, about eighty miles south of Birmingham, Lewis reported from Washington. In Birmingham, Sitton wrote for his May 13 story, riots “raged out of control for more than three hours early today, after bombings of a motel and an integration leader’s home had enraged Negroes. The city police quelled the disturbances shortly after 5 A. M., New York time, with assistance from Negro ministers and civilian defense workers.”<sup>33</sup> Sitton estimated the number of rioters attacking police and firemen, trashing vehicles and burning six small stores and an apartment house, at about two-thousand-five-hundred. Elsewhere on the front page, a wire story reported that Governor Wallace had asked Kennedy to allow local and state forces to handle the situation, questioning in a telegram the president’s authority to order federal troops into the state. A series of photos on the jump page showed the Birmingham police reaching for pistols as bricks rained down on them, and before-and-after shots of the fires. On another inside page, a staff writer described the devastation of a nine-block area of the city. Another inside-page story profiled the state’s public safety director, “a big, burly man who carries a shotgun when things are sticky. The fact that he wears eyeglasses does not make him look any less formidable.” This commander was the one “in charge of the patrol that sealed off a highway on the Alabama-Georgia border May 3 when a band of Freedom Walkers approached” in protest of the murder of postal carrier Moore.<sup>34</sup>

The situation had quieted some by May 13. Staffer Tom Wicker reported from Washington on page one that “any further disposition of Federal force in Birmingham’s racial disturbances depended on whether Gov. George C. Wallace and local officials could maintain the peace.” But, President Kennedy told the governor in a telegram that the law and precedent granted him the authority to take action, if necessary.<sup>35</sup> Sitton, meanwhile, wrote that state and local law enforcement officers had “relaxed security measures after a marked easing of racial tensions” in Birmingham. “State troopers lifted the virtual martial law they had imposed on a 28-block Negro business and residential area after three hours of rioting early yesterday.”<sup>36</sup> On an inside page, the newspaper profiled Wallace, a man who “does not drink, scorns luxurious living and prides himself on his moral character. The racial problems in Alabama, he says, quite simply are the fault of Negroes.” Just a few days before, according to the profile, Wallace said: “I reject President Kennedy’s statement which in substance says the people of Birmingham have inflicted abuses on the Negroes and that this should come to a stop. The white people of Birmingham have been commended for their restraint during

the present demonstrations. White people have not been involved—only lawless Negroes.”<sup>37</sup> A story adjacent to this profile reported that Alabama’s congressional delegation had petitioned the president seeking the withdrawal of federal troops from the state, while another wire dispatch reported that Wallace was considering going to court to prevent federal troops from entering Birmingham.

Wicker reported from Washington for a May 15 inside-page story that “Negro and white negotiators had met in Birmingham since the Saturday night riots and that, despite telephoned threats to some white leaders, the desegregation agreement had been reaffirmed.” Wicker wrote that in a May 14 meeting with Alabama newspaper editors, Kennedy warned that failure of the non-violent movement led by King “might open the door for Negro extremist groups, such as the Black Muslims” led by Malcolm X. “Some editors,” Wicker wrote, “said the President had acted rightly in making the troops available in Alabama. All those interviewed conceded his sincerity in seeking to avoid further clashes.”<sup>38</sup> By May 16, the integration pact was reported to be back on track, bringing to an end, for the time being at least, the Birmingham racial crisis.

In the first editorial found on the Birmingham strife, the newspaper shared the hopes of many in the city that the new mayor and city council would bring “a more enlightened approach to race relations in that strife-ridden industrial city. Birmingham’s citizens, white and Negro, have made plain their desire for a changed municipal attitude by their selection of a moderate administration.”<sup>39</sup> But when the racial discord brought the May 2 tumult, the newspaper in its lead Sunday editorial that weekend condemned the “barbarities committed by Alabama police authorities against Negro and white demonstrators. The use of police dogs and high-pressure fire hose to subdue schoolchildren in Birmingham is a national disgrace.” So were the “acts of hooliganism at the state line,” asserted the newspaper, “where 10 ‘freedom fighters’ were arrested for seeking to carry through the anti-segregation pilgrimage a Baltimore postman began before he was ambushed and shot to death by fanatics on a Federal highway near Keener, Ala., two weeks ago.” The newspaper invoked a foreign-image frame to argue that on the international scene, “these outrages will be immeasurably costly to the United States.” The newspaper called on the president, in a constitutional theme, “to see to it that the Constitution is supreme in that state and in every other in which its principles are trampled.”<sup>40</sup> A week later, the newspaper was hopeful again, editorializing on behalf of the integration negotiations “that racial justice will prevail in Birmingham without open warfare in the city’s streets,” while recognizing that it was, “of course, unrealistic to expect that the injustices of a hundred years will be erased overnight or that friction will disappear.” In its conclusion, the newspaper again referenced “respect for constitutional rights.”<sup>41</sup> In a bigger-picture commentary the next day,

the newspaper in its editorial titled “The Meaning of Birmingham” cited Gunnar Myrdal’s *The American Dilemma*—referenced in this book’s introduction—in observing, as Myrdal had, that “this is the white man’s problem at least as much as it is the Negro’s.” It is, the newspaper argued, “a moral conflict. It is a struggle between the American’s deeply moralistic creed and his specific actions based on interests, prejudices, customs, instincts, fears.” Harkening back to the Civil War, the editorialist concluded that a “tidal wave hit the United States in 1860, and then subsided. Another one, a century later, is gathering force. The hope of a peaceful solution today lies in the fact that Americans, as Gunnar Myrdal believes, are truly ‘moral-conscious.’”<sup>42</sup> On May 11, the newspaper called the agreement reached among city and African-American leaders and federal intermediaries a “precarious peace ... thanks to a unique experiment in collective bargaining between men of enlightenment in the white and Negro community.” The newspaper praised the Kennedy brothers for playing “a skillful behind-the-scenes role in averting a racial explosion that could have reached frightful dimensions.” In a nod to the framing of this issue done by the publicity campaign by King and other African-American leaders, the newspaper asserted that by putting their bodies in the path of police dogs and fire hoses, the civil-rights activists had “succeeded in focusing national attention on the abuses to which Negroes have been subjected in this citadel of repression.”<sup>43</sup> A day later, the newspaper again employed a Civil War frame, arguing that while the nation’s citizens of color “have been freed in law ... many of them, in many parts of the country, still suffer from severe disabilities. Today the American Negro is literally on the march to cover the last mile toward complete emancipation, not only legal but also economic and social.” For the most part, the newspaper argued, “this struggle is being waged by a responsible Negro leadership on the principle of non-violence, through ‘freedom marches,’ boycotts, ‘sit-ins’ and other protest demonstrations. It has erupted in violence only where local authorities defied both moral and Federal law to ‘keep the Negro in his place.’ Therein lies the significance of the ‘battle of Birmingham.’ It was a confrontation, not between Federal and local authorities but between the local authorities and the Negroes themselves. It ended in victory for sanity, reason and democracy when white business and civic leaders agreed over the heads of their local authorities to a package deal meeting the Negroes’ most pressing demands. But the struggle continues, and unless the Birmingham settlement is carried out in good faith and sets a precedent, it could only intensify the conflict.”<sup>44</sup> And when that settlement blew up in bomb blasts, the newspaper urged on the peace-makers. “The white and Negro moderates who so courageously and wisely reached an accord in Birmingham must not lose heart or lose their heads,” the newspaper asserted. “It would be tragic and ironical if criminals of this type should be allowed to succeed



in their aim of destroying the agreement reached by the moderate elements.”<sup>45</sup> In too many cities, the newspaper argued on May 19, “North and South, the forces of bigotry have tyrannized the men and women of goodwill, reducing them to supine silence in the face of oppressions that were bound to erupt in race warfare. The President has rightly put on those who are most privileged in our society the duty for extra vigilance in combating the temptations of prejudice and violence. They must be exemplars of the primacy of freedom and law.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, *The New York Times* took ownership of this national story by conveying a high degree of agenda-setting, assigning up to three staff writers to cover events on the ground in Birmingham along with Washington correspondents to report on the political and administrative doings in the capital city, devoting hundreds of front- and inside-page news hole inches to the reportage, and exploring frames of constitutionality, foreign image, Civil War evocations and ideological arguments on behalf of freedom in a constitutional, legal context in a series of eight editorials spanning about four weeks.

Similarities and variances occurred in the reporting of all the newspapers in this book’s analysis; this transition from *The New York Times* coverage of the Birmingham demonstrations to that of *The Detroit Free Press* brings an opportunity to briefly explore such discrepancies. For example, as the *Times* had done with much of the coverage of the early events of Project C leading up to the eight tumultuous days of early May, the *Free Press*—but using exclusively the wires as opposed to the *Times*’ reliance on staff and correspondent reports—relegated the numerous “kneel-ins” and other protests to inside pages. But the newspapers differed in their treatment of the Sunday, April 7 riot, which the *Free Press* took out front. The *Times* had placed this story on page thirty-one, and it reported the number of persons arrested at twenty-six, whereas the *Free Press* had this number at twenty-three. The *Free Press* published the story of King’s April 12 arrest, along with sixty other participants in a downtown prayer March, on page two; the *Times* had placed its story of King’s jailing on the front page.

But for the most part, except for its primary reliance on wire services, the Detroit newspaper covered the Birmingham developments similarly to its New York counterpart. The Project C story went back inside for the next-day coverage of the April 7 riot—a wire report of one-hundred state troopers joining three-hundred-sixty policemen standing by while those arrested the previous day—now numbering thirty-nine—were making their court appearances. This newspaper reported on April 10 (as had *The New York Times*) that the blind African-American singer Al Hibbler had been arrested with eight other integration demonstrators. “Police chief Jamie Moore said Hibbler was picked up with the others because ‘police couldn’t leave a blind man out on the street without anybody to take care



of him,” the newspaper reported on page twelve.<sup>47</sup> On April 11 the newspaper published a story on page fifteen reporting that Hibbler had been refused “permission to go to jail with 27 other Negroes arrested for staging a segregation protest march on city hall. ‘We ain’t got anything you can do over there,’ Police Commissioner Eugene (Bull) Connor, an outspoken segregationist, told the entertainer when he asked to accompany the others to jail.” When Hibbler protested, Connor asked him what he could do. “‘I can sing,’ Hibbler replied. ‘We don’t have any room for that over there,’ Connor said.”<sup>48</sup> The story moved back to the front page on April 15, when the newspaper’s wire services reported the jailing of another thirty African-Americans in a prayer march that drew hundreds. The next day, the newspaper reported, on page two, the inauguration of Boutwell, “an avowed segregationist,” according to the wire report, “but the courts will determine the future of the city’s Administration,” which did not immediately take office. “The three city commissioners, led by Mayor Arthur Hanes and Safety Commissioner T. Eugene Connor, insist they cannot be superseded until the expiration of their terms in 1965. The question is to be submitted to the State Supreme Court Tuesday, when the new government will demand physical possession of City Hall. A quick ruling is expected in favor of the new officials, since voters last November decided to abolish the old form of government.” Thus, the newspaper’s headline reported, “2 Regimes Claim Birmingham Reins.”<sup>49</sup> The newspaper took the large children’s march story out front on May 3, as the day’s lead story. The Birmingham saga, including graphic photos of the police abuse of the demonstrators, stayed on the front page for the duration.

The newspaper localized the story on May 8 with a page-two account of a delegation of Detroit African-American youths planning “to parade in the streets of strife-torn Birmingham, Ala., during the week of June 17, it was learned Tuesday. The youths will be part of a 400-member Detroit delegation heading to that city for the National Baptist Sunday School and Training Union Congress, expected to draw 25,000 Negro Baptists.”<sup>50</sup> A page-thirty-six photo spread showed the demonstrations and police arrests. By May 9, the newspaper had assigned its Washington bureau chief, Edwin A. Lahey, to Birmingham, from where he filed a story reporting, in the midst of seemingly successful negotiations, “there is a vacuum of communication between the two communities. This is the real tragedy one senses immediately in Birmingham, where nervous and exasperated citizens with other things to worry about are on the brink of major violence.”<sup>51</sup> The next day, Lahey reported on page four that the situation had calmed somewhat, with the possibility of “a constructive news story that the editors of Pravda are going to put on the spike”—a foreign-image frame depicting the Soviet Communist press as being disappointed in good news coming out of the racial troubles of the U.S.<sup>52</sup> On page

ten, the newspaper published a story out of its state capital bureau reporting that Michigan Governor George Romney had praised the courage of the demonstrators in Birmingham. A sports-section brief reported plans by former heavyweight boxing champ Floyd Patterson and baseball star Jackie Robinson to join the protestors in a few days. On May 11, the newspaper reported on page five that nearly three-hundred had gathered at Detroit's old city hall site to stage a "sympathy demonstration to indicate to the world that we in Detroit are concerned with what happens in Birmingham, Ala."—an interesting choice of page placement, with the Alabama strife being published on the front page but a local protest being relegated to an inside page. This phenomenon of placing a lower agenda rating on local racial discord stories out of the main spotlight—an out-of-sight, out-of-mind frame—will be seen in more dramatic fashion later in this chapter.

The newspaper's Sunday, May 12 edition carried a commentary by a Detroit minister who cited a legend of a long-ago English King, named Canute, who "in a royal display of folly sat on his throne at the sea shore and vainly forbade the tide to rise. A modern re-enactment has been going on in Alabama, as those in power armed with night sticks, police dogs and fire hoses try to forbid a rising tide of black humanity from assuming their rightful place in the sun."<sup>53</sup>

One of the leaders of "those in power armed with night sticks," Birmingham's public safety commissioner—that city's "Segregation Symbol"—was profiled by Lahey on page seventeen of this edition. "When Bull Connor points, everyone jumps in Birmingham," claimed a caption beneath a photo of Connor pointing his finger.<sup>54</sup>

After the motel bombing, the newspaper again relied exclusively on its wire services to report the Birmingham story, commenting in a states'-rights, constitutional frame in the second of its two editorials on the Project C narrative that, except for "diehard segregationists, the President's authority to send Federal troops into Alabama is without question. Title 10, Section 333 of the United States code gives him that right." But the real question, the newspaper argued in this May 15 editorial, was not the legality of the president's decision, but why the troops should have been needed at all. When the city leaders, the state director of public safety and the governor nixed the truce efforts, "it was a signal for the race haters and the rednecks to let go. It was Saturday night in Birmingham and everyone, as usual, came to town." With the "uneasy truce" back in effect after the bombing, the newspaper commented that perhaps "the city may realize that this time it will be seceding not only from the North and the moral conscience of the 20th century, but from civilization. This is a high price to pay for a lack of leadership."<sup>55</sup> The first editorial on Project C, published May 10, simply expressed hope that the truce reached by city and activist leaders would hold.

*The Pittsburgh Press* followed the routine of the other Northern newspapers that were not *The New York Times*, relegating much of the coverage of the racial unrest leading up to the events of May 2 to wire stories strewn among inside pages—other than a front-page April 8 account of state troopers moving into Birmingham to reinforce local police after five days of protests that had resulted in the arrests of ninety-three demonstrators. The newspaper moved the Birmingham narrative to its front page on May 3, where it remained. A Scripps-Howard writer covered events in Birmingham the second week of May, filing stories that complemented the wire service coverage of the main events. On May 9, as Birmingham's white leaders, federal intermediaries and activists were negotiating a settlement, *The Pittsburgh Press* published a front-page story by this correspondent, Jack Steele, reporting in its lead that Birmingham was "sitting today on a powder keg with a lit fuse. But many, perhaps most, of its white citizens seem hardly aware of it." City leaders, he wrote "have tried and largely succeeded in keeping this city's head buried in the sand. This policy has kept the city's white citizens tragically unprepared to consider and accept the civil rights concessions which now must be made to the dangerous situation here." These concessions, Steele wrote, would include acceding to "some of the demands of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. that Birmingham make a 'good faith' start on desegregation and other civil rights problems."<sup>56</sup> An inside-page story this same day detailed the political confusion of the city because of the challenge by Connor and his allies to the newly-elected Boutwell administration.

The newspaper localized the story on May 10 with a page-ten report that a couple of Pittsburgh rabbis "who participated in Negro meetings in Birmingham, comforting demonstrators, returned today with profound admiration for the Rev. Martin Luther King." It was his "deepest conviction," one of the rabbis told the newspaper, "that Dr. King's fight is America's fight." He predicted that if Dr. King and his followers are silenced, more aggressive Negro elements will take over."<sup>57</sup>

On May 11, Steele offered a page-three feature—again, complementing the wire service reportage of the primary story of an accord being reached—observing that reporters on-hand in Birmingham to cover the racial crisis "will not soon forget the A. G. Gaston Motel. The city's only integrated motel, Gaston's was the nerve center for the Rev. Martin Luther King's 'non-violent demonstrations' which yesterday finally broke Birmingham's segregation barriers." At times, he wrote, the motel "looked more like the crossroads of the world. More than 100 reporters and photographers from all over the U.S.—and from papers in England, France, Norway, Denmark, Canada and even Australia—stood for hours in the broiling sun of the motel's courtyard, waiting for press conferences by Dr. King and his aides."<sup>58</sup> Notably, that list of locales sending reporters did not include two

of the Northern U.S. papers analyzed here—*The Detroit Free Press* and *Chicago Tribune*, in a show of strong lack of race-issue agenda-setting by these newspapers. Two days later, after African-American and Anglo leaders had reached their agreement, the newspaper published a front-page account by Steele of the ensuing bombing. “I watched the birth of a race riot here early yesterday,” Steele wrote in his first-hand account of the carnage at the Gaston Motel, of which he had written so glowingly. “It was a horrifying, terrifying—and for a reporter a morbidly fascinating—experience.” The motel, he wrote, “had been bombed—almost certainly by white hoodlums—a half hour earlier. Some 1500 Negroes, and less than a dozen cops, were milling around the street. Three ambulances were being loaded with women injured in the blast. The first warning I had of trouble came as a mere murmur, like a distant roll of thunder, from the angry crowd. It grew to a rumble and then a roar. I saw Negroes raise clenched fists and heard them shout at the police: ‘Where’s Bull Connor?’ and, ‘We’ll kill you.’”<sup>59</sup> The Scripps-Howard Service offered a page-nine story the same day reporting that Birmingham residents wondered why the integrated motel, which could easily be seen as a natural target for such violence, had been left unguarded. “Why,” asked an aide to Mayor-elect Boutwell, “in a city swarming with police and imported law-enforcement officers—was not a single cop or trooper guarding the Gaston Motel?” Meanwhile, Connor had taken to the airwaves to ask white residents to boycott stores in the “downtown area and to denounce the unidentified ‘merchants’ who made the agreement with Dr. King.”<sup>60</sup> On page two, the newspaper reported that the Catholic Inter-racial Council of Pittsburgh was sponsoring a prayer-protest meeting in a couple of days “against the atrocities presently going on in Birmingham, Alabama.”<sup>61</sup> On May 15, the newspaper published a story on page twelve reporting of a gloomy mood in downtown Birmingham, where Connor’s call for a boycott had been successful. The white boycott, “on top of a continuing Negro boycott—has cut retail sales in half in many mid-city stores,” Steele wrote. “Worried store owners and managers reluctantly told me their sales have dropped steadily during the racial demonstrations and riots here in the last two weeks.”<sup>62</sup> And when the agreement finally took effect, Steele in a page-eleven May 16 analysis observed that the “truth is dawning belatedly here that the racial agreement reached last Friday fell far short of the sweeping ‘victory’ claimed initially by the Negro leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This may help ease the danger of white ‘retaliation’—like last Sunday’s bombings—stirred up in part by Dr. King’s exaggerated version of the concession he won from the city’s white ‘Senior Citizens.’ But it may also increase the long-range danger of more Negro demonstrations—and perhaps riots—as they become aware that the ‘Senior Citizens’ did not promise all Dr. King had claimed.”<sup>63</sup> But the pact held.

In one of its two editorials during this period, the *Press*, following the bombing, termed the attack, in a Southern folkways frame, “the result of futile efforts to hold back change. A mere handful of lawbreakers has torn down the patient work of the city’s moderates.” Calling for keeping to a minimum the friction that results “from adjustment to new ways of life,” the editorial concluded with a call for Connor to be fired by the new mayor, who “hasn’t made his sentiments entirely clear but this is a case where any change is bound to be an improvement.”<sup>64</sup> The newspaper followed up with an editorial the next day noting that the president “had to dig pretty deep” to find a law justifying federal troop intervention, but “Alabama’s Gov. George Wallace hardly is the one to lecture him on law observance. This presumptuous demagogue campaigned for the high office he now holds on a platform of law defiance.” The best chance for peace, concluded the editorial, would be to maintain calm “pending an Alabama Supreme Court decision which is expected to oust the present diehard administration in Birmingham, installing instead Mayor Boutwell, who is pictured as a moderate on the race question.”<sup>65</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune*, throughout April, scattered wire service stories on the growing turmoil in Birmingham, including the arrest of King and the murder of Moore, on inside pages, moving the story to the front page—to report the massive arrests of the children’s march via United Press International. During this period, the newspaper published, on its editorial page, a “guest editorial” reprinted from the *Washington Evening Star* questioning the extent of President Kennedy’s involvement in arranging for a visit by King’s wife with the incarcerated civil-rights leader. “To the best of our knowledge, no one in Birmingham was preventing the Rev. Mr. King from calling his wife,” the *Star* commented. “In fact, Police Chief Jamie Moore, who enjoys a local reputation in Birmingham as an honest man, says that the Kings talked to each other on the day before the President-to-the-rescue story appeared, and that the telephone conversation between husband and wife ‘was not arranged by Kennedy or anyone connected with the President.’” The *Star* concluded, “We wonder what this business is all about. Could it possibly have anything to do with such things as votes, gullible people, or politics?”<sup>66</sup> Which causes the casual observer to wonder what this guest-editorial ruse was all about and to ask if it could have anything to do with using another newspaper’s opinion to stand in for your own and if the *Tribune* lacked the editorial intestinal fortitude to raise these questions in its own editorial.

The newspaper continued to rely on wire services for the continued front-page stories, including an inside full-page spread of AP photos showing the use of the high-pressure fire hoses and snarling police dogs lunging at the demonstrators, until calling on a Washington-based Chicago Tribune Press Service correspondent to report on the president’s decision to send federal troops to a couple of cities in

Alabama—but not Birmingham. But the newspaper continued to rely on wire service coverage exclusively for on-the-scene reporting in Birmingham throughout the strife. On May 14, the newspaper published a front-page story on a local angle, reporting that more than “1,000 gospel-singing, chanting demonstrators, most of them Negro teen-agers and college students, paraded for more than an hour thru the Loop yesterday, then marched to an outdoor rally in Congress Plaza in support of Birmingham, Ala., Negroes.” The marchers, the newspaper reported in its un-bylined story, “were well ordered. There were no incidents, either, during the parade or during the rally.”<sup>67</sup> The Chicago demonstration apparently prompted the newspaper to finally speak out on the racial unrest, now that it had visited home ground, in an editorial hoping, in a law-and-order frame, that the Southern “zealots are not seeking to bring Birmingham conditions here.” Comparing Birmingham’s realigned and confused municipal government situation to Chicago’s “centralized political authority, a disciplined police, and temperate leaders in both the white and Negro communities,” the newspaper urged local political leaders to exert leadership “to head off any strife before it can develop. We look to Mayor Daley and the responsible spokesmen on both sides to provide a moderating influence so that Chicago’s reputation may be spared the stain of ugly and utterly futile contention.”<sup>68</sup> The frames, then, were of a Southern, “outsider” racial strife foreign to the folkways of Chicago, where racial tensions apparently were not felt—despite the evidence of more than a thousand chanting youths the day before—and of a law-and-order mentality enforced by “a disciplined police”—frames more common to the Southern press than to the newspapers of the North.

In the South, *The Birmingham News* began reporting on the demonstrations early in April. The first story found was an un-bylined staff-written report on page two April 5, about the arrest of ten African-American demonstrators at downtown drug stores in what the newspaper reported was the third day of demonstrations. Also, this story first reported King’s call for boycotts of downtown and shopping center merchants. The next day, the newspaper reported on page two the arrests of another thirty-two demonstrators, and this story offered the first mention of Reverend Shuttlesworth, who “knelt in prayer” as Connor, across the street, shouted to “give the Negroes one minute” to disperse. “Three paddy wagons pulled into the block. After the one minute lapsed, Capt. Wall ordered the Negroes to get on their feet. He placed them under arrest.”<sup>69</sup> A companion story, by the newspaper’s capital bureau staff, reported that the lieutenant governor in Montgomery was urging calm. The tally of arrests, carrying charges such as marching without a permit, piled up in a series of stories, all published on page two or buried farther inside, all without bylines: the total of protestors being held as of a story published April 7, which also reported that singers Ray Charles and Al Hibbler



had volunteered their services to the demonstrations, was sixty-five; another twenty-six were reported arrested on April 8; seven more African-Americans, and an Anglo protestor, reported arrested in the April 9 edition; twenty-seven on April 10, with police refusing to arrest Hibbler. Also on April 10, the newspaper, on page six, reported that a local “influential” businessman of color, in what apparently was the first attempt at establishing negotiations, “called for all citizens of the city to work together to solve its problems in a framework of recognition of local Negro leadership. His full statement: ‘I regret the absence of continued communication between the white and Negro leadership in our city and the inability of the white merchants and white power structure of our community to influence the City Fathers to establish an official line of communication between the races in our city.’”<sup>70</sup> The newspaper reported on April 11 that a circuit court, at the city’s request, had enjoined King and other movement leaders from further participation in marches and demonstrations. On April 13, the newspaper reported, on page two, the arrest of King, Abernathy, and Shuttlesworth in a roundup of nearly fifty marchers on minor charges that included contempt of the circuit court order. The newspaper also reported, on this same day on the same page, the release of the statement by local Protestant, Catholic and Jewish clergymen urging that the marchers withdraw from the demonstrations—the same statement, cited above, prompting King to write his Letter from Birmingham. An Associated Press photo on the same page depicted the protestors marching.

The first hint of compromise came, not from a staff report, but from an April 14 page-two wire story reporting that while, outwardly, the mood was tense in Birmingham, “underneath, there is a current of compromise which likely will be the basis ultimately of understanding.” The dispatch erroneously reported, though, that “Negroes who live in Birmingham have no united front. They have no individual leader,” but the prime mover, it added later in the story, “is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Council with headquarters at Atlanta.” The story also identified Shuttlesworth. “Aside from these two main forces, there are various individuals within the Negro community who prefer to follow programs which are not at all well-defined. They refuse to be aligned with any movement.”<sup>71</sup> Why the newspaper editors chose to include such an ill-informed story in the coverage is difficult to comprehend, unless it was to lend the hope of negotiation to a growing crisis that otherwise seemed stalemated. The newspaper placed a wire story reporting that President Kennedy had no current plans for federal intervention in Birmingham on page three.

On April 12, the newspaper published on page two a report that seven African-Americans had attended two white churches on Easter, “the 12th consecutive day of racial demonstrations against segregation here.”<sup>72</sup> But the more



interesting story published this day was by the newspaper's Washington correspondent, James Free, reporting that liberal factions in the nation's capital, "who previously have criticized the white defenders of segregation," were questioning the "wisdom of Negro leaders of current demonstrations against segregation in Birmingham." The story, in a frame obviously intended to depict the marchers' liberal friends as opposed to the Birmingham activities, quoted from a *Washington Post* editorial asserting that a prayer march staged by movement leaders on Palm Sunday "seems of doubtful utility ... One can hardly help wondering if it was not prompted more by leadership rivalry than by the real need of the situation." It also was significant, Free reported, "that neither of the Sunday newspapers in the nation's capital printed front-page stories about the Rev. Martin Luther King and many of his followers being in jail in Birmingham. They did carry the story on inside pages"—as had *The Birmingham News*, by the way. No other "liberal" sources of discontent with march tactics were cited, though the story did point out that *The New York Times*, which had provided detailed and prominent coverage of the Birmingham strife, had not mentioned "Negro gang attacks on the white baseball fans" in Washington the previous Friday.<sup>73</sup> On the 13th, the question of the president's intervention on behalf of King talking to his wife was featured in a page-two story quoting Police Chief Jamie Moore denying that Kennedy had made arrangements for King to telephone his wife from the jail—intervention which had been reported in Atlanta by Mrs. King. The story also reported that King had not put up three-hundred dollars for his release, while a companion story reported that city officials had asked a court to cite and fine King and his cohorts for disobeying the court injunction against demonstrations. A story the same day on page three reported that the Downtown Action Committee had commended local law enforcement for maintaining control of the racial demonstrations. As though to demonstrate they deserved the praise, police promptly arrested another twenty-six demonstrators, as reported on page five the 17th. The same day, Washington correspondent Free reported that Birmingham, thanks in part to the newly-elected city regime, was getting better press from the Northern papers. "The outside press is getting more balanced, and more objective," Free wrote of papers that included *The New York Times*, which "had been carrying down-the-middle, and often in-depth reports from Foster Hailey of its own staff. Hailey is writing what he sees and finds out for himself on the scene, not merely the views and charges of principles in the racial controversy—as has been done too often by visiting newsmen. Today's Times also printed a factual profile story and picture of Albert Boutwell, Birmingham's newly-installed mayor." More significant still, Free wrote, "The Times had an editorial today noting that 'the swearing-in of a new mayor and city council in Birmingham offered hope for a more enlightened

approach to race relations in that strife-ridden industrial city.”<sup>74</sup> On this same day, on its front page, the newspaper published a wire story reporting that the Civil Rights Commission in Washington had urged the president to “crack down on Mississippi,” possibly cutting off federal funding, for that state’s “open and flagrant violation of constitutional guarantees” that had precipitated “serious conflict.”<sup>75</sup> *The Birmingham News*, meanwhile, had yet to print any news of its own racial strife on the front page.

The King phone-call controversy arose again on page four April 18, when the newspaper’s Washington bureau excerpted much of a *Washington Star* editorial, which the *Chicago Tribune* had used as a guest editorial, questioning what was behind the reported phone call by King to his wife—an incident that kept getting press coverage framed in a suspicious light, in a conspiracy-theory frame, as the newspaper continued to report daily march and demonstration events, including, on this day, a bylined staff report of plans by some demonstrators to visit their jailed colleagues. On April 20, the newspaper reported, on page two, that the jailed protestors were seeking “federal court protection against arrest for violating Birmingham city ordinances. The suit, probably the first to ask such a favor of the federal judiciary, seeks an injunction which would, in effect, bar the city from arresting certain law violators.”<sup>76</sup> The next day, the newspaper reported, on page two, that King and Abernathy had been freed and were en-route to Atlanta. On April 23, the newspaper reported on page five that contempt charges had been dismissed against four of the fifteen marchers, for lack of evidence. King’s, Abernathy’s and Shuttlesworth’s names were not among them.

The race-strife story in its city finally made the front page of *The Birmingham News* on April 24, with its Washington correspondent reporting on the upcoming meeting between Attorney General Kennedy and Governor Wallace. Beneath that story, the newspaper carried a wire service report of the murder of postal worker Moore. The April 25 front page carried a banner headline announcing that a suspect was being held in the Moore slaying, above a long story written by a staff writer that provided more details regarding the crime scene and investigation than did the wire service reports cited elsewhere. Also on the front page, the newspaper’s Washington bureau reported that neither Wallace nor Robert Kennedy had changed their stances in their meeting that day. Robert Kennedy did say, in another front-page story, that he saw no need for federal marshals in Alabama. An inside-page story on April 25 reported that the judge’s decision in the contempt hearing was expected the next day.

The decision, a finding of guilty with a fine of \$50 and a sentence of five-days jail time for the remaining defendants—including King, Abernathy and Shuttlesworth—was placed on page two of the April 26 edition. On page one that

same day, meanwhile, the newspaper published, at the very top, a verbal salute to the rebel flag, being celebrated that day for Confederate Memorial Day. “Fly that flag high today,” the short report urged in one of the stronger Southern folkways frames found in this analysis. Even though the confederacy died, lamented reporter Jerry Proctor, “the flag remained. It became in some mysterious way a symbol of the whole South, past, present and future. Its colors meant Dixie to every man. . . . Ever changing, it is the hallmark of the new South, strong and flourishing, grown tall from the bloody soil of a devastated land.”<sup>77</sup> Below the flag on page one, the newspaper published a staff-written story datelined Montgomery reporting that Robert Kennedy and George Wallace had agreed that they could not agree, and below that a wire service dispatch out of Atlanta warning of increased militancy and extremism if the moderates could not come together. Also on page one of this edition, a staff writer provided an update on the investigation of the Moore murder, for which one suspect was being held. Again, this story provided more background and investigative details than did the wire service accounts published in other newspapers

The newspaper this day was quite a gathering of printed ironies, the Old South meeting the New South while the African-American demonstrators trying to transition the South from old to new sat in jail or continued their nearly daily march—and one white, solo marcher demonstrating on behalf of that transition paid for it with his life. The April 28 front page, in an un-bylined staff dispatch from Gadsden, reported that a 40-year-old DeKalb County man would be charged with murder for the Moore slaying, but racial strife tidings in Birmingham stayed inside, including a May 1 story that eight marchers, attempting to carry on Moore’s trek, had been arrested and charged with breach of the peace. All were reportedly from Birmingham.

On May 2, the beginning of the eight days of rage referred to by the New York *Daily News* in its retrospective, the newspaper published on page two the arrest of more than “200 Negroes, some grade school age.” According to a staff report with no byline, the shouting and singing children “ranged from fourth to eighth graders. Their teachers called encouragement and led them in singing from across the street as police vehicles pulled up.”<sup>78</sup> The next day’s story, a long, descriptive piece detailing the use of fire hoses and police dogs to disperse the demonstrators, also an un-bylined staff report, was placed on page two along with a photo of a six-year-old girl waiting to be taken into a paddy wagon. A *Life* magazine photographer was reportedly injured by a large rock, and King estimated the number of arrested so far, including his brother, at more than seven hundred—“a record for any one series of demonstrations in his civil rights campaign.”<sup>79</sup> The strife, which was front-page news by now everywhere else in the nation, finally made the

Birmingham newspaper's front page on May 4—a story, with a pro-segregation law-and-order frame, by a *News* staffer reporting that Governor Wallace “deplored what he termed the useless racial demonstrations in Birmingham.” The governor said he was “sure that people who are leading the demonstrations will come to their senses and realize they are not doing anybody any good.”<sup>80</sup> The reportage of the main story—demonstrations, hoses, dogs and street fighting—though, remained relegated to an inside page on this day, along with a wire dispatch from Washington quoting Attorney General Kennedy as saying the timing and tactics of the Birmingham protests were “open to question. School children participating in street demonstrations is a dangerous business. An injured, maimed or dead child is a price that none of us can afford to pay.”<sup>81</sup> This story was placed next to a photo of an officer hustling a young girl, who had been knocked down by a high-pressure stream of water, away from the scene of the clashes.

Using page two as its primary cover page of the racial strife, along with other coverage buried farther inside, *The Birmingham News* offered its readers voluminous inches of copy detailing the on-going clashes that papers across the nation were playing prominently on front pages, along with photo spreads on the cover and inside, except for the occasional utterance from the governor. For example, the May 6 edition published on the front page a wire story, framed in a Southern folkways theme, of Wallace and Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett visiting a Mississippi Civil War battleground, with Ross proclaiming that the South has “built a society of which any Confederate veteran would be proud.’ And, he added, ‘if we have the blood in our veins that they did for maintaining our Southern way of life, nothing can stop us from doing it.”<sup>82</sup> So, the Old South culture goes on page one, while the violent uprisings against the old segregationist ways playing out daily on the streets of Birmingham in a modern-day reenactment of the Civil War are placed inside, out of immediate sight and mind.

On May 7, the newspaper published across the top of its front page the text of a telegram it had sent that day to the president, informing Kennedy that “Birmingham expects that you as President of all the people will use your office to encourage maintenance of law and order at all times. Demonstrations have been unleashed in Birmingham by an organization which seems deliberately intent, having created open turmoil, on continuing it indefinitely.” The newspaper tried a guilt frame: “If serious injury or death should result, Mr. President, you would certainly then ask yourself whether every thing had been done, in advance to have prevented it. We ask you, Sir, to use the influence of your office to end this open law violation and provocation.” It was signed by Clarence B. Hanson, Jr., publisher of the newspaper.<sup>83</sup> Beneath this piece, a staff writer reported from the state capital of Montgomery that Governor Wallace, speaking to the legislature, had pledged

“‘legal defiance’ against ‘outside meddling’ in the state’s racial matters.”<sup>84</sup> So, the frame, in both of these front-page items, was of protestors peacefully marching for civil rights as responsible for the violence and tumult in Birmingham, of prominent Alabamians standing up for maintenance of law and order that was threatened by outside agitators intent on stirring up discord—in a remarkable display of agenda-setting that made the newspaper an active participant in the racial unrest that had plagued the city for several weeks now and that had filled the inside pages where singing, chanting and marching mixed with arrests, sirens and warnings of bloodbath.

The reports of a negotiated agreement made the front page on May 8, in a wire report out of Washington that the president was gratified with the progress being made in Birmingham, a city with a badly tarnished reputation where “‘very real abuses’ had been ‘too long inflicted’ on the Negroes there.”<sup>85</sup> An inside-page story this same day reported that juvenile court had created a plan to release the children jailed during the demonstrations. Distinguished Associated Press writer Relman Morin offered a tasty morsel of courtroom color the next day—in a story that *The New York Times* also had carried on an inside page in a rare publication of a wire story by that newspaper on racial strife in the South—reporting from the office of a juvenile court judge, where he found “the whole story of Birmingham today, the Negro side, the white side, the heart-breaking human side.” A fifteen-year-old African-American youth, arrested for participating in the demonstrations and “big for his age,” sat across from Judge Talbot Ellis. “I am going to let you go,” the judge told the youth. “Your mother must have been mighty worried when she couldn’t find you. Why did you tell the officer you were 17? That’s why they put you in jail instead of bringing you here.’ Boy: ‘I said I was 15.’” The old question of American criminal justice, especially in white-on-black arrests: Do you believe the arresting officer or do you believe the arrestee? The judge recited for the boy a quote he identified as coming from one of the nation’s founding fathers: “‘There is no freedom without restraint.’ Now, I want you to go home and go back to school. Will you do that? No answer. The boy stares at the judge, unblinking, through his spectacles. His jaw juts upward.” Finally, the boy says to the judge, “‘Well, you can say that about freedom, because you’ve got your freedom. The Constitution says we’re all equal but Negroes aren’t equal.’” The boy’s mother interjects. “‘Judge—these younger people are not going to take what we took.’” After the judge dismissed the boy and his mother, Morin described the cafeteria where the detained children were being fed. “The tables and chairs are a bright yellow and orange. The room is clean, cheerful. The children come in carrying trays with ground beef and beans, turnip greens, sweet potatoes, corn bread, fruit pudding and iced tea. This is by no means ‘slop.’ If food elsewhere was not like this, Birmingham people tell you,

‘We just couldn’t organize children kitchens fast enough for all the hundreds that swarmed in.’ The children—all little girls in this room—set the trays on the table and then stand until all the tables are filled. Then they say grace.”<sup>86</sup> The frame here, of course, is of the wise hand of the law upholding justice in a show of compassion that is timely when the mood of negotiated peace abounds, and simple but plentiful bounty being offered the children in a scene reminiscent of the orphanage of *Oliver Twist*—comfortable, disciplined—yet, the context not written, captive. Out in the city, by all local and wire accounts of the next few days, peace and agreement were brewing in Birmingham.

When the Gaston Motel was bombed, injuring at least three according to this newspaper, the Birmingham story moved to the front page for the duration. The May 12 edition reported, beneath a top-of-the-page two-bank, bold-face, all-caps headline, the explosions of dynamite “within 29 minutes of each other late Saturday night” damaging the home of King’s brother, A. D. King, and the motel. “King is a brother of Martin Luther King Jr. and has been associated with him in Negro integration demonstrations in Birmingham in the last month,” wrote a staff reporter, no byline. “The Gaston Motel has served as headquarters for demonstration leaders.”<sup>87</sup> Beneath that story, the newspaper published a signed statement from Mayor Boutwell, pleading for peace and wisdom, according to the headline. The May 13 edition carried several front-page stories, the main one by a staff writer reporting that comparative calm had returned to the city while federal troops had gathered in the state. The Washington bureau reported that the president said no troops would be sent in if the city remained quiet, while another story, from the newspaper’s Montgomery bureau, reported that the governor, still defiant, had asked Alabama’s congressional delegation to help keep federal troops out of the city. Inside, the newspaper published a photo page showing the bomb damage, while another inside page gathered several bombing-related stories that included staff reports of city clergy urging peace and unity, city council members warning lawbreakers to behave, the mayor declaring that federal troops would not be needed, and a top-of-the-page feature describing a nervous quiet on the downtown streets. Another inside page carried a wire service story. A statement from the governor accused Birmingham’s two newspapers and a small group of “appeasers who attempted to secretly negotiate with the mobsters,” of making maintenance of peace “doubly difficult.” This bi-racial “negotiating group of appeasers who have kept their identify secret, have played right into the hands of Martin Luther King and his cohorts.”<sup>88</sup> The newspaper also published a statement from the president calling the negotiated agreement “fair and just” and announcing that he had directed the secretary of defense to dispatch federal troops to select areas of Alabama.<sup>89</sup> On page two, the newspaper published a wire story reporting on



demonstrations occurring in twenty or more cities in support of the Birmingham protestors. Another inside page carried a wire story reporting that the state's congressional delegation had acted on Governor Wallace's plea and asked the president to reconsider his ordering of troops into Alabama, while an un-bylined story detailed the damage by rioters and looters to a local grocery store. A page-three story reported that only five of the fourteen-hundred arrested demonstrators remained jailed, while a local dispatch on page fifteen reported that mixed lunchrooms would be tried in the city on a trial basis—small signs of compliance with the negotiated agreement in the aftermath of the new, bloody bomb violence. The story remained dominant on the newspaper's front page as the city's leaders, in conjunction with the civil rights activist leaders, got Birmingham back on the negotiated settlement track.

The newspaper published eleven editorials on its city's and state's racial strife during this period. Early on, as the Birmingham demonstrations saga was in its infant stages, the newspaper observed in a signed editorial by its publisher on April 7 that the racial "problem will be here a long time. We need patience, Negroes and whites. ... The matter is one of citizens with differences—white differing with white. Negro differing with Negro, as well as race differing with race. Never did a free, self-determining people require more understanding and mental effort. Emotion, on either side, will obscure logic."<sup>90</sup> On April 25, the newspaper's lead editorial, on the slaying of William L. Moore—whom the editorial did not, inexplicably, identify by name—began not by condemning the murder but by praising Governor Wallace for "his prompt action in posting a \$1,000 reward for the arrest and conviction" of the killer. After musing on possible motive, the newspaper finally got around to suggesting that the state's citizens "will demand that the person or persons responsible be brought to justice and dealt with in a manner to leave no doubt in anyone's mind anywhere that violence is not condoned and will not be tolerated."<sup>91</sup> The newspaper's April 26 editorial on the meeting between the governor and Attorney General Kennedy predictably summed up the meeting's outcome as "predictable." It then adopted a states'-rights frame, arguing, in agreement with Kennedy, that the issues should be settled "locally, within Alabama, by Alabamians. That is how it must be settled, and will be settled, sooner or later."<sup>92</sup> On May 1, the newspaper again found itself in agreement with the U.S. attorney general, who had urged settlement of the racial issue in courts rather than on the streets, in arguing against groups "from outside Alabama" planning to carry on the march of the slain Moore—action the newspaper deemed, in a law-and-order frame, "would be gross error and exploitation of tragedy." The newspaper called on state officials to be "very, very careful" in plans to arrest the marchers who, the editorialist warned, would welcome the opportunity to martyr themselves by being



jailed to make “additional black headlines.”<sup>93</sup> Keeping the peace, then, was important not for the sake of the peace, but for the sake of avoiding pro-integration publicity. In the aftermath of the May mass arrests of the children’s march, as the newly-elected city regime worked toward consolidating its authority, the newspaper praised Mayor Boutwell for his stance supporting a negotiated agreement with the civil-rights activists. “Responsible Negroes know that not one single thing is going to be settled in the streets,” opined the newspaper, ignoring the fact that it was street demonstrations that had forced the white city leaders into negotiations in the first place. “The only way differences can be resolved and patterns established for the future is at the conference table,”<sup>94</sup> argued the newspaper in endorsing negotiations—a step forward, at least, in the march toward settlement and away from the Wallace method of brutally enforced law-and-order. On May 10, the newspaper again endorsed the negotiations among African-American and Anglo leaders, arguing that such negotiations were not so much a matter of appeasing the demonstrators—“This newspaper shares natural reaction of most citizens everywhere who don’t like settlements under the club”—but rather were a recognition of “only one choice: Try to reach a settlement or face renewed demonstrations with all their potential for real tragedy involving, perhaps, many children too young to be responsible for their conduct.” Bottom line, though, remained a strong states’-rights argument—the possibility “that continued demonstrations might have led to National Guard use and the additional notoriety martial law would bring to Birmingham, not to mention the chance that federal troops—federalized guardsmen or regulars—might ultimately have been employed. Uniformed soldiers with bayonets standing against children was a shattering experience for Little Rock and Oxford: Birmingham most certainly did not want to repeat it.”<sup>95</sup> The newspaper again endorsed the negotiated settlement in a May 11 editorial, assuring readers—in the interests, remember, of preserving local and state authority and eschewing federal intervention as had happened so miserably, from the Southern viewpoint, in Little Rock and Oxford—that the group of Anglo citizens negotiating with the African-American activists “did not bargain away anything.”<sup>96</sup> After the bombing, rather than decrying the bloodshed and terrorist act of violence, the newspaper’s first editorial reaction was to urge against federal intervention. “As long as Birmingham whites and Negroes conduct themselves as responsible, civilized human beings, federal forces should not have to be imposed on this community.” The newspaper again, on behalf of heading off federal intervention, endorsed the negotiated agreement that had been reached and urged African-American leaders who had expressed confidence “in the good faith of a private group of whites who negotiated about certain grievances” to “reflect that confidence though a helpful silence.”<sup>97</sup> The newspaper repeated the states’-rights plea in an editorial the next

day, in response to the president ordering federal troops into Alabama. The editorialist cited the newspaper's telegram to the president to argue that law and order had been "kept by local police and sheriff's departments. It is our expectation that this can be continued. But the strain is great daily." Birmingham, the editorial asserted, "will need no troops, it will need no outside intervention of any kind, if pressures which excite white or Negro people are prevented." The president could do the greatest service, the editorial continued, by using his "powerful influence to get non-Birmingham Negro leaders out of this city." King, the editorial concluded, "and his associates should leave the city. And the President, seeing continued order here, should withdraw troops from Alabama. As long as either remains, provocation is certain."<sup>98</sup> As the city calmed and movement toward the negotiated peace resumed, the newspaper took a lyrical sigh of relief in a Saturday, May 18 editorial: "Birmingham as it came to the weekend resumed its normal balance, or nearly so. Spring was in its last days. Hot summer was at the doorstep." The city, the newspaper commented, had "a source for pride this weekend as we worship and relax. Let every man think some about it—and with the new week, move right ahead."<sup>99</sup>

*The Birmingham News* demonstrated remarkable agenda-setting during this prolonged episode of racial strife, not so much in the massive size of news hole and large commitment of staff resources to covering the story, but more so in a couple of other ways. One, as already noted above, was the participant role it played—as opposed to the traditional press function of observer and uninvolved, unbiased chronicler of events—in sending and publishing a telegram to the president urging federal action to maintain peace in the city. The irony of this editorial intervention, though—some might use the word hypocrisy—was in the newspaper's strong argument against federal intervention when the president did respond, with troop deployment to the state, but in a manner the newspaper's executives had not welcomed or, perhaps, anticipated. More striking than this, though, was the flagrant attempt to shield, as much as possible short of self-censorship, its own residents from the devastating reportage of the non-violent marches and the city and police violent reaction to them by keeping the day-by-day development of this story off of the front page. This editorial gatekeeping and framing decision demonstrated, as a *Pittsburgh Press* reporter had noted in his coverage, a deliberate and egregious attempt by city leaders—a fraternity to which the newspaper publisher and editors belonged—to keep "this city's head buried in the sand," a policy that included keeping the names of the white negotiators secret and that left the city's citizenry woefully unable to understand and consider the concessions being made. Whether it was done out of shame or as collusion with other city leaders to keep negotiations on track and the federal government and other players uninformed, this burial of vital public information betrayed the watchdog role of the

newspaper on a scope similar to the *Houston Chronicle* scheming with city and movement leaders to keep lunch counter-segregation events and negotiations out of that newspaper. No other newspaper analyzed for this book, Southern, Western or Northern, relegated the most significant events and elements of the 1963 Birmingham race crisis to inside pages. It was a big and important story—especially so for Birmingham.

The *News and Courier* in Charleston carried brief wire stories during the course of the Birmingham demonstrations but took the story to the front page on May 3 for a wire service account of the children's march. The story stayed out front for the next couple of weeks, the storyline being the same as the reportage elsewhere, but the newspaper sent a staff writer to Birmingham for its May 14 edition after the motel bombing. Robert L. Thompson, offering sidebar information that complemented the main wire stories, reported a troubled "peace" in the city, where, he wrote, "Vulcan, mythical god of the forge, last night cast his stony gaze from Red Mountain upon a steel-rich city 'keeping a peace' in which neither side has cast aside its weapons. The 55-foot statue on the mountain top is supposedly the symbol of the industry which brought Birmingham to prominence." But the city's "prominence in recent days, however, has been gained by riot and destruction, and symbolized by helmeted state patrolmen."<sup>100</sup> On the next day's front page, Thompson wrote that a Birmingham cab driver's life had been saved by a "Negro man who shielded him from the mob and finally helped him break away." The cabbie, who received knife wounds to his head, back, side, arm and shoulder during post-bombing rioting, said a crowd of African-Americans "began peppering his Yellow cab with rocks." They "weren't just marching that night," he said, "they were out for blood."<sup>101</sup> On page three, the newspaper published an Associated Press story reporting that the police chief in Chicago "blamed racial trouble in Birmingham, Ala., for the stoning of Chicago police and firemen after a Negro youth had been wounded in a burglary investigation. 'This was an outgrowth of the Birmingham situation,' Police Supt. O. W. Wilson said. 'It wouldn't have happened a year ago.'<sup>102</sup>

On its editorial pages, *The News and Courier* early-on personified Southern racial strife, finding a ready-made scapegoat for the Birmingham violence—Martin Luther King, Jr., who "is pouring oil on racial tension there," the newspaper asserted in an April 13 editorial. "Almost daily he and his colleagues issue defiant statements calculated to inflame the people both in Birmingham and elsewhere in the nation." The newspaper constructed a victimization frame in comparing treatment of Anglo protestors to those of color. "When white Southerners protest against court decisions contrary to long accepted constitutional principles, they are pilloried throughout the world for refusing to obey the law. But a Negro demagog

[sic] can do it and win applause as a freedom fighter.”<sup>103</sup> The newspaper invoked the double standard again four days later, editorializing that while President Kennedy was telephoning King’s wife “to sympathize over her husband’s serving in jail as a lawbreaker at Birmingham, Ala., we wish he would do as much for the family of Billie Sol Estes, sentenced to 15 years in prison for fraud. The race racket has become a great swindle on the American people.”<sup>104</sup>

The newspaper continued to identify King as the kingpin behind what it termed “terror tactics” of the peaceful marches and the demonstrators as “invaders” in its Sunday, May 5 lead editorial following the children’s march, in which it accused King of staging the protests in an effort to earn money for the movement. Without explaining how victims of fire hoses and police dogs, followed by being jailed, is a financially profitable undertaking, the newspaper asserted that when “the last dollar has been wrung by Rev. King from the agony of Birmingham, he will move on to greener pastures.” Violence, the writer observed, “begets violence, and the end is not in sight. As usual, the innocent will suffer along with the guilty”<sup>105</sup>—the guilty, the assumption goes, being the nonviolent civil-rights marchers. As King was the much-sung villain of the Birmingham strife, the newspaper on May 9 lauded the Birmingham police as the “unsung heroes of 1963” who, “with great restraint ... have been striving to restore order in the streets.” Calling on the “agitators” to disperse, the editorial suggested that the demonstrators “want blood to flow. They are looking, we suspect, for an excuse to bring in federal occupation.” No such action, the editorial argued in a states’-rights frame, “is necessary if the City of Birmingham and the State of Alabama are left alone to solve their problems.”<sup>106</sup> Next on this newspaper’s list of heroes was the “responsible spokesman,” *Birmingham News* publisher Clarence B. Hanson Jr., whose telegram to the president was “an appeal for safety from mobs in the streets” that “ought to meet with favorable response among people of good will everywhere.” Police dogs, the editorial asserted, are “color blind. They are carrying out the same assignment as the policemen: namely, to disperse unruly crowds in the streets.”<sup>107</sup> A companion editorial commended two lecturers at Howard University in Washington who said, in an interview published in *The New York Herald Tribune*, that a “slower but more realistic approach than the ‘all’, ‘here’, and ‘now’ demands voiced by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.” would be the best route. Accusing King of “demagoguery in a good cause,” one of the professors, Sterling R. Brown, said “he can’t go on telling them that time will take care of these things.” The editorial writer agreed: “the Negro community in America needs to listen to reason rather than heed the dictates of emotion. Thoughtful Negro citizens need to bear in mind the tremendous advances made by their race in the last four decades and to realize that a gradual approach is the only possible one in a country where they are

a minority. Self-proclaimed Negro leaders who urge revolution rather than evolution will only set back the clock for the Negro in America.”<sup>108</sup>

In its May 14 editorial following the bombing, the newspaper claimed that the bombers, whatever their race, were criminals; but the bulk of the editorial argued against those who rioted following the bombings, blaming “King and his henchmen” who “worked up a state of turmoil in the community which over the week end boiled into serious violence for the first time ... The violence that sober Birmingham citizens of both races had feared thus finally was achieved.” King-inspired “incitement of the mobs,” the newspaper argued in blaming the victims of the bombing for the resulting turmoil, “is letting another evil spirit out of containment.”<sup>109</sup> In a May 17 editorial, the newspaper suggested that Birmingham had witnessed the rise of a kind of anarchism not seen since sixty-two years before, when “an anarchist assassinated President William McKinley at Buffalo, N. Y.” The mass law-breaking in Birmingham, along with anti-police riots in Chicago and Hydrogen-bomb protests in New York, argued the newspaper in putting an outside-agitator frame on all progressive movements of the day, “should wake Americans to the emergence of a new anarchism on the national scene.” Anarchism, the editorial asserted in a law-and-order frame, “aims at the breakdown of law enforcement and other legitimate activities of government. It is beyond the pale of toleration.”<sup>110</sup>

In Houston, the *Chronicle* relied exclusively on its wire services, publishing the initial children’s-march story on its May 3 front page. The narrative stayed out front throughout the Birmingham strife—including Relman Morin’s look inside the juvenile court and detention center that *The New York Times* and *Birmingham News* had placed inside. As the story grew, so did this newspaper’s news hole inches devoted to the story—indication, along with the prominent front-page placement, of a high agenda priority for this story short of expending staff resources for on-site reportage. On May 8, with the buildup of state police forces in Birmingham, the newspaper published wire stories on page nine about the crowded conditions in the Birmingham jail; detailing the difficulties of settling the Birmingham racial discord because of the two rival city government factions; and, that Arizona Republican Senator and presidential aspirant Barry Goldwater supported dispatching federal troops to the South if local authorities could not maintain control. A wire story on page eight reported that a right-wing, pro-Catholic newspaper in Mexico said the Birmingham events brought shame to the human race. On the front page, the newspaper published a wire story reporting that the chairman of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee had accused Birmingham police of using “‘barbaric’ police tactics to quell Negro rioters and called for swift passage of civil rights legislation.”<sup>111</sup> A May 11 *New York Times* wire service story on page

four revealed a bit more about the rift between King and Black Muslim leader Malcolm X, reporting, as noted earlier, that Malcolm X had “denounced the use of Negro children in the Birmingham demonstrations. ‘Real men,’ he said, ‘don’t put their children on the firing line.’ The Black Muslim leader criticized Rev. Martin Luther King’s campaign to desegregate Birmingham as an exercise in futility and a wrong-headed approach to the problem of race relations.”<sup>112</sup>

The newspaper devoted several pages to wire coverage of the motel bombing in Birmingham, besides the primary reportage on its front page. The newspaper published a photo spread of the violence and rioting on page six of its May 13 second section, where it also offered an analysis of why African-Americans selected Birmingham for this series of planned demonstrations (Project C, explained above); a report of Governor Wallace defying the president’s authority to use federal troops in Alabama on page six; a page-three explanation of the president’s decision to deploy troops in Montgomery and Anniston, along with a timetable of the evolution of the Birmingham demonstrations and an analysis of what the protestors were seeking in Birmingham; a page-four analysis of what key government and policy officials had to say about events in Birmingham and, on page four of the newspaper’s second section, a story that the Young Democrat Clubs of Texas had passed a resolution in support of the Birmingham demonstrators. On page eight, the newspaper published a first-hand account of a *Detroit News* reporter on the scene of the riots, adopting a battle-front frame that had become commonplace among visiting reporters covering rioting, mob and police violence in foreign locales: “Flames still flickered in the ruins of a house in the riot-torn Negro section close to downtown,” wrote Anthony Ripley. “I stood in the empty street wondering what could be left to feed such a persistent flame. The corner streetlight was burned out. That made it extra dark, because in this section of town, there are lights only at the corners.” State police, he wrote, “said I could re-enter the 28-block area they had marked off as no man’s land, but cautioned me to walk in the middle of the street. ‘Stay off the sidewalks,’ said Maj. Walter Allen of the Alabama State Police. ‘There still may be somebody there with rocks to throw.’ The visit brought back to me all the sounds emotions, fire, and trouble which started with an explosion 21 hours earlier, at 11:32 p.m. Saturday.”<sup>113</sup>

In one of its two editorials on the demonstrations and ensuing violence, this newspaper on May 5 published a commentary suggesting that Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus, whom President Kennedy had “reportedly” asked to intervene in a racial controversy in Alabama the previous year, might be able to play a role in Birmingham. “He’s been down that road,” the newspaper observed. “Excepting the Little Rock crisis, Faubus has been a good governor” and would be “a ‘natural’ for the assignment, if indeed it has been offered. The South trusts him. He’s been



through the fires of civil strife. His national image needs beefing up.”<sup>114</sup> On May 12, the newspaper offered on its editorial and op-ed pages the musings of six pundits and politicians, “to guide readers who must inevitably weight the shrieking news of racial strife against many unresolved imponderables inescapably affixed to it.” Its own, brief commentary offered but a hint of *The Chronicle’s* stance. Observing that Houston, nearly six-hundred-eighty miles from Birmingham, “may think it enjoys the luxury of a spared conscience,” affording it a “cushion of time and space ... so that we may hold hard by the legal, moral and humane ‘thing to do’—rather than front or confront with fire hoses. Not too much time. Not too far distance. And all that bursts from fire hoses is a torrent of water—not wisdom, justice, compassion or righteousness.”<sup>115</sup> And very little in the way of helpful opinion from a major gatekeeper and agenda-setter for a large Southern city.

*The Richmond News Leader*, in maintaining an apparent policy throughout the civil-rights movement of keeping reportage of strife in other states at a minimum in terms of staff assignments and news space, offered spotty wire service coverage of the Birmingham demonstrations on inside pages. It finally placed the story on the front page on May 8—nearly a week after the children’s march. On May 15, the newspaper reported in a wire dispatch on page six that President Kennedy agreed with Alabama publishers and editors during a White House luncheon that racial disturbances are best handled by local authorities when possible, and he also “agreed with Clarence B. Hanson Jr., publisher of the Birmingham News, that the start of Negro demonstrations in Birmingham several weeks ago was poor timing.”<sup>116</sup> A companion story on the same page offered a political analysis suggesting that the president’s “use of federal troops in Mississippi and Alabama has had no material effect on his party’s chances in Virginia next year, State Democratic Chairman Thomas B. Blanton said today ‘because his chances weren’t very good anyway.’”<sup>117</sup>

The newspaper’s sole editorial on the Birmingham racial subject, published two days after the motel bombing, cast King and Shuttlesworth as the villains responsible for the violence in that city, asserting that if they “did not know what they were doing when they began agitation in that sorrowful city, they know now. Human beings may be manipulated by organizers; but passions are greater than even Dr. King.” The editorial argued, in a states’-rights frame, that while African-American leaders had lauded the federal troops being dispatched to Alabama, this troop decision was a “distortion of the Constitution because it seems to aid their immediate desires. It is time that they realize that States rights are for Negroes too. In the long run, the strong arm of a centralized police state does not discriminate when it reaches out to strike first class citizens. To this, the citizens of Little Rock, Oxford, and Birmingham are already able to testify.”<sup>118</sup>



Similarly, the Jackson newspaper relied primarily on wire service coverage, but it published stories of the Birmingham demonstrations and riots on the front page throughout, beginning as early as an April 8 Associated Press report of the use of snarling police dogs to stymie a demonstration riot near Birmingham's city hall. The newspaper on May 10 published a staff-written but un-bylined localization with a page-nine report that Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett had issued a statement "describing as 'sickening' the inhumanity of Negro parents in the City of Birmingham throwing their children into 'crime, arrest and detention.' He further castigated the Negro ministry of the Alabama metropolis, who are inciting minors to 'run afoul' of the law to satisfy their greed for power. 'Regardless of the type and quality of sermon he can preach with his lips, he preaches lawlessness, by his example,' Barnett said of Martin Luther King."<sup>119</sup> On its May 14 front page, *The Clarion-Ledger* published a staff-written, un-bylined report that Jackson's mayor promised a group of city business leaders that "he will not tolerate acts of racial violence such as those which have plagued other Southern cities recently. 'This applies to both white and colored citizens,' he said in an address punctuated by applause. He said he has heard rumors of plans to use economic pressure 'to make us do what agitators say to do. But I promise you, nobody is going to come here and tell our businessmen what they must or must not do.'"<sup>120</sup>

In the only editorial found on the Birmingham protests, the newspaper on May 12—before the motel bombing in Birmingham—presciently predicted an "eruption of hate" in the South. "Somewhere in the South today there is a quiet community, its residents of white and Negro citizens are enjoying a greater degree of prosperity than they have known heretofore. These people are going about their daily activities as normal human beings." The people of this hypothetical town, the editorial continued, "aren't aware of it yet, but this town is about to erupt into hate and near-violence—if not violence." As surely, the newspaper predicted, "as water boils, passions inflame." People who have lived together for decades "are suddenly pictured to the world as goons, idiots, bums, murderers, lawless, violent savages. A quiet Southern community's image is destroyed," wrote the editorialist, combining frames of Southern folkways and foreign image. "The glint of hate displaces the twinkle of a smile." Somewhere in the South today, it concluded, "there is a quiet community and a hate merchant is packing his bags. Whither from Birmingham?"<sup>121</sup> The newspaper responded to the motel bombing, when it arrived in Birmingham, with editorial silence.

Of the three Western newspapers analyzed, *The Denver Post* took the most active agenda-setting role—in a big way. Following extensive wire service coverage that was placed on the front page as early as April 8 and on a daily basis beginning May 3, the newspaper sent two staff writers to Birmingham after the motel

bombing. They were John Rogers, a native Southerner who had covered the Ole Miss riots on-scene the previous year, and George Brown, the first African-American to serve in the Colorado Senate. By sending a mixed-race team of reporters to cover integration demonstrations in the South, the newspaper editors were not only setting a racial-equality agenda by example; they were sending a message to their journalistic brethren that it was important not only to report extensively on the nation's race story, but to do so inclusively.

The team's first report, published on page one of the May 15 edition, told the story of a Denver minister telling an audience of about six-hundred Birmingham African-Americans at the 16th Street Baptist Church that they don't "walk alone." Dr. L. Sylvester Odom, returning to his birth city, "told the audience, 'The God of Denver is the God of Birmingham. The God of Birmingham is the God of Greenwood, Miss. The God of Greenwood is the God of Africa. Our God has got the whole world in his hands. You here in Birmingham don't walk alone.'"<sup>122</sup> An inside page story by the duo reported of a warning by a Birmingham church leader that demonstrations would resume if the African-American citizens of the city were not assured that the negotiated truce would be honored. They reported on the front page of the next day's edition that Birmingham leaders were nervously awaiting the state's supreme court hearing on which of two regimes—"a moderate or militant segregationist"—would rule the city. "While waiting, Birmingham had its most placid day since bloody, fire-punctuated riots Saturday night staggered this area and brought federal troops to stand-by basis near the city."<sup>123</sup> On that same day, Brown filed a separate story reporting—in a frame far different than the more widely-published account of Birmingham's court proceedings by the AP's Relman Morin—on "justice' being handed out in the City Recorders' Court. And I saw a lot before I was tossed out because I'm a Negro. Conclusion: The judicial system here isn't ready for integration nor is it making ready. I heard Presiding Judge Charles A. Brown refer to Negroes as 'blacks' and 'niggers.' When Negro attorney Orzell Billingsley objected to a policeman's 'nigger' reference to his client, Judge Brown overruled the objection. I watched a 20-year-old white youth receive a sentence of 360 days and a fine of \$200 because he 'talked and laughed with a group of niggers.'"<sup>124</sup> The reporting team stayed in town, which had calmed considerably since the bombings and the renewed truce taking effect, filing a May 17 page-six report of King warning that demonstrations might be resumed, with doubled effort, if the negotiated agreement to put a worker of color in a downtown store as a sales rep was not honored. And on the next day they reported, on page one, that threats of renewed bombings had been reported by the police chief, who had posted armed guards at some buildings seen as possible targets. The threats did not materialize.

*The Post* offered four editorials during the Birmingham strife, the initial commentary suggesting that the murder of the highway hiker, William L. Moore, likely would not be investigated “as vigorously as it was denounced”—an indictment of the political and social culture of the South. The editorial strongly condemned Alabama’s “arch-segregationist” Governor Wallace in a frame that personified the governor as the purveyor of injustice: “Moore’s blood is on the governor’s hands—and on the hands of all those who encourage the people of the South to defy the laws that guarantee basic American rights to the Negroes.”<sup>125</sup> During the height of the Birmingham demonstrations, the newspaper on May 8 asked President Kennedy to make good on his 1960 presidential campaign promise of using the moral influence of the presidency “as a weapon in the struggle for civil rights” by speaking out “in strong language to condemn the behavior of the Birmingham authorities, to support the Negro demonstrations to the extent that they are peaceful and to express the moral indignation of the nation.” The president had been “conspicuously restrained in his comments on civil rights” during his first two-and-a-half years in office, the newspaper suggested. “Instead of only seeking a truce, the President can use his position and influence to support Birmingham Negroes in a just cause.”<sup>126</sup> When Kennedy dispatched troops to make it “unequivocally clear to local and state authorities in Alabama” that the federal government would step in if they would not maintain peace and order in Birmingham, the newspaper commended him for mounting “a campaign of persuasion and gentle coercion, in an effort to promote a settlement between the whites and Negroes in Birmingham.” Lauding the negotiated agreement, the newspaper adopted a states’-rights, constitutional frame to comment that entry of U.S. troops into Birmingham would be “a lamentable example of the deterioration of local control,” but the settlement nonetheless “would be a major victory not only for all the Negroes in the South, but also for all Americans who believe that equal opportunity for all citizens is a cornerstone of our democracy.”<sup>127</sup>

*The Seattle Times* published most of the stories preceding the children’s march, all wire service coverage, on inside pages, primarily on page A, actually the second page of the newspaper but serving as a pseudo second front page. The newspaper published a wire service report of the arrest of eighteen white segregationists demonstrating in front of the state capitol building in Montgomery, prior to Robert Kennedy’s arrival in that city for talks with Wallace, on its April 25 front page, then resumed the inside-page story placement of the Birmingham story until May 3, when the wire story of fire hoses and dogs being used to dispel protestors during the children’s march was placed on the cover. The story stayed on page one on May 4, moving back inside on May 5. On May 7, the newspaper published on page A a local piece, un-bylined, on a speech by African-American author James Baldwin

who cautioned that racial discrimination “in the North is ‘more dangerous than it is in the South—because it is hidden. That applies to housing, schools—every single area,’ he said.” Echoing the warning that an African-American mother had given to the juvenile court judge in Birmingham, Baldwin said he could not guarantee that he was “nonviolent, and I couldn’t guarantee that for younger people. A person 20 or 18 years old is more impatient than one 20 years older.”<sup>128</sup>

The Birmingham story was back on the front page May 8, a wire report on the president’s pleasure over the easing of tensions in that Southern city. The motel bombing assured continued front-page placement, along with an inside picture page showing the Birmingham carnage, on May 13. The reportage moved back inside as tensions eased once again, and the negotiated agreement took hold.

The newspaper, on April 26, referenced the Alabama civil-rights demonstrations—expressing shock over the murder of William Moore—in expressing pride editorially, almost in defiance of the author Baldwin’s observation about hidden racism in the North, over the annual report of the Seattle Urban League. The report found that “‘job discrimination is not as severe, the average earning power (for Negroes) is higher, the segregation in housing is less intense, the educational opportunities are more varied,’ than in most other cities.” But, the editorial observed in a vanishing Southern folkways frame, progress in the South would likely be more rapid because of the dynamic changes under way there, as “last-ditch holdouts of any stripe are losing their majority position in the South. This may not be true of Alabama, but that state can hardly remain apart from the trend elsewhere in its region.”<sup>129</sup> Following the brutal white-authority resistance and massive arrests of the children’s march and the following days, the newspaper urged in a May 10 editorial that “local common sense” may help Birmingham avoid the sort of federal military intervention that forced racial integration in the Little Rock public schools. “We have confidence that—despite a demagogic governor, pledged to a last-ditch racist stand—the people of Alabama will begin to break up the segregated pattern of their society.” Repeating the frame of the vanishing folkway mores elsewhere in the South, the newspaper observed that other racial barriers had fallen in other Southern states “without the use of troops and armed marshals.” The newspaper disagreed with “those highly vocal Northerners who seem so eager to rush troops to Birmingham.” That city’s civic leaders, the newspaper asserted in an optimistic, but unrealistic, frame that contradicted logic and facts, “should be given a chance to show that reason can prevail in their city without a show of federal bayonets.”<sup>130</sup> The newspaper continued its optimistic frame of the slow but eventual changing of Southern traditional folkways after the motel bombing, arguing that the “truly significant controversy in Birmingham is progress and moderation vs. fanaticism and violence.” The moderates, the

newspaper argued, “not the bomb-throwers and rioters, represent majority sentiment in the South.” In its conclusion to this editorial, the newspaper urged Birmingham’s “local authorities not to allow a relatively small number of terrorists to undo everything that has been accomplished in the name of enlightenment and common sense”<sup>131</sup>—“terrorists,” in this instance, referring to the segregationists rather than the integrationist “terrorists” disclaimed in the Southern press.

In Los Angeles, the *Times* followed a similar pattern, relegating the wire service reports of the evolving Birmingham demonstrations to inside pages, with a few exceptions. These included a lengthy analysis in the newspaper’s thick April 21 Sunday commentary section that attempted to copy the expansive Week-in-Review Sunday edition of *The New York Times*, datelined Birmingham, mixing feature-style description of the mood and tenor of the marches with cultural and social discourse on the underlying themes of the Birmingham tumult: freedom, and repression, led by Connor—who, along with Governor Wallace, came to be the personification of the racist, demagogic, anti-integration frame in the Northern and Western press. On April 25, the newspaper published, on page twenty-four, an un-bylined localization reporting that city Mayor Samuel W. Yorty had condemned the arrest of African-American integrationists in Birmingham “as ‘an effort to subvert the Constitution’” and had called “for prayers for their release and for racial tolerance.” In a law-and-order frame, the newspaper reported that Yorty, calling respect for the law “one of the pillars of our society,” had labeled the actions of law-enforcement officials in Alabama a “misuse of law enforcement agencies and their power.”<sup>132</sup> The wire service coverage moved to the front page to tell the story of the children’s march and resulting brutal response of law-enforcement and government agents. Ensuing coverage stayed on the front page, and on May 12—the same day that the motel bombings would take place—the newspaper devoted most of the cover of its Sunday commentary section to three think pieces on the Birmingham situation in the context of the negotiated truce that the bombings that evening would blow apart. Following that development, the newspaper published, on page twenty-three of its May 17 edition, an un-bylined account of the thoughts of six African-American ministers who had returned from a visit to Birmingham “convinced the Southern city soon will be integrated. ‘I can’t say how soon it will be integrated but I’m sure it will come in the next month or two,’ said Dr. C. A. Henson, president of the Baptist Ministry of Los Angeles and Southern California. ‘There’s nothing else for them (the whites) but to give rights to all citizens of America.’”<sup>133</sup>

The *Times* published two editorials on the Birmingham strife. The first, on May 8, after the children’s march, invoked a Civil War frame, lending an historical context by citing Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. “Yet now,” the

newspaper argued in a constitutional frame, “a century later, the civil authorities of an American city have turned dogs against their fellow citizens, have jailed children, and have launched a massive drive to prevent free men from achieving the very rights of free men.” Perhaps, the editorial concluded, “in this hour of grave trial, another Lincoln is indicated”—a suggestion that evoked not only a desire for wise integrationist leadership but also the possibility of armed troops entering a Southern state in military intervention *a la* the Civil War in response to the “grim developments in Birmingham” that, lacking negotiated progress in Birmingham, “will certainly signal a far worse situation, even a catastrophe, in this delicate area of inter-racial relations.”<sup>134</sup> Similar to the optimistic editorial conclusion of the *Times*’ Northern colleague in Seattle, the newspaper editorial following the bombings, while invoking a states’-rights argument in support of the president’s legal authority to order troops to Alabama, noted that the negotiated truce in Birmingham “still stands. Yet what really holds the promise for Birmingham is the pressure of the business and professional men who are rarely seen or heard in public affairs, but whose opinions when asserted carry weight with the political community.” Citing the power of the African-American leadership’s agenda-setting in the movement, the newspaper noted that “The Negroes have stirred the national conscience deeply and created the great moral issue of our time. But their moral ascendancy would not thrive in a police state. We all should pray for the success of the Birmingham moderates.”<sup>135</sup>

The Western newspapers, other than *The Denver Post*, were relatively subdued in their coverage of this racial crisis. These newspapers—with *The Denver Post* by far leading the agenda-setting path in a civil-rights-activist reporting methodology on behalf of inclusion and integration—for the most part supported their Northern colleagues, other than the *Chicago Tribune*, a Northern press maverick, in damning the reactionary response of Alabama government officials and police authorities to the non-violent protests of the civil-rights activists. They invoked frames of disappearing Southern folkways and expressing optimism, from a distanced and thus less provincial and perhaps more objective viewpoint, in a politically-moderate-led denouement of negotiated peace—one arising out of the authority of constitutional, democratic ideology but also one that sometimes overlooked precedent, history, logic and fact.

The Northern and Southern newspapers’ reportage of the Birmingham racial demonstrations offered stark differences in framing—not so much in the themes of the frames, but in their bias or slant. For example, newspapers of both regions personified the conflict, with the Northern press depicting Governor George Wallace and Public Safety Commissioner Connor as the agents of lawless disregard of constitutional guarantees of equal rights and the First-Amendment right of free



speech and assembly. The Southern newspapers, though, hailed Wallace and Connor as heroic upholders of Southern customs, traditions and folkways—or the continuance of separate, integrated lifestyles. In the North, Martin Luther King, Jr., was depicted as the heroic leader of a non-violent movement on behalf of equal rights and freedom, while the Southern press portrayed him as an outside agitator willing to deceive, scam, profit and incite violent protest and riots in an illegal protest movement that ignored local law-and-order statutes and norms. Thus, the law-and-order and constitutional frames arose in both North and South coverage; the difference was which principles and laws—those found in the Constitution or those found in the local statutes, those codified in the Fourteenth Amendment or those put forth in the Tenth—were being violated, and by whom. Again, as found in previous chapters, Southern folkways and traditional customs were a dominant frame, and, again, the Northern press interpretation of this frame was of traditions and mores that need to be changed or replaced, and of a foreign, sometimes exotic culture that at times invited feature reportage resembling travelogue. The Southern press, though, invoked them as a way of life and a mode of society that deserved preservation, or, at the least, merited praise and admiration for playing a large role in maintaining peaceful coexistence among the races. As part of these frames, the Southern press painted a portrait of the South as victim of Northern and outsider intrusion, of angry and violent African-Americans willfully breaking local laws in pursuit of rights that, given time and patience—a slow approach that African-Americans made clear they opposed—could be brought about in more peaceful ways. As in analyses of previous chapters, the Civil War theme was a dominant one, by both sides, the Southern commentators using it as threat or justification for violence or on behalf of forceful compliance with state and local laws, the Northern press invoking it to justify use of force, once again as a hundred years ago, as necessary to uphold constitutional guarantees of rights and freedoms—to vote, to learn, and to dine in integrated, equal facilities. And, as in previous analyses, the states'-rights/constitutional frame played a dominant role, with the Northern press, citing constitutional weight, backing the authority of the president and the federal government, and the Southern press, also citing constitutional precedent, supporting local and state eminence. Likewise, the foreign-image theme was raised by the North and South newspapers, in predictable ways.

Agenda-setting was stronger in some newspapers than in others. *The New York Times*, for example, devoted massive amounts of news hole and significant staff resources to offer reporting, analysis and interpretation that most of the other newspapers left to wire service or pooled reportage; and this newspaper produced numerous editorials and opinion-section commentary on nearly every major event or aspect of the Birmingham story. *The Birmingham News* did the same—to be



expected, as the story happened in its community. But this newspaper inexplicably pushed this story—which every other newspaper analyzed here, North, South and West, played prominently on the front page—inside. Similarly, the Richmond newspaper for the most part ignored this story—evidence of agenda-setting by omission of information important to its readership and community. As noted, *The Denver Post*, of the other Northern/Western newspapers, demonstrated the strongest non-South agenda-setting other than *The New York Times*, not only in the news space and strongly-themed editorial commentary on the story, but in sending a mixed-raced reporting team—albeit late in the story, after the bombing—to tell the story to its readers.

The commentary by the Southern press was surprisingly scant in the Richmond and Houston newspapers, but quite lively in the Jackson, Charleston and Birmingham newspapers.

The strongest agenda-setting of all, though, was done by the leaders of the civil rights movement who—wrongly, according to even many of the movement’s allies—put its children at the front of the battle lines in staging a protest movement that captured the attention of media, and thus citizens, around the world, forcing the press to formulate a variable, strongly framed, constructed reality of a crisis that entered the realm of the strongest press content influence of all: ideology—pertaining both to the Democracy and to the established norms and culture of the segregated South. The agendas of other players in the civil-rights movement—a segregationist demagogue and an assassin—will be topics of the next chapter.

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# Wallace Makes a Stand; Assassination in Mississippi

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## 'Spotlight on Tuscaloosa'

If the oft-heard definition of insanity is the repetition of the same activity but expecting different outcomes is accurate, then Alabama Governor George C. Wallace displayed definite symptoms of this malady in 1963. The newly-elected racist demagogue had run on an ultra-segregationist platform; in his inauguration speech, he declared, "I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny. And I say: Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!"<sup>1</sup> Late that spring, he followed through on his campaign promise to oppose entry of students of color to the University of Alabama. But a federal judge in Birmingham had other ideas. U.S. District Judge Seybourn H. Lynne, an Alabamian, on June 5 enjoined Wallace from physically interfering with the enrollment of two twenty-year-old African-American students, Vivian Malone and James A. Hood, at the university's main campus, setting the stage for Wallace to make a public show of his defiance. Lynne based his order on legal precedent: a 1955 order by District Judge H. Hobart Grooms in Birmingham that the University of Alabama admit Autherine Lucy, who became the first student of color to attend a formerly white public education institution in Alabama. She attended classes for three days, then withdrew "and was later expelled after her lawyers had



accused university officials of conspiring with the rioters who opposed her presence,” according to reporting by Claude Sitton of *The New York Times*.<sup>2</sup>

Judge Grooms adhered to his 1955 ruling on Tuesday, May 21, 1963, ordering the University of Alabama to enroll one African-American student admitted for the summer term at the main Tuscaloosa campus and another at the university’s Huntsville branch, *The Birmingham News* reported on its May 22 front page. The university’s board of trustees announced it would comply with the judge’s order, followed by an announcement from Wallace that he would be at the university’s main campus to “bar the entrance of any Negro who attempts to enroll”—despite the counsel of Alabama Attorney General Richmond Flowers that the governor’s defiance “may lead to violence and the invasion of the university campus by federal troops as occurred last year at Oxford.”<sup>3</sup> Lynne, asked by the U.S. Justice Department to intervene, cited the doctrine of interposition along with federal authority over the state in his June 5 order, which enjoined the governor from interfering with the enrollment of three African-Americans “by physically interposing his person or that of any other person under his direction or control, the entry of the Negro students,” as reported on the front page of that day’s *Birmingham News*: “Thoughtful people, if they can free themselves from tensions produced by established principles with which they violently disagree, must concede that the governor of a sovereign state has no authority to obstruct or prevent the execution of the lawful orders of a court of the United States.”<sup>4</sup> But the order did not prevent Wallace from being on campus, and it was followed the next day by notice from a Kennedy administration spokesperson, as reported in an un-bylined *Birmingham News* story, that the federal government would use “overwhelming force” to integrate the university if necessary.<sup>5</sup> As a front-page June 7 story related that a Wallace-federal government showdown was near, a staff writer reported that one of the prospective African-American students “has been described by Gov. George Wallace as ‘a pawn in the hands of the NAACP and those who would create chaos.’” The governor said he hoped and prayed that “nothing will happen to her personal safety,” adding that he had nothing personal against the female student.<sup>6</sup>

The top of the Birmingham newspaper’s June 8 front page featured speculation from a staff reporter that the federal government “will probably not arrest Gov. George C. Wallace ‘on the spot’ Tuesday if he refuses to let two Negroes into the University of Alabama. But it seems plain enough that the President will not hesitate to use federalized troops at Tuscaloosa if this happens”—according to “many high government officials here who are now ‘waiting to see’ what Wallace will do when confronted at the university door with court-ordered integration.”<sup>7</sup> Below that story, a staff writer reported that state troopers had lined the campus. Under orders from Wallace, “more than 750 troopers moved into the area Friday

night and closed off the campus area to all unauthorized persons.”<sup>8</sup> Beneath that story, Eugene Connor, Birmingham’s commissioner of public safety, was quoted urging the Tuscaloosa White Citizens Council to keep away from the campus the following week. Speaking at the council’s meeting at a Tuscaloosa high school, Connor said law enforcement officials were up to the job. “If we don’t have any trouble at the University, we can beat them at their own game,” the forceful segregationist declared. “Nothing would please those Yankees more than for us to have trouble.”<sup>9</sup>

The newspaper’s main front-page story the next day was a wire dispatch, datelined Tuscaloosa, reporting that Wallace sent a telegram to the president informing him that he would call up five-hundred National Guardsmen “for standby duty in this university city to keep law and order in next week’s integration show-down.”<sup>10</sup> Beneath a photo of troopers and police blocking access to the campus, a staff writer reported that, according to a U.S. marshal, Wallace “will not be arrested except under court order if he blocks the admission of two Negroes to the University of Alabama on Tuesday.”<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, an Associated Press dispatch out of Washington reported that the “hottest job” for Secretary of the Army Cyrus Vance and his staff “today is preparing to cope with domestic violence, not foreign war.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most telling piece of writing on this day’s front page, though, was a summary of the day’s events by a staff writer framing the looming confrontation as a fight for the state’s rights. The lead paragraph quoted the Alabama motto, coined when it became a state in 1819: “We Dare Defend Our Rights.” One word preceded the state motto in the lead sentence—essentially, a one-word editorial: “Significantly.” To drive home the point, the five-word motto also stood as the story’s headline—almost a call for action. “On the strength of these five words,” wrote Don Brown, “America’s 22nd state faces the weight of destiny this week—enrollment of three Negroes at the University of Alabama summer session.” (There was some confusion regarding the number of African-American students involved. Besides the two students seeking enrollment at the university’s main campus, a third was seeking entry at its Huntsville branch.) And, as Connor had warned the white citizens council in Tuscaloosa, Wallace was quoted that the only way “we can win is to have law and order. If we have a breakdown of law and order, our cause is hopelessly lost.”<sup>13</sup> On page fourteen of this edition, the newspaper published an Associated Press analysis, datelined Tuscaloosa, that was a Southern folkways appeal to the sentiments of the Old South. Headlined “Tuscaloosa, university prepare for an era’s end,” the story began, “Tuscaloosa means ‘Black Warrior.’ It was the name of a Choctaw Indian chief who fought to the last ditch to preserve his way of life 400 years ago, but finally was overwhelmed by superior force. Now the pattern is repeating itself in Tuscaloosa.” The writer, after summing

the recent events related to the integration confrontation, devoted several paragraphs to describing a Civil War battle in which Northern troops rode onto campus with orders to burn the university. But the Northern colonel in charge of the operation spared the presidential mansion after the wife of the university president pleaded that it be preserved as a private residence. Now, the writer concluded, a “new page is about to be entered in the history of Tuscaloosa”<sup>14</sup>—a page of an epic battle saga likely to end in yet another defeat for the beliefs and customs of the Old South. On page forty-two, the newspaper published a photo spread, including a large, half-page aerial view of the campus, with significant buildings labeled and a dotted line marking the sealed-off areas.

The looming showdown dominated the newspaper’s Monday, June 10 front page. The editors bannered a story across the top, written by its Washington correspondent, reporting that federal government lawyers were urging Wallace to “stand aside,” while a staff dispatch out of Tuscaloosa reported that Wallace, “unshaken in his determination to defy federal marshals,” had come to the “heavily-guarded University of Alabama campus today for the most critical hour of his fighting career.”<sup>15</sup> A companion story, also by a staff writer, reported that the state’s National Guard contingent was on standby near campus. In Montgomery, the newspaper’s capital bureau reported that Wallace had made “a calm but earnest final appeal to all Alabamians Sunday to remain at home when he takes his stand ‘for liberty and freedom’ Tuesday.”<sup>16</sup> Another staff-bylined story out of Tuscaloosa reported that the university president believed Wallace “should be on the campus as a symbol of law and order Tuesday.”<sup>17</sup>

And when the confrontation occurred, the newspaper reported on its June 11 front page, in an all-capitalized, bold-face, two-deck streamer headline, that the Alabama Guard had been federalized “As Wallace Stands At Door.” A bulletin preceding the main story’s report that federal troops were heading to the university to enforce the court’s integration order told readers that the governor had stood down, and that he would not be arrested. The bulletin reported that Wallace “did not actually bar the two Negroes, because the Negroes never left their automobile.” A Justice Department spokesperson told the newspaper’s staff writers that “Negroes Vivian Malone and James Hood would be registered ‘within two hours.’” A story beneath a photo of Wallace standing at the door offered a step-by-step summary of the day’s events, while a wire dispatch datelined Tuscaloosa reported that Wallace, in a statement, slammed the federal government’s action as being “in violation of rights reserved to the state by the Constitution of the United States and to the Constitution of the State of Alabama.”<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the integration of the university was carried out, without incident and in stark contrast to the violence and bloodshed at Oxford, Mississippi the previous year. Wallace’s plea for

maintaining peace and order, trumpeted dominantly and repeatedly by the newspaper, had succeeded even though he had backed off.

Editorially, the newspaper departed from some of its Southern colleagues, in opposition to Wallace's stance. In its initial editorial on this integration ordeal, published June 6, *The Birmingham News* called Wallace's course a "tragic" endeavor "against the United States and its judiciary. It is against a judiciary which finds honor in such Alabamians as Judge Seybourn H. Lynne." The conflict, the newspaper argued in dismissing the states'-rights frame, "cannot correctly be couched in terms of Alabama vs. Washington. It is in terms of one Alabamian's construction of his honor and duty as against another Alabamian's construction of the same worthy considerations." Faced with serving two honors—the legal, constitutional one versus adhering to a campaign pledge on behalf of states' rights—Wallace, the editorial concluded, "should serve to show the way of intelligence, or courage or honor for his state's history, not for its moment in emotion and trouble."<sup>19</sup> The newspaper returned to the theme of honor in a June 9 editorial, lauding university leadership and personnel for choosing their way "judiciously, in keeping with tradition, honoring it fully" in following the law no matter what their personal preferences may be.<sup>20</sup> The newspaper asked on June 11, the day of Wallace's surrender, if the South is "indefinitely, forever, to have large numbers of Southerners believing that federal rulings are 'unconstitutional?'" The newspaper suggested that "the pattern of rulings indicates thoughtfulness and highest sincerity as to law's application." The South, it argued, "has especial need to heed warning. It should look ahead, where still sharper constitutional issues lie. Clamor rises for new legislation, nobly aimed at assuring rights, yet gravely threatening other rights in the Constitution. The '10th vs. 14th' issue will wane. In 14th alone is inherent conflict." The Tenth Amendment, of course, upholds states' rights, whereas the Fourteenth, enacted after the Civil War, guaranteed equal rights to all U.S. citizens. The newspaper, in its conclusion, urged support of the judiciary, which guards against "dangerous innovations' in government."<sup>21</sup> Finally, the day after the standoff, the newspaper noted that Wallace was sincere in his sentiments on behalf of the Tenth Amendment but that the conflict, "again, returns to the rights of individuals, as validated—approve or disapprove—by frequent court citation of the Fourteenth Amendment. In such a case, both cannot remain superior." In adhering to arguments it had laid out in its editorials on the Oxford strife, the newspaper sided with the Fourteenth: "The supremacy of the federal judiciary long has been established. Gov. Wallace's is an opinion. Judge Lynne's is a finding in law through judicial procedure." The confrontation, the newspaper asserted, "has brought nothing not clearly established beforehand."<sup>22</sup> The newspaper thus had surrendered, editorially, to federal constitutional authority—a rather remarkable

departure by a newspaper that had, for the most part during the civil rights crusade era, staunchly argued the segregationist case.

*The News and Courier* in Charleston relied on wire service coverage of the story, played prominently on the front page on a daily basis—with no new, or differing, elements than what has been presented here. But unlike in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Oxford, Mississippi, The Associated Press reported in a June 9 story, “where guardsmen or state police stood in the paths of Negro students, the troops and officers here are under strict orders only to prevent violence and keep mobs from forming.”<sup>23</sup>

By June 11, *The News and Courier* had assigned a staff reporter to Tuscaloosa, where he wrote for the June 11 front page that the university city’s sixty-eight-thousand residents “awaited in quiet but tense anticipation last night for today’s ‘confrontation’ of Gov. George Wallace with federal authority.” Howard H. Lindsay observed that the “tenor of the man on the street seems to be that Alabama citizens will back their governor’s promise to ‘keep the peace.’” The “heavy billy sticks and light blue helmets of the guardsmen,” he wrote, offered “but slight contrast to deeper blue shirts rolled up to reveal their muscles” as they patrolled the city’s main street.<sup>24</sup> A wire story, meanwhile, reported that the governor had arrived on campus, “evidently prepared personally to block the court-ordered enrollment of the Negroes,” while the president had sent a telegram to the governor warning “against ‘defiant conduct’ at the University of Alabama” to avoid the “intervention of any troops, either state or federal.”<sup>25</sup> The Associated Press story on the newspaper’s June 12 front page reported that the two students of color had been enrolled “without a shot fired or a brickbat thrown Tuesday.” The president had federalized the Alabama National Guard to protect the students, while the “fiery segregationist governor, who had made his promised threshold stand by barring the students ... made no effort to resist the might invoked by the federal government after the student turndown.”<sup>26</sup> Of note, though, was the states’-rights frame of the newspaper’s on-scene reporter, who depicted Wallace as a hero in a banner story across the top of the front page. “Gov. George L. [sic] Wallace’s five-hour stand ‘at the school house door’ here yesterday went over big with his Alabama constituents. There may be some doubt about what it accomplished by way of winning national support for his conviction of state sovereignty inviolate. But there is no doubt here that Gov. Wallace is now—more than ever—a hero in the eyes of a majority of the people of the Cotton State.” Newsmen, he wrote, “as well as students, who sweltered through the midday and early afternoon 97-degree heat awaiting a verdict in the University of Alabama’s segregation test, cheered the stocky 43-year-old governor and patted him on the back as he left Foster Auditorium to return to Montgomery.”<sup>27</sup>

The newspaper took a measured, cautionary tone—in stark contrast to its editorials on the integration crisis at Ole Miss—in a June 9 editorial hoping that Wallace “will not insist on more than a token showdown of armed force with U.S. military power.” The editorial quoted at length from a *Los Angeles Times* editorial on the subject, which urged “Reason—Not Intimidation.” The commentary’s conclusion urged tolerance and understanding rather than confrontation.<sup>28</sup> In an editorial two days later, responding to the president’s call for a “peaceful revolution” for civil rights, the newspaper commented that as a “supporter of civil rights for all citizens, irrespective of race, creed or color, The News and Courier notes with apprehension the growing use of the word ‘revolution’ to describe the racial conflict now spreading out of the South throughout the country.” In the light of street muggings, “rape in the parks, hoodlums running wild, mass demonstrations that paralyze downtown business”—code for African-American demonstrators—the race conflict, asserted the newspaper, “seems to have been taken out of the realm of laws and transferred to the streets. This is only one of the chaotic aspects of revolution. To speak of ‘peaceful revolution’ in such explosive matters is a contradiction in terms.” The editorial lauded Wallace for “taking every precaution to prevent violence” in his pursuit of proper constitutional procedure on behalf of the “doctrine of State Rights,” which “has been pounded beyond recognition by court decrees and executive orders.”<sup>29</sup>

The Richmond newspaper provided coverage of this story exclusively via wire service reportage on its front page—and, surprisingly, no editorials were found on the subject, due either to disinterest, which is unlikely considering the segregationist mindset of its editor, or because its editors considered the Alabama case to be redundant, a repetition of settled law after Oxford. Similarly, *The Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson relied on wire service coverage of the conflict—with nary an editorial found. This, again, is surprising, considering the newspaper’s fiery editorial commentary on the Oxford crisis. In Houston, *The Chronicle’s* coverage of this story was quite sparse; three wire service stories of the culmination of the confrontation on the June 10, June 11 and June 12 front pages, with no editorials found—indication of an extremely low agenda-setting role considering this matter. Again, the editorial behavior of these three Southern newspapers—omission of opinion, low commitment to newspaper resources, including news hole—may be explained as consideration by the editors that this question had been settled in Oxford the previous year, or as lack of interest, certainly in the case of *The Chronicle*.

Claude Sitton covered the story for *The New York Times*, which played the June 10 report of Wallace’s flight to Tuscaloosa for his stand at the door of the university on the front page. On Tuesday, June 11, the newspaper published a front-page story from a Washington correspondent reporting on the president’s



telegram to Wallace asking the governor to stay away from the campus. A companion story by Sitton, datelined Tuscaloosa, reported the governor's arrival on campus but that Wallace gave no indication of whether he would go through with his planned act of defiance. On an inside page, the newspaper published an un-bylined profile of the University of Alabama's president. "Frank Anthony Rose has been preparing for the University of Alabama's desegregation crisis ever since he became its president in September, 1957," the correspondent wrote. "This has made him a middleman between the Federal Government and Gov. George C. Wallace. One observer says the Governor 'would sack Dr. Rose in a minute if he could control the (university) board of trustees.' Not only have the two men differed on desegregation, but Dr. Rose last year backed Ryan deGraffenreid, Mr. Wallace's chief rival for Governor."<sup>30</sup>

The newspaper published four front-page stories the day after the African-American students were admitted—all but one staff written. A Washington-based reporter wrote about the president's televised speech; Sitton wrote the campus-based story; another staff writer reported on the reaction of students on campus, noting that Vivian Malone "became involved in a gabfest with other girls in the dormitory. 'She's very attractive,' one coed said afterward. 'I don't think we'll have any trouble with her. She was calm. She wasn't nervous or close-mouthed. She acted very mature.'"<sup>31</sup> The fourth front-page story was an Associated Press report that the U.S. troops had been withdrawn from campus—signaling the end of the showdown. As this newspaper had done with previous civil-rights stories, it devoted many inches of news hole, with a high commitment of resources, to make this story its own—along with numerous editorials, including three consecutive days of commentary when the story reached its climax—demonstrating a high level of agenda-setting on this topic.

The first of these editorials observed that Wallace had "no more doubt than the President or the Attorney General that the University of Alabama will be desegregated." The only question, then, was "whether he will carry his defiance to a point that compels his arrest or that generates violence on or off the Tuscaloosa campus." Concluding with a foreign-image frame that if Wallace would not help the president bring about the "peaceful revolution" sought by the president, the newspaper asserted that "his minimum obligation to his state is to avoid further degrading it in the eyes of the world."<sup>32</sup> The newspaper invoked the constitutional states'-rights frame in the next day's editorial, arguing that the rule of law "is the law of our land. Our Constitution is the main bulwark of our laws and of our strength as a republic of states." It came down on the side of the Fourteenth Amendment in concluding that "we must adhere to, indeed dignify, the 'equal protection of the laws' for all races under the Constitution—the law of the land."<sup>33</sup>



*The Pittsburgh Press* relied exclusively on wire reports, moving the story back and forth from the front page to inside pages in its early development and then keeping it out front for the June 11 and 12 reporting on the showdown and its quiet end. In the one editorial found on the subject, the newspaper urged enactment of new federal laws to better handle racial tensions. The Tuscaloosa incident, it noted, “was at least an improvement over the violence at Little Rock and Oxford. That is progress of a sort, but, as the President suggests, progress at far too slow a pace. Hence the need for a legislative program which the President will present next week”<sup>34</sup>—the president’s proposed civil rights bill.

*The Detroit Free Press* followed much of the same pattern, publishing its wire service coverage of the Tuscaloosa crisis on the front page in its early stages, then moving it inside, finally leaving it on the front page for the climax. An interesting slice of historical context was served to the *Free Press* readership on the June 10 front page, where two Washington bureau reporters offered a lengthy sidebar to the main wire story. “It has been a big month for the American Negro,” the story began, observing that “there has been more progress in civil rights than in any comparable period since Emancipation in 1863. Doors closed to black faces five weeks ago are now open. Century-old walls of discrimination have tumbled down all across the land.” More than forty cities “have made significant changes in their treatment of Negroes,” the story continued. “Another 50 cities are about to let down at least some of their racial bars. Biracial communities, civic groups, or Chambers of Commerce have urged progress toward desegregation in 23 cities. Lunch counters have been opened to Negroes in 12 new cities, with five more expected to follow. Movie theaters have been desegregated in 11 cities, with color bars in 55 more about to fall.”<sup>35</sup> And so on, as the story presented a constitutional equal-rights frame to accompany the latest Southern crisis—evidence of a trend against the folkways the Old South was struggling to maintain. A wire story on an inside page reported that the University of Alabama’s student newspaper had published a special edition, urging Southerners to peacefully accept social change—much as the editor of the student paper at Ole Miss had called out the rioters there. This was a story that had not emerged in the Southern newspapers. And on another inside page, the newspaper’s Washington bureau reported that a Southern senator, George Smathers, a Florida Democrat, had criticized Wallace, along with African-American extremists, for encouraging disrespect for the law.

No editorials on the Tuscaloosa crisis were found, but Judd Arnett, the newspaper’s Southern beat specialist, offered a short commentary in a page-forty-four column on June 12. “This is being written in advance of the ‘moment of truth’ at Tuscaloosa, Ala., where that unbridled supremacist [sic], Gov. George Wallace, has

been threatening to pin the tail on himself one more time,” Arnett wrote. “I have the feeling we are about to run out of the George Wallaces, Ross Barnetts and their ilk,” he observed. “Suddenly—almost overnight!—they have become anachronisms, even in the Deep South. While they have been beating their breasts and declaiming in favor of that hoary old lie, ‘separate but equal facilities,’ history has whirled past them. Racial extremism might have been a good pitch below the Mason and Dixon Line yesterday—but yesterday was a long, long time ago.”<sup>36</sup> This column, thus, offered another jab at the Southern folkways frame.

The *Chicago Tribune*, which by now had dropped the *Daily* from its name, relied exclusively on wire service reportage for the University of Alabama story, playing it inside until June 9, when it moved to the front page until the two students were enrolled. The newspaper published a half-page photo spread of the events in Alabama on page fifty-eight June 11. No attempts at localization could be found, and the newspaper sent no reporters to cover the story. In its one editorial on the subject, the newspaper agreed with other editorial voices in the North that the governor’s doorway stance was a “meaningless” gesture—“so proved a few hours later when the Negroes were registered under protection of federal troops.” Ever since Little Rock and Oxford, the newspaper asserted, “it has been perfectly plain that the federal government has the power to execute the laws against state resistance. Gov. Wallace was certainly aware of that, and the large number of business men in Tuscaloosa, the seat of the university, who counseled him to stay away were acting out of the same knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> So, this newspaper joined many of the others in singling out Wallace as a defiant segregationist acting more out of political motives—and almost as a lone wolf with little support from the business or academic community for his stance.

The three Western newspapers relied almost exclusively on their wire services, with a minor exception at the *Los Angeles Times*, for this story, with scant editorial attention. At the *Los Angeles Times*, the newspaper featured a summary of events in Alabama in its Sunday, June 9 Perspective section. Similar to the coverage in the Chicago, Pittsburgh and Detroit newspapers, the *Times* took the story, primarily wire service reportage, to the front page as it reached its climax. But it called on a Los Angeles Times News Service writer for complementary coverage—the story, on page one, reporting the president’s warning to Wallace to stay away from the campus when the African-American students showed up to enroll, and to report the president’s televised national speech for its June 12 front page. Also, on the 12th, the newspaper published the main story of Tuesday’s dramatic events in a companion front-page story under the byline of a writer in an “Exclusive to The Times from the Washington Post”—similar to how the newspaper had worked with its East Coast partner to cover the Ole Miss story.

In the one editorial found on this subject, the newspaper—in the editorial from which *The News and Courier* had quoted so extensively in its editorial on the story—asserted that “a tide is running all across the United States, starting in the South and spreading North and West, that seeks to inundate an evil thing called discrimination.” The newspaper cited racial strife in Mississippi, Alabama, Florida “and even Pennsylvania.” Such intimidation, the newspaper argued, “is wrong, and it won’t work—for minorities any more than for majorities—among enlightened people.”<sup>38</sup>

*The Denver Post* used solely wire coverage—United Press International and The Associated Press—to tell the University of Alabama story, which it placed consistently on the front page beginning June 8—relegating the story to an inside page, inexplicably, on June 10, the day before the showdown, then taking it back out front on the 11th and 12th. It published two editorials on the subject. The first, published June 9, sarcastically observed that news “apparently travels extremely slowly between Oxford, Miss., and Birmingham, Ala., even though the towns are only 200 miles apart and are linked together by instantaneous communications equipment. Gov. George C. Wallace in Birmingham is behaving as if he didn’t have the slightest inkling about what’s been going on in Oxford.” The newspaper argued that Wallace should have learned something from Barnett’s experience in Mississippi, but “apparently learning from the experience of others is something only wise men can do.”<sup>39</sup> On June 12, the newspaper suggested, as had the *Tribune* in Chicago, that Wallace’s stance had been a futile gesture. Adopting a constitutionalist frame in its argument, the newspaper claimed that if Wallace had served no other purpose, he had “put the nation, and probably the Congress too, in the mood for forceful action in the whole civil rights area. It is high time.”<sup>40</sup>

As *The Denver Post* had done, the Seattle newspaper combined reportage of The Associated Press and United Press International to tell the University of Alabama story, which it placed on inside pages initially, moving it to the front page on June 11. But also on that day, *The Seattle Times* offered, on its second page, in-depth profiles of the two students enrolling at the main campus, plus of the third one seeking to enroll at the Huntsville extension, humanizing the story. Twenty-year-old James Hood, The Associated Press reported, wanted to study psychology and “preached his first sermon at 13. Since then he has delivered sermons at every Negro church in his home town of Gadsden, in Northeast Alabama.” The wire service described Vivian Malone as a “quiet and studious girl, whose home is in Mobile.” Malone “has the same middle name as the university’s first Negro student—Aurtherine Juanita Lucy, who attended three days before she was chased away by a mob and later expelled for unproved charges against school authorities.” Malone planned to major in business. At the Huntsville extension,

David McGlathery, a “trim, athletic-looking man,” wanted to study atomic and nuclear physics after having earned a bachelor-of-science degree, in math, in 1961 from Alabama A&M.<sup>41</sup> The newspaper published multiple photos of events in Tuscaloosa on another inside page. And the next day it used a photo display to show the students’ first day of classes, with demonstrators praying and jeering.

The newspaper’s sole editorial on the subject, published June 12, shared other newspapers’ sentiment that the outcome was a foregone conclusion. “It was almost as though the participants were carrying out roles from a prepared script when violence was avoided and two courageous and determined Negro students were enrolled peacefully at the University of Alabama,” observed the newspaper. Invoking the folkways, or Southern ways, frame, the editorial writer observed that the “Governor Wallaces and others who may believe or pretend that they can turn back the tide for inter-racial equality represent a dwindling minority in both the North and the South which soon must recognize the beginning of a new era that will wipe out the remaining pockets of segregation.”<sup>42</sup>

That theme—of a diminishing Old South way of living, of thinking, of treating citizens of color as lovable second-class citizens beholden to white largesse and sovereignty—was one of the dominant frames of this national editorial debate. The Northern newspapers conceptualized this frame as a welcome change; the Southern newspapers, with some exceptions, depicted the forced integration—made inevitable not so much by a Supreme Court ruling but by a federal government willing to use force to uphold the Constitution, first, hesitatingly, at Little Rock, then more quickly but tragically at Oxford, and finally peacefully at Tuscaloosa—as a lamentable, evolutionary development. Hence, the subdued editorial response, especially by *The Birmingham News*; this was a replay of a battle already waged, and lost, in Oxford. Wallace, who embodied the manners, customs, and beliefs of this fading Old South, was the major player of the higher-education integration drama for newspapers of both regions—but again, with differing frames. To the South, he was the hero of a worthy, though failed, effort to preserve the Southern folkways—but of a lower stature than Barnett, in the eyes of some of the Southern press, for waging a caricatured, foreordained, failed battle. To the Northern journalists, Wallace was a ranting demagogue who must be put in his rightful place—that rightful place being in the Fourteenth Amendment box instead of the Tenth. And that—the constitutional frame—was the dominant argument. The Southern newspapers depicted a victimized Old South—at the hands of a liberal, Northern Paper Curtain in cahoots with such outside organizations as the NAACP and the Reds—standing up for its constitutional guarantees as spelled out in the Tenth Amendment. The Northern press, with the assistance of the Western newspapers, painted a picture of a heroic and morally-sound federal government, embodied in

the Kennedy brothers, taking the correct and necessary action—use of force—on behalf of the equal rights guaranteed all U.S. citizens, African-Americans included, in the Fourteenth Amendment. Yet another dominant frame in this journalistic debate was the Civil War. And finally, a major frame for the Northern press, as it had been in previous civil-rights event commentary, was the negative image that Southern racism and white supremacy evoke to friends and foes in foreign lands.

In the end, the Tuscaloosa story was an example of segregationist agenda-setting and news content being set, influenced, and managed by outside, non-press forces: a governor and a president. One little-noticed irony of this segregation, states'-rights versus federal-authority confrontation is that both occurred despite the fact that the university, as at Ole Miss, as dutifully reported by the press of the North and South, had experienced enrollment by a student of color several years before the integration agenda had been so prominently set by a starkly segregationist governor.

## 'When The Killing Begins'

As George Wallace was claiming newspaper heading in Alabama, civil-rights activists in Jackson, Mississippi, were staging peaceful sit-ins, marches, mass meetings and economic boycotts, following the Birmingham Project C model, as part of the Jackson Movement—an attempt to end segregation in Mississippi's largest and most heavily African-American-populated city. During the early days of June, led by Roy Wilkins of New York, executive director of the NAACP, and Medgar Evers, field secretary of the organization's Jackson office, African-Americans staged daily demonstrations and marches—including, on May 31, a children's march *a la* Birmingham, leading to a police sweep that took in more than four-hundred participants in two separate demonstrations. "A professional race agitator," reported *The Clarion-Ledger*, in a story written by staff reporter Bill Simpson on its June 1 front page, "led about 350 Negro youths to jail in Pied Piper fashion Friday afternoon as they streamed from a mass rally and marched toward E. Capital Street, the scene of racial demonstrations for the past four days."<sup>43</sup>

The next day, the newspaper reported, in an un-bylined story on page one, that the combined forces of city police and county sheriff's officers had snared Wilkins and Evers, "a big fish and 90 smaller ones (down to 11 years of age) in their nets in roundups of Negro demonstrators Saturday. 'Non-violent' demonstrators tried every method possible to damage Fair Grounds buildings in which they have been imprisoned."<sup>44</sup> The city was quiet the next day, the newspaper reported on its front page, with one "agitator"—Wilkins—departing the city and

another—comedian Dick Gregory, “who makes a fancy living poking fun at both white and Negro people and their relationships”—scheduled to arrive on Monday, June 4, “to use his own brand of agitation on the local Negro population.”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the children arrested a couple of days before had been released. On June 4, Jackson Mayor Allen Thompson declared the city’s racial disturbances as over while promising greater hiring initiatives and job opportunities for African-Americans in the city. For the most part, he was right—other than a couple of small, sporadic demonstrations. But the alleged peace blew up June 12, when Evers “was fatally wounded by a rifle fired from ambush near his home in Northwest Jackson” early that morning. “The most intensive manhunt in recent Jackson history was under way Wednesday night as police, aided by the FBI, sought the slayer,” the newspaper reported. “Rewards totaling \$22,350 were posted Wednesday for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the slayer.” The newspaper chipped in one-thousand dollars to this total. “Police were believed eyeing a suspect in the killing but would reveal nothing Wednesday night.”<sup>46</sup> A down-page story reported the expressions of shock and denunciations of the slaying by state and local leaders, and an accompanying front-page AP story carried a headline that put a political/martyr frame on the murder: “Congressmen See Slaying As CR Boost.” Many members of Congress, the wire service reported, “said the slaying may have helped the cause of civil rights legislation that the President will propose to Congress next week.”<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere on the front page, an un-bylined local story reported that one-hundred-sixty African-Americans had been arrested during demonstrations in the wake of the assassination. Thirteen of those were ministers.

The newspaper reported on its front page June 14 that a ‘round-the-clock investigation by the FBI and Jackson police was continuing, “but scattered racial demonstrations in the city claimed the time of some members of the police.” Those “scattered” demonstrations included the arrest of a reported ninety people, “including several whites, as a demonstration march was broken up in a Negro community.”<sup>48</sup> A companion story reported that Mayor Thompson had told local African-American leaders “that their only chance of lowering Jackson’s racial barriers is through court action. He told the group—which requested a conference with city officials—that Negro policemen and school crossing guards will be hired as previously promised; that Negroes will get better job opportunities in city government as they earn the right; that a bi-racial study committee definitely will not be appointed.”<sup>49</sup>

The newspaper’s June 16 front page reported a funeral procession of an “estimated 4,000 Negroes sprinkled with two dozen or so whites,” which marched in hundred-degree weather. But, the story continued, “a small minority” of the white marchers “turned on police with brickbats Saturday afternoon in a sudden, brisk

melee.” After almost all of the crowd had dispersed, the newspaper reported, a “violent group erupted in a flurry, attacking the police officers at the rear of the procession.” Soft-drink bottles were thrown at the police, and dogs and fire trucks were called to the scene but not used, as law enforcement officers “formed a human barricade” a half block from the funeral home, where “the mob of unruly Negroes, most of whom were youths,” had gathered. Following a standoff, during which “the mob refused orders to disperse, and continued throwing bricks and bottles at officers,” several of the young demonstrators charged the line and tossed more bottles. An assistant U.S. attorney implored the crowd to disperse. Finally, an African-American borrowed the police chief’s bullhorn “and urged the crowd to ‘go home. That’s the best thing you can do now.’ The mob reluctantly dispersed and police ordered the entire area cleared.”<sup>50</sup>

*The Clarion-Ledger* published a front-page editorial—the only editorial found in this newspaper on this subject—the day after the murder, calling it “most regrettable. We join our entire community in this feeling.” Then, in the second paragraph, the newspaper, adopting a law-and-order frame, decried the “atmosphere of tension and strife by outside agitators. These tensions were easing and had all but disappeared in most recent days.” Continuing the outside-agitator, Southern-victimization frame, the editorial argued that “these disturbing visitors who fomented demonstrations are no more representative of the colored citizens of Jackson than the shooting of Medgar Evers is representative of white citizens’ feelings toward the colored citizens of Jackson.” Such lawlessness, the editorial continued, abandoning the regret expressed in the lead paragraph, “must not go unpunished. ... Continued demonstrations can lead only to more bloodshed. Therefore it is hoped that all our citizens, both white and colored, immediately will return to the work of building a law-abiding, progressive city.”<sup>51</sup>

*The News and Courier* in Charleston published the AP report of the assassination on its June 13 front page, along with an AP account from Jackson of Governor Ross Barnett’s condemnation of the slaying. The newspaper had a local race story on its front page the next day, reporting on the arrest of forty-six sit-in demonstrators at two downtown restaurants, a story that its editors placed just above the day-two Evers story reporting the continued search for his killer. On page five, the newspaper published a wire story reporting that a friend of Evers, Mississippi head of the NAACP Aaron Henry, had told a House Judiciary subcommittee holding hearings on civil-rights legislation that “the battle for civil rights in Mississippi cannot be won without strong federal action. ... His recital of bombings, arrests, bricks crashing through windows and other acts of violence led two other Negro witnesses to urge prompt enactment of a strong civil rights law to avert a worsening of racial tensions.”<sup>52</sup>



On June 16, *The News and Courier* published on its front page a story of a “wild demonstration” at Evers’ funeral, a wire account far different than the downplayed page-one report of demonstrations, with no arrest- or participation-number estimate, by the Jackson newspaper—yet another demonstration of local newspapers tending to downplay, or bury inside, as *The Birmingham News* had done in its coverage of demonstrations there, reportage of hometown or home-state racial violence. “Crying ‘we want the killer,’ hundreds of chanting, bottle-throwing Negroes charged police barricades in the heart of Jackson Saturday an hour after the funeral of Medgar Evers had stirred racial emotions to a fever pitch,” read the first paragraph of the AP story. “Police, with the help of a Justice Department attorney, brought the wild demonstration under control in about 50 minutes.”<sup>53</sup>

In its sole editorial on the slaying, titled “When The Killing Begins,” published June 13, the newspaper expressed sorrow over the death of Evers, along with offering sympathy, in a false-equivalency frame, for the gunshot wounding of white men during race rioting in Maryland and a remembrance of the killing of Fred Link, a white man “fired on from a crowd of Negroes in Lexington, N. C.” So, while the newspaper expressed remorse for the murder of Evers, it tempered that remorse by reminding the readers that innocent white men were being shot also. The newspaper then took aim, not at the murderer, but at the president, who “is pouring coal on the fires in his program to force racial associations on a reluctant populace”—a states’-rights frame that portrays the South as victim of unreasonable federal edicts and enforcement of equal rights guarantees. The editorial concluded by sharing with the Jackson community its disdain for outside trouble-makers. “Something must be done to bring both racial agitators and politicians with a thirst for racial votes to their senses before real revolution erupts.”<sup>54</sup> This newspaper offered an interesting take on the civil rights movement generally in a rather prescient June 14 editorial on the upcoming March on Washington, warning that “pressure is building up over racial conflict that could explode in Washington before frost returns to the Potomac.” Demonstrations in Southern cities, the newspaper asserted, “may turn out to be mere curtain raisers for the Big show to accompany civil rights debates in Congress. Should a Southern filibuster impede what race leaders regard as progress—and the whole nation as well as the South needs defense against this form of legislative assault on constitutional liberties—the marchers may create the most spectacular and potentially dangerous incidents since an unemployed mob marched on Washington during the Depression.” The editorial concluded on an ominous note: “We hope not to live to see the day when U.S. tanks roll down the avenues of Washington to pacify American mobs. Yet even that would be preferable to the sight of Russian tanks—or smoking ruins.”<sup>55</sup>

*The Birmingham News* placed the assassination story on its June 12 front page, paired with a report that Governor Wallace of Alabama had begun pulling troops from the University of Alabama campus as two African-American students had begun attending classes there. A brief wire story on page seven reported that the FBI was cooperating in the Evers slaying investigation. The newspaper published, on page five of its June 13 edition, a wire account of a “mourning march” in Jackson that resulted in the arrest of one-hundred-forty-six demonstrators on charges of parading without a permit. “The big demonstration came,” the AP reported, when the “demonstrators began a march with American flags from the NAACP headquarters building toward downtown Jackson.”<sup>56</sup> A staff writer with the newspaper’s Mississippi bureau published a think piece on page two of the June 14 edition, datelined Jackson, heavily framed in a Southern folkways/Civil War theme. “Fear, frustration and fatigue rode into this city today on the centennial anniversary of another ‘invasion’ which topped an earlier way of life,” wrote George Metz. “Fear by some whites that today’s racial unrest and violence may only trigger more violence and eventually erase last vestiges of that ‘traditional way’ which survived the onslaught of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant 100 years ago. And fears by many Negroes that they must bear the brunt of the inevitable violence which accompanies change.” Today, Metz’s piece concluded, “a Seige [sic] of Jackson almost on the anniversary of another onslaught of change 100 years ago, drags on.”<sup>57</sup>

In its editorial on the slaying, *The Birmingham News*, while bemoaning the violent act, framed the murder not in terms of loss to the civil-rights movement but, rather, in its impact on the efforts to quell the movement. The killers, the editorial argued, “threw the switch for another high-voltage charge of unrest and racial provocation.” The tragedy beyond the loss of human life, the editorialist wrote, “lies in knowledge of so many that these so few yet will believe they did their home region a service. They made eventual hope for solution more remote.”<sup>58</sup> True. But they also killed a human being guilty of no more than promoting peaceful resistance to injustice—a frame overlooked, or not realized, by this editorial board.

*The Richmond News Leader* placed its wire story on the assassination, which included the information that a 30.06 Enfield rifle had been found near Evers’ home, on its June 12 front page, and, like the Birmingham paper, paired it with the University of Alabama story reporting the entry of two African-American students there. The next day, it folded the report of the on-going search for the assassin into a wire story that also reported on the reassignment of federal troops to the University of Mississippi campus to provide protection for James Meredith and his fellow African-American student, Cleve McDowell “after the assassination of Evers.” The article then added an interesting take on the Evers story—especially

for a Southern, segregationist newspaper—in a blame frame that had been brought up by *The Denver Post* in its April 26, 1963 editorial on the murder of William L. Moore. Interviewed by The Associated Press, Meredith said that part of the blame for Evers' murder “clearly rests with the governors of the Southern states and their defiant and provocative actions.”<sup>59</sup> The newspaper published a wire funeral-advance story on the front page of its June 15 edition.

In its June 13 editorial on the assassination, this newspaper evoked the same martyr frame as did *The Birmingham News*, arguing that if the assassin thought this act would suppress the African-American cause, then the killer “is not merely a coward and a shameful discredit to his State and his race; he is a fool. The assassination of Medgar Evers will not deter this Negro agitation for an instant; it will serve merely to give the movement new speed and fervor. This appalling act will accomplish much more than that. ‘The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church,’ said Tertullian. In this slaying of Medgar Evers the assassin created the NAACP’s first true martyr. The act should be worth a million dollars to them. Out of Evers’ death, the NAACP, which had been faltering as an organization, will gain a whole new lease on life.” The editorial concluded on a similar note—one that, rather than bemoaning the loss of a dignified human life, argued that this murder had strengthened the anti-segregationist cause: “The Mississippi assassin lost his head. Let us dedicate ourselves, in a turbulent hour, to preserving law and liberty from the disastrous effects of a shot that, sad to say, surely will be heard around the world.”<sup>60</sup>

*The Houston Chronicle*, in a remarkable show of little interest—small agenda-setting priority on this topic—covered the assassination with a front-page story on June 13, followed by a June 14 inside brief on funeral preparations that was included with a collection of wire snapshots of race stories from around the nation. No editorial was found.

In the North, Claude Sitton reported on the front page of the June 13 *New York Times*, from Jackson, that the ambush murder “touched off mass protests by Negroes in which 158 were arrested. It also aroused widespread fear of further racial violence in this state capital.”<sup>61</sup> This information appeared in the second paragraph of Sitton’s story, a stark contrast to the downplaying of violence in the Southern newspapers in their initial reporting. A staff-written story on page twelve the same day provided background on Evers, who “knew that his position as field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Jackson, Miss., was a dangerous one.” Information included the clubbing of Evers with a revolver by a policeman after Evers had applauded a courtroom defendant in a sit-down proceeding, lynching of his father’s friend when Evers was fourteen “for allegedly insulting a white woman,” anonymous telephone threats of

murder and being taken to a police station for questioning when he tried to sit in the white section of a bus. "Despite the assaults and threats to his life, Mr. Evers continued his efforts to register Negroes to vote and to organize demonstrations against segregation," the newspaper reported in a personification frame that the Southern newspapers had ignored.<sup>62</sup>

The next day, the newspaper again reported on its front page about the racial violence in Jackson following the murder. "The police charged today on adults and teen-agers who were jeering and chanting 'We want freedom' and clubbed them into submission," Sitton wrote. "A blow to the head felled a white sociology professor in the group. Six Negroes were struck or choked by police nightsticks drawn across their throats. Others were snatched or pushed from the porch of a Negro home. The incident came as the police were arresting 82 Negro youths who had staged a second mass march to protest the ambush slaying early yesterday of Medgar W. Evers."<sup>63</sup> A story on page fifteen reported, based on interviews with white Jackson citizens, that the slaying would not change the pattern and attitudes regarding segregation in the city. Sitton's front-page story on June 15 reported that the city would permit mourners to march at the funeral the next day; meanwhile, thirty-seven teenagers were arrested for parading without a permit. The next day's page-one story of the funeral led with the report that hundreds of African-Americans had rioted "after the police arrested a rowdy group of demonstrators in the wake of an ambushed integration leader's funeral." Twenty-seven people, including two local white integrationists, were arrested, the newspaper reported. As the Jackson newspaper had reported, the rioting was quelled when a United States Justice Department aide, with the help of several African-American leaders, appealed to the mob to cease the demonstration.<sup>64</sup> A companion story offered a frame that had increasingly been emerging in Northern newspaper and wire service reportage of civil-rights violence in the South—blaming Southern officials and political leaders for the violence. "Southern politicians were accused here today of responsibility in the death of Medgar W. Evers," the newspaper reported. "In a eulogy at Mr. Evers's funeral, Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, declared that the 'Southern political system' had put the assassin 'behind that rifle.' He listed 'lily-white Southern governments, local and state, the Senators, Governors, state legislators, mayors, judges, sheriffs, chiefs of police, commissioners and so forth.'"<sup>65</sup> In the Sunday commentary section, which summarized the week's events in Jackson, staff writer Anthony Lewis wrote an opinion piece from Washington on the Kennedy Administration's commitment to improve conditions for African-Americans, while Sitton penned a companion piece, datelined Jackson, on the growing insistence of African-Americans to resist the racism and segregation of the South.

Editorially, the newspaper agreed on June 13 with its Southern counterparts that Evers' martyrdom had furthered the anti-segregation cause, not by spawning further violence but, rather, by advancing "the prospects for strong civil rights legislation. Congressmen who only a few days ago were pussyfooting on the need for new laws were loud in their pledges of swift action yesterday."<sup>66</sup> On the day of the funeral, the newspaper—again, in a notable departure from the Southern newspapers in its framing—lauded Evers as a World War II veteran who knew "what it meant to serve his country. Does his country know how to serve him, how to make his sacrifice worthwhile?" The answer, argued the newspaper, is "to realize that the struggle for which Medgar Evers died will continue until freedom is attained."<sup>67</sup> Thus, in opposition to the Southern newspapers that bemoaned the impetus that the murder would lend to the civil-rights movement, the *Times* viewed the assassination as an opportunity to push the movement forward.

*The Pittsburgh Press*, an afternoon newspaper, published the story, by United Press International, on its June 12 front page. On June 13, it published on its front page a follow-up on the investigation, reporting the posting of twenty-two-thousand dollars in reward money, with a paragraph devoted to the demonstrations in Jackson which, as *The New York Times* had also reported, included the clubbing by police of a white college professor participating in the activities. The story moved inside on June 14, where the newspaper reported via the UPI on the push by the FBI and Mississippi investigators to find the murderer as Evers' family prepared to attend the funeral service. A page-three story on June 15 reported the tolling of bells in some of the two-hundred-fifteen United Presbyterian churches in Pittsburgh's home county in tribute to Evers on the day of his funeral. On Sunday, June 16, the newspaper buried, on page forty-one, the story of the funeral march and the rioting that ensued.

In its sole editorial on this subject, *The Pittsburgh Press* argued—as had James Meredith, and Wilkins at the funeral oration—in an accusatory frame aimed at Southern political leaders, that Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett "bears heavy responsibility for this crime. When the chief executives of states, such as Mr. Barnett and Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama, openly defy the law and the courts, what should they expect of fanatics whose passions they have aroused and encouraged?"<sup>68</sup>

In Chicago, the *Tribune* published the assassination wire story on its June 12 front page, beneath a banner headline that read, "N. A. A. C. P. CHIEF SLAIN!" A subhead, also bannered across the front page, reported that two African-Americans had successfully enrolled at the University of Alabama. The story was quite brief because of deadline constraints. The newspaper gave the story full-blown treatment on its June 13 front page with a report that a gun had been found near Evers' home and that FBI agents had joined the hunt for the assassin. More

Evers stories were published on page five—a wire service report, referenced elsewhere, detailing previous threats to Evers, and a Chicago Tribune Press Service report about the posting of a ten-thousand-dollar reward by the NAACP. Also on this page, the newspaper published a brief local story of plans for a memorial service at a Chicago south-side church and including comments from Evers' brother, who owned a suburban Chicago night club. "He didn't believe in violence," Charles Evers said. "And he said he would never leave Mississippi. He always said that should it come to the worst, he wanted to be buried there."<sup>69</sup> On page seven, the newspaper published a wire story, also referenced elsewhere, quoting University of Mississippi student James Meredith's comments about the danger to African-Americans in the segregationist culture of Mississippi.

The wire story of the demonstration in Jackson on the June 14 front page led with the report of "club-swinging violence"—again, a noticeable change in framing from the coverage of the same event by the Southern newspapers of this book's analysis, which downplayed the violence—that included the clubbing and arrest of a white professor demonstrating with the marchers.<sup>70</sup> A story by the newspaper's press service on page eight reported that the president of the NAACP's Mississippi branch had called for legislation authorizing the Department of Justice to protect threatened citizens—as referenced elsewhere. In a curious alteration of the *Tribune's* framing of the story, which had appeared on the front page previously, the story of the funeral plans was folded into a page-six report of the shooting of a white youth by a sniper in Mississippi. The wire story of the funeral, though, and of the accompanying violence, was on the front page of the June 16 edition, along with a photo of the assistant U.S. attorney who had helped restore order in Jackson. On June 17, the newspaper published a page-five story reporting that Evers' brother had been named to replace Medgar Evers temporarily until a permanent replacement could be found. "Charles Evers, employed by the Cook county board of education as a physical education instructor, said he and his brother had agreed that one of them would carry on in civil rights work should anything happen to the other," reported The Associated Press. "We made this pact when we tried to register in Newton county in 1946," Evers said.<sup>71</sup> An accompanying story reported that more than a thousand people had attended a south-side memorial service in Chicago, which was attended by the father of Martin Luther King, Jr., who spoke during the service. "The Rev. Mr. King said it would take the Negroes 50 years to desegregate Mississippi if they wait for court action. 'It won't be long and we will be free because the death of Evers has brought us closer to freedom,' he said."<sup>72</sup>

In yet another somewhat remarkable display of low priority in this newspaper's agenda-setting for this story, no editorial was found—despite the local connection of the King and Evers families to the slain civil-rights leader.



The race agenda dominated the front page of *The Detroit Free Press* on June 13—all by wire services. The Evers assassination story was paired with a story out of Washington reporting that President Kennedy had met with former President Eisenhower, hoping to gain Republican support for his civil-rights agenda. And an AP photo of an African-American coed accompanied by two white coeds was placed atop a wire story reporting that two African-American students attended classes peacefully at the University of Alabama. The front page of the June 14 edition carried a wire dispatch reporting the violence in Jackson, and the next day's cover page reported, via wire services, the arrival of hundreds of mourners in Jackson the day before the funeral. The newspaper's front page on June 16 displayed an AP story that led with the narrative of bottle-throwing African-Americans charging the police barricades in Jackson following the funeral. An AP photo showed a nine-year-old African-American girl eyeing guardsmen on duty during racial tensions in Cambridge, Maryland—again, this packaging of the Southern racial uprisings was a sharp difference, in this Northern newspaper, to the downplaying of the violence by the Jackson and other Southern newspapers. On page three, the newspaper reported growing support for a planned June 23 “March to Freedom” demonstration in Detroit. A wire story on page thirteen reported the tolling of church bells across the nation in honor of Evers—along with increased racial tension and demonstrations in the North and South.

In agreeing with other Northern newspapers that the martyrdom of Evers had strengthened anti-segregationist sentiment, the newspaper argued in a June 14 editorial that the Ku Klux Klan “could have done no better than to assassinate Medgar W. Evers” to find “the most effective way to dramatize the plight of the Negro.” It was, the newspaper said, “an unbelievably stupid thing for even a vicious mind to do. The murder lent new validity to every protest across the nation, from Jackson to Boston. It gave undeserved credence to the comment of James Meredith at Oxford that ‘A Negro’s life is not worth the air it requires to keep it alive in Mississippi.’”<sup>73</sup> *Free Press* President and Editor John S. Knight penned a lengthy lead column for the Sunday, June 16 editorial page. The “greater tragedy” of the assassination, Knight wrote, would be the painful interruption of the tranquil atmosphere of the integration of the University of Alabama. “In every state—not only the South—thoughtful citizens are working responsibly to compose racial conflicts. Not even the most militant NAACP leader can rightfully assert that encouraging progress is not being made.”<sup>74</sup>

Up and down the West Coast and on the plains east of the Rocky Mountains, the newspapers' coverage was similar—page-one placement of the main stories and inside placement of ancillary pieces, provided exclusively by wire services, with no different information than what has already been provided here. *The Denver*



*Post* published one editorial on the subject, a June 13 commentary predicting “grim days ahead for our nation. The arch-segregationists are more and more being pushed into a corner, and some, like cornered animals, will fight savagely out of desperation. . . . We cannot any longer move slowly toward integration.” Suggesting that the assassination lent fuel to the movement, the newspaper concluded that “anyone who thinks that we have seen the worst of the racial violence is either naïve or overly sanguine.”<sup>75</sup>

No editorials were found in *The Seattle Times* or *Los Angeles Times*. The Los Angeles newspaper did, though, have a couple of local tie-ins. One was a June 13 page-six reaction story from the president of the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP, who announced that his office was adding one-thousand dollars to the national organization’s ten-thousand-dollar reward fund. Evers’ death, said Dr. Christopher L. Taylor, “gives greater meaning and incentive to our determination to completely rid Los Angeles of all discrimination and segregation and achieve complete freedom now.”<sup>76</sup> On June 15, the newspaper published a two-paragraph brief on page eight announcing that the Congress of Racial Equality was planning a June 16 march in tribute to Evers. On June 17, the newspaper published, on page two, an account of the parade, which drew an estimated one-thousand-five-hundred participants. “The 10-block procession was orderly and witnessed by only casually interested observers along the sidewalks of the Negro neighborhood through which it passed,” the newspaper reported in an un-bylined story.<sup>77</sup>

Like the “casually interested observers” of the Los Angeles march, the three Western newspapers exhibited little more than perfunctory interest in the Evers assassination; the sole editorial of the three offered a frame of distanced observance of an event that signaled—presciently—an increased flame of violence. The Southern and Northern newspapers, though, demonstrated what had by now become rather predictable framing and agenda-setting. The Southern presses continued to stress a theme of outside agitation, suggesting that the home crowd of African-Americans would be content to accept a leisurely pace toward equality, if any pace was necessary at all; a steady drumbeat of the right of states to determine their own policies regarding race; a nostalgic nod to Southern folkways, and an evocation of Civil War memories and horrors visited on the South during Reconstruction. The Southern newspapers framed Evers’ martyrdom as a problem, because it would only inflame the African-Americans more—unfortunately, in their eyes. The Northern press, though, other than the *Chicago Tribune*, viewed the martyrdom as a positive coming from the tragic murder of a World War II veteran who toiled honorably on behalf of the worthy causes of justice, equality and freedom—as an impetus that would boost the movement. The Northern papers also invoked a constitutional frame, on behalf of equality and justice rather than

as a states'-rights issue. The Northern papers personified the movement, and the grim nature of the slaying and resulting rioting, through the actions and words of the drama's participants. One of the persistent, and stronger, themes offered by the Northern papers, editorially and in their coverage, was the role that Southern demagogues played in fueling the assassination—while the Southern press hinted at a responsibility for the violence in the South borne by President Kennedy in his administration's, primarily his Attorney General Robert Kennedy's, activist role on behalf of civil rights.

The Tuscaloosa confrontation and the Evers murder bolstered the national impetus toward civil-rights legislation; but more immediately, it fueled the planning and activism looming in the nation's capital and the massive march planned there. The next chapter explores this path, with integration agenda-setting again being set by civil-rights activists, shaping and informing press coverage and framing in a carefully planned and managed event on a national stage—a civil-rights drama directed by Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Postscript:** Byron De La Beckwith, a 42-year-old fertilizer salesman and member of Mississippi's segregationist White Citizens Council and a Ku Klux Klansman, was arrested and charged with the murder of Evers on June 23, 1963. Two all-white, all-male juries deadlocked in 1964, and a second trial that same year ended with a hung jury. Beckwith was finally convicted of the murder February 5, 1994 and sentenced to life. He died in prison at the age of 80 in 2001. "It was Mississippi's fingerprint on the Beckwith case, even more than the print on Mr. Beckwith's rifle, that brought the cowardly sniper at last to justice," reported *The New York Times* on February 8, 1994. "The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson discovered that the former State Sovereignty Commission, a publicly financed arm of government, helped Mr. Beckwith's lawyers screen jurors whose deadlock caused a mistrial in 1964. That prompted prosecutors to search for evidence of jury tampering, which led instead to new evidence that Mr. Beckwith had bragged about getting away with murder."<sup>78</sup>

## Notes

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3. Ted Pearson, "Showdown with U.S. near for Gov. Wallace," *The Birmingham News*, May 22, 1963, 1.

4. George C. Biggers, III, "Federal Judge Enjoins Wallace, Says He Must Let Negroes in U of A: Physical Bar Means Arrest," *The Birmingham News*, June 5, 1963, 1.
5. "Shoving Match Will Bring Troops, Wallace Warned": Won't Tolerate Any Violence," *The Birmingham News*, June 6, 1963, 1.
6. Ted Pearson, "Wallace Says Negro Pawn of NAACP," *The Birmingham News*, June 7, 1963, 1.
7. George C. Biggers III, "U.S. to Avoid Jailing Wallace," *The Birmingham News*, June 8, 1963, 1.
8. Jack Hopper, "State Troopers Line Campus at University," *The Birmingham News*, June 8, 1963, 1.
9. Jack Hopper, "Connor Urges White Citizens to 'Stay Away'," *The Birmingham News*, June 8, 1963, 1.
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11. George Biggers, III, "Arrest Order Rests on Court," *The Birmingham News*, June 9, 1963, 1.
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14. AP, "Tuscaloosa, University Prepare for Era's End," *The Birmingham News*, June 9, 1963, 14.
15. Al Fox, "Unshaken Wallace Goes to 'Bama for Showdown: Keep Peace, Stay Away, Citizens Told," *The Birmingham News*, June 10, 1963, 1.
16. News Capital Bureau, "Stand with Me at Home—Wallace," *The Birmingham News*, June 10, 1963, 1.
17. Mickey Logue, "Rose says Wallace should be present," *The Birmingham News*, June 10, 1963, 1.
18. AP, "Wallace Statement Brings Up Question of Constitutionality," *The Birmingham News*, June 11, 1963, 1.
19. "Judges, Law, Governors," *The Birmingham News*, June 6, 1963, 14.
20. "The University's Honor," *The Birmingham News*, June 9, 1963, 16.
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## On the Capital Stage; Some Afterthoughts

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### **‘Equality Is Their Right’**

While Project C in Birmingham produced the most important written document of the civil-rights movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Letter from the Birmingham Jail, the August 28, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom brought about the most famous oration of the movement, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. The march had several precedents, the most notable being the 1941 call by A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, for a massive march on Washington to draw attention to the exclusion of African-Americans from positions in the defense industry. The prospect of such a march prompted President Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 mandating creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission to look into charges of racial discrimination involving defense firms. Randolph cancelled the march, but he was on hand now to direct this 1963 version, sponsored by the Negro American Labor Council, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and planned during the Birmingham demonstrations. Unlike the weeks-long Birmingham protests, though, the Washington event was more of a quick-hit one-time demonstration intended to draw national attention to the disenfranchisement of African-Americans, economic inequality caused by racism, and the

persistence of racial segregation in the South.<sup>1</sup> Hence, newspaper coverage across the nation, rather than drawn-out over a period of weeks, was short in duration and would not feature photos of snarling dogs, high-pressure fire hoses and mass arrests. It was a peaceful undertaking under the aegis of an agenda set not by the government or by segregationists, but by the civil-rights crusaders themselves.

*The New York Times* offered page-one pre-march coverage on August 28, with a story by a Washington-based correspondent reporting that a crowd of one-hundred-thousand was expected for the march, with six-thousand police officers assigned to the event and liquor sales banned in the District. "The mass demonstration," the newspaper reported, "is intended to press for equal rights and the end of discrimination in jobs, housing, schools and other fields." The capital city, it continued, "awaited the marchers with some uneasiness, although the preparations were elaborate and impressive. The 10 leaders of the march have called upon all to maintain dignity and order. The police have said that they expect no trouble."<sup>2</sup> Inside, a *Times* correspondent reported on six busloads of African-Americans headed for the march from Alabama, paused in Chattanooga, Tennessee during the evening. "The 260 demonstrators, of all ages, carried picnic baskets, water jugs, Bibles and a major weapon—their willingness to march, sing and pray in protest against discrimination. They gathered early this morning in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park, where state troopers once used fire hoses and dogs to put down their demonstrations. It was peaceful in the Birmingham park as the marchers waited for the buses. The police, now part of a moderate city power structure, directed traffic around the square and did not interfere with the gathering."<sup>3</sup>

The August 29 front page of the newspaper reported a turnout nearly double the expected number; a photo showed the massive crowd of peaceful demonstrators, with the pencil-thin Washington monument in the background. "More than 200,000 Americans, most of them black but many of them white, demonstrated here today for a full and speedy program of civil rights and equal job opportunities," a staff correspondent reported. "It was the greatest assembly for a redress of grievances that this capital has ever seen." There was no violence, E. W. Kenworthy wrote. "In fact, at times there was an air of hootenanny about it as groups of schoolchildren clapped hands and swung into the familiar freedom songs."<sup>4</sup> An accompanying front-page story reported exclusively on King's "I Have a Dream" speech. "Abraham Lincoln, who presided in his stone temple today above the children of the slaves he emancipated, may have used just the right words to sum up the general reaction to the Negro's massive march on Washington," wrote staffer James Reston from the capital. "I think' he wrote to Gov. Andrew G. Curtin of Pennsylvania in 1861, 'the necessity of being ready increases. Look to it.' Washington may not have changed a vote today, but it is a little more conscious



tonight of the necessity of being ready for freedom. It may not ‘look to it’ at once, since it is looking to so many things, but it will be a long time before it forgets the melodious and melancholy voice of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. crying out his dreams to the multitude.”<sup>5</sup> A companion front-page story, also by a staff writer, reported that President Kennedy had met with march leaders as part of his campaign for a civil-rights bill. Inside, the newspaper carried the full text of the president’s statement on civil rights, along with a localization featuring New York residents who had participated and were heading home praising the D.C. rally. Most of the capital city had been deserted, with many businesses shut down, reported another inside-page story. On page seventeen, the newspaper published a “Woman In the News” profile of a woman from Birmingham, observing that after this day “her life would never be the same.” About two years before, the newspaper reported, Hazel Mangle Rivers “felt the passion of the civil rights movement. She had always been a believer in integration, she said, but one day she realized that the national movement concerned her as an individual.” If she had ever had doubts about the movement, she told the newspaper, “they’re gone now. When I get back home I’m going to follow this on out. I’ve followed it this far. When I get back there tomorrow I’m going to do whatever needs to be done—I don’t care if it’s picketing or marching or sitting-in or what, I’m ready to do it. I’m ready to march on Montgomery or even march in Birmingham again. When they march I’m going to march.”<sup>6</sup> On August 30, the newspaper published a front-page story, datelined Washington, by a correspondent reporting that civil rights leaders, “elated by yesterday’s march on Washington, vowed today to use its momentum to broaden their nation-wide campaign. ‘We will need to continue demonstrations,’” Randolph told the National Conference on Civil Rights of the Socialist party.<sup>7</sup> Inside, the newspaper offered a foreign-image frame with a wire story reporting varied views of the march in Africa, with Arab nations and European capitals praising the march and demonstrators holding rallies, except in Moscow, where the Soviet Union party newspaper claimed the march proved the exploitation of African-Americans in the United States.

That Sunday’s commentary section carried analyses by Claude Sitton, writing from Atlanta, and M. S. Handler. Sitton argued that besides possibly bringing support in Congress for civil rights legislation, the march had “other significant results. More Americans than ever before have some understanding of what the Negro means when he speaks of freedom and equality. More are aware of the distance the nation yet must travel if all citizens are to enjoy these ideals.” And, he added, at least “a few whites undoubtedly are asking if the long-range penalties of racial privilege, to the nation and thus to themselves, may not outweigh whatever short-term personal gains it has brought them. And some Negroes may have been

led to consider whether orderly, though militant, pleas and protests are not more persuasive than those that embrace the violence and racism displayed by some of their opponents.”<sup>8</sup> Handler, meanwhile, outlined civil-rights strategies for the future. “In the last few months,” he observed, “Negro leaders have come to the conclusion that they should concentrate their political action in three spheres.” These were a federal fair employment practice law, withholding federal funds from projects in which segregation was practiced, and agitation on behalf of federal injunctive power “that would authorize the Department of Justice to initiate suits to bring about desegregation. These new targets will involve a further and more complete agitational movement directed at sensitive parts of the American social structure.”<sup>9</sup>

*The New York Times*, in demonstrating, once again, a high agenda-setting priority in hard news coverage, volume of news space, number of stories and use of staff resources devoted to the race story, published four consecutive editorials on the march. The first, published August 28, urged Congress to yield to the pleas not only of the marchers but of the Committee on Federal Legislation of the New York City Bar Association, which had “found constitutional support for Congressional action in both the Fourteenth Amendment and the commerce clause.” Congress, the editorial urged in a constitutional frame, “ought to heed both pleas, so similar in their recognition of the need for providing a means under law for redressing grievances that are equally violative of basic law and basic morality.”<sup>10</sup> The next day, the newspaper argued, again in a constitutional frame, that the large assemblage demanding equality “embodied, in concept and in execution, the noblest tradition of our democracy.” The segregationists, the newspaper observed, “lost no time in making it plain that they were unimpressed” by the legislative movement in the capital—“that, if anything, they were more confirmed than ever in their hostility to the President’s program” for civil-rights legislation. The newspaper singled out Randolph, “who perhaps more than any other American has consecrated his life to the fruition of the civil rights movement.”<sup>11</sup> High praise, considering the giant figure of King looming over the march and the movement. The newspaper took up the subject of King in its August 30 editorial, in a personification frame, observing that the march was an affirmation of the African-American’s “confidence in the efficacy of an appeal to national morality to make true the dreams so eloquently evoked by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in the shadow of the Great Emancipator. It is up to all of us to make certain those dreams are not destroyed.”<sup>12</sup> Finally, the newspaper evoked again the “Great Emancipator,” in a September 1 editorial calling on Congress to codify civil rights in the nation.

*The Detroit Free Press* relied on wire service coverage for the story, which it played on the front page August 28 and 29. But it offered some extra reportage,

beginning with an August 25 story on page three announcing that one-thousand-five-hundred Detroiters would be traveling to Washington for the march. An August 27 inside-page feature by a Washington bureau staffer described preparations in an old dance hall serving as headquarters for the march, and an August 28 story in the entertainment section featured an interview with the entertainer Sammy Davis, Jr. regarding his plans to attend. On August 29, a Washington bureau reporter interviewed march participants who had come to the city from places that included Milwaukee and Cincinnati for a page-one account of why they were marching. A page-fourteen story, also out of the Washington bureau, reported the attendance of three Michigan congressmen at the march, and a staff writer sent to the march by the newspaper reported, on the same page, about the participation of the marchers from Michigan “who came by special train, airplanes, buses and private cars.” The Michigan marchers, Robert Pearson wrote, “like demonstrators from all parts of the nation, were generally smiling but quiet. ‘You get the feeling you’re participating in something in the making,’ said Arthur Johnson, executive secretary of the Detroit NAACP. The universal answer to the universal question—‘Why are you here?’—was: ‘For freedom.’”<sup>13</sup>

The newspaper referenced those Michigan marchers in a pre-march August 27 editorial that noted the participation of an estimated one-hundred-twenty-five-thousand demonstrators in a June 23 Detroit freedom march that had been the largest civil rights demonstration in the nation to that date. “Because the nation has witnessed scores of smaller marches,” the editorial writer observed, “the impact of newness has worn off.” The Washington march, the editorial concluded in a constitutional, equal-rights frame, “is, like the march in Detroit, more of an opportunity than a goal. Those who take part are given a chance to demonstrate support for equal rights for all.”<sup>14</sup> After the march, the newspaper argued in an August 29 editorial that the true measure of its success “will be what the organizers do from here on out.” If the march accomplished nothing more than unifying the various groups behind it, the editorial concluded, “it will have been a whopping success”<sup>15</sup>—a somewhat demure observation of such a massive civil-rights demonstration.

The *Chicago Tribune*’s pre-march reportage began on inside pages leading up to the march. An August 25 page-ten story reported a “send-off” rally downtown featuring the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, visiting from Birmingham, as its lead speaker. Another inside-page story, by the newspaper’s press service, summarized the march preparations taking place throughout Washington. On August 27, the newspaper reported on an inside page that more than two-thousand-five-hundred were leaving the city in two “freedom trains,” four chartered airplanes and several automobiles to participate in the march; accompanying stories elsewhere inside

the paper reported on Shuttlesworth's remarks the previous day, in which he criticized northern civil-rights groups for less-than-enthusiastic demonstrations, and a story, also by the newspaper's press service, in which march leader Randolph conceded that violence was a possibility during the march.

The story moved to the front page on August 28, where the newspaper paired a Washington-based advance story by a Chicago Tribune Press Service staff writer with a piece datelined "Aboard a Chicago Freedom Train, Aug. 27" reporting that one-thousand-eighty-six Chicagoans were en route to the capital city. When the march came off peaceably, as reported on the August 29 front page and on four inside pages—a strong show of agenda-setting by this large, Midwestern newspaper—the newspaper accompanied the hard news with wire service features that included the president's reaction to the march, march participants doing some sight-seeing, civil-rights leaders calling on Congress to enact a civil-rights program, and a summary of European reactions. The newspaper published a photo spread of the march on its back page. In that same edition, on page six, aboard the "freedom train" ride home, a newspaper staff writer wrote a dispatch reporting of plans by the Chicago civil-rights leaders to continue to rally in Washington in weekly visits to the city until civil-rights legislation was enacted.

In the sole editorial found on the march story, the newspaper on the day of the march warned of the possibility of violence occurring during the "combustible affair." It is to be hoped, the newspaper commented, "that the demonstration will come off without trouble but, even if it does, what was the purpose in tempting chance? Any legislation on racial matters will come from Congress, not from the crowd. The massing of thousands of people is no contribution to a calm and rational exercise of the legislative process. It is a visible threat." The eleventh hour "is here," the editorial concluded in a law-and-order frame that might be expected more from a Southern newspaper than one of the North. "The peril is on two fronts and only a rediscovery of reason will shield the nation from the consequences."<sup>16</sup> This newspaper, then, once again was a framing outlier of the Northern press, with nary a word in its editorial on the cause of freedom or equality, the constitutional frame completely ignored.

Pittsburgh likewise sent a contingency of residents, via a fifteen-car special train and a caravan of fourteen buses, as reported on the August 28 front page of *The Pittsburgh Press* by a correspondent in its Washington bureau. This story accompanied a same-day wire service story on the main event. Three wire stories complementing the front-page coverage were published on page seven, along with photos of the march, one of them featuring Pittsburgh participants. On page twelve, the newspaper published a UPI feature with an historical frame, reminding readers of the First Amendment guarantee of the right to assemble and to petition

the government, this march being but one in a “long series of historic occasions when Americans have marched on their capital city to invoke that right. One of the first and most famous marches was that of ‘Coxey’s Army’ in 1894. The country was in the grip of a severe depression and there were many unemployed.”<sup>17</sup>

The story stayed on the front page the next day, the peaceful aftermath of the march reported in a story provided by the Scripps-Howard News Service. On page ten, a UPI story reported church leaders hailing the march as the beginning of a new era, while a staff report, un-bylined, on the same page quoted a Pittsburgh march participant calling the experience “incredible.” In a way, though, “it was the lack of planning which made the demonstration click,’ said Miss [Molly] Yard, who co-ordinated the Western Pennsylvania participation.”<sup>18</sup> Next to this story, UPI reported that European media provided massive but sympathetic reportage of the march, while the Soviet news agency “called it a demonstration of the ‘sores of American society.’”<sup>19</sup>

No march-related editorials were found in the *Press*, a curious lack of voice that suggests a lackadaisical sense of agenda-setting to what most of the press recognized as a staged publicity event—but one that nonetheless drew front-page coverage accompanied by supportive editorial commentary in the Northern press, save the Chicago daily. Lack of editorial comment has significance in the perceptions surrounding the silence: interpretations ranging from lack of interest to opposition.

Of the Western newspapers, *The Denver Post* again took on the strongest agenda-setting role, sending the African-American member of the team it had sent to cover the Birmingham demonstrations to report on the march. George Brown began his coverage with a front-page August 27 advance story reporting that while most of the Washington residents agreed with the goals of the march for jobs and freedom, “many question the advisability of the massive march. One city official, who declined to be identified ‘because of the large Negro population here,’ summed up his feeling with these words: ‘The demonstration admittedly is in a good cause. But it is ill-advised. The massing of more than 100,000 marchers in downtown Washington is a risk which should have been avoided. At stake is the hard-earned progress made in race relations in recent years by many people.’”<sup>20</sup> But an un-bylined story on page eleven reported that Washington residents were not apprehensive over the upcoming march. Brown and staff writer Barnet Nover, of the newspaper’s Washington bureau, wrote the main story of the march for the August 28 front page, which included the fact that a delegation of thirty-nine Coloradans, which included African-Americans, Hispanics and Anglos, had arrived by bus at 5:30 a.m. the morning of the march. Accompanying a page thirty-eight wire story on the march, with a photo spread at the top of the

page, was a report by Nover that the event resembled a church picnic and that fears of violence had disappeared. A brief story at the bottom of the page summarized Colorado congressional delegation members' defense of the march in a constitutional, right-of-assembly frame.

A front-page wire story the next day reported the intentions of march leaders to carry forward the initiative of the march. On page six, Nover reported that the peaceful event had quieted march critics and that Congress had gotten the message. A page-twelve piece written by Brown featured interviews with march organizers and leaders discussing the goals of the march and the necessity of such demonstrations "for the Negro to win full equality and to end racial bias in American life," according to Randolph. "We in this country today are in the midst of a civil rights revolution. No force under the sun can stem or block this revolution. And because of this, now is the time to advance the frontiers of freedom and human dignity. Only a massive demonstration would draw the worldwide spotlight necessary to get the attention we need."<sup>21</sup>

An important journalistic and agenda-setting breakthrough, though, was published on page thirty-five: a first-person account of the march by a journalist of color writing for a traditional, white newspaper in a powerful personification frame. "I've always been proud of my Negro heritage," wrote Brown. "I haven't always been pleased to be an American Negro. Wednesday, as I watched some 200,000 persons assembled in Washington, I was proud ... thrilled ... pleased ... happy to be an American Negro. Tears welled in my eyes when Marian Anderson sang 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands.' When Mahalia Jackson sang spirituals, I tingled with an emotion which must have been similar to that which kept my forefathers moving when they were slaves in this country."<sup>22</sup>

On the August 29 editorial page, *The Denver Post* heaved an editorial sigh of relief that the march "went off with a gratifying lack of incident and with great dramatic effectiveness." The editorial concluded in a constitutional, equal-rights frame arguing that, to the shame of the nation, "there are still many Americans who suffer from blindness and deafness in the matter of discrimination. But the Washington march demonstrated that Negroes of the United States will not relax their efforts until they make all their fellow citizens see and hear."<sup>23</sup>

The *Los Angeles Times* used wire services to cover the march in far-away Washington, advancing the event on its August 26 edition's second news page, but local demonstrations captured this newspaper's reporting attention. A page-two story on Tuesday, August 27, written by a newspaper staffer, reported that civil-rights demonstrators unable to make the trip to D.C. would conduct a march on city hall that Wednesday night. Meanwhile, Paul Weeks reported, two chartered flights were scheduled to carry Los Angeles march participants that night. Among



the passengers would be a show-business contingency: Harry Belafonte, Anthony Franciosa, Rita Moreno, Burt Lancaster, Eartha Kitt, Marlon Brando and James Garner. The newspaper's August 28 edition reported that an Episcopal priest who had been jailed the previous month while participating in a sit-in demonstration in Torrance would be a principal speaker at the Wednesday night Los Angeles demonstration.

The main headline on the August 29 front page was not the Washington march—that event was reported by The Associated Press on page one, but down-page—but, rather, the Los Angeles march on city hall. “Freedom cries rang along Broadway Wednesday night as 3,000 marchers staged the biggest demonstration of the civil rights drive here in moving on City Hall.” The march, declared the Reverend Maurice A. Dawkins, was “the largest civil rights march on the West Coast. This turnout was inspired by the success of the Washington demonstration. It’s like a religion. It’s a contagious fever of ‘Freedom Now!’”<sup>24</sup>

In an August 27 editorial, the *Times* invoked a strong constitutional frame, arguing that there is “no more basic right guaranteed by the Constitution than the freedom of ‘the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.’” The editorial also took on a foreign-image frame, observing that the “rest of the world will also be watching Wednesday with mixed emotions—some smugly and some even callously anxious for failure.” The newspaper observed that a “vast majority of their countrymen concur in demands for equality by Negroes and other minorities, and they deplore the inequities that have led to the civil rights march”—but the writer was careful not to include the newspaper among that vast majority, observing in the editorial’s conclusion that a “sympathetic nation can only hope that the Washington march will not be a step backward.”<sup>25</sup>

On the upper West Coast, *The Seattle Times*, after only a brief second-page wire story advancing the march on August 27, crammed a pile of wire service stories on its August 28 front page and six inside pages, along with a full-page photo package. The next day, it published an Associated Press story on page A—the newspaper’s second news page—reporting in the headline that the march had failed to speed action on a civil-rights bill, though the text of the story simply reported lack of evidence of congressional movement being hastened as a result of the march. No reportage of Seattle residents attending the march could be found, but a brief story on page two reported a demonstration of more than seven-hundred people in Seattle in support of the Washington march, with a focus on criticism of local labor unions, segregated Seattle school facilities and area employers.

An August 29 editorial expressed relief over the lack of incidents or violence during the march, arguing in a constitutional frame that the “exemplary conduct of



the marchers themselves—here as well as in the capital—proved that the crusade for racial equality is one which must be advanced in the best American traditions of assembly and petition for redress of grievances.”<sup>26</sup> Similar to the editorial of the *Los Angeles Times*, though, was a striking lack of argument placing the newspaper on the side of equality and dignity regarding the African-American citizens of the country. The West Coast newspapers, indeed, seemed content to let the racial issue play out in the East and South so long as the racial differences were debated peacefully.

Coverage of the Washington march was a different story in our Southern newspapers, where the treatment was mixed, ranging from an agenda of indifference and banishment to inside pages, to front-page coverage accompanied by hostile editorial commentary and negative framing in staff coverage.

*The Birmingham News* relied almost exclusively on wire service reportage of the event, except for a front-page August 28 Associated Press main report accompanied by a sidebar by its Washington correspondent on the address by John Lewis, “chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee—a native Alabamian—[who] predicted in a prepared speech that ‘the black masses will march through the South ... the way Sherman did.’” The correspondent called Lewis the “most militant, firebrand speaker” of the march<sup>27</sup>—while the newspaper ignored King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, by far the most notable public utterance of the event. The *News* placed the other march stories on inside pages—a stark contrast from the front-page placement in newspapers in the North and West. This newspaper made no effort to localize the story or to cover any Alabamians or Birmingham residents who made the pilgrimage to the nation’s capital. The only other exception to the consignment of this story to inside pages was a page-one localization, with no byline, of a local Methodist bishop who chastised a national board of his church for its “deplorable irresponsibility” in endorsing King’s criticism of white religious leaders in his Letter From Birmingham City Jail. “The Methodist leader said that because of civil rights demonstrations in Alabama, ‘it can be affirmed now that the hard core of segregationists has been made more militant ... and the moderates and people of good will upon whom ultimately depends the solution of this whole problem here become greatly embittered indeed, many have thus been driven over to the camp of the diehards.’”<sup>28</sup>

In its one editorial on the march, *The Birmingham News* called the event “a peaceful piece of nonsense affronting sober consideration of senators, representatives and thoughtful Americans everywhere,” many of whom are interested “in a solution to racial problems.” But how those needs are met, argued the newspaper in a law-and-order frame, “whether by responsible stewardship of elected officers, by rank and file of decent citizens or by circuses such as the extravaganza of

whoop-up speeches offered by Negroes and whites before the symbol of quiet dignity, the Lincoln Memorial, is a very great issue.” Concluded the editorial: “This isn’t America. Not the America of reason, sanity and orderly procedure in law and through law.” Thus did this newspaper contrast the decent, law-abiding citizens of the nation who supported racial equality through a reasoned, legislative process, with the “whooping” street-marchers, albeit peaceful ones, who had the audacity to “take it to the streets’ . . . and this time on the doorstep of federal government.”<sup>29</sup>

The *Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson placed all of its coverage—all wire dispatches—on the front pages of its August 28, August 29 and August 30 editions. The headlines and stories were routine; there was no attempt to localize the story through coverage of Mississippians participating in the march or reporting on any related events, if there were any, in Jackson. The most remarkable finding of this analysis was the headline placed above a brief page-one story on August 30 reporting on the clean-up efforts at the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial: “WASHINGTON IS CLEAN AGAIN WITH NEGRO TRASH REMOVED.”<sup>30</sup> The negative framing of this headline is obvious in its segregationist, racist invective. No editorial could be found on the march, an absence of voice that is loud in its evidence of the newspaper’s dismissiveness, or antipathy to, a subject that drew voluminous editorial comment in the Northern and Western newspapers.

Likewise, no editorials on the march were found in *The Houston Chronicle*, which published wire service reports of the march on its front pages of August 28 and August 29.

*The News and Courier* in Charleston relied heavily on wire service reportage, which was placed on the front page from August 26 through August 29, and its editors complemented these stories with staff reports that provided features and color. A staff writer—one of three newspaper staffers assigned to the march—reported on August 27 that a spokesman for the marchers expected that African-Americans “pouring into the nation’s capital Wednesday” would be “in ‘an angry and hungry mood.’” But, he added, “it will be a well disciplined anger. . . . We want those poor, oppressed people to have the opportunity to earn bread.”<sup>31</sup> A sidebar detailed preparation for the march by Washington officials. On the following day, the newspaper relied on The Associated Press to provide the primary story regarding the arrival of the marchers and the city’s preparations, while an unidentified staff writer reported on the security measures that had been established in the city. Staff writer Stewart R. King wrote an analytical backgrounder casting the demonstration in a negative, dismissive frame. “There are few white residents of the capital who join with the residents of the White House in openly approving the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” King wrote,

beneath a lead paragraph reporting that an “angry minority” of city residents saw the event as “a good day to close the shutters and get away from the city.” Most of the city workers he had spoken to in the previous two days, he wrote, “simply shrug their shoulders at the idea of 100,000 persons massing in the city center. They are irritated by the thought of having traffic disrupted, being barred from their usual parking spaces on downtown streets or having to trek to work under fear and tension the huge demonstration will bring.”<sup>32</sup> At the bottom of the front page, the newspaper reported, in an un-bylined story, that two-hundred-seven African-Americans had left Charleston the previous night by special train for the march. “As the group boarded the train shortly before 11 p.m., they were seen off by a crowd of more than 1,000 friends, who gathered at the Atlantic Coast Line station in North Charleston.”<sup>33</sup> The newspaper published related stories and photos on two inside pages.

The day after the march, the newspaper published three front-page stories in its follow-up coverage, one of them a wire service account. Staff writer King reported that only two arrests had been made by capital police, while an unidentified staff writer wrote that the District had returned to normal under a headline far more tame than the trash-cleanup headline of the Jackson newspaper: “District Returns To Normal After Mass Demonstration.”<sup>34</sup>

The newspaper editorialized heavily on the march, in predominantly negative frames. Its initial editorial, a lengthy commentary published a day before the march, referenced the mantra of the marchers: “We shall overcome.” “Whom do they mean by ‘we,’” asked the newspaper. “Do they refer only to colored people? If so, whom do they intend to overcome? All white people? Or only those who do not wish to associate in varying degrees of intimacy.” This section of the editorial ended on a high note, however, arguing that if the march could “demonstrate true discipline, and encourage that quality elsewhere, it would be a new first step toward genuine freedom for both white and colored citizens.” Should that come about, the commentary asserted, in a constitutional frame, “grievances of the past, when blacks as well as whites held fellow men in slavery, could recede into the dim corners of history. Then Negroes and white people could stand, with malice toward none, on their own two feet, looking ahead together to freedom for everybody.” Following this hopeful note, though, the editorial devolved into a parochial, us-versus-the-North victimization frame, observing that New York’s mayor, Robert F. Wagner, “leader of the world’s largest Negro city,” planned to participate in the march. “About the same time he made the announcement, New York City policemen were cleaning City Hall of demonstrators who have occupied the place for many days. As the officers moved in, ‘pickets fell on police with fists and knees,’ The New York Times reported.” This scene took place, noted the

editorial, “not in Jackson, Miss., but in New York City. Though we have seen no pictures of mounted police in New York quelling racial demonstrators, The New York Herald Tribune printed a photograph of ‘an unidentified Negro who got too close to Plaquemine’s city hall’ being chased by mounted Louisiana troopers carrying electric cattle prods. Perhaps Mayor Wagner will equip New York horsemen with these devices.”<sup>35</sup> The newspaper published another lengthy commentary the next day, abandoning its upbeat tone of the previous day to adopt a law-and-order and South victimization theme in arguing that the “underdeveloped minority in our national life is the most highly organized. More than a dozen high-powered organizations, with professional directors and staffs, are managing the Washington march. They have the money and the training to set up their own police units and radio communications systems.” As for those Charleston African-Americans who attended the rally, the newspaper wondered if the expenses of that trip “might have been used for more constructive purposes” and fretted that white citizens, “who shoulder the financial burdens of community, have a right to be irritated at frivolity and wastefulness that is presented in the guise of ‘rights.’ The Washington March is typical of those who support it. They would rather attend a big show in a faraway city than stay at home and help their neighbors buy school books.”<sup>36</sup>

Similar to the white citizens’ get-out-of-town attitude in D.C. depicted by a staff writer of *The News and Courier*, *The Richmond News Leader’s* front-page staff-written story suggested a capital city on edge in advance of the march, with some white residents fleeing. “The concessionaire at the train station, the cabbie who drives you to the hotel, the college girl who shares the cab, the clerk at the hotel desk, the waitress in the restaurant, the people you meet in a two-hour Capital Hill stroll, that’s all they talk about—the march,” wrote Carl Shires. “There is nervous bravado in their voices ... and an under-current of apprehension. The cabbie tells you of the persons he drove to the station to get out of town. The man with the poodle in the park says he sent his family off to Delaware last week; the bus driver remembers the crawling week end traffic with cars laden with out-bound Washingtonians.”<sup>37</sup>

This newspaper, like its Southern brethren, relied on wire service reportage along with a four-picture photo array for the main front-page story on the march, while staff writer Ross Weeks wrote a feature sidebar for the front page describing the singing of freedom songs, the clapping of hands and the banner-waving of a group of three-hundred-to-four-hundred Richmond participants in the march. “The NAACP marchers left Richmond at dawn quietly, as if they were going to an all-day church outing. They arrived here awake and singing. At the northwest base of the Washington obelisk the Richmond marchers joined other Virginians to sing the freedom songs which have characterized most of the nation’s civil rights

demonstrations.”<sup>38</sup> Shires contributed a sidebar description of the convergence of the demonstrators on the capital city, who marched shoulder-to-shoulder, “from curb to curb and in waves that stretched for block after block . . . ”<sup>39</sup> This newspaper’s front-page aftermath story, rather than concentrating on trash and cleanup, focused its wire service reportage on the civil-rights leaders’ task of turning the drama of the march into action.

In its editorial on the march, the *News Leader* observed that the event was “quite a show” and applied a political frame to the demonstration, suggesting that it had little effect on the country or on Congress. Up on the hill, the writer argued, President Kennedy’s Civil Rights Bill “has not been altered by a comma—or a vote. It was a bad bill when the marchers came to Washington yesterday morning; and it was still a bad bill when they went home last night.”<sup>40</sup>

In a show of unanimity on one subject, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech was largely ignored by the Southern newspapers (only a brief reference by one of them) in putting forth, despite an outlay of staff resources and news space by some, an overall dismissive display of agenda-setting and framing for this event—and, on the editorial pages, largely negative victimization, law-and-order, racist themes in stark contrast to those of the Northern and Western presses. As for that so-called “bad bill” cited by the *News Leader*, President Lyndon Johnson, who took up the civil-rights banner after the assassination of Kennedy in November of 1963, would use the momentum of the March on Washington to press on for passage of the Civil Rights Bill the following year—an initiative that gained an unexpected, and ugly, boost by a terrorist bombing at a church in Birmingham on a peaceful Sunday morning in September. For now though, at the end of this first volume, the mood of the civil-rights activists got a boost from the successful, non-violent show of support for equality and opportunity in the nation’s capital.

## Words Matter

### Some Concluding Remarks and Observations

“There were, in short, two ways, and only two, of dealing with the South after the war, neither of which we adopted,” wrote the editorialist in 1871.

One was to treat the whole community as hostile or diseased and disorganized, and take charge of it from top to bottom, administer its justice, manage its finances, provide it with security of life and property, until such time as we were satisfied that it was competent to take charge of itself. This was the course which the highest statesmanship prescribed, but there were grave constitutional and political difficulties in the

way of resorting to it, and, although we have at various times advocated it, we have never been disposed to find fault with the majority in Congress for shrinking from it.

The other way was to treat the whole community as made up of unfortunate Americans, equally entitled to care and protection, demoralized by an accursed institution for which the whole Union was responsible, and which the whole Union had connived at, and, down to 1860, had profited by; rent and desolated by a bloody war; disorganized by the most radical social and industrial revolution ever witnessed. The first view was European, rather than American; this was purely American. It had no constitutional difficulties, or at least not so great constitutional difficulties, in its way, and it accorded in all respects with the habits and temper of the people and the machinery of the Government. We adopted neither plan, however, but a combination of the two, and the worst possible combination, the results of which have been positively infernal. In the idea that we were befriending the negroes, we gave them possession of the government, and deprived them of the aid of all the local capacity and experience in the management of it, thus offering the States as a prey to Northern adventurers, and thus inflicting on the freemen the very worst calamity which could befall a race newly emerged from barbarism—that is, familiarity, in the very first moments of enfranchisement, with the processes of a corrupt administration carried on by gangs of depraved vagabonds, in which the public money was stolen, the public faith made an article of traffic, the legislature openly corrupted, and all that the community contained of talent, probity, and social respectability put under a legal ban as something worthless and disreputable.

“Instead of establishing equal rights for all,” the commentary continues,

we set up the government of a class, and this class the least competent, the most ignorant and inexperienced, and a class, too, whose history and antecedents made its rule peculiarly obnoxious to the rest of the community. Out of this state of things Ku-kluxing has grown as naturally as Whiteboyism grew out of Orange rule in Ireland, and Kleptism out of Turkish rule in Greece. We condemn the Whiteboys, the Klephts, and the Ku-klux; we read the patriotic, humanitarian and law-loving denunciations of the last, which appear in the loyal paper with the North, with concurrence and approval. We cannot gainsay anything anybody says of the atrocity of riding about the country at night with one’s face blackened, murdering and whipping people. But we confess we condemn Ku-kluxing very much as we condemn the cholera. ... There is no more use in getting in a rage with Ku-kluxery, and sending cavalry and artillery after it, than of legislating against pestilence, as long as nothing is done to remove the causes.<sup>41</sup>

This essay was published by *The Nation* during Reconstruction. But it could have been published nearly a century later, during the civil-rights movement, and still maintain its salience; its thoughtful description of the errors of Reconstruction summarized some of the primary frames that newspapers—other than

word-of-mouth, the dominant information medium in terms of journalistic agenda-setting that the broadcast outlets followed—employed to inform their readers of the civil-rights movement.

One of the more prevailing frames was what I have termed the Southern folkways theme—the refrain, in the Southern newspapers, of a traditional, agrarian South that had come out of the Civil War, through the Reconstruction era and into the last half of the twentieth century with certain mores and customs intact: a benevolent but superior attitude toward an African-American populace that, as the argument went, just as it had been content and better-off under slavery, was comfortable with segregated (separate-but-equal) schools. In this view, it was a passive minority community willing—in fact, preferring—to shop and eat and swim in facilities set apart by race, that was pleased with an economic system that provided steady, albeit subservient, employment offering low wages and a modicum of opportunity. It was an easy, genteel style of living that accommodated and encouraged two distinct cultures, white and black, dominant and submissive. The Northern press sent white, liberal, educated reporters to observe the South; they filed dispatches describing a Southern style of society and economic structure that denied equality in economic and employment opportunity and access to the political system, that preyed upon the African-Americans, brutalizing them to adhere to a dual-pronged educational and criminal justice system that research long has shown discriminates against African-Americans and other minorities.

Which brings in another, more powerful, frame: constitutionality. Again, both the Northern and Southern press and, other than outlying frames from time to time in the Northern and Western newspapers (i.e. the *Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*, both politically conservative organs), invoked this frame, but with a key difference. The Northern and Western press framing was in a Fourteenth-Amendment context, with its emphasis on equal protection of the laws for all citizens, born or naturalized, of the United States, while in the South the newspapers put forth their constitutional arguments and reportage in a context of the Tenth-Amendment separation of federal and state authority, reserving certain responsibilities, duties and rights to the states. Thus, another frame, law-and-order, took on diverse meaning in the different regions—on behalf of federal authority upholding the constitutional rights of the federal government to enforce guarantees of equal access and opportunity, from voting to education, dining and bus-riding in those newspapers with a pro-integration frame, versus state and local authority to oversee and maintain the existing regimes, through local police and courts on behalf of segregationist dispositions. Other frames—including foreign image, political themes, states' rights, or personification (for example, attaching prominent people to events and incidents in favorable ways, such as casting Martin



Luther King, Jr., or President John F. Kennedy or his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, in a non-favorable light while extolling the principles and stances of Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus or Alabama Governor George Wallace)—took on similar contexts.

So, newspapers of all regions were invoking identical larger themes and principles but flavoring them with varying constitutional (statutory) and sociological/cultural interpretations. One theme unique to the Southern press, though, was the conspiracy, outside-agitator-driven victimization theme—one taken to Orwellian extremes in arguments suggesting that the real victims of the civil-rights demonstrations and brutality were not the ones being hosed, clubbed and imprisoned but, instead, were the communities, and their residents and officials, in which the demonstrations were taking place.

Story placement also was a factor in the framing. The most obvious example of this process was the decision by editors and/or owners at *The Birmingham News* to play the stories of the Project C Birmingham demonstrations and civil rights activities on inside pages—a narrative that other newspapers placed prominently on their cover pages. Similarly, the Charleston newspaper played its coverage of a local lunch counter demonstration inside. Language choice abetted the framing process. The most obvious example of this was the headline in *The Clarion-Ledger*, cited above, in its march on Washington coverage regarding the clean-up of African-American trash. But other, more subtle instances were abundant—for example, refusal by some newspapers to use the term “freedom-riders,” or employing descriptions of marchers as invaders or thugs, or as outside, communist-inspired agitators.

Gatekeeping and agenda-setting played significant roles in this framing. Gatekeepers—editors, publishers, reporters—omitted some stories, such as coverage of jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong and his decision to cancel a foreign trip because of racial attitudes in the United States, while other newspapers played up this and other stories. The most glaring example of this gatekeeping was the decision by editors and the publisher of *The Houston Chronicle* to collude with city business and political leaders to withhold any coverage of an agreement in that city to integrate its restaurants and diners slowly and quietly, so as not to disrupt business and the city’s food industry economy at the tail end of a lengthy diner sit-in movement. Story selection and placement was part of the gatekeeping—such as decisions by editors of Southern newspapers to include, in prominent placement, reaction stories of local politicians supporting police brutality and mass jailings of civil-rights demonstrators in the name of maintaining peace and law-and-order, or wire and staff dispatches of political reaction in Washington and state capitals in support of segregationist policies. These stories often were placed on the front

page alongside the more neutral wire dispatches that provided the primary information. The more obvious example of this strategy was the front-page play, by Southern newspapers, of official statements, framed in constitutional states'-rights and victimization themes paired with primary stories reporting the events of the day. Or the decision by editors at the Richmond newspaper to downplay the 1963 Project C racial demonstrations through extremely sparse coverage in an attempt to deflect the martyrdom of the savaged demonstrators in that city.

So, the gatekeeping procedure here would be more accurately defined as a filtering, or flavoring, agenda-setting enterprise. Omission of stories, or silence on a subject, speaks loudly. Ignoring topics is a manner of agenda-setting in that readers are shielded from alien, or foreign, or differing, views, severely damaging the Miltonian argument on which a representative democracy or republic is based: that truth will emerge from a variety of ideas. Thus, truth—the constructed reality—sometimes becomes the picture or narrative that is withheld, as opposed to a multitude of images that combine to portray a more accurate truth.

All of the analyzed newspapers demonstrated agenda-setting policies that revealed attitudes toward the events and policies of the civil-rights era—but some more than others. The Western newspapers, other than *The Denver Post*, which demonstrated a robust civil-rights-movement agenda by sending reporters to the South for on-scene coverage as the movement progressed, exhibited strong interest in covering events in the South with front-page placement. For the most part, though, these newspapers served as a distant relative, noting political and foreign-image ramifications as an interested but uninvolved party—deferring for the most part, though, to the federal government agenda. The Northern papers, especially *The New York Times* and, to a lesser extent, *The Detroit Free Press*, exercised a stout civil-rights agenda. *The New York Times* stationed full-time reporters and correspondents in the South, assigned to what Roberts and Klibanoff in their book aptly termed “the race beat”; *The Detroit Free Press* parachuted reporters into the South as news events boiled up, but then pulled them out when the waters calmed. *The Pittsburgh Press*, in a unique position as a member of a large newspaper chain with a news service that included reporters at some Southern newspapers, took advantage of this reporting network but did not expend a great deal of additional financial and staff resources to the race agenda in the South. The *Chicago Tribune* relied heavily on its news service but did not expend much in the way of resources to the Southern race beat other than for its relatively heavy coverage of the Emmett Till murder for parochial reasons: Till and his family were from Chicago.

Parochialism played a large role in the Southern newspapers' agendas. These newspapers devoted large news hole space and staff expenditures to cover the

events in their readership areas—*The Birmingham News*, for example, to Project C in its city, and the *Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson to events specific to Jackson and Mississippi. But these newspapers—and *The Houston Chronicle* is a prime example of this—performed more of a maintenance journalism than an active, agenda-setting reportage when it came to civil-rights events or developments in other Southern cities. This phenomenon was similar to the method of states'-rights framing; these newspapers focused on a local journalistic determinism while displaying umbrage at the interference of outside media attempts—especially visiting broadcasters—and their “liberal” leanings that offered different perspectives on what these newspapers considered home, and thus sacred, turf where outsiders—press and activists—were not welcome.

The most apparent, and strongest, agenda-setting in all of these newspapers was found on their editorial pages. This is where newspapers, despite claims of so-called objective or unbiased reporting on their news pages, show their ideological hands. And here is where agenda-setting plays out in ways other than the obvious frames—from constitutional and cultural norms to political interpretations. For example, frequency of editorials on a subject indicate the importance that newspapers attach to issues or events. *The New York Times*, along with *The Detroit Free Press*, offered more than one commentary on the March on Washington, which these newspapers supported, showing a stronger agenda on this subject than did the Southern newspapers, except one. A highly unique use of the editorial is its placement on the front page, indicating greater intensity of agenda-setting or show of interest—a technique that a couple of the Southern newspapers employed to underscore their segregationist arguments. Editorials, especially during the era of print newspaper dominance of the media landscape, represented a respected and credible source of opinion and thus enjoyed immense power in shaping public debate and public opinion—the very definition of agenda-setting.

The most powerful forces behind agenda-setting are found in the realm of factors that determine media content. The model developed by Shoemaker and Reese, as discussed in this book's introduction, reveals layers of influences behind content determination by the gatekeepers and agenda-setters. The most potent of these, by far, is ideology—i.e. media operating beneath the umbrella of a political and economic system that governs societal and cultural behavior. This is the level that most strongly influenced the newspaper debate in this nation during the civil-rights era. Newspapers of all political stripes adhered to the norms of the U.S. democracy in their framing; their thematic arguments, or framing, were carried out in the context of constitutional arguments, the Constitution being the legalistic and normative Bible of the democracy. They differed in constitutional interpretation, invoking either Tenth-Amendment or Fourteenth-Amendment analyses,

and this was the primary level of most of the argument. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their 2002 book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, similarly identify ideology—in their case, anti-communism—as the single strongest factor in determining media content. “The anti-Communist control mechanism reaches through the system to exercise a profound influence on the mass media,” the authors argued. “In normal times as well as in periods of Red scares, issues tend to be framed in terms of a dichotomized world of Communist and anti-Communist powers, with gains and losses allocated to contesting sides, and rooting for ‘our side’ considered an entirely legitimate news practice.”<sup>42</sup> The Southern press frequently cited alleged communist—or “outside”—influences in its framing of the coverage of civil-rights events by the Northern press and of the activism of civil-rights “agitators.” Substitute the word “integrationist” for “communist” and the concept of Southern folkways for democratic norms—substitutions the Southern newspapers facilitated—and the influence of ideology becomes apparent.

Both sets of media-content scholars cited here agree on the second-most-powerful determiner of media content: extramedial components. This level was apparent throughout the media coverage of the civil-rights era’s events. Government officials, from federal to state to local, including courts, policy-makers and law-enforcement administrators, were the key governmental-level agenda-setters of the movement. A second source of external forces was the civil-rights activists, who planned marches, staged sit-downs and freedom rides, who produced mass rallies and bore the beatings and arrests, who confronted governors on behalf of the right to a public education, in an orchestrated show of agenda-setting—who played a prominent role in the agenda-setting. Civilian rioters, marchers and mobsters also played an external role. The newspapers, obviously, set agendas, but primarily in reaction to events and decisions set in force by the other, more powerful, external players—though some newspapers, notably organs such as *The New York Times*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Denver Post* and some of the Southern newspapers, took on a more proactive agenda-setting role.

Shoemaker and Reese, and Herman and Chomsky also all agree on a third significant component affecting media content: media routines, primarily the selection of sources for their narratives. Here, again, is another important realm of press coverage of the civil-rights activities. Northern newspapers, and those in the West through their wire service accounts, relied heavily on official sources in the federal government—the president and administration officials, court sources and government documents, along with comment and information from Southern politicians and officials. Southern newspapers also frequently called upon the same wire services, but they more often turned to state elected officials and to

their own congressmen, along with local officials, bureaucrats and law-enforcement workers for their information—which, therefore, lent their coverage a more segregationist, or states'-rights, tinge. Beyond the wire stories, though, the use of sources showed great, and important, differences. For example, during the Project C activism in Birmingham, the Southern newspapers—particularly *The Birmingham News*—relied upon Public Safety Commissioner Eugene Connor, an avowed racist, for comment and authoritative information. The Northern press called more on the activists, such as Reverend Shuttlesworth, or Martin Luther King, Jr., for their information and comment. Sources, particularly those who are authority figures, lend credibility to reporting, so the selection of sources, especially those in positions of power and authority, for comment, information and interpretation, is important. Hence, source selection played a vital role in how the newspapers framed their coverage—particularly the complementary and local, in the case of the Southern newspapers, pieces produced by staffers and correspondents.

Combine these factors—the forces that determine media content, the differing framing and its complementary elements of agenda-setting and gate-keeping—and the result is a widely disparate range of reportage and interpretation of the same events and players. The Northern and Southern newspapers selected for this analysis produced similar accounts of the major events, primarily from wire service reportage shared by newspapers of all ideological ilk (except for *The New York Times*, unique in its nearly total dependence on staff writers and correspondents)—but they published widely different explanations and analyses, much of it distorted by factors that include information omission and/or enhancement, and framing. These differences mirrored those found in the national and regional debates, conversations, events and decisions that led up to the Civil War—hence the numerous Civil War references by newspapers and politicians throughout the civil-rights drama analyzed here—and that continued through the Reconstruction era. The Civil War and its ideological, cultural and social components, was prosecuted again in the pages of these newspapers during the civil-rights movement—a crusade that produced a mind-numbing deluge of barbarism and cruelty that it was difficult for any observer to view dispassionately.

On the subject of war and battle, media theorist and renowned political commentator Walter Lippmann produced a seminal work on the media and shaping of public attitudes in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*—a work, referenced in this book's introduction, that bears some examination through the lens of narrative framing and media content variables. Lippmann borrowed from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" in the introductory quote to his book to precisely, and poetically, drive home a major concept of his book—one that is applicable here. In the allegory, Plato placed a group of human beings in a cave. These people are chained in

such a way that they can only view a wall opposite them; light is provided by a fire behind them, which casts shadows onto the wall much the way that a projector flashes images on a movie screen. Through this allegory, Plato posits that what these chained prisoners in the underground den see is their perceived reality—the shadows, for them, represent truth—much as the narrative presented readers by their sole news source during the civil-rights era became their perceived reality.

Lippmann then weaves his own tale, one of an island where, during the onset of World War I, “a few Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans lived. No cable reaches that island, and the British mail steamer comes but once in sixty days.” When the next steamer arrived in September—several weeks after the war had begun—the island’s inhabitants learned that those who were English and French had been fighting the Germans in Europe. “For six strange weeks they had acted as if they were friends, when in fact they were enemies.” But, Lippmann argues, the plight of these imagined islanders was not that different from the situation of most of Europe’s population. The islanders “had been mistaken for six weeks, on the continent the interval may have been only six days or six hours. There was an interval. There was a moment when the picture of Europe on which men were conducting their business as usual, did not in any way correspond to the Europe which was about to make a jumble of their lives,” Lippmann wrote in developing a notion he called the “picture in their heads”—or, as Plato developed it, a perceived or constructed reality, as media theorists after Lippmann came to explain the theory of a reality created by media portrayal and interpretation of facts. “We can see,” Lippmann wrote, that news of the world “comes to us now fast, now slowly; but that whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself.” The argument Lippmann developed is that most of us live in an environment “which is in lesser or greater degree made by man himself. . . . We shall assume that what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.” Those pictures are a mediated message—they are provided by other witnesses who bring their own beliefs, histories and attitudes to the reality they are mediating, so that the question, for Lippmann, becomes “how this trickle of messages from the outside is affected by the stored up images, the preconceptions, and prejudices which interpret, fill them out, and in their turn powerfully direct the play of our attention, and our vision itself. From this it proceeds to examine how in the individual person the limited messages from outside, formed into a pattern of stereotypes, are identified with his own interests as he feels and conceives them.”<sup>43</sup>

I have devoted this much space to Lippmann’s concept of the formation of public opinion because it laid the groundwork for much of the development of the theory of constructed reality since then—a concept that, as we have seen, actually

dates back to the Greeks. But it is the principle, the precept, of constructed reality, not its origin, that is important here. This is because, as demonstrated by the examples and analyses of newspaper reportage here, the narratives of the events and policies of the civil-rights movement are a mediated reality. The dispatches published on the pages of the newspapers of the day were filtered facts and truths that, during times and events of heightened tensions and activity, such as riots or marches or major court rulings, drew increased media attention in a process I will call cumulative salience—an amplified production of constructed reality, or pictures in our heads, or flickering shadows on a cave wall—that lends greater credence and importance to the events being reported.

In the days of the civil-rights movement, televised news of the marches and riots and court rulings was limited in nature and scope by time—an hour each evening, perhaps, to capture news of war in Vietnam, rocket shots into space, Senate hearings on communist witch hunts, riots and clubbings in the South. And much of the televised reportage was based on, or driven by, national newspaper coverage, primarily *The New York Times*, which set the media agenda for most other media of the day, but also newspapers aspiring to national status such as *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *The Los Angeles Times*. That is why this book has included in its analysis some of these newspapers, along with newspapers that carried much influence and set the journalistic agenda for electronic media regionally—*The Denver Post*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Houston Chronicle*. In the South, a unique world unto itself, the newspapers informing the citizens of the states and cities where the civil-rights drama was staged frequently were, if not the only sources of local or state news, the primary sources of such news, such as *The Clarion-Ledger* and its sister newspaper in Jackson, and *The Birmingham News*—both the primary newspapers of the states where most of the civil-rights activism and events of this book took place. Similarly, *The Richmond News Leader* and *The News and Courier* in Charleston were principal sources of information in their states. Thus, the news—the constructed, mediated reality—that these organs provided about the civil-rights movement represented the real world for their readers. It was a perceived truth, heightened by cumulative salience, filtered through framing, gatekeeping and agenda-setting, shaped by ideology, extra-medial political forces and selective sourcing.

Is it any wonder, then, that residents of these Southern communities, receptors of a reality manufactured to represent a world and culture under attack from invading, communist-inspired agitators intent on disrupting a way of living and believing—is it any wonder that many of them responded violently to what they perceived to be an armed incursion, an attack on them and their well-being and very way of life—an attack that necessitated a violent response, as urged by some



editorials calling for insurrection? The Southern press, and some organs in other regions of the nation, share responsibility for the violence and deaths because of their distortion of truth and fact. Their coverage of the civil-rights movement, by and large, epitomizes the definition of framing put forth by media scholar Robert M. Entman in his 2004 book, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.”<sup>44</sup>

Words do matter.

And they matter still, in a modern era rife with demagoguery, in a media atmosphere not so much driven by newspapers but by television and the Internet riven by political differences, where ideology rules and demagogues thrive. It is a vastly expanded media environment, but one controlled by an increasingly smaller group of owners, each with their own agendas, ideologies and beliefs—as evidenced, most recently, by Sinclair Broadcast Group, the largest owner of television stations in the United States, ordering its news anchors in the spring of 2018 to deliver scripted speeches supporting President Trump’s indictment of “fake news.”

Much as the newspapers of the North and South waged ideological warfare with words that inspired action during the civil-rights era, cable networks and alternative media sources today battle each other through framing, sourcing (publicists posing as experts on discussion panels marked more by shouting than by reason) and gatekeeping that ignore or tarnish truth in favor of distortion intended to serve ideology—ideology that took root before and during the Civil War, that was nourished by Reconstruction, that thrived during the civil-rights movement and that remains with us today. Witness the back-and-forth discussion of a president accused, with sound reason, of racism, who enjoys the support of congressional representatives and conservative and so-called alt-media constructing an alternative reality intent on carrying out their own political and ideological agendas, the nation be damned, as this book chapter is written. Application and selection of language—framing—is a key element in this national debate.

Now, more than ever, with mediated information channeling the nation every moment instead of every day or hour, with cumulative salience bursting with each new “breaking news” revelation—now, more than ever before, words matter. In this modern era of white supremacy on the rise, of an assault on the nation’s women, minorities and citizens in the lower financial classes, of increasing xenophobia, of war declared on the cleanliness of the planet’s air, water, land, animals, and on a free press acting as watchdog, the use of language matters.

Because truth and facts, which are under assault by modern-age framers, gatekeepers, agenda-setters, and ideologues, matter.

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