

‘PUBLIC ORDER IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE RIGHTS OF  
NEGROES’: RACE AND RECREATION IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA,  
1927-1973

by

Michael Worth Ervin

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in  
History

Charlotte

2015

Approved by:

---

Dr. Sonya Ramsey

---

Dr. Cheryl Hicks

---

Dr. David Goldfield

©2015  
Michael Worth Ervin  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

MICHAEL WORTH ERVIN. "Public order is even more important than the rights of negroes:" race and recreation in Charlotte, North Carolina 1927-1973.  
(Under the direction of DR. SONYA RAMSEY)

In July 1960, Charlotte's Park and Recreation Commission enacted an official policy of desegregation in the city's parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and recreation centers. This development, which resulted in the first integrated municipal swimming pool in the state of North Carolina, seemed to embody the progressive business-centric ethos of Charlotte's white elite. While token desegregation was lauded by commentators as evidence of Charlotte's progressive race relations, the reality was far more complex. During the majority of the twentieth century, the Commission utilized a series of putatively moderate methods to suppress black dissent and muffle white reaction in the city. Even after de jure segregation crumbled, de facto segregation remained largely intact. This form of exclusion was buttressed by discriminatory public policies that redistributed black tax dollars to white communities, spatial segregation that insulated middle-and upper-class white neighborhoods from African Americans, and police harassment that fractured militant Black Power organizations. The persistence of these factors disempowered black residents in distinctive ways, perpetuating poverty and insecurity. Although modes of white reaction in Charlotte were less vivid than massive resistance or the violence found in other southern locales, the effects of these seemingly banal policies were remarkably similar.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work, like any other piece of academic writing, could not have happened without the tireless support of a number of collaborators. The insightful advice and guidance of my adviser, Dr. Sonya Ramsey, improved my understanding of Charlotte's story and deepened my interest in southern history. Meticulous edits and illuminating commentary from Dr. Cheryl Hicks and Dr. David Goldfield pushed me to understand the black freedom movement and urban history in a much broader context. Other members of the history faculty that provided encouragement and direction at crucial points include Dr. Gregory Mixon, Dr. Peter Thorsheim, Dr. Maren Ehlers, and Dr. Karen Flint. Special thanks also go to Ann Belk and the Everett Fellowship, whose support freed up crucial time for research in my first year. The staff of Special Collections in the J. Murrey Atkins library was essential in researching this topic. In particular, Tina Wright and Marilyn Schuster's exhaustive knowledge of the university's archives and Charlotte's history benefited my project enormously. I would also like to thank my fellow history graduate students, Layne, Emily, Jake, Allyson, and Ian, for their advice and friendship throughout this process. Because of their camaraderie, my time at UNC-Charlotte was both enjoyable and enlightening. My parents, Mary and Jim Ervin, were unfaltering in their encouragement and support during this enormously rewarding and challenging process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: ‘THE STREET WAS OUR PLAYGROUND’: THE RISE OF SEGREGATED RECREATION, 1927-1951	20
CHAPTER 3: ‘THERE LIES A SLEEPING GIANT, FOR GOD’S SAKE AWAKEN HIM’: PUBLIC LEISURE, LITIGATION, AND SPATIAL SEGREGATION, 1951-1966	69
CHAPTER 4: ‘TO SEEM RATHER THAN TO BE’: DIRECT ACTION, MILITANCY, AND CONSERVATIVE REACTION, 1963-1973	122
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY	186

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Charlotte's Wards, Courtesy of the Special Collections Unit of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission Papers.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Get on out, right now,” screamed a white father to his children.<sup>1</sup> Three adolescent black girls had just waded into the Revolution Park swimming pool, shattering the tranquility of a hot July day in 1960. Leading an exodus of roughly half the white swimmers from the pool, this parent demonstrated the depth of white disapproval for desegregation. Although the pool’s white patrons refrained from violence that day, most of them abandoned Charlotte’s public pools for the rest of the summer. Unlike many other Southern communities, key city leaders publicly condoned the actions of the African American youth, providing several uniformed police officers to prevent a potential riot.<sup>2</sup> This initial show of support, however, masked the obstructionist intentions of the Park and Recreation Commission, as well as the municipal government.

After this first carefully monitored test case, the Commission drafted a series of parameters designed to limit black attendance to white pools and to encourage the bulk of the African American population to continue patronizing the poorly maintained and inconveniently located facilities designated for their use. Justifying their gradualist stance, the Commission asserted that “of all public facilities, swimming pools put the tolerance of white people to the most severe test, and present the greatest danger of disorder.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Commission empowered pool directors to prohibit the

---

<sup>1</sup> Roy Covington, “Swimming Pool Desegregated: City Policy Statement is Issued,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> “Charlotte, N.C. City Swim Pool Integrated,” *The Evening Independent*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> “The Park Board Accepted Reality,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 29, 1960.

entrance of black swimmers, if they felt that unrest was imminent, a power that was exercised multiple times in 1960.<sup>4</sup>

Although municipal leaders would cite the token integration of the Revolution Pool as tangible evidence of Charlotte's progressive race relations, the story is far more complex. The first public pool desegregated in North Carolina, the NAACP's test case at Revolution provided an important region-wide precedent. This contribution, however, obscures the persistence of Jim Crow segregation in Charlotte's public, private, and commercial leisure spaces. Despite the city's progressive reputation, Charlotte's race relations were less than enlightened throughout the majority of the twentieth-century. Instead, this episode illuminates discrepancies in the city's anachronistic progressive veneer in a number of distinctive ways. First, although African Americans were technically allowed to visit white pools after 1960, resistance from white patrons prevented them from partaking in this privilege for several years.<sup>5</sup> Second, the lack of an immediate violent white reaction did not serve as evidence of idyllic race-relations. Rather, as this study demonstrates, white Charlotteans of all class-statuses resisted the inclusion of African Americans through a variety of methods, including boycotts, appeals to public officials, and flight to private facilities. Third, while this test ultimately provided some additional venues for black recreation, it did nothing to address the underdevelopment of public leisure spaces in Charlotte's predominantly black neighborhoods.

---

<sup>4</sup> Roy Covington, "4 Negroes Denied Admittance to Revolution Pool," *Charlotte Observer*, July 29, 1960; "Revolution, Cordelia Pools Not Visited," *Charlotte News*, August 4, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Gist to Leslie Barnard, April 10, 1964, Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

While Charlotte avoided race riots and other extreme forms of public disorder during the twentieth-century; this is not proof that local black citizens were unharmed by segregationist policies. Using leisure as a lens to analyze Charlotte's black freedom movement, it is possible to provide several important correctives to the narrative. Primarily, this perspective demonstrates how the inequitable distribution of tax monies for public recreation harmed majority black communities in distinctive and tangible ways. Although this form of oppression was less vivid than acts of white terrorism, the effects were equally harmful. Black youth, unable to reach adequate parks and playgrounds, were forced to venture into a treacherous urban landscape to recreate, often exposing themselves to bodily harm or legal danger. In a larger sense, lack of access to leisure space also contributed to numerous social ills, including juvenile delinquency, depression, and poor health. Not only did segregated public leisure spaces reinforce notions of white superiority and black inferiority, but the extraction of black tax dollars for use in white neighborhoods undermined the fiscal security of local African Americans. Second, segregation in public, private, and commercial leisure spaces deprived the black community of the right to fully occupy the urban space they resided in and handicapped attempts to build a sense of community in African American neighborhoods. Finally, segregated leisure spaces, like other facets of Jim Crow, were a daily reminder not only of black second-class citizenship, but also that African Americans were considered to be subhuman. This uneven pattern of development was not limited to leisure spaces, but instead reflected a profound misallocation of public works in general. The impact of these policies, however, was particularly visible in recreational facilities.

Beginning in the early-twentieth century African Americans in Charlotte utilized a variety of tactics to contest de facto and de jure segregation in the city's public, private, and commercial leisure spaces. Access to recreation was not a trivial matter for black residents, but instead served as the impetus for landmark legal cases, protests, and acts of militancy. From the first legal challenge to segregation in Charlotte in 1951, which was aimed at ending discriminatory practices at a municipal golf course, to large Black Power rallies demanding a more equitable distribution of parks and recreation facilities in majority black communities in the late-1960s, local African Americans resisted Jim Crow recreation in the spaces with remarkable tenacity. Despite the centrality of leisure to the black freedom movement, however, scholars have largely ignored this topic.<sup>6</sup> Although some historians of twentieth-century Charlotte have intermittently mentioned segregation in leisure spaces in their publications, there has been little analysis of how Jim Crow policies in these spaces shaped civil rights and Black Power activism, as well as white reaction.<sup>7</sup>

Leisure spaces provide an ideal venue to interrogate the intricate intersections of race, class, and gender in the twentieth-century American South. Unlike other public

---

<sup>6</sup> Exceptions to this trend include: Andrew Kahrl, "The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no.1 (February 2013), 113-125; Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*.

<sup>7</sup> Marianne Bumgarner-Davis, "Rending the Veil: Desegregation in Charlotte 1954-1975" (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 89-90; Evan Faulkenbury, "'Telenegro': Reginald Hawkins, Black Power, and the 1968 Gubernatorial Race in North Carolina" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2012), 44-46; Charles Westmoreland, "Strong Legs Running: The Integration of the North Carolina Shrine Bowl" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2000); Christopher Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States," (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1994), 1-37; Frye Galliard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 35, 92; Douglas, 4, 58, 60-61, 131; Damaria Etta Brown Leach, "Progress Under Pressure: Changes in Charlotte Race Relations, 1955-1965" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1976), 74-80.

spaces, recreation required a degree of physical proximity and intimacy that was considerably different than that encountered at the ballot box, lunch counter, or school house. Desegregated swimming pools, parks, and playgrounds threatened white Southerners with frequent interaction with black citizens outside the bounds of the rigid Jim Crow hierarchy. These fears were compounded by low-cut athletic clothing, as well as the unique visibility of both black and white bodies in leisure spaces, which challenged evolving conceptions of gender and sexuality in the American South in substantive ways.<sup>8</sup> Concerns about the possibility of desegregated leisure were particularly salient amongst lower-class whites, who viewed black inclusion as a grave threat to their own status. For these reasons, white reaction to challenges to segregation in recreational facilities was markedly different than other comparable spaces. Faced with these variables, the white power structure responded vigorously, with municipal and business leaders exhausting legal and procedural means in an attempt to stall desegregation efforts and maintain the status quo.<sup>9</sup> Lower-class white reaction to desegregated leisure, however, manifested itself in more vivid forms including counter-protests, threats, boycotts, and even violence. The existence of these every-day forms of resistance

---

<sup>8</sup> Wiltse, 8-10.

<sup>9</sup> This study defines the term “white power structure” fairly broadly. In essence, this label applies to two manifestations of white power in the Jim Crow racial hierarchy, namely economic power and state power. The first prong, which is composed of Charlotte’s white economic elite, controlled black access to employment, housing, as well as goods and services. These businessmen, lawyers, and factory owners benefited from cheap African American labor and controlled the prices of consumer goods in black neighborhoods. Moreover, these leaders had a vested interest in Charlotte’s progressive reputation because well-publicized racial strife would discourage investment in the community. The second category is composed of white municipal leaders and workers, who both crafted and enforced exclusionary policies in Charlotte. Members of the city council, county commission, and the mayor played crucial roles upholding the Jim Crow caste system, prioritizing public works in white communities, contesting desegregation challenges in the courts, and instituting gradualist desegregation policies. Like the city’s business elite, these municipal leaders also understood that racial conflict would harm the community’s image nationally, undermining fragile economic prosperity. For a similar model, see: Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 257-258.

significantly undermines the narrative of progressivism espoused by the local government and Chamber of Commerce.

With a focus on leisure, a more insurgent movement appears, with the concerns of lower-class African Americans, women, and youth at the forefront of the struggle. These actors, largely ignored by previous analyses of race relations in Charlotte, were the most marginalized by segregated public leisure spaces and inequitable public policies. Rather than being socially and politically apathetic, black Charlotteans of all ages, classes, and both genders demonstrated their agency through a variety of methods. Moreover, tensions predicated on class and gender taboos become apparent, illuminating relevant divisions amongst both black and white communities. Above all, Charlotte's progressive image can be seen as façade, obscuring the persistence of discrimination by private and state actors, even years after token desegregation had been accomplished. An analysis of segregated leisure exposes heretofore unseen community tensions, providing a more complex and problematic view of desegregation in Charlotte into the 1980s.

The chapters that compose this study are supported by diverse range of primary sources. By using the papers of civil rights and Black Power activists in tandem with those from white municipal and business leaders, it is possible to view the black freedom movement's strategic direction and white reaction within a larger context. Moreover, drawing from several oral history collections, this study intends to provide a grassroots perspective of civil rights and Black Power struggles in Charlotte, giving voice to previously invisible lower-class, female, and youth actors. These perspectives are also contextualized with a variety of government documents, including city council minutes, police reports, and census data. Finally, this study will use local, state, and national

newspapers to reflect the varied responses to civil rights and Black Power activism in Charlotte, as well as white reaction. Taken together, these sources will provide a complex and multifaceted view of the black freedom movement in Charlotte during the twentieth-century.

This work separates the struggle for desegregated leisure into three broad thematic chapters. The first chapter explores the rise of segregated public recreation facilities in Charlotte between 1927 and 1951, as well as the methods used by both African Americans and lower-class whites to overcome the lack of public leisure spaces. Furthermore, this section seeks to contextualize the rise of Jim Crow segregation with a number of related threads; including New Deal funding, urbanization, and municipal politics. Chapter two delves into the NAACP's legal campaign to abolish segregation in public leisure spaces in the years between 1951 and 1965. In an attempt to protect Charlotte's progressive image, white municipal and business leaders endeavored to suppress conflict, using procedural and legalistic means to combat token desegregation. Although these legal challenges successfully dismantled many vestiges of de jure segregation, de facto segregation persisted in parks, pools, and playgrounds in Charlotte's predominantly white communities. Moreover, public policy makers continued to underdevelop leisure spaces in majority black neighborhoods. Chapter three documents rising black discontent with the hollowness of token desegregation, as well as the municipal government's continued neglect of public works in majority black regions of the city. Tracing the rise of Black Power in Charlotte, as well as the subsequent reaction of law enforcement, this section analyzes the decline of the radical black freedom movement in Charlotte. Cumulatively, these chapters will challenge the orthodox narrative of

desegregation in Charlotte, recognizing the agency of a diverse array of historical actors, as well as casting significant doubts about the city's progressive image.

An analysis of segregated recreation in Charlotte intersects with several significant historiographical debates. First, this study adds to a growing body of scholarship that reexamines the significance of public accommodations to the black freedom movement.<sup>10</sup> Although historians have developed nuanced understandings of the quest for equal education, housing, and political rights, public accommodations remain a neglected topic.<sup>11</sup> Rather, many scholars have dismissively dealt with this topic, contending that after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill the desegregation of public space occurred quickly and seemingly effortlessly.<sup>12</sup> This misconception ignores a considerable body of work that documents protracted white resistance to the desegregation of public accommodations.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, historians have contended that the study of public accommodations overly privileges an integrationist framework, ignoring the concerns of Black power movements and sharing an anachronistic overemphasis on non-violent activists and national protest movements.<sup>14</sup> Likewise,

---

<sup>10</sup> The label "public accommodations" is relatively fluid and ambiguous. Generally, scholars define "public accommodations" as a public or private entity that provides services to the general public, typically for a fee. Examples of public accommodations include restaurants, retail outlets, recreation facilities, entertainment venues, gas stations, and grocery stores. For examples of other scholars' definitions see: Victoria Wolcott, *Race Riots and Rollercoasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 235; Randall Kennedy, "The Struggle for Racial Equality in Public Accommodations," in ed. Bernard Grofman, *Legacies of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 162.

<sup>11</sup> Wolcott, 2-5; Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 73.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of this reductionist view, see: Robert Loewy, *To End All Segregation: The Politics of the Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 331.

<sup>13</sup> Notable examples include Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Wolcott, *Race Riots and Roller Coasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation*; Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Evolution in the American South*.

<sup>14</sup> Wolcott, 2-3.

analyses of public accommodations have also been accused of being overly legalistic, neglecting the significance of grassroots activism.<sup>15</sup>

Victoria Wolcott disputes these claims and posits that the desegregation of public accommodations was “desired by African Americans throughout the country. Just because white liberals, who saw integration as the primary goal of racial equality, also embraced this objective does not diminish its centrality in the black freedom movement.”<sup>16</sup> Patronizing public accommodations was a highly sought after goal for African Americans in mid-twentieth century urban South. Access to these facilities was seen as a critical component to achieving equality for several distinct reasons. First, being denied access to these contested spaces prevented African Americans from fully engaging in the United States’ developing consumer culture.<sup>17</sup> Second, because black exclusion was often justified on the basis of “uncleanliness,” many community members sought to gain access to public accommodations to refute this stereotype.<sup>18</sup> Third, denial of access to public space was a highly visible manifestation of racial segregation, providing an ideal venue to challenge discrimination. Wolcott’s narrative cites these reasons and demonstrates that disputes over access to public accommodations were “not only the purview of southern non-violent activists but a national movement that included

---

<sup>15</sup> The legalistic perspective is typified by Richard Cortner, *Civil Rights and Public Accommodations: The Heart of Atlanta Motel and McClung Cases* (Topeka: University of Kansas Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Wolcott, 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Kahr, “The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930.” *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no.1 (February 2013), 121; Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

teenagers, mothers, and ordinary consumers.”<sup>19</sup> These correctives allowed Wolcott to re-envision the significance of public space.

Framing the desegregation of public accommodations as part of a larger conflict over equal access to urban space, Wolcott contradicts previous histories that assumed Black Power groups were uninterested in gaining access to these establishments.<sup>20</sup> Instead, Wolcott emphasizes that Black Power activists were not concerned with inclusion into white society, but instead with “power and possession.”<sup>21</sup> Stokely Carmichael put it simply, “I am black, I know that. I also know that while I am black I am a human being. Therefore, I have the right to go into any public place.”<sup>22</sup> By accessing these spaces, Black Power groups asserted their rights to coexist along whites as equal in confined urban spaces. As a subset of public accommodations scholarship, historians have also neglected the social significance of the desegregation of recreation facilities.<sup>23</sup>

Despite this deficit some historians have begun to use recreation to dissect the peculiarities of Jim Crow society. Historian Andrew Kahrl, combining a thematic focus on recreation with a spatial methodology, demonstrates the complex interrelationships between leisure and economic development in the New South. Balancing the concerns of broadleaf tobacco agriculture, the Great Migration, commercial leisure, and white

---

<sup>19</sup> Wolcott, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3. For more discussion on the linkages between civil rights and Black Power in North Carolina see Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Tyson, “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 85, no 2 (September 1998): 540-570.

<sup>21</sup> Wolcott, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Stokely Carmichael, “Speech at University of California at Berkeley,” October 29, 1966, in *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*, eds. Catherine Ellis and Stephen Smith (New York: New Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>23</sup> Wolcott, 2.

supremacy in early-twentieth century Pitt County, South Carolina, in an article entitled “The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930,” Kahrl provides a compelling argument for the study of segregated leisure.

Kahrl explains:

The ‘Negro park’ question did not alter the balance of power in Pitt County so much as it revealed some of the ways that power operated in this changing rural landscape. It did not instigate a fundamental transformation in the meaning of race but rather demonstrated the inherently contingent, place-bound, and spatial nature of race. The spatialization of leisure in the rural South and the conflicting demands of commercial and agricultural economies profoundly influenced both white and black understandings of the difference race made, giving rise to new forms of race-based exploitation, altering relations of power and dependence, and providing new avenues for African Americans to negotiate white supremacy and pursue economic empowerment.<sup>24</sup>

Specifically in Pitt County, white agriculturalists supported the development of black leisure spaces, an action that seems to contradict basic precepts of Jim Crow hierarchy. The logic of this stance, however, becomes clear when Kahrl outlines how segregated riverside resorts discouraged black migration out of the South, providing the white bourgeois with a stable labor force. This support allowed black business men opportunities to cater to middle- and upper-class patrons, providing them with a modicum of stability. White real estate developers resisted the black resort’s operation, which forced its owners to exclude black patrons, heralding the financial decline of the business.<sup>25</sup> By applying this intricate understanding of the economic and spatial dimensions of segregated leisure to upper-South urban locales, like Charlotte, it is possible to provide a more nuanced analysis of the operation of Jim Crow.

---

<sup>24</sup> Kahrl, “The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930,” 116.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 135-142.

A study of segregated recreation in Charlotte also contributes to a larger debate over the chronological and thematic boundaries of the black freedom struggle. During the past three decades historians have challenged the “master narrative” of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>26</sup> This framework is characterized by top-down perspectives that overemphasized the significance of national movements, non-violent activists, and dismissed the contributions of Black Power militants.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, this narrative focused almost exclusively on the South and limited its temporal scope from the 1954 *Brown* decision to the 1964 Civil Rights Bill.<sup>28</sup> Revisionist scholars, however, have challenged this orthodox interpretation. An early illustration of this is William Chafe’s *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Struggle for Black Freedom*, which emphasizes the need for histories that examine the political, economic, and social transformations of a single community.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, micro-historical studies became a popular methodological approach for evaluating civil rights and Black Power activism, illuminating the contributions of local actors.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most influential example of this trend, however, is Charles Payne’s seminal *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. In this monograph, Payne rejects many of the fundamental assumptions of the master narrative, instead concluding that:

---

<sup>26</sup> The label “master narrative” was coined by civil rights veteran Julian Bond. Brian Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the Valley of the Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>27</sup> An example of this master narrative is August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> Purnell, 2.

<sup>29</sup> William Chafe, *Civil Rights and Civilities: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Struggle for Black Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Examples of local studies include: John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

the sheer volume of material written from a top-down perspective implies that the dynamism of the movement is to be understood in terms of these national leaders and national organizations. But the more closely one looks at history, the less comfortable one becomes with reducing the tens of thousands of people across the South to faceless masses, singing, praying, and marching in the background.<sup>31</sup>

Rejecting orthodox conclusions about the black freedom movement, Payne instead posits that the leadership of “ordinary” African Americans guided and sustained the movement. This brand of community organizing brought by older African Americans in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was not focused on relatively short-term public events, but instead on long term community mobilization.<sup>32</sup> This increasingly local and populist understanding of the Civil Rights Movement became a dominant force, inspiring a number analyses focusing on grassroots activism.<sup>33</sup>

This discussion further evolved in 2005 when Jacquelyn Hall published an article entitled “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” which argues that historians should expand their conceptions of the civil rights movement to include pre-1950s activism and the Black Power struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>34</sup> Hall posits that “by confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerize heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement.”<sup>35</sup> Contesting the idea of a simple legacy, Hall envisions a radical and ongoing civil rights movement aimed at fundamentally restructuring the racial, economic, and political system in the United

---

<sup>31</sup> Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 1-6.

<sup>33</sup> A recent example of this trend is Barbara Ransby's *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); For the grassroots origins of Black Power see: Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Jacquelyn Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 1234.

States. Hall eschews the perception of a moderate Civil Rights Movement, instead situating the activism of King and others in a larger radical and democratic worldview. This new schema emphasizes continuity with the protest movements of the 1930s and 1940s, rather than accepting the precept that the more assertive activism of the 1950s and 1960s was a wholly unique development.<sup>36</sup> Applying these interpretive lenses to Charlotte's experience illuminates meaningful resistance prior to the 1950s, as well as unearths the linkages between the struggle for desegregated leisure spaces and the African American community's larger economic, social, and political goals.

Significantly, Hall contends that the rise of the Black Power Movement did not represent a decline in the civil rights agenda.<sup>37</sup> Although the long civil rights thesis remains controversial, even its critics concede that it has uncovered significant local histories, highlighted the role of female activists, and emphasized the black freedom movement's contingent nature.<sup>38</sup> By limiting the geographic scope of this study to Charlotte, the concerns of previously invisible local residents and leaders are rescued from relative obscurity. This narrow focus also allows for the examination of localized conditions, namely spatial segregation and novel legal circumstances, resulting in a more nuanced and probative analysis. Furthermore, understanding the struggle for civil rights in the context of a larger struggle of social, political, and economic rights unveils new insights about the goals of local black freedom organizations.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 1250-1258.

<sup>37</sup> Dissenters include: Sundiata Keita Chau-Jau and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as a Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 265-288; Steven Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement" in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Danielle McGuire, John Dittmer. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 2011), 9-37.

<sup>38</sup> Lawson, 13.

Finally, a focus on Jim Crow segregation in recreation facilities challenges orthodox assumptions about the nature and goals of civil rights and Black Power activism in Charlotte. While histories of Charlotte have emphasized struggles in education, housing, local politics, and the judiciary, recreation has been largely ignored.<sup>39</sup> Generally, analyses of the black freedom movement in twentieth century Charlotte have focused on middle-and upper-class leaders, ignoring the contributions of the grassroots activists. Damaria Leach's master's thesis, "Progress under Pressure: Changes in Charlotte's Race Relations, 1955-1965" adheres to this trend. Using comparative analysis, Leach explores the activism of three prominent local leaders, Dr. Nathaniel Tross, Kelly Alexander, and Reginald Hawkins.<sup>40</sup> This thesis attributes the progress made in race relations during this period to strategic public relations efforts and legal pressure applied by these three activists. While this analysis is not wholly incorrect, Leach dramatically underestimates the influence of lower-class African Americans, as well as Black Power activists. In particular, Leach's analysis of militant leader Reginald Hawkins is wanting. Leach contends that "by the end of the 1960s distaste for Hawkins' self-promotion, and doubt thrown onto his character by voter fraud and malpractice charges brought against him, had all but destroyed his effectiveness as a leader."<sup>41</sup> A focus on grassroots protest in Charlotte during the late-1960s contradicts this assertion,

---

<sup>39</sup> For residential segregation see: Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting out the New South City: Race Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); An example of the progressive view includes Mary Norton, *Charlotte: Spirit of the New South* (Winston Salem: Continental Heritage Press, 1980); For a focus on African American community life see Vermelle Diamond, *Charlotte, North Carolina: Black America Series* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2001); For education see Davison Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); To view the fight for equal justice see Christopher Schutz, "Going to Hell With the Devil: The Charlotte Three Case and the Decline of Grassroots Activism in 1970s Charlotte, North Carolina (Ph.D Diss., University of Georgia at Athens, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Leach, 1-4.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 166.

instead situating Hawkins at the center of a nascent Black Power Movement in the city. Just because Hawkins alienated himself from white liberal politicians and some upper-class African American leaders, does not necessarily mean he was an ineffectual activist.

Other works on black freedom in Charlotte have placed inordinate focus on the contributions of white liberals in the municipal government, the judiciary, and the white business community. The most glaring example of this tendency can be located in Bernard Schwartz's 1986 *Swann's Way*. Schwartz, elevating the role of Judge James McMillan, essentially contends that the demise of Jim Crow segregation in Charlotte was the product of a sympathetic judicial system.<sup>42</sup> This conclusion was also sustained by Marianne Bumgarner-Davis in her 1995 dissertation "Rending the Veil: Desegregation in Charlotte 1954-1975," which examines this period through collective biography. Exploring the leadership strategies of Reginald Hawkins, Stanford Brookshire, and James McMillan, Bumgarner-Davis concludes that McMillan's decision to uphold the *Brown* ruling was "the most important ingredient in Charlotte's story."<sup>43</sup> Although journalist Frye Galliard's *Dream Long Deferred* provides more coverage of African American contributions to the black freedom movement than many other studies, this narrative is more descriptive than explanatory. Documenting the struggle to desegregate Charlotte's school system, Galliard argues that "whatever the experience of other cities, busing was not a tragedy in Charlotte. The inescapable truth of this city's experience is that by almost any measure you care to apply, busing succeeded in the first place it was tried."<sup>44</sup> While this study, unlike Schwartz or Bumgarner Davis', provides commentary on the

---

<sup>42</sup> Schwartz, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Bumgarner-Davis, iv.

<sup>44</sup> Galliard, xii.

struggles of black actors, Galliard mainly credits middle- and upper-class leaders for desegregation efforts.

Similarly, Davison Douglas' lauded 1995 *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of Charlotte Schools* also views the black freedom movement through the lens of Charlotte's white power structure. Unlike older histories, Douglas provides a cursory description of black organizations and protest tactics, but the driving force in his narrative are the decisions of white jurists, businessmen, and politicians. Douglas consistently emphasizes that "the desegregation process in Charlotte thus supports the conclusions of those who have noted that white business leaders, motivated by economic considerations, positively influenced the breakdown of racial segregation in southern communities."<sup>45</sup> Although Douglas cedes that white business leaders initially resisted busing in the wake of *Swann*, he concludes that the white power structure eventually realized that economic growth was more important than racial custom.<sup>46</sup> Douglas' analysis provides an interesting vantage point on the black freedom movement in Charlotte, but it is lacking in several respects. First, although Douglas recognizes the centrality of Charlotte's business-centric ethos in the 1950s and 1960s, he fails to adequately explain why moderate leaders were able to retain positions of authority during this tumultuous period. Second, his study neglects to recognize the agency of ordinary African Americans, as well as the subtle means of resistance they used to subvert white authority on a day-to-day basis.<sup>47</sup> Rather than simply being victimized by the South's

---

<sup>45</sup> Douglas, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>47</sup> Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Worker Class* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 1-18.

racial caste system, lower-class actors routinely disrupted white institutions, businesses, and norms.

Accepting George Lipsitz's prescient conclusion that "racism takes place," these factors will be considered in relation to Charlotte's spatial layout.<sup>48</sup> Although many historians have ignored urban geographies, Lipsitz argues that "racialized space gives whites privileged access to opportunities for social inclusion and upward mobility. At the same time, it imposes unfair and unjust forms of exclusion on aggrieved communities of color."<sup>49</sup> Understanding that Jim Crow leisure spaces were not natural or inevitable developments in the process of urbanization, but instead were socially-constructed, allows the observer to understand the social, economic, and political significance of the layout of urban space in the black freedom struggle. This vantage point illuminates a narrative that is centered on place rather than personality. By focusing on transitions in the racial status quo of various public, private, and commercial leisure spaces, it is possible to construct a narrative that encompasses the agency of a variety of previously invisible actors and organizations.

A spatial methodology yields several distinct benefits.<sup>50</sup> First, by viewing the development of new parks, playgrounds, pools, and recreation centers geographically, it is possible to see how city budget allocations harmed black communities. Although public works were often distributed unevenly amongst white neighborhoods and communities of color, recreation provided a particularly visible manifestation of this trend. Second, because leisure spaces, both public and private, were principally

---

<sup>48</sup> George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Places* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Other examples of this methodological approach include: Wolcott, 1-30; Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Mark Gottendeiner, *The Social Construction of Urban Space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985); Edward Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

frequented by the members of the immediate community, there was a sense that these facilities “belonged” to the neighborhood that surrounded them.<sup>51</sup> This perception of possession made it difficult for African Americans to access historically white leisure spaces, even after years token desegregation was accomplished. Instead, white patrons persisted in treating black Charlotteans as unwarranted intruders in a way that is sharply contrasted with other public accommodations. As this study demonstrates, the desegregation of leisure in Charlotte occurred in a distinct spatial context, shaping the contours of local Jim Crow society as powerfully as any other factor.

The significance of this story transcends the city limits of Charlotte, however, yielding valuable insights into the operation of Jim Crow in the New and Sunbelt South. In urban centers throughout the South, similar struggles unfolded, with African Americans pressing recalcitrant city governments for their rights. Although, at first glance, access to leisure appears to be a trivial issue, at least when compared to voting or education rights, nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, as this narrative will show, African Americans in Charlotte fought for the better part of a century to secure recreation for themselves and their community. During that period, black residents utilized every method available to them to contest their exclusion; however, spatial, legal, and procedural factors stymied many of their attempts. From petitions for better funding to court cases demanding equality, black men, women, and children of all classes resisted the constraints of their time. When these methods failed to catalyze substantive change, African Americans took their grievances to the street, illuminating the persistence of discrimination to both national and international audiences.

---

<sup>51</sup> Wolcott, 169.

## CHAPTER 2: "THE STREET WAS OUR PLAYGROUND": THE RISE OF SEGREGATED RECREATION, 1927-1951

Charlotte expresses a recreational attitude which is historic and peculiar. It is the result of the immigration of Scotch-Irish settlers into this section in large numbers. They knew no time for leisure and labored from morning until night. Amusement was fool's play and to them recreation was found in "plowing a field," "painting a barn," or "cutting a cord of wood..." The Negro, regarded as a mere machine, was even more subjected to this attitude. It was absurd to think of him as playing. His job was in the fields. This attitude exists today among many citizens of Charlotte. They can see no reason why money should be spent to provide anyone with a swimming pool, tennis courts, or gymnasium, much less the Negro.<sup>52</sup>

A report, written by a panel of Johnson C. Smith professors and students in 1939, expressed deep disdain for the underdevelopment of leisure spaces in Charlotte's black neighborhoods. Composed of middle-and upper-class African Americans, this body rejected their exclusion from white parks and recreation facilities, while simultaneously seeking to distance themselves from the forms of leisure pursued by less affluent members of their own race. Although the study's participants proposed a variety of solutions to the recreation dilemma, ranging from the creation of community-based institutions to lobbying for more suitable segregated public facilities, their understanding of the benefits of adequate recreation was clear.

These members of the black bourgeois agreed that the lack of leisure spaces represented a structural form of Jim Crow with distinct consequences, contributing to poverty, crime, and dissatisfaction in African American communities. For these reasons,

---

<sup>52</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 20-22.

Charlotte's parks, swimming pools, and recreation centers became important focal points in the struggle for black freedom in Charlotte. While the Johnson C. Smith study understood segregated recreation within a distinct socio-religious context, relating the city's discriminatory public policies to Scotch-Irish austerity and white constructions of black citizenship, the reality was more complex. The problem had deeper roots, with these influences constituting only components of a thoroughly engrained system of paternalism and privilege that guided race relations in twentieth century Charlotte.

Segregated leisure spaces were an important facet of Jim Crow society, allowing whites to maintain physical distance from African Americans and to retain a superior position in the South's social hierarchy. These spaces were not of trivial value to either race, but instead were considered essential to the mental and physical wellbeing of urban dwellers in the early-twentieth century. Parks and playgrounds enabled urbanites, at least temporarily, to escape the overcrowded conditions of rapidly growing twentieth century cities and provided much appreciated distractions from monotonous factory work. African American communities in particular considered recreation a panacea for numerous social ills, including juvenile delinquency and economic marginalization.<sup>53</sup> For whites, however, the racial exclusivity of public leisure spaces was a central component of their value, incentivizing resistance to African American inclusion.<sup>54</sup> Although middle-and upper-class whites had access to commercial forms of leisure, most specifically country clubs, these options were foreclosed to less affluent whites. This began to change, however, in the early-twentieth century. Responding to increased demand from lower-class whites and blacks in the 1920s and 1930s, public policymakers

---

<sup>53</sup> T.J. Woofter, *Negro Problems in Cities* (New York: Negro University Press, 1928), 234-236.

<sup>54</sup> Wolcott, 6.

in many New South cities endeavored to create more extensive and adequate systems of public recreation.<sup>55</sup>

The networks of municipally funded leisure established by white bureaucrats in the early-twentieth century were rigidly segregated and, almost uniformly, neglected to include suitable facilities for black residents. While Charlotte began modernizing its parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities later than other comparable New South cities, the pattern of segregated recreation that emerged adhered to this region-wide trend.<sup>56</sup> Funded principally through New Deal recovery programs, the exclusionary nature of these systems harmed black communities economically, as well as socially. While temporary employment created by the construction of white-only recreation facilities went to laborers of both races, the permanent managerial and maintenance jobs located in these new leisure spaces went primarily to whites.<sup>57</sup> Although these developments were not localized, with segregated leisure spaces springing up in all other New South cities, analyzing segregation in this context provides a fresh perspective on Jim Crow's operation in Charlotte, as well as the larger fight for equal rights in urban America.

---

<sup>55</sup> Andrea Tuttle Kornbluth, "Municipal Harmony: Cultural Pluralism, Public Recreation, and Race Relations," in *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: Blacks in the Industrial City, 1900-1950*, eds. Henry Louis Taylor and Walter Hill (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 73-80.

<sup>56</sup> For descriptions of Greensboro, Durham, and Richmond's expenditures on recreation compared to Charlotte's in 1938 see: "Park Board Seeks More Recreation Facilities," *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1939. Between 1930 and 1960 Charlotte's population expanded and urbanized at a rapid rate. In 1930 Mecklenburg County had a population of 127,971 inhabitants, out of which 64.6 percent resided in an urban setting. By 1960, the county's population had more than doubled, reaching 271,211 residents, with 77.9 percent living in an urban setting. Carolina Population Center, *County Population Trends North Carolina 1790-1960: State, Region, County Residence, and Color*, North Carolina Population Data Series No. 1, March 1969, 65.

<sup>57</sup> In 1938, only six African Americans were employed in Charlotte's Parks and Recreation system. These employees were part time, often otherwise occupied as students at Johnson C. Smith University. Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 12; For a discussion of the racial breakdown of New Deal era labor see Harvard Sitkoff, *Towards Freedom Land: The Long Struggle For Racial Equality in America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 28-29.

In Charlotte, African Americans consistently resisted the uneven distribution of public resources for leisure. Although their tax dollars funded the city's recreation programs, black Charlotteans saw little return on their investment during the first half of the twentieth-century. Adopting a bifurcated strategy, African Americans lobbied for a more equitable distribution of public recreation facilities, while simultaneously developing private leisure venues in an attempt to satisfy the community's needs. Because these tactics were unable to provide substantive results, Charlotte's black youth sought to subvert Jim Crow segregation by seeking unofficial spaces to recreate amongst Charlotte's urban landscape. Examining recreation in this context reveals several important correctives to the narrative of Charlotte's black freedom movement. First, resistance to segregation in leisure spaces illuminates a more insurgent fight for equal rights, driven by the concerns of black youth, than scholars have previously acknowledged. Because young African Americans had a larger vested interest in access to recreation facilities than older residents of the city, they tested the boundaries of Jim Crow segregation in leisure spaces in unprecedented ways. Second, the municipal government's consistent neglect of black leisure spaces in the 1930s and 1940s problematizes Charlotte's image as a racially progressive New South city. Third, observing resistance to segregated recreation uncovers important divisions, predicated primarily on class, age, and gender, within Charlotte's black community.

An analysis of segregated leisure in Charlotte demonstrates that African Americans contested segregation through a variety of methods and channels, even prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision.<sup>58</sup> Despite these efforts, however, Charlotte's municipal

---

<sup>58</sup> This conclusion tentatively supports Jacquelyn Hall's "Long Civil Rights Thesis," which contends that the roots of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s can be found in the struggles

government continued to expand white recreation facilities, while concurrently funding only minimal improvements to the leisure spaces provided to African Americans.

Tokenism and accommodation quelled black resistance prior to WWII, allowing municipal leaders to divert the vast majority of public monies to white recreation. The success of these moderate obstructionist policies, however, sowed the seed for the rise of protest movements in the city. Segregation in public recreation did not evolve in a vacuum, but instead was shaped by larger social and economic trends.

Although Charlotte's transformation into a major Southern urban center did not occur until WWII, the roots of the city's economic and spatial growth can be traced to the Civil War. While the ravages of war devastated the South's economy, Charlotte's transportation and economic infrastructure survived relatively unscathed.<sup>59</sup> This privileged position was reinforced by the combination of a successful cotton crop in 1866 and a supply-starved market.<sup>60</sup> A relatively prosperous business climate served as the impetus for an influx of both black and white southerners who had been displaced by the war.<sup>61</sup> Initially, it appeared that Reconstruction would herald a new social and political order in Charlotte, but like elsewhere in the South, the legal promises made to freedmen were broken within a few decades. Although black Charlotteans asserted themselves politically, economically, and socially in the wake of the war, this brief window of social

---

against segregation in the 1930s. Additionally, Hall contends that the black freedom struggle, especially in its early stages, was focused more on economic goals than many scholars assume. Hall, 1233-1263. Kahl provides an example how economic forces shaped the fight for leisure space in the South. Andrew Kahl, "The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930," 113-142.

<sup>59</sup> Dan Morrill, *The Civil War in the Carolinas* (Charleston: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 2005), 477.

<sup>60</sup> Hanchett, 23-24.

<sup>61</sup> Between 1860 and 1870 Mecklenburg County's population increased from 17,374 to 24,299. Unsurprisingly, the end of the Civil War also heralded an increase in Charlotte's African American population, which rose from 39.4 percent of the population to 44.1 percent between 1860 and 1870. Data derived from: Carolina Population Center, 65.

opportunity was brought to an end by a successful disenfranchisement movement orchestrated by leading Democrats in 1898.<sup>62</sup> This race-baiting campaign shattered the fragile alliance between North Carolina's Populist Movement and the Republican Party, resulting in the rise of the Jim Crow hierarchy.<sup>63</sup>

Jim Crow developed concurrently with a turn towards residential segregation in Charlotte. Although Charlotte's spatial evolution from a "salt and pepper" arrangement, which was not rigidly defined by race or class, to a strictly segregated ward system began in the late-1800s, the process accelerated dramatically during the 1930s. Charlotte's seismic spatial rearrangement was driven by a multitude of forces, however, the most influential included increased automobile ownership, New Deal grants for urban development, rapid population growth, and industrialization.<sup>64</sup> Federal aid reshaped Charlotte's residential layout through two primary programs. First, the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934 exacerbated suburbanization in Charlotte. Essentially, the FHA insured the home loans of borrowers across the nation, insulating banks against the possibility of default. Aiming to encourage the construction of new homes, this program lowered down payments for home loans, allowing potential buyers to pay smaller amounts over longer periods. In order to qualify for FHA loans, however, borrowers had to demonstrate both their "economic stability" and "freedom from adverse influences."<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hanchett notes that "in practice this meant an absence of nonresidential land use, and it meant a strict separation by race and income

---

<sup>62</sup> Janette Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White Better Classes of Charlotte, 1850-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1-3

<sup>63</sup> Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2-18.

<sup>64</sup> Hanchett, 224-225.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 232-233.

level.”<sup>66</sup> Similar to the experiences of other Southern urban areas, FHA loans in Charlotte served as the impetus for rapid suburbanization between 1934 and 1962.

The intricacies of FHA regulations privileged large developers, leading to the creation of massive subdivisions that were racially and economically homogenous. The application of racially restrictive covenants by white developers further solidified the racial rearrangement initiated by the FHA. Although the majority of these loans went to white Charlotteans, some African American suburban developments emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. These subdivisions contributed to a decline in the middle-and upper-class population in historically black portions of the city, most notably First, Second, and Third Wards.<sup>67</sup> Cumulatively, the effect of FHA grants in Charlotte was to draw middle-and upper-class Charlotteans from the city’s increasingly impoverished core and redistribute them to the suburbs. The suburban developments that resulted from FHA loans were markedly different than the city’s previously heterogeneous racial geography. Bettye Golden Holloway, a resident of the historically African American inner city Brooklyn neighborhood, elaborated, “that’s the way it was all over the city. White folks did not live in black communities.”<sup>68</sup> Suburbanization effectively separated middle-and upper-class citizens of both races from their less affluent counterparts.

The second New Deal project that transformed Charlotte’s racial geography was a series of federally funded public housing programs. Despite being adamantly opposed by Charlotte’s large real estate brokers and business elite, the Charlotte Housing Authority

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>68</sup> Bettye Golden Holloway, interview by Jennifer Payne, April 26, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

was created on November 30, 1938.<sup>69</sup> In a preliminary survey that year, the Housing Authority reported that “4,500 residences—one-fifth of the city’s dwellings—urgently [were] in need of plumbing, heat, or other major improvements.”<sup>70</sup> Seeking to provide an alternative to these difficult living conditions, the Housing Authority began drafting plans for a series of low cost public housing projects. Financed primarily by a 2.14 million dollar Wagner-Steagall Loan, the Housing Authority’s plans came to fruition on July 22, 1940 when the black-only Fairview Homes complex was completed. A corollary facility, Piedmont Courts, was created for lower-class whites on January 1, 1941.<sup>71</sup> The pattern of building separate units for Charlotte’s white and black residents persisted until the mid-1950s, serving to further fissure Charlotte’s population along racial and class lines. The development of public housing projects in Charlotte had the practical effect of grouping lower-class white and black citizens into strictly segregated and compartmentalized communities within the city.

New Deal programs culminated in a dramatic demographic reorganization that yielded significant economic and political consequences for Charlotte’s African American citizens. Segregated principally in Charlotte’s First, Second, and Third wards, racially and economically insular communities developed. Fracturing previously heterogeneous communities along class lines, this rearrangement caused the interests of

---

<sup>69</sup> “Charlotte Housing Authority,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, November 30, 1938, Book 27; Hanchett, 238.

<sup>70</sup> Hanchett, 238.

<sup>71</sup> Wagner-Steagall Act, which is also commonly referred to as the Housing Act of 1937, established the Federal Housing Authority. This bill was an expansion of the 1934 National Housing Act. The FHA was tasked with allocating subsidies to local Housing Authorities in order to provide low cost housing to impoverished urban residents. Hanchett, 238.

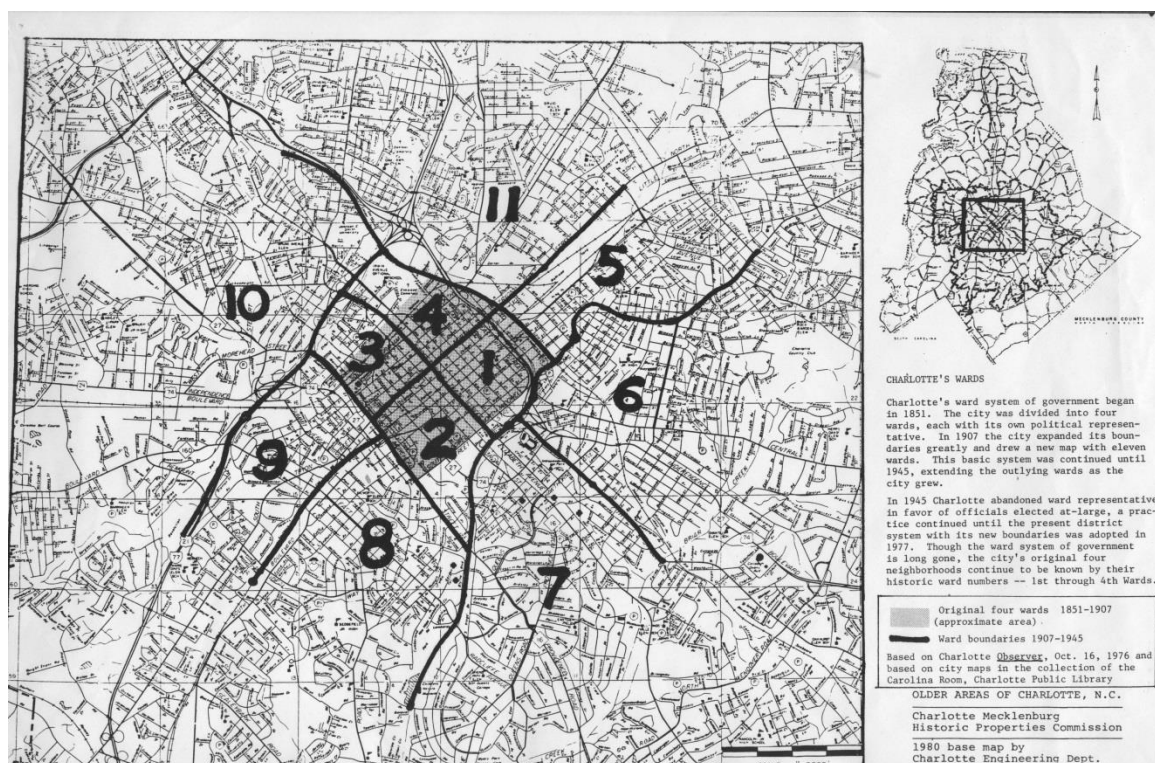


Figure 1: This map traces Charlotte's spatial evolution from 1851 to 1945. The effect of New Deal programs was to cause Charlotte's population to be concentrated in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> wards. Suburbanization shifted whites to the outer wards and to the periphery of the city. Charlotte's Wards, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

lower-and upper-class African Americans to diverge in substantive ways. Insulated from the hardships of Charlotte's impoverished wards, middle-and upper-class African Americans were less inclined to rally for improvements in inner city public works. Another practical effect of this changing landscape was that by the 1930s, Charlotte's "ward system virtually guaranteed the defeat of black candidates."<sup>72</sup> Although there were attempts during the 1930s and 1940s by upper-class African Americans to gain footholds in various aspects of Charlotte's municipal government, these efforts were resolutely defeated.<sup>73</sup> The emergence of Charlotte's segregated ward system prevented the election of an African American candidate to the City Council until 1965.<sup>74</sup>

Politically disenfranchised and rendered invisible, black communities were frequently neglected by city planners. While public works in Charlotte's white communities rapidly improved during the first half of the twentieth century, black neighborhoods were routinely ignored. Dirt roads and inadequate schools lingered much longer in majority African American areas than they did in predominantly white and affluent sections of Charlotte.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, after the Park and Recreation Commission began modernizing the city's recreational facilities during the late-1920s, the public leisure spaces developed in the 1930s and 1940s were almost exclusively reserved for whites. While the turn towards spatial segregation mirrored similar patterns in other New

---

<sup>72</sup> Randy Penninger, "The Emergence of Black Political Power in Charlotte, North Carolina: The City Council Tenure of Frederick Douglas Alexander, 1965-1974" (Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1989), 12.

<sup>73</sup> There were several attempts orchestrated by the Citizens' Committee for Political Action to elect black candidates to municipal offices. The first attempt was Second Ward native Bishop Dale's 1934 city council race. Undeterred, Dale ran once again in 1949, but once again he was met with defeat. Similarly, Reverend James Wertz unsuccessfully ran for a seat on the Charlotte City School Board in 1949. Penninger, 11-12.

<sup>74</sup> Penninger, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Douglas, 6-10.

South cities, the development of leisure spaces in Charlotte was, to a degree, shaped by localized concerns.

Charlotte's attitude towards public recreation emerged from a distinct historical context, marked by fiscal and political conservatism. Prior to the early-1930s, Charlotte's municipal government exhibited a reluctance to invest in or systematically plan a network of public recreation facilities. This trend mirrored larger social and bureaucratic trends within the state.<sup>76</sup> During the early-twentieth century, progressive era reformers repeatedly fought for urban planning in Charlotte, however they were fiercely contested by the local conservative business elite. A principal example of this is planner John Nolen's failed 1917 attempt to create a series of parks, interconnected by greenways, throughout Charlotte.<sup>77</sup> Ideally, this proposed layout would facilitate communications between the city's many neighborhoods, binding a diverse citizenry into a larger fabric. Particularly repulsive to Charlotte's business elite, Nolen's plan called for extra taxes to be collected in high income neighborhoods in order to fund parks and greenways in the city's slums.

This idealistic proposal, however, was rejected by Charlotte's ruling business class, who insisted that "boulevards and greenways seemed a frivolous thing for a municipality to spend tax dollars on."<sup>78</sup> Resoundingly opposed to investing money in public works, especially on parks, government officials were also not interested in

---

<sup>76</sup> For an excellent analysis of how fiscal conservatism was replaced by business progressivism in the late-1920s see: Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>77</sup> Although Nolan's main project failed, he was responsible for designing the Myers Park neighborhood. The layout of this community serves as a testament of Nolen's larger plan for Charlotte. Hanchett, 219.

<sup>78</sup> Hanchett, 219.

funding projects to benefit Charlotte's low income neighborhoods.<sup>79</sup> Principally concerned with keeping taxes low, while simultaneously discouraging regulation, these powerful conservatives stonewalled the majority of public works projects before the late-1920s. Hanchett posits that during this time "Charlotte leaders agreed wholeheartedly that the city should stay far away from any effort to plan or guide urban development."<sup>80</sup> This anti-planning mentality persisted until the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the arrival of federal funding to Charlotte. The reorganization of Charlotte's government, coupled with the advent of business progressivism, and New Deal era projects served as the stimulus for dramatic changes in municipal policy.

During the 1920s North Carolina experienced a significant economic boom. Textile mills and furniture factories rapidly began to replace agriculture as the dominant force in the state's economy.<sup>81</sup> This newfound economic progress radically altered North Carolina's political landscape, allowing business progressivism to supplant fiscal conservatism. Seeking to encourage industrial migration to North Carolina from the North, this philosophy necessitated investment in public works in order to craft a favorable business climate. This drive was spearheaded by newly elected governor and "voice of Charlotte's business community," Cameron Morrison.<sup>82</sup> Charlotte, like the rest of North Carolina, began improving education, roads, and public works at an unprecedented pace. It is important to note, however, that this new form of progressivism had limitations. While business progressives were interested in modernizing and expanding the state's infrastructure, they remained unconcerned with

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>81</sup> Christensen, 52.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 52.

extending rights to African Americans or elevating the lower-class out of poverty.<sup>83</sup>

Reflecting this statewide trend, Charlotte's attitude towards recreation evolved in meaningful ways during the late-1920s.

In 1927 Charlotte's government underwent a bureaucratic reorganization that allowed for an unparalleled expansion of public leisure space in the city. This shift was not an anomaly, but instead reflected a nationwide wave of enthusiasm for public recreation in urban centers. Andrea Kornbluth notes that in the late-1920s, "many Americans came to regard public recreation as a public utility, just like the sewers, the streets, and the water system."<sup>84</sup> This cultural change, which occurred concurrently with the New Deal's reorientation of government's relation to social welfare, swept the nation. Community advocates lobbied for recreation for several distinct reasons, including a desire to make urban spaces more livable, to foster democratic values, and to encourage a sense of community in urban neighborhoods.<sup>85</sup> Similar impulses swept through Charlotte, overcoming historically conservative attitudes and serving as the impetus for a newfound appreciation for public recreation. Prior to 1927 Charlotte's public leisure spaces were managed by the Park and Tree Commission, a local board without a professional staff or any significant funding source. Created in May 1927, the Park and Recreation Commission, which was authorized by an act of the North Carolina Legislature, consisted of seven board members. Serving five year terms and receiving no compensation, these commissioners were appointed by the City Council.

Capitalizing on the new climate of business progressivism in North Carolina, the Park and Recreation Commission successfully lobbied for and passed a referendum

---

<sup>83</sup> Chafe, 5-7.

<sup>84</sup> Kornbluth, 80.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 73-81.

authorizing “a two cents sales tax on the hundred dollars assessed valuation for the purpose of financing the Commission’s Program.”<sup>86</sup> This new revenue stream allowed the Commission to appoint a full-time professionally trained superintendent and a small staff to manage the city’s leisure holdings and to develop a recreation program for Charlotte. The Commission’s bureaucratic reorganization, coupled with the increase in public funding for recreation, allowed for a sizeable expansion of the city’s facilities.

Despite these systemic changes, however, the Park and Recreation Commission inherited an insufficient and poorly designed network of public recreation. In 1927, Charlotte’s municipal recreation program included approximately 165 acres of land devoted to public parks.<sup>87</sup> Inadequate to accommodate a population of 83,000, much of the land devoted to recreation was undeveloped, inconveniently located, and suffered from damaging erosion.<sup>88</sup> Initially, the principal holdings of the Commission were composed of Independence Park, Latta Park, Cordelia Park, Colonial Park, and Morgan Park. Even Independence Park, the Commission’s oldest and most developed space, was riddled with various landscaping and equipment shortcomings. A history drafted by Commission officials in the late-1960s lamented the initial condition of the park:

Independence Park, consist[ed] of approximately 46 acres, practically all of which was sub-marginal land carrying a very heavy runoff of storm water. The Park contained five rather mediocre tennis courts which were in very bad condition, an athletic field, and a poorly equipped playground near Hawthorne Lane.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Park and Recreation Facility Handbook, August, 1969,” 1.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, “A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939,” 22.

<sup>88</sup> Carolina Population Center, *County Population Trends North Carolina 1790-1960: State, Region, County Residence, and Color*, North Carolina Population Data Series No. 1, March 1969, 65. Johnson C. Smith University, “A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939,” 22.

<sup>89</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 2.

The Commission's other holdings were even more dilapidated than Independence Park. Outlining the various deficiencies of Cordelia Park in 1927, the same report assessed that the park "consist[ed] of 24.0 acres [of] rocky land running down to a flat covered with underbrush, brambles and trash and [was] entirely undeveloped."<sup>90</sup> One possible explanation for this continued neglect is that the existence of several country clubs satisfied the recreational needs of Charlotte's middle-and upper-class whites.<sup>91</sup> While this apathy left lower-class whites devoid of suitable leisure spaces, the status quo was far worse for Charlotte's black residents.

Predictably, the worst maintained and smallest park managed by the city was also the only public leisure space available to African American residents. While rural southern locales encouraged the development of black leisure spaces, in an attempt to stem the tide of the Great Migration and maintain a stable agricultural work force, public policy in urban centers was less motivated by labor conditions.<sup>92</sup> A Commission report described conditions at Morgan Park, Charlotte's only public park for African Americans, concluding that "the area consisted of five acres, the gift of Mr. Meyers, who developed Myers Park, and was totally undeveloped."<sup>93</sup> Clearly, Morgan Park's pitiful five acre span, which remained the sole park available to African Americans until the early-1940s, was incapable of meeting the recreation needs of Charlotte's 25,160 black residents. Remarking on the inequitable allocation of recreation facilities and funding, an African American mail clerk asserted that:

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid," 2.

<sup>91</sup> For a description of these exclusive establishments, their principle clientele, and their amenities, see: Dan Morrill, *Historic Charlotte: An Illustrated History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County* ( San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2001), 70-72.

<sup>92</sup> Kahrl, 113-115.

<sup>93</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August 1969," 2.

The recreational facilities in Charlotte are not representative of a city of this size. There is only one park for the public use of Negroes and it can hardly be termed as such. Not until Negroes wake up to their needs, not until the leadership of Charlotte works unselfishly for the interests of their race, can we hope to improve the situation.<sup>94</sup>

Further problematizing the utility of Morgan Park was its geographical location.

Located in West Charlotte, Morgan Park was divorced from the bulk of the city's black population and was nearly impossible for many African American children to reach.

While there were substantial problems with Charlotte's white only recreational facilities, those issues paled in comparison to the difficulties inherent in leisure recreation. The stark disparities between the facilities offered to African Americans and those provided whites only widened in the two decades after the Commission's creation.

Charlotte's system of public recreation began modernizing after the 1930s; but the vast majority of the Commission's funds were spent on improving and expanding facilities for white citizens.<sup>95</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, the onset of the Great Depression fueled a drastic upswing in the development of Charlotte's public leisure spaces. Funding from federal sources and generous grants from white business owners served as the impetus for a bold modernization campaign. The largest projects envisioned by the Commission were undertaken with the explicit condition that they would never become accessible to African Americans.<sup>96</sup> This was accomplished by the inclusion of racially restrictive covenants and reverter clauses in the deeds of these properties, which obligated the city to return them to their previous owners if the covenant was violated.

---

<sup>94</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 23.

<sup>95</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, August 1969," 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Wyche and Spottswood Robinson, "Petition: Charles W. Leeper, et. al. to the City of Charlotte," 1951, Box 1, Folder 1, Joseph W. Grier Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; The Stephens Company to the Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission," March 22, 1944, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Examining the development of these facilities demonstrates that while there was a concerted effort to modernize Charlotte's recreation facilities in the 1930s and 1940s, African American communities were routinely neglected.

By allocating the vast majority of the city's funds for the construction of white leisure spaces, African Americans were excluded from the social and economic benefits of New Deal Programs. Between the Great Depression and the Second World War, Charlotte's Park and Recreation Commission invested the vast majority of Works Progress Administration (WPA) labor and funding on the development of modern recreation facilities for white Charlotteans.<sup>97</sup> This unofficial policy had important implications for Charlotte's black labor force. First, because the spaces created by New Deal expenditures were overwhelmingly reserved for Charlotte's white citizens, the long-term jobs created by the construction of these areas went primarily to whites.<sup>98</sup> Second, while the investment of WPA funds and labor increased property values in white communities, there was no comparable effect in black neighborhoods. Cumulatively, these impacts served to redistribute African American tax dollars to white communities, skewing the impact of New Deal programs in Charlotte. The best example of this discriminatory practice can be found in the construction of Revolution Park.

First envisioned in 1927, Revolution Park was meant to embody the Park and Recreation Commission's renewed efforts in Charlotte. Unlike the Commission's existing facilities, Revolution's grounds were designed to house a variety of programs and activities, many of which catered to middle-and upper-class Charlotteans.

---

<sup>97</sup> For a survey of WPA projects in Charlotte see: Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August, 1967, 1-5; Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 1-15.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 12.

Revolution's construction was funded by a variety of sources, including land grants from local benefactors, tax revenue, and through New Deal programs. The bulk of the land required to create Revolution, approximately 240 acres, was provided by local developers Osmond Barringer, W.T Shore, and T.C. Wilson.<sup>99</sup> Owning significant real estate holdings directly adjacent to the proposed park, these businessmen presumably hoped to increase the property values in their growing developments. This speculation is somewhat substantiated by the fact that the donors attached a restrictive covenant to the land deed. First, this covenant stipulated that the Park and Recreation Commission must spend five thousand dollars "improving" the land per year for eight years. Second, the park should never be allowed to fall into "disuse." Third, the land could never be used for any purpose apart from recreation. Finally, the deed required that Revolution Park must remain a whites only space.<sup>100</sup> In the event that any of these conditions were violated, the covenant contained a reverter clause that was designed to transfer ownership of the park and any facilities built to Barringer, Shore, and Wilson.<sup>101</sup> Agreeing to these conditions, the Commission began work on Revolution Park in 1927.

In the years directly preceding the Great Depression, the Commission endeavored to shape Revolution Park into a model for middle-and upper-class public recreation. The timetable for Revolution's construction betrayed the Commission's upper-class focus during this period. Ignoring the concerns of lower-class whites and communities of

---

<sup>99</sup> There were also several other smaller property donations in 1927. The largest of these came from E.C. Griffith, who donated approximately 16 acres of undeveloped land. Unlike the grants from Barringer, Shore, and Wilson, however, these smaller parcels were not gifted conditionally. The restrictive covenants all originated from the 240 acre allotment. Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, 1969," 2; Charles Reynolds, "Donors Seek Return of Revolution Park," *Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 1944.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Reynolds, "Donors Seek Return of Revolution Park," *Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 1944.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Wyche and Spotswood Robinson, "Petition: Charles W. Leeper, et. al. to the City of Charlotte."

color, the Commission concentrated their efforts on creating a golf course at Revolution.<sup>102</sup> The Commission did not publicly justify their choice to build an upper-class leisure space, but presumably their decision was shaped by a desire to enhance the value of Barringer, Wilson, and Shore's real estate developments. Upon completion, the course was fairly rudimentary, at least when compared to neighboring private country clubs, housing only nine holes and lacking a clubhouse. Despite these shortcomings, the Revolution course represented Charlotte's first attempt to provide upper-class white citizens recreation opportunities with the public's tax dollars. While this uneven development was not initially contested by lower-class whites and African Americans, as the twentieth century wore on, civil rights groups repeatedly used Revolution to illustrate how the municipal government allocated public leisure space unevenly.<sup>103</sup> Soon after the golf course's completion in May 1930, however, the onset of the Great Depression temporarily stalled the development of additional amenities.<sup>104</sup>

While the arrival of the Great Depression caused a drastic reduction in tax revenue, the implementation of New Deal Programs provided a much needed injection of labor and capital for public recreation in Charlotte. After securing WPA funding in early-1936, the Commission embarked on two major projects to improve recreation for the city's white denizens.<sup>105</sup> The first project was geared towards creating a modern stadium in Independence Park, located in the center of the predominantly white Elizabeth

---

<sup>102</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, August, 1969," 2.

<sup>103</sup> Beginning in the 1950s and persisting until the 1970s African Americans and lower-class communities became increasingly aware of the distribution and quality of public leisure spaces in Charlotte: "Petition of Charles Leeper, et. al," December 20, 1951, Joseph Grier Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Delores Arrington to James Martin, April 1970, John Belk Papers, Box 2, Folder 9, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>104</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, August, 1969," 2.

<sup>105</sup> "A Resolution Relative to the Construction of Concrete Seats in the Municipal Stadium," January 15, 1936, Book 25, Charlotte City Council Minutes, p.156.

community. Dedicated to Charlotte's WWI veterans, this new facility was named the American Legion Memorial Stadium. By March, the Council and WPA officials reached an agreement on how to split the cost of this project. The approved contract stipulated that the Park and Recreation Commission would bear roughly 30 percent of the cost, while the WPA absorbed the remaining 70 percent.<sup>106</sup> This torrent of federal funding allowed for the completion of Memorial Stadium by 1937.<sup>107</sup> Hosting a variety of events ranging from high school football games to professional wrestling, Memorial Stadium merged recreation and entertainment in Elizabeth. The first WPA recreation project accomplished in Charlotte, the construction of Memorial Stadium represented the beginning in a series of rapid improvements to Charlotte's whites-only recreation infrastructure.

The second project undertaken by the Commission was the construction of a public swimming pool. Initially, there was some debate between members of the City Council and the Commission about the best location for this new facility. Ultimately, the discussion narrowed to two possible sites; either Revolution or Independence Park. On August 26, 1936, with one member abstaining, the Council narrowly decided that Revolution Park was more centrally located and would therefore be more accessible to Charlotte's white population.<sup>108</sup> Once the location was settled, the Commission approached the WPA requesting funding and labor for the project. The result of this inquiry was an agreement that was nearly identical to the one established to fund the creation of Memorial Stadium. In this contract, the Commission also agreed to bear 30

---

<sup>106</sup> "A Resolution Relative to the Construction of Concrete Seats in the Municipal Stadium," p. 156.

<sup>107</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August, 1969," 3.

<sup>108</sup> "Swimming Pool Program," Charlotte City Council Minutes, August 26, 1936, Book 25, p.432.

percent of the cost, while the WPA covered 70 percent. This deal, which provided for the construction of both a swimming pool and a community center on Revolution's grounds, left the Commission responsible for raising approximately 60,000 dollars.<sup>109</sup> Although the Revolution Pool would not be completed until 1938, and the community center would wait until 1949, this initial investment illuminates the inherent inequality of the Commission's policies.<sup>110</sup> While these fiscal programs appear banal, they were not trivial developments for communities of color.

Equal access to public leisure spaces signified more than just the opportunity to recreate for Charlotte's African American community.<sup>111</sup> Rather, admission to adequate recreation represented a multitude of different meanings that were contingent on the variables of class, age, and gender. A self-described "working girl" summarized her desire for recreation concretely, as a "diversion from the daily grind."<sup>112</sup> This sentiment was echoed by a medical doctor who observed that additional parks would allow African Americans in Charlotte to "escape the bare realities of life and the same monotonous routine."<sup>113</sup> Although distraction from the hardships of day-to-day life remained a consistent concern for African Americans, access to recreation was also seen to have deeper implications for community well-being.

Many residents understood the significance of leisure in more abstract terms, arguing that it was a necessary component for the social uplift of Charlotte's African American population. Summarizing this particular viewpoint, a Johnson C. Smith

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 432.

<sup>110</sup> "Park Project is Announced: Community Recreation Center at Municipal Swimming Pool Will Be Opened," *Charlotte Observer*, October 14, 1949.

<sup>111</sup> Wolcott, 235

<sup>112</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 24.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 24.

professor asserted that “the benefits of wholesome recreation and amusement are recognized as occupying an important place in the prevention of crime, in the acceleration of general vocational efficiency, and in the improvement of human welfare.”<sup>114</sup> In particular, the concept that access to recreation would prevent juvenile delinquency and improve scholastic performance was a particularly salient point amongst black Charlotteans. This perspective was epitomized by a teacher surveyed in the Johnson C. Smith study who contended, “I believe that a park with indoor as well as outdoor activities would improve the physical fitness of the youth and solve the disciplinary problems which arise from the desire to play.”<sup>115</sup> Although there was a general consensus amongst Charlotte’s black community that the leisure opportunities available to African Americans in the 1930s and 1940s were severely underdeveloped, there was little agreement on how the situation should be remedied.

African Americans in Charlotte were not ignorant of the Commission’s efforts to modernize the city’s white facilities. Viewing this pattern of inequitable development, some black community members voiced their discontent to the City Council. On February 24, 1937 local African American activist Chester Nixon appeared before the Council imploring them to “consider the matter in the light of justice, and that this [segregation] law should be repealed and people be allowed to play golf, baseball, and other sports, including the opening of Negro swimming pools.”<sup>116</sup> It is important to note that while Nixon advocated the desegregation of most facilities, he recognized the immense taboo of integrated swimming pools. Interestingly, WPA planners also recommended the creation of an African American pool in the Cordelia neighborhood

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>116</sup> “Sunday Baseball,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, February 24, 1937, Book 27, p. 85.

during this period, but the Commission voted down this measure in December 1936. A number of issues influenced this decision; however, lack of funding was a primary concern.<sup>117</sup> Instead, they chose to sponsor a segregated swimming pool in the predominantly black Greenville neighborhood. Similarly to Revolution, the land reserved for the pool had been donated by E.C. Griffith in 1930. Although this step represented a drastic refiguring of Commission policy, there were inherent issues with this pool's location and design.

The Fairview Pool was not a suitable facility for several distinct reasons. An African American minister lamented that it "is too far removed from the bulk of the population."<sup>118</sup> Situated in the Greenville section of Charlotte, this pool was difficult, or even impossible, for residents of inner city wards to reach.<sup>119</sup> Adding to the inconvenience of this pool's position was the fact that it was directly adjacent to an active railroad. Train traffic both disturbed the tranquility of the pool and endangered the lives of youth attempting to reach the structure. Apart from issues of location, the Fairview pool was not a purpose built facility. Rather, it was adapted from a water-filtration plant that had fallen into disuse in recent years. Finished in May of 1936, this swimming pool typically remained open from June 1 to August 31.<sup>120</sup> The problematic placement of the Fairview pool, coupled with a lack of funding from the Commission, made its continued operation ultimately unsustainable.

Although the pool required a fee of fifteen cents adult admission and ten cents for children, this meager sum was not enough to pay for maintenance and the salaries of the

---

<sup>117</sup> "Swimming Pools," City Council Minutes, December 2, 1936, Book 26, p. 12.

<sup>118</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 24.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>120</sup> "Negro Recreational Center," Charlotte City Council Minutes, May 27, 1936, Book 25, p.321.

pool's staff. By 1938 the Fairview pool was running a 1,500 dollar annual deficit, enough to severely jeopardize its continued operation.<sup>121</sup> Within a few years, Fairview's maintenance backlog accumulated to such a degree that the "pool was condemned by the State Health Department later and was closed."<sup>122</sup> Throughout the late-1930s the Negro Citizen's League protested this closure, requesting that the Commission appropriate funds to remedy this situation.<sup>123</sup> The Negro Citizen's League's effort bore fruit on July 12, 1940, when the Commission agreed to request 15,000 dollars of funding and labor from the WPA to return the pool to a serviceable condition.<sup>124</sup> The League's request, however, paled in comparison to the 47,500 dollars the Park and Recreation Commission had invested in building a purpose built pool for Revolution Park on September 7, 1938.<sup>125</sup> This uneven funding illuminates the Commission's de facto practice during this period of providing ample resources for the construction and expansion of white facilities, while neglecting to even complete rudimentary maintenance at black leisure spaces.

Although most African Americans in Charlotte did not publicly insist on desegregation before the 1950s, they used a variety of other tactics to mitigate the harsh realities of Jim Crow. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s a variety of black civic, religious, and educational organizations petitioned the City Council for the temporary use of

---

<sup>121</sup> Currently Fairview Park is referred to as Biddleville Park. Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 18.

<sup>122</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, August, 1969," 2.

<sup>123</sup> "Report of Committee on Negro Swimming Pool Situation," Charlotte City Council Minutes, July 24, 1940, Book 28, p. 261.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>125</sup> "Funds Advanced to Charlotte Parks and Recreation Commission for the Construction of a Swimming Pool," Charlotte City Council Minutes, September 7, 1938, Book 27, p. 185.

facilities that were typically designated white-only.<sup>126</sup> The official policy of the Commission was to charge a fee for the use of white facilities, but they repeatedly waived this requirement for African American groups. The most common requests were for the use of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Armory for charitable events, which often had the explicit purpose of raising funds for African American recreation.<sup>127</sup> On November 8, 1939, Professor Jefferson E. Grigsby, representing Second Ward High School, made a fairly typical query to the Council. Grigsby inquired whether the Commission would grant “free use of the Armory-Auditorium on the night of November 23rd, 1939 for a dance to be given by Negro high schools, the benefits from this dance to be used for their athletic programs.”<sup>128</sup> Although this type of concession was frequently allowed, permission was not approved unconditionally to black organizations.

Often the Council granted African American associations use of the armory or the auditorium, but with the caveat that their reservation would be canceled if a white group became interested in the same date. The Commission, responding to a black YMCA party hoping to host a basketball tournament, stipulated that “if the city has the opportunity to rent the Armory on any of these dates the [YMCA’s] reservation will be canceled on proper notice.”<sup>129</sup> This strategy, which relied on the paternalistic impulses of white Council members, provided some fundraising support for private African American recreation programs. Because of this, in the 1930s and 1940s many African Americans in

---

<sup>126</sup> Some examples of this strategy include: “Armory Granted Colored YMCA for Basket Ball Games,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, January, 26, 1938, Book 26, p. 394; “Seventh Street Presbyterian Church, Colored, Granted Use of the Armory Auditorium,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, September 28, 1938, Book 27, p. 222.

<sup>127</sup> “Phyllis Wheatley Branch Y.W.C.A., Granted Use of Armory Without Cost,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, September 28, 1938, Book 28, p.221.

<sup>128</sup> “Request of Colored High Schools For Use of Armory-Auditorium November 23<sup>rd</sup> For Dance, Granted,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, November 8, 1939, Book 28, p. 48.

<sup>129</sup> “Armory Granted Colored YMCA for Basket Ball Games,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, January 26, 1938, Book 26, p. 394.

Charlotte used private recreation as a means to circumvent the grossly inadequate system of public leisure supplied by the Commission.

Reacting to uneven public policy expenditures, Charlotte's black community endeavored to create recreation opportunities for the city's youth without the Commission's aid. YMCA and YWCA programs constituted one means for African Americans to recreate in a private context. The most significant branches in Charlotte during this time were the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA and the McCrorey YMCA. Financed primarily by white benefactors and through periodic fundraising efforts, Charlotte's African American YMCA and YWCA branches provided a number of activities that were unavailable through the city's public recreation program. In particular, the YMCA and YWCA's grounds contained spaces that were appropriate for baseball, softball, volleyball, and horseshoes. Equally significant, these organizations provided the only venue for free indoor recreation available to black citizens. In the event of inclement weather, these private organizations offered ping pong, checkers, and boxing for black youth.<sup>130</sup> Many participants in these programs remembered them fondly.

Second Ward resident Christine Bowser recalled that "we had teen night, where we would go and do various activities such as dancing, so you got a chance to dance with all of the boys from different parts of town. You see, everybody came from all parts of town to the Y because it was located in Brooklyn...it was pretty exciting."<sup>131</sup> Although these programs were more conveniently located than those provided by the Commission, they still were insufficient in size and scope to properly serve the city's black community.

---

<sup>130</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 7.

<sup>131</sup> Christine Roseboro Bowser, interviewed by Nick Gallardo, April 13, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Cumulatively, YMCA programs reached 874 African American boys under the age of 18 in 1939.<sup>132</sup> During that year, however, there were 4,595 African American males below 18 years of age in Charlotte. Serving roughly a fifth of Charlotte's black youth, clearly YMCA and YWCA programs were an inadequate solution to the city's recreation crisis. Further problematizing the efficacy of YMCA and YWCA efforts, these programs did little to address the leisure needs of the city's adults.

After school programs constituted another means the African American community utilized to compensate for the lack of available public leisure spaces. These programs were housed at Morgan Street Elementary, Third Ward Social Center, Second Ward High, and West Charlotte High. While well intentioned, these afterschool programs were plagued by a severe lack of equipment and staff. The conditions at Third Ward Social Center are indicative of the overall flaws of these after school recreation programs. Housing a playground that was fifty by fifty feet, the Social Center was extremely limited in the number of children that it could accept. The authors of the Johnson C. Smith study disdainfully remarked that "this area for play is small and is therefore not effective."<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, because the program was chronically understaffed, there were frequent disciplinary problems.<sup>134</sup> In their concluding remarks about the afterschool programs available to African Americans during the mid-to late-1930s, the study's author asserted that "in my opinion, based on observation in the above places, recreational facilities for Negroes are very inadequate in both the schools and elsewhere."<sup>135</sup> Clearly, private non-profit recreational facilities and community-based programs were wholly unable to

---

<sup>132</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 8.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 29.

muster the resources or the personnel to serve Charlotte's black community in a satisfactory manner.

Apart from issues of scale, many of these community-based programs suffered from a lack of trained personnel to facilitate their recreation programs. This shortcoming was epitomized by Second Ward resident Naomi Davis' experience in an elementary school program in West Charlotte. One summer, Davis recalled that Mr. Martin, an employee of the school, became frustrated with her trepidation towards swimming. Davis described that "he decided that he was going to put my head underwater. So you know I know now that he wasn't trying to drown me and you know to learn how to--but I thought he was trying to drown me."<sup>136</sup> While Davis was physically unscathed from this incident, it left her with a lasting fear of the water. Inability to pay for staff at school programs during the summer represented another shortcoming of this form of recreation. Brooklyn resident Vernon Herron recollected that in the summer "the street was our playground."<sup>137</sup> Although the Myers Street School had a rudimentary playground on its grounds, this was inaccessible to students during the summer. Herron recounted:

See school was closed so the boys would climb the fence and play in the school yard. Mr. Teague [the janitor] considered himself an authority and he had a big paddle and one day I was on the bus going home, or going somewhere. And I looked out and saw Mr. Teague running a little boy all over the school ground trying to catch him in order to give him a beating for playing on the playground. And this little fellow was so lively, Mr. Teague couldn't catch him. And it was so funny to see this old man running behind him with a paddle, running and trying to catch this little fellow. That was a true experience.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Naomi Davis, interviewed by Mary Metzger, November 23, 2004, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>137</sup> Vernon Herron, interviewed by Tosha Pearson, March 13, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

While humorous, Herron's anecdote illuminates how the absence of a full time staff could make previously adequate facilities inaccessible to black youth. Lacking in both resources and expertise, private organizations were unable to fill the void left by insufficient public facilities.

Commercial leisure provided another alternative to public recreation for African Americans in early-twentieth century Charlotte. These operations, however, were fairly limited and were potentially cost prohibitive for lower-class Charlotteans. While there were a number of pool halls in Charlotte, the most frequented commercial leisure activity prior to WWII was a series of bi-weekly swing dance sessions hosted by the Black Cat Inn. The cost of admission depended on the volume of attendees at each event, however, this fee typically ranged from five to ten cents per person.<sup>139</sup> During these raucous, youth-centered events participants engaged in "forms of dancing [that were] for the most part very sensuous," including the "lindy hop," the 'shag,' the 'mooch,' [and] the 'boogie-woggey.'<sup>140</sup> Generally well attended, commercial dances both supported the efforts of black entrepreneurs and provided alternative spaces for black Charlotteans to unwind.

Because they challenged conservative conceptions of gender and sexuality, however, events at the Black Cat Inn were not approved by many of Charlotte's more conservative African Americans residents. The Johnson C. Smith study disdainfully concluded that "conversations and actions between the participants lead one to believe that loose habits develop from these dances."<sup>141</sup> This display of scorn powerfully

---

<sup>139</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 13.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 14.

showcases how notions of the value of recreation were contingent on age and ideological bent. These dances, however, provided important venues of cultural expression for young black females in the early-twentieth century, allowing them to temporarily subvert patriarchal and racial power structures. While white employers attempted to control the physical actions of black female bodies, the African American bourgeois sought to impose notions of sexual morality upon them. Dances provided a concrete way for lower-class African American women to wrest control from these influences. Historian Tera Hunter describes, “African American wage-earners, however, asserted their own right to recuperate their bodies from exploitation. Their defiance exhibited more than creative release.”<sup>142</sup> Rather, dances exhibited a form of emancipation from the marginalizing influences of twentieth century life in the urban South.

A more conservative form of leisure available to African Americans regardless of class standing came from the various recreation events sponsored by local black churches.<sup>143</sup> Religious officials organized and facilitated recreation programs in a variety of ways, organizing games and events for their congregations, as well as playing critical roles in staffing and funding local YMCA and YWCA branches.<sup>144</sup> Beyond this, some churches even supported community organizations, such as the Boy Scouts. A lack of facilities, however, consistently handicapped the leisure activities sponsored by black churches during the early-to mid-twentieth century. Without proper fields, pools, or recreation centers, church groups were unable to engage in anything but the most

---

<sup>142</sup> Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 168.

<sup>143</sup> These kinds of events were not limited to African American churches, but were also hosted by the city's white congregations as well. For example, see: Lafferty, “History of the Second Presbyterian Church,” undated, Rare Books, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 3-11.

<sup>144</sup> “Caldwell Memorial Presbyterian Church: A History, 1912-1964,” 1964, Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 20-21.

rudimentary games and exercises.<sup>145</sup> Because of this deficit, many church groups organized transportation to public parks for their congregations. Although some white denominations helped to raise funds for these religiously-based programs, money remained a persistent issue.<sup>146</sup>

Clearly, no combination of private, public, or commercial recreation could adequately satisfy the needs of Charlotte's black youth. Although these programs did valuable work, positively influencing the lives of hundreds of children, on a fundamental level they could not cope with the massive scale of demand. Without proper facilities, Charlotte's black youth were forced to improvise, venturing into an urban landscape in search of leisure. One venue where young African Americans attempted to recreate was the well-equipped and conveniently located facilities that were reserved for the city's white children. An early lesson learned by many young African Americans in Charlotte, however, was that their presence at white facilities was strictly prohibited. The experience of Second Ward native Walter Dial is instructive of how strict recreational segregation was in Charlotte during the mid-1930s. A false rumor spread around Dial's neighborhood during those years that nearby Dilworth Park was open to black children. Because there were no public playgrounds accessible to African Americans in Charlotte at that time, with the exception of Morgan Park, children from Dial's neighborhood flocked to Dilworth to enjoy the "swings, the sliding boards, and things like that."<sup>147</sup> Initially, the children's presence on the playground went unopposed; however, residents of Dilworth quickly took offense and complained to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg police.

---

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>146</sup> Lafferty, 3-11.

<sup>147</sup> Walter Dial, interviewed by Hope Murphy, March 13, 2007, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Dial recounted that “half the police force came,” and “we ran in all directions and I don’t think they caught any of us.”<sup>148</sup> Although Dial and the other fourteen children escaped, the message was clear. The color line in Charlotte would be reinforced by state action. This realization led many young African Americans to search for recreation in small patches of undeveloped forest and amongst abandoned industrial sites in the city. These locations were not the sole purview of black Charlotteans, but also were frequented by lower-class whites, who were similarly excluded from commercial and private upper-class leisure spaces.

Interestingly, these unofficial venues occasionally facilitated otherwise forbidden interaction between white and black youth. Remarking on this phenomenon, Mecklenburg County native James Ross described, “in the summertime... the Myers Park Country Club had a swimming pool but you didn’t have any public swimming pool so we swam in the creek ...a lot of white kids swam in the creek with us so you had some kind of interaction but again it was just bare.”<sup>149</sup> Ross’s experience was not unique. Exploring unofficial neighborhood leisure spaces often democratized recreation for many children in Charlotte prior to WWII. This trend was especially pronounced on the outskirts of the city, where residential segregation was less well-defined. Mint Hill native, Dr. Lem Long, noted that playing in the woods and open fields around Mint Hill during the mid-1930s allowed interracial friendships to form. Long concluded “out in the country we just all lived together. We didn’t go to the same church, and didn’t go to the

---

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> James Ross, interviewed by Debbie Howard, March 13, 2007, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

same school,” but “we played, black and white played together, ate with each other.”<sup>150</sup>

Although unofficial recreation spaces could be potentially liberating, allowing white and black youth to interact outside the confines of the Jim Crow racial hierarchy, there were inherent risks in inhabiting these spaces.

Walter Dial’s attempt to find a safe location to swim illuminates the potential dangers of this strategy. Eager to escape the summer heat in the early-1940s, Dial explained how finding a natural body of water to cool off in could be legally hazardous.

We didn't have [access] to swimming pools or anything like that. So, we would go and get in creeks, find a deep creek to get in just to wade in and just things like that. We would go and slip in on the golf course sometimes and take our clothes off and swim in the ponds there. One day and this did happen...we got caught. The police came and took us all down to the jail house.<sup>151</sup>

While the officers decided to not formally charge the adolescents, Dial had been forcibly taught a central lesson about Jim Crow. Breaching lines of color and class would not to be tolerated. Even though Fairview Swimming Pool may have been open during the summer of Dial’s swim, its location was so removed that the children of Second Ward could not reach it. Legal dangers aside, improvised swimming locations could also prove hazardous to the health of black youth. Lack of adult supervision in natural swimming holes frequented by African American children periodically created unsafe conditions. This inherent risk is illustrated by the experience of neighboring Monroe, North Carolina. While Monroe’s white youth were able to attend a pool at the city’s publicly financed country club, African Americans were forced to seek alternate venues. Historian Timothy Tyson describes that “the black children barred from these programs swam in

---

<sup>150</sup> Lem Long, interviewed by Nicholas Gallard, Brooklyn Oral History Project, March 15, 2007 Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>151</sup> Walter Dial, interviewed by Hope Murphy, May 12, 2004, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

isolated farm ponds, muddy creeks, and abandoned quarries—and they drowned all too frequently.”<sup>152</sup> While lower-class white children were subjected to similar hazards, the increased availability of whites-only public leisure spaces, beginning in the 1930s, provided them with opportunities that black children simply did not have. Although drowning was a less frequent occurrence in Charlotte than Monroe, recreating in improvised spaces could be fatal.

A popular site for children in the Brooklyn and Cherry neighborhoods to visit during the 1930s and 1940s was a dense patch of woods adjacent to Baxter Street. In this space children could play freely, without adult supervision, hopping along rocks in the streambed or shimmying across drainage pipes that crisscrossed Sugar Creek. There was also a decrepit swinging bridge that children congregated on. This hangout spot, however, was the site of a tragic accident in the mid- to late-1930s. Cherry neighborhood native David Hunter described, “I never will forget it many, many years ago some kids was on the swinging bridge playing and the swinging bridge broke and about 7 or 8 kids were drowned in Sugar Creek.”<sup>153</sup> Forced to pursue leisure in an urban landscape riddled with unstable abandoned structures, these children were a casualty of Jim Crow’s exclusionary policies. The city’s response to this tragedy was simultaneously predictable and shocking. Hunter recollected that “the city of Charlotte didn’t get upset about that bridge,” instead officials implied that “broke [African American] kids had no business on

---

<sup>152</sup> Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, 83.

<sup>153</sup> David Hunter, interviewed by Debbie Howard, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, April 14, 2005; For another description of the swinging bridge’s collapse see Frances Leach’s interview with the Brooklyn Oral History Project: Frances Leach, interviewed by Brian Alexander, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, April 2, 2004, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

the bridge.”<sup>154</sup> While there is no evidence that any African American community members publicly protested the city’s apathetic response, the experience left residents of Brooklyn and Cherry traumatized for years.<sup>155</sup> No improvements to this space were made and recreation opportunities for black youth remained limited to Morgan Park’s five-acre expanse. The frequent attempts of African American children to carve out their own leisure spaces within the city demonstrates the inadequacy of private, community-based, and public facilities to meet their needs. This, however, was sharply juxtaposed with the improvements made in white recreation during the 1930s and 1940s.

As the construction of Revolution Park and the implementation of public summer recreation programs progressed, the responsibilities of the Commission began to outstrip its ability to complete them. Councilman Nance lamented that “we do not keep funds with which to build or maintain needed parks, swimming pools and to improve and make usable the park lands available, much less [provide] the proper supervision so essential to the thousands of Charlotte children” that used the city’s recreation facilities.<sup>156</sup> Throughout the City Council meeting, members of the Commission argued that although the city’s recreation facilities had begun modernizing, this process was far from complete.

Reflecting a profound shift in municipal policy, Councilman Bundy asserted that “we recognize that it is not a luxury but an obligation to provide parks and open air spaces in the interest of health and welfare for its own citizenship. Parks and

---

<sup>154</sup> David Hunter, interviewed by Debbie Howard, April 14, 2005, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>155</sup> Frances Leach, interviewed by Brian Alexander, April 2, 2004, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>156</sup> “Park and Recreation Commission Request Abolition of Parks Commission,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, March 17, 1937, Book 26, p.102.

Playgrounds are not luxuries for any livable city.”<sup>157</sup> Advocating for another bureaucratic reorganization in order to facilitate the growth of Charlotte’s Park and Recreation Department, the Commission’s members unanimously requested the Commission be abolished. The motion stipulated that the Commission’s facilities and holdings should be subsumed by the city administration. Expressing frustration, Commission member Robertson proclaimed that “if [we] cannot do a good job [we] had rather not do it at all.”<sup>158</sup> Although this measure passed the City Council unanimously, the North Carolina legislature refused to authorize this reorganization. This desperate attempt to dismantle the Commission, however, is indicative of how dire the city’s fiscal constraints had become.

As funding from New Deal programs became scarce, the Park and Recreation Commission lobbied for an increased tax levy to support their modernization campaign. In the late-1930s, it became progressively more difficult to maintain existing recreation programs, while simultaneously trying to develop new community parks and facilities.<sup>159</sup> On April 11, 1939 the Commission approached the City Council and requested additional funding to build new recreation facilities in segments of the community that were densely populated and had insufficient facilities. Specifically, the Commission officially recognized that the bulk of the African American population was forced to travel substantial distances to reach the city’s limited segregated facilities.<sup>160</sup>

In a reversal of previous practices, the Commission sought to raise revenue through a tax referendum with the explicit purpose of building segregated facilities in

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>159</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facility Handbook, August 1969,” 3.

<sup>160</sup> “Will Purchase More Sites if Voters Agree: All Depends on Pass of Additional Tax Levy,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1939.

Charlotte's predominantly African American wards in 1939.<sup>161</sup> While officials provided no explanation for this substantive policy shift, there are several possible reasons for this newfound focus. One possibility is that the paternalist impulses of the Commission dictated minimal improvements in black spaces to mask the far larger expenditures on white facilities, namely Revolution Park. Alternatively, officials may have reacted to the collapse of the bridge near Baxter Street, but, if this was the case, the intention was not articulated and the city never assumed any responsibility for the accident. Regardless of the motivation, this proposed levy would amount to a fifty cent per capita tax increase annually and was projected to boost the Commission's funding to approximately 50,000 dollars yearly.<sup>162</sup>

Although this proposed tax would substantially increase Charlotte's recreation budget, the city still spent considerably less than other New South metropolises. For example in 1938 Greensboro operated with a Park and Recreation budget that was twice as large as Charlotte's, despite the fact that these urban centers were roughly equivalent in size. The 1940 census lists Guilford County with a population of 97,814 urban dwelling citizens, while Mecklenburg County had an urban population of 100,899 persons.<sup>163</sup> Also in 1938, Richmond, Virginia, whose population was just shy of 200,000, nearly tripled Charlotte's budget, investing roughly 146,000 dollars in public recreation.<sup>164</sup> A crucial difference separated the public policy orientations of these various metropolises, however, that explains their divergent views on public recreation. First, business interests had a far firmer grip on Charlotte's municipal government than

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> See: Carolina Population Center, 46, 65.

<sup>164</sup> Carolina Population Center, 65; "Will Purchase More Sites if Voters agree: All Depends on Pass of Additional Tax Levy," *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1939.

their contemporaries did in either Greensboro or Richmond.<sup>165</sup> Second, Charlotte was in the midst of a major demographic expansion, with amenities lagging significantly behind public need.<sup>166</sup>

To compensate for this historical deficit, Commissioners brought their cause to the people, through a tax increase on the ballot. In order to facilitate the vote, Charlotte's election board required a fee of seven hundred dollars. Raising the stakes of the vote, "the City Attorney ruled that this expense can be borne by the special taxation for Parks and Recreation if the additional levy is authorized, but that if it is defeated the expense will have to be borne by the [City of Charlotte's] Emergency Fund."<sup>167</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, Charlotte's culture of fiscal conservatism, and perhaps the Scotch-Irish heritage of many of its white residents, shaped the bond's fate. After the votes came in, the Commission was unable to secure a majority and the tax remained at a meager two cents per capita.<sup>168</sup>

This development left the already poorly funded Park and Recreation Commission in dire financial straits. To keep up with rising personnel costs and property maintenance, the Commission was forced to pursue a loan from the City Council on August 8, 1939. In an official statement to the Council, R. W. Gibson emphasized that the Park and Recreation Commission desperately needed 2,800 dollars to cover immediate expenses, most specifically the completion of the Revolution Park swimming

---

<sup>165</sup> Christensen, 51; Hanchett, 219-223; For the religious dimension to the city's fiscal conservatism see: Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 20-22; For a description of Greensboro's liberal public policies see: Chafe, 26-28; For comparative analysis of all three cities: "Will Purchase More Sites if Voters agree: All Depends on Pass of Additional Tax Levy," *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1939.

<sup>166</sup> Carolina Population Center, *County Population Trends North Carolina 1790-1960: State, Region, County Residence, and Color*, 65.

<sup>167</sup> "Cost of Park and Recreation Tax Election," Charlotte City Council Minutes, April 26, 1939, Book 27, p. 387.

<sup>168</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facility Handbook, 1969," 3.

pool.<sup>169</sup> Responding to this inquiry, “Councilman Hudson moved that this request be granted with the understanding that if it becomes necessary for the City of Charlotte to borrow money for current expenses that the Park and Recreation Commission would be charged interest on this money.”<sup>170</sup> The Commission accepted the Council’s conditions and unanimously approved the funding advance. Although this payment allowed for limited improvements to Revolution Park, the underlying funding crisis remained unresolved.

The onset of the Second World War caused the flood of public and private funding for recreation in Charlotte to dry up. Despite dwindling finances, however, the Park and Recreation Commission endeavored to provide “wholesome recreation” for servicemen stationed in Charlotte.<sup>171</sup> Drawing on funding from the 1941 Lanham Act, the Commission sought to build a recreation center that was only available to active duty servicemen and defense industry employees involved with the pre-war mobilization effort.<sup>172</sup> Initially, these funds were slated for repurposing an abandoned school house located at the intersection of Stonewall and South Tryon Streets.<sup>173</sup> This plan, however, was scrapped because it failed to provide facilities for enlisted African Americans in Charlotte. Rather than allow black and white soldiers to recreate in the same facility, the Commission drafted a new plan that created two segregated centers to meet the military’s

---

<sup>169</sup> “Advance to Parks and Recreation Commission,” City Council Minutes, August 9, 1939, Book 27, p. 483-484.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 483-484.

<sup>171</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 3.

<sup>172</sup> The Lanham Act, otherwise known as the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act, was passed on July 16, 1941. This bill was intended to fund public works projects, most specifically schools, hospitals, childcare services, and recreation opportunities, for communities impacted by sudden influxes of soldiers or defense industry workers. Created under the umbrella of Federal Works Agency (FWA), funding provided by the Lanham Act was administered by Division of War Public Services (DWPS). United States Census: Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Recreation: Community Recreation in 1942,” *Monthly Labor Review* 57, no. 2 (August, 1943), 284-286.

<sup>173</sup> “Members of Advisory Committee on Recreation for Defense, Requested Assistance From City on Rental of Clubhouse For Recreation,” Charlotte City Council Minutes, May 14, 1941, Book 29, p. 4.

needs. Finished in 1941, the white servicemen's center was located in the basement of the Armory, while a new African American recreation center was built on West Hill Street.<sup>174</sup> Although these spaces provided a valuable service to Charlotte's enlisted soldiers, the majority of the city's black population remained neglected.

In addition to building new venues, the Park and Recreation Commission sponsored a series of events to entertain Charlotte's servicemen. The Commission scheduled ten dances for military personnel between August 2, 1941 and April 3, 1943.<sup>175</sup> Contrary to the Commission's standard policies, the use of the auditorium was gifted to white servicemen free of charge. These occasions, however, were not available to black servicemen and no equivalent leisure-time activity was offered to them. Although the Colored Voters Alliance had previously requested a combination auditorium and gymnasium for African Americans, citing several comparable facilities available to whites, this request had repeatedly been denied.<sup>176</sup> Recognizing growing discontent amongst the black community, however, the Park and Recreation Commission approved a small expansion of Charlotte's segregated facilities in late-1941.

Even though WWII forced the Park and Recreation Commission to operate under increasing fiscal constraints, there was a token attempt to improve African American recreation. This expansion came after the Negro Citizen's League approached the Council on May 28, 1941 charging that "in the past the Negro race had not been receiving its share of money appropriated for park purposes."<sup>177</sup> After a lengthy wait,

---

<sup>174</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August, 1969," 3.

<sup>175</sup> "Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission Granted Free Use of Armory-Auditorium for Dances For Soldiers at Army Air Base," Charlotte City Council Minutes, July 16, 1941, Book 29, p. 107.

<sup>176</sup> "Colored Voters Alliance Requested Auditorium and Gymnasium and Negro Policemen," City Council Minutes, February 12, 1941, Book 29, p. 424.

<sup>177</sup> "Negro Citizens League Requested Assistance of Council in Connection with Parks and Playgrounds for the Negro Race," City Council Minutes, May 28, 1941, Book 29, p. 13.

this petition bore fruit on December 10 when the Park and Recreation Commission began discussing the purchase of a six acre span between the Thompson Orphanage at the intersection of Pearle Street and Baxter Street. The Commission wanted to construct a facility at Baxter Street because “this negro section of the City is the most thickly populated and that is the center of crime”<sup>178</sup> Echoing the concerns of the Negro Citizen’s League, Commission members also felt that a facility at this location could serve a larger portion of the African American community, while simultaneously reducing the crime rate.

White community members, however, harbored objections to the proposed location for Pearle Street Park. Expressing their displeasure, residents of the adjacent Harding community requested that the Pearle Street location be scrapped. A legal representative appointed by the residents of Harding asserted that the neighborhood was “vigorously opposed [to] the location of the Negro park as proposed by the Commission.”<sup>179</sup> While a lengthy discussion ensued, City Council members showed little interest in altering their plans. Curiously, however, viewing the Council’s intransigence, the residents of Harding unexpectedly withdrew their petition at the end of the meeting.<sup>180</sup> This action, however, when considered in the context of North Carolina’s race relations is not inexplicable. Manifesting a central theme of Chafe’s progressive mystique, Harding’s residents may have believed “that conflict over any issue, whether it be labor unions, race relations, or political ideology, will permanently rend the fragile

---

<sup>178</sup> “Park and Recreation Commission Asked That New Street Be Across Sugaw Creek,” City Council Minutes, December 10, 1941, Book 29, p. 290.

<sup>179</sup> “Withdrawal of Petition of Residents of Harding Place Section Relative to Establishment of a Negro Park in the Area Adjacent to that Section,” City Council Minutes, December 9, 1942, p. 157.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 157.

fabric of internal harmony.”<sup>181</sup> Whatever the cause, however, Harding’s acceptance of the new park set an important precedent.

When it opened in early-1943, Pearl Street Park quickly became a popular leisure space for the Brooklyn, Cherry, and Blue Heaven communities. Housing the first public playground available to African American youth in Charlotte, Pearle Street served as a central meeting place between these neighborhoods.<sup>182</sup> Equally significant, this location provided a rudimentary field that could be used for baseball, football, and even golf practice. Although lack of equipment was a persistent issue at Pearl Street Park, a common sense of community often overcame this scarcity. Brooklyn resident Olaf Abraham notes that “some of [the teams] weren’t well-equipped, you know, so they, they would use- if your team had bats and gloves and everything, they would share that with the team that they were playing.”<sup>183</sup> As the 1940s wore on, Pearle Street Park became a model of how access to adequate leisure spaces could positively affect African American communities.

Citing a fifty percent reduction in crime in surrounding neighborhoods, the Community Crusaders and the Negro Citizen’s League employed Pearl Street as an example of how recreation facilities could benefit low income urban areas in 1943.<sup>184</sup> Despite the success of Pearl Street Park, however, the glaring gap between the facilities available for whites and African Americans persisted, with approximately 10 acres of public land available to African Americans, while whites enjoyed over 554 acres of

---

<sup>181</sup> Chafe, 7.

<sup>182</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 3.

<sup>183</sup> Olaf Abraham, interviewed by Dawn Funk, April 11, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>184</sup> “Community Crusaders and Negro Citizens League Bring Message to City Council,” City Council Minutes, April 14, 1943, Book 30, p. 249.

developed park space.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, both the parks at Pearle Street and Morgan Street lacked the sophisticated recreation programs and facilities provided to Charlotte's white residents. There was no African American equivalent to the golf course, pool, or stadium that the Commission provided to white citizens. While white facilities were chronically underfunded during this 1930s and 1940s, at least when compared to other New South metropolises, they remained vastly superior to those afforded African Americans.

As the war effort continued to divert resources away from public projects, some private groups endeavored to create leisure spaces for the Commission.<sup>186</sup> After meeting with the Park and Recreation Commission on August 3, 1943, the Charlotte Lions Club offered to spearhead the construction of a new park. Expressing appreciation to the Lions Club, the Commission resolved to "make land available" and to provide general direction to the club.<sup>187</sup> First publicized in the *Charlotte Observer* on July 19, 1943, the Lions Club's effort attracted broad based support from the Charlotte community. Numerous donors responded to the Lions Club's call for funds and local realtor Frank Jones offered to conduct the property negotiations pro bono.<sup>188</sup> Soliciting the support of wealthy donors, the Lions Club intended to raise 100,000 dollars to finance the project.<sup>189</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> This estimate does not include the 22 acres devoted to the Fairview pool, because this facility was no longer operational in 1943. Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 22.

<sup>186</sup> While the creation of Freedom Park is the best example of a privately created public park, the residents of the Midwood Community similarly raised funds and created a park in their section of Charlotte. Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August, 1969," 4.

<sup>187</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission Resolution," Charlotte Park Association Files, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>188</sup> Frank F. Jones to Frank W. Orr, July 20, 1943, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>189</sup> Charlotte Park Association, "Proposed Plan to Finance Memorial Park," undated, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Parks Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

After several years of negotiation and planning, the Lions Club, with Jones' assistance, was able to secure a 35-acre tract of land on the west side of Sugaw Creek for 150 dollars per acre from the Stephens Company.<sup>190</sup> Similarly to Revolution, however, several stipulations accompanied the deed from the Stephens Company. First, any swimming pools or baseball diamonds had to be located more than 200 feet away from Sugaw Creek. Second, the Commission agreed to expend 50,000 dollars improving the land within 5 years of the transfer to the Commission. Finally, the deed specified that 'this land be restricted exclusively for use as a public park for members of the white race only.'<sup>191</sup> After construction was completed on April 14, 1946, the newly created park was leased to the Commission for the nominal cost of one dollar per year.<sup>192</sup> Ironically, the name of this new racially segregated facility, which was decided by a public referendum, was Freedom Park.<sup>193</sup> During the late-1940s and early-1950s the Commission continued to invest funds in Freedom Park at a much higher rate than on Charlotte's African American leisure spaces. Perhaps the most significant improvement to Freedom Park was the addition of a nature museum to the park's grounds in 1950.<sup>194</sup> This provided another recreation opportunity for Charlotte's white community with no analogous option available to the black population.

---

<sup>190</sup> "Memo, March 22, 1944," Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission, March 22, 1944, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>191</sup> "The Stephens Company to the Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission," March 22, 1944; "Park and Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes August 17, 1944 in the Office of Frank Orr," August 17, 1944, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>192</sup> "Park Lease," April 14, 1946, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>193</sup> "The New Charlotte Park: Name to be Selected by Public Contest," undated, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Park and Recreation Commission, "Facilities Handbook, August, 1969," 4.

<sup>194</sup> James Robinson to Park and Recreation Commission, April 21, 1950, Box 1, Folder 1, Charlotte Park Association Records, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Similarly to other New South cities, increasing activism in the African American community after WWII spurred Charlotte to hastily develop more adequate recreation facilities for African Americans.<sup>195</sup> This happened in the context of a series of successful legal challenges to the “separate but equal” doctrine in higher education, residential segregation, and the polls.<sup>196</sup> Although the citizens of Charlotte rejected another proposed tax hike after the war, the Commission devised alternate strategies to increase the facilities available to the city’s residents. The first major effort occurred concurrently with the demobilization of the nation’s armed forces. The two servicemen’s facilities, created by the 1941 Lanham Act, were converted in Youth Centers, each staffed by full time personnel.<sup>197</sup> The renovation of these spaces and the personnel costs their operation incurred were principally funded by the imposition of a new municipal alcoholic beverages sales tax implemented in 1946. Receiving roughly 5 percent of the revenue generated by this tax, the Park and Recreation Commission was also able to divert unused funds toward the creation of a third African American park in the city.<sup>198</sup> Located behind the Alexander Street Elementary School, in the North Davidson community, this three acre park was the second African American public playground in Charlotte. Opened in 1946, the construction of Alexander Park represented the beginning of a

---

<sup>195</sup> In 1953 city officials in Atlanta, Georgia undertook an aggressive program of park and swimming pool construction in an attempt to quell mounting discontent. This strategy was explicitly geared towards preventing legal action, while simultaneously allowing the racial status quo to remain intact. Andrew Kahrl, *On the Beach: Race and Leisure in the Jim Crow South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 306. For additional analysis on Atlanta’s experience see: Ronald Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). William Chafe describes the same impulse in Greensboro: Chafe, 25.

<sup>196</sup> For higher education see: *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950). The most important attack on residential segregation was: *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948). The abolition of the white primary was accomplished by *Smith V. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

<sup>197</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 3.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

conscious effort by the Commission to provide a more equitable distribution of leisure space in the city.

In reversal of typical practice, Charlotte residents voted for an increase in recreation funding in 1949. This break with fiscal conservatism was not an anomaly, but instead was influenced by a wave of post-WWII economic prosperity. Like other New South cities, Charlotte invested much of this new revenue in improvements to public works.<sup>199</sup> A Park and Recreation Commission official history observed that “the citizens themselves seemed to become more and more interested in seeing Charlotte’s recreation program and facilities compare more favorably with those of cities approximately of the same size.”<sup>200</sup> Whatever the cause, Charlotteans uncharacteristically approved a million dollar bond, as well as a new “tax levy at 6 cents for 1949; 7 cents for 1950, and 8 cents for 1951, and succeeding years.”<sup>201</sup> This newfound funding coincided with an attempt to lessen the disparities between white and black facilities in Charlotte. In the 1950s the Commission began work on a purpose-built African American swimming pool in the low income Double Oaks Community. Completed in 1951, this space offered a segregated alternative to the pool housed at Revolution. Ostensibly this facility represented a last minute attempt to quell black discontent about recreation in the city.

Charlotte entered the 1950s a transformed urban center. Rapid economic growth, coupled with intense urbanization and spatial segregation, had changed the city’s social, political, and economic landscape. African Americans were increasingly aware of the vast differences in quality and availability between the recreational facilities available to

---

<sup>199</sup> James Cobb, *The South and America: Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48-52.

<sup>200</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 3.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

whites and those accessible by blacks. Although black citizens and organizations consistently resisted the harshest aspects of Jim Crow segregation, these strategies yielded few tangible rewards. While there was a degree of consensus amongst black Charlotteans that the current state of affairs was unjust, there was little agreement about how to combat inequality in the city. Token progress had been made, however, the gap between African American and white facilities had only expanded in the previous two decades. The authors of the Johnson C. Smith study offered the most conservative approach to solving the recreation crisis. After concluding that the current status quo was intolerable, the study recommended that “a standing committee be appointed or selected of Negro and white civic leaders, teachers, laymen, and interested persons, to conduct further research into the problem of recreation for Negroes in Charlotte.”<sup>202</sup> This biracial committee was intended to explore fundraising methods for black leisure and to strive towards educating citizens to be more civically minded.<sup>203</sup> Other community members, however, were less inclined to believe that biracialism and appeals to the city’s white political and business elite would be fruitful strategies.

The goals of the Johnson C. Smith Commission are juxtaposed with other black Charlotteans who sought to remedy the recreation dilemma privately, without the assistance of the white power structure. An unnamed “business man” asserted that “as long as we are dependent on the white race to originate these movements on our behalf we cannot hope to approach a solution of this problem.”<sup>204</sup> The notion that new and improved recreation opportunities should emanate from black community institutions,

---

<sup>202</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, “A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939,” 25.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 24.

rather than government action, seemed to be gaining some traction in mid-twentieth century Charlotte. Rather than approaching the Council or Commission to request more support, an African American minister advocated that “the churches ought to be more recreationally minded and they should lead in the attempt to study the problem of recreation. There should be more action.”<sup>205</sup> These nascent differences evinced the formation of deep ideological rifts amongst Charlotte’s black community. Chasms that would only deepen as the twentieth century progressed.

Despite the progress made by the Commission, public recreation for African Americans remained inadequate. In the early-1950s the Commission managed approximately fifty public parks, but only three of these were available to African Americans.<sup>206</sup> Indeed, the gains made in black leisure can be understood as a veneer, masking the persistence of inequality in Charlotte. The remarks of an African American doctor who observed ten years prior that “we are a race sadly in need of better opportunities for wholesome recreation,” remained devastatingly true.<sup>207</sup> Discontent over economic marginalization and racial discrimination continued to increase, sowing the seed for more active and assertive protest movements in the 1950s and 1960s. It is important to understand, however, that the civil rights and Black Power activism of the 1950s and 1960s did not appear out of a vacuum. Rather, these new strategies had their roots in decades of discrimination and marginalization in Charlotte. These protests did not occur because national movements emerged during this period, but rather represented

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>206</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, “Facilities Handbook, August, 1969,” 4.

<sup>207</sup> Johnson C. Smith University, “A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939,” 24.

a climax of discontent over decades of suffering under Jim Crow's oppressive social and economic constraints.

Likewise, the ideological divisions that emerged between civil rights and Black Power activists had their origins in decades of disagreement amongst the black community. Questions of whether recreation opportunities should emanate from the government or community-based institutions persisted. As the black freedom movement in Charlotte matured, these questions became increasingly relevant, dividing black Charlotteans along class and age lines. Despite these divisions, however, African Americans of all ages and classes continued to resist Jim Crow in public leisure spaces. Although the struggle for equal access to public leisure space in the 1930s and 1940s did not successfully dismantle Jim Crow, the efforts of the black community during this period set the stage for increasingly militant protests.

CHAPTER 3: “THERE LIES A SLEEPING GIANT FOR GOD’S SAKE AWAKEN HIM”: PUBLIC LEISURE, LITIGATION, AND SPATIAL SEGREGATION, 1951-1966.<sup>208</sup>

“They were trying to kill us,’ cried Kelly Alexander, the state president of the NAACP. ‘If this had been a frame home, they would have killed my children.’”<sup>209</sup> On November 22, 1965 a series of explosions tore through the homes of local civil rights leaders Kelly Alexander, Fred Alexander, Reginald Hawkins, and Julius Chambers. That night white supremacists shattered the apparent tranquility of Charlotte’s race relations, lobbing explosives at the houses of instrumental black leaders. The blasts demonstrated with devastating force that beneath Charlotte’s progressive façade lay a diehard commitment to white supremacy. Although no fatalities resulted from this act of terrorism, Charlotte’s enlightened image suffered irreparable harm. Interestingly, unlike other southern locales, this violent event occurred not because of school desegregation or a putative challenge to white womanhood, but rather after the NAACP’s push to integrate the North-South Carolina Shrine Bowl.<sup>210</sup> Each of the targeted leaders was intimately involved with a legal suit that contested the Shrine Bowl’s exclusionary player selection

---

<sup>208</sup> This quotation is from a 1953 *Carolina Times* article urging civil rights leaders in North Carolina to take a more aggressive stance against Jim Crow. Specifically, this article lauds Charlotte native Kelly Alexander as the most promising activist in the state. “Lethargy of Negro Leadership in N.C.,” *Carolina Times*, December 26, 1953.

<sup>209</sup> “Blasts Rip N.C. Negroes Homes,” *Newsday*, November 22, 1965.

<sup>210</sup> The victims concluded that the bombing was in reaction to their participation in the suit against the Shrine Bowl. Kelly Alexander’s opinion is expressed in “4 Negro Homes Hit by Bombs in South,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1965. Several scholars have already made the argument that the Shrine Bowl suit was the impetus for the bombing in 1965. See Douglas, 122. In his master’s thesis “Strong Legs Running: The Integration of the North-South Carolina Shrine Bowl,” Westmoreland tentatively links the bombings and the integration suit: Westmoreland, 72-73.

policies, as an attorney, litigant, or vocal supporter. This violent reaction to the Shrine Bowl's desegregation reveals the centrality of leisure spaces and recreation in Charlotte's black freedom movement.<sup>211</sup>

During the 1950s and 1960s, challenges to exclusionary policies in public and private leisure spaces became more aggressive, with civil rights activists utilizing backroom negotiation and litigation to dispute Jim Crow in Charlotte. The first implementation of these strategies came with the legal suit against segregation at the Bonnie Brae golf course in 1951, evincing the importance of leisure space to the black community. In an interview in 1960, Kelly Alexander concisely summarized the NAACP's strategic direction, asserting that "we are going to concentrate on other areas of tax-supported [leisure] facilities...this is only the beginning for young people to press for civil rights."<sup>212</sup> Rather than continue to work within the confines of Jim Crow and request concessions to equalize unequal facilities or subvert segregation by sneaking into white leisure spaces, black Charlotteans began to openly challenge segregation. Through legal suits and negotiation, African American civil rights organizations exploited the desire of white business and municipal leaders to maintain a progressive image.

These new protest strategies accelerated the demise of Jim Crow segregation in Charlotte's public recreation facilities, but also yielded unintended consequences. First the NAACP's campaign sparked an unprecedented white backlash, revealing tensions predicated on status anxiety, masculinity, and class. Second, as activism expanded out of the public sphere, white moderates became increasingly disenchanted with the agenda of

---

<sup>211</sup> Wolcott, 8-9.

<sup>212</sup> Roy Covington, "Swimming Pool Desegregated: City Policy Statement is Issued," *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1960.

civil rights leaders.<sup>213</sup> Third, as NAACP attorneys pushed test cases through the courts; black youth became disillusioned with the pace of desegregation, which further undercut consensus in the African American community. These tensions were not unique, however, but instead mirrored larger shifts in the black freedom movement.

Like other Southern business centers, Charlotte's leadership utilized seemingly moderate strategies in response to challenges to segregation in public leisure spaces. Rather than obstructing the black freedom movement through massive resistance, violence, or outright defense of segregation, moderate municipal and business leaders used legalistic and procedural means to contest black activists. These methods enabled municipal leaders to consistently retain a progressive image, while simultaneously ensuring minimal changes in the racial status quo.<sup>214</sup> The factors that determined the success or failure of these approaches, however, were somewhat localized. Because of this, Charlotte's response to challenges differed from comparable New South cities in subtle, but important ways. While, in many cases, white moderates in other Southern business centers used privatization and closure as putatively progressive alternatives to contest desegregation of controversial leisure spaces, business leaders in Charlotte avoided these tactics. Instead, Charlotte's white power structure relied on novel legal

---

<sup>213</sup> This study defines white moderates as community members that do not disagree with desegregation in the abstract, but instead tend to dispute the pace. Oftentimes, white moderates attempt to undercut civil rights activism by arguing that lower-class whites would overreact, inherently damaging the community's seemingly good race relations. A central theme to be explored in this chapter is whether obfuscation by white moderates was a strategy with more efficacy than outright resistance to civil rights activists. For other scholarship exploring this notion, see Chafe, 1-8; Anders Walker, *The Ghost of Jim Crow: How Southern Moderates Used Brown V. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>214</sup> Elizabeth Jacoway, "Civil Rights and the Changing South," *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 6-10.

conditions and spatial segregation to ensure that parks, stadiums, pools, and golf courses remained predominantly white.

Charlotte's reaction to the NAACP's campaign of direct action and litigation was shaped by the city's racialized geography and the climate of business boosterism. Spatially, Charlotte entered the 1950s and 1960s more segregated by race and class than ever before. During this time "more than 90 percent of the city's nearly 60,000 African Americans lived northwest of the downtown central business district. Meanwhile, the most affluent area of the city, comprising of ten census tracts in the southeastern quadrant, housed more than 40,000 whites and not a single black family."<sup>215</sup> A series of urban renewal projects began in the 1950s and 1960s that effectively destroyed Charlotte's black business district and its oldest neighborhoods, most notably Brooklyn and Blue Heaven. Apart from undermining black populations economically, these policies also destroyed a sense of community in these historically black areas.<sup>216</sup> Compounding the social and economic impacts of urban renewal, the demolition of these neighborhoods undercut the political clout of African Americans, rendering black populations invisible to white municipal officials.<sup>217</sup> The construction of I-85 in the 1960s solidified the physical boundary between black and white spaces. David Cunningham observes that during the 1950s and 1960s, Charlotte was "more highly segregated than any other city in the Carolina Piedmont or in Louisiana, Arkansas,

---

<sup>215</sup> Cunningham, 174.

<sup>216</sup> For examples of the black community's response to the destruction of historically black neighborhoods in Charlotte, see: Vermelle Diamond Ely interviewed by Katherine Wells, March 25, 2004, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Don Bryant interviewed by Jason Harpe, March 26, 2004, Brooklyn Oral History Project; Douglas, 137-138.

<sup>217</sup> Penninger, 12; "Housing Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," City Council Minutes, December 4, 1961, Book 27, p. 184.

Georgia, and Alabama.”<sup>218</sup> The thirteenth most segregated city in the nation, white Charlotteans of all economic statuses were insulated from interaction with poor black communities.<sup>219</sup>

This spatial arrangement complicated attempts by white supremacist groups to gain a foothold in the region, allowing moderate politicians to retain important municipal offices during the turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s. In this way, Charlotte’s geographic segregation sustained the city’s policy of business progressivism during the mid-twentieth century.<sup>220</sup> Put simply, Charlotte’s comparatively moderate response to desegregation efforts was not wholly rooted in genuine progressivism or business interests, but also embedded in the city’s physical layout. Supported by municipal programs, such as urban renewal and housing projects, as well as federal investments, including the interstate highway system, the GI Bill, and subsidized mortgages, spatial segregation provided a seemingly race neutral and ostensibly progressive alternative to the maintenance of Jim Crow.<sup>221</sup> The spatial redistribution of Charlotte’s African American population was also exacerbated by structural changes in the economy.

The fight for equal access to public leisure spaces in Charlotte occurred contemporaneously with a further decline in the economic status of black residents. The persistence of racial discrimination and insufficient educational opportunities prevented African Americans from competing for newly created industrial and white-collar jobs available both in Charlotte and the state at large. Mechanization in industrial plants and

---

<sup>218</sup> Cunningham, 174.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>220</sup> “Report of the Sub-Committee on Housing,” March 13, 1967, Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Cunningham, 180-184.

<sup>221</sup> Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1-10.

agriculture severely undercut the market for unskilled and semiskilled labor in North Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s. Between 1947 and 1964, ninety-seven percent of Charlotte's employment growth was in the white-collar workforce, a field that was virtually inaccessible to African Americans.<sup>222</sup> Dave Coltrane, a representative of Governor Sanford's Good Neighbor Council, remarked at a meeting in Charlotte that "this poverty and insecurity are particularly appalling to the Negro, who sees the white society that surrounds him grow increasingly affluent while he remains tied to his slum and without work."<sup>223</sup> These dismal economic conditions shaped how African Americans viewed public leisure spaces.

By 1964, the typical black family in North Carolina earned 1,922 dollars annually, compared to the average white family who earned roughly 4,588 dollars.<sup>224</sup> While conditions were nominally better in metropolitan Charlotte, presumably due to the presence of an African American business class that rural North Carolina could not sustain, drastic income inequality persisted. During the same year the median black family income was 2,904 dollars annually, while white families could expect to earn 6,504 dollars.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, the comparatively high income of African Americans in Charlotte was distorted by the higher cost of living in metropolitan areas. NAACP leader Kelly Alexander complained to the press, "everything has gone up except negro salaries."<sup>226</sup>

---

<sup>222</sup> "Talk by Dave Coltrane," Mayor's Committee on Race Relations, Box 1, Folder 5, p. 6, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>223</sup> "Talk by Dave Coltrane," 6.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>226</sup> "Housing Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," City Council Minutes, December 4, 1961, Book 27, p. 184.

Widespread poverty yielded two distinct consequences. First, it solidified the city's geographic layout by preventing African Americans from affording homes in white regions of town. Second, this decline made public recreation spaces even more important for lower-class African Americans. Municipal facilities provided a recreational outlet for poor African Americans who could not afford private and commercial leisure spaces. This does not mean, however, that public leisure spaces were not valued by affluent African Americans. In contrast, middle-and upper-class black Charlotteans desired to access municipal recreation facilities equivalent to their economic and social standing. In this way, the fight for access to recreation spaces in Charlotte was tied to a larger struggle for both economic advancement for the lower-classes and social respect for Charlotte's black business class. This effort required both a concerted protest movement and a sustained legal campaign orchestrated by black activists.

The constitutional aspects of the NAACP's litigation campaign have attracted considerably less attention from historians than direct action protest and massive resistance. Anders Walker posits that "though the 'epic' battle between black activists and white extremists has captured modern memory, the more important constitutional struggle at the time took place between black activists and white moderates."<sup>227</sup> Such a conflict began in Charlotte in 1951. Prevented from fully engaging in social and leisure activities associated with their social standing, middle-and upper-class African Americans contested segregation at the publicly owned Bonnie Brae golf course. Situated in the predominantly white, southwestern quadrant of Charlotte, the public golf course at Revolution Park was inaccessible to most African Americans not only because of racial custom, but also because of the prohibitive cost of equipment, green fees, and

---

<sup>227</sup> Walker, 157.

travel.<sup>228</sup> Despite this limited practically, however, access to Bonnie Brae was a highly sought after objective for the members of the black bourgeois that steered the course NAACP activism.<sup>229</sup>

In Charlotte, like other southern locales, the association between golf and class status was strong. Commenting on Charlotte in the 1950s, historian Dan Morrill characterized golf as “one of the most important male bonding rituals for upper-class [white] males.”<sup>230</sup> Regular golf games provided more than friendship for affluent white Charlotteans, but instead served as a networking opportunity for business professionals and municipal politicians. In a concrete sense, the decisions made on the golf course shaped both economic development and public policy in the city.<sup>231</sup> Because Charlotte’s most prominent citizens typically frequented the exclusive Charlotte Country Club, lower-class whites were barred from engaging in this cultural ritual. Public courses also proved problematic for lower-class whites, with green fees likely preventing them from attending Bonnie Brae with any frequency.<sup>232</sup> The social significance of golf was not lost on black Charlotteans. Access to golf offered black professionals a veneer of respectability that the Southern caste system denied them, allowing them to assert themselves as men in a paternalistic society. Although it seemed inconceivable that activists could breach the racial exclusivity of Charlotte’s private country clubs, public courses provided a practical way to gain access to this highly sought-after form of leisure.

---

<sup>228</sup> Margaret Alexander, “History of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Branch of the NAACP, 1919-1992,” p. 2, Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>229</sup> Jess Usher, “The Golfers’: African American Golfers of the North Carolina Piedmont and the Struggle for Access,” *North Carolina History Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2010), 158-160.

<sup>230</sup> Morrill, 77.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 75-77.

Because equipment and green fees were a considerable investment, the participants in the Bonnie Brae desegregation challenge were comprised of Charlotte's most successful black male professionals. This included some of the most influential black businessmen, lawyers, and physicians in Charlotte. Dr. Robert Greene provides a fairly representative example of the NAACP members involved.<sup>233</sup> Upon graduating from Howard University's medical school in 1927, Greene travelled to Durham, North Carolina to complete his residency at Lincoln Hospital. In 1934, Greene then moved to the Brooklyn community in Charlotte to establish his private practice, situating himself amongst the city's black bourgeois.<sup>234</sup> Despite his personal success, however, the realities of Jim Crow prohibited Greene from engaging in the professional and social activities enjoyed by white Charlotteans of equivalent class-standing.<sup>235</sup> Barred from white medical associations and deprived of adequate leisure spaces, Greene's inability to partake in these activities was not unique, but rather was emblematic of the collective experience of Charlotte's middle- and upper-class black citizens.

This frustration manifested itself in a distinctly gendered context. Along with traditional modes, such as patriarchal familial control, racial uplift, and emphasis of their class status, upper-class black men also sought to express their masculinity through leisure time activities.<sup>236</sup> This new focus was not an aberration, but instead reflected a region-wide redefinition of black manliness in the wake of post-Reconstruction

---

<sup>233</sup> Usher, 166-170.

<sup>234</sup> Robert H. Greene, "The Story Of My Life", Private Collection, January 21, 1971, quoted in "Survey and Research Report on the Dr. R. H. Greene House," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, [http://www.cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/Surveys&rGreene.htm#\\_ftn20](http://www.cmhpf.org/S&Rs%20Alphabetical%20Order/Surveys&rGreene.htm#_ftn20).

<sup>235</sup> For a description of Greene's life and career see: "Charlotte M.D. Honored," *Charlotte News*, June 11, 1970; Frank Coley, "77-year old Doctor Turning His Interests To Fishing And Gardening After 50 Years of Practice," *Charlotte Weekly-East*, January 4, 1979.

<sup>236</sup> Edward J. Blum, "A Subversive Savior: Manhood and African American Images of Christ in the Early Twentieth-Century South," *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction*, edited by Craig Thompson Friend (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 152.

disenfranchisement and white violence. Edward Blum explains that in the early-twentieth century “black manhood moved from a focus on the producer-oriented qualities of character, respectability, industry, and thrift to the consumer-oriented qualities of leisure pursuits, sexual virility, and material acquisition.”<sup>237</sup> This assertion of manhood, however, was not passively accepted by white Charlotteans. Because the racial exclusivity of upper-class leisure spaces was a crucial component of their appeal, affluent white Charlotteans drew upon a variety of legalistic and procedural means to block African American access to the golf course in Revolution Park.<sup>238</sup>

The NAACP’s choice to prioritize upper-class leisure spaces was also guided by strategic concerns. Because there was no equivalent African American golf course in Charlotte, activists could legitimately charge that segregation in this context violated the “separate but equal test” established by *Plessy v. Ferguson*.<sup>239</sup> NAACP officials presumably felt that Jim Crow was more vulnerable in this context. The initial attempt to gain access to affluent white leisure space, however, was stonewalled by the Park and Recreation Commission. On December 12, 1951 twelve upper- and middle-class African Americans arrived at the publicly owned Bonnie Brae golf course in Revolution Park with the intent of integrating the facility. Numerous white golfers were admitted that day, but the black vanguard was resolutely denied. Undeterred, eight of the golfers returned the next day and were again refused entry.<sup>240</sup> While both attempts were turned away politely and without spectacle, municipal officials and the Park Commission refused to elaborate on whether any integration plan could be accepted or whether

---

<sup>237</sup> Blum, 51.

<sup>238</sup> Wolcott, 1-6.

<sup>239</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

<sup>240</sup> “Petition of Charles Leeper, et. al,” December 20, 1951, Joseph Grier Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

separate facilities would be offered in the future. Even though government officials declined to comment on the black golfers' refusal, other whites in the city did not remain silent. Wealthy entrepreneur and Revolution's primary land donor, Osmond Barringer, remarked, "it is my opinion that the Negroes are not ready for this step yet."<sup>241</sup> Soon after their second rejection from the course, NAACP attorneys informed the Commission that unless the exclusionary policy was discarded in the next fifteen days, a formal petition would be filed. Predictably, the Commission ignored this deadline and refused to consider the matter until its next scheduled meeting.<sup>242</sup>

The Commission's unwillingness to respond to the golfers' request was more than simple recalcitrance and instead signified genuine confusion. By attempting to access Bonnie Brae, the sixteen African American golfers forced the Park and Recreation Commission into a perplexing legal predicament.<sup>243</sup> While recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, most notably the *Shelley v. Kraemer* decision of 1948, had undercut the legal validity of racially restrictive covenants, Revolution's case was novel. In *Shelley*, the Supreme Court ruled that:

Private agreements to exclude persons of designated race or color from the use or occupancy of real estate for residential purposes do not violate the Fourteenth Amendment; but it is violative of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment for state courts to enforce them.<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>241</sup> Ralph Mulford, "Petition May Cause Closing of Golf Course: Property Donor Points to Deed in Reply to Negroes' Request," *Charlotte Observer*, December 14, 1952.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> As outlined in the first chapter, the land composing Revolution Park was donated by a number of white benefactors, most notably Osmond Barringer and the Abbott Realty Company. These two donors attached a racially restrictive covenant to Revolution's deed, prohibiting the use of the Revolution Park by African Americans. If violated, this restrictive covenant would activate a "reverter clause," which would legally transfer the donated land, as well as any improvements made by the Commission, back to Barringer and the Abbot Realty Company. In total, fifty-nine acres of land were threatened by restrictive covenant. While none of the donated land was located on the golf course, the expansive language of the covenant prohibited African Americans from accessing any portion of Revolution.

<sup>244</sup> *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

This decision did not explicitly ban the creation of restrictive covenants; but it severely undermined the government's ability to enforce them. Charlotte's situation, however, was more complex than the *Shelley* case. Because the restrictive covenant devised by Barringer included a reverter clause, which stipulated that the land must revert to its original owner if the covenant was violated, the implications of the *Shelley* decision were less clear. Attorneys working for both the NAACP and the city government recognized that although the racially restrictive covenant could not be enforced outright, the reverter clause was possibly defensible. Since the reverter clause was technically separate from the racially restrictive covenant, it was conceivable that the land could revert to Barringer even if the covenant was deemed unenforceable.<sup>245</sup> Despite doubts, however, the NAACP decided to pursue legal action as a remedy for segregation in municipal leisure spaces.

Faced with inaction from the Commission, NAACP attorneys made good on their threat in late-1951. A petition authored by attorneys Spottswood Robinson and Thomas Wyche filed on December 20, 1951, claimed that the Commission's racially exclusive policies violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The language of the motion was both exhaustive and predictable. The petition demanded that the city:

forthwith cease and desist from enforcing, executing or pursuing against [the] petitioners, or any other Negro similarly situated, or either or any of them, because of their race or color, of the right and privilege of admission to and use of the only public course provided, established, maintained and conducted by [the Park and Recreation Commission].<sup>246</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> Charles Renfrew, "Constitutional Law: Equal Protection: Determinable Fee as Device to Impose Racial Restrictions on Use of Land," *Michigan Law Review* 54, no. 5 (March 1956,) 698-701.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

While the petition's wording was convoluted, the message was clear. Inequitable leisure opportunities would no longer be tolerated by black Charlotteans. Unless the city complied in a timely manner, the petitioners made it known that formal legal action was imminent. Situating the golfers' request in the language of natural and constitutional rights, the motion claimed that preventing African Americans from accessing the Bonnie Brae course denied them "their privileges and immunities as citizens of the United States, their liberty and property without the due process of law," and that these factors rendered the restrictive covenant "unconstitutional and void."<sup>247</sup> This formal statement, however, did not yield the response the NAACP intended.

During the Commission's regularly scheduled meeting on January 7, 1952, the board members declined to debate on the merits of the NAACP's petition. Instead, the Park and Recreation Commission preemptively filed its own suit. Scheduled to be heard in the Mecklenburg Superior Court, this suit listed Osmond Barringer, the Abbott Realty Company, and the group of black petitioners as defendants.<sup>248</sup> Compiled by City Attorney John Shaw and entitled *Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission v. Barringer*, this motion asked the Court to resolve two fundamental questions. First, the Commission wanted to determine whether the restrictive covenant and reverter clause in Revolution's original deed were valid. Second, if these exclusionary clauses were indeed legal, the Commission needed to know whether these covenants were enforceable.<sup>249</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> "Charles Leeper et. al.," 7.

<sup>248</sup> Presumably the black petitioners were included as parties to the suit in order to make any court decision binding to them, as well as Barringer and the Abbott Realty Company.

<sup>249</sup> "Suit to End Golf Course Ban is Filed," *Charlotte Observer*, January 15, 1952.

Although these were important questions, the suit did not indicate whether the city considered the black petitioners' request valid.<sup>250</sup>

The decision to preemptively file suit diverged substantially from other golf course segregation cases in similar upper-South locales. During the 1950s, middle-and upper-class African American activists throughout the South used direct action and litigation to dispute Jim Crow in public golf courses. Municipalities that attempted to defend golf course segregation typically relied upon one of two basic strategies. Wolcott posits that "the primary method of resisting golf course desegregation was privatization, which proved an effective and profitable way to evade civil rights activists and district courts."<sup>251</sup> By removing government oversight of these facilities, city leaders made legal challenges infinitely more complicated. Notable instances of this strategy's implementation occurred in Charleston, South Carolina and Jacksonville, Florida, where courses were sold quickly, and at cutthroat prices, after segregation was threatened. In each of these cases, privatization efforts were framed as fiscally necessary, but this was just a veneer intended to camouflage the persistence of exclusionary policies.<sup>252</sup> Both in Charleston and Jacksonville, segregation in previously public golf courses persisted into the 1960s, with desegregation efforts becoming mired in complex legal arguments. The second strategy required outright legal resistance. A case that emanated from Atlanta, Georgia provides the archetypal example of this strategy. In 1951, the Atlanta NAACP office initiated a court challenge to the course's exclusionary practices. This effort bore fruit in 1954, when a federal judge ruled that segregation in Atlanta's courses violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Compared to these precedents, however, Charlotte's situation

---

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Wolcott, 171.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, 171.

was fairly defensible, with the reverter clause adding crucial protection to Jim Crow at Bonnie Brae.

Two reasons may have guided the Commission's decision to refrain from privatization or closure. First, somewhat paradoxically, Revolution's complex land deed likely prevented city officials from privatizing the course. The expansive language of the restrictive covenant that banned African Americans from entering Revolution could also be construed to mean that the park had to remain public.<sup>253</sup> If this were the case, then the forty acres donated by Barringer would have reverted during a privatization attempt.<sup>254</sup> Second, the inclusion of the reverter clause also separated Charlotte from other restrictive covenant cases, making segregation at Revolution more defensible than other public courses. This particular factor came into play in 1954 after a landmark federal court ruling in Atlanta, one of the few large southern urban areas to maintain a public course.<sup>255</sup> While this judgment opened Atlanta's public courses to African Americans on a limited and token basis, City Attorney John Shaw correctly noted that Charlotte's case was not subject to this precedent. Essentially, "the so-called 'reverter clause' issue apparently makes the local case unique among litigation on the question of segregation."<sup>256</sup> The novel nature of this case also acted as a disincentive against closure of the course, with the reverter clause substantially increasing the likelihood of a decision upholding segregation. Because privatization was not a viable option for Charlotte, municipal

---

<sup>253</sup> Although none of the land donated by Barringer or the Abbot Realty Company included the golf course, the expansive language of the original covenant meant that if African Americans used any of the facilities included Revolution, then the land would revert back to the original owners. Ralph Mulford, "Suit is Filed by Park Board as Result of Negro Petition," *Charlotte Observer*, April 4, 1965.

<sup>254</sup> Charles Reynolds, "Donors Seek Return of Revolution Park," *Charlotte Observer*, March 1, 1944.

<sup>255</sup> Bayor, 150; The only other large city to maintain a public golf course in the 1950s was Houston, Texas, but segregation in this course was tied inextricably to the Atlanta's legal battle. After the *Dawson* case was resolved in Atlanta, Houston's course was quickly ordered to desegregate.

<sup>256</sup> "Links Ruling Doesn't Alter Local Case," *Charlotte Observer*, July 10, 1954.

officials disarmed the NAACP through a public relations campaign and complex litigation.

Commission officials outlined the situation to the *Charlotte Observer*, by emphasizing that the NAACP's petition placed the city in an untenable position. First, R. P. Steffey, vice chairman of the Commission, described the legal quandary created by Barringer's restrictive covenant, concluding that "we certainly can't afford to lose all that land."<sup>257</sup> Second, the Commission highlighted that they were committed to treating African Americans fairly. Park Superintendent Foster Blaisdell told reporters that the Commission firmly believed that African Americans had a right to equal recreation facilities. Blaisdell accurately stressed that the Commission was "currently spending more per capita for Negro recreational facilities than for white [facilities]."<sup>258</sup> While this assertion was not disingenuous, it ignored decades of disparate funding for white facilities. These assurances may have assuaged white moderates, but NAACP attorneys failed to find them persuasive and proceeded with filing their own case on April 4, 1952. Entitled *Leeper v. Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission*, this suit listed the same sixteen golfers from the original petition as plaintiffs.

Thomas Wyche, a local attorney, and Spottswood Robinson, a lawyer from Richmond, Virginia who was an integral member of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund (LDF), were charged with preparing the case against Revolution Park's segregated golf course. The suit emphasized that the plaintiffs were "taxpayers and citizens" and charged that the Commission's policies violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Robinson and Wyche also served Harry McMullan, the North Carolina

---

<sup>257</sup> Ralph Mulford, "Suit is Filed by Park Board As Result of Negro Petition," *Charlotte Observer*, April 4, 1952.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

State Attorney General, a memorandum requesting that either he or his representatives be present at the hearing.<sup>259</sup> Scheduled to be heard in the Mecklenburg Superior Court by Judge William Hatch on November 10, 1952, this action was the first legal challenge to Jim Crow segregation in Charlotte. Shortly after the NAACP's case was filed, however, attorneys representing the city began a series of procedural motions in an attempt to have the suit removed from the docket.<sup>260</sup>

The suit filed by the City of Charlotte represented a seemingly progressive form of legal obstructionism. First, on April 4, 1952 “the Commission, the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation and the Professional Manager of the Golf Course, ask[ed] for relief by declaratory judgment and injunction against the racial discrimination claimed to be practiced as respects the course.”<sup>261</sup> Essentially, this motion aimed to accelerate the Commission's suit, allowing its decision to precede the NAACP's case. Second, on May 26, 1952, the Commission requested that the NAACP's case be dismissed, claiming that the issues at stake in the case filed by the city were equivalent to those raised by the NAACP.<sup>262</sup> This contention, however, was not entirely accurate. While the Park and Recreation Commission's lawsuit probed the legality of segregation at Bonnie Brae, the outcome of the suit would only provide advice on the exclusionary policy, rather than a binding order. Conversely, the NAACP's countersuit sought for a ruling to actively prevent the Commission from engaging in exclusionary practices on public land. An affirmative decision on the NAACP's behalf was likely then to desegregate all public leisure spaces. Although both of the Commission's procedural motions were denied, they

---

<sup>259</sup> “Negroes' Suit May Bring in Att'y General,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 10, 1951.

<sup>260</sup> Ralph Mulford, “Suit is Filed by Park Board As Result of Negro Petition,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 4, 1952.

<sup>261</sup> Kelly Alexander to Thurgood Marshall, June 7, 1954, Box 18, Folder 6, Kelly Alexander Sr. Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

are indicative of an attempt to use legalistic means, rather than massive resistance or outright refusal to forestall desegregation.<sup>263</sup> These actions were not an anomaly, but instead were emblematic of the Commission's obstructionist agenda during the 1950s.

Once filed, both suits became bogged down in a legalistic quagmire that would take years to resolve. Even though a long period elapsed between the Commission's filing of the suit and the case's actual hearing, little was accomplished in the first skirmish. During the preliminary hearings for both cases on November 10, 1952, Judge William Hatch made it clear that both the Commission's and the NAACP's lawsuits "must take their turn on the calendar."<sup>264</sup> The schedule devised by Judge Hatch was for the Commission's original case to be heard in January 1953, "so that plenty of leeway will be available to get the matter before the North Carolina Supreme Court at the regular Mecklenburg hearing time in April."<sup>265</sup> The NAACP's countersuit, however, was not even given a tentative date during this preliminary hearing.

Privately, NAACP attorneys welcomed the recurrent delays in the Bonnie Brae case. Watching the progression of the landmark *Brown* case, the association's lawyers believed that by allowing more time to elapse, they would improve their chances of success.<sup>266</sup> Understanding this, Robinson recommended that:

when the Supreme Court decides the school cases, I expect to be jammed for a while, and since we do not know when the decisions may be handed down, I

---

<sup>263</sup> For further analysis of how southern moderates sought to use legalistic means to subvert challenges to segregation see: William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (London, England: Oxford University Press, USA, 1981); Victoria Wolcott, *Race Riots and Rollercoasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>264</sup> "Golf Course Issue is Heard in Court, *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1952.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Spottswood Robinson to Thomas Wyche, Kelly Alexander, and Robert Glass, October 5, 1953, Box 18, Folder 6, Kelly Alexander Sr. Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

suggest that we do not ask the Court for a hearing date until after we shall have substantially completed the brief and the aforesaid difficulties respecting my own program have disappeared.<sup>267</sup>

Essentially, until the conclusion of the *Brown* decision, Robinson would not be able to direct his full attention towards the Bonnie Brae case.

This patience was not shared by local members of the NAACP. Frustrated with the progress of the desegregation efforts, Kelly Alexander corresponded with prominent NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall in an attempt to accelerate the pace of the trial. Stressing that the Charlotte Branch would cover the legal costs incurred by the trial, Alexander voiced his dissatisfaction with the vague assurances provided by Spottswood Robinson about the case's headway. In this vein, Alexander described that he had "discussed this matter with Spotts and he cannot give me anything definite as usual [emphasis in original]."<sup>268</sup> Faced with only vague assurances that the trial would proceed, Alexander noted that "you can easily see the task I face with the people in my city."<sup>269</sup> Alexander's frustration is emblematic of an inherent issue with the strategy of litigation. Faced with persistent delays and constant obfuscation from Commission lawyers, challenges to Jim Crow would drag on for years. Increasingly, black Charlotteans, especially youth, were unwilling to defer to gradualism.

While the Bonnie Brae case was slowly winding its way through the legal system, tensions over access to leisure space in Charlotte began to reach a boiling point. During the summer of 1953 a group of African American children snuck into Latta Park in the Dilworth neighborhood and began playing baseball. While the transgression of racial

---

<sup>267</sup> Spottswood Robinson to Thomas Wyche and Kelly Alexander, April 15, 1954.

<sup>268</sup> Kelly Alexander to Thurgood Marshall, June 7, 1954, Box 18, Folder 6, Kelly Alexander Sr. Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

boundaries in public leisure spaces was not unheard of, this incident was markedly different. When the police responded to complaints by Dilworth residents, the children did not flee. Instead, they remained in the park until forcibly removed by officers, acting on the authority of Park and Recreation Superintendent Marion Diehl.<sup>270</sup> Unlike many protests staged in Charlotte, this event was not orchestrated by the NAACP or any other African American organization. Instead, it appears that this challenge was arranged solely by lower-class black youth.<sup>271</sup> Because of this, the Latta Park incident is emblematic of how young black activists began a wave of more militant protests in the early-1950s. This narrative has been ignored by historians of civil rights era Charlotte.<sup>272</sup>

On August 4, in a dramatic reversal of previous custom, the Commission voted to erect signs at the entrance of white facilities clarifying their exclusivity and to “prosecute as trespassers any Negro persons using white park facilities or whites using Negro parks.”<sup>273</sup> Although the police had been mobilized to remove African American children from public parks prior to the 1950s, previously no policy had existed that required trespassing charges to be filed.<sup>274</sup> Rather, black youth caught illegally in white leisure

---

<sup>270</sup> Kays Gary, “Racial Issue in City Parks Begins to Boil,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1953.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> In general, histories of Charlotte have provided inordinate emphasis on the contributions of middle-class, Christian, and moderate civil rights actors. Examples of this brand of scholarship include: Damaria Etta Brown Leach, “Progress Under Pressure: Changes in Charlotte Race Relations, 1955-1965” (Master’s Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1976); Frye Galliard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); Marianne Bumgarner-Davis, “Rending the Veil: Desegregation in Charlotte 1954-1975” (Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995).

<sup>273</sup> Kays Gary, “Racial Issue in City Parks Begins to Boil,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1953.

<sup>274</sup> For first person accounts of African American children sneaking into white facilities see: Paul Harris and Robert Brown, interviewed by Kyle Cox, Revolution Park Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, April 28, 2010; Walter Dial, interviewed by Hope Murphy, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 12, 2004.

spaces typically had been released without formal charges.<sup>275</sup> Kelly Alexander capitalized on the reactionary trespassing policy and proclaimed that this action “will only serve to increase the activity and aggravate the situation. It calls for another test case in the courts and we’re confident of winning.”<sup>276</sup> Despite the increasingly credible threat of legal action, the Commission continued its exclusionary policies.

The use of legalistic and procedural means to combat desegregation was not uniformly endorsed by Charlotte’s white community. Instead, some segments of the clergy resisted the maintenance of exclusionary public policies and exhorted the white community to accept desegregation as the law of the land. The congregation with perhaps the strongest views was the Episcopal Church. Led by Rector Thomas Blair, many of Charlotte’s Episcopalians endorsed controversial issues, most notably school desegregation, in the direct aftermath of the 1954 *Brown* decision. Although this perspective was not unanimous, with a prominent rector dissenting against this stance after the 1957 attempt to integrate Harding High, this congregation remained an important influence on white views.<sup>277</sup> Presbyterians, the largest religious denomination in the city, took a more ambiguous stance on the merits of racial equality during the 1950s and 1960s. While Presbyterian churches played minimal roles in supporting the desegregation of the city’s public accommodations, neither condoning nor condemning the movement, a number of prominent white liberals emerged from the fold. These progressive congregation members most notably included Judge James McMillan, who would later rule on the issue of school busing, and Dr. John Cunningham, who would

---

<sup>275</sup> Walter Dial, interviewed by Hope Murphy, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 12, 2004.

<sup>276</sup> Kays Gary, “Racial Issue in City Parks Begins to Boil,” *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1953.

<sup>277</sup> Douglas, 65-67.

chair a mayoral race relations committee.<sup>278</sup> While some members and clergy from area Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and Catholic churches supported desegregation, their efforts were less impactful and well-defined than the white members of Episcopalian and Presbyterian congregations.

Unsurprisingly, African American congregations were much more inclined to support integration efforts. The impact of black churches in Charlotte was twofold. First, these institutions sheltered the black community during periods of economic and social hardship, helping to mitigate the harsh realities of Jim Crow society and foster strong black communities.<sup>279</sup> Second, churches provided platforms for activists and leaders to support the cause of desegregation. Arguably the two most active black denominations pushing for social equality during the 1950s and 1960s were the Baptists and the Presbyterians.<sup>280</sup> Presbyterian minister Reginald Hawkins was one of the more vocal advocates of racial equality to emerge from the clergy. In the late-1950s and 1960s, Hawkins would go on to challenge desegregation in a variety of contexts, including recreation, public accommodations, and voting rights.<sup>281</sup> Like other black leaders, Hawkins used his faith to garner biracial support amongst Presbyterian ministers for a protest against segregation in the Central Branch of the YMCA.<sup>282</sup> Despite challenges from clergy of both races, however, the Park and Recreation Commission

---

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>279</sup> For examples of the role of churches in black community life see: Olaf Abraham, interviewed by Jennifer Payne, June 6, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Ida James, interviewed by Brian Alexander, March 23, 2004, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>280</sup> Douglas, 67.

<sup>281</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Greg Childers, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, undated.

<sup>282</sup> This incident is explained in depth in the third chapter, p. 135-136.

devised putatively race neutral strategies to blunt NAACP challenges to segregation in public leisure spaces.

During the mid- to late-1950s, Park and Recreation Commissions around the state scrambled to find ways to blunt NAACP challenges to segregation in public parks and recreation centers. W.T. Robertson, commissioner of recreation in the nearby city of Morganton, wrote Charlotte's recreation director Marion Diehl on September 30, 1955, to inquire about how best to maintain an unofficial policy of racial exclusion in public recreation facilities:

I would appreciate very much if you would furnish me with a copy of the policy you use for letting groups, clubs or organizations rent or use your buildings and facilities. We have just recently received a request from the N.A.A.C.P. to use our Negro [recreation] center for monthly meetings and we are not sure at this point just how is best to cope with it.<sup>283</sup>

Diehl's response to Robertson's request reveals a great deal about the operation of Jim Crow in Charlotte. Robertson's quandary was not unfamiliar to Diehl. In a handwritten letter, Diehl responded to the query, concluding that "We do not let any private clubs or organizations such as [the NAACP] use our clubs or comm[unity] centers. We say they are for recreational purposes only and are all scheduled up."<sup>284</sup> Although private organizations were routinely allowed to use the Commission's facilities, Diehl's clever diversionary tactic allowed Charlotte's Commission to deny access to African American groups, while simultaneously appearing to be acting on race-neutral criteria. This private correspondence reveals that although the Commission adhered to the rhetoric of civility, the city's leadership consistently bent the truth to maintain segregation.

---

<sup>283</sup> W. T. Robertson to Marion Diehl, September 30, 1955, Unnamed Folder, Board of Recreation Minutes, Collett Street Recreation Center, Morganton Parks and Recreation, Morganton, North Carolina.

<sup>284</sup> Marion Diehl to W. T. Robertson, undated, Unnamed Folder, Board of Recreation Minutes, Collett Street Recreation Center, Morganton Parks and Recreation, Morganton, North Carolina.

Independent from these local struggles, the court system finally reached a verdict in 1955. The ruling handed down by the North Carolina Supreme Court served only to further complicate an already difficult issue. The decision, handed down in October 1955, upheld the Superior Court's contention that the reverter clause was both valid and enforceable, without violating either the Fourteenth Amendment or *Shelley v. Kraemer*. A somewhat esoteric legal principle dictated the outcome of the case. The matter at stake was whether the reverter clause represented a "qualifiable" or "determinable fee."<sup>285</sup> If the fee was determinable, then the reverter would require Barringer to actively sue the Commission, requiring state action to enforce the clause, thus violating the parameters of *Shelley*. Conversely, if the reverter clause represented a qualifiable fee, the land would automatically revert to Barringer, technically not breaching the state action requirement of *Shelley*.<sup>286</sup> Ruling that the reverter constituted a qualifiable fee, Justice Parker decreed that "if Negroes use Bonnie Brae Golf Course, the reverter provision in the Abbott Realty Company deed will become effective and the title will revert to the Abbott Realty Company."<sup>287</sup> By deciding to uphold the reverter, the Supreme Court ruled against the NAACP. This decision, however, did not resolve the Commission's legal quandary. An unnamed Commission member concluded that the "decision may leave them trapped between two fires."<sup>288</sup> Essentially, if the city chose to allow golfers on the course, then forty acres of Revolution would to revert to Barringer, but if the Commission decided to enforce the parameters of the reverter then it would be in violation of federal law. Although the case was sent to the United States Supreme Court, the justices refused to

---

<sup>285</sup> *Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission v. Barringer* 88 U.S. 114 (1955); Renfrew, 698-701.

<sup>286</sup> Renfrew, 698-701.

<sup>287</sup> *Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission v. Barringer* 88 U.S. 114 (1955)

<sup>288</sup> Hoke May, "Not to Rule on Reverter," *Charlotte Observer*, March 8, 1953.

hear the suit. This decision made the North Carolina Supreme Court's decision binding.<sup>289</sup>

With this legal question answered, the NAACP's case proceeded in the Mecklenburg Superior Court. On May 4, 1956 attorney Shaw filed a motion "asking that [the suit] be dismissed in the light of the reverter decision."<sup>290</sup> But Judge Susie Sharp, who would later become the first female State Supreme Court Justice in North Carolina, denied this motion.<sup>291</sup> Oral arguments continued until December of 1956, when Judge Sharp, influenced by a series of Supreme Court rulings mandating integration in public leisure spaces in other cities, ordered that the Commission had to either integrate the golf course in ninety days or shut it down.<sup>292</sup> Recognizing that integration would activate the reverter clause, the Commission approached Barringer and the Abbott Realty Company, hoping to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution.

After years of legal wrangling, the remedy to the Park and Recreation Commission's dilemma came through arbitration. In an attempt to comply with Judge Sharp's December 4 order, city attorneys negotiated an agreement with Barringer to purchase the forty acres to which the reverter clause applied. After agreeing upon a price of 17,500 dollars for the tract in question, Charlotte's attorneys rushed the contract to the Park and Recreation Commission. In a speech before the Commission, City attorney Shaw concluded that "frankly, I think we've got an uphill fight if we do [anything] other than attempt to make peace."<sup>293</sup> The Commission concurred and passed a unanimous

---

<sup>289</sup> "Judge Sharp Gets Bonnie Brae Suit," *Charlotte Observer*, December 4, 1956.

<sup>290</sup> "Ruling Climaxes 5-Year Litigation," *Charlotte Observer*, December 5, 1956.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> The cases that influenced justice Sharp included a decision involving beaches in Baltimore, the *Holmes* golf course case in Atlanta, and a case desegregating Virginia's state parks. See *Ruling Climaxes 5-Year Litigation*, *Charlotte Observer*, December 5, 1956.

<sup>293</sup> "Segregation Ended," *Charlotte Observer*, January 10, 1957.

resolution to approve the purchase. As part of the agreement, the Commission promised to pay a 3,500 dollar fee that would have been required if Barringer had activated the reverter clause.<sup>294</sup> With this purchase, segregation at the Bonnie Brae course effectively ended at 11:20 am on January 8, 1957. Unsurprisingly, the first black Charlottean to test the new arrangement was a teenage golfer named James Otis Williams, who scored one over par with a set of borrowed clubs.<sup>295</sup>

By spinning token integration as evidence of Charlotte's progressive and business friendly climate, Commission members then sought to divert attention from their legal obstructionism. In a baffling statement, Commission member J.B. Clark asserted that "so far as I know we're the first public body in Charlotte to take any action toward integration. Just for the record, I think it should be made clear there was no attempt at evasion."<sup>296</sup> This perplexing remark reveals a persistent theme in Charlotte's desegregation. Municipal officials sought to exhaust legal and procedural means in an attempt to forestall desegregation of public space, but they would publicly agree with desegregation once it had been accomplished.<sup>297</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* was less subtle. An editorial entitled "No Other Ruling Was Possible" cast the course's integration in a positive light. But the paper was careful to clarify that the decision was only valid because there were no segregated golf facilities available to African Americans in Charlotte. Characterizing the decision as "both legal and equitable," the *Observer* reminded readers that "the 'separate but equal' argument was never a factor in the Bonnie

---

<sup>294</sup> "Links Are Opened to Negroes," *Charlotte Observer*, January 8, 1957.

<sup>295</sup> James Ross II interviewed by Kyle Cox, April 12, 2010, Revolution Park Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; "Negro Golfer Fires Hot 37," *Charlotte Observer*, January 9, 1957.

<sup>296</sup> "Segregation Ended," *Charlotte Observer*, January 9, 1957.

<sup>297</sup> This phenomena and its political significance is well documented by Chafe, 8-10.

Brae case.”<sup>298</sup> Even with the course’s integration, however, Bonnie Brae remained a contested space. Problematizing the progressive façade manufactured by the Commission and the white press were a series of racially charged incidents at the Revolution Golf Course.

Triumphalist narratives of the black freedom movement in Charlotte ignore the persistence of racial unrest in the city, even after the official demise of Jim Crow.<sup>299</sup> Black golfer James Ross describes the mood at Revolution several years after, the course’s desegregation:

You had incidents where people would go out to play and they would be, you know, called names or be treated in a disrespectful manner. And so that was, there was incidents, a lot of incidents. I don’t remember any actual fights but I remember some confrontations between the people who ran the golf course and individuals who went out...They didn’t change their mind, they just had to go by the law, so they would harass you when you came in and they just really still didn’t want you out there.<sup>300</sup>

Ross’ experience was not unique. The persistence of discrimination remained a salient theme throughout nominally desegregated leisure spaces in Charlotte in the 1950s and 1960s. Even after civil rights victories, African Americans still frequently experienced discrimination in public recreation spaces.

Inspired by success in the Bonnie Brae case, the NAACP’s leadership set their sights on more provocative targets in the late-1950s. The next locus of the organization’s desegregation efforts became the Revolution Park swimming pool. Unlike the Bonnie Brae golf course, this action breached gender and class boundaries in unprecedented ways. The first attempt to desegregate the pool ended in failure. The NAACP’s swim-in,

---

<sup>298</sup> “No Other Ruling Was Possible,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 10, 1957.

<sup>299</sup> Specifically referring to Bonnie Brae, most analyses treat James Otis Williams’ round as the end of racial conflict in this space. Leach, 74-80; Douglas, 60-61; Cunningham, 177.

<sup>300</sup> James Ross II, interviewed by Debbie Howard, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, March 22, 2005.

which involved a mixed gender group of two boys and a girl, resulted in a resolute denial by Commission representatives on July 17, 1960. This rejection, however, led to a series of meetings where the NAACP reiterated its dedication to the desegregation of public leisure spaces. Adding credence to this policy, Kelly Alexander “pledged financial support [from the NAACP] to desegregate the pool.”<sup>301</sup> Recent history added considerable credibility to the NAACP’s threat. With success of the Bonnie Brae suit, white Charlotteans became increasingly conscious of the efficacy of the NAACP’s litigation campaign.

Charlotte’s reaction to the swim-in diverged from other New South cities in subtle, but relevant ways. As with the golf course, most upper-South urban locales chose to either privatize or close down their municipal pools entirely.<sup>302</sup> Even seemingly liberal cities, like Nashville, closed their pools in 1963 in the face of multiple swim-ins and a lawsuit.<sup>303</sup> Wolcott contends that the strategies of closure and privatization were particularly effective because “unlike the right to go to school or to vote, there was no constitutional right to a public pool.”<sup>304</sup> Even cities bent on promoting a progressive image utilized privatization as a means to circumvent desegregation attempts. This scenario played out in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1956. When African Americans filed suit against the discriminatory policies of the Lindley Park Swimming Pool, municipal officials quickly sold the facility.<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> Roy Covington, “Swimming Pool Desegregated: City Policy Statement is Issued,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>302</sup> Unlike upper-South locales, urban centers in the deep South often used massive resistance and white terrorism to contest desegregation efforts. See: Wolcott, 160-165; Wiltse, 157-166.

<sup>303</sup> Wolcott, 165.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>305</sup> Wolcott, 160; For analysis of progressivism in Greensboro municipal politics see Chafe, 1-8.

Rather than adopt privatization or closure as strategies, however, municipal officials in Charlotte sought to negotiate with the NAACP. As early as 1958, correspondence between upper-tier leaders of the NAACP and the municipal government had begun. The activists and bureaucrats that attended these secret meetings agreed on a set of simple, informal terms. Mayor Brookshire's personal notes recounted that "negroes planning to swim would warn the police in advance—as demonstrators downtown had been doing."<sup>306</sup> The choice to support the activists, however, was not entirely voluntary. Rather, city leaders capitulated under the credible threat of a NAACP funded lawsuit and the possibility of direct action demonstrations.<sup>307</sup> Adding further substance to the NAACP's position were the series of tumultuous sit-ins in Greensboro in February 1960. These protests sparked a spate of similar demonstrations throughout the South, indirectly leading to the creation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>308</sup> Thus, by choosing to negotiate rather than privatize or shut down the pools, Charlotte's leaders diverged from path of many Southern locales.

Charlotte's choice was not incomprehensible, but once again, the decisions of municipal officials were informed by the city's racial geography and the government's well-established policy of economic boosterism.<sup>309</sup> New Deal and Urban Renewal projects drastically re-sorted the city's population until, by 1960, segregation had reached 75.6 percent.<sup>310</sup> This degree of spatial segregation caused both lower- and upper-class white Charlotteans to be less threatened by the presence of African Americans than the

---

<sup>306</sup> Stanford Brookshire, "Notes on Desegregation Steps Taken in Charlotte," June 11, 1963, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Folder 1, Box 1.

<sup>307</sup> Stanford Brookshire, "Notes on Desegregation Steps Taken in Charlotte," June 11, 1963, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Folder 1, Box 1; Cunningham, 117.

<sup>308</sup> Cobb, 71-72; Usher, 158-159.

<sup>309</sup> Hanchett, 225; Cunningham, 178; Douglas, 51.

<sup>310</sup> This statistic is based upon degree of dissimilarity. See Hanchett 261-262; Douglas, 55.

white residents of more heterogeneous New South cities.<sup>311</sup> The dual forces of spatial arrangement and economic boosterism encouraged token desegregation and dulled white reaction. Cunningham explains:

While the 'Charlotte Way' provided a setting inhospitable to hard-line expressions of white supremacy, the pronounced racial divisions that insulated whites' status in the face of civil rights reform both enabled and reinforced this progressive action... High rates of residential segregation across geographically distant neighborhoods minimized interracial contact, and the city's urban renewal programs exacerbated such divisions.<sup>312</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically, Charlotte's racialized layout allowed for superficial civil rights action to be taken, without stimulating a white backlash. The rigidity of spatial segregation in Charlotte promoted a moderate political discourse, enabling the dominance of Charlotte's business class during the turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s.

Mayor Stanford Brookshire, the quintessential Charlotte business booster, understood that protracted racial unrest would discourage businesses from investing in Charlotte.<sup>313</sup> While most historians of civil rights era Charlotte have provided in-depth analyses of how Brookshire's business boosterism contributed to desegregation, these perspectives obscure a larger context.<sup>314</sup> While business concerns certainly encouraged the moderate decisions of Charlotte's leadership, making them more willing to negotiate with the NAACP, the city's spatial segregation helped those leaders remain in power. In this way, the insulating effect of spatial segregation empowered moderate municipal politicians and discouraged the development of white radicalism.

---

<sup>311</sup> Cunningham, 180-182

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>313</sup> Stanford Brookshire, "Notes on Desegregation Steps Taken in Charlotte," June 11, 1963, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Folder 1, Box 1, J. Murrey. Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte ; Alex Coffin, *Brookshire and Belk: Businessmen in City Hall* (Charlotte: Monarch Printing, 1994), 50-54.

<sup>314</sup> Examples include Douglas, 97-90; Galliard, 22-23, 106; Coffin, 50-54.

Charlotte's experience can be juxtaposed with the situation in neighboring Greensboro, which harbored a far more heterogeneous racialized geography. Deprived of the insulating effect of segregation, whites in Greensboro were considerably less tolerant towards desegregation efforts. Although Greensboro's leaders supported business boosterism, white radical groups had a much easier time establishing a foothold.<sup>315</sup> Cunningham describes that "the multiple UKA klaverns that dotted Guilford County, many of which maintained large memberships, demonstrated that...whites in Greensboro simply had more to lose in the civil rights struggle than those in Charlotte."<sup>316</sup> Thus, Charlotte's negotiation was predicated on spatial segregation rather than genuine progressivism.

After several weeks of tense negotiation with city leaders, the NAACP's efforts bore fruit on July 28, 1960. That day three black girls arrived at the Revolution pool, accompanied by an escort of two African American boys. The girls swam for approximately forty-five minutes and then vacated the pool. While there was no violence and minimal jeering, a number of white patrons left the premises and demanded refunds when the girls hopped in the pool. As the black children entered the water, one white parent screamed to his own children: "Get out, right now."<sup>317</sup> Roughly half of the white swimmers at the pool joined the exodus, with only ten adolescent males remaining. While this evacuation did not end in violence, it clearly demonstrated that many whites in Charlotte simply were unwilling to allow the desegregation of leisure facilities.<sup>318</sup> City officials sanctioned this experiment, unlike the first attempt to desegregate the pool. Key

---

<sup>315</sup> Chafe, 208; Cunningham, 180-183.

<sup>316</sup> Cunningham, 183.

<sup>317</sup> "Charlotte, N.C. City Swim Pool Integrated," *The Evening Independent*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>318</sup> B.R. Booth JR. to Joseph Grier, July 28, 1960, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Folder 1, Box 1.

members of the Commission, including director Grier, were present to ensure that order was maintained.<sup>319</sup>

Municipal officials also enlisted the help of several plain-clothes and uniformed police officers, cognizant of race riots resulting from attempts to desegregate municipal swimming pools in St. Louis, Missouri and Montgomery, Alabama.<sup>320</sup> As part of the prearranged plan, the African American girls stayed at the opposite end of the pool as the other white patrons. Revolution's token desegregation was a landmark moment for North Carolina, because it was the first pool integrated in the state. Newspapers around the South published articles praising the city's leadership for its enlightened race relations, reinforcing Charlotte's progressive image.<sup>321</sup>

The Commission's choice to only allow black adolescent females into Revolution was deliberate and reveals much about the gendered dimensions of Jim Crow in Charlotte. Constructed notions of black masculinity and sexual immorality shaped this test case in important ways. Amongst middle- and upper-class whites, understandings of masculinity underwent a significant evolution between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Gail Berderman has explained, during the nineteenth century, white manliness was conceived in moral, political, and economic terms.<sup>322</sup> Political challenges from the urban lower-class and women, as well as a decline in the small-scale entrepreneurial ventures that had sustained many members of the white Southern middle-

---

<sup>319</sup> Roy Covington, "Swimming Pool Desegregated: City Policy Statement is Issued," *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>320</sup> For descriptions of these riots see Wolcott, 85, 113, 165-168; Wiltse, 170-175.

<sup>321</sup> "Bathing Pool in Charlotte Integrated," *Greensboro Daily News*, July 28, 1960; "Swimming Pool in Charlotte Admits Negroes," *Spartanburg Herald*, July 28, 1960; "Charlotte, N.C. City Swim Pool Integrated," *The Evening Independent*, July 28, 1960.

<sup>322</sup> Gail Berderman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8-17.

class, eroded these pillars and served to force a redefinition of masculinity.<sup>323</sup> Instead of the old construct of manliness, white middle- and upper-class men increasingly sought to express their masculinity by emphasizing physical strength and their inherent superiority to black men.<sup>324</sup> Lower-class whites also gravitated towards this new understanding, believing that this definition was more inclusive of their presence.

Public leisure spaces, however, proved problematic for this revised version of white manliness. Historian Jeff Wiltse posits that “racial segregation at municipal pools... likely resulted from white concerns that black men displaying their bodies at highly visible public spaces would undermine white supremacy.”<sup>325</sup> While most black men worked as laborers in physically difficult jobs, contributing to a muscular physique, many white men were employed in white collar occupations, making “white men’s claim to superiority...more tenuous.”<sup>326</sup> Emasculated by the sedentary middle-class economy of the mid-twentieth century and rising black militancy, white men of all economic backgrounds viewed the African American quest for social equality as synonymous with the desire for amalgamation and a challenge to the purity of white women. Reaction to this issue, however, was distinctly class orientated. Because upper-class whites increasingly had access to private pools, either at their homes or at area country clubs, middle- and lower-class whites were the principal reactionaries to pool integration efforts. These citizens felt that bolstering the rights of African Americans eroded their inherent rights as whites, serving as the impetus for a vitriolic response.<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>325</sup> Wiltse, 134.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, 154-158.

Faced with desegregation at the Revolution pool, local whites voiced their discontent to municipal officials, relying on constructed notions of hyper-sexualized black masculinity. Even though the African American swimmers who desegregated Revolution had been all female, reactionary whites viewed this incident as a first step towards miscegenation. White segregationists refrained from public protests at Revolution, and instead voiced their discontent in letters to various municipal officials. This vitriolic correspondence framed the pool's desegregation in gendered terms, viewing the admission of black citizens as a grave threat to white womanhood. White Charlottean B. R. Booth charged that "you have no right to use our tax monies on any kind of unnatural experimentation. You have no right to use our little girls as subjects. You have no right to keep us from going to our own pools and associating with our own kind."<sup>328</sup> Booth's fears that integration was a threat to white womanhood were shared by a number of white locals. Grocery store owner J.K Clontz, for example, posed the question to Brookshire, "would you rather see a negro in your parlor or a white man?"<sup>329</sup> Increasingly emasculated by the trend towards white-collar work and rising civil rights activism, white Charlotteans saw the desegregation of Revolution's swimming pool in distinctly gendered terms.

A corollary to the constructed image of the hyper-sexualized black male was the notion that African American bodies harbored sexually transmitted diseases at much high rates. In the 1950s and 1960s, black bodies, both male and female were seen as a threat

---

<sup>328</sup> B.R. Booth JR. to Joseph Grier, July 28, 1960, Folder 1, Box 1, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>329</sup> J. K. Clontz to Stanford Brookshire, February 12, 1963, Box 1, Folder 5, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee. Other correspondence that expresses profound fear of interracial marriage include: Anonymous to Stanford Brookshire, March 1, 1963, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Box 1, Folder 5; W. McIntire to Stanford Brookshire, August 5, 1963, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Box 1, Folder 6; A. Stone to Stanford Brookshire, March 2, 1965, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Box 1, Folder 7, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

to the purity of white citizens. Samuel Davis, in a letter to Mayor Brookshire, suggested that:

in view of the fantastic record of venereal disease which infects the negro race which I have before me I am wondering if the necessary protective precaution of a Wasserman Test, along with a Gonococci test was required of these 'Experimenters' before the white swimmers were subjected to this infections hazard.<sup>330</sup>

Some white Charlotteans felt betrayed by Mayor Brookshire in the wake of Revolution's desegregation. This sense of disgust did not arise in a vacuum, but instead was the product of a distinct historical context. Richie Richardson notes that "the discourse on venereal disease in the South in the early-twentieth century, which was prominently shaped by military medicine, reinforced notions of racial difference, particularly the diseased and infected black body."<sup>331</sup> Widely publicized instances of medical experimentation on black bodies, most notably the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment of 1932, added venereal disease to the white construct of black masculinity.<sup>332</sup> Brookshire and the Commission were cognizant of the fears engendered by these social forces and developed a decidedly gradualist desegregation plan that exploited the gendered taboo surrounding public swimming facilities.

White Charlotteans mapped sexuality differently on black female bodies than they did on male bodies. Although popular constructs of black femininity included notions of sexual promiscuity, resistance to black women occupying municipal pools hinged on

---

<sup>330</sup> The Wasserman test is designed to detect syphilis, while the Gonococci test determines whether a patient is infected with gonorrhea. Samuel Davis to Stanford Brookshire, August 1, 1960, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee, Box 1, Folder 1, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>331</sup> Richie Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 122.

<sup>332</sup> Susan Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xvii.

concepts of the inherent uncleanness of black bodies.<sup>333</sup> Reinforced by discriminatory public policies, most notably North Carolina's state-sponsored eugenics program that labeled lower-class African American women unfit to reproduce, these views were widely held by white community members in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>334</sup> Because of these fears, many white Charlotteans abandoned the Revolution pool in the aftermath of the first successful desegregation attempt.<sup>335</sup> Black female swim-ins, however, were conscious attempts to combat these negative stereotypes. Like African American women throughout the South, female activists engaged in what Evelyn Higginbotham termed "the politics of respectability." In essence, this mode of resistance "emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations."<sup>336</sup> Adhering to Victorian norms of behavior and dress, black women actively contested white constructions of African American womanhood.

Although these strategies had begun to wane in the 1960s, with some activists redefining their dress and mannerisms to reflect a more insurgent mentality, many women in Charlotte still adhered to the strategies of respectability.<sup>337</sup> A vivid example of this can be found in Dorothy Count's brief attempt to integrate Harding High School. Seeking to project an air of respectability that white society had denied her, Counts' attended school each day adorned in her Sunday best, as she carefully ignored the

---

<sup>333</sup> See: B.R. Booth JR. to Joseph Grier, July 28, 1960; J. K. Clontz to Stanford Brookshire, February 12, 1963, Box 1, Folder 5, Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee.

<sup>334</sup> Rebecca Klunchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 91.

<sup>335</sup> "Revolution, Cordelia Pools Not Visited," *Charlotte News*, August 4, 1960

<sup>336</sup> Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>337</sup> For analysis of how modes of dress and behavior changed in the 1960s, see: Tanisha Ford, "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress," *Journal of Southern History* 79, no.3 (August, 2013), 625-658.

vitriolic reaction of the white crowd.<sup>338</sup> Similarly, many middle- and upper-class black women in Charlotte also participated in a variety of civic clubs and organizations, evincing their perceived responsibility towards the lower-classes.<sup>339</sup> These efforts to assert the dignity of African American women were indelibly tied to the struggle for access to public leisure space. In essence, unrestricted access to highly contested recreational spaces allowed African Americans to assert their respectability in a public context. Although pool desegregation was in part about practicality and geographic proximity, it was also a central component in the larger struggle for human dignity. For these reasons, the NAACP continued to press the Park and Recreation Commission for more inclusive policies throughout the summer of 1960.

After the first carefully controlled test, the Park and Recreation Commission issued a statement outlining its policy about the admission of black swimmers. In a stark reversal of previous procedure, Commission Director Joseph Grier conceded that “all people have a right under the law to use all public facilities, without discrimination on account of race.”<sup>340</sup> The success of the Bonnie Brae case demonstrated that NAACP threats of litigation were credible. This precedent caused the Park and Recreation Commission to rethink its position about segregation at the Revolution Pool. In reality, however, the Commission’s newly adopted policy was not a wholesale renouncement of exclusionary policies in public leisure spaces. Rather, Grier stressed that “public order is even more important than the right of Negroes to use all public facilities and any

---

<sup>338</sup> Susan Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 294.

<sup>339</sup> For a description of middle- and upper-class black social functions in Second Ward, see: Diane Wyche, interviewed by Tosha McLean Pearson, April 28, 2007, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>340</sup> Roy Covington, “Swimming Pool Desegregated: City Policy Statement is Issued,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1960.

admission of Negroes which takes place must be within the bounds of the willingness of the public to observe order or the ability of the police to enforce it.”<sup>341</sup> This policy further elaborated that although all park spaces and community centers were to be technically integrated, the Commission would prefer to maintain a policy of de facto segregation.<sup>342</sup>

Engaging in the politics of civility, the Commission quickly made it clear that the pool’s desegregation would occur on a gradual, carefully controlled basis. Another group of African American children arrived at the Revolution pool on July 28, 1960 requesting admission. Unlike the previously successful group, however, these activists were of mixed gender. Upon their arrival, Revolution’s manager claimed that of “all public facilities, swimming pools put the tolerance of white people to the most severe test and present the greatest danger of disorder” and summarily refused entry to the black youth.<sup>343</sup> The president of the Charlotte Branch of the NAACP, Mrs. Marcetta Brooks, reacted to this incident by emphasizing that access to the Revolution meant more than just inclusion to Charlotte’s black youth. Brooks noted that the city’s African American children would continue to pressure the Commission on this issue because “use of the [African American] Double Oaks pool meant long trips across the city for Negroes that did not live near the pool.”<sup>344</sup> Despite this threat, however, black access to Revolution’s pool remained restricted.

During the muggy heat and unbearable sun of August 1960, white Charlottean’s displayed their distaste towards the Commission’s putatively inclusive policy by largely

---

<sup>341</sup> “The Park Board Accepted Reality,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 29, 1960.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Roy Covington, “4 Negroes Denied Admittance to Revolution Pool,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 29, 1960.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

avoiding both municipal swimming pools. Whites frequented one of Charlotte's segregated country clubs, visited natural swimming holes, or refrained from swimming entirely. In this way, many white residents unofficially boycotted the municipal pool. Commission officials reported that admissions were down fifty percent in the week directly after the first group of African Americans was admitted to Revolution.<sup>345</sup> Within several weeks resistance became formal, with 528 white Charlotteans signing a petition that expressed their intention to boycott the pool as long as integration persisted.<sup>346</sup>

While a majority of whites opposed desegregation in Revolution Park, this sentiment was not entirely uniform. In particular, members of the white clergy used their influence to combat racist attitudes in the Charlotte area. Dr. John Cunningham, a Presbyterian minister and the chair of Mayor Brookshire's Committee on Friendly Race Relations, a biracial body charged with mitigating racial tensions, was a valuable leader in this respect. After being notified about the white boycott of the Revolution Pool, Cunningham sought to diffuse white anger. In essence, Cunningham concluded, "I'm sorry that you are denied this privilege and pleasure. It is of course, of [your] own choosing. [But] it would not be too difficult to secure a list of 528 persons on the other side of the line who have been denied such privileges for many years."<sup>347</sup> African American youth capitalized on this unofficial boycott, however, because they recognized that the absence of the most vitriolic whites would undercut the Commission's ability to claim disorder as the reason for black exclusion.

---

<sup>345</sup> "Revolution, Cordelia Pools Not Visited," *Charlotte News*, August 4, 1960; "Three Negroes Swim Peacefully in Revolution Park Pool," *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1960.

<sup>346</sup> John Cunningham to Mary Alexander, July 30, 1963, Box 2, Folder 2, Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>347</sup> John Cunningham to Mary Alexander, July 30, 1963.

This next group of activists, however, sought to further challenge the unofficially gendered contours of the Commission's new policy. On August 4, 1960, another mixed-gender group arrived, composed of one adolescent male and two young females, demanding access to the pool. Because most of the white citizens opposed to the pool's integration were not present, the manager could not rely upon the potential for public disorder as a justification to block the children's access. The youth remained in the pool for approximately forty-five minutes, recognizing the tenuous nature of their admittance.<sup>348</sup> Ironically, diminished white attendance facilitated the entry of African American males to the pool. This successful test, however, did not completely resolve the issue of segregation at municipal pools in Charlotte.

Charlotte's white pools were nominally desegregated in 1960, but for a number of years questions remained about whether African Americans were allowed access. As late as 1964, even the Mayor's Committee on Friendly Race Relations could not come up with a definitive answer on the subject. That year, Lucy Gist, the director of the African American Bethlehem Center Day Camp, corresponded with committee member Dr. Cunningham about whether the children in her care could use the Revolution Park swimming pool. Cunningham was unable to answer this question and brought Gist's query up in the April 14 meeting of the Committee. At this meeting it was decided that "although the Revolution Park pool is now open to all people it would be best for the Director, Mrs. Lucy Gist, to contact Mr. E. Lowell Mason, Chairman of the Parks and

---

<sup>348</sup> "Three Negroes Swim Peacefully in Revolution Park Pool," *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1960.

Recreation, to ascertain an understanding of the policy.”<sup>349</sup> In a letter dated April 10, 1964, Gist inquired that “we understand the pools are open, but would like assurance of this, and an understanding with the pool director.”<sup>350</sup> This question was especially pertinent because Gist had been spending over one hundred and fifty dollars transporting campers from 1<sup>st</sup> Ward, across town to the historically African American Double Oaks Pool.<sup>351</sup> While there is no record of the director’s response, this letter demonstrates that there were significant questions about the actual inclusiveness of Charlotte’s public leisure spaces as late as 1964. Spatial segregation had accomplished what Jim Crow policies could not.

The formal desegregation of Charlotte’s public parks, golf course, and swimming pool did not fully resolve the issue of Jim Crow in public leisure spaces. Because the Commission still allowed private groups, which were free to operate on a racially segregated basis, to rent public facilities, black tax dollars still funded segregated events.<sup>352</sup> These functions provided the NAACP with an opportunity to challenge Jim Crow in a quasi-private space.

The next target of the NAACP’s campaign was the North Carolina Shrine Bowl. A private event hosted by the Shriners, the Shrine Bowl selected the best high school football players to compete before spectators in order to raise money for charity. Since its creation in 1937, the Shrine Bowl had hosted twenty-six games, each time adhering strictly to an unwritten policy of segregation. The cultural significance of this event

---

<sup>349</sup> “Minutes of the Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, April 14, 1964,” Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Lucy Gist to Leslie Barnard, April 10, 1964, Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>352</sup> Westmoreland, 43.

transcended that of a regular high school football game. Rather, “parades, dinners, and widespread pageantry made the Shrine Bowl more than a football game.”<sup>353</sup> Further reinforcing the importance of the game was its charitable dimension. With all proceeds going to the Shriner’s Greenville Hospital for crippled youth, the Bowl fused entertainment and charity in the white and upper-class Elizabeth Community. While the 1937 game raised a mere 2,500 dollars, over time the Shrine Bowl became a high grossing event. By the 1960s, the game was bringing in over 100,000 dollars annually.<sup>354</sup> As the Shrine Bowl’s popularity and charitable efficacy grew, it became an important social and cultural event for white Charlotteans. This notoriety combined with the Shriners’ use of a public stadium, however, made the Bowl an ideal test case for segregation in quasi-private leisure spaces in the city.

The Shrine Bowl’s player selection policy was not explicitly exclusionary, but it effectively blocked the participation of African American players. Two principal rules shaped the choice of players for the bowl, both of which capitalized on seemingly race neutral methods to reinforce segregation at the game. First, official policy dictated that only coaches could select players for the bowl. The coaches charged with choosing players were subject to intense scrutiny from the media and the local community. Breaking the unwritten rule of segregation would have been enormously problematic for any coach.<sup>355</sup> Second, could only be selected from schools within the North Carolina Athletic Association (NCAA) or the Western North Carolina High School Athletic Association (WNCHSAA). Neither of these entities included any majority African

---

<sup>353</sup> Westmoreland, 43.

<sup>354</sup> “Catawba Coaches Hit Jackpot for 2000,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 19, 1999; Westmoreland, 44.

<sup>355</sup> Westmoreland, 45.

American schools. The North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSA), the historically black counterpart to the NCAA and the WNCHSAA, was not included in the Shriners' game.<sup>356</sup> Cumulatively, these rules allowed coaches to overlook talented African American athletes.

In 1965, these well-established discriminatory policies served as the catalyst for renewed racial tensions in Charlotte. Civil rights victories in publicly funded educational and leisure spaces had undermined Jim Crow in Charlotte in substantive ways. The new controversy centered on local black football luminary and Grier Heights' resident Jimmie Kirkpatrick. Playing the position of halfback, Kirkpatrick's performance exploded in the 1965 season with the Myers Park High Mustangs, culminating in his critical performance in the state championship game.<sup>357</sup> When the Shrine Bowl's player selection concluded on November 9, there was widespread discontent amongst the African American community over Kirkpatrick's omission. Members of the Grier Heights' neighborhood publicly denounced the decision, comparing statistics that documented Kirkpatrick's performance against the records of the other players selected from Myers Park.<sup>358</sup> Reginald Hawkins characterized black public reaction as follows: "you can't let this happen. It's an affront to the black community to tell us we got to be better, twice as good to get half as much."<sup>359</sup> The Shrine Bowl controversy evinced the continued

---

<sup>356</sup> "Shrine Director Amazed at Charges," *Charlotte News*, November 10, 1965. There was, however, an African American counterpart, popularly known as the Negro Shrine Bowl. In a conciliatory move, the black Shriners invited several white players to the 1965 bowl. See Emil Parker, "Negro Bowl Wants Myers Park Pair," *Charlotte Observer*, November 18, 1965.

<sup>357</sup> "Mustang Powder Keg Finally Blew Up," *Charlotte News*, November 27, 1965; Westmoreland, 41-42.

<sup>358</sup> Westmoreland, 53.

<sup>359</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Charles Westmoreland, November 18, 1999, quoted in Westmoreland, 54.

frustration of black Charlotteans regarding the lingering aspects of Jim Crow in private spaces.

Kirkpatrick maintained a conciliatory tone after his rejection, remarking that he was “not disappointed” and that the “Shrine Bowl coaches did the best they could” in choosing players.<sup>360</sup> NAACP attorneys, however, took a more aggressive stance. After learning of Kirkpatrick’s exclusion, Julius Chambers filed a restraining order against the Shrine Bowl, and demanded that the event not proceed.<sup>361</sup> This legal test was somewhat indirect, however, because the Shriners were not listed as defendants. Rather than contesting the Shriners’ ability to host a de facto segregated event, Chambers charged that the Park and Recreation Commission’s practice of leasing Memorial Stadium to the Shriners for a racially exclusive event was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process and equal protection clauses. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education was also labeled as a defendant in the case, under the charge that the segregated Athletic Association aided the Shriners in selecting all white players.<sup>362</sup> The NAACP’s injunction, hoping to force a redraft of players, requested that the court move the case forward on the docket so that the suit could be heard before the game was played on December 4, 1965. Furthermore, the petition demanded that the Commission and the Board of Education desist from participating in the planning or operation of the bowl.<sup>363</sup> This injunction forced a response from the Shriners’ leadership.

---

<sup>360</sup> Emil Parker, “I’m Not Disappointed Says a Calm Kirkpatrick,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 10, 1965.

<sup>361</sup> “Injunction Will be Sought,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 10, 1965.

<sup>362</sup> *Polk et. al. v. Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, 1-4, Box 2, Folder 12, Reginald Hawkins Papers, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>363</sup> *Polk et. al. v. Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*.

Adopting the rhetoric of civility, Shrine Bowl officials sought to diffuse the situation by casting the NAACP's suit as unfounded. Clarence Beeson, the Chairman of the Shrine Bowl Board of Governors, refused to admit the suit had any legitimacy. He dismissively concluded that "we have not negotiated with anyone and see no justifiable reason for doing so."<sup>364</sup> Beeson emphasized the charitable dimensions of the event and implied that it was unreasonable to question the morality of the Shrine Bowl. Beeson also cited the organization's seemingly race neutral selection factors to explain the Shrine Bowl's racial makeup. Somewhat paradoxically, the token desegregation of Charlotte's public school system bolstered Beeson's argument. Essentially, the Shriners' policy was to select a maximum of two players per high school. This rule allowed the Shriners to choose only the "best players," who all incidentally happened to be white.<sup>365</sup> Despite this assertion, it is difficult to believe that skill rather than race guided the Shriner's protocols. In line with North Carolina's progressive mystique, Beeson lamented, "it is unfortunate that threats have been made that we do not believe are in the best interest of good race relations."<sup>366</sup> Beeson insisted African Americans hurt their chances of being gradually incorporated into white society, by challenging the region's system of race relations.

Beeson's argument gained some traction with Charlotte's white liberals. Ironically, journalist Harry Golden, a northern born white liberal, accepted the pretext of Beeson's argument, while simultaneously endorsing aggressive protest strategies. Initially, Golden argued that "there hasn't been a single official who stood up one morning and said, 'we will do so-and-so.' All the 'better race relations' [in Charlotte]

---

<sup>364</sup> Emil Parker, "Shrine Bowl's Beeson Not Negotiating, No Reason To," *Charlotte Observer*, November 12, 1965.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

have come through pressure, lawsuits, injunctions, writ, sit-ins, fear of boycott, etc.”<sup>367</sup>

Despite this nuanced understanding of the recalcitrance of Charlotte’s white power structure on the issue of Jim Crow, Golden still believed that the Shrine Bowl was an inappropriate target. He made this assertion with two reasons in mind. First, Golden agreed with Beeson that disrupting a charitable event was an improper way to achieve equality. Second, Golden felt that the suit against the Shrine Bowl was a waste of the NAACP’s and the city government’s resources.<sup>368</sup> Golden’s views on this subject were not unique amongst white Charlotteans. In an attempt to gauge public opinion, the *Charlotte Observer* concluded that “the move against the Shrine Game has been interpreted by some as a move against charity.”<sup>369</sup> These perspectives, however, ignore that the charitable aspect of the game could easily have proceeded if token integration had been allowed to take place. It is altogether likely that even just the admission of Kirkpatrick, an unquestionably talented athlete, would have silenced the NAACP. White liberals, however, were unable to accept this development.

Another brand of white reaction accompanied the NAACP’s attempt to integrate the Shrine Bowl. The bombing of Julius Chamber’s, Reginald Hawkins’, Kelly’s, and Fred Alexander’s homes in many ways demonstrated the limits of the white community’s tolerance of desegregation.<sup>370</sup> One possible reason for this disproportionate response was that the NAACP had shifted its attention from the public to the private sphere. Generally, Charlotte’s spatial segregation shielded whites from interactions with African Americans, particularly the lower-class. Because public leisure spaces “in theory ‘belonged’ to the

---

<sup>367</sup> Harry Golden, “Peoples Platform: Shrine Bowl,” *Charlotte News*, November 16, 1965.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> Paul Jablow, “Shrine Bowl: Suit Not Likely to Block Game,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 16, 1965.

<sup>370</sup> “4 Negro Homes Hit by Bombs in South,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1965.

residents in the surrounding neighborhoods,” parks and swimming pools in highly segregated regions of cities were seen as more secure than large venues such as stadiums that drew clientele from the entire city.<sup>371</sup> Test cases to desegregate facilities in majority white neighborhoods were seen as temporary intrusions. Protracted white resistance to black bodies in informally white leisure spaces, for example a park in a predominantly white neighborhood, displays the pervasiveness of this reactionary segregationist mentality.<sup>372</sup> The prospect of including African Americans in private events, hosted by all-white organizations, was even more unpalatable. Even white liberals were somewhat resistant to desegregation in this context.

Municipal leaders, businessmen, and the clergy adopted a conciliatory tone in the aftermath of the bombing, casting the bombers as a radical minority. To display their goodwill, city leaders quickly organized a benefit rally at the Charlotte Park Center to raise money to repair the civil rights leaders’ homes and to reassert the importance of good race relations. Addressing the crowded auditorium, Mayor Brookshire emphasized that “except for this good community climate, we might have had a conflagration that not only could have stopped all progress in race relations but which might have set us back a score of years.”<sup>373</sup> African American leaders present expressed appreciation for the sentiments of leading whites, but used the occasion to stress that the struggle for racial equality in Charlotte was far from complete. Reverend George Leake, of the Little Rock African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, took a particularly aggressive tone against the

---

<sup>371</sup> Wolcott, 169.

<sup>372</sup> The persistence of de facto segregation at both the Revolution Park Swimming Pool and the Bonnie Brae Golf course epitomize this trend. This narrative of de facto resistance has been omitted from histories of civil rights era Charlotte.

<sup>373</sup> “Crowd Packs Auditorium in Concern Over Bombing,” *Charlotte Observer*, undated, Folder 5, Box 28, Kelly Alexander Sr. Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

persistence of racism in Charlotte's city government, emphasizing that the politicians and business leaders in attendance had a responsibility to do more. Speaking directly to municipal leaders, Leake queried "does this mean that the dispatcher at police headquarters will stop using the word 'nigger' when making calls to cars?"<sup>374</sup> These remarks proved prophetic, as local white leaders continued to remain apathetic about the NAACP's Shrine Bowl segregation challenge.

By framing the NAACP's integration suit as wasteful and uncharitable, Golden and other white liberals illuminated the inner-workings of Jim Crow in Charlotte. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, white liberal Charlotteans continually asserted that progress could only occur gradually, under the direction of leading whites. Any initiative from African Americans to accelerate the pace of desegregation was termed "militant" or "unreasonable" by the *Charlotte Observer* and the white power structure. Even the challenge to the Shrine Bowl, which had yielded no protests, boycotts, or vandalism, did not escape these labels. Porter Munn of the *Observer* charged that the Shrine Bowl challengers were "militant elements among Negroes [who] refused to soft pedal their fight against what they consider racial prejudice."<sup>375</sup> By treating the NAACP's legal efforts as radical, white liberals in Charlotte sought to promote a gradualist agenda.

Despite the Shrine Bowl's protests, a federal court agreed to accelerate the hearing of the NAACP's restraining order request. The case was scheduled to be heard by Judge Braxton Craven on December 4, 1965.<sup>376</sup> A political liberal, appointed to the federal bench by Kennedy in 1960, Craven tried a number of civil rights cases in the

---

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Porter Munn, "U.S. Judge to Receive Plea Today," *Charlotte Observer*, November 17, 1965.

<sup>376</sup> Porter Munn, "Suit to Halt Shrine Bowl Contest is Filed: Negroes are Plaintiffs," *Charlotte Observer*, November 13, 1965.

foothills and mountains of western North Carolina. Craven's former law clerk Thomas Starnes concluded that although Craven displayed the "epitome of appropriate judicial temperament," he had a "jaundiced view of the black race."<sup>377</sup> Perhaps the best summation of Craven's legal philosophy as it applied to the black freedom movement can be derived from his own words. Responding to a survey of leading North Carolinians Craven concluded as follows:

In my opinion the strongest weapon the Negro has in this quasi-public domain is not a weapon at all. It is the social gospel of Jesus Christ as understood by a majority of the members of the churches of North Carolina...The key to this problem is to be loving not in law but in religion. The answer here depends upon which is the stronger—racial prejudice or love of one's neighbor.

Epitomizing the progressive mystique, Craven did not dispute the ends of desegregation, but considered legal means an improper remedy. While Craven was certainly not a rabid segregationist, there is reason to believe that his philosophical leanings disadvantaged the NAACP in court.

Attorney Chambers insisted that the situation could be resolved by negotiation between the Shriners and the NAACP.<sup>378</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Shriners refused to respond to this gesture. Despite this, the suit failed to proceed as planned. The first of these delays emanated from Chambers, who requested more time to accumulate evidence.<sup>379</sup> Once Chambers' argument was prepared, the NAACP's plea was filed and received by Craven on the seventeenth of November. After a meeting on November 19, which ended with Chambers rushing away to deal with unrelated business, Craven recessed to make a

---

<sup>377</sup> Thomas Starnes, interview by author, Morganton, NC, February 15, 2012.

<sup>378</sup> "Suit Against the Shrine Bowl Postponed until Weekend," *Charlotte Observer*, November 12, 1965.

<sup>379</sup> Paul Jablow, "Shrine Bowl: Suit Not Likely to Block Game," *Charlotte Observer*, November 16, 1965.

decision on whether a restraining order would be filed, effectively blocking the city from loaning Memorial Stadium to the Shriners.

Judge Craven sided with the city's white liberals and refused to postpone the game. He remarked that "the ends of justice would not be served by forbidding the game this year," and decided to postpone Shrine Bowl suit until March 1, 1966.<sup>380</sup> This ruling came with the order, however, that the Shriners must compose a plan for a race neutral process with which to draft players for future bowls by the end February 1966.<sup>381</sup> Craven's decision reduced the effectiveness of legal action, at least in the short-term. African Americans in the city were forced to seek other avenues to highlight the absurdity of Jim Crow in Charlotte. Frustrated in the courts, local blacks instead chose to invite two white players from Myers Park High to the Negro Shrine Bowl.<sup>382</sup>

Although the NAACP was defeated in the short-term, Craven's order set the stage for the Shrine Bowl's ultimate desegregation. The Shrine Bowl was played as scheduled on December 4, 1965, with North Carolina's team losing by four points.<sup>383</sup> After this, the Bowl's organizers, who faced the possibility of a desegregation order from Craven, a fear that was exacerbated by a series of successful challenges to segregation in public accommodations nationally, drafted a meaningful desegregation plan.<sup>384</sup> On February 24, the Shriners unveiled a new plan that agreed to admit players from any accredited athletic association, not just the NCHSAA and WNCCHSAA. Satisfied with this procedural shift,

---

<sup>380</sup> Clyde Wilson, "Federal Court Order Sets March Hearing," *Charlotte Observer*, November 19, 1965.

<sup>381</sup> Porter Munn, "Court Gets Plan: Coaches Would Still Pick Players," *Charlotte Observer*, February 25, 1966.

<sup>382</sup> Emil Parker, "Negro Bowl Wants Myers Park Pair," *Charlotte Observer*, November 18, 1965.

<sup>383</sup> "S.C. Pads Shrine Bowl Streak, 31-27," *Charlotte Observer*, December 5, 1965.

<sup>384</sup> The most prominent victory was the 1964 case *Katzenbach v. McClung* where the court ruled that segregation in Ollie's Barbecue violated the 1964 Civil Rights Bill. See: Randall Kennedy, "The Struggle for Racial Equality in Public Accommodations," in ed. Bernard Grofman, *Legacies of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

Craven dismissed the NAACP's suit in March 1966.<sup>385</sup> Under this new system, however, coaches still retained complete authority over the selection of players. Because of this, civil rights leaders would have to wait until the next Shrine Bowl to test the efficacy of these changes.

Token integration at the Bowl went forward on October 26, 1966, when North Carolina coach Red Wilson selected Tommy Love, a running back from Sylva High, and Titus Ivory of West Charlotte High.<sup>386</sup> Concerns about the potential for discord between the newly admitted black players and the rest of the team proved to be unfounded, but the team's coaches were less open-minded. Although Wilson refrained from racial slurs or obscenities, he "gave Ivory and Love the periodic 'cold shoulder.' Ivory never felt wholly respected and wanted by the coaches."<sup>387</sup> Despite minor recalcitrance on the part of the North Carolina team's coaches, the integration test was a success by all other measures. By the end of the game, the North Carolina team won by twenty points and the Shriners were able to raise 300,000 dollars for the hospital.<sup>388</sup> Still, this success did not set a precedent for the desegregation of private leisure opportunities in Charlotte.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Charlotte's municipal government consistently adopted seemingly moderate and progressive alternatives to privatization and closure of leisure facilities in the face of desegregation challenges. These policies, however, were not unexplainable. Localized concerns, rather than genuinely progressive attitudes, shaped the city's reaction to the NAACP's litigation campaign. These factors included

---

<sup>385</sup> "Shrine Bowl Board Oks Negro Players," *Charlotte News*, February 25, 1966; Westmoreland, 76.

<sup>386</sup> "2 Negro Players Picked on N.C. Shrine Team," *Charlotte Observer*, October 27, 1966.

<sup>387</sup> Westmoreland, 84. This account is based on a series of oral histories conducted by Westmoreland in January of 2000. These histories were not archived or reproduced for public consumption.

<sup>388</sup> Westmoreland, 86.

novel legal conditions, spatial segregation, and business boosterism. Insulated from African American populations of all classes, whites were less inclined to seek radical outlets to contest desegregation efforts. Rather, because public leisure spaces generally attracted populations from the communities that surrounded them, whites felt secure that token desegregation would have little effect on the racial status quo.<sup>389</sup> This moderate climate enabled white leaders to negotiate with black activists, clearing the way for token integration in public recreation spaces. Black activists exploited the desire of municipal officials and business leaders to cast the city in a progressive light, securing token desegregation in public parks, pools, golf courses, and stadiums through litigation and negotiation. This would not have been possible, however, without the insulating impact of the city's spatial segregation.

When viewed in context, the image of Charlotte as a progressive New South city is revealed to be somewhat of a facade. The token desegregation of the city's parks, golf course, pools, and stadiums was predicated on the hope that de facto segregation would remain. This argument is reinforced by the Commission's protracted legal and procedural resistance to desegregation in its public facilities. White city officials often deferred to gradualist mechanisms, which were disguised as policies meant to maintain order, in an attempt to simultaneously satisfy black activists and segregationist whites. This allowed Charlotte to be perceived as progressive, at least in contrast to more recalcitrant cities that used violence and massive resistance to maintain the racial hierarchy of Jim Crow.

Yet, the victories achieved by the NAACP's litigation campaign were somewhat hollow. Discrimination persisted at both the Bonnie Brae Golf Course and the

---

<sup>389</sup> Wolcott, 169.

Revolution Park Swimming Pool for several years. Abrasive comments from white patrons prevented black attendees from fully occupying these spaces. This ambiguous status persisted for years, fomenting further black discontent. The dissatisfaction caused by de facto exclusion was compounded by the persistence of segregation in private and commercial leisure spaces and served to inspire the rise of more militant protest movements in Charlotte. Frustrated by the slow pace of integration, a new generation of youth activists adopted direct action protest tactics in an attempt to illuminate the persistence of inequality in Charlotte. This new, more insurgent mentality was epitomized by James K. Alexander who contended that “racial talks is all right, but talk won’t solve the situation, you have got to get to the root of a tree if you want to kill it.”<sup>390</sup> Although progress had been made, it remained unanswered whether the Gordian knot of race, class, and gender could be undone.

---

<sup>390</sup> James K. Alexander to John Cunningham, undated, Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

#### CHAPTER 4: “TO SEEM RATHER THAN TO BE”: DIRECT ACTION, MILITANCY, AND CONSERVATIVE REACTION, 1963-1972<sup>391</sup>

“I’m walkin’ proud, talkin’ loud, [I’m] America’s New Black Joe,” exclaimed Durham-based Black Power activist Howard Fuller at a rally in Oaklawn park sponsored by the UNC-Charlotte Black Cultural Association (BCA) in 1968.<sup>392</sup> Fuller, arguably North Carolina’s most influential Black Power leader during the 1960s, was in the midst of a prolonged state-wide campaign to promote community-based solutions to the interlocking problems of poverty and racism.<sup>393</sup> Addressing a crowd of roughly five hundred residents in the predominantly lower-class and African American Greenville neighborhood, Fuller insisted that the City Council allocate funding for a recreation center in the community.<sup>394</sup> On a fundamental level, Fuller and the BCA rejected the notion that integrating white facilities would provide relief to aggrieved communities of color, instead adopting the separatist view that black institutions should serve as a space for cultural and social development. Sponsored by the BCA, a Black Power group composed of students from UNC-Charlotte, this rally represented a newfound insurgent mentality amongst lower-class African Americans. Stymied by gradualism and de facto

---

<sup>391</sup> This remark, which purposefully confuses North Carolina’s state motto, “to be rather than to seem,” was made by activist Reginald Hawkins. See: Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda Desmarias, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 11, 2001.

<sup>392</sup> Bob Rosenblatt, “Go Downtown, Get Gym,’ Fuller Tells Young Negroes,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1968.

<sup>393</sup> Roger Korstad and James Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 176-180; Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and Making of American Politics, 1965-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 57-59.

<sup>394</sup> Bob Rosenblatt, “Go Downtown, Get Gym,’ Fuller Tells Young Negroes,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 12, 1968.

segregation, the participants in this rally sought to vividly contest Charlotte's progressive New South image.

Unlike the local NAACP branch, Fuller and the BCA believed that neighborhood-controlled black institutions, rather than integrated facilities, were the solution to lingering vestiges of Jim Crow. "White folks don't want you coming downtown" to use their recreation centers, claimed Fuller, remarking on the failure of token desegregation.<sup>395</sup> Departing from the NAACP's propensity for backroom negotiation and litigation, Fuller threatened that "we plan to have one of these get-togethers every Wednesday night until we got us a gym."<sup>396</sup> Fuller's presence at the BCA's rally was not inconsequential and instead lent considerable credence to their reputation as a Black Power organization. Although Fuller's activism began in the North, he became intimately involved with the struggle against economic inequality and racism in Durham, North Carolina in 1965. Initially serving as a community organizer during "Operation Breakthrough," a project aimed at empowering marginalized tenants in Durham's public housing system, Fuller soon became involved in a myriad of struggles around the state.<sup>397</sup> As a grassroots organizer, Fuller's intention was to cultivate support for community goals, empowering residents to combat inequality at the local level. While Fuller's time in Charlotte was short-lived, his work with the BCA had a lasting impact on the protest tactics of black Charlotteans.

Founded in 1968, the BCA was an extension of the UNC-Charlotte Black Student Union (BSU). The creation of these organizations was not a local anomaly, but instead

---

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 118-121.

reflected a nationwide movement for equality on college campuses and for the creation of black studies courses.<sup>398</sup> In particular, the BSU was influenced by the development of the Black Student Movement (BSM) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>399</sup> Like the BSM, the BSU was a pressure group on the UNC-Charlotte campus, which advocated for courses on African American history to be included in the curriculum, however, the BCA's activism quickly expanded beyond the confines of the university.<sup>400</sup> With this expansion, only a few members of the BSU remained active in the BCA, leaving only the most militant university students to lead the organization. By mid-1968, the BCA's agenda had become broad-based, with the organization staging boycotts against white businesses engaged in price gouging, rallies for public works in black communities, and pickets against the discriminatory policies of the local housing board.<sup>401</sup> Representing a form of militant cultural nationalism, the BCA's activism was not an aberration, but instead exemplified a substantive change in the liberation politics of many black Charlotteans.

By the late-1960s the nature of the black freedom movement nationwide had underwent a fundamental evolution. The shift towards more forceful protest strategies became evident in 1966 when SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) chairman, Stokely Carmichael, raised his fist and cried "Black Power!"<sup>402</sup> Although, as

---

<sup>398</sup> Wayne Glasker, *Black Student's in the Ivory Tower: African American Student Activism at the University of Pennsylvania* (Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 1-3.

<sup>399</sup> Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012), 9, 55, 68, 163.

<sup>400</sup> Ronald Caldwell, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders and Lois Stickel, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 31, 2005.

<sup>401</sup> Christopher Schutz, "The Burning of America: Race, Radicalism, and the 'Charlotte Three' Trial in 1970s North Carolina," 50; Michael Meyerson, *Nothing Could Be Finer* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), 26-27.

<sup>402</sup> Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009), 755.

an ideology, Black Power had much deeper roots, Carmichael's speech brought the concept to a much larger audience.<sup>403</sup> In particular, Black Power resonated with poor urban African Americans, who felt betrayed by the decidedly middle-class and integrationist strategies of more conservative groups like the NAACP and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Instead, many Black Power organizations adopted separatist views, concluding that independent black economic and political movements were the only way to challenge white supremacy. Moreover, these groups consciously sought to bring about a cultural revival, highlighting the value of their African heritage, while simultaneously attempting to remove the stigma of "blackness." Throughout the nation, a diverse constellation of militant organizations began to emerge, with 1966 to 1975 serving as the "classical era" of the Black Power struggle.<sup>404</sup>

With few exceptions, historians of twentieth century Charlotte have ignored or dismissed the role Black Power organizations played in challenging the city's moderate and obstructionist public policies.<sup>405</sup> Some observers have even gone so far as to situate militant activists at the center of a declension narrative regarding the local black freedom movement.<sup>406</sup> Rather than constituting an anomaly, however, these reductive perspectives adhere to the contours of early scholarship on the Black Power movement. In many publications, Black Power became synonymous with violence, separatism, and racism.<sup>407</sup> Moreover, this dominant interpretation understood Black Power as a betrayal

---

<sup>403</sup> Tim Tyson, "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (September, 1998), 543.

<sup>404</sup> Joseph, 772.

<sup>405</sup> Scholarship that neglects to mention Black Power, or only superficially references militant protesters, includes: Douglas, 94; Galliard, 68. Bernard Schwartz's 1986 *Swann's Way* fails to mention Black Power entirely.

<sup>406</sup> Leach, 166-168.

<sup>407</sup> For examples scholarship that has viewed Black Power as a betrayal of civil rights see: Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University

of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the harbinger of the conservative resurgence in the 1980s. While there are certainly some elements of truth to this orthodox narrative, recent scholarship has upended the notion that Black Power precipitated a decline in the black freedom movement and instead has highlighted integral cultural contributions made by militant groups.<sup>408</sup>

Despite this progress, however, a concise understanding of Black Power's central features remains contested among scholars.<sup>409</sup> In general, however, historians have identified four facets of Black Power including economic power, cultural power, political power, and armed resistance.<sup>410</sup> Remarking on the movement's complexity and significance, Peniel Joseph concludes:

Black power contains elements of Greek tragedy, including fratricide, incarceration, forced and self-imposed exile, mistaken identity, wrongful deaths, and decades-long political odysseys. Black power did scandalize America in the 1960s, but its apparent novelty masked a deeper history. Beyond the era's verbal pyrotechnics, racial controversies, and stylistic bombast, it was a watershed moment of social and political transformation. Black power grew out of multiple streams of social, political, and economic struggle.<sup>411</sup>

Because the study of Black Power is relatively young, many aspects of the movement remain understudied. In particular, Joseph identifies that analyses of Black Power need to address distinctly local organizations, the differences between Northern and Southern struggles, and the role of women in the movement.<sup>412</sup>

---

Press, 1981), 287-290; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 3-8. The trend was not completely uniform. To see contemporary scholarship that viewed Black Power as pragmatic and necessary see: Chafe, 173.

<sup>408</sup> See Komozi Woodword, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1-4

<sup>409</sup> Joseph, 755.

<sup>410</sup> Joseph, 772-775; Ahmed Shawki, *Black Liberation and Socialism* (Chicago: Hay Market Books, 2006), 193-198; Faulkenbury, 6.

<sup>411</sup> Joseph, 776.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, 774.

While this study cannot adequately resolve all of these deficits, it will dissect a series of local Black Power protests that dialoged with a putatively moderate power structure, dramatically exposing the inherent contradictions of North Carolina's progressive mystique. In Charlotte, Black Power generally took the form of cultural and economic nationalism, with activists typically avoiding armed resistance to white supremacy. Local organizations, most notably the BCA, provide an alternative to the popular image of Black Power as an inherently violent endeavor. Moreover, while historians have emphasized the centrality of politics, the arts, prison reform, economic development, and police brutality to the Black Power agenda, recreation has been ignored. Leisure spaces provided black activists with venues for cultural and artistic expression, promoted community health, and inspired neighborhood cohesion, issues that were of vital importance to Black Power organizers. An analysis of indigenous Black Power groups will unveil both the centrality of leisure to Charlotte's Black Power movement and simultaneously contest the declension narrative. Throughout the late-1960s and early-1970s militant activists adopted pragmatic strategies to provide relief for the city's impoverished communities of color, especially in the areas of cultural development, police brutality, and recreation. Radical organizations did not fracture because of an absence of grassroots support, but instead were marginalized by prolonged police harassment.

These new insurgent movements violated the parameters of Charlotte's seemingly progressive race relations in substantive ways. Primarily, Black Power activists attempted to disempower business progressives and their system of patronage-based paternalism by highlighting lingering structural inequalities through public protest.

Dissatisfied black leaders dispensed of the backroom negotiations that characterized the NAACP's campaign to desegregate public parks, playgrounds, golf courses, and recreation centers. Instead they sought to circumvent attempts by white officials to placate African Americans with token and gradual integration measures through direct action protest tactics. In doing this, activists took their grievances to the street, shedding light on the persistence of discrimination in Charlotte's public, private, and commercial leisure spaces.

Militant organizers emphasized Charlotte's continued commitment to Jim Crow, terming the city's token desegregation a clever form of obstructionism. Moreover, leaders recognized that the integration of leisure spaces in predominantly white communities did little to improve the lives of lower-class African Americans. Because public leisure spaces were principally frequented by residents of the communities that surrounded them, token integration of white facilities failed to provide much relief to the majority of African Americans in the city.<sup>413</sup> In this context, the gradualist desegregation measures enacted by Charlotte's white moderates in the 1950s and early-1960s failed to catalyze the substantive change many had anticipated. This sense of frustration led to a new distrust of white moderates among many members of the black lower-class. Activist Reginald Hawkins summed up this jaundiced perception best, concluding: "Charlotte is a funny town. It's typical of North Carolina, rather than to be they seem, and [it is] very sophisticated in its denial."<sup>414</sup> The direct action and Black Power organizations that emerged during the late-1960s shared a common distrust of white moderates and a

---

<sup>413</sup> Wolcott, 169.

<sup>414</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda Desmarais, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 11, 2001.

disdain for legal action; however, the activists that participated in these movements often defied classification.

It is somewhat anachronistic to view indigenous civil rights and Black Power movements in Charlotte as wholly distinct entities. Rather, as was common throughout the South, African Americans activists moved freely between different associations depending on the context of a particular issue. While militant organizers tended to be younger and poorer than their counterparts in civil rights groups, these factors were not entirely deterministic. This fluidity was captured by the experience of student-activist Ben Chavis, who described:

I had myself stretched in many different places. Student leader on campus, I did the black cultural association, I was also with the Panthers, and every once in a while I had my foot in the church. In those days, you didn't join on one organization. You join on as many organizations as you can. I was in the NAACP, I was in SCLC, I was the Black Student Union, Black Cultural Association, if it was black I was in it.<sup>415</sup>

Despite this relative ambiguity, the white press sought to sow divisions amongst Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in Charlotte. During the mid-to late-1960s the *Charlotte Observer* ran a series of articles that lambasted indigenous Black Power movements, while simultaneously rebranding more established civil rights leaders as conservative and sensible alternatives.<sup>416</sup> Many activists, however, downplayed these differences, regarding them as a construction of the white power structure.<sup>417</sup> Although these distinct organizations shared a somewhat similar membership base, the objectives and impacts of Black Power and civil rights groups differed in substantive ways.

---

<sup>415</sup> Benjamin Chavis, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders, New South Voice, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, February 7, 2005.

<sup>416</sup> For example: "Black Power Bad Term to the NAACP," *Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1966; "Opinion of Two Negro Leaders Split on Local Issues," *Charlotte Observer*, May 10, 1961; "NAACP Statement Provides a Good Answer to Black Power," *Raleigh Times*, October 15, 1966.

<sup>417</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Greg Childers, Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, undated.

From the mid-1960s to the early-1970s Black Power groups targeted leisure spaces for several distinct reasons. First, like pre-1950s activists, black militants recognized that public leisure spaces and community centers provided ideal venues for organizing efforts, cultural events, and community building. Second, advocating the development of insular African American communities, Black Power agents realized that adequate recreation facilities would sustain the health and solidarity of their neighborhoods.<sup>418</sup> Third, the municipal government was spending African American tax dollars disproportionately to improve recreation facilities in white communities, while African American communities remained neglected.<sup>419</sup> This inequitable redistribution represented a banal, but repressive form of Jim Crow. Because of this, access to leisure space held a central place in the indigenous Black Power agenda.

Demands for these localized objectives did not occur in a vacuum, but were instead shaped by a larger historical context. Mirroring the national scene, trust between white moderates and African Americans eroded after Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. This event served as the catalyst for urban riots nationwide, vividly demonstrating the depth of black discontent. Moreover, the rise of an anti-war movement after the U.S. escalation in Vietnam radicalized many young African Americans, stressing this tenuous relationship even further. These reasons, coupled with the persistence of de facto segregation, helped shape a more militant and assertive protest

---

<sup>418</sup> Wolcott, 1-8.

<sup>419</sup> This particular facet of Black Power in Charlotte supports Hall's "long civil rights thesis." The objectives of these activists were not narrowly confined to the desegregation of white spaces, but instead had an equally important economic component. In fact, by redirecting attention towards development in African American neighborhoods, activists privileged economic concerns over integration. See: Hall, 1235.

movement in the 1960s.<sup>420</sup> Indigenous white reaction to the black freedom movement, however, was shaped by Charlotte's racial geography.

Just as spatial segregation permitted business progressivism to dictate white reaction to civil rights activism in the 1950s and early-1960s, the maturation of suburban developments helped create a political climate hostile to direct action and Black Power protest. While the containment of lower-class African Americans to urban slums initially facilitated a grudging white acceptance of gradualism and tokenism, this stance hardened in the late-1960s.<sup>421</sup> As the Sunbelt South emerged, the political culture of suburban locales became defined by fiscal conservatism, aggression towards federal intervention, and a belief in the sanctity of free enterprise.<sup>422</sup> This new brand of conservatism sought to protect the racially homogenous composition of the suburbs, while simultaneously preventing tax dollars from being spent on public works in poor communities.<sup>423</sup> As Republican voters ousted former business progressives, and civil rights leaders were usurped by younger and more militant activists, race relations in urban South became increasingly contentious.

Similarly to other southern locales, white reaction to the black freedom movement transformed from white terrorism and vigilantism to state-sanctioned repression. Instead of employing tokenism and legalistic obstruction to counter the black freedom movement, the municipal government's strategy evolved, with authorities using surveillance and harassment to undermine Black Power organizations. Under the façade of putatively race neutral "law and order" policies, Charlotte, like other New South cities,

---

<sup>420</sup> Cobb, 124-125.

<sup>421</sup> See previous chapter, 95-98.

<sup>422</sup> Kevin Kruse, 1-8.

<sup>423</sup> Kruse, 235; Lassiter, 13.

contained Black Power activism in the late-1960s and early-1970s through legalistic means.<sup>424</sup> As protests grew more assertive in Charlotte, state and federal authorities became increasingly hostile to activists. Ultimately, state-sponsored suppression and spatial segregation diverted the attention of Black Power activists and disempowered the black freedom movement. For a brief moment, however, Black Power provided a promising way to challenge the interlocking problems of de-facto segregation and economic marginalization.

Nascent forms of direct action appeared in Charlotte beginning in the early-to mid-1950s. Along with the incident at Latta Park in 1953, there were other instances of black youth forcefully defending their right to access urban space.<sup>425</sup> Although there was an absence of formal direct action movements in Charlotte during this period, black youth, especially the lower-class, asserted themselves in unprecedented ways. This pattern intensified in the early-1960s. One such incident may have occurred in December, 1963. Davis Thompson, a white member of Charlotte's middle-class, expressed his frustration with the militancy of black youth in a letter to Mayor Brookshire. Although Thompson, a self-proclaimed political liberal, expressed support for desegregation, he worried that black assertiveness had gone too far. Thomson complained, "several weeks ago my daughter and I were walking in front of Belk's and

---

<sup>424</sup> For examples of how police harassed and undermined Black Power movements see: Yohuru Williams, "Red, Black and Green Liberation Jumpsuit: Roy Wilkins, the Black Panthers, and the Conundrum of Black Power," in ed. Peniel Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 167-180.

<sup>425</sup> This incident is described at length in the previous chapter, see page 87. For the *Charlotte Observer* report: Kays Gary, "Racial Issue in City Parks Begins to Boil," *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1953.

two colored boys tried to deliberately walk over us or force us from the sidewalk.”<sup>426</sup>

While it is impossible to determine whether Thompson’s experience was genuine, or perhaps grossly exaggerated, it is certainly true that African Americans were pushing for the right to occupy public space in more frequent and vivid ways. One possibility for the origin of Thompson’s concern is the local media’s alarmist coverage of black militancy.<sup>427</sup> While this newfound forcefulness evinced an important shift in the black freedom movement’s tactics, the goals of activists often remained the same. Protesters used evolving means to cast themselves as equal to whites in an urban context, upsetting established norms of black deference and white superiority.<sup>428</sup> As the civil rights victories of the 1950s and early-1960s began to appear increasingly hollow, new modes of protest emerged to combat state-sanctioned discrimination in public policy and a resurgence of conservative politics.

Despite pleas from lower-class African Americans, as the 1960s wore on, the Park and Recreation Commission continued to invest the majority of the city’s funding into creating and maintaining facilities for middle-and upper-class white citizens.<sup>429</sup> A resident of the low income Springfield community summed up the situation concisely, contending that “money talks...” and “for this reason our desperate[sic] cries are not heard” by Charlotte’s government.<sup>430</sup> No equivalent to Revolution, Independence Park,

---

<sup>426</sup> Davis Thompson to Stanford Brookshire, December 13, 1963, Box 1, Folder 6, Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>427</sup> For an example see: “Opinion of Two Negro Leaders Split on Local Issues,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 10, 1961. As the 1960s progressed coverage of militancy in the *Charlotte Observer* became increasingly stigmatized.

<sup>428</sup> Kelley, 7-9.

<sup>429</sup> Clarence Brown to Stanford Brookshire, January 29, 1962, Mayor’s Community Relations Committee, Box 1, Folder 5, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>430</sup> Delores Arrington to James Martin, April 1970, Box 2, Folder 9, John Belk Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, J. Murrey Atkins Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

or Memorial Stadium emerged in Charlotte's majority black communities. The unofficial policy of underdevelopment was further aggravated by the persistence of de facto exclusion in nominally desegregated spaces.<sup>431</sup> This ambiguity, coupled with the erosion of support from white liberals, undercut conservative civil rights strategies in substantive ways, prompting more aggressive forms of activism to emerge.

The experience of Reginald Hawkins vividly illustrates how the Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s had their roots in earlier, more conservative civil rights struggles.<sup>432</sup> Hawkins arrived in Charlotte in 1948 and quickly became involved with the local NAACP branch, eventually serving as treasurer for the organization. Hawkins continued in that capacity until 1957. Frustrated by the slow, litigious activism and the nonpolitical leaning of the NAACP, and disgusted by vitriolic white reaction to Dorothy Counts' attempt to integrate Harding High School, Hawkins sought more direct means to contest Jim Crow. Hawkins summarized his position, lamenting that "I carried the NAACP with me as far as they would go, kicking and screaming in the area of direct action. Because they had never done that before."<sup>433</sup> Hawkins' disenchantment with the

---

<sup>431</sup> For continued discrimination at the Bonnie Brae Golf Course see: James Ross, interviewed by Debbie Howard, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, March 22, 2005. At Revolution's Pool: "Minutes of the Mayor's Community Relations Committee, April 14, 1964," Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina; Lucy Gist to Leslie Barnard, April 10, 1964, Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina; For discrimination in recreation centers in predominantly white communities, see: "Rally Sponsored by The Black Cultural Association: City of Charlotte Inter-Office Communication," September 13, 1968, Stanford Brookshire Papers, Box 4, Folder 2, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>432</sup> This conclusion is also supported by Timothy Tyson's *Radio Free Dixie*. Essentially, Tyson uses the radicalization of Robert F. Williams to conclude that the grievances of Black Power and civil rights activists had the same roots. Although these distinct organizations utilized different strategies, their goals were not entirely dissimilar. See: Tyson, 8-11.

<sup>433</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda Desmarais, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 11, 2001.

NAACP, coupled with the growing ambivalence of business progressives, led him to create a more confrontational organization.

Unlike the NAACP, Hawkins' had little faith that cooperation with white liberals and businessmen would solve the issues of poverty and racism present in mid-twentieth century Charlotte. Rather, he concluded that black political power and direct action protest were the only ways to penetrate the city's hollow, gradualist, and progressive facade. Reflecting on the 1950s and 1960s Hawkins' outlined: "There was no political clout in the blacks [of Charlotte]. All we were doing [was] filing suits and begging."<sup>434</sup> With this in mind, Hawkins created the Mecklenburg Organization for Political Affairs (MOPA) in 1958. Using the McCrorey Heights YMCA as a meeting place, MOPA orchestrated militant challenges to Jim Crow.<sup>435</sup>

Hawkins recognized the centrality of leisure spaces to the social, economic, and physical well-being of the African American community. Because of this, he applied for membership at the Central Branch of the YMCA in Charlotte multiple times between 1962 and 1964.<sup>436</sup> Attempts to desegregate the Central Branch were not entirely motivated by a desire for inclusion, but instead reflected persistent inequalities between Charlotte's black and white YMCAs. There were a number of amenities at the Central Branch that had no parallel in Charlotte's black YMCAs, the most significant of these being a health club and fitness center.<sup>437</sup> Although the national YMCA board enacted a policy of integration in the early-1960s, recalcitrant Southern branches were often overlooked. The structure of the YMCA's bureaucracy enabled the exclusionary

---

<sup>434</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda Desmarais, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 11, 2001.

<sup>435</sup> Faulkenbury, 27-28.

<sup>436</sup> "Hawkins Denied Membership in Central Y Club," *Charlotte Observer*, May 24, 1963.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

tendencies of Southerners. Because each municipality's YMCA had an autonomous advisory committee that recommended policy to individual branches, cities could ignore the mandates of the National Branch.<sup>438</sup> The Central Branch adhered to this regional pattern and unsurprisingly responded to Hawkins' request by "conclud[ing] that it would not be in the best interests of the YMCA to grant you membership at this time."<sup>439</sup> Hawkins retaliated by organizing a protest of the Central Branch's discriminatory practices. Asserting that segregation was in "direct conflict with the very principles which Christianity represents," Hawkins threatened to return on May 13 with approximately twenty "placard bearing" Presbyterian ministers.<sup>440</sup> Bypassing the traditional channels used by more conservative civil rights leaders, Hawkins violated the discourse of civility that had previously guided race relations in Charlotte.

Under thunderous skies, a biracial group of protesters, many of whom were Presbyterian ministers, publicly challenged the moral and legal validity of the YMCA's stance on May 13, 1964. Bearing signs, such as "Jim Crow: why are you at the Y" and "Whites Always Right? HECK NO," picketers sought to embarrass the Central Branch and Charlotte's moderate leadership.<sup>441</sup> The presence of the ministers did not go uncontested, however. Rather, local whites repeatedly berated them, cursing their efforts from the relative safety and anonymity of passing vehicles. Midway through the demonstration, however, white reaction escalated from verbal abuse to physical violence. Incensed by the protest, local electrician Troy Hardin struck Dr. G. Kuiper, a white theology professor at Johnson C. Smith University. While the altercation was initially

---

<sup>438</sup> Nina Mjagkiji, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 126-128.

<sup>439</sup> "Hawkins Denied Membership in Central Y Club," *Charlotte Observer*, May 24, 1963.

<sup>440</sup> "Hawkins Led Force Slated to Picket Central YMCA," *Charlotte Observer*, May 13, 1964.

<sup>441</sup> James Batten, "Churchmen Picket YMCA: But Y Officials Say No Changes Anticipated," *Charlotte Observer*, May 14, 1964.

ignored by both the black and white press, this incident was publicized after legal charges were filed on May 16.<sup>442</sup> The first instance of violence at a protest over leisure in Charlotte, this minor scuffle demonstrates the divisiveness of direct action, as well as the limits of white tolerance. Hardin's attack, however, represented only one facet of white reaction.

YMCA officials adopted the rhetoric of civility and gradualism in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the demonstrations. General Secretary George Simmons expressed the belief that while Hawkins' motivations were presumably good, the picket was a manifestation of his "big ego." "It is always bad when the cohesiveness of a community is hampered by such a thing," Simmons elaborated.<sup>443</sup> Like many other white moderates, Simmons professed to have no problems with the YMCA's desegregation, but he insisted that the pace was too rapid for whites to bear.<sup>444</sup> Other YMCA officials concurred with Simmons' assessment. The Central Branch's general secretary predicted that the protests would "tear down a lot of constructive things that have been done."<sup>445</sup> The insistence that black activists should defer to gradualism was meant to placate protesters. In this way, YMCA officials sought to diffuse the situation through the traditional modalities of progressivism.

The media's response to Hawkins' protests diverged on the basis of regional and racial lines. Local white media outlets sought to discredit Hawkins' direct action tactics and concluded that gradualism was the only acceptable path for the black freedom movement. WBTV broadcasting published an editorial that complained "the direct action

---

<sup>442</sup> Ken Duffer, "White is Charged in Picket Incident," *Charlotte News*, June 17, 1964.

<sup>443</sup> Ken Duffer, "11 Stage Protest Picket at YMCA," *The Charlotte News*, May 14, 1964.

<sup>444</sup> James Batten, "Churchmen Picket YMCA: But Y Officials Say No Changes Anticipated," *Charlotte Observer*, May 14, 1964.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

he prefers is self-defeating when the means of conciliation are as available as they are in Charlotte.”<sup>446</sup> Although phrased in moderate rhetoric, the editorial’s contention assumed that black activists must defer to the judgment of Charlotte’s white power structure. The inadequacy of the business progressive’s unique form of gradualism, however, was apparent by the mid-1960s. Perhaps the most vivid evidence of this was the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School system, which remained highly segregated until the 1980 *Swann* decision.<sup>447</sup>

Faced with a quagmire of gradualism, Hawkins’ protest tactics further diverged from the Charlotte Branch of the NAACP. In July, 1964 Hawkins bypassed negotiations with the municipal government, instead formally requesting an FBI investigation into whether the Central Branch’s policy violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>448</sup> This action circumvented the city’s white moderates, whose response to desegregation would be inevitably shaped by a desire to cast Charlotte in a progressive light. White officials at the Central Branch, however, were not unprepared and had adopted a strategy similar to other area businesses, in an attempt to deter civil rights protest and federal intervention.

YMCA officials anticipated desegregation and took preemptive steps to transform the Central Branch into a quasi-inclusive space. The limits of the YMCA’s token desegregation plan, however, were clearly demarcated by the boundary between public and private space. Public facets of the YMCA’s operation, most notably the lunch

---

<sup>446</sup> Rupert Grier, “Editorial: Hawkins and the YMCA,” May 21, 1964, Clippings, Box 2, Folder 13, Reginald Hawkins Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>447</sup> Douglas, 4.

<sup>448</sup> “FBI Asked to Study City YMCA,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1964; Ken Kraemer, “FBI to Check Status of ‘Y’ in Civil Rights,” *Charlotte News*, July 28, 1964.

counter and meeting rooms, were desegregated in the early-1960s.<sup>449</sup> The majority of the YMCA, however, required potential attendees to purchase a membership. Included in these accommodations were the YMCA's gymnasium, showers, dormitory rooms, and health center.<sup>450</sup> These nominally private portions of the YMCA remained strictly segregated in 1964. In the direct aftermath of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it was unknown how defensible segregation would be in private facilities. Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the 1964 bill's relevance to the YMCA was that, while it made exceptions for private facilities, this term was not defined. This ambiguity complicates the assumptions of historians who regard the 1964 bill as a panacea for segregation in private spaces.<sup>451</sup> YMCA officials capitalized on this uncertainty; because they could be reasonably assured that segregation in their nominally private spaces would remain defensible into the foreseeable future.

Another possible explanation for protracted white resistance to the YMCA's desegregation were the distinctly gendered contours of this space. From their outset, YMCAs helped to construct an idealized version of masculinity for Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nina Mjagkij asserts that YMCAs hoped to create men that "were industrious, thrifty, self-reliant, honest, pious, and culturally-refined Christian gentlemen, as well as, physically fit and healthy individuals."<sup>452</sup> Scholar Paula Lupkin has even labelled YMCAs "manhood factories" in the early- and mid-twentieth

---

<sup>449</sup> This move was not accomplished solely because of the moderate tendencies of YMCA officials, but instead occurred as a part of a larger push to desegregate lunch counters and theaters in downtown Charlotte. For analysis of this movement, see: Douglas, 86.

<sup>450</sup> "Official Approves Y's Rights Policy," *Charlotte Observer*, August, 7, 1964.

<sup>451</sup> For an example of this reductionist view see Robert Loevy, *To End All Segregation: The Politics of the Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (New York: University Press of America, 1990), 331.

<sup>452</sup> Nina Mjagkij, "True Manhood: The YMCA and Racial Advancement, 1890-1930," *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and YWCA in the City*, Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 141.

century.<sup>453</sup> This role transcended racial boundaries, with many middle- and upper-class African American supporters of the YMCA hoping that the values instilled by membership would create a generation of men respected by white society.<sup>454</sup> While this strategy proved ineffective to breach the rigid Jim Crow hierarchy, YMCAs retained a central position in the black freedom struggle. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the early-twentieth century, notions of masculinity began to evolve, with manhood being defined in more physical terms.<sup>455</sup> Thus, local YMCAs constituted a quasi-public space where men could both hone and display their masculinity in this new cultural context.

The potential for black access to communal spaces where nudity was common, most significantly the shower room, threatened the tenuous masculinity of lower- and middle-class white males in unique ways.<sup>456</sup> “In most public settings, the physical shortcomings of some white men in comparison to some black men would not have been apparent because all were fully clothed,” Wiltse describes, but shower rooms and fitness centers made these disparities apparent.<sup>457</sup> While the upper-class could retreat to country clubs, the Central Branch’s exclusionary policies were the last defense for less affluent whites. These fears were compounded by the fact that desegregation would allow black Charlotteans to interact on an equal social level with whites within the Central Branch, particularly in the residential facilities. In this way, the YMCA’s desegregation represented a critical breach in the Jim Crow hierarchy. This persistent tension is presumably why the Central Branch’s administrators were willing to preemptively

---

<sup>453</sup> Paula Lupkin, *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making Modern Urban Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1-4.

<sup>454</sup> Gregory Bond, “Jim Crow at Play: Race, Manliness, and the Color Line in American Sports, 1876-1916,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008), 126-128.

<sup>455</sup> For a more thorough discussion of this transformation see p. 32-34 of this study.

<sup>456</sup> “FBI Asked to Study City YMCA,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 28, 1964; Ken Kraemer, “FBI to Check Status of ‘Y’ in Civil Rights,” *Charlotte News*, July 28, 1964.

<sup>457</sup> Wiltse, 133-134.

desegregate the institutions' lunch counters, but remained adamant that the "private" portions of the YMCA, namely the showers, residential units, health club, and fitness center, be reserved for whites-only.<sup>458</sup> While it is unlikely that gendered concerns consciously animated Troy Hardin when he assaulted Dr. Kuiper, clearly violating the color barrier at the YMCA was a more contentious issue than the city's lunch counters and theaters.<sup>459</sup>

Federal investigators initially rejected Hawkins' claim, instead agreeing that token desegregation constituted adequate compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Hawkins' complaint was routed through William Medford, a federal district court judge in the western portion of North Carolina, who rejected the notion that the YMCA's policies were discriminatory on August 6.<sup>460</sup> Providing a concise legal analysis, Medford concluded that "he decided against an investigation because Title 2, Section 200, of the [1964 Civil] rights law applies only to public accommodations and not to memberships in an organization."<sup>461</sup> Medford also noted that the lack of a specific instance of discrimination prevented him from launching an investigation.<sup>462</sup> Hawkins, however, did not accept this judgment. Instead, he orchestrated a carefully controlled test case to strengthen his claims and expose the persistence of discrimination in Charlotte.

On August 9, 1964 Thomas Lassiter, a black civil rights activist visiting from Kansas, telephoned the Central branch inquiring whether there were any vacant rooms for

---

<sup>458</sup> This development was not unique to Charlotte, but instead represented a regional phenomenon with public and private administrators fighting to keep showers, steam rooms, bathrooms, and changing rooms segregated, even after token desegregation of less contentious spaces. See: Wolcott, 121-122.

<sup>459</sup> James Batten, "Churchmen Picket YMCA: But Y Officials Say No Changes Anticipated," *Charlotte Observer*, May 14, 1964.

<sup>460</sup> "Official Approves Y's Rights Policy," *Charlotte Observer*, August, 7, 1964.

<sup>461</sup> Ken Kraemer, "FBI Won't Probe Bias Charge at Y," *Charlotte News*, August 8, 1964.

<sup>462</sup> "Official Approves Y's Rights Policy," *Charlotte Observer*, August, 7, 1964; Ken Kraemer, "FBI Won't Probe Bias Charge at Y," *Charlotte News*, August 8, 1964.

rent that evening. A YMCA employee, unaware of Lassiter's race, informed him that there were multiple vacancies that evening and provided him with a reservation. Upon arriving at the YMCA, however, Lassiter was refused service after an employee insisted all the rooms were occupied.<sup>463</sup> This blatant discrimination confirmed Hawkins' distrust of white liberals, leading him to bring Lassiter's case once again to the FBI, while simultaneously threatening to begin another wave of direct action protests.<sup>464</sup>

Hawkins responded to the YMCA's legalistic arguments and pleas for gradualism forcefully. During an interview with the *Charlotte News* he charged that "there is moral decay at the Y. They are out of step with Christianity and out of step with the community."<sup>465</sup> Moral condemnation aside, Hawkins attempted to highlight the damage that the YMCA's exclusionary policies rendered to black Charlotteans. Access to the Central Branch was about more than inter-racialism for Hawkins and other militant activists. Rather, as Wolcott has observed, segregated leisure facilities:

denied African Americans the right to occupy the same spaces as whites. They could not act as consumers on an equal basis, and they could not fully inhabit the cities in which they lived. African Americans' demand for the right to recreation was not simply about integration and interracial friendship but about power and possession.<sup>466</sup>

For these reasons, Hawkins refused to accept the YMCA's insistence that the facilities at the segregated McCrorey Branch were adequately similar to those at the Central Branch.

Faced with inaction by the FBI, Hawkins pursued legal action independent of the agency's investigation. Although Hawkins had previously derided the efficacy of

---

<sup>463</sup> Ken Kraemer, "Hawkins' Second Try Gets Probe of Y," *Charlotte News*, August, 17, 1964.

<sup>464</sup> For an example of Hawkins' mistrust of Charlotte's white leadership see his correspondence with Mayor Brookshire: Stanford Brookshire to Reginald Hawkins, June 21, 1963, Box 1, Folder 10, Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

<sup>465</sup> Ken Kraemer, "Hawkins' Second Try Gets Probe of Y," *Charlotte News*, August, 17, 1964.

<sup>466</sup> Wolcott, 3.

litigation, he filed suit claiming that the Central Branch had violated Title II of the 1964 Civil Rights Act on February 19, 1965.<sup>467</sup> Unlike the FBI probe, Hawkins' suit was not limited to Lassiter's denial, but also included Hawkins' multiple attempts to apply for membership, beginning in 1962. The motion summarized the negative impacts of the YMCA's discriminatory policies, asserting that "plaintiffs are now suffering and will continue suffering irreparable injury from the defendant's policy, practice, custom and usage."<sup>468</sup> Hawkins claim is substantiated by the lack of a health club, fitness center, or residential spaces at the historically black McCrorey YMCA. While the suit took several months to resolve, the outcome reflected a well-established pattern.

Aware of the damage an affirmative desegregation order would do to public perceptions of the YMCA and the Charlotte community, Central Branch officials capitulated to Hawkins' demands.<sup>469</sup> Under the pretext of maintaining order, desegregation steps were unveiled quietly, in a piecemeal fashion, under the guise of acclimating recalcitrant members to the new status quo. No data exists to indicate whether white patrons of the YMCA abandoned the facilities after token integration. Ostensibly, however, whites fled from this space in similar numbers as they did from the Revolution Park Swimming Pool.<sup>470</sup>

---

<sup>467</sup> For Hawkins' opinion of litigation see: Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda Desmarias, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 11, 2001; For information on the suit: Lamar Gutner, "Negroes File Suit Against Local YMCA," *Charlotte News*, February 19, 1965.

<sup>468</sup> Lamar Gutner, "Negroes File Suit Against Local YMCA," *Charlotte News*, February 19, 1965.

<sup>469</sup> Robert Conn, "Action Begun Quietly: YMCA's Integration Steps are Revealed," *Charlotte Observer*, April 20, 1965.

<sup>470</sup> After the pool's token integration in 1960, the number of white attendees dropped by roughly fifty percent. Also, a group of outraged white patrons circulated a petition demanding the immediate resumption of segregation in this spaces that received five hundred and twenty-eight signatures. See: "Revolution, Cordelia Pools Not Visited," *Charlotte News*, August 4, 1960; "Three Negroes Swim Peacefully in Revolution Park Pool," *Charlotte Observer*, August 4, 1960; John Cunningham to Mary Alexander, July 30, 1963, Box 2, Folder 2, Mayor's Community Relations Committee, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Predictably, after the Hawkins' suit forced the Central Branch to desegregate, local YMCA officials claimed that desegregation had been the plan all along. Simmons asserted that even though Hawkins suit "accelerated" the process, the YMCA "had been moving toward integration" for some time.<sup>471</sup> This statement, which mirrored remarks made by municipal officials after the desegregation of the Revolution golf course and swimming pool, demonstrates how white leaders upheld Charlotte's progressive veneer in the wake of successful desegregation actions. What Simmons' remark ignores, however, is that the national YMCA board had mandated a policy of complete branch desegregation five years earlier.<sup>472</sup> Simmons credited the progressive sentiments of local whites for the peaceful integration of the YMCA. In an interview with the *Charlotte News* he concluded that "the Charlotte YMCA has been very much pleased with the understanding and the cooperation of the community in the implementation of a policy that has crosscut some of the traditions that have been rather deeply seated in the community."<sup>473</sup> These seemingly enlightened developments, however, were not entirely persuasive to Hawkins and his followers.

Skeptical of the YMCA's motives, Hawkins refused to drop his suit after the Charlotte YMCA preemptively desegregated its facilities in April 1965. Perhaps aware of the persistence of de facto segregation in public leisure facilities in the wake of token integration, Hawkins sought an affirmative desegregation ruling. This distrust of the intentions of white liberals separates Hawkins from the more conservative NAACP activists. During a series of pretrial hearings in mid-1965, Hawkins' lawyers repeatedly

---

<sup>471</sup> Robert Conn, "YMCA's Integration Steps Are Revealed: Action Begun Quietly," *Charlotte Observer*, April 20, 1965.

<sup>472</sup> Mjagkiji, 126-128.

<sup>473</sup> Lee Stinnett, "YMCA Desegregates All Its Facilities Here," *Charlotte News*, April 20, 1965.

denied motions by YMCA attorneys to dismiss the case.<sup>474</sup> This refusal vividly contrasted with the Charlotte Branch of the NAACP's handling of the Shrine Bowl and the Revolution swimming pool suits. Rather than settling for gradualism, Hawkins aimed to set a region-wide precedent.<sup>475</sup>

Only after Hawkins was confident that the YMCA's decision was substantive did he consent to the suit's dismissal. Presumably, Hawkins' newfound willingness to settle was influenced by the fact that Judge Braxton Craven was scheduled to hear the case.<sup>476</sup> Also motivating Hawkins' decision to drop the suit was the acceptance of his application for membership.<sup>477</sup> Hawkins explained his choice, concluding that "our point was that they were violating Title II of the Civil Rights Law by not opening all facilities to Negroes. [Now] I'm sure that is done."<sup>478</sup> Somewhat ironically, Hawkins' desegregation campaign hinged on the same strategies he had set out to avoid. The decision to engage in litigation, rather than forcing white reaction through direct action and political maneuvering, is emblematic of Hawkins' place within the overall schema of the black freedom movement. Ultimately, Hawkins' activism cannot be neatly characterized as either that of a traditional civil rights leader or a Black Power separatist. Instead, Hawkins served as a bridge between the two factions in Charlotte, although as time passed, his philosophy became more assertive.

---

<sup>474</sup> "Discussion Asked in YMCA Suit," *Charlotte News*, July 15, 1965.

<sup>475</sup> "Hawkins-Led Force Slated to Picket Central YMCA," *Charlotte Observer*, May 13, 1964.

<sup>476</sup> While Craven was a political liberal, he had doubts about whether the legal system was an appropriate venue to achieve equality. For a more exhaustive analysis of Craven's political orientation and view of the black freedom movement see the previous chapter, page 116.

<sup>477</sup> George Simmons to Reginald Hawkins, November 8, 1965, Box 2, Folder 13, Reginald Hawkins Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>478</sup> Lee Stinnett, "Federal Judge Dismisses YMCA Discrimination Suit," *Charlotte News*, October 29, 1965.

While it is debatable whether Hawkins' protests at the YMCA were an expression of Black Power, his militant style ingratiated him with a younger generation of activists. Hawkins' distrust of the white power structure, coupled with his willingness to use direct action, represented a marked departure from previous civil rights activism. Charlotte, unlike other Southern metropolises, did not harbor any nationally organized direct action groups, such as CORE, SCLC, or SNCC.<sup>479</sup> In this vacuum, Hawkins and MOPA played a crucial role, instituting tactical approaches ignored by the local NAACP. Although Hawkins' activism was much more restrained than other Black Power leaders in the region, his direct action protests at the YMCA violated Charlotte's accepted race relations in substantive ways. Unlike more conservative activists, namely Kelly Alexander or Julius Chambers, Hawkins was welcomed by indigenous Black Power groups. Moreover, Hawkins' bombastic rhetoric during his failed 1968 gubernatorial campaign solidified his reputation as a Black Power leader of statewide significance.<sup>480</sup> This allowed Hawkins to remain influential throughout the late-1960s and 1970s, while many other members of his generation were viewed as ineffectual or lethargic. Because of this perceived relevance, Hawkins played critical roles in new debates over the access to urban leisure space, revamped urban renewal projects, and police surveillance and brutality.<sup>481</sup> One of the first issues confronted by Hawkins and the new militant vanguard was the Model Cities program.

---

<sup>479</sup> While there was not an organized chapter of CORE, the organization did financially and legally support four travelling members to picket a Howard Johnson's on Independence Boulevard on August 9, 1962. This isolated incident, however, was the limit of CORE involvement in Charlotte. See: Dwayne Walls, "4 More Demonstrators Begin Jail Sentences," *Charlotte Observer*, August 24, 1962.

<sup>480</sup> Faulkenbury, 1-3.

<sup>481</sup> This contradicts an assumption by Leach that Hawkins' provocative tactics alienated him. See Leach, 166.

Created in 1966 as a subset of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, this idealistic program was intended to be a more enlightened form of urban renewal. Essentially:

Model Cities programs were meant to be five-year experiments in new forms of municipal government and to provide a greater understanding of the lives of the impoverished, improved methods for dealing with their problems, replication on a larger scale, and ultimately the elimination of urban poverty.<sup>482</sup>

By fostering greater community involvement and better coordination between municipal and federal agencies, city planners sought to avoid the mistakes made by earlier urban renewal efforts. Another less publicized, but equally significant purpose of these programs was to prevent the emergence of further urban riots.<sup>483</sup> Throughout the 1960s, urban centers around the nation exploded due to police brutality, discontent over inequitable urban renewal programs, poverty, and the persistence of racial discrimination. In 1966 alone, forty-three riots erupted; demonstrating the frustration of lower-class urban African Americans. Municipal and business leaders who sought to thwart the emergence of riots embraced the Model Cities initiative as a panacea for inequality and discrimination in their districts.<sup>484</sup> Like the urban renewal projects that preceded them, however, the goals and impacts of Model Cities programs diverged significantly.

While the Model Cities initiative benefited black communities in certain ways, namely in terms of increased employment for African Americans in city government, the program also privileged business developers.<sup>485</sup> The advent of the Model Cities program, as well as the election of Fred Alexander to the Commission, sparked a modest increase

---

<sup>482</sup> Bret A. Weber and Amanda Wallace, "Revealing the Empowerment Revolution: A Literature Review of the Model Cities Program," *The Journal of Urban History* 38, no.1 (January 2012), 174.

<sup>483</sup> Weber and Wallace, 175.

<sup>484</sup> Riots emerged nationally, in cities such as Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York. See Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements of the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>485</sup> "Ordinance 878 Amending the Code of the City of Charlotte by the Addition of a New Chapter Entitled: Chapter 13 A, Anti-Discrimination," June 10, 1968 book 50, p. 342; "What If Not A Park," *Charlotte News*, February 28, 1968.

in the number of black employees in the Park and Recreation Department.<sup>486</sup> This development, however, was overshadowed by the tension between business interests and the needs of lower-class black residents. The blighted areas reviewed by Charlotte's municipal government included the historically African American Blue Heaven and Greenville neighborhoods. In February 1968, a frenzied debate emerged between City Council members about whether municipal land and federal dollars should be used to build public leisure spaces or encourage business development in these neighborhoods.<sup>487</sup> During this exchange Councilman Milton Short argued that the program represented a "once in a lifetime opportunity" for business development and that the Council should "put revenue producing buildings on [the proposed park site] and parks on land that lends itself to parks."<sup>488</sup> Although this sentiment was certainly in line with business-centric ethos of Charlotte's political elite, it was not unanimously shared. Councilman Gibson rallied against business interests, exclaiming that "the city can't lightly risk driving a decaying stake into the heart of a potentially stable neighborhood, or courting the loss of a valuable park just for the sake of going through some fruitless tax generating motions. It is much more than a matter of economics."<sup>489</sup> The implications of this debate were not limited to the confines of city hall. Rather, as the late-1960s wore on, local blacks voiced

---

<sup>486</sup> Generally the applicants to these jobs were highly qualified and well-educated. Most African American applicants had several years of relevant experience and held college degrees. See: Gilbert Fuller, "Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission Employment Application," February 3, 1967, Fred Alexander Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Nathan Smith, "Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission Employment Application," July 10, 1967, Fred Alexander Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; "Negro Appointed to Park Board," *Charlotte Observer*, undated, Fred Alexander Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>487</sup> "Recommendation that Urban Renewal Area Project No. 4 be Used as a Greenway with Public Facilities to be Taken Under Consideration for Study and Thought by Council," February 26, 1968, Book 50, City Council Minutes, p. 95.

<sup>488</sup> "What If Not A Park," *Charlotte News*, February 28, 1968.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

their discontent with the inequitable distribution of municipal resources in more forceful ways.

Although white commentators would remark that African Americans could simply frequent public leisure spaces in majority-white quadrants of Charlotte, the reality was less simple. Rather, discrimination in public accommodations in Charlotte persisted well into the late-1960s. This situation led civil rights attorney Julius Chambers to propose an ordinance on June 10, 1968 that would prohibit discrimination in education, public facilities, and employment.<sup>490</sup> After a lengthy debate, the Council narrowly approved the measure, but some black leaders felt that the ordinance lacked efficacy. Chambers' law partner, James Ferguson, addressed the Council after the measure's ratification. Essentially, Ferguson claimed that the passage of the ordinance left "more problems unsolved than solved" and the Council should reconsider how municipal programs contributed to issues of poverty and slum housing.<sup>491</sup> Ferguson, specifically referenced the Model Cities program, charging that "if Charlotte is to bear the title of 'Model City,' then conditions should reflect the merit and just [designation] of that title."<sup>492</sup> This skepticism illuminates Ferguson's understanding that the recent spate of legal protections passed both within North Carolina and nationally, most importantly the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, often lacked proper enforcement powers to address the problems plaguing African Americans.

The threat of an urban riot in Charlotte seemed increasingly possible in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Violent and dramatic race riots were exploding in urban locales

---

<sup>490</sup> "Ordinance 878 Amending the Code of the City of Charlotte by the Addition of a New Chapter Entitled: Chapter 13 A, Anti-Discrimination," June 10, 1968, Book 50, City Council Minutes, p. 342.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, 342.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, 342.

throughout the country. The experience of Watts in 1965 and Newark in 1967, powerfully demonstrated that the threat of black rebellion was not confined to any particular region of the country, but instead could emerge anywhere.<sup>493</sup> The underlying factors that created these uprisings, economic inequality, de facto housing segregation, and police brutality, were also present in Charlotte.<sup>494</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968 contributed to the feeling of hopelessness experienced by African Americans, serving as the impetus for considerable disorder.<sup>495</sup> Although a large scale riot did not emerge in Charlotte, there were a variety of smaller incidences in which black residents lashed out against the miserable conditions they were subjected to in urban America. At the time, the city was a veritable tinderbox of black frustration.

An epidemic of vandalism began during the late-1960s, which targeted white facilities in affluent neighborhoods, most notably Revolution and Freedom Park. Leisure spaces became central venues for public disorder in 1967, with a wave of destruction sweeping Charlotte's parks and recreation centers. Cloaked by darkness, trespassers battered white public leisure spaces almost exclusively. Cumulatively, the damage to the city's recreation facilities amounted to approximately 23,000 dollars in 1967 alone.<sup>496</sup> While some of the vandalism was presumably juvenile, many of the incidents involved careful execution and powerful weaponry. Commission Superintendent Marion Diehl decried that is "worse than it has ever been," while the *Charlotte Observer* emphasized

---

<sup>493</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* eds. Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 54-56.

<sup>494</sup> Schutz, "The Burning of America: Race, Radicalism, and the "Charlotte Three" Trial in 1970s North Carolina," 43-45.

<sup>495</sup> Clay Risen, *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination* (New York: Wiley Press, 2009), 8-10.

<sup>496</sup> Marion Ellis, "Tab For Thoughtlessness in Parks is \$20,000," *Charlotte Observer*, February 19, 1967.

that the more militant vandals “had fashioned homemade bombs to blow commodes to pieces and have used high powered rifles” in order to destroy facilities at Revolution and Freedom Park, as well as Memorial Stadium.<sup>497</sup> Because authorities were unable to apprehend the perpetrators, it remains unknown what individuals or groups were responsible for these destructive acts. It is plausible, however, that some of these incidences were orchestrated by Black Power militants, frustrated by the Commission’s inequitable allocation of public funds.<sup>498</sup> The complexity of the vandals’ operation, the caliber of their weaponry, and the focus on white neighborhoods tentatively supports this conclusion.

Another manifestation of racially-based disorder occurred in 1968 during the football games of Charlotte’s newly integrated high schools. In a particularly violent episode, two fans engaged in a knife fight at Memorial Stadium.<sup>499</sup> Although funds were allocated for an additional police presence at these games, the BCA announced it would provide security at the events as well.<sup>500</sup> Because the BCA had suffered from protracted harassment from the Charlotte police, the organization’s leaders harbored significant doubts about how black spectators would be treated at these events. This assumption was later validated during an incident in the Charlotte Coliseum where a white police officer threw a black attendee down a flight of stairs. Despite the presence of three African

---

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> There is some anecdotal evidence that the police suspected the Black Cultural Association of committing these crimes. In *Nothing Could Be Finer*, Meyerson describes an incident in which “the police arrested two Black Cultural Association members, took them downtown, placed pistols at their temples and demanded they confess to a bombing if they didn’t want their brains drying on the wall the next morning.” While this story does not specifically reference vandalism in the parks, this incident falls within the same timeframe. Quoted from: Meyerson, 26.

<sup>499</sup> Violent altercations became increasingly common in the 1968. See: “Not Just a Police Problem,” *Charlotte News*, September 19, 1968.

<sup>500</sup> Edward Cody, “Negro Youth Group to Aid Police in Preventing Fights at Memorial Stadium,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 28.

American witnesses, the policeman was acquitted of all charges before an all-white jury.<sup>501</sup> Dismayed by police brutality in public leisure spaces, the BCA evolved into a paramilitary organization to protect black youth. This temporary role, however, was overshadowed by the BCA's cultural nationalism. While this insurgent organization insisted on the right of African Americans to occupy white leisure space, another tier of their activism focused on the creation of black recreational facilities in Charlotte's African American wards.

Discontent over the Model Cities program caused public leisure spaces to serve as both a venue for and a target of black power activism in the late-1960s. The lack of adequate recreation facilities for lower-class African Americans sparked a large demonstration on September 11, 1968. Hosted by the BCA, this rally was staged at a public baseball field on Oaklawn Avenue. Led by Greg Ross, president of the BCA's youth council, protesters rejected the backroom negotiations characteristic of the NAACP. Instead, the BCA and its followers levied three distinct demands to the Council. First, they pressed for a gymnasium in the Greenville neighborhood. Second, the BCA insisted that African and African American history be taught in the city's public school system. Third, members asserted their right to use community centers for meetings and for members-only dances.<sup>502</sup> The white power structure, however, was not receptive to these requests.

Militant protest strategies alienated Charlotte's white moderates, resulting in increased surveillance of activists and demonstrations by municipal officials. Plain

---

<sup>501</sup> Reverend Coleman Kerry, et al., "The Charlotte Report," July 29, 1972, Box 2, Folder 7, T.J. Reddy Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>502</sup> "Rally Sponsored by The Black Cultural Association: City of Charlotte Inter-Office Communication," September 13, 1968, Box 4, Folder 2, Stanford Brookshire Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

clothes officers observed Black Power demonstrations, discreetly recording the names of African American city employees present.<sup>503</sup> While there is no record that these employees were terminated, this heightened surveillance was clearly geared towards discouraging members of the government from participating in Black Power protests. The conspicuousness of the police department's surveillance was purposeful. A government report noted:

Contact with Officer Torrence was made by [one of the protesters] Burrell Jordan, III in reference to police action. Mr. Jordan asked this officer if it was the intention of the police department to harass the members of the Black Cultural Association. Mr. Jordan stated that he had observed some time ago a black-headed man taking pictures of the Black Cultural Association meeting house, and that on September 10, he observed an unmarked police cruiser writing down tag numbers of cars in front of the club house.<sup>504</sup>

Although the potential chilling effect of police surveillance is unquantifiable, this shift in municipal policy evinces an important change in white reaction to Black Power. While police officers had offered protection for the NAACP's desegregation of the Revolution Park swimming pool, the same officials now actively sought to intimidate militant activists.

These repressive strategies did not emerge from a vacuum, but instead had their roots in a distinct socio-political context. President Nixon's 1968 campaign had emphasized a law and order platform in response to the persistent threat of urban riots. While Nixon repeatedly denied accusations of race baiting, his rhetoric and the programs he supported disproportionately targeted African Americans, more specifically New Left

---

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> "Rally Sponsored by The Black Cultural Association: City of Charlotte Inter-Office Communication," September 13, 1968, Box 4, Folder 2, Stanford Brookshire Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

activists.<sup>505</sup> Although these arguments were fiercely contested throughout the nation, suburban whites were particularly receptive to these new ideas.<sup>506</sup> The passage of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 marked an important milestone in this conservative crime prevention campaign and empowered the police to disrupt militant black freedom organizations in unprecedented ways. In Charlotte these authoritarian tendencies were inflamed by the implementation of the 1971 *Swann* decision, which permitted busing as remedy to residential segregation. In this new narrative, liberals were cast as too soft on criminals, necessitating an increased police presence and harsher penalties for subversives.<sup>507</sup> As early as 1972, the impacts of these repressive public policies were apparent.

The police department's "law and order" tactics were not limited to the Black Cultural Association's protests, but instead extended to full-time surveillance. Located in the Greenville neighborhood, the organization's headquarters, known as the black house, was conspicuously painted black and decorated with portraits of militant African American leaders, most notably Malcolm X. Michael Myerson notes that "the police could not abide the appearance of the black house, and a round-the-clock stakeout was imposed."<sup>508</sup> Harassment of black citizens by the police eventually led the BCA to protest the department's tactics. In the midst of a contentious closed meeting with officials, in which BCA members attempted to gain redress for an unlawful search of a community member's home, officers physically threw them out of the department's

---

<sup>505</sup> Tali Mendleberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 99-102.

<sup>506</sup> Lassiter, 6-10.

<sup>507</sup> Mendleberg, 102.

<sup>508</sup> While Myerson's work is decidedly polemic, an oral history by Ben Chavis corroborates this particular point. Benjamin Chavis, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, February 7, 2005; Michael Meyerson, *Nothing Could Be Finer* (New York: International Publishers, 1978),

headquarters. “We were bodily thrown out,” claimed BCA member Ben Chavis, “I was still trying to get the names of the policemen who were putting us out.” Conversely, Chief Goodman emphasized to reporters that the meeting had been “a profitable exchange.”<sup>509</sup> This interaction became typical of the relationship between BCA member and police officers.

Contemporaneously, Black Power groups also sought to use procedural means to challenge exclusionary policies in public leisure spaces and to develop recreation facilities in predominantly black communities. On September 18, 1968 members of the BCA, attended the Commission’s regular meeting to protest the persistence of discriminatory policies in Charlotte’s recreation facilities.<sup>510</sup> After some deliberation, the Commission deferred to the same obstructionist policy it had used to prevent NAACP meetings in the 1950s.<sup>511</sup> Commission members deemed the BCA “too controversial,” and claimed that their policy was not to allow “private groups” to use recreation centers.<sup>512</sup> This obstructionist argument, however, does not reflect reality. Rather, as early as the 1930s, the Commission had allowed both private white and African American groups to rent Commission facilities for meetings and special events.<sup>513</sup> Instead, Commission members only chose to employ this policy against groups that contested the racial status quo. After rejecting the BCA’s petition, Commissioner Martin

---

<sup>509</sup> Pat Alford, “Negro Complainants Say Police Threw Them Out of Station,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 28, 1968.

<sup>510</sup> James Grossman, “Park Board: It’s Our Policy; Black Association: Change It,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1968.

<sup>511</sup> See previous chapter, p.90-91.

<sup>512</sup> James Grossman, “Park Board: It’s Our Policy; Black Association: Change It,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1968.

<sup>513</sup> “Colored Voters Alliance Requested Auditorium and Gymnasium and Negro Policemen,” February 12, 1941, Book 29, Charlotte City Council Minutes, p. 424; “Armory Granted Colored YMCA for Basket Ball Games,” January, 26, 1938, Book 26, Charlotte City Council Minutes, p. 394; “Seventh Street Presbyterian Church, Colored, Granted Use of the Armory Auditorium,” September 28, 1938, Book 27, Charlotte City Council Minutes p. 222.

declared that “we are not going to turn this planned meeting into a dialogue session,” and moved onto the next agenda item.<sup>514</sup> Unlike their conservative predecessors, however, the BCA did not wait for a legal suit to dispute the persistence of discriminatory policies.

As promised, another larger demonstration was held in Oaklawn Park on September 18. Undeterred by the presence of police surveillance, a sizeable crowd of protesters, which was estimated to be between 200 and 250 people, gathered to voice their discontent. After a glowing introduction by Burrell Jordan III, Reginald Hawkins took the stage amidst thunderous applause. Although Hawkins was not a member of the BCA, his participation in their rallies afforded them a degree of legitimacy amongst older African Americans. Hawkins also had a well-established, albeit increasingly adversarial relationship with Charlotte’s business and municipal leaders, which opened up new avenues for communication between the BCA and the white power structure. At the lectern Hawkins immediately addressed the issue of police surveillance. Hawkins explained that “he was aware of the Charlotte Police Department’s harassment, and that it had been stated to him by two black police officers at a football game last week that the Black Cultural Association was a bad organization.”<sup>515</sup> This anecdote was the first of many attacks by Hawkins on the current policy orientation of Charlotte’s municipal government. In particular, Hawkins referenced the implementation of the Model Cities Program as evidence of the persistence of racial bias in the local government’s programs. Hawkins charged that “Paul Jones, the Executive Director of the Model Cities Program, was an ‘Uncle Tom’ and that residents of the Model Cities Program should rebel against

---

<sup>514</sup> James Grossman, “Park Board: It’s Our Policy; Black Association: Change It,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1968.

<sup>515</sup> J. C. Goodman, “Rally Sponsored by The Black Cultural Association: City of Charlotte Inter-Office Communication,” September 20, 1968, Box 4, Folder 2, Stanford Brookshire Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

the activities of the Model Cities Program.”<sup>516</sup> Diverging from more conservative black leaders, Hawkins rallied against the moderates who were willing to accept accommodation and gradualism.

The Park and Recreation Commission’s discriminatory policies also came under fire during the rally. Hawkins exclaimed that it was “a sad state of affairs when a group of black people could not meet with the Recreation Commissioners without the Chief of Police, Assistant Chief, and in all probability, his dogs being there.”<sup>517</sup> While municipal leaders had engaged in dialogue with conservative civil rights organizations that operated throughout the 1950s and early-to mid-1960s, these same officials were less inclined to address the concerns of new insurgent black freedom organizations. This hypocrisy was not lost on Hawkins, who exclaimed:

If the Recreation Commissioners did not see fit to let [the Black Cultural Association] use their facilities, that they should take steps to close up the facility. [Hawkins] further stated that if they are denied the use of the facility in their own community, that they should try using facilities in the [predominantly white] southeast section of Charlotte and if they are denied there then steps should be taken to close up all park and recreation facilities.<sup>518</sup>

Hawkins’ inflammatory rhetoric resonated with the crowd. Systemically denied redress by the city’s white power structure, lower-class and young black Charlotteans felt that forceful means were the only viable path forward. Before these protests could materialize, however, city, state, and federal authorities acted to further destabilize historically black communities and to disempower indigenous Black Power organizations.

---

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> J. C. Goodman, “Rally Sponsored by The Black Cultural Association: City of Charlotte Inter-Office Communication,” September 20, 1968, Box 4, Folder 2, Stanford Brookshire Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Adhering to the business ethos that guided most of Charlotte's public policy decisions throughout the mid-to late-twentieth century, City Councilors chose to set aside the available land in Blue Heaven and Greenville for commercial purposes. Councilman Smith justified the decision, claiming that the development "could produce \$200,000 a year in taxes in addition to the \$1.5 million sale price."<sup>519</sup> Essentially, the view of the Council was that the potential for profit trumped the needs of local blacks. In a token gesture, the Council mentioned it would begin to search for suitable land elsewhere. The editor of the *Charlotte News* lamented "as soon as I can find 'elsewhere' on the city map, I want to drive over and stroll among the trees and flowers and, perhaps, linger a while to watch the slow descent of an autumn leaf upon the greensward."<sup>520</sup> Beyond depriving these communities with viable leisure spaces, the commercialization of this land also displaced residents and disrupted community life. While the Council's decision was not particularly surprising, the cumulative effect of police harassment on the BCA was.

The BCA was crippled by internal divisions and law enforcement pressure in late-1968. Harassment by the Charlotte police department handicapped the BCA's operations and made them appear suspect, even amongst the black community. Ultimately, this constant pressure distracted the BCA from grassroots goals, forcing them to focus inordinate amounts of attention on combating the abuse of police power. The external influence of law enforcement repression was compounded by internal divisions amongst the members of the BCA. The introduction of Walter Washington and Theodore Hood, radical black activists with long criminal records, to the organization also served to further destabilize the BCA. After meeting activist, poet, and UNC-Charlotte student T.J.

---

<sup>519</sup> "Editors Letter: Blue Heaven Still Waiting for City Council's Bonanza," *Charlotte News*, September 28, 1968.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

Reddy at the rally in Greenville, Washington and Hood quickly became integrated into the BCA.<sup>521</sup> Although they were not students, each of these men took an active role in the organization's business. Their entrance also coincided perfectly with an epidemic of narcotics use and sale amongst BCA members, which coupled with increased pressure by city police, caused the group to fracture.<sup>522</sup>

Some observers have seen the proximity between the BCA's disintegration and the entrance of Hood and Washington as more than mere coincidence. Instead, foreshadowing later controversies, some conclude that these men were already operating as informants for state and federal authorities. Meyerson concludes:

There is some evidence to suggest that Washington and Hood may have been operating as police agents as far back as 1967 when they set up a Black Cultural Association in a separate Charlotte neighborhood than that in which Ben [Chavis'] Black House stood. That the two informers formed a group calls US, which in other parts of the country was clearly an arm of the police, at a time when the Black Panther Organization was organized in Charlotte lends substance to this suggestion. As does their driving a carload of dynamite into a police roadblock at a time of racial tensions in Oxford. Nobody would ever accuse Washington and Hood of being brilliant master criminals, but such an act suggests incompetence roughly on the level of being unable to catch water with a sponge.<sup>523</sup>

While the claim that US constituted an "arm of the police" is clearly false, Washington and Hood's illicit activities in the late-1960s probably contributed to the decline of the BCA.<sup>524</sup> Moreover, although their first verifiable collaboration with state and federal authorities was not until 1970, it is certainly plausible that Washington and Hood were

---

<sup>521</sup> Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States," 45.

<sup>522</sup> Meyerson, 26-29.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>524</sup> It is altogether likely that Meyerson's perception of this issue was blurred by conflict between the Black Panther Party and US. A common accusation leveled by the Panthers was that US was cooperating with the FBI. While certainly there were instances of COINTELPRO operatives infiltrating US, the FBI's program was a far cry from a complete takeover of the organization. For more on this issue see: Scot Brown, *Fighting For US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), ix-xi, 116, 136.

cooperating earlier.<sup>525</sup> Whatever the cause, when the BCA fractured, militant consensus in the Greenville neighborhood dissolved. Although the Black Student Union, which the BCA grew out of, remained a force at UNC-Charlotte, its goals were largely confined by the boundaries of campus. Instead of passively accepting the organization's demise, however, many of the militant student leaders that had sought to expand the BCA's efforts joined the newly formed Charlotte Black Panther Organization.<sup>526</sup>

The Black Panther Organization was a distinct entity from the national Black Panther Party (BPP). Created by Benjamin Chavis, after Stokely Carmichael visited Charlotte in 1968, this new black freedom organization mirrored the goals of the national BPP, espousing a doctrine of cultural nationalism and vowing to protect black Charlotteans from white violence, institutionalized or otherwise. Charlotte's indigenous Black Panther Organization, however, differed from the national BPP's Marxist tendencies in substantive ways.<sup>527</sup> Primarily, the local Panthers did not press for radical income and resource redistribution, but instead focused on more localized concerns, most notably the necessity for African American history courses to be taught in area schools and the need to regulate police activities in black neighborhoods. Moreover, the Charlotte-based manifestation of the Panthers viewed with the BPP's conflict with US to be a counterproductive endeavor, and condemned the inter-organizational strife. Despite these critical differences, the local Black Panther organization was stigmatized in many of the same ways as the national BPP, being considered synonymous with violence, racism, and Marxist economic programs. As a result of this radical reputation, the

---

<sup>525</sup> Schutz, "The Burning of America: Race, Radicalism, and the "Charlotte Three" Trial in 1970s North Carolina," 43-45.

<sup>526</sup> Ronald Caldwell, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders and Lois Stickel, New South Voices, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, May 31, 2005.

<sup>527</sup> Joshua Bloom and Waldo Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 310-312.

Panthers found it difficult to mobilize grassroots support within Charlotte's black neighborhoods.<sup>528</sup> Because of this, the group had virtually disbanded by the mid-1970s; when even its creator Ben Chavis abandoned the organization.<sup>529</sup>

The legacy of the BCA in Greenville, at least in relation to the Model Cities program, is contested and complicated. Despite the BCA's collapse, its activism may have precipitated the development of a recreation center and park for Greenville in 1973. Although municipal reports had long recognized the run-down status of public amenities in Greenville, prior to the BCA's campaign officials had not planned to resolve any of these issues. The Park and Recreation Commission's 1966 Master Plan for Recreation Development lamented that the neighborhood was characterized by "overcrowding, low income, poverty, single parent (mother) households, concentration, hav[ing] [the] usual social problems of crime, illegitimacy, etc."<sup>530</sup> When asked to recommend capital improvements to the neighborhood, the plan's authors concluded that "the area needs more of everything- [but especially] educational opportunities for adults, recreational opportunities for all ages."<sup>531</sup> The Commission planned no capital improvements in 1966 to address these issues and the report concluded that a lack of leadership within the Greenville community was the central obstacle to the development of additional facilities. While there were clearly larger racial, political, and economic interests preventing the

---

<sup>528</sup> Unlike the BCA, the Black Panther Organization was considered "dangerous" by many local African Americans. See: James Cuthbertson, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, July 28, 2004.

<sup>529</sup> For a description of the similarities and differences between the national and local organizations see: Benjamin Chavis, interviewed by Bridgette Sanders, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, February 7, 2005.

<sup>530</sup> Park and Recreation Commission, "Master Plan For Recreation: Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, North Carolina," 1966, Local Documents, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 49.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid, 49.

development of parks and recreation centers to serve Greenville's residents, the BCA's protests vividly demonstrated that a lack of leadership was not a problem.

Instead, the BCA's forceful activism may have made the issue of recreation in Greenville too visible for city leaders to ignore. Even after the BCA disintegrated in the late-1960s, their rallies demonstrated to the municipal government that the residents of Greenville were unlikely to continue passively accepting the Commission's discriminatory policies. While officials did not credit the BCA for sparking the development of the Greenville Recreation Center in 1973, it is more than plausible that their demonstrations played a role. In fact, public disorder may have accomplished what litigation and backroom deals could not have. While many scholars have placed Black Power groups at the center of the black freedom movement's decline in the late-1960s and 1970s, the protests in Greenville challenge this interpretation. The BCA's legacy in Greenville contradicts this simplistic declension narrative, instead demonstrating that militant black activism and public protest movements could catalyze change in Charlotte.<sup>532</sup>

Commercial leisure spaces remained a bastion of segregation in the city well into the late-1960s and 1970s. Unlike large-scale quasi-private organizations, such as the YMCA, small commercial establishments were not subject to the decisions of national boards. The decentralized nature of these autonomous enterprises also made them less vulnerable to legal challenges, forcing activists to protest or pursue legal action at each location. The continued existence of de facto segregation in commercial establishments was no trivial matter, but instead negatively impacted the lives of African Americans in

---

<sup>532</sup> For literature disputing that Black Power represented a decline of the civil rights agenda see: Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (2009), 751-755.

urban metropolises. Exclusionary policies in these spaces prevented black patrons from participating in the United States' consumer culture and precluded them from fully occupying the cities they resided in. Wolcott posits that "demanding access to recreation, a much-prized commodity, was an assertion of consumer rights...and citizenship rights."<sup>533</sup> Because of these reasons, black activists began contesting segregation in commercial establishments.

An interracial group of four activists, many of whom were employed through the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) anti-poverty program, arrived at the Lazy B. Stables in October 1967 to ride horses. While this trip was not a planned desegregation attempt, the four activists, which included T.J. and Vicky Reddy, were quickly stonewalled by employees at the Lazy B. Stables. Although the activists had previously ensured that there would be enough availability to accommodate their group, once they arrived at the stables they were quickly denied entry. Upon seeing the race of the potential patrons, the establishment's owner, Bill Medlin, insisted that the stables were closed for the day.<sup>534</sup> A keen equestrian, Vicky Reddy was a regular patron of the Lazy B., who often rode on Sundays. Because of this, she protested, correctly pointing out that their exclusion was not due to improper scheduling. Exacerbating the situation, it appeared that Medlin was particularly incensed by the interracial relationship between Vicky and T.J. Reddy.<sup>535</sup> Medlin concluded that "he rents horses 'like I want to, to who I want to.'"<sup>536</sup> This response was not inexplicable. Wolcott, analyzing segregation in

---

<sup>533</sup> Wolcott, 34.

<sup>534</sup> "Rights Suit Threatened After Showdown at the Lazy-B," *Charlotte Observer*, October 29, 1967.

<sup>535</sup> Vicki Reddy, interviewed by Christopher Schutz, April 14, 1994 in Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States," 6.

<sup>536</sup> "Rights Suit Threatened After Showdown at the Lazy-B," *Charlotte Observer*, October 29, 1967.

commercial facilities, presciently argues that instead of being inherently democratic spaces, the racial homogeneity of commercial leisure was a critical component of its appeal to the white middle-and upper-class.<sup>537</sup> In this context, Medlin's resistance undertakes a new meaning. Conceivably, integrating the facility would detract from the popularity of the Lazy B., potentially infuriating white consumers. This incident was not an anomaly, but instead was indicative of the difficulties African Americans had engaging in commercial leisure even years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Rebuffed, the VISTA workers left without incident that day.

Reddy's second attempt was more forceful. When he returned the next day, Reddy brought with him a group of ten interracial activists, many of whom attended Johnson C. Smith, as well as television cameras and a local news crew to document the exchange.<sup>538</sup> Under increased pressure, Medlin capitulated to the activists' demands. Despite Medlin's previous resistance, the Lazy B. Stables were desegregated with minimal spectacle. Reddy's protest seemed to provide a model of how media coverage could unveil the absurdity of Jim Crow segregation. It is unclear whether racial discrimination was ever an issue again at the Lazy B. Stables, but clearly by bringing the news media, the activists intended to broadcast that exclusionary policies in commercial facilities was unsustainable. Years later, in an interview, Vicky Reddy deemphasized the significance of the Lazy B.'s integration. Essentially, she claimed that "it was basically

---

<sup>537</sup> Wolcott, 5-8.

<sup>538</sup> Vicki Reddy, interviewed by Christopher Schutz, April 14, 1994 in Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States," 6; James Ferguson, "Petition for Pardon: In the matter of Thomas James Reddy, James Earl Grant," December 30, 1977, Box 1, Folder 6, T.J. Reddy Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

just forgotten after that.”<sup>539</sup> Whether Vicki Reddy’s recollection is accurate or not, the matter was far from resolved. Instead, an unexpected turn of events would catapult T.J. Reddy and two others to the center of an international drama.

One year later a mysterious fire swept through the Lazy B. Stables. The scene was horrific; one observer described that “you could hear the horses in there squealing, kicking and trying to jump into the flames.”<sup>540</sup> Two fire departments responded to the blaze, but were unable to prevent the barn’s destruction. In the aftermath of the fire, Medlin had lost fifteen horses and 21,000 dollars in property. Without insurance, Medlin’s business was devastated.<sup>541</sup> Compounding the destruction of the fire, several local equestrians had contracted with the Lazy B. to board their horses. The *Charlotte Observer* ran an article detailing the emotional toll the incident took on these citizens, characterizing the fire as an unspeakable tragedy. In the wake of the incident, it was not entirely apparent how the fire had started.<sup>542</sup> After several days, however, “local police concluded that the fire was deliberately set with incendiary devices.”<sup>543</sup> Despite this revelation, however, law enforcement had no leads pertaining to who may have burned the stable. Because of this, the issue lay dormant for a number of years.

Four years after the fire, in January 1972, a grand jury indicted five Black Power activists for allegedly burning down the Lazy B. Stable.<sup>544</sup> Those charged included T.J.

---

<sup>539</sup> Schutz, “The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States,” 6.

<sup>540</sup> “Lazy B. Stables Barn Burns,” *Charlotte News*, September 25, 1968.

<sup>541</sup> The number of horses that died in the fire was inconsistently reported in the aftermath of the trial. While the initial article in the *Charlotte Observer* reported that thirteen horses perished in the blaze, all subsequent accounts conclude that fifteen horses were lost.

<sup>542</sup> “Lazy B. Stables Barn Burns,” *Charlotte News*, September 25, 1968; Mamie Zillman, “Melancholy Hangs Over Lazy B. Stables...,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 26, 1968.

<sup>543</sup> “Petition for Pardon: In the matter of Thomas James Reddy, James Earl Grant,” 5.

<sup>544</sup> Mamie Zillman, “Melancholy Hangs Over Lazy B. Stables...,” *Charlotte Observer*, September 26, 1968.

Reddy, James Earle Grant, Daniel Herring, Charlie Parker, and Clarence Harrison.

While charges were eventually dropped for Herring and Harrison, the remaining three activists were subjected to intense legal scrutiny. This development shocked many in Charlotte, who had presumably forgotten about the fire at the Lazy B. Stables.<sup>545</sup> Almost immediately, members of Charlotte's African American community responded, claiming that the charges were unsubstantiated. In a letter to the editor, Rick Rosen and Vicky Reddy accused Charlotte's white power structure of indicting these men because of their protest activities and political orientations, rather than on the basis of meaningful evidence. In their view, the defendants' situation was grim. Reddy and Rosen concluded that "we don't expect fair trials. Fair trials are not given to Black people in North Carolina and especially not to Black people who are active in fighting the racist power structure of our society."<sup>546</sup> The expectations of Reddy and Rosen proved prophetic in the coming years.

State prosecutors reified Reddy and Rosen's assumptions, subjecting the defendants to a racially and politically motivated trial. Prosecutors principally relied on statements from black militants and former BCA members Al Hood and David Washington to prove the guilt of the Charlotte Three. Cooperating with federal investigators, these two witnesses testified, with a promise of immunity, that they had assisted Reddy, Grant, and Parker burn down the stable, in fulfillment of a personal grudge.<sup>547</sup> What was not apparent during the trial, however, was that Grant and Hood were provided considerable incentives for their testimony. Both Washington and Hood

---

<sup>545</sup> Rick Rosen and Vicky Reddy, "Letter to the Editor," undated, Box 1, Folder 2, T.J. Reddy Papers, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>546</sup> "Letter to the Editor."

<sup>547</sup> Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, North Carolina, and the United States," 44.

were in precarious legal situations themselves. Involved with militant protests in nearby Oxford, North Carolina, they were caught by local police with dynamite and firearms.<sup>548</sup> In exchange for monetary compensation, amounting to 4,000 dollars paid to each witness and an agreement to end Washington's probation, both men agreed to testify against the Charlotte Three.<sup>549</sup> These incentives were not exposed during the trial, providing a veneer of credibility to the accusations.

The damning testimony of Washington and Hood was reinforced by another surprise witness for the prosecution. Although Reddy, due to the passage of four years, could not provide an alibi for the night of the fire, Grant could. In court, Grant claimed to have been in Pennsylvania the night of the crime and had several witnesses to corroborate his story. Initially, this development seemed to discredit the prosecution's case. After a recess, however, Laura Booton, an administrative assistant at the African American Mechanics and Farmers Bank, took the stand and testified that Grant had visited the establishment during the period in question. As a part of her testimony, Booton produced a bank document that bore Grant's signature. Although the date on the form preceded Grant's alleged trip to Pennsylvania, ostensibly it could have been submitted later. This testimony, however, was suspect for several distinct reasons. First, because Booton and Grant were not acquaintances, her ability to remember the exact date of his visit, four years later, is incredibly unlikely. Second, Booton's boyfriend was facing criminal charges, incentivizing her cooperation with authorities. Butch Rosen, Reddy's white housemate, concluded "they had her...and her testimony was a way to buy

---

<sup>548</sup> Along with the recent charges from the Oxford incident, both Washington and Hood had lengthy criminal records from a variety of other incidents. Also, Washington had been medically discharged from the Marine Corps for potentially homicidal schizophrenic tendencies. For a more detailed description of this incident and Washington's instability see: Tim Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name: A True Story* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 134-146.

<sup>549</sup> "Petition for Pardon: In the Matter of Thomas James Reddy and James Earl Grant," 5-8.

the police off him.”<sup>550</sup> Third, the bank document provided by Booton may have come from Grant’s apartment. In May 1972, Grant’s house was mysteriously ransacked. While no valuable items were stolen, it appeared that his personal papers had been meticulously sorted through.<sup>551</sup> Cumulatively, these discrepancies seem to indicate that Booton’s testimony was fabricated by the prosecution. Along with the considerable incentives offered to Hood and Washington, this was emblematic of a larger effort to frame Reddy, Grant, and Parker.

After a trial that was reminiscent of justice in the Old South, the verdict and sentencing further revealed the influence of race in the proceedings. Once oral arguments had concluded, the jury, which was all white except for one member, deliberated the case for approximately two hours. Subsequently, the foreman announced the jury’s decision was that the Charlotte Three were guilty of unlawful burning. Offended by the nature of the crime and troubled by the activists’ political orientations, Judge Frank Snepp, a jurist well-known for his short temper, then chose to exercise extreme prejudice in his application of justice. Snepp accepted the prosecutor’s claim that Grant and Reddy were the masterminds of the fire, sentencing them to twenty-five and twenty years respectively. Charlie Parker, cast as a child-like accomplice, was given ten years in prison.<sup>552</sup> When compared to other unlawful burning sentences, handed down within the previous ten years in North Carolina, the inequity of the Charlotte Three case becomes clear. A study done by the *Charlotte Observer* found the Lazy B. case yielded harsher sentences than any other case during the previous decade. These included crimes that

---

<sup>550</sup> Butch Rosen, interview by Christopher Schutz, March 31, 1994, in Schutz, “The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States,” 47.

<sup>551</sup> Schutz, “The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B. Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States,” 46.

<sup>552</sup> The maximum sentence Snepp could hand down was 30 years. Nancy Brachey, “3 men Sentenced in Lazy B. Burning,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 15, 1972.

were demonstrably more heinous. Perhaps the starkest example was a seventeen-year-old male, who torched three occupied homes and only received a fifteen-year sentence.<sup>553</sup>

These unusually long prison terms reveal that the Charlotte Three case was about much more than arson, but instead represented a backlash against Black Power and New Left activism.

Perhaps the most illuminating description of the motivations of the trial inadvertently came from Judge Snepp. In a phone interview with the *Washington Post*, Snepp justified his sentencing decision, remarking that “I thought they were dangerous to the community and I gave them the maximum sentence.”<sup>554</sup> In other words, the trial’s character and the severity of the sentence were more influenced by the potential for future disorder, than the events at the Lazy B. Stables. After the trial, Attorney Ferguson filed a series of appeals and motions for review, but each of these was ultimately denied by the courts.<sup>555</sup> These repeated motions stirred up a variety of reactions from local, national, and international sources.

Those intimately involved with the defendants’ case endeavored to expose the influence of race in the trial’s proceedings. James Ferguson, counsel for the defendants, saw racial and political oppression as key reasons for the Charlotte Three’s prosecution and conviction. In a petition for gubernatorial pardon, Ferguson argued that “there is no explanation for the harshness of the sentences imposed on the petitioners other than that the same improper emotional, political, and racial motivation which produced the

---

<sup>553</sup> “The Sentences in the Stable Fire,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 18, 1972.

<sup>554</sup> “North Carolina Justice,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1974.

<sup>555</sup> An exhaustive analysis of the legal aspects of the Charlotte Three Case is well beyond the purview of this study. For a more detailed approach see: Christopher Schutz, “The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States,” (Master’s Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1994); Christopher Schutz, “Going to Hell With the Devil: The Charlotte Three Case and the Decline of Grassroots Activism in 1970’s Charlotte, North Carolina (Ph.D Diss., University of Georgia at Athens, 1999).

prosecution and convictions affected, if not determined the sentences.”<sup>556</sup> This view was shared by T.J. Reddy, who attacked Charlotte’s progressive façade from his prison cell. Drawing comparisons to more visible forms of white supremacy, Reddy charged that “they use[d] to just lynch us, now they use the courts to do it. Litting(sic) those who confess [to] crimes go free for their testimony against someone the state wants enslaved.”<sup>557</sup> These perspectives, however, were not unanimously shared by others in Charlotte.

The views of local Charlotteans adhered to the contours of the contemporary conservative political discourse. Nixon’s law and order syndrome informed the responses of many white Charlotteans to the Charlotte Three case. This trend was manifested by an outpouring of public support for Snapp’s sentencing decision in the *Charlotte Observer*’s public forum. The new conservative ethos that branded lenient sentencing practices as responsible for urban disorder was epitomized by local white J. Milling. Essentially, he concluded that “lack of respect for the law is due to the gentle and liberal attitude of our judges as plainly evidenced by the sentences meted out to those other lawbreakers.”<sup>558</sup> This sentiment was echoed by other white residents of Charlotte and the city’s suburban periphery.<sup>559</sup> Unlike outright defenses of segregation and white supremacy, white Charlotteans instead used the seemingly race neutral rhetoric of law and order to curb local Black Power activists and organizations.

---

<sup>556</sup> “Petition for Pardon: In the Matter of Thomas James Reddy and James Earl Grant.”

<sup>557</sup> T. J. Reddy, “Letters From Our Readers,” *The African World*, September 30, 1972.

<sup>558</sup> J. Milling, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972.

<sup>559</sup> Examples include: Don Alexander, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972; Neil Douglas Barnes, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972; Martha Washam, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972; Arthur Page, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972. White responses to the Charlotte’s Three’s convictions were not uniform. Rather some whites concurred with African American groups about the motivations of Charlotte’s white power structure and the injustice of the sentencing. See: Kelly Jones, “The Observer Forum,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 21, 1972.

The Charlotte Three case exposed the persistence of racial inequality in North Carolina to both national and international audiences. This development did more to damage to the progressive image of the city that business leaders had endeavored to cultivate than any other event in Charlotte during the twentieth century. A *Washington Post* editorial posited that the “national significance of the Charlotte Three is its suggestion that political repression at the state level can match or even pass what has been seen on the federal level.”<sup>560</sup> This critical response to racially and politically based injustice in North Carolina was echoed in other mainstream media outlets.<sup>561</sup> Outside pressure peaked in 1977, when Amnesty International declared the Charlotte Three Political Prisoners of Conscience. Unlike other racial incidents in Charlotte, the response to the Charlotte Three case reached a global audience and exposed the fragility of Charlotte’s progressive image.

Ultimately, in the context of this study, the question of whether Reddy, Grant, and Parker committed arson is somewhat irrelevant.<sup>562</sup> Instead, the more significant aspect of the Charlotte Three case was the prosecutorial excesses and the reactionary response of state and federal authorities to the threat of Black Power. These questionable strategies

---

<sup>560</sup> “North Carolina Justice,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1974.

<sup>561</sup> Examples include: “North Carolina Justice,” *Encore*, November, 1974; “A Crucial Court Case in North Carolina,” *Washington Post*, August 30, 1970; “Dixie Frameup: Says Ex-City Man Serving 25 Years,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 16, 1972; “The Price of Militancy: Ten Years in North Carolina,” *The Southern Patriot*, May, 1972; “Two Carolina Militants Called Political Prisoners,” *New York Times*, May 1972.

<sup>562</sup> Perhaps the most persuasive argument for the guilt of the Charlotte Three came in a 1974 *Charlotte Observer* article that claimed to have found a witness of the burning that did not testify at the trial. This unnamed source implicated Reddy, Grant, and Parker in the crime. The reporters located this informant through a tip by Washington, who claimed that he had also notified prosecutors of this witness’s existence. For whatever reason, however, officials declined to have this witness testify. There are several reasons, however, that cast doubt on the validity of this new data. First, the *Observer’s* source was found through Washington, who had virtually no credibility in 1974. Second, because the informant insisted on remaining anonymous, there is no way to independently verify whether their testimony was credible. See: Mark Ethridge, Michael Schwartz, Frye Galliard, Walker Lundy, “New Data Implicates Lazy B. Three,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 25, 1974.

disempowered Charlotte's black freedom movement in several distinct ways. First, by casting Grant, Reddy, and Parker as dangerous criminals, Charlotte's judiciary reinforced white Charlotteans' association of Black Power with criminality and violence. This narrative allowed policy makers to continue ignoring the concerns of lower-class African Americans. The second impact was to divert critical attention away from the grassroots goals that originally guided their activism. Not only did state officials remove Grant, Parker, and Reddy as community leaders, but they also distracted the attention of their followers. Instead of protesting discriminatory public policy decisions or contesting segregation in private and commercial spaces, civil rights and Black Power activists were forced to raise awareness of the prisoners' plight.<sup>563</sup> In essence, the Charlotte Three Affair decapitated the militant wing of the Black Power movement in Charlotte, while simultaneously distracting their followers and other organizations from more substantive grassroots goals. Grant, Reddy, and Parker's trial revealed a crucial aspect of white reaction in North Carolina. While paternalistic tendencies and an attitude of civility hid the state's commitment to white supremacy, this façade was undergirded by a combination of extrajudicial and sanctioned violence.

When state prosecutors indicted the Charlotte Three they sent a message to black New Left activists in the city. Militant resistance to the interlocking problems of poverty and racism would not be tolerated. This stance was not unique, but instead mirrored the pattern of legal suppression of New Left activists nationwide.<sup>564</sup> The implications of the court battle that arose from this incident were not abstract. Rather, as Christopher Schutz

---

<sup>563</sup> Schutz, "The Unlawful Burning of America The Lazy B Stables Trial, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States," 309.

<sup>564</sup> Similar examples include the Wilmington Ten, the Chicago Seven, the New Haven Fourteen, and the Biltmore Six. For a comparison of these cases to the Charlotte Three see: Christopher Schutz, "The Burning of America: Race, Radicalism, and the 'Charlotte Three Trial in 1970s North Carolina," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (January, 1999), 61.

presciently observed, “by the time Gov. James B. Hunt reduced the ‘Charlotte Three’s’ sentences in 1979—enabling their release—the streets of Charlotte had become decidedly quiet.”<sup>565</sup> Charlotte’s grassroots African American coalition was more disjointed than it had been in the late-1960s; issues of poverty and race had become more complex. Conservative consensus had become firmly entrenched and the solidification of Charlotte’s spatial segregation prevented African Americans from organizing to combat inequitable public policy decisions, gentrification, and de facto segregation.

The use of state force to suppress militant black organizers was not limited to the Charlotte Three, but instead represented a broad-based aspect of law and order policies. In this sense, the Lazy B. case was not an anomaly, but instead was emblematic of a new repressive norm. While police interference with the BCA was less pronounced, the effect was the same. When black activists refused to accept the poverty and insecurity created by spatial segregation and public policies that redistributed black tax dollars to white communities, authorities labeled them subversive and used whatever means necessary to incarcerate them. This repression did not occur automatically, but instead was deliberately crafted to sow chaos in the Black Power movement.

It is overly reductive to conclude that the rise of Black Power represented a decline of the black freedom movement in Charlotte. Unlike their more conservative predecessors, radical black groups were faced with a new conservative political culture, predicated on notions of law and order. The challenges posed by de facto racism and discriminatory public policies faced by insurgent black organizations in the late-1960s and 1970s were more abstract and ostensibly race-neutral than the de jure segregation

---

<sup>565</sup> Schutz, “The Burning of America: Race, Radicalism, and the ‘Charlotte Three’ Trial in 1970s North Carolina,” 63.

encountered by the NAACP in the 1950s to mid-1960s. These new movements responded to these changes, providing bold and innovative solutions.

While state-sponsored repression dissolved militant black groups and diverted the attention of activists, organizations like the BCA and MOPA also accomplished substantive goals in the late-1960s and early-1970s. Perhaps most significantly, these groups refused to accept the new modalities of white supremacy quietly and instead shed light on the evolution of discrimination for both national and international audiences. Hawkins' direct action campaign against the YMCA served an important role in this evolutionary process, providing an antecedent for militant organizations to build upon. In essence, Hawkins revealed that the vulnerability of Charlotte's progressive façade could be exploited through public demonstrations. Moreover, indigenous Black Power groups did valuable work in impoverished communities of color in the late-1960s and early-1970s. These groups made major progress in their agendas and highlighted persistent inequality in novel ways, often in areas ignored by the NAACP and other more conservative movements. Token integration of white leisure spaces failed the marginalized followers of these militant groups, largely benefiting Charlotte's black bourgeois.

Unlike the middle- and upper-class agenda of the NAACP, black militants were principally concerned with the problems plaguing impoverished neighborhoods. A close analysis of the Black Cultural Association demonstrates this point vividly. While the NAACP focused on white facilities, the BCA successfully lobbied for a recreation center in one of Charlotte's most blighted communities, contested police harassment, challenged price gouging, and inspired the creation of an Africana Studies Department at UNC-

Charlotte. In terms of leisure, the BCA's success in forcing the construction of a recreation center in Greenville represented an important win for cultural nationalists in the city. The BCA, however, was not the only militant black organization that improved the leisure opportunities for black Charlotteans. Hawkins's successful protest of the YMCA's Central Branch opened up recreation facilities that previously had been unavailable to African Americans, most notably a fitness center and health club. T.J. Reddy and the VISTA activists also, at least temporarily, dealt a blow against de facto segregation in commercial leisure spaces, forcing a recalcitrant local business owner to abide by federal law. These accomplishments were not trivial, but instead represented a grassroots effort to reform a system that perpetuated black poverty and insecurity. One avenue ignored by indigenous cultural nationalists, however, was the development of black-owned private and commercial leisure spaces. It is plausible that without police intervention militant activists would have persisted in and expanded these campaigns, demanding more equitable public policies and exposing the cracks in Charlotte's progressive image to national audiences.

Ultimately the decline of indigenous Black Power organizations in Charlotte was not due to ideological inconsistencies or a lack of popular support. Rather, because they were considered subversive by municipal and state authorities, activists like the BCA and the Charlotte Three were targeted. By demonizing and suppressing Black Power activists in the 1960s and 1970s, Charlotte officials revealed a central truth of race relations in North Carolina. Despite the state's progressive reputation, when challenged, "beneath

the green ivy of civility, lay a stone wall of coercion.”<sup>566</sup> How this wall could be breached, however, remained unanswered.

---

<sup>566</sup> Tim Tyson, “Wars for Democracy: African American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina During World War II,” in eds. Tyson and Cecelski, *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 255.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

“My impression is that most blacks see it as a bit of unfinished business,” remarked Kelly Alexander Jr. after an Associated Press reporter informed him that all four of Charlotte’s oldest country clubs remained exclusively white.<sup>567</sup> Even in 1990, nearly forty years after the official end of Jim Crow segregation, considerations of race and class still shaped access to Charlotte’s private leisure spaces. Like his father, Alexander was the president of the North Carolina NAACP, but when faced with racial discrimination in this context he chose not to pursue legal recourse or to stage demonstrations. When the same reporter approached Charlotte Country Club member Stanford Brookshire, Charlotte’s former mayor, who many historians have credited for guiding the city’s desegregation, he explained that these establishments are different than restaurants and other public spaces and thus have no responsibility to include black members.<sup>568</sup> “The clubs are private, and your home is private. The two are an extension of each other in a manner of speaking,” asserted the former mayor, “at home, you can invite whom you want, so you ought to be able to do the same at your club.”<sup>569</sup> At first glance, the attitudes espoused by both of these men seem to be fundamentally at odds with their firm stances against racial segregation in Charlotte.

---

<sup>567</sup> “Many Clubs are Segregated,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 5, 1990.

<sup>568</sup> “Many Clubs Still Exclusively White,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, February 5, 1990. For a perspective crediting Brookshire with Charlotte’s desegregation see: Coffin, 54.

<sup>569</sup> “Many Clubs Still Exclusively White,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, February 5, 1990.

One plausible explanation for their lack of concern is that the various campaigns to eliminate de jure segregation in Charlotte's public accommodations largely succeeded in preventing both the municipal government and private citizens from enforcing exclusionary policies. In this way, the struggle against Jim Crow recreation in Charlotte appears to have a fairly simple legacy. Jim Crow laws were abolished and black citizens, at least nominally, gained access to public, private, and commercial leisure spaces that previously had excluded them. While this story is uplifting, it obscures the larger legacy of civil rights and Black Power activism in Charlotte. The city's desegregation was not a simple morality tale, with seemingly anachronistic segregationists steadily overcome by a unified coalition of non-violent activists and well-timed intervention by the federal government. This popular depiction falsely assumes that the demise of legal segregation heralded the end of discriminatory public policies and barriers to black advancement.<sup>570</sup> That legislation, like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act, served as a panacea for racial discrimination.

The reality, however, was far messier. Alexander hinted at this complexity during the interview when he explained why the NAACP was not planning to take legal action against the discriminatory policies of area country clubs. "Frankly, it is not a burning issue," Alexander maintained, "when we are all living in million dollar homes and driving expensive cars, then maybe we'll start looking around and exploring what distinctions are between us."<sup>571</sup> While Alexander's sarcastic response was intended to disarm the reporter's question, it alluded to a central truth about Charlotte's black

---

<sup>570</sup> This view has been perpetuated through a variety of mediums, including popular culture, the early historiography of Charlotte's Civil Rights Movement, and studies of black freedom in Charlotte. For a description of the broad contours of this narrative see: Payne, 3-6.

<sup>571</sup> "Many Clubs Still Exclusively White," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, February 5, 1990.

freedom movement. Segregation in public venues served as an unavoidable daily reminder of African Americans' second-class citizenship, but also in a larger sense their subaltern status. Protests over segregated leisure spaces were never solely about inclusion. Instead, activists used leisure as a tool to address larger social ills, including juvenile delinquency and criminality, poverty, poor health, police harassment and brutality, social status, and respectability.<sup>572</sup>

To accomplish these aims, African American activists in Charlotte utilized every means available to them. Beginning with subtle forms of resistance, principally sneaking into traditionally white parks and playgrounds, and progressing to large Black Power rallies demanding concessions from a recalcitrant city government, local African Americans consistently contested discriminatory public policies throughout the twentieth century. This movement was not orchestrated by a middle- and upper-class vanguard, as some historians have argued, but instead took a broad-based form, reflecting long-standing grievances of the lower-class, women, and youth.<sup>573</sup> As the legacy of the city's indigenous Civil Rights and Black Power Movements clearly demonstrates, these previously invisible actors were able to articulate concrete grassroots goals and challenge the white power structure's obstructionist practices in meaningful ways. This new understanding recognizes that public protest movements were just as important as legal challenges, comprising a vivid way to contest Charlotte's progressive image.<sup>574</sup>

---

<sup>572</sup> This understanding tends to support Hall's long civil rights thesis. Hall contends that the master narrative has condensed the aims of black activists into a simplistic platform, obscuring the overarching social, economic, and political goals of the movement. See: Hall, 1233.

<sup>573</sup> Greenwood, 1-3; Bumgarner-Davis, iv; Schwartz, 3.

<sup>574</sup> This assertion runs contrary to many historians of Charlotte that have neglected grassroots protest, instead concluding that legal battles catalyzed change in the city's racial status quo. Douglas, 4; Schwartz, 1-8.

Brookshire's remarks are instructive as well. A central architect of Charlotte's New South progressive reputation during the 1960s, his conclusion that private leisure spaces were perfectly justified in maintaining racially-based membership policies reflects a long-standing middle- and upper-class tendency to endorse the desegregation of public space, while simultaneously defending their right to exclude African Americans in private facilities. Moderates like Brookshire consistently opposed desegregation through gradualist rhetoric, procedural obstruction, and complex litigation, but masked their efforts with public condemnations of white supremacy and negotiation with civil rights leaders. This strategy, which adheres to the parameters of Chafe's progressive mystique, prevented Charlotte from experiencing massive unrest like was seen in Selma or Birmingham.<sup>575</sup> Like the progressive façade he spent his career constructing and reinforcing, however, Brookshire's legacy as an enlightened figure is problematic.

During the bulk of the twentieth-century moderate members of Charlotte's municipal government and business community carefully instituted token and gradualist policies in an attempt to mollify African American citizens, while simultaneously avoiding a backlash from reactionary white residents. The principal aim of this unofficial strategy was to attract and retain industrial development, by casting Charlotte as a progressive Southern metropolis unstained by the racial turmoil plaguing other cities nationwide.<sup>576</sup> The relative success of these tactics, however, cannot be divorced from the spatial realities of Charlotte. Rigidly segregated by race and class, white populations were insulated from black communities, inhibiting the rise of radical white supremacist

---

<sup>575</sup> Chafe, 4-9.

<sup>576</sup> This phenomenon has been well documented, see: Douglas, 1-8; Chafe, 1-14.

movements.<sup>577</sup> This in turn allowed the city's moderate civic and business elite to retain positions of influence during the 1950s and 1960, instead of being usurped by race-baiting reactionaries. Without this spatial arrangement, the agenda of business boosters like Brookshire could have been replaced with the tactics of massive resistance. While seemingly progressive policies prevented public disorder, this was not evidence of equitable race relations. In short, the moderate legalistic and procedural tactics used by Charlotte's white power structure were not evidence of a progressive status quo, but instead constituted an extremely effective form of obstruction throughout most of the twentieth century.

Too often, however, observers have taken this putatively moderate stance at face value, ignoring the substantive harm done to communities of color by gradualist public policies.<sup>578</sup> The social ills plaguing Charlotte's black citizens did not develop in a vacuum, but instead were exacerbated by inequitable public policies that redistributed tax dollars from black communities to white neighborhoods. Underdeveloped public works and uneven economic development perpetuated black poverty and insecurity, serving to undermine the accomplishments of the local black freedom movement. Even though the city avoided dramatic acts of racial hatred, black neighborhoods were consistently neglected by city planners. Furthermore, as the desegregation of the Revolution Park golf course and swimming pool demonstrate, token integration did not herald a new era of black inclusion, but instead the continuation of a repressive status quo. Spatial segregation and protracted white resistance caused the desegregation of these spaces to be

---

<sup>577</sup> Cunningham, 178; Hanchett, 225; Douglas, 55.

<sup>578</sup> Schwartz, 1-8; Galliard, 185-194; Although *Reading, Writing, and Race* takes a more critical stance on Charlotte's reputation, Douglas still largely supports the interpretation that the city was progressive. See: Douglas, 69-71.

somewhat hollow with black patrons prevented by social custom and physical distance from fully occupying them.<sup>579</sup> In this context, token integration can be seen as an insufficient remedy for the problems plaguing black communities. While Charlotte's moderate leaders avoided widely-publicized strife, the effect of gradualism was to delay addressing substantive barriers to the social and economic advancement of black communities. These persistent delays constituted a subtle form of violence perpetrated against black communities, with inadequate leisure spaces forcing African American children to recreate in a hazardous urban landscape, diverting black tax dollars to white communities, and engendering black residents with feelings of inferiority.

Just as the goals of black freedom activists are more complicated than historians of civil rights era Charlotte have generally understood, so is white reaction. Although several analyses of the city have addressed how economic concerns shaped the policy decisions of Charlotte's civic and business elite, there has been very little investigation into the motivations of less affluent residents.<sup>580</sup> Instead, histories of twentieth century Charlotte have viewed white reactionaries in static and one-dimensional terms, neglecting to interrogate why the desegregation of certain spaces became more volatile than others. As this study has demonstrated, the uniquely gendered contours of urban leisure spaces illuminate significant tensions between local whites and black activists. Unlike the ballot box or lunch counter, public, private, and commercial leisure spaces challenged contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality.<sup>581</sup> In a very concrete sense, the presence of black men at white swimming pools, recreation centers, and YMCAs put the masculinity of white men in question. Furthermore, desegregation in this context

---

<sup>579</sup> Cunningham, 182, 284.

<sup>580</sup> Leach, 2-5; Penninger, 1-4; Galliard, 65-68.

<sup>581</sup> Wiltse, 86, 125-126; Wolcott, 134-135.

invoked the specter of miscegenation and amalgamation in the white imaginary, increasing the potential for disorder. Because it was difficult for lower- and middle-class whites to afford membership at private institutions, they were more likely to contest black inclusion. In particular, the vitriolic correspondence received by municipal officials after the first attempt to integrate the Revolution Park swimming pool illustrates the depth of white discontent for desegregation in public leisure spaces.

Because the principal aim of this study has been to disentangle the complex relationships between race, gender, progressivism, and leisure, certain aspects of this struggle have been necessarily glossed over. In particular, the interplay between religious affiliation and exclusion from leisure spaces has received little attention in this narrative. Throughout the twentieth century, Jewish residents of Charlotte suffered similar forms of discrimination as African Americans, especially in private and commercial recreation facilities.<sup>582</sup> In fact, Jewish denizens remained unable to gain membership to Charlotte's elite country clubs into the 1990s.<sup>583</sup> Another issue that warrants further examination is the experience of poor whites in the city. As this narrative has explained, the correlation between access to leisure and class-status is strong. Especially in the early- to mid-twentieth century, lack of public leisure spaces subjected the white lower-class to similar legal and physical hazards. Furthermore, if this study were to extend into the late-twentieth century, it would also be crucial to investigate the experiences of Hispanic and Asian residents in Charlotte. Presumably, the persistence of discriminatory public

---

<sup>582</sup> Jeri Gertzman, interviewed by Sam Eneman, April 22, 1990, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>583</sup> "Many Clubs are Segregated," *Wilmington Morning Star*, February 5, 1990; "Many Clubs Still Exclusively White," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, February 5, 1990.

policies harmed these communities in equally impactful ways. While these avenues will require painstaking research, they constitute significant components of Charlotte's story.

The broad aims of the movement Kelly Alexander Jr. inherited from his father were not altogether dissimilar from the NAACP's agenda in the 1960s.<sup>584</sup> Even in the 1990s, the linkages between poverty and race in North Carolina remained robust. While Charlotte's business community experienced unprecedented fiscal prosperity, predominantly black neighborhoods continued to suffer underemployment, incarceration, and poor health at disparate rates.<sup>585</sup> Moreover, decades of conservative redistricting efforts handicapped black candidates in state and federal elections, significantly curtailing the political clout of African American communities statewide. In fact, although African Americans constituted 22 percent of the state's population in the 1990s, no black candidate had succeeded in obtaining federal legislative office in North Carolina since George White left his house seat in early-1901.<sup>586</sup> While the roots of these problems were not the product of explicitly racist legislation, their effects were no less real. Unlike Jim Crow segregation, this new brand of discriminatory policies was codified in race-neutral language, causing them to be less vulnerable in the courts.<sup>587</sup>

Taken in context, the legacy of the black freedom struggle in Charlotte reflects the central tension of Southern history. Elements of both continuity and change are present, with concrete gains counterbalanced by lingering inequalities. While formal barriers to

---

<sup>584</sup> Kelly Alexander, interviewed by Melinda Desmarais, May 1, 2001, New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Margaret Alexander, "History of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Branch of the NAACP, 1919-1992," p. 2-7, Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>585</sup> Specifically for North Carolina see: Tom Eamon, *The Making of a Southern Democracy: North Carolina Politics from Kerr Scott to Pat McCrory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 238-242, 252. For a compelling national view of these problems see: Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 1-17.

<sup>586</sup> Eamon, 238.

<sup>587</sup> Alexander, 8.

black inclusion and advancement fell, African American communities continued to be plagued by poverty, police harassment, and underdevelopment. In the face of these stark disparities, however, both Charlotte and North Carolina retained their progressive reputation, at least in relation to other Southern locales.<sup>588</sup> From his prison cell in 1972 T.J. Reddy presciently observed that “Charlotte has a way of whitewashing things, keeping what’s happening subdued, not letting the facts about our deaths reach the news... All this to put fear in your mind for you to be still and quiet.”<sup>589</sup> During the bulk of the twentieth century this strategy preserved Charlotte’s progressive reputation, at least within the specter of Southern politics, while simultaneously allowing the racial status quo to remain essentially unaltered. Whether these tactics will continue to mask oppression and suppress dissent in the twenty-first century, however, remains to be seen.

---

<sup>588</sup> Matthew Lassiter, “Searching for Respect: From ‘New South’ to ‘World Class’ at the Crossroads of the Carolinas,” in *Charlotte N.C.: The Global Evolution of a New South City* eds. William Graves and Heather Smith (Athens: University of Georgia, 2010), 28.

<sup>589</sup> T. J. Reddy, “Letters From Our Readers,” *The African World*, September 30, 1972.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Manuscript Collections:

Alexander, Frederick Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Alexander, Kelly Sr. Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Belk, John Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Brookshire, Stanford Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Charlotte Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee Records. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Charlotte Park Association. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Grier, Joseph Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Hawkins, Reginald Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Mayor's Committee on Race Relationships. Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Reddy, T.J. Papers. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

#### Government Documents:

Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes and Petitions. Books 25-50. Office of the City Clerk. Charlotte Mecklenburg Governmental Center. Charlotte, North Carolina.

Marion Diehl to W. T. Robertson, undated, Unnamed Folder, Board of Recreation Minutes, Collett Street Recreation Center, Morganton Parks and Recreation, Morganton, North Carolina.

Park and Recreation Commission, "Park and Recreation Commission Facility Handbook, August 1969," August, 1969, Local Documents, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

W. T. Robertson to Marion Diehl, September 30, 1955, Unnamed Folder, Board of Recreation Minutes, Collett Street Recreation Center, Morganton Parks and Recreation, Morganton, North Carolina.

#### Statistical Studies:

Carolina Population Center. *County Population Trends, North Carolina, 1790-1960; State, Region, County, Residence, Color*. North Carolina Population Data Series No. 1. March 1969.

Division of War Public Services (DWPS). United States Census: Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Recreation: Community Recreation in 1942," *Monthly Labor Review* 57, no. 2 (August, 1943): 284-286.

#### Newspapers:

*Carolina Times*  
*Charlotte Observer*  
*Charlotte News*  
*Charlotte Weekly-East*  
*Encore*  
*Evening Independent*  
*Greensboro Daily News*  
*Hartford Courant*  
*Newsday*  
*New York Times*  
*Southern Patriot*  
*Spartanburg Herald*  
*Washington Post*

#### Oral Interviews:

Abraham, Olaf. Interviewed by Dawn Funk. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 11, 2007.

Alexander, Kelly. Interviewed by Melinda Desmarais. OHAL-0004. New South Voices, Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. May1, 2001.

- Bryant, Don. Interview by Jason Harpe. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. March 26, 2004.
- Caldwell, Ronald. Interview by Bridgette Sanders and Lois Stickel. UACA-0005. New South Voices, Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. May 31, 2005.
- Chavis, Benjamin. Interview by Bridgette Sanders. UACH-0006. New South Voices. Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. February 7, 2005.
- Davis, Naomi. by Mary Metzger. BBDA-0014. New South Voices. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. November 3, 2004.
- Dial, Walter. Interview by Hope Murphy. BBDI-00003. New South Voices. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. May 12, 2004.
- Diamond, Vermelle Ely. Interview by Katherine Wells. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. March 25, 2004.
- Gertzman, Jeri. Interview by Sam Eneman. JCGE-0004. New South Voices. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 22, 1990.
- Harris, Paul and Robert Brown. Interview by Kyle Cox. Revolution Park Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 28, 2010.
- Herron, Vernon. Interview by Tosha Pearson. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. March 13, 2007.
- Hawkins, Reginald. Interview by Greg Childers. Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Undated.
- Hawkins, Reginald. Interview by Melinda Desmarias. OHHA-0077. New South Voices. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. May 11, 2001.

Holloway, Bettye Golden. Interview by Jennifer Payne. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 26, 2007.

Hunter, David. Interview by Debbie Howard. April 14, 2005. BBHU-0024 in New South Voices, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

James, Ida. Interview by Brian Alexander. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. March 23, 2004.

Leach, Frances. Interview by Brian Alexander. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 2, 2004.

Long, Lem. Interview by Nicholas Gallard. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. March 15, 2007.

Roseboro, Christine Bowser. Interview by Nick Gallardo. Brooklyn Oral History Project, Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 13, 2007.

Ross II, James. Interview by Kyle Cox. Revolution Park Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 12, 2010.

Ross II, James. Interview by Debbie Howard. BBRO-0019. New South Voices, Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. March 22, 2005.

Wyche, Diane. Interview by Tosha McLean Pearson. Brooklyn Oral History Project. Special Collections. J. Murrey Atkins Library. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. April 28, 2007.

#### Court Cases:

*Charlotte Park and Recreation Commission v. Barringer* 88 U.S. 114 (1955).

*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948).

*Smith V. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

*Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950).

#### Secondary Sources

## Books:

Bayor, Ronald. *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Berderman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Bloom, Joshua and Waldo Martin. *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013.

Blum, Edward. "A Subversive Savior: Manhood and African American Images of Christ in the Early Twentieth-Century South," In *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction*. Edited by Craig Thompson Friend. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Brown, Scot. *Fighting For US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.

Cahn, Susan. *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Carmichael, Stokely. "Speech at University of California at Berkeley." In *Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches*. Edited by Catherine Ellis and Stephen Smith. New York: New Press, 2013.

Carson, Clayborn. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Chafe, William. *Civil Rights and Civilities: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Struggle for Black Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Christensen, Rob. *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

Cobb, James. *The South and America: Since World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Coffin, Alex. *Brookshire and Belk: Businessmen in City Hall*. Charlotte: Monarch Printing, 1994.

Cortner, Richard. *Civil Rights and Public Accommodations: The Heart of Atlanta Motel and McClung Cases*. Topeka: University of Kansas Press, 2001.

- Cunningham, David. *Klansville, U.S.A: The Rise and Fall of the Civil Rights-Era Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Diamond, Vermelle. *Charlotte, North Carolina: Black America Series*. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2001.
- Dittermer, John. *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- Douglas, Davison. *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of Charlotte Schools*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Fergus, Devin. *Liberalism, Black Power, and Making of American Politics, 1965-1980*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.
- Galliard, Frye. *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988.
- Garrow, David. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: Harper Collins, 1986.
- Glasker, Wayne. *Black Student's in the Ivory Tower: African American Student Activism at the University of Pennsylvania*. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- Greene, Christina. *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Greenwood, Janette. *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White Better Classes of Charlotte, 1850-1910*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.
- Gottendeiner, Mark. *The Social Construction of Urban Space*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- Hall, Simon. *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements of the 1960s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Hanchett, Thomas. *Sorting out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Jacoway, Elizabeth. "Civil Rights and the Changing South," In *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*. Edited by Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Kahrl, Andrew. *This Land was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Kennedy, Randall. "The Struggle for Racial Equality in Public Accommodations." In *Legacies of the 1964 Civil Rights Act*. Edited by Bernard Grofman. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000.
- Kelley, Robin. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Worker Class*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.
- Korstad, Roger and James Leloudis. *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Kornbluth, Andrea Tuttle. "Municipal Harmony: Cultural Pluralism, Public Recreation, and Race Relations." In *Historical Roots of the Urban Crisis: Blacks in the Industrial City, 1900-1950*. Edited by Henry Louis Taylor and Walter Hill. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000.
- Kruse, Kevin. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Lassiter, Matthew. "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas," In *Charlotte N.C.: The Global Evolution of a New South City*. Edited by William Graves and Heather Smith. Athens: University of Georgia, 2010.
- Lassiter, Matthew. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Lawson, Steven. "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement." In *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*. Edited by Danielle McGuire and John Dittmer. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 2011.
- Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Places*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011.
- Loevy, Robert. *To End All Segregation: The Politics of the Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act*. New York: University Press of America, 1990.
- Lupkin, Paula. *Manhood Factories: YMCA Architecture and the Making Modern Urban Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

- Meier, August and Elliott, Rudwick. *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Mendleberg, Tali. *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Mjagkiji, Nina. *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998.
- Mjakij, Nina. "True Manhood: The YMCA and Racial Advancement, 1890-1930." in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and YWCA in the City*." eds. Nina Mjakij and Margaret Spratt. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Morrill, Dan. *Historic Charlotte: An Illustrated History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*. San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2001.
- Morrill, Dan. *The Civil War in the Carolinas*. Charleston: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of America, 2005.
- Morris, Aldon. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Meyerson, Michael. *Nothing Could Be Finer*. New York: International Publishers, 1978.
- Norton, Mary. *Charlotte: Spirit of the New South*. Winston Salem: Continental Heritage Press, 1980.
- Payne, Charles. *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Purnell, Brian. *Fighting Jim Crow in the Valley of the Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2013.
- Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Reverby, Susan. *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Study and its Legacy*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Richardson, Richie. *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007.
- Risen, Clay. *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination*. New York: Wiley Press, 2009.

- Rogers, Ibram. *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012.
- Shawki, Amhed. *Black Liberation and Socialism*. Chicago: Hay Market Books, 2006.
- Sitkoff, Harvard. *Towards Freedom Land: The Long Struggle For Racial Equality in America*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2010.
- Soja, Edward. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Theoharis, Jeanne and Komozi Woodward. *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.
- Theoharis, Jeanne. "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South." In *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*. Edited by Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespi. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Tyson, Timothy. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Tyson, Timothy. "Wars for Democracy: African American Militancy and Interracial Violence in North Carolina During World War II." In *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*. Edited by Tyson and Celceski. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Walker, Anders. *The Ghost of Jim Crow: How Southern Moderates Used Brown V. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Williams, Yohuru. "Red, Black and Green Liberation Jumpsuit:" Roy Wilkins, the Black Panthers, and the Conundrum of Black Power." In *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*. Edited by Peniel Joseph. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Wiltse, Jeff. *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Woodward, Komozi. *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Woolf, T.J. *Negro Problems in Cities*. New York: Negro University Press, 1928.

Wolcott, Victoria. *Race Riots and Rollercoasters: The Struggle Over Segregated Recreation in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012.

Wright, Gavin. *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Zukin, Sharon. *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1991.

Articles:

Chau-Jau, Sundiata Keita and Clarence Lang. "The 'Long Movement' as a Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 265-288.

Ford, Tanisha. "SNCC Women, Denim, and the Politics of Dress." *Journal of Southern History* 79, no.3 (August, 2013), 625-658.

Hall, Jacquelyn. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

Joseph, Peniel. "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field." *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009), 751-776.

Kahrl, Andrew. "The Negro Park Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina." *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no. 1 (February 2013): 113-142.

Renfrew, Charles. "Constitutional Law: Equal Protection: Determinable Fee as Device to Impose Racial Restrictions on Use of Land." *Michigan Law Review* 54, no. 5 (March 1956,) 698-701.

Tyson, Timothy. "Robert F. Williams, 'Black Power,' and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle." *Journal of American History* 85, no 2 (September 1998): 540-570.

Usher, Jess. "The Golfers': African American Golfers of the North Carolina Piedmont and the Struggle for Access." *North Carolina History Review* 87, no. 2 (April 2010), 158-193.

Weber, Bret and Wallace, Amanda, "Revealing the Empowerment Revolution: A Literature Review of the Model Cities Program." *The Journal of Urban History* 38, no.1 (January 2012), 173-192.

Unpublished Material:

- Margaret Alexander, "History of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Branch of the NAACP, 1919-1992," Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University North Carolina at Charlotte.
- Bond, Gregory. "Jim Crow at Play: Race, Manliness, and the Color Line in American Sports, 1876-1916." Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008.
- Bumgarner-Davis, Marianne. "Rending the Veil: Desegregation in Charlotte 1954-1975." Ph.D. Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995.
- "Caldwell Memorial Presbyterian Church: A History, 1912-1964," 1964, Rare Books, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
- Faulkenbury, Evan. "'Telenegro': Reginald Hawkins, Black Power, and the 1968 Gubernatorial Race in North Carolina." Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2012.
- Griffin, Willie. "An Indigenous Civil Rights Movement: Charlotte, North Carolina 1940-1963." Master's Thesis, Morgan State University, 2006.
- Johnson C. Smith University, "A Survey of the Recreational Facilities for Negroes in the City of Charlotte: 1938-1939," 1939, Special Collections, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
- Leach, Damaria Etta Brown. "Progress Under Pressure: Changes in Charlotte Race Relations, 1955-1965." Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1976.
- Penninger, Randy. "The Emergence of Black Political Power in Charlotte, North Carolina: The City Council Tenure of Frederick Douglas Alexander, 1965-1974." Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1989.
- Schutz, Christopher. "Going to Hell With the Devil: The Charlotte Three Case and the Decline of Grassroots Activism in 1970's Charlotte, North Carolina. Ph.D Diss., University of Georgia at Athens, 1999.
- Schutz, Christopher. "The Unlawful Burning of America: The Lazy B Stables Trial, Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, and the United States." Master's Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1994.