ORGANIZING THE 'LIVING DEAD': CIVIL RIGHTS IN OKLAHOMA CITY AND TULSA, OKLAHOMA, 1954-1964

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CHAPTER I

THE SPECTRUM OF CIVIL RIGHTS

One contributor to the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* writing in 1958 recalled his effort to vote thirty years earlier. As he and a group of other blacks loaded up a wagon and attempted to vote in the ongoing election, the registrar fled in an effort to avoid recording their votes. After several hours in hot pursuit, the wagon finally caught up to the registrar and the group demanded to exercise their right to vote. The writer evoked the memory of the night saying, "When we finally did corner him, that 'honest' individual resigned his office right before our eyes. We did not get to register that night."[1] The registrar's response reflected the difficulties that African Americans in Oklahoma City and Tulsa endured on a regular basis. Outright hostility rarely flared to the extent that it did in other Southern states. Instead, a continual refrain of political maneuver, avoidance, and delay persisted as the normal reactions of whites in response to black issues. However, the willingness of state and city officials to listen to the complaints of blacks, and the gradual shift from segregationist policies within the government to more egalitarian ones, helped increase the chances of a relatively peaceful, if arrested, political and social collaboration between the two races in Oklahoma City.

The period from 1954 to 1964 encapsulates the modern African-American civil rights movement from its revitalization following the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court decision to the movement's success in generating significant legislative change in the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The outlawing of segregation in public education by the *Brown* decision began an era notable for the drastic amount of social change and by the animosity displayed by those who opposed the changes. The intervening decade also witnessed the beginnings of the sit-in movement, which challenged segregation in eateries and other public facilities. The success of the sit-ins led to other forms of protests including kneel-ins, ride-ins, and wade-ins that aimed to desegregate churches, amusement parks, and swimming pools.

This decade reveals as well the cracks in society exposed by new social trends and cultural movements. The civil rights movement launched the first salvo in an era notable for its contentions. Remembered for its consumer culture, conformity, and suburbanization, the trends of the 1950s also disguised the growing dissatisfaction of several groups over their stake and position in society. Beginning at the onset of World War II, a second "Great Migration" of African Americans gradually changed the black population of the United States from a largely rural population to an urban one. Much of this resulted from blacks eager to be employed at (better) positions left empty by men fighting in the war. As soldiers left their positions at factories and workshops throughout the North, blacks embraced the opportunity of a potentially higher income and a chance at escaping the Jim Crow restrictions encountered in the Deep South. While many

African Americans chose to move to the North, Midwest, and West from the South, when soldiers returned after the war the same corporations that hired blacks unceremoniously dumped them. In the north blacks realized that while the segregation may not have had the official basis that it maintained in the South, the stigma of segregation still influenced everything they did.[2]

Blacks in Oklahoma mirrored this trend of moving into urban areas. The black towns formed in the territorial and early statehood period provided one source of people for this urban migration. Some of the towns failed to maintain their early success in creating an enclave that provided equal rights and allowances for blacks. The racial and often geographic isolation that motivated African Americans to create separate towns could lead to economic disjunction as well. The desolation of the area prevented much trade with other towns and forced the towns to be almost entirely economically self-sufficient. The discriminatory policies of the government or of individual businesses outside of the towns increased the difficulty of economic interaction with other cities. In addition, the reliance on small farms and agriculture in black towns isolated them to an even greater degree. The landowners often produced items of necessity for themselves, further limiting the amount of interaction with other cities.[3]

This problem came to a head in Oklahoma even as late as 1954 when debates over the construction of the Turner Turnpike resulted in a dissatisfied black populace. The state government controlled the assigning of contracts and gave these contracts only to white business owners. Almost all white business owners still forbade African Americans

from entering their establishments in 1954. As a result, the awarding of contracts only to white business owners eliminated the likelihood that blacks would use the toll road. Blacks lacked motels to stay at and restaurants to eat in during their travels, and so they would plan routes that avoided the road. Such frustrations led to blacks to demand: "What we want in Oklahoma and the South is government by law and not by compromise. Full and complete democracy by law and in its fullest sense would give the black man not only what he is getting in the dining halls on the Turner Turnpike, but inestimably more of the same quality of treatment everywhere in America."[4]

The Deep South, especially Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and the Carolinas, has received the majority of attention from scholars studying the civil rights movement, and understandably so. The region saw the largest number of demonstrations and also experienced more intense reactions to the civil rights efforts than any other area. The Deep South also tended to enact harsher *de jure* and *de facto* segregationist policies than other states. Movement activities such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the marches on Selma and Birmingham, Alabama, and voter registration drives in Mississippi all occurred in the South, where the grossest violations of civil liberties for African Americans happened. Whites in the South maintained attitudes of racial superiority that drew from a long history of prejudicial treatment stemming from the era of black slavery. During and after Reconstruction, there was a brief promise of an increase in status for former slaves, soon followed by a reversion to the previous prejudicial attitudes. Literacy tests, poll taxes, and "grandfather clauses" all aimed to disenfranchise blacks, and

implementation of these preventative measures gradually eliminated almost all of black political participation in the South in the following decades.[5]

Thus historians writing in the years immediately after the civil rights movement tended to focus on the entirety of the Southern portion of the movement. At the same time, the initial wave of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. scholars entered with studies that examined his life and politics and his interactions with the other leaders involved with the African-American civil rights movement in the United States. His place as the most recognizable and important of the leaders of the movement led to King being the focus of much of the initial scholarship of the movement. Offshoots of King studies typically traced his role in the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as well as the leadership of his and his successors. Two major works, David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* and Adam Fairclough's *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.,* devote their pages to unwinding the inner workings of the organization and the personalities behind it. Both works struggle with understanding the organization's successes despite its largely chaotic structure. *Bearing the Cross* explores King's initial reluctance in accepting a role as the movement's head and the eventual relish that he displayed in leading the movement towards equal rights.[6] As Fairclough explained the benefit of such an unsystematic approach to attacking racial injustice in the South, "What appeared to outsiders as chaos and inefficiency was often the inevitable consequence of flexibility, spontaneity, and a

capability for swift decision making and mobilization."[7] Taylor Branch does the best job of exploring King's character and motivation in his trilogy that includes, *Parting the Waters, Pillar of Fire,* and *At Canaan's Edge.* Branch identifies King as the most influential figure in American life of the last half century. Although repetitive at times, the intricacy and delicacy of Branch's portrayal make it an essential study for students of the civil rights movement. King studies emerged as their own specific area of civil rights scholarship that continues in earnest to current times with books that explore specific aspects of King's role in gaining African-American civil rights or attempt to examine new aspects of his life. Included in these works are Diane McWhorter's *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*; Richard Lischer's *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Word That Moved America;* and Michael K. Honey's monograph *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Last Campaign.*[8] The integral role that King played in the civil rights movement and the force of his personality ensures that books will continue to be produced on him even as other areas of civil rights research continue to increase in popularity.

While Martin Luther King, Jr. is essential to the understanding of the civil rights movement, focusing solely on King and the SCLC can overlook others who helped form the Southern Movement during the 1950s and 1960s. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick offered the earliest comprehensive study of the Congress of Racial Equality with their work *CORE; A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968.*[9] Other works on CORE

place less emphasis on the group as a whole and instead center their research on either specific actions or locales in which the organization devoted their energies. The experiment by a mix of black and white protestors to ride a bus together throughout the south to challenge segregation statutes receives considerable attention from authors including works like Raymond Arsenault's, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice.*[10] CORE and another prominent civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, often disagreed about the methods used by the other in trying to achieve equality. Despite its prominent place as the organization founded first among those that played a significant role in civil rights, the NAACP only recently received a comprehensive examination of its activities during the civil rights era. Two works bearing similar titles were published in 2005 about the organization. Jonas Gilbert's *Freedom Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969* and Manfred Berg's *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* each attempt to distance the organization from its portrayal by other civil rights historians as heavily bureaucratic and inflexible.[11] Where other historians point to the rigidity of the NAACP as a key factor in the emergence of groups like CORE, the SCLC, and SNCC, Gilbert and Berg both argue that without the efforts made by the NAACP in the 1920s and 1930s at organizing those black liberals, radicals, and activists involved with the socialist, communist, early civil rights reform, and labor movement, the later civil rights organizations would never have attained the momentous successes that they did. The other major organization essential to

advancing civil rights in the South was the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The best work on the role that SNCC played in South is by noted civil rights and black power historian Clayborne Carson in his work, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*.[12] A more recent work by Wesley Hogan discusses the emergence of SNCC as major influence for civil rights as well as other divisive issues in the 1960s including the Vietnam War.[13]

In the early 1980s historians expanded the scope of investigation as social histories became popular. Examinations of specific states and communities and of their responses to different aspects of the civil rights movements ensued. Scholarship still focused largely on men, however, and roles of women in the movement often received little, if any, credit for their contributions. But after the late 1980s and early 1990s, the study of civil rights splintered, and new areas of study emerged as scholars expanded the scope of who had been affected by the movement and the regions where civil rights played a significant role. Traditionally, historians focused on blacks in the civil rights era, but the effect that the movement had on whites began to be examined further. Studies of civil rights generally also ignored northern and border states, like Oklahoma, but this changed during this period. [14]

Research on the civil rights movement in Oklahoma, however, is still limited, with most studies being article or chapter length. Graduate students attempted the few longer studies of the civil rights in Oklahoma. Included in this group are many different investigations of school desegregation in the Oklahoma City school districts, its

effectiveness, and struggle to ensure that integration occurred quickly and efficiently. This group includes studies of the failures of school desegregation in Oklahoma City despite the pledges by the state government to ensure its implementation. The school desegregation studies encompass a variety of different degree programs including history, sociology, political science, public health, and education.[15] In addition to the aforementioned research scholars have studied topics linked to other aspects of civil rights in Oklahoma. Contained in this group are Louise Carolyn Stephens dissertation, "The Urban League of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma," June Ann Baker's thesis, "Patterns of Black Residential Segregation in Oklahoma City: 1890 to 1960," and John Henry Lee Thompson's dissertation, "The Little Caesar of Civil Rights: Roscoe Dunjee in Oklahoma City, 1915 to 1955."[16] The only extended examination of the civil rights movement itself is James Gribble Hochtritt's thesis, "An Absence of Malice: The Oklahoma City Sit-In Movement, 1958-1964." This brief narrative asserts that the civil rights movement in Oklahoma City did not have the controversy over integration that other Southern cities did because of the generally positive relationships between the black and white communities. Generally, this study agrees with the assessment that less tension existed in Oklahoma than other Southern states. However, the good will repeatedly claimed by the other studies on the topic overlooks the dissension that certainly existed in Oklahoma leading up to and during the movement the movement.

Tulsa, the other major metropolitan area in Oklahoma, has a unique position in African-American history because of the 1921 race riot that occurred there. Even before

the riot, the city had developed into two virtually separate communities, one black and one white. The black portion was referred to as Greenwood but also was known by its nickname "Black Wall Street." The riot destroyed a significant amount of the area. The destruction and the subsequent rebuilding efforts by members of the black community are the primary subjects dealt with in the literature available on Tulsa's African Americans. One of the earliest investigations that gave an in-depth treatment to the riot was Lee William's 1972 work *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine, Tulsa, and Chicago, 1921*.[17] Another early work is R. Halliburton Jr.'s 1972 study *The Tulsa Race War of 1921* that first appeared in the *Journal of Black Studies.* The study examined the events surrounding the riot as well as its portrayal by local newspapers and politicians after the fact.[18] Recent years have seen a spate of works that examine the memory of the riot by those who lived through it and the movement towards restitution by the city of Tulsa. These works include: James Hirsch's *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy*, Tim Madigan's *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921*, Eddie Faye Gates' *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street, 1921*, Hannibal Johnson's *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*, and, probably the best work on the topic, Alfred Brophy's *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*.[19] Beyond works involving the riot, there are few studies that deal with African Americans in Tulsa. Eddie Faye Gates's work *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa* deals with the initial groups

of African Americans and how they arrived in Tulsa. The only other major work dealing with African American history in the city is Karl Lutze's autobiographical work *Awakening to Equality: A Young White Pastor at the Dawn of Civil Rights*. Lutze reflects on his placement by the Lutheran Church in Muskogee, Oklahoma and the interactions, there, and later in Tulsa, that led to his efforts in securing equality for blacks in Oklahoma.[20]

My thesis occupies a distinct place in the civil rights historiography because of a unique combination of factors. Even though Oklahoma certainly displays a Southern attitude towards racial matters, the lack of a common Confederate heritage with the rest of the Deep South lends to a cultural similarity more in line with that of border states, particularly Kentucky, than that of Alabama, Mississippi, or Georgia.[21] Even as the scope of civil rights literature continues to be expanded, research on civil rights in border states remains limited. The majority of the research done on border states remains article length. Almost all of these studies were written as community studies, with August Meier's discussion of Baltimore civil rights, "The Successful Sit-Ins in a Border City: A Study in Social Causation" being among the earliest of these investigations.[22] Since Meier's study, Baltimore has remained a popular city among those researching African-American history. In Peniel Joseph's collection *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, Kent B. Germany writes on the city in his article "The Pursuit of Audacious Power: Rebel Performers and Neighborhood Politics in Baltimore, 1966-1968."[23] Another collection on Baltimore, organized by Jessica Elfenbein, Thomas

Hollowak, and Elizabeth Nix, culls together studies of the city encompassing everything from oral history, to school desegregation, to the investigation of the riot after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in their book, *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City*[24]. Another border city that has been investigated is St. Louis. In Daniel Monti's *A Semblance of Justice: St. Louis School Desegregation and Order in Urban America*, the author investigates the manipulating of school districts to ensure the continuing segregation of students based not only upon race, but also upon class.[25] While all of these works are important for the new scholarship produced on each city, the collective research on border states remains woefully underdeveloped.

Beyond being in a border state, by paying attention solely to Oklahoma City and Tulsa rather than the state as whole this study is linked with other investigations of specific communities. In focusing on these cities as a whole this study also refrains from concentrating on a single civil rights organization but instead examines the interplay between different organizations. In addition, this study examines local activists unattached to any of the major civil rights organizations that either acted independently or in conjunction with other similarly-minded unaffiliated citizens. The third factor that distances the Oklahoma City and Tulsa movements from those in other cities or states is that a woman provided the central leadership. This statement is not intended to denigrate the key roles of women throughout the civil rights movement. As other historians have demonstrated, women were integral throughout the black freedom struggle. Works like the essay collections *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil*

Rights- Black Power Movement and *African American Women Confront the West: 1600-2000* as well as Merline Pitre's monograph, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* all examine the unique difficulties that women faced as they assumed leadership within the movement.[26]

For the purposes of this thesis, Oklahoma will be included as a part of the South on the basis of its racial policies. Two pieces of evidence are key to the inclusion of Oklahoma in the region. The first is that Oklahoma, along with the other southern states, border states, and the District of Columbia, required legal segregation in schools and public facilities prior to the *Brown* ruling . The fight to enforce Brown decision would be the basis for the majority of the racial conflict between blacks and whites in the years that followed.[27] The second reason is the inclusion of Oklahoma within the South by the United States Commission on Civil Rights.[28] Blacks in Oklahoma also referred to the state as southern. They applauded the action of the state's officials in announcing their plan to obey the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision in saying, "Oklahoma has outstripped every other southern state in its liberal thinking and action. This can be seen in the forward outlook taken in regard to school integration."[29]

The civil rights movement forced the South to face a situation that had been long in the making. Blacks had reached a moment where their will to resist matched a slowly growing national sentiment that sympathized with the oppressed. The crossroads created a decision for southerners. Would they resist the growing tide and risk having their entire way of life swept away in the roiling torrent? Or, would they rectify the wrongs of

centuries of mistreating African Americans as a subclass of humanity? For some, the bulwarks against any outside influence went up immediately. The memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction, as periods when outsiders tried to destroy the "Southern way of life" bubbled to the surface. The deeply ingrained attitudes of self-sufficiency and regional solidarity created a bunker mentality for those who resisted changes in racial policies. Historian David R. Goldfield explains the similarities between the attitudes of two different groups of southerners fighting for their way of life, each a century removed from the other: "The likelihood of outsiders - the federal government, Yankee reformers, philanthropic organizations - attaining a voice in the region was even more remote." Others, who either embraced the humanitarian cause or recognized the futility of their resistance to what would become a national enterprise, simply conceded to the overwhelming pressure.[30]

Oklahoma, like other Southern states, aggressively defended the racial caste system established firmly in the aftermath of statehood. Whites meted out violence with aplomb following any incident viewed as upsetting the racial status quo, and the justice system seldom favored African Americans. Yet, the years between 1954 and 1964 in Oklahoma usually avoided displays of brutal opposition that disrupted many other southern states. Massive resistance -- the term adopted by pro-segregation white southerners in combating African American civil rights -- never reared itself in either Oklahoma City or Tulsa with the same fervor as in other Southern states. The factors that precluded massive resistance from attaining the same hold in Oklahoma, a state with

similar values and attitudes as much of the South, is one of the primary explorations that reveals the deeper character of the leaders of both the civil rights movement and the government officials in each area.

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[1] "Registration," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 21, 1958.
[2] James Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 5.
[3] Thomas R. Knight, "Black Towns in Oklahoma: Their Development and Survival" (PhD, Oklahoma State University, 1975), 127-128.
[4] "Toll Road Democracy," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 6, 1954.
[5] Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Oxford: University Press, 1978), 322-323.
[6] David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986), 56-9.
[7] Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 4.
[8] Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster: 2001); Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).
[9] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Core: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
[10]Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[11] Jonas Gilbert, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle Against Racism in America, 1909-1969,* (New York: Routledge, 2005), and Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005).
[12] Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[13] Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Dreams, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[14] A couple of examples of community studies include: Morton Inger, *Politics and Reality in an American City: The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1969) that examines the hotly contested topic of bussing in New Orleans, and Tomiko Brown-Nagin's monograph, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) that discusses the role of civil rights played in the largest Southern city. Examinations of white reactions to black efforts to gain civil rights include: Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); and Jason Sokol's, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). Examinations of civil rights as a component within a larger historical work examining the South include: David Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge Louisiana State University Press, 1990); *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); John Egerton, *Shades of Gray: Dispatches from the Modern South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Studies of civil rights in the north include: Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

[15] Jon R. Bond, "The Impact of Judicial Policy in a Local Community: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City" (MA, Oklahoma State University, 1969); Alan Saxe, "Protest and Reform: The Desegregation of Oklahoma City" (PhD, University of Oklahoma, 1969); Samuel R. Stalcup, "The Desegregation of Oklahoma City Schools, 1954-1991" (MA, University of Oklahoma, 2006); William L. Wollitz Jr., "An Ecological Approach to the Case Study Method: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City" (PhD, University of Oklahoma, 1973).

[16] Louise Carolyn Stephens, "The Urban League of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma" (PhD, University of Oklahoma, 1957) covers the Urban League from its inception in 1946. In particular, the dissertation examines the purpose behind the group and how it aimed to complete these purposes through education, community, and employment services. June Ann Baker, "Patterns of Black Residential Segregation in Oklahoma City: 1890 to 1960" (MA, University of Oklahoma, 1970). John Henry Lee Thompson, "The Little Caesar of Civil Rights: Roscoe Dunjee in Oklahoma City, 1915-1955" (PhD, Purdue University, 1990).

[17] Lee E. Williams, *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflicts in Knoxville, Elaine, Tulsa, and Chicago, 1921* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1972).

[18] R. Halliburton Jr., "The Tulsa Race War of 1921," *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (Mar., 1972), 333-357.

[19] James Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), Eddie Faye Gates, *Riot on Greenwood: The Total Destruction of Black Wall Street, 1921,* (Austin, TX: Sunbelt Eakin Press, 2003), Hannibal Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District,* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1998), and Alfred Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[20] Karl Lutze, *Awakening to Equality: A Young White Pastor at the Dawn of Civil Rights,* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

[21] Specific studies on Kentucky, particularly Louisville, that will be used later in this study include: Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky,* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930,* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), and Russell Thomas Wigginton, "Both Sides of the

Tracks: Louisville and Nashville Railroad's African-American Workers in Louisville, Kentucky, 1915-1946" (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001).
[22] August Meier, "The Successful Sit-Ins in a Border City: A Study in Social Causation," in David Garrow, *We Shall Overcome, Vol. II*, (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 721-8.
[23] Kent B. Germany, "The Pursuit of Audacious Power: Rebel Reformers and Neighborhood Politics in Baltimore, 1966-1968," Peniel E. Joseph ed., *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).
[24] Jessica Elfenbein, Thomas Hollowak, and Elizabeth Nix, eds., *Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011).
[25] Daniel J. Monti, *A Semblance of Justice: St. Louis School Desegregation and Order in Urban America* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1985).
[26] Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin eds., *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), Quintard Taylor and Shirley Anne Wilson Moore eds., *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), and Merline Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).
[27] Jon R. Bond, "The Impact of Judicial Policy in a Local Community: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City" (MA, Oklahoma State University, 1969), 36.
[28] Commission on Civil Rights, *The 50 States Report*, by the State Advisory Commission (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1961), 519.
[29] "Be Proud of Oklahoma's Bright Future for Negroes," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 15, 1959.
[30] David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 22.

CHAPTER II

A PRELUDE TO CHANGE

While Oklahoma exhibits a distinct mix of Southern sensibilities, its own unique history distanced the state from some of the less savory aspects of the region. Scattered throughout the history of Oklahoma were examples of segregationist laws, policies heavily influenced by Jim Crow, and cultural mores flavored by racist attitudes. Nevertheless, racism did not always represent the rule in Oklahoma. During the territorial period of the late-nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, racial discrimination existed but several factors minimized its effects. The relatively small population in the territory often necessitated that schools and other public institutions integrate. Schools and businesses could not maintain enough students to operate without interaction between different races essentially forcing cordial relationships between the groups regardless of personal feelings or enmity towards a specific race.[31]

Blacks, who also comprised a significant proportion of the total population in the Oklahoma Territory, came to the area from the Deep South following the end of reconstruction in search of greater opportunities. Blacks gained advantages in

the Oklahoma Territory that Jim Crow laws elsewhere in the South prevented. Unlike the South, where sharecropping pushed African Americans into a different form of bondage, blacks in the Oklahoma Territory operated largely without outside interference.[32] Of the 13,225 black farmers in the state in 1900, 9,934 owned their own farms. Blacks actually represented a much higher percentage of farm ownership then whites did. Whites owned the property on which they farmed only 46.1 percent of the time in the Oklahoma Territory, while blacks owned 75.2 percent. Despite a larger number of blacks farm owners than whites, blacks struggled to exert similar economic strength as white farmers did. The size of the farms owned was the primary factor. Thirty-eight percent of black farms had fewer than fifty acres in 1910, but for white farms only eighteen percent had fewer than fifty acres. While these facts suggest that blacks could exercise more power in Oklahoma than they could in the Deep South, blacks displayed minimal ability to effect demonstrable political change in Oklahoma later decades.[33]

Demography alone could not create opportunity to exert influence in early Oklahoma history; newspapers provided another invaluable source of influence. Newspapers printed by African Americans flourished throughout Oklahoma during these years. Almost all of these papers appeared during the early days of Oklahoma's statehood, but the majority fizzled out by the 1920s from a lack of sustained financing. Even though they only thrived for a brief period, over seventy different black newspapers printed installments.[34] Oftentimes, the black press provided the only source of fair news coverage about African Americans, as white newspapers often relied upon stereotypes

and caricatures. Newspapers supplied an avenue for African-Americans to express their independence in an era where few opportunities to do this existed.[35] In the years following statehood, the papers railed against injustices in the state, especially the legislature's implementation three years after achieving statehood of a "grandfather" clause on voting. The clause required that all persons who did not have a relative eligible to vote before January 1st, 1886, pass a test that demanded that the individual be able to read, write, and recall sections of the state constitution from memory.[36] The amendment passed easily with a 35,000-vote margin of victory. This passage, from section 4a article 3 of the Oklahoma State Constitution, remained in place until after the federal government outlawed literacy tests.[37] The law stayed on the books in Oklahoma until 1915. The United States Supreme Court finally outlawed the measure in its *Guinn v. United States* decision that declared that the law violated the rights of black citizens by effectively preventing blacks from participating in state elections.[38]

The Native American population also contributed to the difficulty in maintaining white dominance in the territorial period. The number of African Americans and Native Americans altered the common black/white racial dichotomy that governed the South. The inclusion of a third racial group made it clear that, "[the] biracial pattern was impossible in the Oklahoma Territory."[39] Counter to what might be expected from another minority population, Native Americans by and large harbored similar prejudicial attitudes as whites towards blacks. Given the harsh treatment of Native American tribes by the United States government, it shocked some that they in effect allied with their

previous, and sometimes current, oppressors in the Oklahoma territory. Oftentimes, the Native Americans displayed the same sense of disdain and belief in the inferiority of African Americans that the white settlers embraced. Both groups castigated blacks as unreliable and lacking intelligence and believed these shortcomings burdened the people surrounding them. [40]

The treatment of blacks by Native Americans stemmed from the original relationship between the two races in the Deep South. When the United States government seized the land of the Native American tribes in the region, it forced the Natives to emigrate from their homes but tribes took the culture and traditions of the area with them. The Native Americans who practiced slavery in the South took their slaves with them, effectively transplanting the practice into what became Oklahoma. The region being left under the control of the Native American tribes, the laws of the United States did not apply within Indian Territory. Thus, the Emancipation Proclamation and the subsequent amendments concerning slavery did not take effect until a full year after the end of the Civil War, when separate negotiations could take place.[41]

Politically, the Oklahoma Territory differed significantly from the Deep South that many of the black migrants recently left. Different parties maintained political primacy in each region, and as each competed for supporters, African American needs were often the first items squeezed out in an effort to appease racist white voters. In the South Democrats maintained control, while the Oklahoma Territory leaned towards Republican rule during the years prior to statehood in 1906. As larger numbers of

African Americans entered the territory enticed by promises of free land and a greater sense of equality, the Democrats saw the potential disruption that black rights could have within the Republican Party. The Democrats, unified in their opposition towards African-American political participation, identified race as the crucial issue in the elections immediately before statehood. For members of the Republican Party, the position on race issues became the crux on which many of the party members based their votes. The tensions over this issue resulted in the party splitting into factions over whether to support or reject the rights of blacks in the Oklahoma Territory. One faction retained the Republican title and insisted on aiding African Americans because of groups willingness to support the Republican Party. The splinter group based their politics around the racial issue and began calling themselves the "lily-white" Republicans to avoid any confusion among voters about their position on black rights.[42]

During the months preceding the first state elections in Oklahoma, Democrats spread rumors aiming to further damage the possibilities of Republican control of the legislature in the state's initial election. Insistent in their efforts, the Democrats spread rumors that Republicans were importing Kansan blacks in order to skew voting results. Intent on smearing the other party, both groups attacked blacks. Murray Wickett describes the situation as, "The lily-white Republicans and the Democrats tried to turn the election campaign into a contest of racial slurs designed to prove which party hated the African-Americans more." The questionable veracity of the Democrats' claims notwithstanding, voters overwhelmingly elected the Democrats into control of the first

ever state Constitutional Convention, with the Democrats taking 99 of 112 possible seats. The combination of racist Democrats and lily-white Republicans in control of the initial Oklahoma state legislature signaled the beginning of the demise of the political rights of Oklahoma's African-American population. And if the election of a Democratic legislature was the beginning of the demise, then the election of William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray as the president of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention signaled the funeral dirge of black rights in Oklahoma. His influence on civil rights hung heavy over the state for the next half-century.[43]

Murray made his views on matters of race clear as soon as he was elected to his post as Constitutional Convention chairman. His acceptance speech claimed that blacks lacked the capacity to succeed in professional careers, and their shortcomings left only menial occupations such as porters, shoeshines, or barbers as suitable jobs for blacks.[44] The subsequent Constitutional Convention provided the legal backbone upon which Jim Crow would thrive in Oklahoma for next fifty years. At the convention, which ran from 20 November 1906 to 15 March 1907, the participants included one significant piece of racial legislation that established segregated education in the new state. [45]

The status of African Americans in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s failed to improve from its low position during territorial and early statehood period. Statewide governmental policies still enforced legal discrimination while smaller towns frequently enacted harsher measures than those implemented by state government. These decades also witnessed violence erupt in clashes between whites and blacks. The lynching of

blacks by whites also continued, with the last recorded incident in Oklahoma occurring in 1930 over the supposed rape of a white woman by a black man, Henry Argo. Even though the authorities thought that the woman's case lacked any truth, a mob ripped off the door of Argo's jail by chaining it to a truck. Despite the lynching of Argo, this signaled a new attitude towards blacks in Oklahoma. The authorities, including the National Guard, attempted to prevent the lynching rather than allow the mob to do as it pleased. Lynching, used to dissuade blacks from participation in politics, fell out of use thanks to changes in laws. But while direct violence against blacks slowed, other indirect and nonviolent forms of discouragement emerged.[46]

The political maneuvering between Democrats and Republicans in the later territorial and early statehood period of Oklahoma counted good racial relations between blacks and whites among its casualties. Blacks had migrated and settled in Oklahoma because of rumors of more equal treatment and a chance at political participation. The shattering of the hopes of the black settlers initiated the rocky relationship between whites and blacks that continued for over half a century afterwards. Black frustration at unequal treatment manifested even more now that a large number of black settlers came to escape the harsh treatment that they had experienced throughout the Deep South. The decades following the achievement of statehood maintained these precedents and led to the sustained situation in which blacks were treated as second-class citizens regardless of rights guaranteed them by the constitution.

The difficulties in Oklahoma, as throughout the South, arose from a fundamental lack of understanding between blacks and whites. James McBride Dabbs who served as president of the Southern Regional Council, an organization created to promote racial equality, eloquently explored the disconnect between the reality of the situation and what many people thought was the reality, in his address to the council in 1961, explaining, "with a strong sense of being southern, we lack a vision of what the South is." He continued, "We have already in the South one or two partial visions but nothing that encompasses the whole." What Dabbs understood well before many political, community, and social leaders was that the future of the South depended as much on blacks as it did whites. Even if one race had come up from slavery and submission to the other, the South would be lacking an integral part of what made it southern if blacks left the region because of continued prejudicial treatment. He later stated, "However much the institution of slavery may have expressed at one time the vital life of the South -- and I don't know how much it did -- that time is gone. The life-blood seeps from the institution, Negroes cease to obey it, whites cease to enforce it." This sentiment applied even more to Oklahoma than it did to other southern states. In the deep South, the most severe battles that would be fought over civil rights still waited. In a decided contrast, the Oklahoma City civil rights movement accomplished their initial goals and had moved on to secondary aims by 1962.[47]

Oklahoma courts in the 1940s and 1950s became a battleground as Roscoe Dunjee, the editor of the primary black newspaper in Oklahoma City, the *Black Dispatch*,

brought in National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Chief Legal Counsel Thurgood Marshall to discuss the possibility of beginning desegregation in the state. As time went by, the group set forth a plan attempting to enroll a black student at the University of Oklahoma knowing that that the university would prevent the student from starting courses there. Upon hearing about the intended legal challenge, University of Oklahoma president George L. Cross referred to the action as "dynamite" for its potential national implication. The university's Board of Regents certainly recognized the potentially explosive reactions that the case could generate across the state. They pushed their next planned meeting forward a week to address the issue, and their stand on the issue was little surprise, the group voted unanimously to deny admission "to anyone of Negro blood."[48]

The University of Oklahoma Board of Regents had reason to be confident in their stance. The Oklahoma legislature had passed laws in 1941 that further limited the possibility of integration in the state's schools. The law stated that it was a misdemeanor to educate children in mixed race schools or classrooms, and it also established a financial penalty of five hundred dollars for any school official who broke the mandate. However, the NAACP would not be that easily dissuaded and found Ada Lois Sipuel, the student who would help the organization pursue its test case. After searching throughout the state for a candidate that met the standards of the NAACP search committee, they decided on a recent graduate from Langston University. The young woman tried to gain admission to the Oklahoma Law School since the black college in the state, Langston

University, did not have a law school. Intent on challenging the school segregation ruling established by *Plessy v. Ferguson,* Sipuel along with Roscoe Dunjee and Dr. W. A. J. Bullock scheduled a meeting with University of Oklahoma president George Lynn Cross in Norman on January 14, 1946.[49] Cross, accompanied by Professor Royden Dangerfield, met with Sipuel to discuss the possibility of her admittance to the University of Oklahoma. After confirming that Sipuel's transcript met the requirements of the law school, Cross pulled out a prewritten, typed letter from his desk that had been forwarded to him from the governing board of all state colleges and universities. The letter told Cross that under no circumstances should he admit an African American to the University of Oklahoma. Despite the orders from the board preventing Sipuel's admission, Cross sympathized with Sipuel and her cause. He then promised to write a letter that affirmed that race provided the only reason behind preventing Sipuel's admission the college. Cross could easily have claimed that the university's refusal of Sipuel's application resulted from Langston's lack of accreditation. His assertion that it solely was based on race allowed for NAACP to legally challenge the decision.[50]

The years following World War II changed perceptions among blacks. Blacks fighting side-by-side with whites came back to find that this had changed nothing in social conditions in the United States. Historian Jimmie Lewis Franklin explained, "The performance of black soldiers on the battlefields and the patriotic support of black citizens on the home front argued well against an old system that kept racism alive and held blacks to second-class citizenship in America."[51] Whites still saw blacks as

subservient and unequal despite having courageously served their country. African-American veterans made frequent arguments about their willingness to die for one's country but inability to receive equal service at a restaurant, hotel, or business once they returned. This theme, where black soldiers fought often for whites, would continue in other wars especially Vietnam.[52]

Similarly, the affluence of the United States following World War II aroused a desire in blacks for economic well-being that up to this point had eluded them. While ownership televisions, radios, and home appliances all required some expendable income, blacks clearly aspired towards a more substantial measure of financial equality. Blacks desired home ownership as they viewed such a substantial purchase as evidence of their growing financial and social equality. This proclivity arose from several factors. Beyond allowing for some sense of security, home ownership allowed choice for blacks and also provided some sense of social equality between blacks and whites. But even though a strong desire for home ownership arose among African Americans, the reality of the situation resulted in a geographical limitation on where blacks could buy houses. In Oklahoma City beginning in the 1920s, "Northeast 4th Street served as a boundary, north of which no Negro could live, or own, or operate a business."[53] However, after the City Council abolished the segregation ordinance that had established this boundary, whites began informally discouraging blacks from moving into their neighborhoods, without the support of the city government. When one family moved into a neighborhood on NE 7th Street an unknown assailant exploded a bomb in their home. This racist behavior only

served as a temporary deterrent, and black migration into all-white neighborhoods continued. As the black community grew in population, it continued to expand geographically as well, and the state fairgrounds became the next unofficial border for black neighborhoods. This expansion often led to run-ins with white neighbors who viewed it as a prelude to sagging housing prices and a plunging standard of living. Once the legal restrictions that prevented blacks from moving outside of prescribed areas were overturned in 1953, heated exchanges over whether a neighborhood should allow black residents became a common sight in neighborhood associations and community gatherings. Violence, "panic selling" and "blockbusting" all became methods to either avoid or discourage integrated neighborhoods in Oklahoma City.[54] One Oklahoma City woman voiced the opinion of many in the white community regarding blacks becoming their neighbors: "I guess there's sort of a social stigma. You don't want your friends driving through a colored section to get to your home. I can't explain it, but I feel that way."[55]

As years went by, the attitudes of Oklahoma City whites softened concerning civil rights for blacks, but the reality of housing reflected the housing practices of previous decades. Whites continued to chafe at the possibility of blacks moving into the neighborhoods and discouraged African Americans from purchasing homes in the same developments. A pamphlet of the League of Women Voters provided evidence of this stagnation in the housing situation when they detailed in their report that "With the exception of two areas (one just south of the downtown business district and one just

north of Reno between Western and Indiana), Negro residents are confined to an area east of Santa Fe and north of the Canadian River. This area as expanded from 4th Street in 1920, to 23rd Street in 1959, and 50th Street in 1963."[56] The expansion of areas available to blacks for rental or for purchase, while important, did nothing however to improve the condition of the homes available. A survey discovered that among homes occupied by African Americans 48 percent could be considered as "deteriorating" or "dilapidated."[57] Another report noted "Negro housing kept growing worse and higher priced, approaching slum status."[58] Despite these facts, no fair housing laws would be passed in Oklahoma City until it became federally mandated by a direct presidential executive order from Lyndon Johnson in 1968.

The racial segregation within Oklahoma City mirrored the situation throughout the South. Blacks and whites generally associated with people of their own race, and the limited interaction between the two groups often conformed to social expectations that clearly placed whites over blacks. Throughout the nation segregated schools were the norm, but Oklahoma perpetuated the segregation on an organizational level as well. Oklahoma retained the only schools in the nation where black and white schools had separate budgets. By funding each group of schools individually and solely on the basis of race, Oklahoma officials had little basis on which to argue and made it difficult to escape the effects of *Brown v. Board of Education.*[59] Upon word of the decision, state superintendent Dr. Oliver Hodge displayed a balanced reaction with his main concern being the feasibility of a rapid implementation of a new schooling plan, rather than the

mixing of black and white students or faculty. He commented to *The Daily Oklahoman*, "If we don't have to do anything about it until a year after September 1, it will be all right, but if we had to do something about it before September 1 this year, we would be in bad shape."[60] The statement reassured the African American population of Oklahoma City that the school district intended to fully obey the decision set down by the Supreme Court, even if the implementation was delayed.

The early state attitudes on interracial neighborhoods forced blacks into certain geographical areas within the city. Even though no legislation forced blacks to stay in a certain area, many de facto policies prevented blacks from moving outside of certain areas. As a result of white pressures, both legal and illegal, blacks formed their own community within the community. This result should be expected considering schools, neighborhoods, restaurants, public transportation, and workplaces all either remained segregated or had only recently been desegregated. Blacks maintained their own newspapers, including the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* and the *Oklahoma Eagle* based in Tulsa. Oklahoma City also had a radio station, KBYE, which focused its programming on the black community, informing the public about concerts, cotillions, dances, revivals, and sporting events. These two methods afforded the black community with some of the only methods of disseminating information available to it. The major media outlets, the three local televisions networks, *The Daily Oklahoman* newspaper, and the city's radio stations, often focused on the events and concerns of the white community. Whites ignored many things that African-Americans might find relevant and, in return, blacks

often responded by closing the ranks to their own community. The actions of both groups resulted in the same thing, a city divided into two distinct social communities.[61]

Throughout the early 1950s Oklahoma remained unconcerned about constructing any progressive initiatives pertaining to race relations. Governor Johnston Murray, elected in 1951, did not publicly embrace the crude racial convictions that his father, William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, advocated. Instead, Johnston Murray contented himself with holding office and making very little efforts at effecting change of any sort. The younger Murray had never held an elected office before being elected to the governorship and this lack of experience with politics, combined with the fact that "[Murray] was given to indecision and vacillation at critical moments," made his governorship unremarkable except for his stance following the *Brown* decision. While other governors, senators, and mayors bellowed their disapproval, planned to ignore the decision, and tried to strip the Supreme Court justices of their authority, Murray continued his policy of following whichever avenue resulted in the least amount of work for him and quietly agreed to follow the dictates of the Supreme Court concerning the *Brown* decision. According to Murray, "there was no reason for assembling the legislature in the matter of compliance with the high court ruling." The *Black Dispatch* also reported, "he indicated very definitely Oklahoma would accept integration of whites and blacks in the schools without any trouble." Following the lead of the governor, state officials began preparing for the integration of state schools.[62]

Despite the statements by Governor Murray claiming that Oklahoma would obey the ruling of the Supreme Court, his assurances changed when he left the state. While on a trip to Dallas, Texas in July of 1954, the governor explained that he expected Oklahoma, "to school its white and Negro children separately-yet legally comply with anti-segregation edicts." Using his status as a 1/16th Chickasaw Indian to claim solidarity with blacks, Murray went on to say, "I'm very much for liberalizing exchange of students between districts. That'd let the whites go to white schools and the colored to colored schools. And I speak as a member of a racial minority."[63] Interestingly, this statement foreshadowed the exchange of students in Oklahoma City as well as throughout much of the South. The obvious difference between the suggestion of Governor Murray and the later system that transferred students between districts is that the later system used the exchange to integrate schools rather than segregate them. Murray further damaged his relatively positive relations with the black community as he continued his speech. He then focused on teachers, "Where white teachers are available to hire, they'll be preferred. I don't know of any law in the world that can tell a school board who it can hire." To complete his offending of the black populace Murray then attacked integration as a whole, outlining his belief that, "A person who insists on shoving himself in where he is uninvited is going to be ostracized. To me segregation is a mental attitude of the individual. Change must be evolutionary and not revolutionary."[64]

Murray's statement highlighted a growing frustration among blacks about the governor's position on civil rights. However, the anger of the black citizens did nothing

to discourage the governor from displaying his indifference to the plight of African Americans. Rather than trying to repair the damage to his relationship with the black community Murray continued his verbal onslaught against the *Brown* decision explaining, "I don't believe in forcing people to do something they don't want to do."[65] Fortunately for Oklahoma's African Americans, Murray had been voted out of office by the end of 1954. Yet the *Brown* decision that generated so much excitement among the African-American community dissipated quickly as blacks realized that the Supreme Court could do little to force the implementation of their verdict in Oklahoma. While there were few hopes of a quick and easy solution to a centuries-long problem of racial prejudice, the jubilation that blacks initially felt because of the victory of the *Brown* ruling gave way to the understanding that the issues surrounding integration had little hope of being solved as quickly as they desired. The *Black Dispatch* called the dismissal of the doctrine of separate but equal "more significant and momentous than the Dred Scott decision,"[66] but it clearly showed a sense disappointment when President Eisenhower, "stated very definitely last week that his administration is putting forth no effort to support legislation for any particular or special group of any kind."[67] This statement tempered the excitement of blacks that hoped that equality waited in the near future. At the same time, now that blacks had legal backing they could expect some kind of support if they brought a case to court. Other segregationist policies now appeared precarious, and challengers of the policies became more willing to defy measures that they viewed as undemocratic or immoral. As political challengers to Governor Murray

began to speak out in 1954, blacks expressed their frustrations as well, saying "What we really need in Oklahoma is a civil rights law which requires all persons who operate public facilities to give uniform treatment to all American citizens who enter their doors."[68] This sentiment germinated over the course of the next year as obstruction of civil rights legislation continued on city, state, and national levels.

Raymond Gary supplanted Johnston Murray as governor in January 1955, and inherited a wealth of problems from the former governor. Despite the lack of action on civil rights during his governorship, Murray did not leave unaware of the mess he left to his successor, remarking that Oklahoma had "[a] staggering maze of unresolved problems which shame my state and hold it in the category of the retarded."[69] The biggest problem for Gary would be how to consolidate the budgets of black and white schools into a single one. Fortuitously, Gary's approach to school integration reflected the same dedication to a peaceful transition from segregated to desegregated schools that Murray espoused. While running for governor, Senator Gary pledged, "I'll not only enforce this decision of the Supreme court, if I am elected governor and any other directive of that august body. I think any public official should regard the oath he takes to support the constitution of the United States when elected to office, as a sacred obligation and trust."[70] Behind these good intentions, Gary tackled the enormous task of incorporating two types of schools, each being financed separately and by different methods, into a single unified school system. The white schools received funding based upon a budget prepared by each district, with additional money being provided by the state. The state

funded black schools by using a four-mill tax within each county that contained a black school and again any supplementary money came from the state. To accomplish this, the governor packaged all of the changes to the schools into one bill that he titled the "Better Schools Amendment." By the time the Supreme Court issued their verdict on the second *Brown* case with its conclusion that schools should be integrated "with all deliberate speed," the Oklahoma voters had passed the 1954 bill with an overwhelming majority of 231,097 for to 73,021 against.[71]

The quick support of the Supreme Court decision towards desegregation of Oklahoma schools displayed the wide contrast in attitude towards government civil rights policy between the state and the rest of the South. Residents throughout the South waited to see which government official would be the first to challenge the ruling ending segregation. Several governors decried the decision as government intervention into an area where they were not needed, nor wanted. Charging that integration of schools (and later other institutions) threatened the very way of life that Southerners had enjoyed for decades, public figures railed about their intent to ignore the ruling until the federal government forced them to do otherwise. Some went beyond this declaration and announced their plans to resist even if the government attempted to force the South to obey the *Brown* decision. The efforts to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas brought national attention to the struggle to implement the Supreme Court ruling. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus opposed the Supreme Court's directive and ordered the National Guard to prevent black students from attending the school. While

Faubus's actions appear drastic, they were not outliers when examined in conjunction with the behavior and statements of other Southern politicians. Soon after the opposition to federal policy began in Arkansas, Mississippi Governor J.P. Coleman weighed in on the issue of segregation on the national television program *Meet the Press*. He expressed his belief that "A baby born in Mississippi today will never live long enough to see integration."[72] When compared to the statements of Oklahoma officials who asserted the need to obey the rulings of the court, the differences between the two illustrated how Oklahoma politicians wanted to remove themselves from the uproar being raised throughout the rest of the South. The governors of Oklahoma often went out of their way to display their willingness to cooperate with blacks, even going as far to visit the black high schools in the area to speak, or to invite prominent black citizens to state parties as a show of goodwill and to potentially attract black voters.[73]

Despite the increasing interest shown by politicians in the welfare of the state's blacks, Oklahoma City reflected the state's racial bias by continuing to exclude blacks from party politics. The lily-whitist portion of the state's Republicans held a dominant position in the Oklahoma City area that continued into the 1950s. Democrats shunned black voters altogether.[74] The success of the whites in ensuring their own continued dominance was apparent. Alan Saxe, a graduate student researching desegregation in Oklahoma City, wrote "The Negro was so effectively isolated from the state's political scene that none had ever served, from 1907 to the mid-1960s, in the state legislature from the Oklahoma City area."[75] By the beginning of 1954, the almost entirely white political

parties began to make attempts to incorporate blacks into their parties. The Republican Party in Oklahoma tried to gain the support of the black community first. They criticized the Democrats for passing a bill that required blacks to identify themselves as such on a ballot if they intended to run for public office in Oklahoma. The Republicans resolution passed "without a dissenting voice" at a municipal meeting that 3,000 party members attended. Though seen by some as simply good politicking by the Republicans after the Democrats had moved to fully integrate during the previous election, the actions of each party demonstrated that they understood the growing importance of the black vote for their respective success in future elections. [76]

While ever since Oklahoma had achieved statehood whites certainly had tried to prevent blacks from obtaining political power, blacks often failed to embrace the opportunity at political participation once the opportunity opened to them. Blacks who were both registered and had voted in 1954 numbered only 10 percent. The more frustrating aspect for many Oklahoma City blacks who voted was the knowledge that across the nation restrictions or threats of violence prevented blacks from exercising this right. Some people attempted to address this problem head-on by asking, "Is this not a sad commentary upon Negro leadership in Oklahoma, where all that is necessary to qualify for suffrage is to exercise enough energy to walk or ride to the registrar's home?"[77] Interestingly, this same "Negro leadership" often included the same group of people who exhorted others to register to vote. Throughout the community the effort of the black leaders seemed to exist. It just appears that the effectiveness of their rhetoric in

inspiring action seems to be lacking. The leaders in the movement expended large amounts or energy and dedicated much of their free time to the civil rights cause only to be disappointed when the general population responded indifferently. Joe Brooks, proprietor of the Silver Star Sundry store reflected the view of the *Black Dispatch* on this problem when he wrote, "All of the Negroes who come into my place of business who shout about being race men, are halted immediately and I will not hear them unless they can produce a registration certificate for voting and a this year's NAACP card…I don't want to hear a lot of gush that is backed up with nothing more than an empty pair of leather lungs."[78] Brooks reported that two-thirds of the people who came in had nothing else to say after he announced his requirements for listening to them. Black leaders did make efforts to remedy the problem of people not using their vote. Perhaps naively given the previous voter turnouts, they hoped to register fifty percent of the adults eligible to vote. To do this, all of the city churches held meetings after their services, to "stress the importance of Negro registering and preparing for use of the ballot during the primary and general elections this year."[79] Reality reared its head following the conclusion of the voter registration drive at the end of March when L.B Nutter, the chairman of the Oklahoma County Democratic Precinct Association, reported that only about half of those African Americans who had previously registered to vote had reregistered by the cut-of date. Any progress that the voter registration drives made could now only be seen as a partial success as voters who had registered in the past could not be retained and kept active. [80]

African Americans in Oklahoma City still struggled to break free of the influence of historical prejudicial voting policies even in the 1950s. The remnants of the earlier efforts to prevent African-Americans from voting still remained, and despite myriad attempts at motivating blacks to vote more often the not the pleas of community leaders for empowerment through participation led to little change in voting patterns. Addressing the problem during a speech in Oklahoma City, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. scolded the city's residents for their lack of voting in recent elections, "You're not voting like you should…you're doing yourself a grave injustice when one of the most significant steps you can take is that short walk to the voting poll."[81]

At the same time that the voter registration drives were going on in the black community, the state government provided an interesting look at the sometimes contradictory attitudes towards African-American rights within the state. While the state senate approved a bill that forbade discrimination in employment based on "color, creed, or ancestry," the state capitol and the Oklahoma County courthouse still had restrooms segregated by race.[82] Signs adorned the doors making it clear that they existed only for "White Gentlemen" or "White Ladies," while the restrooms available to African Americans were located in the basement of each building. These two restrooms along with one other in the Union Bus Station provided the only places for an African American to relieve themselves in the whole of downtown Oklahoma City. Situations like this one seemed to play out in Oklahoma City and across the nation quite frequently. A grandiose statement made in a speech or passed into law failed to realize the

segregation of the most basic of human activities. A disconnect between the two races certainly still existed, and blacks continued to try to alter this through legislation.[83]

Blacks frequently dealt with figures in local government either opposed or indifferent to the efforts towards equality that African Americans made in the late 1950s. According to scholars Numan Bartley and Hugh Davis Graham, Oklahoma, like its surrounding states, had a "tradition of white southern ethnocultural unity that…had shielded the region from outside intervention in social arrangements in social arrangements and in large part had protected entrenched elites from the vicissitudes of mass democracy." Government officials often reacted slowly to black concerns if they acknowledged them at all. The feeling of powerlessness that resulted frequently dissuaded blacks from social and political activism or seriously lessened their efforts in either.[84]

The local and state government also perpetuated racist policies. The government positions available to blacks were primarily service or custodial positions. As a result, positive career advancement only existed on a limited basis. The few blacks hired by the government occupied the lowest positions available, and stayed at a similar level for the entirety of their tenure while on the state's payroll. After being told and observing these biased hiring policies by state and local government agencies, the Labor and Industry Committee of the state NAACP branch decided to investigate the depth of the discrimination in employment practices. After examining eight state agencies, the NAACP committee discovered compelling evidence regarding discriminatory hiring

practices within the Oklahoma state government. Of the 6,500 government posts potentially available to African Americans, blacks actually occupied less than one percent of the positions.[85] In addition, the leaders of two of the eight agencies interviewed openly admitted to racial discrimination, while another said, "We hire according to the race. That is our policy."[86] The NAACP obviously took umbrage with any government office unapologetically enacting racist policies. Beyond the unflinching racism being displayed, the government exclusion of blacks from state employment eliminated yet another sector of the job market in which blacks could not have an occupation.

Frequently the government gave blacks hope in significant positive change in the rights given to them, only to dash these new expectations just as quickly as they came about. When Governor Raymond Gary announced that the Oklahoma National Guard would be desegregated in 1958, the black press commended the action immediately. However, the press tempered their reaction with hesitancy of the motivations behind the action, "There will, of course, arise the surmise that enrollment in the guard is a political move calculated to benefit some particular candidate. On the other hand, it can be considered as evidence that integration is strongly rooting itself in the political soil of Oklahoma."[87] Even given the welcome news of the state government acting against segregation blacks still expressed concern about the factors behind the decision. The hope that blacks had that, "the entire attitude of the state has completely changed about integration," was dashed a little over a month later when the African-American community learned that the integrated unit, the 45th infantry division, no longer existed.

The federal government planned to disband the 45th after they failed to gain enough volunteers to operate at full strength. This would have obviously prevented the desegregation of the National Guard.[88] However, protests by Oklahoma Governor Raymond Gary and the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce helped convince the national government of the importance of the 45th Infantry Division to the economics and military readiness of the nation, and the federal officials backed off their plan to disband the group.[89] In the days leading up to the government's final decision, an addition of 350 volunteers to the 45th Division, including 42 blacks, pushed the group up to 90 percent of its required strength and helped prevent its dissolution while at the same time desegregating the military in Oklahoma.[90]

Much of the misunderstanding, and often outrage, surrounding the efforts towards eliminating discrimination came about because of innuendo and fear centered on black sexuality. Long-held beliefs of black sexual predation throughout the South frequently influenced decisions regarding desegregation and integration. Racist policies arose based on the assumption that white women needed protection from potential sexual attacks from black men. This so-called "rape myth" perpetuated the idea that blacks lacked any sort of restraint when it came to sexual behavior. This, in turn, led Southern whites to believe that if black men could not contain themselves sexually, that some other method needed to be used to enforce the corrective behavior upon them. Previously, slavery provided an easy and already established method of preventing the alleged sexual assaults. After emancipation, blacks, no longer under the control of their masters and

overseers, could move about freely without fear of punishment over any minor infraction. In the words of historian Diane Miller Sommerville, "Having come of age without having experienced the moral strictures of slavery, the New Negro, in the view of race radicals, was reverting to his natural, bestial state."[91] In the view of some racist white Southerners a new form of social control needed to be introduced to continue white dominance in the region. [92]

Lynching became the new method of intimidation in the South. Its extralegal implementation allowed for retribution from alleged sexual misconduct to be swift, needing only the hint of black-on-white violence to put into motion a crowd of angry whites. Rarely did those accused of attacking a white woman receive fair treatment. While not a guaranteed death sentence, frequently racist attitudes combined with being in a position of power put whites in control of the fates of the accused blacks. Despite whites controlling the means of punishment, they seldom waited for a guilty verdict to be handed down. For example, the rumor of sexual misconduct by a black male could incite a frenzied reaction among whites eager for any opportunity to reassert their superiority in the social hierarchy. This attitude, while certainly lessened over the passage of time, still pervaded the thoughts of Southerners, including Oklahomans, whenever a rumor about the rape of white women started to spread.[93] Even though the last recorded lynching in Oklahoma occurred in 1930, the "rape myth" still held sway in the minds of many people. Blacks were seen at times as dangerous or threatening, and black parts of town were to be avoided lest some incident occur happen as you travel through. This concern

tinged many of the confrontations between blacks and whites in Oklahoma City even during the 1950s and 1960s.

Even during the 1950s and 1960s fear of black men sexually assaulting white women led to unfair treatment at the hands of the police. In August of 1954, an accusation of sexual assault interjected in to the relatively serene racial mood in Oklahoma City. A fifteen-year old white girl, unnamed on account of her age, alleged that she had been raped after a night on the town with a group of youths.[94] The supposed rapist, a nineteen-year old black youth named Herbert Hill, who had been picked up by two girls who hoped that they could be shown the "Negro beer joints in Green Pastures," which was one of the black areas of the city.[95]

The group also picked up two white males while on the highway during the course of the night. After the group had gone to the taverns, the group parked the car and the other three members of the group fell asleep in the back seat while Hill and his accuser sat in the front of the car. She charged that it was during this period that Hill raped her. When questioned about the other occupants of the car, the girls refused to identify the two white males that came along on the journey. Eventually, the two girls capitulated and gave the names of the two after repeatedly being questioned by the police, and admitted who had accompanied them during the night. Several suspicious factors arose from this case concerning the accusations that were made by the alleged victim. Even though a crime supposedly occurred between the young black man and the white girl present, the two white youths fled the crime scene and it took the coercion of

the Oklahoma City police force to convince the girl to reveal the identities of the two white males. The other oddity in the situation when examined more closely was that, "We are asked to believe that this crime was committed within the narrow, contracted precincts of an automobile, on the front seat, without disturbing the Morphean occupants of the rear seat."[96] The possibility that these events occurred in the manner in which the young woman said that they happened aroused the suspicion of the police officers as well as the newspaper in the area. After the full story emerged, the county attorney's office declined to press charges against Hill because of the lack of evidence and the inability of the girls to corroborate their stories concerning the night's events. An editorial in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* elaborated on the problems that could erupt within a community after something as simple as young girl making up a story to try to escape punishment:

> The Scottsboro case exposed internationally the disposition of southern law enforcement agencies to exaggerate entirely out of its importance or justification sex relationship between white and black, and the facts revealed in this revolting case could be duplicated a thousand times all over the Southland. The myth of color has caused America to commit some horrible crimes, and the action in the Herbert Hill case shows some sort of morality and social decency seems to be attaching to unfortunate incidents we hitherto were just a little too marble-hearted about.[97]

While the police dismissed the charges against the accused in this case because of a lack of a clear account of the event by the young woman, the law enforcement agencies admitting any sort of possible error represented the unusual much more than the norm.

Under the usual circumstances, the rumor alone may have generated enough innuendo and animosity surrounding Hill to at least guarantee a jail stay, if not a conviction on a more serious charge. Instead the police questioned the story when a reason for doubt emerged during the investigation. Even if some doubt existed about the girl's story the typical response in rape cases involved only thoroughly examining the case from a male's perspective, and minimizing what the woman had to say. The fact that the young women picked up a young black man to show them the beer joints and bars in the black part of town casted doubt upon the morality on the young lady immediately, whether such doubts were grounded in fact or fiction. Author and journalist Susan Brownmiller wrote in discussing cases involving alleged black male on white female rape, "Not that the crime of rape did not take place-the petitions do not address themselves to that point-but that the poor reputations of a certain class of white women render their rape a lesser crime *even if* their rapists are black."[98] Instead, the *Black Dispatch* reacted, understandably, in highly defensive manner. The newspaper's editors understood the quickness with which a rumor or sexual misconduct by a black man could turn into jail time or worse if it spread.

Even though the police never filed formal charges during the course of the Hill rape proceedings, the case ignited a maelstrom of controversy in Oklahoma City. Angry blacks called for the girl to have charges pressed upon her and whites unnerved by the proceedings found the worst of their fears about blacks confirmed. Both sides found themselves considering their own attitudes towards racial matters as headlines offering

opinions about the rape case splashed across the pages of local papers. The result, a dismissal of charges against the young man, indicated the development of a sense of tolerance, if not one of acceptance, towards black equality during the course of the debate in the weeks that surrounded the matter.

Another view simply attributes the dismissal of charges as an example of police expediency resulting from the hope of avoiding controversy linked to the department. Beyond the shifting of personal attitudes towards African Americans, the case displayed the continued elevation of black legal rights within Oklahoma. Only twenty years previous it would not have been unusual for a black man to be convicted or worse no matter whether a lack of evidence to determine his guilt existed or not. The police's acknowledgement that pursuing the case would fail to return a guilty verdict indicated that the false convictions based solely on race that were common in preceding decades had begun gradually fading away. Another possible reason behind the disproportionately inflamed reaction to the case came from the already heightened tensions between blacks and whites of all age groups. Historian Hannah Rosen described the phenomenon while she examined post-emancipation attitudes towards African Americans, but her statement could easily be adapted to the circumstances that followed the rape case in 1954. She wrote, "Many white southerners fervently resisted the entry into formerly white domains by African Americans, and one of the first ways they did so was by describing the new black presence as socially, sexually, and politically dangerous."[99] Even though the period examined in her work and this study are decades removed from the other, the struggles of

blacks remained frustratingly unchanged by the passage of time. Casting an omniscient eye over the country revealed economic repression, the forceful denial of political participation, and a black culture sequestered from mainstream American life, a situation that would look oddly similar to the blacks living through Reconstruction.

Softening attitudes towards race issues and an increasing level of community involvement provided the support that allowed for civil rights activism to find a foothold in Oklahoma City. The bombshell of school desegregation mandated by the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board* drew the attentions of all Oklahoma citizens back to the race issue, as now their own children or grandchildren would regularly interact with black children. The increased interest in racial matters by all Oklahoma citizens produced a situation that set up perfectly for a more drastic approach to gaining equal rights than a push to stir up interest among the black community in Oklahoma. Government officials appeared confident that statements that used the right words would placate a populace that continued to become more vocally opposed to heady rhetoric that failed to address the significant problems affecting the African-American community.

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CHAPTER III

FROM PLAN TO ACTION

Continuing issues surrounding political participation, the actual implementation of school desegregation, and the use of legal means to alter prejudicial policies continued for the next several years, but the actions of a group of students and a well-respected school teacher forced the hand of business owners and state politicians to take some sort of stand on civil rights. Clara Luper, a teacher of American history at the all-black Dunjee High School, wrote and presented school plays on a yearly basis. In 1957, her play "Brother President" highlighted the non-violent methods of protest that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used in the civil rights demonstrations that he helped initiate. National Youth Director of the NAACP Herbert Wright attended the play while visiting Oklahoma City. Following the performance, he invited Luper along with the cast members to present the show in New York City for the "Salute to Young Freedom Fighters Rally." The group of 25 youths and 6 adults traveled to the rally on donations collected at churches throughout the city, and while in New York experienced equality that they had never been exposed to in Oklahoma City. Restaurants owners treated the students as any other customers. The students could sit at tables in restaurants without controversy or stay in hotels that did not differentiate between races. This treatment left an indelible impression on the youths who made the trip. While returning, they decided that waiting

for court cases to be resolved may take years and this did not allow for the rapidity of change that blacks deserved. The group formulated a plan to attack segregation in the businesses of Oklahoma City.[100]

The group, comprised of NAACP Youth Council Members, pushed forward in their attack of segregation when they returned home. Headed by Clara Luper, the group members studied the reasoning and methods behind non-violent protest and came up with a program that had four basic rules: (1) The objective at this time was to eliminate segregation in public accommodations. (2)To achieve this it required honesty on the part of those who participated- "non-violence is not an approach to be used by hypocrites- honesty pays." (3) You must love your enemy, "You are not to ridicule, humiliate, nor vilify him at any time or in any way." (4) And finally, "Give the white man a way out…Find a way to let him participate in victory when it comes."[101] This group of rules reflected a clear plan for achieving desegregation and, more importantly, the thought processes behind their approach. The Youth Council's intent clearly emerged from a nonviolent demand for equality. While this seems obvious, the distinction is important because it precluded the anger that conceivably could arise from either side of the desegregation issue, given the length and severity that mistreatment of African Americans in this country endured. These teens outlined their methods because they knew that questions would follow the sit-ins. Luper condoned the actions, believing that the legal efforts of the NAACP parent body would not generate change and that demonstrations were needed.[102] Luper later recalled the most significant reason behind the trouble with desegregating public facilities in Oklahoma, "That was the one problem

we had. You see, I believed that white Oklahoma had never seen us; they'd never thought about us."[103]

Following these standards, the students began sending groups of two or three students to owners of downtown businesses to discuss the integration of their establishments. When this failed they initiated a letter writing campaign that hoped to sway the proprietors through writing. This did not succeed either. The group then shifted their focus to those people in charge, and arranged meetings with both the City Council and the City Manager. The officials stonewalled the group at this turn as well saying, "We are sorry, we do not have the power to interfere in private businesses. We don't tell the businessmen who to serve and they don't tell us how to run our city government."[104] Finally, the Youth Council turned to a group that they hoped would appreciate the moral high ground from which they were approaching the problem-- the churches of Oklahoma City. Both black and white churches failed to reciprocate any interest in actively pursuing integration in downtown business. The white churches just ignored the letters of the Youth Council, while the black churches agreed to make announcements about the group's activities and solicit donations for any costs the group incurred, but would not take any sort of direct action.[105]

Frustrated, but not necessarily surprised at the lack of support, the Youth Council began to make plans for confronting the segregation of the local businesses head-on. The Council studied non-violent protest for eighteen months prior to the conclusion of the letter-writing campaign. Feeling that the letters were not making a difference, the group decided to stage a sit-in at one of the downtown restaurants. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King's Montgomery Bus Boycott, the first sit-in in Oklahoma City began on

August 19th, 1958 at the Katz Drug Store located downtown on the southwest corner of Main and Robinson. While blacks could enter and purchase goods at the drug store, the store owners prevented African Americans from sitting down to eat. Katz only allowed blacks to get food on a walk-up basis, and then had to find somewhere other than the lunch counter to eat their meals.[106] In an effort to combat this policy, about fifteen people, including at least eight youths ranging in age from six to seventeen, entered the store and tried to receive service. Barbara Posey, a fifteen year old member of the Youth Council, sat down and attempted to purchase thirteen cokes with a five dollar bill but was refused. The group stayed until the closing of the restaurant and promised to keep returning until the store agreed to desegregate. Keeping their word, the students returned the next day with the same result.[107]

The Youth Council chose their target well for the first of the downtown sit-in because the owner of the downtown Katz Drug Store did not withhold service because of racial matters. Instead the store manager, J.B. Masoner said, "I want to do what the rest of the downtown people do, and if they start serving them at booths and counters I will too…But, I can't be the first one. It's a matter of policy. I have given instructions to the counter personnel not to argue with them. They are instructed to be nice, just don't serve them."[108] The owners of the Katz store caved rapidly to the demands of the Youth Council to desegregate their store. The entire Katz chain, with stores throughout Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri, opened to people of all races.[109]

By the following week, the group sat-in at four other stores downtown in addition to Katz: Veazey's Drug Store, S. H. Kress and Co., Green's Variety Store, and John A. Brown.'s Restaurant. Having heard news of the sit-ins at the Katz Drug Store from the

previous days, these four stores had time to determine their own policy and develop a plan to implement their decision concerning desegregating their restaurants. While the company in charge of Katz quickly made their decision to integrate their stores, the next four stores responded in several different ways. The student's targeted the S. H. Kress and Co. store and restaurant as the location for their second sit-in. Yet, when the students and Clara Luper entered through the front door to try to sit down and eat a smiling store manager greeted them. The manager explained his willingness to take the group's order, but the chairs and tables had all been removed in an effort to prevent the Youth Council from demonstrating at the restaurant. Rather than conceding to be actors in the ridiculous plan of the Kress store managers, Luper and the group simply moved on to the next restaurant in their effort to be served. A few members of the group accompanied by several police officers then traveled over to Veazey's Drug Store where the managers had already decided to serve anyone who wanted to come inside. The police proved unnecessary, and the group ate without trouble before moving on to their next target for desegregation. Green's Variety Store also conceded quickly and opened the store to people of any race who desired service.[110]

Despite the problems at Kress, the beginning of the sit-in movement in downtown Oklahoma City ran fairly smoothly. Of the five initial stores that the group sat in at, the struggle at John A. Brown's became the central battleground for the Youth Council during the early stages of the sit-ins. The resistance of the Brown's to integration came as a surprise to members of the black community. Given their location and the variety of products sold at the store, Brown's clientele consisted largely of African-American customers. The planners of sit-ins assumed that because of this fact the owners of

Brown's had little choice but to open its door to all races, if simply for the reason that the money that they lost if they refused to serve African Americans would be too great to maintain the policy. However, upon the arrival of the demonstrators if became quite clear that the managers and employees of the store intended to dash any expectation of an easy and peaceful resolution to the issue.[111]

After entering Brown's, the staff made the Youth Council aware of how unwelcome they were in the restaurant. The demonstrators, according to leader Clara Luper, "were welcomed with hostile looks and gestures by both customers and employees of the store."[112] As the group sat, the obvious disapproval of the other people in the store did not dissipate. The thick tension in the air and the contentious crowd frightened some of the more youthful participants. In response, the sit-inners sang hymns and spirituals to try to bolster their spirits in the face of the opposition they encountered. Even though the group trained for the possibility that they would collide with adversity, actually being confronted with angry adults tested their mettle. One demonstrator, seven-year old Lillye Harris, received perhaps the biggest shock when one of the customers sat on her while she waited to be served. While the police escorted that individual out of the store, Clara Luper and her fellow Youth Council members calmed the girl down before they exited.[113] The Oklahoma City police displayed their determination to not become the scapegoats that other law enforcement offices became during the civil rights protests in other cities. The police encouraged their officers to not let their personal feelings about the desegregation efforts affect their judgment.[114]

The sit-ins at Brown's continued the following day, August 23rd, 1958, when the same group headed by Luper returned to the store. After entering the restaurant, the

manager of the restaurant, Frank Wade, unveiled his new plan to try to prevent serving the group. Whenever any African Americans came into the restaurant they would be required to ask each white customer if their presence upset them in any way. If the whites assented that they were uncomfortable with the blacks sitting down then they would be forced to stand up while they ate. Luper and the Youth Council members refused to abide by these guidelines and left after promising once again to return.[115]

The Youth Council group returned to Brown's for seven consecutive days with the number of demonstrators growing after each trip. By the end of the week of sit-in protests, the participants filled the luncheonette area of Brown's almost beyond capacity. As word spread of the sit-ins spread throughout downtown Oklahoma City the number of those interested in observing or heckling the protestors increased. Two separate episodes of harassment occurred in the week that followed the first protests. The first consisted of a man, quickly ejected from Brown's by the police, that loudly derided the protests for the disruption they caused customers. The other involved four young white men who brought a large rebel flag into the store in an attempt to inciting a response from those participating in the sit-in by displaying the symbol of the confederacy. The police once again diffused the situation quickly by removing the youth that tried to arouse trouble.[116] Not all of the customers at Brown's supported the refusal of service by the owners of the store. *The Daily Oklahoman* reported that older white man bought ten dishes of ice cream for the child participants and attempted to give them out. The group declined the man's generosity because it might distract from their efforts, but thanked him profusely for his kindness.[117] The culmination of the first week occurred on Wednesday, August 27th, 1958 when around 135 people filed into the store and sat-in, effectively limiting the amount of

business that could happen around them. Following the demonstration, the group reconvened outside of the State Capitol where they sang the National Anthem and "Oklahoma!"[118]

Some African-Americans not associated with the Youth Council also took it upon themselves to try to desegregate restaurants on their own outside of the targeted downtown Oklahoma City area. Stories started to circulate back to the newspapers and the NAACP detailing individual excursions into segregated restaurants to challenge their policies. One couple received service at the Uptown Cafeteria owned by W.P. Bill Atkinson. The customers reported that, "They treated us like King and Queens." Upon being asked about the decision behind the desegregation of his restaurant, Atkinson answered, "Why my cafeteria is opened to the public and always has been. I have instructed my manager to serve anyone who enters the doors."[119] Whether the restaurant had been previously open to blacks is unknown, but now African Americans felt confident enough to enter a random restaurant and attempt to eat there indicates that the sit-in movement already had begun to provoke change concerning racial policies in Oklahoma City.[120]

Not all of the restaurants followed the same cordial path that the employees at Katz did. At S.H. Kress the owners had removed all of the chairs at the counter of the store, and announced the plan to serve only on a "stand up" basis from this point forward.[121] The John A. Brown Company continued to hold out service against the intermittent sit-ins until 1963.[122] The Brown Company did gradually begin to voluntarily segregate by starting to admit light-skinned blacks in 1959, but for those who opposed any segregation this just raised the problem that, "many light skinned blacks are

indistinguishable from dark skinned whites." [123] The classification of blacks between light-skinned and dark-skinned may have represented a minimal amount of progress from the era when the government considered anyone with even one drop of African blood to be considered "Negro," but blacks considered the distinction unnecessary and offensive as it clearly still upheld segregationist policies.[124]

On September 2, 1958, Clara Luper suspended the sit-ins at the downtown restaurants under the auspices that school would soon resume and the children who participated had their studies to concentrate on. In truth, the recess intended to give the business owners a chance to reconcile their policies to the demands of the NAACP Youth Council. It also allowed for Vivian Reno, the executive secretary of the Oklahoma City Council of Churches, to try to meet with the business owners and try to devise some sort of conclusion to the sit-ins. Reno's meetings with the owners failed to provide a resolution to the problem, and the sit-ins, along with an attempted boycott of downtown stores that practiced segregation ensued.[125]

The break in the sit-ins also allowed for a period when information disseminated throughout Oklahoma City. The layoff provided a platform for the members of the Youth Council to elaborate on the underlying reasoning behind their actions. Perhaps the most eloquent elucidation came from Clara Luper who during a speech to members of the Youth Council said, "Race prejudice degrades the dignity of the individual and is therefore an offense against the human spirit. We are duty bound to eradicate all forms of intolerance in American life."[126] This inspired writing imparted the reason behind the continued vitality of the Oklahoma City movement and those behind it.

Throughout the ongoing sit-ins, the members of the Youth Council reiterated their own motives behind sitting-in. This continued over the next several years as the sit-in movement continued in Oklahoma City. This also allowed for the new members of the Youth Council to elaborate on their own reasons for joining in the movement. Since the Youth Council consisted primarily of middle and high school students, there needed to be a constant flow of new leadership as reinforcements as leaders graduated or moved on to other endeavors. For all of the problems with continuity that could arise from such a high turnover of individuals important in the movement, the same rapid replacement rate revitalized the group as different students took up the mantle of leadership within the Youth Council. At the time of the sit-ins, Gwendolyn Fuller, the youthful leader of the first set of sit-ins spoke out about how the action supported her personal beliefs, "The John A. Brown Company through its practice of racial segregation and its no comment policy has insulted millions of whites who believe in democracy and who realize that old prejudice must be closed from out country if we are to survive."[127] Beyond explaining the motivating behind the sit-ins, the statement placed the onus for action back onto those whites that, to this point, failed to make exert much effort towards desegregation.

The previous statement also highlighted one trope that ran through many civil rights tracts and speeches during the 1950s and 1960s, the idea that the inequality present throughout the country degraded or completely denied the democratic principles that the United States was founded upon. The civil rights activists reiterated the point *ad nauseam* during the course of the sit-in movement in Oklahoma City. The Youth Council released a statement addressing what they believed solved the question of, "Oklahoma City, What Is the Answer?" The writer acknowledged that the goals of the group were significantly

larger than simply integrating businesses in downtown Oklahoma City. The release asserted, "In conclusion, we firmly believe that Oklahoma City should exemplify the principles of humane democracy irrespective of race which in our way of thinking is far more important to Oklahoma, the United States, and to the world than the question of a person desiring food when he is hungry and seeking it wherever the general public is invited."[128] When interviewed, specific members of the Youth Council reprised their insistence about this point. Gwendolyn Fuller chose to speak directly about the troubles encountered at Brown's luncheonette attacking their policies, "I do not believe that the managers of John A. Brown's and the other restaurant owners will continue to hold on to a long lost dream of white supremacy. Rather I believe and pray that they will join with the organizations and people who are working to make democracy and Christianity work in Oklahoma City."[129] Another member of the Youth Council offered a similar sentiment, "I sit-in because I am able in a non-violent way to remind America of her undemocratic behavior.[130] The group understood that their actions likely would affect circumstances well beyond Oklahoma City, and embraced the opportunity presented in spite of any difficulties or notoriety that might arise.

Beyond the stress on democratic principles that some people highlighted, another way that African-Americans attacked the segregation came from emphasizing flaws in reasoning inherent in attitudes about segregation. Some bombarded the notion that segregation was biblically ordained with scripture that refuted the verses that supposedly supported the basis for separation of the races. Individuals pointed to the difficulty of forcing an entire race to remain a subclass without resenting that position. Historian Jason Sokol pointed out the frequently paternalistic attitudes that people developed concerning

African Americans noting, "Too often…whites believed affection could take the place of fairness."[131] In Oklahoma City the sit-ins hoped to wrest this fairness from whoever prevented it through non-violent demonstrations, but the remarks of Clara Luper emphasized the need for a swift and peaceful resolution to the racial problems in Oklahoma City by echoing the biblical pronouncement made by Abraham Lincoln a century earlier that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" when she conveyed her belief that, "This town cannot remain half segregated and half integrated."[132] Whether or not she recognized the trouble that would later arise throughout the South with white resistance to black equality, Luper did observe, "that the dream of true democracy would become a reality because these young will never be contented with second class citizenship."[133]

Despite the successes of the Youth Council, some people from the black community disagreed with the methods that the group used when attempting to desegregate the downtown restaurants. The biggest rift arose between two different groups within the NAACP, the Youth Council and the regular adult membership. The *Black Dispatch* presented the problems between the two factions as the adult group displaying some sense of jealousy over the accomplishments of the younger members who were not yet old enough to become full members saying, "Because on the one hand persons in the adult group want credit for what they haven't the guts to do, while on the other hand the Youth Council is down town stepping on the toes of some adult members' friends." Reverend James Lawson recalled that the national NAACP agreed with the sentiments of the local parent body in their admonition of the Youth Council sit-ins, "the NAACP opposed [sit-ins]. The parent body, the branch body, chastised the school teacher

who was responsible for it, chastised them, told them to desist."[134] In addition, the paper attributes the reaction of the NAACP to the gains made by the youth group as a sense of the moment passing them by, "For years, the NAACP was the 'Moses' wielding the big sword that slew the school segregation for Ada Lois Sipuel. It was the 'Moses' that beheaded the dragon called segregation in interstate travel. But now the 'Moses' group has gone to sip tea." Curiously, the issues between the two groups developed even though each used different methods in affecting change. The parent NAACP group relied on attacking segregation statutes by challenging through litigation, while the youth employed nonviolent civil disobedience. Both fought for the same ends, despite relying on different procedures to achieve their goals.[135]

The role that the young people played in the sit-ins also generated commentary that condemned the adults in the African-American community for the lack of interest and action in the desegregation of the restaurants. One editorial attacked the older members of the community for allowing children for being placed in such a dangerous situation.

> In Oklahoma City, the youth have started a battle to open eating establishments throughout the city for all citizens. What have you done in this effort? Are you contented to sit by and say "I am for them"? Why let a child have to do the job of a man? We don't have to be Uncle Toms, we don't have to go around with our hands out and our heads bowed any more. The time is now for us all to get upon our feet and hold our heads high. The time is here to walk like men, think like men, and fight like men.[136]

The differences in opinion could also be attached to a generation gap between the two groups. With the exception of Clara Luper, the Youth Council obviously represented

a younger cohort than the regular NAACP group did. With that space between the two groups new expectations arose. While some older African Americans still heard stories from immediate relatives about the days of slavery during their childhood, for many in the younger generation that time seemed removed from their own lives even as they heard the stories of others and the events that affected them. Being younger also removed the youths from some of the fear that older blacks may have been concerned about. Violence originating in racism obviously still threatened blacks throughout the South. Yet, a lull existed between the lynchings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the televised brutality of police dogs and water hoses being used against civil rights marchers in Selma and Birmingham, Alabama that flooded the nation's collective psyche in the 1960s.

Angry rhetoric within the black community in Oklahoma City also generated heated responses. Accusing an individual of acting like an 'Uncle Tom' evoked ardent feelings as the term, originating as a character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, came to be used to describe an African-American individual who turned their back on the race by acting in a manner that affirmed the white belief in the superiority of the white race. While the accusation of someone being an Uncle Tom intermittently occurred during the years preceding the sit-ins, the charge became even more common during the sit-ins. When different people disparaged those who opposed the Youth Council's actions, calling someone an Uncle Tom amounted to a charge of cowardice and intended to shame the person it was directed towards. Even with the stigma associated with the name some groups endured the charges, or even embraced them. In 1954, a group of blacks attempted to reestablish the Democratic Central

Committee (DCC). The DCC called for a separate, black political organization that allowed blacks, "to have the freedom to serve in any executive capacity in our own organization, rather than look on as the other fellow serves the organization after integration."[137] For those blacks fighting for integration and African-American political power in local, state, and national government the DCC seemed to be a "step backwards" and also referred to the organization's leaders as "Uncle Toms."[138]

Going forward several years to 1958, people who did not support the Youth Council's sit-ins became targets of the epithet as those who supported the group incited those who did not exhorting, "We don't have to be Uncle Toms, we don't have to go around with our hands out and our heads bowed any more. The time is now for us all to get upon our feet and hold our heads high."[139] Others highlighted the sacrifices that might be required to achieve equality, including cutting loose those who accepted the government program of gradual change. Dr. A. L. Dowell alerted other blacks to the difficulties they might endure for the cause, "Friendships will often be broken, traditions must fall, and the Uncle Toms and Aunt Thomasines must be exposed if the youth of today are to walk without fear in the paths of respectability and pride. Long suffering, the loss of jobs, all of these are part of the sacrifice which must be made, if need be, in this struggle for first-class citizenship."[140] The sentiment that blacks who adopted a wait-and-see type of philosophy concerning civil rights had an inability to affect change even received a celebrity endorsement when former Major League Baseball player for the Brooklyn Dodgers, Jackie Robinson told the Youth Council during a speech, "We aren't going to improve race relations with the 'Uncle Tom' type of Negro." [141]

Besides the parent NAACP, other failed to offer support for the downtown sit-ins as well. The role that faith played in the sit-ins recurred frequently in the statements of the participants in the actions. To pass the time while waiting for service, the sit-inners often sang church hymns and sometimes studied schoolbooks or scripture to distract them from angry looks or remarks extended by white customers. But in general, churches in Oklahoma City offered little or no support for the actions of the Youth Council. Instead, churches distanced themselves from the direct efforts of the sit-inners. On September 22nd, 1958, after the first of the restaurant sit-ins, the Youth Council initiated what they called a pray-in at churches across Oklahoma City. The youth-initiated pray-in represented the first recorded instance of that type of protest. Twenty pairs of youths attempted to integrate twenty different white churches throughout the metropolitan area by attending services. At the vast majority of the churches the youths experienced little trouble, but three of the churches turned them away.[142] One of the churches, Kelham Baptist Church, offered to educate the youths on how God did not support the mixing of races, and volunteered to show the visitors the scriptural basis for their beliefs.[143]

The sentiments of the churches varied on the matter of civil rights. More than any other factor, the beliefs of the pastor and church leaders concerning desegregation probably determined the willingness of parishioners to aid blacks in their efforts in gaining equality. At other times, the opposite occurred, and ministers acceded to the opposition towards desegregation that the members of the their congregations maintained. Reconciling personal beliefs about racial matters with a congregation that disagreed with them often conflicted the ministers involved. One minister explained the difficult circumstances he faced, “I feel, as Christians, we have a basic responsibility. But

you know, I am in a box…They [the congregation] see my role as a minister not as a sociologist. I have got to back off. This thing could split my congregation-just tear it apart."[144] The anonymous minister's statement above brought to the fore several different antagonisms that had to be acknowledged and handled. First, the internal struggle of the minister of what he believed constituted the conscientious action versus what the congregation understood as correct. Contained within this problem is the issue over what is the proper action to undertake biblically, and does this disagree with the interpretation of the congregation. Finally, the minister addressed the larger concern of how any disagreement over a social issue could easily overlap into church matters. If this occurred, then the minister not only had the congregation and church's well-being to worry about, but his own role within the church and by extension, his job. The break between congregation and minister could be seen throughout white churches throughout the South. Emanating from other states came reports of pastors being fired from their positions for supporting interaction and cooperation between blacks and whites. The situation in Oklahoma bore a close resemblance to the circumstances elsewhere which caused blacks to claim, "That, on the whole, the southern white clergy had not demonstrated courage or martyrdom."[145]

The attitudes of Oklahoma City churchgoers concerning integration, like those of a larger percentage of the population, were not so clear-cut. During the fervor surrounding the fight for racial equality, one member of a local white church sent minister Ted Monroe (who supported civil rights for blacks) a copy of the *Thunderbolt*, "a publication of a White Citizen's Council that highlighted the rape of white women by blacks, Jewish conspiracies, and race mixing."[146] At the same time the Youth Council

reported that, “The whites are really working to help us win the fight. They have been the unsung heroes in the fight…They have invited us into their homes and churches. This isn’t Little Rock. The good white people didn’t wait and are not waiting. They are speaking up for liberty, justice, democracy, and Christianity.”[147] While quite happy with the support that the Youth Council gained from white churchgoers, frustrations still abounded from the absence of approval and assistance from members of black congregations. During a series of reports called “A Study in Racial Climate of Oklahoma City,” the people running the study observed, “For the most part Negro pastors have been conspicuous by absence. Well over 100 pastors of Negro churches have been represented by a total of only five or six during several years of demonstrations. Lately, white ministers, doctors, and priests outnumber by far Negro ministers.”[148] The division over black rights in Oklahoma City obviously did not depend solely upon the lines of race. Instead, like the situation throughout the South, feelings over black achievement of civil rights were muddled. Dr. Chester M. Pierce elaborated on this in a study of the local racial climate in 1961. He said, I must share my disappointment and distress that there seems to be in this city all too many who believe that they should negotiate with whites, but not be seen or heard in public to condone aspects of passive resistance. Yet nearly all approve the wisdom of passive resistance, which aims to correct social injustice by the weapons of humility, kindness, honesty, and non-violence.”[149] A variety of different factors generated support or resistance towards desegregation in Oklahoma City and simply attributing this to racism provides a quick but ultimately unsatisfying solution that lacks the nuance and detail necessary to understand race relations in the city.

Beyond the NAACP and the city's churches some of the residents unassociated with any of the aforementioned groups also disagreed with the actions taken by the Youth Council. During a meeting on the sit-ins local businessman L. E. Richardson announced under the banner of the Eastside Citizens Chamber of Commerce that despite the fact that he, "was against discrimination, they were against the sit-ins and would do everything in their power to stop the demonstrations."[150] However, the Eastside Citizens Chamber of Commerce disavowed Richardson as a spokesman for the group, dismissed his comments, and asserted that the Chamber, "stood 100 per cent behind the demonstrations and any other peaceful action that would bring about first class citizenship for minority groups."[151] Ultimately, the majority of people made their opinions known when over a thousand eastside citizens announced their intentions to participate in a series of non-violent demonstrations that were scheduled for the upcoming weekend.

The *Black Dispatch* recognized that the disagreement among different groups of blacks over the methods being used were symptomatic of a larger problem. An editorial in the paper chastised the African-American community because, "There are too many Negroes who take upon themselves to be the self-appointed leaders and proceed to take over the planning for the entire city, and many times attempt to plan things with selfish interest."[152] The L. E. Richardson incident provides an example of this type of behavior. A person, without a stake in an organization, claimed a position of influence and power. While the motivations behind his claim are unknown, Richardson displayed an instance of the "lack of unity in Negroes' approach toward major problems."[153] Other African-American community leaders assessed the situation in even harsher terms. Dr. A. L. Dowell asked, "How long will Negroes continue accepting pseudo leadership from a few

Uncle Toms?"[154] Repeated mentions of "Uncle Toms" and continuing friction between the leaders of different factions within the assorted civil rights groups in Oklahoma City hinted at the fractures and fissures within the black community that made protests possible.

Beyond a "lack of unity" the African-American population of Oklahoma City experienced the reemergence of another problem, the lack of political participation. Tired of being taken advantage of by white politicians with political interests, black community leaders urged citizens to make an effort to, "learn to vote intelligently." According to local optometrist A.L. Dowell, this process included, "learning the background of candidates and who they associate with, rather then just listening to campaign promises."[155] The frequent complaints about a lack of voter knowledge about potential candidates received a possible solution with the development of the New Deal Improvement Club. Leaders of the Eastside community formed the club to educate voters about the views that each candidate had on central issues, and how this affected the black community. The originators also hoped that by informing the public about the candidates, they could prevent the temporary system of patronage that many felt contributed to the anemic power of the black voting bloc in Oklahoma City. Politicians often hired black aides to "help deliver the Negro vote," only to fire them once the election cycle concluded. The group wanted to extend these jobs from a part-time basis to full-time. They also hoped that by ending this system that blacks would start being elected themselves, rather than whites gaining the black vote then ignoring their constituents once achieving office. Acknowledging that on occasion individuals put their own interest above that of the African-American community, the Club made a statement condemning

such actions, “If we are ever to enjoy the privileges of first-class citizenship we must accept its responsibilities. We must vote for the candidates who earnestly desire to serve all the people—not as we are told to vote by a few Negroes who have already sold our rights.”[156]

The previous paragraphs indicate the leadership problems that plagued local civil rights movements throughout the country. Throughout the South the numerous associations that dealt with civil rights activities (NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, Urban League, and diverse local affiliations) struggled with differing levels of organization, bureaucracy, and the number of capable coordinators available. Even the primary leader of the sit-in movement in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa remembered her personal wavering and the subsequent hardening of her resolve during the beginning of the movement,

> We participated in sit-ins until 1964, and I didn’t realize the threatening calls that I would get, all the time at night. I didn’t realize that somedays I would wake up and shotgun shells would be on my porch. I didn’t realize the hatred that was embedded in this town, and I didn’t realize the attitude of some of the policemen, and the responsibility of the government, of the whole city government. I never shall forget the mayor of the city told me that what I needed to do was to teach my people how to eat, and I had to tell him that I knew how to eat and my people know how to eat the day we were born; otherwise we wouldn’t be here.[157]

The profile of the sit-ins received a major attention boost when the inspiration for the demonstrations, Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed an Oklahoma City audience at the Calgary Baptist Church in July of 1960. Highlighting the potential historical significance of activists both in Oklahoma City and throughout the country, King claimed, “We who live in the twentieth century have the privilege of standing between two ages -- the dying old and the emerging new.”[158] King encouraged the participants in the sit-ins,

emphasizing the continued perseverance of the group while humbly overlooking his own work with the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) in the preceding years, "The new order is not yet with us. We must give to our nation an example of non-violent, dignified, effective action."[159]

As already displayed in other incidents, government officials often failed to follow their own pronouncements regarding civil rights. When four blacks tried to gain entry to county commissioner Ralph Adair's restaurant at Northeast Twenty-Third Street to receive service, the manager refused them service. This refusal of service presented an abrupt about-face from Adair who glad-handed black voters during his election campaign that gained him his position. The four members of the Youth Council turned away; Barbara Posey, Richard Brown, Roger Kelly, and Lillie Walker, reported that Adair announced that he would not serve them in his places of business because he did not want to become known as a "Negro lover." When the *Black Dispatch* brought to his attention that during the previous election cycle Adair had conversed and ate barbeque and hot dogs with blacks, he replied, "I will stand by my record as a public official, but my private business is another thing and it shall be run in order that I can make money. I cannot make money serving Negroes because I will lose my white customers. I do not want to be branded as a Negro lover."[160] According to the *Dispatch,* this once again brought up two concerns that African-Americans constantly reiterated as primary issues that needed to be addressed according if blacks were going to achieve racial equality: The number of blacks voting had to be increased, and those that did vote should elect officials who genuinely had their best interest in mind. Some government officials disingenuously promised to fight for increased black rights only to ignore that cohort of their

constituency upon being elected. Only supporting merchants who allowed blacks to shop at their store was the second necessity. Without economic repercussions, storeowners had little reason to change their policies at the risk of alienating or offending their white customers.[161]

This statement raised an extremely significant question about the sit-ins: Does a private business owner have the right to refuse service to anyone that he or she desires? The previous statement of the City Council that they had no right to interfere in private business came to a fore once again. The situation at Atkinson's cafeteria displayed the need for the city or state government to legally outlaw segregation for the situation to be resolved. The Oklahoma City chapter of the NAACP recognized the possibility of this type of challenge in 1954, well before the Youth Council even considered the downtown sit-ins. The parent body of the NAACP understood the defenses that white storeowners would use because of previous experiences throughout the country and called a meeting to address how to go about changing these segregationist policies. The meeting honed in on the main problem behind the issue, "The state of Oklahoma has no civil rights statutes and there is a cloud over the practice of private institutions practicing discrimination against Negroes in the absence of constitutional or satutory [sic] provisions for segregation." The discussion continued to address the legal aspects that could develop in a situation like a sit-in. Questions about these things included: "What is private enterprise and who may participate?" and "If licenses are granted, admissions, fees, or charges are made to the general public, what right does management have to select or exclude patrons?" This displayed the foresight of the leaders in the civil rights movement, and the

tactics that would be used against participants in Oklahoma City and throughout the South. [162]

While the disagreements over methods and the people who protested continued, Brown's still refused to allow blacks into their store. Almost a year had passed since the original sit-ins, but the Youth Council maintained their struggle against segregation. On June 19th, 1959, four youths once again tried to gain service. Upon entering the restaurant the manager told them that all of the tables were occupied, and they could not expect to be served, even though at least half the tables within eyesight of the four youths were open. Hoping to avoid any conflict, the youths decided to try to desegregate another store so they traveled to the Maywood Drug Store on Sixth and Walnut. Once again the manager in charge told the students that they would not be served. The manager then added, "We have no place for you colored people."[163] These incidents provided the framework upon which the civil rights movement in Oklahoma City was built upon. The early sit-ins by the Youth Council entrenched a systematic nonviolent approach for the movement in Oklahoma, and this approach would remain in place during future demonstrations.

The sit-in movement in Oklahoma City experienced success in the majority of their efforts to this point in 1959. Yet, the stakes became higher than just desegregating restaurants as the attention of the black community began to notice efforts that some saw as a white reaction to the efforts towards civil rights made by the NAACP Youth Council. The largest sense of outrage ensued following the announcement that the Oklahoma City commissioner's districts would be shifting. The previous system had included the almost the entirety of Oklahoma City African Americans in one district, while the new lines

drawn split the black area of the city into two pieces. This, in turn, split the black vote in two, and further diminished an already shaky grasp on any sort of political power. Needless to say, community leaders were not pleased by the development. The President of the Citizens' Chamber of Commerce, A. D. Mathues, urged black citizens to fight the redistricting, "so they won't have power on each end." For many, the fact that Ralph Adair, the County Commissioner, seemed to be involved caused conspiracy theories to start to fly since he was fighting integration at his cafeterias at the same time.[164] Calling the whole activity a "total disregard of voter's rights" the leaders of the black community vowed to continue their fight to reinstitute the previous voting boundaries.[165]

The battle against those stores that refused to end discrimination intensified when the Youth Council announced that they, along with their supporters, would boycott those businesses that were still holding out against integration. The demonstrators announced that they would boycott after the failure of "five days of silent picketing of downtown restaurants [including] Brown's, Anna Maude's, and the Skirvin, as well as O'Mealey's, Greens, Classen Cafeteria, Adair's and L'Charrito."[166] The council did offer downtown business owners one chance of respite before they began the boycott, and the Retailers Association and the leaders of the black civic organizations parleyed over the proposed boycott. However, when the meeting failed to produce the desired results for the Youth Council they instituted a four-day long boycott of the downtown stores that would not desegregate.[167] The boycott, which the president of the Oklahoma City NAACP Dr. E. C. Moon called 70 percent effective, did little to dissuade the hold-out store owners who said, "they could see no decrease in Negro trade as a result of the general boycott."[168]

Following the boycott, the sit-ins resumed throughout Oklahoma City. As the sit-ins began to branch out beyond the downtown area the reactions to them increased in severity. Arrests started to occur for disorderly conduct as business owners sought out effective ways to prevent the sit-ins from happening at their stores. Eight participants, four black and four white, demonstrated at the Anne Maud Cafeteria and were taken into custody. Even though they ended up having to only pay fines of ten or twenty dollars apiece, stronger reactions on the part of the police and storeowners were becoming more prevalent. After the early sit-ins, the store owners that refused to desegregate their businesses hardened in their opposition to the demonstrators. They also developed an understanding of the means that they could use to fight back against the civil rights protests. Rather than bowing to unfavorable public opinion, they proclaimed their status as a whites-only location. The storeowners also pressed charges on the protestors of disturbing the peace or trespassing at any opportunity.[169] In a more drastic example, Louis McNeill, the manager of the Civic Center Grill, tried to intimidate six demonstrators by locking them inside his restaurant after refusing them service. Clara Luper, along with five youth including her daughter Marilyn Luper, were forced to stay inside the stuffy, un-air conditioned building for several hours before attorney E. Melvin Porter negotiated their release. While inside, McNeill acted like he was about to spill hot grease on the children and the waitress mopped over them.[170] The increasingly agitated behavior of storeowners accomplished more than simply drawing attention to the sit-ins. In addition to added media coverage, the threat of violence or arrest actually led many Oklahomans who had previously been on the fence about the sit-ins to sympathize with them and eventually support their efforts.

As time passed, the movement's momentum attenuated. While sit-ins continued at the Springlake and Wedgewood Amusement Parks and the restaurants that still were holding out, most storeowners saw that further resistance to the sit-ins as only a temporary stop to the flowing tide of integration.[171] The quest of the African-Americans of Oklahoma City to answer the questions above continued even while the student sit-ins successfully desegregated dozens of different restaurants. While the movement lost the constant media attention that characterized the early protests, the black community continued their support of the actions. Members of the Youth Council moved away to college or into the work force, making it necessary for different leaders to emerge. With the accomplishment of desegregating restaurants and businesses, new goals emerged that required other methods than just sitting-in. As the complexity of protestor's methods grew, so did the intricacy of the responses by those that opposed the Youth Council's efforts. Oklahoma City civil rights organizations turned their focus on economic equality and a greater political influence through an increasingly active black community. Though blacks had been allowed to vote for decades in the city the actions of the protesters proved to many that political participation could be a viable tool for achieving their goals. Frequently, white politicians used underhanded tricks in an attempt to maintain as much power in the hands of whites as possible. Hiring blacks to their campaign teams and then dumping them soon after the election, and gerrymandering the voting districts of Oklahoma City were only two examples of this type of behavior. However, the continued persistence and growing sagacity of black leaders to these ploys proved too great to maintain white dominance. Ultimately, the desegregation of public facilities became a reality largely because of Clara Luper and the Youth Council she led. However,

simply giving credit only to that group fails to account for the work of others, either affiliated with a civil rights group or not. They achieved their goals because of their absolute refusal to accept inequitable treatment simply because of their skin color.

[100] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 1-2.
[101] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 7.
[102] Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma,* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 188.
[103] Clara Luper, interview by Floyd Freeman and Rodger Harris, September 7, 1999, VHS and transcript, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oral History Collection, Oklahoma City, OK.
[104] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 3.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Martin Oppenheimer, *The Genesis of the Southern Negro Student Movement (sit-in movement),* (MA thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1963), 51.
[107] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 8-9.
[108] Quote from J.B. Masoner in, "Negro Group Denied Service at Katz Drug," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* August 22, 1958.
[109] Jean Van Delinder, *Struggles Before Brown: Early Civil Rights Protests and Their Significance Today,* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2004), 125.
[110] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 14-15.
[111] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 19.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 19-20.
[114] I.G. Purser, interview by Rodger Harris, VHS, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oral History Collection, Oklahoma City, OK.
[115] Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls,* 20.
[116] "Negro Youths Continue Their Store 'Sitting','' in *The Daily Oklahoman,* August 24th, 1958
[117] "Negro Group's 'Sitdown' Goes Into 2nd Week," in *The Daily Oklahoman,* August 26, 1958.
[118] "Negroes Are Served in Midwest City Café," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* August 29, 1958.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] "Negro Youths 'Store Sitting' in Fourth Day," in *The Daily Oklahoman,* August 23, 1958.
[122] "NAACP Downtown Boycott Ends," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* July 7, 1961.
[123] "Open Letter to John A. Brown Company," written by Caroline E. M. Burks, in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* August 7, 1959.
[124] Jean Van Delinder, *Struggles Before Brown,*123.
[125] Linda Williams Reese, "Clara Luper and the Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma City, 1958-1964," in *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000,* eds. Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 338.
[126] "Clara Luper Speaks," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* September 26, 1958.

[127] "Gwendolyn Fuller Speaks," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* September 26, 1958.
[128] "Oklahoma City Citizens, What Is the Answer," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*
[129] "Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council Speaks," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* September 26, 1958.
[130] "Why I Sit-In," statement by Barbara Posey in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 3, 1961.
[131] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 57-8.
[132] "To the Editor," letter from Clara Luper, in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 1, 1960.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Quoted in, Jean Van Delinder, *Struggles Before Brown,* 125.
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[137] "State Leaders Condemn Attempt to Reorganize Jim Crow Demo Organizations," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* February 13, 1954.
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[164] "Plot to Split Negro Vote Angers Many Eastsiders," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* July 24, 1959.
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CHAPTER IV

MOVING NORTH

The other major city in Oklahoma experiences its own unique struggle for African-American equality. First established by Creek Indians, Tulsa thrived following the discovery of a major oil reserve in the area.[172] As blacks filtered into the southwest from the eastern half of the country, white Tulsans deemed anyone with African-American blood as a subclass of citizen and subsequently forced blacks to remain sequestered in one area of the city. The black community of Tulsa thrived despite the best efforts of whites to prevent black successes. This success created an area eventually known as "Negro Wall Street" as black businessmen turned a deplorable situation into a rousing victory for blacks in the region. However, a misinterpreted exchange between a black man and a white woman set back years of work by black Tulsans to create self-sustaining community within the larger city to Tulsa.[173]

The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 affected black-white relations in the city more than any other factor in its history. The riot, which began after an alleged incident between a black man and white woman in an elevator, destroyed almost the entirety of the African American section of Tulsa known as Greenwood. The area previously had been one of the wealthiest African-American areas in any city in the United States. The violence of

the riot, in addition to the need for an almost complete reconstruction of the neighborhood, caused blacks who could afford the option to leave for another city. The ensuing decades reasserted the division between blacks and whites, so much so that in the years following the riot that one study on segregation by the United States Commission on Civil Rights described the situation in Tulsa as, "An invisible wall had seemingly been erected between blacks and whites that almost completely isolated one race from the other."[174]

Restrictive housing covenants prevented whites and blacks from intermingling on a regular basis. Virtually the whole of the black population lived in the area of North Tulsa since the beginning of the twentieth century. Black-white daily interaction consisted of white employers directing black employees in their tasks, and, even if a friendly rapport developed, social circumstances dictated that interactions between the races rarely extended beyond courtesy. Despite these short moments displaying instances of mutual respect, the reciprocity ended once the individuals arrived in a public setting.

The employment situation for the African Americans of Tulsa reflected bleaker circumstances than those in Oklahoma City. The earning potential of blacks, limited in almost any city in the country, fell even lower in Tulsa. The poverty level indicated this generality. Of the 39,850 residents at or below the low-income level in Tulsa in a study published in 1976, 14,055 or 35.5 percent were African American.[175] The oppressive situation offered blacks few favorable options once they ended their education. Staying in

the city meant accepting a low-paying job often in a menial position. If educated and black, job opportunities in Tulsa left little option but underemployment.

The employment situation in Tulsa also contributed to the poverty of the city. Few available jobs encouraged those blacks that completed their education to emigrate from Oklahoma City to other cities more open to hiring African Americans. As a result of this "brain drain," the black community lacked the number of "professional" leaders like doctors, lawyers, and prominent businessmen that Oklahoma City had. The problem emanated primarily from discriminatory hiring among businesses. One individual reflected on the problem in 1959, "The few openings that occur in our industry will go to the inexperienced white man or woman instead of the qualified Negro."[176] Even in circumstances when blacks did get hired, the employment that they gained often left little opportunity for advancement. Instead, "a number of the grocers, meat markets, and clothing stores hire us in laboring positions but never in a white collar job."[177] While some employers would not hire an African American until something or someone forced them to do so, others simply absorbed racial prejudices exposed to them throughout their lifetime. Winthrop Rockefeller, a board member of the National Urban League, delivered a speech to the local chapter imploring the attendees that, "Blacks must prove to whites that the characteristic of mediocrity is not inherent in blacks."[178] The message addressed the need of African Americans to disprove the damaging rumors surrounding the race, even if it meant adhering to a higher standard of behavior than that expected of whites in the same or higher positions. Rockefeller continued, "In recognizing this fact-fact and not

aspiration-we must realize that first class citizenship will require work and understanding and not miracles."[179] The work it would require to convince whites of black equality often discouraged blacks from applying themselves in what they saw as a futile endeavor.

The dearth of good jobs for blacks caused numerous other problems within the Greenwood community. The housing market in the areas of town where blacks were permitted to purchase homes was virtually nonexistent. As a result, the only housing options open to blacks consisted of undersized homes. Usually they were in poor condition, resulting from the general overcrowding of the homes by their previous owners. Realtors also frequently inflated the costs of houses Few available jobs and massive unemployment in Tulsa often forced multiple families to live together in homes intended to shelter only a single small family. With close contact unavoidable with such poor standards, health problems sprouted throughout the Greenwood area. After a six-week long study of the neighborhood city and county health director Dr. Paul Haney reported that, ""Living conditions in the Greenwood area make it a hotspot for many diseases in Tulsa."[180]

Several different organizations headed efforts to improve conditions for African Americans in the community. The Prince Hall Masons, an African-American fraternal organization, encouraged the enrichment of the community through social participation and service. Another group, the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce, formed to advance the welfare of the businesses that resided in North Tulsa. Each group willingly volunteered time and money to whatever endeavors that seemed to promote the

movement toward African-American equality in the United States. They welcomed another civic group to Tulsa when they helped bring a chapter of the National Urban League to the city. Both the Prince Hall Masons and the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce offered two thousand dollars in seed money to establish the chapter in Tulsa. The Urban League focused on educating citizens on employment issues believing that increasing the number of skilled and gainfully employed individuals also improved the economic position of blacks throughout the country. By achieving economic empowerment, blacks could use their newfound wealth as a source of influence that could help to advance the causes of African Americans nationwide.[181] Its methods included "conferences, understanding, and mutual agreement," and it aimed to, "improve the social, economic, and working opportunities for minority citizens."[182] Tulsa also counted a NAACP chapter among its organizations. The NAACP promoted African-American welfare by challenging segregationist and discriminatory policies through legislation and judicial decision. Yet, like their Oklahoma City brethren, getting citizens to participate became an enduring quandary for the Tulsa chapter. Even with constantly trumpeting the need for voters to pursue participatory democracy with their ballots, the actual turnouts at voting tills continued to disappoint.[183]

The white leaders of Tulsa often demonstrated contradictory attitudes about civil rights in their city. Even though blacks implored important whites for egalitarian legislation to be passed, "He has appealed to the City Hall- He has bargained with politicians," they gained little public support. Since politicians relied on their

constituents, they were forced to pay attention to the people who voted for them, whether this agreed with their personal feelings about the civil rights movement or not. Some politicians opposed the movement towards black equality and refrained from saying so in a public forum. A story related by Pastor Karl Lutze, an active participant in the civil rights movement, illustrated the conflict that often occurred with whites regarding African-American rights. While serving as the chairman on the Tulsa Industrial Relations Committee, one of the other board members could no longer contain his umbrage and explained, "that he had been willing to serve because he wanted to lend his efforts to bring decent housing to minorities, but he was disturbed to learn that the Urban League had also been pressing to eliminate separate seating at symphony concerts downtown." The reasoning behind the outburst? He did not want his wife to have to sit that closely with blacks when they attended the musical.[184] Even those whites that displayed interest in black civil rights often dealt with internal conflictions about exactly how much ground that blacks should gain. The inability of blacks to solidify a significant voting bloc left these unsure whites with little incentive to completely embrace black equality.

The lack of black citizens voting in both local and state elections exhibited perhaps the most indicative sign of the lack of effort in improving conditions. Not all black Tulsans contributed to this problem. Efforts to remedy the dearth of election participants came from several different sectors of society. The Tulsa Ministerial Alliance, a group comprised of the African-American churches in the city, began a voter registration drive at Booker T. Washington High School in 1958. The Tulsa-based

Oklahoma Eagle also contributed to the endeavor by publishing editorials pleading for increased participation in the upcoming city elections. One commentary in the newspaper encouraged registration when it asserted the obligation that North Tulsa residents had to vote, "A people are a free people only so long as they are factors in determining what shall be the character of the government under which they live and likewise the character of the personalities who have the responsibility of governing."[185]

Repeated adjurations by Tulsa civic groups, as well as local newspapers, did little to improve voter participation despite voter registration drives during each election cycle. When serious efforts failed, the *Eagle* turned to more humorous efforts to make its point. During the Christmas season they recruited the help of Santa to outline the failings of black community, and on Christmas Eve of 1959 he chided Tulsa residents for a lack of political participation. Santa withheld the traditional Christmas gifts explaining, "Well, well, well, What's wrong with those apathetic charity seekers. I intended to give them better jobs, facilities, homes, and less juvenile delinquency but I can't help anyone who won't help themselves."[186] Two organizations, the Urban League and the staff of the *Tulsa Eagle*, recognized that the methods being used in the voter registrations drive needed to change if the number of voters was going to increase. Instead of sending out mass mailers to the whole of the North Tulsa area and going door-to-door to try to drum up support, the new method relied upon already established personal relationships. The groups divided up the area into separate divisions, and assigned each division a "personal evangelist" to register voters. These "personal evangelists" were much younger than the

previous volunteers sent out to register voters. The Urban League and *Eagle* placed their hope in the fact this new cohort of volunteers, "is young enough to be vigorous in the prosecution of his task," "old enough and enlightened enough to know the value of the effort," and "free enough from the political red tape and money politics to win the confidence of this oft-betrayed constituency."[187]

The desegregation of Tulsa schools failed to progress with any more speed than the schools in Oklahoma City. Like their counterparts to the south, the Tulsa school district demonstrated an unwillingness to move expediently to integrate their schools. The opposition by Tulsans to the dictates of the Supreme Court reached such a high level of resistance that legal means had to be used to force schools in Oklahoma to admit blacks on a normal basis. Instead of an esteemed private citizen and community leader who sued the Oklahoma City schools, on July 30th, 1968 the United States Attorney General Ramsey Clark accused the school district of failing to comply with the *Brown* ruling made four years prior by still maintaining what basically amounted to segregated schools.[188]

Possibly the most significant difference between the civil rights movements in Oklahoma City and Tulsa came from the level of participation of churches and ministers in the two communities. While Oklahoma City churches provided some help for civil rights activism, it primarily came in the form of donations or allowing groups of activists to use church facilities to meet and strategize about upcoming demonstrations. Ministers were unwilling to take a stand on the non-violent protestors, instead they repeated

concerns about how taking a personal stand could affect the congregation and their place as minister within the church, and decided to primarily leave what they saw as politicking out of the pulpit. The ministers in Tulsa viewed their responsibility in the civil rights movement in a decidedly different manner. While ministers in Oklahoma City avoided the possible controversy caused by addressing the potentially divisive issue, the clergy of Tulsa supported the movement from its inception. Several of Tulsa's African-American ministers began to create plans of action designed to address the severely prejudicial treatment of blacks within the city in the 1950s. The group, which drew its inspiration from the non-violent methods of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., included among its number: Reverends B.S. Roberts, Ben Hill, G. Calvin McCutchen, and T. Oscar Chappele.[189]

During the ongoing restaurant sit-ins in Oklahoma City, the adult sponsor of the movement, Clara Luper, spoke at the Vernon African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Tulsa. She challenged the listeners to replicate the successes of the Youth Council had in Oklahoma City. One of the primary concerns addressed by Luper was once again leadership among blacks. She asked, "Who is concerning themselves about our young, to lead them into the serious ventures of social action that works for a better community?"[190] The editors of the *Tulsa Eagle* were struck by this question and applied the question to themselves, and their city about Luper's remarks, "We could not refrain from making the contrast-We could not forgo asking the question-'who cares in Tulsa?'"[191] Unfortunately, while women and men who supported civil rights for blacks abounded in Tulsa, efforts to achieve change were fractured, much as it had been in

Oklahoma City before the sit-ins headed by Luper's group. In both cities the movement needed something to unify the various people and organizations fighting for the same goal but using different means to achieve it.

Even though the organization first printed the statement a year before Luper's address, the statement of the Tulsa NAACP about the Oklahoma City sit-ins answered the questions the newspaper posed, "The Tulsa Branch NAACP does not contemplate any similar move at the present time, but the local branch will continue to be vigilant in its efforts to secure equal treatment of all American citizens."[192] The plans of the NAACP did not satiate Tulsans who desired some form of action to be undertaken to remedy the injustices in Tulsa. One person who supported an active response towards discrimination wrote to the editor of the *Eagle*:

> "I read in the papers (yours included) that a very successful picket line has been formed in Kansas City and has been successful. The stores being picketed are stores practicing discrimination against citizens of color; stores will not allow colored personnel and do not appreciate the business the Negro citizens give them. The NAACP in Tulsa could very well be instrumental in doing this type of thing here because a number of the downtown stores that cater to Negro buying still practice discrimination. If we would picket these stores, or better still cease to buy their merchandise, our strength (dollars) would be felt. And a loss of several thousand dollars a month in revenue will be felt by any business." The sit-ins provided this rallying point used to unite the black community in Oklahoma City, but by 1959 no event or person displayed the dynamism necessary to galvanize Tulsans to do the same."[193]

The leaders of the movement towards equality in Tulsa recognized that changes needed to be made if they hoped to be successful. Observing the situation in Oklahoma City, they decided that emulating Luper might improve results for Tulsans. Citizens

called for more effort in the push for equality. A few pinpointed the same problem that the Youth Council in Oklahoma City dealt with before and during the sit-ins, the resistance to the methods being used. One Tulsa citizen attributed the ineffectiveness to the age of those in charge, "Some of these old die-hard leaders who have long outlived their usefulness should step aside and let the younger set take over and push for some of the good things out of life that are promised all citizens."[194] The introduction of new blood into the movement energized the movement, and brought fresh perspectives to the strategies being used by civil rights organizations. However, the call for replicating the actions of the Oklahoma City largely went unheeded. Instead, civil rights organizations relied upon the same methods for improvement of circumstances for the black community. The problem displayed in Oklahoma City displayed itself in Tulsa, but in a different form. In Oklahoma City problems arose primarily between the national, local, and city Youth Council of the NAACP, but in Tulsa the civil rights organizations cooperated in their efforts quite well. Throughout the 1950s, the mass of African Americans in Tulsa remained indifferent to these organizations and to politics, inhibiting progress in civil rights. Despite constant encouragement to participate by community and political leaders, unaffiliated blacks aggravated even the most affable volunteers with their lack of involvement.

The ineffectiveness of civic groups devoted to civil rights also needed to be overcome before any significant changes emerged. Two organizations in particular came under fire for the ineffectualness of their activities. The first, the Greenwood Chamber of

Commerce, influenced policies in the black community beginning in the early 1950s, and received plaudits for its role in bringing together area businesses into one body that could influence local policies. By the early 1960s, citizens attacked the Chamber of Commerce for not doing enough. Even though the group "has talked of ways and means of improving Negro business, but the fact that Negro business has not only failed to improve, but has diminished consistently, sticks out like a sore thumb."[195] The other organization that the public scrutinized in Tulsa was the NAACP. While the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce dealt primarily with the businesses, the NAACP devoted its energy solely to the cause of civil rights. As a result, its inactivity magnified. The issue evoked an intensified level of criticism from those who expected the organization, on account of its national connections and seemingly greater resources, to be able to generate greater change than any of the others in the city. The rhetorical questions asked of the Tulsa NAACP branch chastised the organization for its inadequacy in generating change in Tulsa, "What action has our local branch taken to cure the ugly features of inequality in Tulsa? What single demonstration? What single lawsuit has grown out of our togetherness here as a local chapter, a single link in this mighty movement across the nation?[196]

The vehement outrage voiced by members of the NAACP in Tulsa only partially detailed the list of grievances held by the city's black citizens against city leaders, employers, and other blacks who displayed little passion for the fight for equal rights that consumed many African Americans. One editorialist voiced his disgust saying,

> Eighty percent of the industries in Tulsa maintain a policy of discrimination that makes no provision for employment of people of color. We've been undergoing a run-around in the City Hall and the County Court House so long we're almost dizzy from the chase, and the reason they offer for not hiring a Negro is that there are no vacancies for us…We can't borrow money like other people from the banks only banks we have because we have to bank what little money we got; We can't buy property in certain areas because we haven't achieved what it takes to be accepted by the exclusive. All this and more items that could be named keep us in the valley of depression, blots out any opportunity to build healthy aspiration and in the main leaves us without hope, either for ourselves or for our children…Maybe we're not satisfied, just resigned to the fate of living our lives among the living dead. And maybe, to the dead it is too much to hope that these dead will be quickened by proposing that the multiplied use of the ballot; that the pooling of 12 or 15,000 peoples 'one' vote could change this.[197]

The continued accumulation of injustices suffered by black Tulsans combined with the successful efforts of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council reignited hope among the community that Tulsa's activists could duplicate the achievements of their neighbors to the south.

By 1960, African Americans made efforts to reach out to the managers of businesses that count among their customers a sizable number of blacks. However, after discussions with the owners of the Froug's, Brown Dunkin, and Field's stores nothing changed. The discussion ended with the stores explaining the tough situation they were in. They worried about what would happen to their individual business if they voluntarily desegregated before the stores that sold similar products in the same area. Concerned about giving away business with no guaranteed reciprocal benefits, the trio of store

managers "agreed in principle that racial discrimination should be eliminated." This statement came with the provision from the three, "that they as individual companies will not openly advocate fair employment practices unless their competitors will agree to do the same."[198] Other downtown stores implemented similar policies. One business owner offered his opinion on the matter, "We will try to continue to do business on the basis of what the majority of our customers prefer whether it relates to employment, promotions, sales, etc." Mirroring the statement of the other store managers, he continued, "As far as integrating our working force at all levels, we know it will happen but we have no immediate plans and intentions of pioneering in this area."[199] The next logical step for those pursuing civil rights would be to find additional stores willing to pledge support for integration in businesses.

Not all businesses opposed integration in Tulsa, and the *Oklahoma Eagle* made a habit of recognizing those that served or employed African Americans. Among those stores listed as being friendly to the black community included, "Crown Drug Store…Banfield's Meat Market, Timmerman's Meat Market, King's Grocery, the Ben Franklin Store, and several others."[200] Even though some businesses supported the cause, the vast majority still enthusiastically retained their right to refuse service to anyone that they deemed not in their best interest to serve. The *Eagle* also used the opposite method in an attempt to shame uncooperative businesses into integrating their establishments. In addition, by publishing the "names of business who do not cater to Negroes," the paper made sure that no one could be confused by not admitting blacks to their stores as,

"pictures will be taken of anyone who continues to patronize places that refuse to hire Negroes."[201] While voter registration drives and discussions with business owners continued, this action represented a shift in the type of methods used to fight for equality and adumbrated the more active types of resistance that lay ahead.

The civil rights movement in Tulsa received some much needed encouragement when the unofficial national leader of the movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., traveled to Tulsa to deliver an address at the First Baptist Church in the summer of 1960. Met at the airport by over one hundred supporters, the group escorted King in a parade of cars through the streets to the church.[202] Introduced by the Reverend Ben H. Hill as "the living Moses," the primary theme of King's speech called for unity among all people fighting for the cause of civil rights saying, "God loves all His children. All men are made in his image and we must work together until freedom is obtained for all." He also stressed the dire need for civil rights to succeed for the sake of the county first explaining, "If democracy is to live, segregation must die." After emphasizing the successes had by the movements throughout the country, King offered his most searing message, "We must learn to live together as brothers or die as fools."[203] He then offered one piece of advice essential to the sit-in movement, "The white man must have love in the coming new world. Until then, we will meet his physical force with our soul force; his tendency to inflict with our tendency to endure, and his hate with our love. And one day, our capacity to suffer will overcome him."[204] Having been thoroughly inspired by King

the audience returned home eager to demonstrate that his message had been taken to heart.

The increased aggressiveness of the Tulsa civil rights movement saw its first new type of activity in 1963, when a group called the "Citizens for Progress" introduced a petition that aimed to desegregate any business that could be called a "public" facility. Attempting to gain the support of the mayor of Tulsa, the group planned to circulate the petition and gain a large number of signatures, thinking that this would spur the mayor into proceeding with some sort of ban on segregation. Headed by the Reverend Ben H. Hill, who also served as president of the North Tulsa Ministerial Alliance and the Tulsa chapter of the NAACP, the petition reversed the course of previously lackadaisical efforts of the organizations. However, it did not persuade any city officials to take any immediate action. Instead they tabled the idea for further discussion, which allowed them push back any possible issues until some undetermined future date.[205]

While community groups made little progress towards the eventual integration of all public businesses in Tulsa, churches dealt with the still unanswered question of how much they would contribute to the more aggressive civil rights tactics undertaken by civic organizations. The first major step towards churches supporting the civil rights movement occurred when the Oklahoma Council of Churches met and composed a document that supported ending discrimination in churches statewide. The manifesto launched a unified affirmation of civil rights that said, "We call upon local churches and congregations to make clear to the community at large that the churches and

congregations are open for worship to all persons irrespective of race, religion, or national origin."[206] This statement mirrored the declaration made in February the prior year by the Tulsa Council of Churches that opened that city's churches to, "all men who seek to flee the wrath-that is to come and get the salvation offered through the gospel, are welcome."[207] The black residents of Tulsa warmly received the news. However, even the 118 churches in Tulsa that signed the statement represented 60 percent of the churches that had membership in the council. While the church's action provided a positive step in race relations within the church, many churches still refrained from welcoming blacks into their services.[208]

The progress being made in the civil rights movement did not please all Tulsans. At a bi-racial meeting of the City Commission organized with the intent of hearing the public opinion on the public accommodations ordinance discussed tempers flashed during the proceedings. . The meeting started off calmly enough, and a relatively cordial atmosphere endured for much of the assembly. During the meeting Ted Cotton, the former leader of the White Citizens Council of Tulsa and the current leader of a group called the United Conservatives, attacked two of the civic organizations that had arranged the forum and were heavily invested in the civil rights cause, the Urban League and the NAACP. He stated that, "The NAACP is not and never has been for the Negro people." His claims grew more and more outrageous. He even tried to explain that, "[it was a] myth that white men are exploiting the Negro. It is the Negro leaders who are exploiting the masses."[209] While this example exhibited the radical opposition in Tulsa to African-

American equal rights, common people also displayed a reluctance towards black progress. When the Tulsa Planning Commission confirmed zoning plans for the first new apartment building for blacks since 1921 the complex failed to pass the board as a result of petition filed by 120 housewives. They claimed that bringing a large number of blacks in the area would funnel too many children into the nearby elementary school and it also would result in decreased property values. While not as virulent in its language, the actions of the housewives displayed quite clearly the opposition that many whites throughout Tulsa still maintained.[210]

Driven by two organizations headed by Tulsa young people, the Student Committee on Human Rights and the Youth Council of the NAACP, demonstrations began in March of 1964 with a Freedom March Parade. The march planned to draw attention to a five-fold program of issues including; "voter registration, Federal Civil Rights legislation now pending in Washington DC, Strong city ordinances on public accommodations, and better job opportunities."[211] Moving on a pre-planned route from the Vernon African Methodist Episcopal Church to Boulder Park, about 400 marchers carried signs displaying civil rights mottos like, "Jim Crow Must Go," "We Shall Overcome," and "Freedom Now."[212] The march went off without difficulty; many of the demonstrators continued their efforts fighting injustice.

After the Freedom March, a sit-in organized by the Congress of Racial Equality occurred at the Apache Circle Restaurant. Fifty-four members led by president Milton T. Goodwin entered the business, seated themselves, and asked for service. The owner of

the restaurant, who was dining when the protestors entered, told them to leave and then called the police when the continued to occupy the store. He then charged the whole group with trespassing. The CORE members maintained their sitting positions upon the arrival of the police, forcing the officers to carry them out of the restaurant and into a waiting transport to the jail. Having planned the demonstration ahead of time, the group's lawyers arrived quickly and negotiated their release.[213]

Shortly after the Apache Circle sit-in, Clara Luper, along with white University to Tulsa student Dan Dryz, led a group of approximately eighty youths to Borden's Cafeteria to attempt to gain service. About twenty marchers entered the restaurant and tried to pick up food from the cafeteria line only to be turned away, and all the food removed from the line. After being refused service, the group declined to move out of the store and the remainder of the protestors surrounded the front and back doors of the restaurant. The manager called the police who dispersed the crowd, but not until nineteen demonstrators were arrested for trespassing and taken to jail along with twenty other juveniles who were not arrested.[214]

The sit-ins continued for the next several months at various restaurants throughout Tulsa with some success. Many restaurants conceded to integration after being contacted by the civil rights organizations in the hope that they could avoid having a sit-in protest happen in their store. Others held out and refused to integrate and, as a result, demonstrators picketed outside of their business. This forced customers to cross the picket line to receive service at the store, and kept many people from shopping at stores

that insisted on segregation. Much like the situation in Oklahoma City, the drastic changes in the civil rights movement in Tulsa occurred when the youth organizations finally became involved in the movements. Both the CORE chapter in Tulsa and the NAACP Youth Council had been established within the previous two years, yet still managed to force the Tulsa City Commission to pass an accommodations ordinance with three months of the beginning of their sit-ins.[215] All of the calls for increased dedication and action from black adults, quickly were quelled once the youths and young adults took the initiative and adopted the leadership of the movement themselves.

The rapidity with which the city government passed legislation that allowed for blacks to enjoy equal rights in Tulsa demonstrated a clear difference between the political leaders in Tulsa and those in Oklahoma City. Within a few months of the beginning of the demonstrations by the NAACP Youth Council, CORE, and other unaffiliated activists, the Tulsa city government passed a public accommodations ordinance that assured that restaurants and other facilities open to the public could not ban patrons upon race only. While many store owners and managers desegregated their businesses prior to 1964, the state legislature forced those who still retained segregationist policies to integrate their stores. Despite years of attempts by sit-ins, parades, and appeals to city politicians the city reacted with a mix of indifference to the plight of African Americans and unwillingness to alienate themselves from their constituents. The movement came at a later date to Tulsa, but the quick response of officials demonstrated a strong sense of empathy and responsibility to their black citizenry that Oklahoma City leaders

continually deemed unnecessary. Perhaps because of the riot years earlier the government leaders in Tulsa responded much more quickly to the demands of their black citizens after sit-ins began. City officials avoided the protracted desegregation struggle by acknowledging the grievances of Tulsa's African-American community. Despite Oklahoma City's hope to be seen as a "progressive" city, the quick action of their northern neighbor after the demonstrations displayed a much more enlightened attitude towards racial matters.

Louisville, Kentucky shared similarities to the conditions in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Called "the most 'Southern' of the border states," Louisville retained the same attitudes toward race that Oklahoma did.[216] Even after emancipation those blacks that lived or moved into Kentucky remained second-class citizens both socially and economically. The early economies of both the cities in Oklahoma and Louisville operated primarily around a single economic source. In Oklahoma City oil reigned, while Louisville remained an industrial center that relied upon it central location along the Ohio River to serve as a mid-point between the east coast and southwest markets for shipping and receiving goods. This concentrated the wealth of each city in the hands of a few, white businessmen. Since the economy was based around a single source in each city, black workers were often forced to work at whatever leftover jobs were available. The characteristics of each city's economy made it increasingly difficult for a black person to break out of crippling poverty or to increase their social standing.

The first two decades of the twentieth-century proved to be a positive period for the blacks of Louisville. Several railroad companies had hubs located in Louisville, and the tracks offered careers for black men better than the typical agricultural occupations available to them. Consequently, a great many of blacks found themselves in the employ of the railroads. Like in others places of employment, blacks still found themselves in the hardest, hottest, and dirtiest positions in either the rail yards or on the locomotives but the job "remained desirable work for blacks, as it usually meant competitively high wages and job security."[217] The rail lines also offered a reason for businesses to relocate to Louisville, as the ease of shipping by train could be an attractive commodity for those looking to minimize costs. Even though railroad companies established black employment in the late nineteenth-century in Louisville, the growing labor movement and the early years of the Great Depression combined to force African Americans out of positions they occupied for nearly forty years. When whites in other jobs found themselves out of work, they became willing to take any position available including those that they believed were beneath them only a few months earlier.[218]

The flood pushed bleak situations of Louisville's African Americans into dramatically worse conditions. In 1937 a flood swept through the city destroying blocks of the city most of which was located in the floodplain of the Ohio River. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the homes left under water belonged to blacks as whites ensured that their homes were located out of the reach of the rising waters. Following the devastation left by the raging torrents, the black community needed to be rebuilt from the ground up.

Since the entire structure of black community had been destroyed in the flood, the community could only be rebuilt slowly as little help arrived from whites in Louisville. The loss of jobs that resulted from the flood delayed the rebuild even longer. Much like the black community in Tulsa, the self-sufficient city within a city found that rebuilding after a disaster brought out the worst among the white citizens. Those whites still scrambling to find any sort of employment during the years of the Great Depression quickly filled any jobs now available leaving those previously self-employed blacks with nowhere to turn to for an occupation. With blacks and whites engaged in cutthroat competition for jobs, violence occasionally erupted further heating an already tense atmosphere in Louisville.[219]

The lean years that followed the 1937 flood gradually improved as the African Americans who remained in Louisville rebuilt their homes and businesses. When World War II began job opportunities once again appeared for blacks either through service in the military or in the openings left behind by whites during their military service. Still housing remained an issue for blacks and those that tried to move out of the area prescribed to blacks quickly found out. In a story related by author George C. Wright, a white couple bought a house for a black man in the late 1950s in a Louisville neighborhood and after his neighbors uncovered the true owner of the home they insisted that the home be sold. When the man refused to accede to their demands, an anonymous person bombed the home, and the city government arrested the couple for sedition efficiently and effectively discouraging anyone else from following the same plan to fight

housing discrimination. Blacks who tried to display an increased social standing by purchasing homes outside of African-American neighborhoods quickly discovered that not only were white citizens opposed to black success, but that government officials also resisted the idea that blacks could attain the same status as whites in any way.[220]

Much like the politicians in Oklahoma City and Tulsa when they positioned their city and state as "progressive" and forward thinking on racial matters, the government leaders of Louisville portrayed their city as "liberal" in an effort to attract businesses despite evidence that suggested that prejudices in both cities still remained. The manner in which each responded to demands of black equality also mirrored the other. In both cities, the government publicly claimed support but refused to back their pronouncements with legislation. The hypocrisy also extended to the state governors as well. After the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision, Kentucky governor Lawrence Wetherby assured the state's African Americans that he would, "do whatever is necessary to comply with the law."[221] Oklahoma's governor similarly proclaimed that he would do anything demanded him by the government concerning school desegregation.

In both states, the *Brown* decision began an increasingly divisive era for black-white relations. Allowing blacks an education at their own black high schools and institutions of higher learning displayed a well-meaning, and indeed "progressive" racial agenda, but integration with their own children serving as guinea pigs for a federally-initiated program proved to be one step too far for the parents of Louisville. After receiving word that a second version of the Supreme Court's decision would arrive

shortly, the city's board of education tabled the matter for the year and pledged to revisit their decision following the further exploration of the country's highest court.[222]

Following the assertions by the governors, the black citizens of each city waited to see when and how the implementation of school desegregation would occur. Before the passage of *Brown,* the teachers in black schools in Kentucky were all white because. Historian George C. Wright elaborated, "Hiring whites to teach black students was a way of ensuring that blacks would be educated in such a way that they would not be likely to challenge the white establishment."[223] After the high court's decision, the situation improved only incrementally. Although the desegregation of the schools went by without almost any incident, the implementation left something to be desired. The Louisville School District allowed for parents to choose where their children would attend school, and inevitably the white children tended to remain where they were. Black children who attempted to gain access to the formerly all-white schools often met resistance unless they exhibited some outstanding or attractive quality that increased the prestige of the school they entered. Ultimately, the desegregation decision altered very little in terms of the racial distribution of students in the Louisville school district. Black and white students generally still went to the schools they attended prior to the integration effort. The schools showed only token integration in an attempt to mollify black parents fighting for equality in their children's schooling.[224]

While the fight continued for equality in schooling, another group decided to meet a different facet of segregation head-on. Businesses in Louisville, especially restaurants

had racial policies similar to those in Oklahoma. Each store created its own policies on segregation. Restaurant owners forced blacks to pick up their meal in the rear of the store or at a separate counter so that their entrance would not offend the store's white patrons. Beginning in 1956, the local chapter of the NAACP Youth Council began sitting in at local variety stores to force the owners to give them service. Led by local black; Lyman Johnson, the variety stores held out for almost six months before they caved to the demands of the Youth Council.[225] Encouraged by their early successes the group then set a larger goal, to end segregation at all public facilities and ensure the passage of a public accommodations bill that guaranteed service for blacks at any business in the city. Exactly as in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the mayor and city council rebuffed the group and neglected to commit to any demonstrable change in legislative form.[226]

Focusing only on the city government ignores the wider range of the racial problems that infiltrated Louisville. Louisville advocated the right of blacks to vote beginning in the 1920s. And unlike other Southern cities, locals did not actively prevent blacks from participation in the electoral process.[227] Much like Oklahoma City, Louisville did not have a history of widespread violence concerning the registration of black voters. While this should have encouraged blacks in Louisville to vote freely, that was rarely the case. Instead, those activists willing to demonstrate for black rights found themselves hamstrung by a disinterested community. When the Louisville Youth Council resumed sit-ins at a local Walgreens drugstore in 1958, the lack of community support,

relegated the activism to a brief sputter in the city's history rather than a clear step forward for the movement.[228]

Eventually, the NAACP Youth Council gained allies in the form of CORE in addition to the increasing amenability of both black and white activists who remained unaffiliated with any specific organization. Even with the support gained by the Youth Council, activism in Louisville still lacked the traction necessary to create a public accommodations ordinance. While the Youth Council no longer worried about a rivalry from the local CORE chapter, the small number of CORE members could do little to help the Council in terms of large-scale activism. Rather than providing a major boost to the civil rights cause, the elimination of the antagonism just offered some sense of unity among the civil rights organizations in the city. Indeed, the rapprochement of CORE and the Youth Council only eliminated a distraction rather than providing a tangible advancement of the cause in the city.

Despite the continuous series of obstacles being placed in their path, the determination of the members of the Youth Council and other Louisville activists would not let the failure of their previous efforts prevent the continuation of the movement. After the announcement of a showing of the film *Porgy and Bess* at the local Brown Theater at the end of 1959, the members uncovered their next opportunity for fighting segregation in the city. The film, based on the George Gershwin opera of the same name, focused on the struggles of African-American characters, and the inability of the black students to view the picture illustrated the cruel irony of being black in the middle

decades of the twentieth century. The group challenged the theater by having two members protesting each showing of the film at the venue. In an effort to lend their effort a more official basis, several students met with the city's mayor during a regularly scheduled community dialogue meeting and vented their frustration with the lack of a public accommodations ordinance in Louisville. Despite the response from the mayor, the rebuffed protestors returned to their previous methods at the theater. Once again the Youth Council along with fellow supporters from a local church group, the Unitarians for Social Action, failed to discourage the theater from showing the film, but did not initiate any major legislative action either.[229]

After years of activism, the civil rights organizations finally realized their ultimate goal when the Kentucky governor passed a public accommodations ordinance in 1963. The final step reflected the similarities between Kentucky and Oklahoma as much as the genesis of the movement resembled the other only a decade earlier. Only with the passage of statewide legislation did any of the cities, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, or Louisville, become truly open to African Americans. Legislation only represented the final step in the process for the civil rights activists in each city. The passage of a law received attention for its significance, but the development would never have emerged except for the direct action practices of the Youth Council. The primary factors that reflected the similar histories of civil rights in these three cities include the early genesis of active demonstrations in each, and the youthfulness of a sizable number of the movement's major contributors. Under the strong leadership of a determined adult

sponsor the Youth Council and other young activists forced the city and state governments to respond, even if the response garnered was not what the activists hoped to hear.

[172] Hannibal Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1998) 1.
[173] Johnson, *Black Wall Street*, 9.
[174] United States Commission on Civil Rights- Oklahoma Advisory Committee, *School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), 3.
[175] United States Commission on Civil Rights-Oklahoma Advisory Committee, *School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report* (Washington, DC:, US Government Printing Office, 1976), 16.
[176] "Letters to the Editor," by E.L.W., in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, February 12, 1959.
[177] Ibid.
[178] "Fear is a Big Factor in Hiring Negroes," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* January 24, 1957.
[179] Ibid.
[180] "Greenwood Area-'Hotspot For Community Diseases," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* August 11, 1960.
[181] Johnson, *Black Wall Street*, 107.
[182] "Tulsa Urban League Makes Strides Since Its Organization in April 1954," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 7, 1960.
[183] "Second Class And Satisfied We Ought To Be Kicked," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 7, 1960.
[184] Karl E. Lutze, *Awakening to Equality: A Young White Pastor at the Dawn of Civil Rights* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 127.
[185] "Registration Drive…Oct. 9 and 10," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* October 9, 1958.
[186] "Santa Claus Is Mad At North Tulsa," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* December 24, 1959.
[187] "A Start in the Right Direction," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* November 26, 1959.
[188] United States Commission on Civil Rights-Oklahoma Advisory Committee, *School Desegregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma: A Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 37.
[189] Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street,* 111.
[190]"Who Cares in Tulsa," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* August 13, 1959.
[191] Ibid.

[192] "Tulsa NAACP Doesn't Plan to Act Now," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* August 28th, 1958.
[193] "Letters to the Editor," written by S.L. from Tulsa, in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* January 22, 1959.
[194] "Letters to the Editor," written by T.M. in Tulsa, in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, June 25, 1959.
[195] "Strangled By the Half Committed," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* August 26, 1961.
[196] "Our Turn To Move," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, December 12, 1960.
[197] "Same Theme—Same Purpose," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, June 16, 1960.
[198]"Negroes and….Downtown Tulsa," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* July 28, 1960. (This headline used by the *Eagle* for a series of articles during the summer of 1960)
[199]"Negroes and…. Downtown Tulsa," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* July 21, 1960.
[200] "Area Merchants Integrate Stores," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* February 16, 1961.
[201] "Operation: Consolidation," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, May 25, 1961.
[202] "Martin L. King At 1st Baptist," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* July 28, 1960.
[203] "Live Together As Brothers Or Die Together As Fools," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* August 4, 1960.
[204] "Live Together As Brothers Or Die Together As Fools," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, August 4, 1960.
[205] "Tulsa 'Citizens For Progress' Circulate Petition to Erase Discrimination Here," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, May 9, 1963.
[206] "Religious Leaders Take Stand On Segregation In Churches," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, July 18, 1963.
[207] "Where Unity Begins," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* February 22, 1962.
[208] Ibid.
[209] "White Citizens Council Leader Blasts UL, NAACP" in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* December 19, 1963.
[210] "120 White Housewives File Protest Against Infiltration Of Negro Children In Schools," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, February 20, 1964.
[211] "Protest March Scheduled Here Mon.," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* March 26, 1964.
[212] "Clara Luper, Militant Fighter, And OC Youths Join March," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 2, 1964.
[213] "CORE Leaders Stage Sit-In At Segregated Apache Circle," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* April 2, 1964.
[214] "Arrests Follow Tulsa's 1st Rights Demonstration," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* April 2, 1964.
[215] "City Commission Passes Ordinance," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, July 2, 1964.
[216] Francis Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance*, 30.
[217] Russell Thomas Wigginton, "Both Sides of the Tracks: Louisville and Nashville Railroad's African-American Workers in Louisville, Kentucky, 1915-1946," (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001), 24.
[218] Russell Thomas Wigginton, "Both Sides of the Tracks," 24-5.
[219] Mervin Aubespin, Kenneth Clay, and J. Blaine Hudson, *Two Centuries of Black Lousiville: A Photographic History* (Louisville, KY: Butler Book, 2011), 139.
[220] George C. Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations in Louisville: A Long and Difficult Struggle in a 'Liberal' Border City," in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* eds. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 194.

[221] Quoted in Francis Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance*, 30.
[222] Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 48.
[223] George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil: Blacks in Louisville, Kentucky, 1865-1930* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 70.
[224] George C. Wright, *Life Behind a Veil,* 193-4.
[225] George C. Wright, "Desegregation of Public Accommodations in Louisville," 196.
[226] Ibid.
[227] "Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 9.
[228] Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 81.
[229] Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

By the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, significant change had been generated in Oklahoma City politics. Spurred on by the actions of the NAACP Youth Council and their allies in fighting segregation, the Oklahoma City City Council, "Went on record for the first time officially as opposed to discrimination based on race, creed, or color."[230] Perhaps an even bigger victory came with from the legislation that preceded it. As Jimmy Stewart wrote in *The Black Dispatch*, "This follows closely on the heels of a similar bill, SB 273, passed by our state senate recently, 34-0, which officially declared the state policy as opposed to segregation."[231] The announcement provided a welcome assurance of support for the black community that had been shot down only a few years previously. The government finally passed the type of legislation that the *Black Dispatch* hoped for a decade earlier when it declared, "What we really need in Oklahoma is a civil rights law which requires all persons who operate public facilities to give uniform treatment to all American citizens who enter their doors. It is going to take the underpinning of law to give minority groups in America the substantial guarantees of the constitution."[232] With the law now supporting them, the activists reveled in the accomplishment of their initial goal. Without a central goal, the civil rights movements in

Oklahoma City and Tulsa fractured as activists found specific areas to focus their efforts upon.

One particular area, the struggle for school desegregation, continued to attract the attention of activists into the mid-1970s as government officials failed to implement a system that generated a timely course of action in Oklahoma City. Unhappy with the school board's promises about future school integration, Dr. A. L. Dowell tried to enroll his son at high school not assigned to their neighborhood. His son, who attended the all-black Douglass High School, attempted to take an electronics course not offered by his school at the all-white Northeast High School. The failure to develop a suitable plan to allow his son to take the course led Dowell to sue the Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools Jack Parker, and Assistant Superintendent Merle Burr in 1961. Accusing the defendants of running a "qualified biracial school district," Dowell resorted to legal means to rectify the situation. The case, delayed by multiple appeals from the school system, continued until 1967 when Judge Luther Bohanon ordered the district to find an operable plan for desegregating the schools. Bohanon stated in his decision,

> "This litigation has been frustratingly interminable, not because of insuperable difficulties of implementation of the commands of the Supreme Court of the United States, but because of the unpardonable recalcitrance of the Defendant School Board and the Superintendant of Schools to come forward with a constitutional plan for the desegregation of the schools of this District."[233]

The Oklahoma City school districts previously adopted the Cluster Plan for integrating schools. This plan made each school have a sister school based on proximity

to the student's residence. Each student attended the school closest to their home for the majority of their classes. If the school failed to offer a course that the student wished to take, the student could attend the sister school for that class but for only that class. Once the student completed the course they returned to their primary school for the remainder of their classes. This new plan adopted by the school district derived its name from its originator, Dr. John Finger. The Finger Plan developed new groupings for the schools in the Oklahoma City system and also changed the areas from which the city's high schools received their students. [234] However, it became increasingly clear by the end of the 1970-1971 school year that the new plan had the same problems as the old, a school board and superintendent uninterested in desegregating the schools. Despite the pleading of the school districts that they obeyed the court's earlier ruling, Judge Bohanon declared that the case once again would be discussed. The primary reasoning behind the recommencing of the proceedings came from enrollment statistics that showed that, "65 of the city's 110 schools were at least 99 percent white or 99 percent black."[235]

The plan would finally be implemented by the school district in 1973. Still some people did not see this as a significant victory over segregated schooling.[236] One anonymous individual commented that, "Those affluent persons who still live here, even the cocktail party liberals, are sending their youngsters to private schools, so they don't care."[237] This problem had existed since the government first confirmed its acceptance of school desegregation. Governor J. Howard Edmondson transferred all three of his children to an all-white school district claiming, "his children had made friends at an all-

white high school before he moved into the Governor's mansion."[238] Regardless of the truth of the statement, the facts still existed that, "The system is working this: If you are white and live in an integrated school district you can transfer to an all-white school district with no delay. On the other hand, if you are a Negro, you can transfer within so-called Negro districts." The actions of the governor continued to display the duplicitous nature of the major players behind settlements. Whites followed one set of rules, while blacks did not receive equal consideration. The issue of government officials claiming support for initiatives that gave blacks more rights and then failing to implement them was demonstrated again here, and continued to be a common occurrence for at least two decades after the passage of *Brown.*[239]

The geographical arrangement of blacks and whites in Oklahoma City clearly affected the initial acceptance of those in power in government of the Brown decision. Blacks typically did not live near whites within the city limits or on the outskirts of the city. A clear division existed between black parts of town, and white parts of town. Discrimination could still be seen on even a neighborhood-to-neighborhood basis. Perhaps more mystifying the situation did not seem to be rectified even after the passage of civil rights acts and President Johnson's housing initiatives. In fact, the situation actually seemed to be getting worse. Specific neighborhoods went from being partially integrated to being enclaves for separate ethnicities. Whites evacuated neighborhoods as they saw blacks buying houses as the first step towards falling property values. Frequently, when a certain percentage of blacks entered a neighborhood, a "tipping

point" occurred and whites moved out. As whites moved out and other blacks filled the newly vacant homes, the neighborhoods effectively become resegregated. When laws and official policies no longer existed to enforce segregation, the decisions of homeowners reinforced the status quo that had been in place since African Americans first attempted to move in to previously all-white neighborhood. While legislation did not dictate who could live in certain areas, the decisions of homeowners prevented integration from occurring on a large-scale basis.[240]

The Oklahoma City sit-in movement failed to attract the attention of the nation for several reasons. The first and likely best explanation for the lack of coverage of the events outside of Oklahoma is that the state and city government officials desired to showcase the state as a progressive state. The officials envisioned the state as an up-and-coming municipal area, and being known as a bastion of racism would obviously subvert their attempts at improving the state's image. Having such an image would also likely discourage national businesses from expanding corporate headquarters or branches to Oklahoma. Governor Henry Bellmon even appealed to the closest thing to many businessmen's heart, the pocketbook, when he addressed their concerns; "We've found that industries will not locate in communities where segregation exists. I think we are going to see a change in these community leaders viewpoint when they see how segregation can be costly."[241] As a result, government officials encouraged businesses to desegregate.

Civil rights in Tulsa faced a different challenge than the one in Oklahoma City. The race riot in the 1920s cemented the black community in North Tulsa. After its near destruction, the Greenwood neighborhood understandably barricaded itself. Hoping to ensure their survival, the action succeeded in preserving the neighborhood at the cost of almost complete isolation for African Americans in Tulsa. This pleased those whites that believed in the separation of races. Unbeknownst to the remaining African Americans in Tulsa, the isolation intended as a defense mechanism would be the same thing that they struggled to escape thirty years later. The struggle to emerge from the ruins of the riot and the subsequent era of racial restrictions caused black Tulsans to refer to the fact that their hometown, "still qualifies as the most segregated city in the world."[242]

As the sit-ins in Oklahoma City gradually overturned segregationist policies, Tulsa's citizens prepared for the demonstrations to move north into their city. Like Oklahoma City the reactions of Tulsans displayed a variety of opinions concerning the actions of the NAACP Youth Council. Some, content with the current rate of progress, saw little need to follow the example illustrated in Oklahoma City. One Tulsa woman, Janene McGuire elaborated, "Integration is progressing in Tulsa in a natural and quiet way…We have nice colored people in Tulsa who never cause trouble; let's not let it start now."[243] Others voiced the opposite opinion and called for increased activity by Tulsa's blacks. The Reverend William C. King provided this perspective, "Until the conscience of the people of Tulsa is sufficiently awakened to give the Negro equal rights, then let's have more demonstrations-more sit-ins."[244] The responses of some of Tulsa's citizens

attacked the movement in its entirety. One individual wrote an excoriating letter to the editor of the *Tulsa World* vilifying all of the participants in the demonstrations, "It seems these people don't choose to earn what they desire; they want selfish laws passed giving them what they haven't cared to earned." The letter's author continued, "It'll always be nature and that's God's will at work, for people to seek their own peers."[245] Despite all the differing opinions of Tulsa citizens on race and potential future demonstrations, the citizens knew that the movement that Oklahoma City experienced would eventually spread to Tulsa. The rapidity at which change was accomplished in Tulsa can be linked to directly to the influence of the Oklahoma City sit-ins. Clara Luper provided a leader experienced in both demonstration activities and recruiting techniques. However, by the time that the movement reached Tulsa volunteers for the sit-ins left little need for recruitment. This resulted in the early focus in Tulsa being on gaining supporters for civil rights from those individuals that refrained from active participation.

Both Oklahoma City and Tulsa experienced decidedly different movements towards achieving civil rights than other Southern states. Of CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC, the emergent organizations that keyed many of the successful efforts throughout the South, only CORE achieved any semblance of influence, and primarily acted supporting role to Clara Luper and the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council. The fact that Luper played the key role in the Oklahoma City movement in itself signaled a unique aspect of civil rights in Oklahoma City simply because the primary leader and organizer of the sit-ins was a woman. Black males, often Baptist preachers, typically took the

leadership role throughout the Southern civil rights movements and managed an older cohort of volunteer activists than what Luper typically directed in her efforts. In a distinct difference from the Southern movement, the civil rights movement in Oklahoma received little support from the church. While some pastors and parishioners gave freely of their time and money, the city's churches made no concerted effort offering their help to the movement. The reluctance of some pastors to advocate the movement could be linked the mixed feelings within each congregation about the non-violent direct action methods that the civil rights groups were using. However, a more in depth study of the sentiments behind the pastors refusing to champion the civil rights activities within the state.

The people of Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville all maintained distinctively Southern attitudes towards race during the decade examined, but each was located in a border state. Each city found itself struggling to reconcile its current racial attitude with its cultural heritage. While individuals from each state certainly fought for the South during the Civil War, others fought for the Union. Without a definitive link to the Confederacy, the view of race remained muddled in the border states. Jumping to 1954-1964, the time period covered in this thesis, views on race had changed but the end result was still similar. Whites in Oklahoma, Kentucky, and other border states around the country still maintained confused and often uncertain attitudes concerning blacks. When the *Brown* Supreme Court Decision was handed down, Oklahoma's government officials reacted in a calm and measured manner. But, in the period after the initial public reaction, the more honest opinions on the decision began to seep out. Officials voiced their

concerns about budget issues and the feasibility of integration, while white parents explored options to keep their children from ending up at an overwhelmingly black school. Ultimately, painting the government or citizens as racist simplifies a multifaceted issue into something inaccurate. Many individuals struggled with their own sentiments about African Americans and these ideas often evolved as whites became more comfortable with the possibility of integrated schools, public facilities, and governments.

This uncertainty about their own feelings concerning race cannot be linked solely to the cities in border states. While the South was demonized by many public figures for the gross displays of racial violence aired upon television screens across the nation, the region's people were often linked with the most despicable and violent of the racists in the South. Though common throughout the South, the racism that captured the attention of the nation erupted from those individuals, sheriffs, police officers and Ku Klux Klan members that represented the worst of the South. In addition, these individuals failed to understand the nation's developing news media. Civil rights leaders, whose decades of verbal protests had resulted in little government intervention, benefitted from the increasing use of video cameras by media outlets. Police officers unleashing violent attack dogs provided an image that burned deeply into the psyche of the nation. However, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville never came close to dealing with reactions as violent as those in Deep South. Why is this? With a similar view on race as the South, why would the reactions to Civil Rights demonstrations in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville be so drastically different from those throughout the region? Indeed, the sit-ins

in the border cities witnessed an almost opposite reaction than those throughout the Deep South. Even if civil rights organizations specifically chose cities based upon the likelihood of a violent response by local authorities, why was a similar response not seen in the border cities?

The first reason behind the tempered reaction in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville lies in the concerned reactions by the business owners whose stores were targeted first. The small demonstrations were each localized to a lunch counter or dining room of a particular store, limiting the provocation of the general public. Rather than a city-wide march down one of the primary arteries of the city, the protesting groups respectfully entered and requested service at the store. Whereas the major Southern demonstrations intended to spur a violent reaction, these sit-ins provided defiance displayed in a different manner. The groups in each city dealt with of store managers denying service, threats from other patrons, and scattered violent acts during their demonstrations, but the protestor's refusal to respond in kind defused these situations as much as possible. In addition, the stores location in majority black sections of each city forced the hands of the business owners. The economic reprisal ensured by boycotts of specific stores that refused to give equal treatment to blacks left storeowners with no choice but to serve blacks if they wanted to remain profitable. Left with the options of integrating their business, facing a boycott that could put the store out of business, or moving to another location, storeowners capitulated to the demands of the African-American community.

Unlike the situation in the Deep South, blacks found themselves in a greater position of power in the three border cities of Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville. Each city had distinctive residential and business areas where almost the entire black population lived, worked, and attended school. Even though decades long practices of racial intolerance and de facto segregation had forced blacks into small section of the city, these unofficial policies created largely self-sufficient communities within the larger city. Without a dependence on white-owned businesses that refused to integrate, blacks could more effectively challenge segregation policies simply because they had the option to go to another store that supported their cause. Another difference that distances border states from the Deep South was the ability of blacks to vote. Throughout the South blacks were routinely disenfranchised to the extent that some counties in Alabama and Mississippi had never had a black vote in an election. In border states no one prevented blacks from voting. Instead motivating blacks to register and vote became the major issue. The tensions in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville were lessened because voting provided blacks with another avenue for generating change beyond sit-ins or other types of demonstrations.

This study was intended to supplement the growing trend of community studies in civil rights literature. While Southern communities have been studied extensively in this manner, border states are often ignored. By contrasting three cities in two different states that had largely been ignored, I intended to provide an entry point for further studies of each of these states. The importance of this thesis lies in the differences between these

cities and those in the Deep South or north during the civil rights era. Both the Deep South and the North had characteristics that distinguished it from the movement in the other region. However, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Louisville display a mélange of influences that make it impossible to easily place any of these cities squarely in either one of these commonly accepted regions. The unique qualities of this thesis arise from not only the distinctive attributes of each city, but also from the commonalities that link them as a major component of a border state.

In Oklahoma, local and state officials generally implemented a more moderate approach to civil rights reform than their counterparts in the South and the official's willingness to obey federal legislation demonstrated the state's intention to become the state within the region that contained forward-thinking and progressive policies concerning race relations. This attitude, present from Governor Johnston Murray's embrace of the of the *Brown* decision, helped shape the stance that the state would take on civil rights legislation from 1954 to 1964. However, it became increasingly clear that after the initial claims of government officials that they would obey the decisions handed down by both national and local courts, that a policy of gradualism would be enacted when it came time to implement that court's decisions.

School and government officials at both a local and state level all displayed a disinterest in the quick implementation promised in achieving African-American equality. Though research does not suggest that any collaborative effort ever existed, each group separately and unequivocally exercised similar policies concerning civil

rights. Despite these delayed efforts, when coupled with the mostly cordial relationships between the overwhelmingly white police force and the black community the reasons for the relatively quiet movement become evident. Despite a wide range of opinions about the sit-in movement and those who participated in it, the leaders of Oklahoma City generally showed a significant measure of restraint when reacting to the demonstrations. Time and again potentially violent situations were defused by the respect and deference displayed by the police, demonstrators, shopkeepers, or city officials. In a matter fraught with questions both moral and political, the general level of calm that was maintained is a credit to those individuals involved. However, overlooking the arrests, the political obstacles, the internal struggles, and the frequent delays demonstrates an incomplete and misconstrued understanding of the civil rights struggle in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Even with the participation of both black and white activists it took a decades-long effort for a significant measure of progress to be realized. Civil rights legislation finally came to Oklahoma in 1963, a year before President Lyndon Johnson authorized the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

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[230] "Jimmy Says," written by Oklahoma City NAACP President Jimmy Stewart, in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 31, 1963.
[231] Ibid.
[232] "Toll Road Democracy," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 6, 1954.
[233] Quoted in, William D. Wollitz, "An Ecological Approach to the Case Study Method: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City," (PhD, University of Oklahoma, 1973), 31.
[234] William D. Wollitz "An Ecological Approach to the Case Study Method: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City," 28.

[235] W. Edwin Derrick and J. Hershel Barnhill, "With 'All' Deliberate Speed: Desegregation of the Public Schools in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, 1954 to 1972," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 6 (Spring, 1981), 83-84.
[236] Stewart, *Born Grown*, 42.
[237] William L. Wollitz, Jr., "An Ecological Approach to the Case Study Method: School Desegregation in Oklahoma City," 74.
[238] "A Special Class," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 4, 1959.
[239] "Segregation Still Exists in City School Program," in the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch,* September 4, 1959.
[240] W. Dennis Keating, *The Suburban Racial Dilemma: Housing and Neighborhoods*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 12-13.
[241] "Governor Says Segregation Dying Out; Trend Forward," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* February 20, 1964.
[242] "Sleeping In A Dangerous Time," in the *Oklahoma Eagle,* July 13, 1961. Tulsa is also called "the most segregated city in the United States in, "Sometimes It Takes A March," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, June 18, 1959.
[243] "People's Forum," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 4, 1964.
[244] "People's Forum," in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 3, 1964.
[245] "Barb Thrown at Sit-In," from a letter to the editor, in the *Tulsa Editor,* April 5, 1964.

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Pages in Study: 136 Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: History

Scope and Method of Study: This thesis examines the civil rights movements of Oklahoma City and Tulsa during the ten-year period of 1954 to 1964.

Findings and Conclusions:

By providing an in-depth examination of the civil rights movements in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Oklahoma through the lens of the black newspapers in each city, *The Black Dispatch* and *The Oklahoma Eagle*, this thesis introduces a new perspective on the civil rights demonstrations in the state. While there is a tendency to view the lack of violence in the state's civil rights demonstrations as an indication of an easy resolution to the problem of racial equality in the state, my research indicates that government officials pointed to this fact as an example of the state's progressive attitude towards race. In reality, the racism was often more subtle in Oklahoma and, because of this fact, inequality in government, school, and society lingered in the state because of the inattention given it by city and state officials.

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