

From Pre-Civil War to Post-Civil Rights: The Political Lives of African-Americans
from Slavery to the 21st Century in Perry County, Alabama

by

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Abstract

African Americans have played a major role in the history of Perry County almost since the first white settlers arrived in the area with their black enslaved laborers. In a county known for its pre-Civil War cotton wealth, enslaved blacks plowed the fields and built the houses that made all of that wealth possible. In 1865, they were freed when Union soldiers moved through the county on their way to the Confederate arsenal in Selma. The freed men and women worked to establish their identity in a white governing society that wanted interaction on their own terms. Through the establishment of their own churches, schools, and businesses, blacks maneuvered within a segregated society that allowed them to learn at the Lincoln School but offered them no employment opportunities to use their education other than menial labor. Exactly 100 years after gaining their freedom, the African-American community in Perry County, in conjunction with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, marched on the county courthouse and lined up at the voter registration office to demand change. Through the work of the U.S. Department of Justice and the local black community, the Civil Rights Movement in Perry County helped define and pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This work documents the lives of African-Americans in Perry County from slavery through segregation and then discusses the Civil Rights Movement in the county and its impact on the lives of blacks and whites in the county into the twenty-first century.

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List of Abbreviations

CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
PCCL	Perry County Civic League
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
MLKC	Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Non-Violence, Atlanta, GA
ADAH	Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL

Introduction

It was the best of times. Marion, Alabama, in the mid-twentieth century, was a small, thriving rural Alabama town. As with most towns in the Black Belt region of west central Alabama, Marion survived the Civil War, and Wilson's Raiders, and did what it could to pick up where it left off before the war began. White landowners who managed to keep their land, and those who had moved to the area right after the Civil War to take advantage of cheap land prices, continued to plant cotton and assert their influence in the Alabama state legislature. After the creation of several Alabama state constitutions during Reconstruction that were not favorable to white landowners, the planters were able to regain and eventually cement their control through district apportionment via the 1901 state constitution. The populations in their counties were small, and the black majority of the population was not allowed to vote, the Perry County representative in the Alabama state house represented 8,679 residents, while a representative from Mobile represented 104,767 residents.¹ Both representatives cast votes that were weighted the same.

But some things in Perry County had changed after, and because of, the Civil War. The descendants of African-born slaves brought to the United States prior to 1808 still worked the land, growing and harvesting cotton. But now, according to the

¹ Brian K. Landsberg, *Free At Last To Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Voting Rights Act* (Denton, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 112.

Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1865, they were free from slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, made them citizens and provided them due process under the law. As free citizens, they were entitled to a paid wage for their labor, though in the South after the War, actual specie was scarce. Education became an option for the newly freed men and women and they took advantage of the opportunity once the American Missionary Association established the Lincoln Normal School in Marion just a few years after the War ended.² Most importantly for this discussion, the Fifteenth Amendment, which became the law of the land in 1870, granted all males, regardless of race and previous condition of servitude, the right to vote.

It would be almost one hundred years before the Supreme Court would insist that states operate under the decrees set forth in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The increasingly perceptible struggle for political and economic power between the white and black citizens of Perry County began during the first Reconstruction, continued through the second Reconstruction of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and continues in the twenty-first century. For African Americans, the somewhat imperceptible struggle prior to 1965 was a struggle for power over their own lives and households. They struggled to gain a quality education and equal access to jobs and the ballot box. And they struggled for recognition as human beings, to be recognized as “sir” and “ma’am,” just as their white counterparts were.³ For white landowners, the struggle

² An extensive history of the Lincoln School can be found in Bertis Deon English, “Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875” (PhD diss., Auburn University, 2006), <http://etd.auburn.edu/etd/handle/10415/593>.

³ For a contemporary picture of the racial etiquette of the early twentieth-century, see Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937). Doyle was a professor of Sociology at Fisk University, a traditionally black

was to retain a workforce to grow and harvest their crops for market in an increasingly industrialized economy that paid less and less for commodity crops. It was only with the wealth from their land that the white landowners could retain their power in Montgomery, the Alabama state capital. As long as these landowners controlled who could and could not vote, they controlled the money, and the power.

Thus, it was the best of times in Marion and many of the small towns in the South, if you were white. According to the 1960 United States census, the population of Perry County was 17,358, down from 20,439 in 1950, a 15% decline. The white population of Perry County was 5,943. The black population was 11,415.⁴ The median income by 1959 in Perry County was \$1,675. For blacks alone, however, it was \$980.⁵ Judson College, a Baptist woman's college founded in 1838, and Marion Military Institute, founded in 1841, experienced peak enrollments in the 1950s.⁶ The county's population had risen steadily from the 1920s, through the Great Depression and WWII.

university, at the time the book was published. For the white view of Southern blacks during the early twentieth century, see W.D. Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs* (New York: Association Press, 1911), and William Hannibal Thomas, *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become* (New York: McMillan Company, 1901).

⁴ Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," 12. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Papers, Martin Luther King Center (MLKC), Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files."

⁵ 1960 U.S. Census. The median income of families in the United States in 1960 was \$5,600. See U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE. Luther Hodges, Secretary. Current Population Reports: Consumer Income" (Washington, DC: January 17, 1962, Series P-60, No. 37), 1.

⁶ For information on the history of Judson College, see Louise Manly, *History of Judson College, 1838-191* (Atlanta: Foote and Davis Company, 1913); Judson Alumnae Association, "A 100-Year History of the Judson College Alumnae," (Marion, AL, 1968); Frances Dew Hamilton and Elizabeth Crabtree Wells, *Daughters of the Dream: Judson College 1838-1988* (Marion, AL, 1989).

"County Schools to Open Tuesday," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 30, 1962. According to Marion Military Institute's Director of Admissions, the 121st annual session of MMI was expected to contain the largest enrollment in the school's history. This continued a trend that began in the 1950s and was likely due to the increased hostilities of the Cold War.

Though the population had begun to decline by mid-century, the county had slightly more people in 1950 (29,439) than it had in 1850 (22,285).⁷

There were poor whites as well as poor blacks in the region. James Agee's famous work, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which chronicles poor white tenant farmers during the Great Depression of the 1930s, is written from material the author gained while staying in Hale County, which borders Perry County to the west. And there were successful blacks. Obie Scott, who lived in the North Perry area, was a successful African American farmer and businessman. Scott, along with his wife Bernice, was registered to vote prior to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.⁸ He and his wife sent their three children, including their youngest daughter Coretta, to the Lincoln School, and then to college in the north.

Though the patterns of rural life seemed set in west central Alabama in the 1950s, change was coming. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court issued their unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, declaring that the doctrine of separate but equal was not legal in public schools. The ruling sent shockwaves through the South, and white resistance began in earnest, as evidenced by the rise of White Citizens Councils in Perry, Dallas, Marengo, and Bibb Counties. Because of this defiance, ten years passed before the *Brown v. Board* decision had any effect on the schools in Perry County.

⁷ US Census Bureau, Census of 1850, 1950, and 2000. <http://www.census.gov/> (accessed September 24, 2011 and October 21, 2011). The population in 2000 was 11,861 and falling. Between 2000 and 2010, Perry County had lost 10.1% of its population.

⁸ "List of Qualified Voters For Perry County, Alabama for 1962," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15, 1962. The Scotts are listed in the Oldtown Section of the county, Beat 7. There are 19 African Americans registered in their section. There are 239 blacks registered in Perry County overall. There are a total of 4,239 registered voters in the county.

As an example of the slow path that integration and equality under the law followed in the county, three years after the *Brown v. Board* decision, a black man named Jimmy Wilson was arrested for stealing \$1.95 from a white woman in Marion. Because robbery was a capital offense in Alabama in 1957, Wilson was sentenced to die in the electric chair for his crime.⁹ Wilson's case is illustrative of what had not changed in the treatment of African Americans in the previous 100 years. This work chronicles the persecution and successes of African Americans in Perry County and provides an examination of the path that integration and voting rights took in Perry County.

The first half of the narrative examines the lives of African Americans in Perry County in the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries. The emergence of the Lincoln School, and the role that its graduates played in the Civil Rights Movement is chronicled, as well as the development and importance of three local churches: Zion United Methodist Church, Berean Baptist Church and the Congregational Church. Because there is no comprehensive written history of African Americans in Perry County, the first half of this work also chronicles how blacks came to Perry County and what life was like for blacks in the county prior to 1955.¹⁰

The second half of this narrative chronicles the massive changes that occurred from 1955-1965 and into the twenty-first century. The work examines the interaction of Perry County's black and white populations, with emphasis on the county's role in the Civil Rights Movement before and after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. The

⁹ Jimmy Wilson's case will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

¹⁰ There is information compiled by Idella Jones Childs on the Lincoln Normal School, found in W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage, Vol. 1* (Marion, AL: private printing, 1991), 28-36. Bertis English's dissertation "Civil Wars and Civil Beings" offers a rich monographic treatment of the Reconstruction period in Perry County. The Lincoln School also maintains a small museum on the former school property. Other than information on the Lincoln School and English's study of Reconstruction in Perry County, there are no extensive sources on the history of African Americans in Perry County.

citizens of Perry County witnessed dramatic change in just a few years during the 1960s, and the stage was set for an unprecedented shift in the lives of blacks and whites throughout the county, the state, and the nation. The concluding chapter focuses on life for blacks in the county after the climactic events of 1965.

The impetus for the sweeping changes that stirred the federal government to take action on the issue of civil rights for African Americans occurred mostly in the South, especially in Alabama. Frye Gaillard, author of *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America*, asserts that the state of Alabama, the former “Cradle of the Confederacy,” is also the cradle the Civil Rights Movement. The following monograph will assert that if Alabama, the “Heart of Dixie,” is the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement in America, the Black Belt region of the state, and Perry County in particular, are the heart of the movement in Alabama. The rural counties of the Black Belt did not gain the media attention of Birmingham, Selma, or Montgomery, the latter two of which are in the Black Belt, but the foot soldiers in these rural counties faced more danger in some places, like Lowndes County, where their disappearance and death would not make the national news. Perry County is unusual in the impact of its contributions on the national Movement, as well as the relative lack of violent resistance to the demonstrators by local law enforcement officials, though there was violence against demonstrators on the part of state troopers. It is imperative that the story of the Movement in Perry County and the county’s impact be told so that the overall Movement narrative is more complete.

The Civil Rights Movement has been chronicled, either through publications or the preservation of important landmarks, in all of the Black Belt counties that surround

Perry County. These counties include those immediately adjoining Perry County: Hale County to the west,¹¹ Marengo County to the south and west,¹² and Dallas County, to the south and east.¹³ Other Black Belt counties that have been chronicled include Greene County,¹⁴ Wilcox County, home of the Gee's Bend Quilters,¹⁵ Lowndes County, the home of the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which was the first organization to use the black panther as its logo, and is the site of the shooting of Jonathan Daniels and Viola Liuzzo,¹⁶ Montgomery County, site of the Alabama state capital and the home of

¹¹ In Hale County, visitors are able to learn about the Movement in the area by visiting the Safe House Museum. The Museum is located in the former home of the Burroughs family. On the night of March 21, 1968, during one of Martin Luther King's visits to the area, he was forced to hide on the floor of the Burroughs' home for the night because the Ku Klux Klan was patrolling all of the roads that led out of Greensboro, the county seat. The Museum contains artifacts relating to the history of African Americans and chronicles the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro and Hale County.

¹² Two works exist on the Movement in Marengo County, which is where Demopolis is located. The first is Dick Reavis, *If White Kids Die* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2001). This book chronicles Reavis's experience as a white SCOPE worker in Marengo County in the summer of 1965. For information on the development of the White Citizen's Council in Marengo County, see Stephanie Carol Hardin, "Civil Rights and White Resistance in the Black Belt: A Case Study of Marengo County, 1954-1956" (MA thesis, University of South Alabama, 1987). Like Reavis's work, Hardin's thesis chronicles the Movement from the white perspective. Because of their focus specifically on the actions of whites in the Movement, these two works are rather unique among the literature of the Movement.

A monograph on the Movement in Marengo County from the African American perspective is needed.

¹³ Multiple works are available about the Civil Rights Movement in Selma and Dallas County. They will be referenced in a later chapter of this work. The march that led to "Bloody Sunday," which was the first attempt by demonstrators to complete what became known as the Selma-to-Montgomery March, began because of the death of a Perry County resident who was shot by a state trooper. These events will receive more attention in chapter five.

Bibb County, to the north of Perry County, is not considered a Black Belt County. Its geography and demographics differ drastically from those of the Black Belt counties. Therefore, it is not discussed except for a brief reference to the White Citizen's Council there.

¹⁴ Jason Sokol's book, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), though focused on multiple sites, gives considerable attention to Greene County. Greene County does deserve a more thorough examination, however, including a look at the Movement from the African American perspective.

¹⁵ Works on Wilcox County include Nancy Callahan, *The Freedom Quilting Bee: Folk Art and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987); and Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *In the Shadow of Selma: The Continuing Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

¹⁶ One of the more recent works on the Movement in Alabama is Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). Jeffries looks at the Movement pre- and post-1965. Adam Scott Lovelady has written an undergraduate honors thesis entitled "Not for Demonstration: Politics, Poverty, and the Struggle for Equality in Lowndes County, Alabama" (Honors Thesis, Auburn University Honors College, 2002). See

Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott which introduced the world to a young preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr.,¹⁷ and Macon County, the home of Tuskegee University.¹⁸ The following work will illuminate the important role that Perry County played in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, and fill a geographical and narrative gap in the literature of the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama and the nation.

The larger Movement was comprised of a collection of local movements, led by local individuals, who ultimately looked to groups like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) for guidance. But the individuals at the local level molded the national programs to fit their circumstances. By “overlooking the process of mobilization at local levels,” according to oral historian Kim Lacy Rogers, interpreters of the Movement diminish the “populist origins of the civil rights movement” and “obscure the movement’s real consequences – a transformed black political consciousness, the

also Charles W. Eagles, “From Shotguns to Umbrellas: The Civil Rights Movement in Lowndes County, Alabama,” in *The Adaptable South: Essays in Honor of George Brown Tindall*, ed. Elizabeth Jacoway, Dan Carter, and Robert McMath (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 212-36. There are also several works examining the shooting of Viola Liuzzo in Lowndes County following the Selma-to-Montgomery March in the spring of 1965.

Ministerial student Jonathan Daniels was murdered in broad daylight in Hayneville, the seat of Lowndes County. See Charles W. Eagles, *Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). The anniversary of his death is marked each August by a pilgrimage to the Lowndes County courthouse.

¹⁷ The Movement in Montgomery has been chronicled in detail in multiple works about Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks. Books about Dr. King include Vincent Harding, *Martin Luther King, The Inconvenient Hero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008); Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds., *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Clayborne Carson, ed., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Warner Books, 1998). Works about Rosa Parks include Rosa Parks, with Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York: Dial Books, 1992), and Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Viking, 2000).

¹⁸ Macon County, the home of Tuskegee Institute, has also received extensive coverage for its role in the Movement. Robert Norrell, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Civil Rights Movement in Tuskegee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985) is but one example of the works examining the Movement in that county.

increased political efficacy of thousands of movement leaders and participants, and expanded opportunities and possibilities for all black Americans.”¹⁹

Overall, historians have tended to be critical of the use of oral history as a source of research. Memory is fallible, and it is preferable to use written records to verify events. Given the local nature of the Movement, the pace of the Movement and the quick decisions that the changing nature of such a dangerous undertaking created, plus the fact that many of the participants, including the leaders at the local level, had received a minimal education in segregated and under-funded schools, an abundance of written records from the local movement participants simply does not exist. It was also dangerous for local Movement participants to hold onto the few documents that they did receive because they could be used against them by local whites. It is important, Kim Lacy Rogers stresses, that the oral histories of participants are recorded in order to find “abundant evidence of the local genesis of the civil rights movement” and to connect “the individual to the collective experience” of the national movement.²⁰ The Movement in Perry County did not occur in a vacuum, but it certainly was a local movement, with local participants and challenges. Accordingly, Rogers notes, “oral history can yield evidence rarely available in contemporary written records.” Interviews can also “restore the local, individual, and collective dimensions to our historical interpretations of the civil rights movement.”²¹ This is certainly the case in Perry County. This is the reason why oral histories play an important role in the second half of this work.

¹⁹ Kim Lacy Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 2 (Sept. 1988): 567.

²⁰ Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” 568.

²¹ Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” 576.

The Movement in Perry County is, in some ways, illustrative of the grassroots organizing that defined the Movement throughout the South. There were mass meetings and the singing of spirituals, followed by rousing speeches delivered by well-known Movement leaders. But Perry County was also different from its neighbors, especially in the lack of violence that characterized the white reaction to the Movement in the county. There were a few demonstrations in the County beginning in early 1965. Prior to March 1965, they were led by Rev. James Orange of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, Movement work was led by Albert Turner, Sr. Turner, like Orange, was aligned with the SCLC, which had a presence in the county, though unlike other areas of the South, SNCC and CORE did not.²²

While the actions of participants in the Movement throughout the nation are noteworthy, two events cement the importance of Perry County's role in the national Movement. The first event was a lawsuit brought against the Perry County Board of Registrars by the Department of Justice in 1962. The authors of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed specific actions based on the discrimination exhibited by the voting registrars in Perry County.²³ The passage of the Voting Rights Act was moved to the

²² 1962 gubernatorial candidate MacDonald Gallion obtained a temporary injunction against CORE in early 1962 while he was serving as Attorney General for the state of Alabama, thus limiting the organization's work in Alabama. Carl Goggins, "Alabama Political News," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962. Federal judge Frank Johnson upheld the injunction in April 1962. The state had forced the NAACP to cease operations in Alabama in 1956, so Gallion was familiar with the tactic of forcing a civil rights group to cease work in the state.

²³ For a thorough examination of the role of the Department of Justice (DOJ) in the Movement, see Brian K. Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Voting Rights Act* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007). Landsberg was a lawyer for the DOJ in 1964 and worked on several civil rights cases. His book highlights three of the 70+ cases the DOJ investigated. He focuses on Perry, Sumter, and Elmore Counties in Alabama.

Sumter County, though it had a relatively small Movement, deserves more study. Its registration case was similar to that of Perry County, and, just like the registrars in Perry County, the Sumter County

forefront of American politics because of “Bloody Sunday” and the Selma-to-Montgomery March in 1965. It was the shooting and subsequent death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, a black Perry Countian, that led to the March and ultimately the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Several people assert that the idea of walking to Montgomery to protest the treatment of blacks by the state government was put forth by Lusa Foster, a foot soldier and “momma” of the Movement in Marion.²⁴ Thus, the work of Movement participants in Perry County had a direct influence on the overall outcome of the Civil Rights Movement nationally, including the passage of what many people consider the apex of the Movement – the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Chapter one begins by examining the geography of the Black Belt, including a brief outline of the geologic history of the region, beginning about 65 million years ago. After describing the physical development of the area, this work examines what the region looked like when the first white settlers, soon followed by their black slaves, entered the Black Belt at the turn of the nineteenth century. Settlement patterns, as well as “Alabama Fever” and the creation of Alabama as an economic powerhouse thanks to

registrars were from long-standing, church-going, white families. Ruby Pickens Tartt was one of the voting registrars in Sumter County. She genuinely thought, according to Landsberg, that she was doing the best she could for the local black population. Mrs. Tartt was the white connection to the black residents of the County. When the Library of Congress sent John and Alan Lomax to the South to record field songs and spirituals, they met many of the blacks they recorded in Alabama through Ruby Pickens Tartt. For more information on Ruby Pickens Tartt, see Virginia Pounds Brown and Laurella Owens, *Toting the Lead Row: Ruby Pickens Tartt, Alabama Folklorist* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1981), and Tina Naremore Jones, “Stealing Away From Society: Negotiations of Voice in the Works of Ruby Pickens Tartt” (PhD diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2002).

For more of the folk stories that Tartt recorded, and to read the songs she helped preserve, see Alan Brown, ed., *Dim Roads and Dark Nights: The Collected Folklore of Ruby Pickens Tartt* (Livingston, AL: Livingston Press, 1993), John Lomax, *Adventures of A Ballad Hunter* (New York: McMillan Company, 1947) and Alan Lomax, *The Folk Songs of North America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1960).

²⁴ Interestingly, Foster was registered to vote at least by 1962. Marion, Beat 1, Box 2, *Marion Times-Standard*, March 25, 1962. Her polling place was the public library. See also Willie Nell Avery, voter registrar, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010, and Mattie Atkins, speech at a mock mass meeting, Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, Alabama, February 19, 2010. Foster’s first name is spelled either Lusa or Lucy. In interviews, she was referred to by both names.

cotton production, are also explored. The the role that African Americans played in the economic and cultural development of the area is included. The rise of the political power of the Black Belt will be discussed because it is necessary in order to understand the extent of the power that planters in the Black Belt wielded in the state and the nation. This power kept African Americans in the Black Belt subjugated both before and after the Civil War and ultimately provided their motivation to participate in the Civil Rights Movement in the second half of the twentieth century.

The rise of black institutions, specifically schools and churches and their later role in the Civil Rights Movement in Perry County, is the focus of chapter two. While the rise of these institutions in and of themselves is not unique to the county, specific institutions in Perry County played a vital role in the development and sustainability of the Civil Rights Movement in the area. The most prominent organizations are the Lincoln Normal School, which is considered one of the most notable and influential schools for African Americans in Alabama, as well as Zion United Methodist Church, the First Congregationalist Church, and Berean Baptist Church.

The lives of African Americans in Perry County from Reconstruction to the middle of the twentieth century are the focus of chapter three. To understand the motivations behind African American protests in Perry County in the 1960s, it is necessary to understand the conditions in which they lived. This chapter will provide data and first-hand accounts of life under Jim Crow laws in the rural Black Belt. The case of Jimmy Wilson, an African American who was sentenced to die in the electric chair for stealing \$1.95 from a white woman, illustrates the experiences of blacks in the county prior to 1965. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the lives of Coretta

Scott King who grew up in rural northern Perry County, and Jean Childs Young and the Childs family, who were successful entrepreneurs in the town of Marion. Including the experiences of these two women provides a look at the lives of educated African Americans in both a rural and urban setting. Both women came from successful families, and their financial situations will be examined to open a dialog about the importance of financial freedom as a step toward becoming leaders in the Movement. Chapter three concludes with biographical information about Albert Turner, who emerges as the local leader of the Movement and is responsible for readying the black citizens of Perry County for the entrance of national groups into the area to organize mass resistance among the black population.

The work of Civil Rights participants in Perry County beginning in the 1950s provides the material for chapter four. This chapter examines the Movement in the County from multiple viewpoints, including interviews with black Movement participants, as well as white citizens of Perry County. The black and the white interviewees are male and female, and lived either in Marion or in the rural areas of the county. Blacks and whites interacted in the county on a daily basis as employees and employers, patients and doctors, business owners and customers, and as citizens. The personal interactions may have been on an equal level, but the formal transactions were not. The work of individuals, the Perry County Civic League, and the SCLC in the Perry County Movement are chronicled here. The SCLC became Albert Turner's source of funding and their actions in the area, coupled with Turner's ever-increasing work for the agency, will be examined in this chapter, along with the early investigations of the

Department of Justice into voter registration irregularities. The chapter will end at the close of 1964 and will set the stage for the dramatic events of 1965.

Chapter Five, “Perry County’s Role in the Movement,” chronicles the events of 1965 in Perry County, with an emphasis on Movement events in January and February that led to the night march and shooting of Jimmie Lee Jackson on February 18, 1965. The events of that night, most notably Jackson’s death, led to “Bloody Sunday” on March 7 in Selma. The attack by state troopers against unarmed protestors on the Edmund Pettus Bridge that day brought national attention to the Selma-to-Montgomery March, which was originally planned to protest Jackson’s death. The result of the five day march across the Alabama’s Black Belt was the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A look at the work of the Department of Justice in Perry County and the role Perry County played in determining the wording of the 1965 Voting Rights Act will be included. Both of these stories – the shooting and the work of the DOJ – and the subsequent passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, demonstrate Perry County’s importance in the Civil Rights Movement.

The concluding chapter examines the political, economic, educational, and racial status of Perry County from 1966 to 2010, including a brief look at the political machinations of Albert Turner, Jr., and the legacy of the Movement in Perry County. Once the Selma-to-Montgomery March was over and the Voting Rights Act was passed, thousands of African Americans began to register to vote and run for office. This process was not always pleasant for blacks or whites. Many would-be black office holders had learned the importance of gaining and maintaining power at all costs from their white political predecessors. White politicians prior to 1965 had manipulated the vote by

simply refusing to allow African Americans to register or cast a ballot. Once blacks in Perry County began to hold office, they manipulated the vote through absentee ballot fraud.²⁵ The fraud led to investigations and indictments and left Perry County in the hands of a group of black politicians that were no less corrupt than the white politicians that maintained power before them. A recap of the power of the white planter elite and the tactics they used to develop and maintain power will be given at this point to draw comparisons with the actions of African American office holders. The Congressional hearings regarding voting fraud prosecutions in 1986 are also referenced. These hearings include the Senate hearing for the appointment of Jeff Sessions as a Federal Judge. A report on the trial of James Bonard Fowler, the state trooper that shot Jimmie Lee Jackson in 1965 and pled guilty in 2010, concludes the chapter.

The Movement has been treated by those documenting its history with kid gloves. Not until Jason Sokol's work, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*, which was published in 2006, has a historian attempted to systematically examine the mindset of white Southerners, who formed a majority of the population of the South during the Civil Rights Movement. The SCLC consistently noted that blacks were only the majority in about fifteen Black Belt Counties in Alabama.²⁶ Without white Southerners, the Civil Rights Movement would not have developed as it did.

Historians have tended to elevate black participants in the Movement to the level of saints and martyrs, whose actions were divinely blessed and destined to have the

²⁵ Perry County is very similar to post-Voting Rights Act Lowndes County because the fraud and disappointment that followed the election of African Americans to office in both counties is strikingly similar. See Hasan Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*.

²⁶ Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 174, folder 11 - "Direct Action Files."

appropriate outcome. While sanctifying black Movement participants, historians have demonized most white Southerners as rabid segregationists. Movement participants have been given *carte blanche* permission by historians to exercise their hard-won freedoms and rights as they choose, regardless of the rules, the outcome, or the effects on those who did not seemingly benefit from the Movement. Much of this asymmetrical historical treatment had to do with the fact that many historians participated in the Movement. John Hope Franklin, Richard Hofstadter, Walter Johnson, Lawrence Levine, August Meier, Kenneth Stampp, Henry R. Winkler and C. Vann Woodward were among forty-four “U.S. Historians Who Actually Marched on the Birthplace and First Capital of the Confederacy, March 25, 1965,” which was the day the Selma-to-Montgomery March entered Montgomery, the capital city of Alabama.²⁷ The Southern Christian Leadership Conference made special note of their participation by creating a list of historians who participated. The SCLC did not compile a list of participants from any other profession. Perhaps SCLC understood the importance of having the historians who would document the Movement serve as participants in the Movement.

So important were historians to the Movement, that C. Vann Woodward and John Hope Franklin delivered speeches at the SCOPE orientation workshop in Atlanta, Georgia, in June 1965. Woodward recognized the Movement as the Second Reconstruction and tried to educate the Northern white SCOPE participants about the past that would surround them as they ventured south. He noted that it was important for Movement participants to interpret the past of the South, and not let “men like Governor Wallace [and] Senator Eastland” do it for them. Woodward pointed to the success of

²⁷ SCOPE, “Those U.S. Historians Who Actually Marched on the Birthplace and First Capital of the Confederacy, March 25, 1965.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 168, folder 15 – “SCOPE Correspondence.”

blacks and whites who worked together in the Populist movement at the end of the nineteenth century as a model for the work of Civil Rights participants in the middle of the twentieth century.²⁸

John Hope Franklin criticized historians for pointing to the period of Reconstruction as a tragic period in American history. He then suggested that there has been a “great amount of misrepresentation and distortion associated with the period after the Civil War.” Franklin asserted that the glorification of the South and the creation of myths perpetuated this false history.²⁹ Perhaps it is a fair criticism to note that just as Southerners wrote the history of the Lost Cause and Reconstruction, a fact that Franklin was critical of, so too have Movement participants, including academic historians, written the history of the Movement. They were personally vested in recording the Movement, and this likely impacted their writing about the period.

The emotional treatment of the Movement often occurred at the detriment of the historian’s craft, which is supposed to examine facts and provide a neutral assessment of the information the researcher uncovers. This lack of critical review is expressed by Charles W. Eagles in his article, “Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era.” As Eagles states, “Writing in the midst of the ongoing struggles for racial equality, historians have often lacked detachment because of their profound and justifiable moral commitment to the aims of the civil rights movement. . . . Few scholars of the black freedom struggle have had any personal experience of a world apart from the movement; individuals born since 1940 can scarcely recall a period before the movement gained

²⁸ SCOPE, Orientation Speeches, 1965. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 169, folder 9 – “SCOPE Orientation Session.” Walter Johnson provided a reading list for orientation participants. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 168, folder 15 – “SCOPE Orientation Session.”

²⁹ SCOPE, “Notes on Speech by John Hope Franklin – Mon, June 14, 1965.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 169, folder 9 – “SCOPE Orientation speech.”

widespread publicity.”³⁰ Because, as Eagles notes, historians have “tended to emphasize one side of the struggle, the movement side, and to neglect their professional obligation to understand the other side,” the following chapters in this work include interviews with both black and white citizens living in Perry County in the 1950s and 1960s. As with the WPA slave narratives included in chapter 1, it is important to read and interpret all of the interviews, black and white, with caution. Time and social constructs tend to change how participants remember and discuss events. As Scott Ellsworth notes in a discussion of what he calls “the segregation of memory” in his work on the Tulsa race riots of 1921, “It is part of our nature as human beings — whether as individuals, groups, or societies — that we create ‘pasts’ with which we can live. If the reality of our history poses questions about our lives of today which are too painful or ominous to ponder, then we will mold our past into a less threatening chronicle, or repress it entirely. If anything, our ‘historic memory’ is as malleable as our personal one.”³¹ Just as blacks living under Jim Crow and hard-line segregation developed mechanisms to cope with their situation, so too did former slaves, and blacks and whites that lived through the voting rights struggles and the political commotion that followed them, developed mental mechanisms for dealing with their struggles. The following work is their story.

³⁰ Charles W. Eagles, “Toward New Histories in the Civil Rights Era,” *Journal of Southern History* 66, no. 4 (November 2000): 815.

³¹ Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 98.

Chapter 1

“With Colored Servants for Each”: The Ante-Bellum History of African Americans in Perry County

The rich, dark soil that forms the land of the Black Belt region of Alabama begins 250 miles to the northwest at the Mississippi River near Memphis, Tennessee. From its beginning point on the Mississippi River, a crescent of fertile soil undulates south and east through Mississippi, bisecting the state north to south. It crosses into Alabama in modern-day Pickens, Sumter, and Choctaw counties and narrows as it continues east across lower central Alabama. It begins a northeastern turn as it crosses the Chattahoochee River into Columbus, Georgia.

While the fertile band continues to taper as it moves up the eastern coastline before fading away in southern Virginia, geographically, politically and some would argue, historically, the Black Belt is most fertile, prominent, and influential, in the swath that it cuts through Alabama. According to Frederick D. Wright, “certain sections of this agrarian South, namely the Black Belt counties, contain the areas that have ‘given the South its dominant political tone.’”¹ For, though in terms of size, “the Black Belt areas of the South ‘make up only a small part of the [region]. . . . Yet if the politics of the

¹ Quote from V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 5, in Frederick Wright, “The History of Black Political Participation to 1965,” in Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed and Tod A. Baker, eds., *Blacks in Southern Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 17.

South revolves around any single theme, it is that of the role of the black belt.”² In a state known for its red clay hills, the Black Belt prairie, only about 25 miles wide, has borne a disproportionate influence on the history of Alabama, and the nation.

The Black Belt in the modern era is directly influenced by its geography and topography, which formed over millions of years. While many areas of the United States have moved away from an economy based on agriculture, the land in the Black Belt still bears a direct influence on the lives of citizens of this region of Alabama. Author Frederick Wright notes that while the South is often considered a “single geographical entity . . . there were (and are) important differences within this region.”³ He continues with a quote by Charles S. Johnson, who studied multiple counties in the South in the 1920s. According to Johnson, “Variations in the topography, agricultural and industrial characteristics, climate, population, history and traditions between various areas of the South are associated with variations in the social organization of these different areas.”⁴ The population demographics, as well as the job opportunities and the Black Belt’s history and cultural life, are intertwined with the dark soil of the land. As Arthur Raper noted in his 1936 work *Preface to Peasantry*, this region has been home to “the richest soil and the poorest people.”⁵ The authors of the Black Belt Heritage Area Feasibility

² Quote from V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 5, in Frederick Wright, “The History of Black Political Participation to 1965” in Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed and Tod A. Baker, eds., *Blacks in Southern Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 17.

³ Frederick Wright, “The History of Black Political Participation to 1965” in Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed and Tod A. Baker, eds., *Blacks in Southern Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 16.

⁴ Quote from Charles S. Johnson, *Statistical Analysis of Southern Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 1-2, in Frederick Wright, “The History of Black Political Participation to 1965” in Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed and Tod A. Baker, eds., *Blacks in Southern Politics* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), 16.

⁵ Arthur Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936; reprint: Forge Village, MA: Murray Printing Company, Atheneum edition, 1968), 3.

Study observed, “From DeSoto’s meeting with Tuscaloosa to the birth of the Confederacy and the civil rights struggles of the mid-twentieth century,” it was here that some of nation’s most significant historical events occurred.⁶ The meeting of the various groups that have shaped this history can trace their roots in this place back to the soil.

The geological features that form the Black Belt are a band of white clay, known as Selma Chalk, and the black soil that sits on top of the clay. The chalk was formed when the area was an ancient seafloor, 45-65 million years ago. The area that is now known as the Black Belt was somewhat off-shore in the vast Mississippi Embayment, perhaps 200 feet deep. This warm, shallow sea was full of single-celled algae, known as coccolithophores. As these algae lived and died, very small pieces of their calcite shells—coccoliths—fell to the seafloor and accumulated into a thick ooze. This ooze was joined by very fine particles of clay that washed down from the shore. This combination of lime and clay formed a rock called marl, and several successive layers, some harder due to the presence of more lime, and some softer because there was more clay present, make up the 1000-foot thick layer of Selma Chalk.

The layer of chalk is impermeable to water. Therefore, once a soil layer was established on top of the chalk, the nutrients in the soil simply built up, instead of percolating down through the soil with the groundwater.⁷ This soil became extremely

⁶ Wimberly Comer, ed. *Black Belt Heritage Area Feasibility Study*, submitted to the National Park Service, April 2009. Prepared by Fermata, Inc. New York Office, Trumansburg, NY, 5.

⁷ The knowledge of the composition of the soil is not a recent discovery by geologists. As early as 1844, a citizen of the region noted the clay (chalk), and stated that Marion’s geology, which is hilly, and its soil, which is loamy, is different from the soil of the “prairies or black land” just a few miles south of the town. The writer, a Dr. Woodruff, suggested that the area was once “the bed of the ocean . . . the shore of the vasty deep.” See Samuel A Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama* (Marion, AL: Dennis Dykous, 1844, facsimile produced by Samford University Library Research Series, Paper No. 7, 1985, printed by A.H. Cather Printing Company), 45. See letter from Dr. C.A. Woodruff to Samuel A. Townes, August 1844. This slight variation in the geology and makeup of the soil explains why Marion was able to prosper

rich in nutrients, creating what is today known as black land prairies. Though many people assume that the Black Belt got its name from the African American population which forms the racial majority in most Black Belt counties, this is not the case. The black soil literally forms a band from west to east across Alabama and it is much darker than the soil to the north or south. The soil, and the system of slavery and sharecropper agricultural that it supported, have directly affected the current demographics, culture, and economy of the region. This soil is what makes the topography of the region unique, and gives the Black Belt region its name.

Before European settlers entered the region, first as individual homesteaders and later with their enslaved chattel, several Native American tribes roamed the area. The Choctaws and Creeks were most prominent, with the Choctaws not ceding their land in west Alabama until 1830.⁸ The ancestors of the Choctaw and Creeks had built the great mounds at Moundville along the Black Warrior River in modern-day Hale County. Their descendants had met DeSoto during his journey across Alabama. Their chief, Tuskaloosa, battled DeSoto at Maubila, somewhere along the Alabama River. Both the Alabama and Black Warrior Rivers flow through the Black Belt, providing an important shipping route for the cotton grown in the area.

as it did – it had the fertility of the Black Belt soil, but due to the hills, was able to provide more easily accessible sources of fresh water than was available in most of the Black Belt region.

See also Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1965, reprint 1990), 31. Abernethy's book includes a letter from Dr. J.W. Hesustis of Cahawba, dated April 1, 1821, and published in the *Cahawba Press and Alabama State Intelligencer*, June 2, 1821. The letter provides first-hand information about how early settlers viewed the land, and how well they understood its composition and importance.

⁸ The Choctaws turned over what are now Choctaw and Sumter Counties to the United States Federal government in 1830 via the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. The Choctaw's holdings were the last of any major tribe in the western portion of the state, though the Creeks still held vast portions of eastern Alabama. White settlers were already in the area by 1830, however. For more on the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, see James Taylor Carson, *Searching for the Bright and Shining Path: The Mississippi Choctaws from Prehistory to Removal* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

The Creek Indians that controlled the land that is modern-day Perry County were forced to cede their holdings after their defeat at Horseshoe Bend in 1814.⁹ Alabama became a territory as part of Mississippi in 1817, and a state in 1819. Much of the push to create the state of Alabama came from land speculators and settlers who had migrated into the interior of the state via its many rivers.¹⁰ The Alabama River, the Cahaba River, the Black Warrior River, and the Tombigbee River deposited their fertile silt, and boatloads of settlers and slaves, into the region.¹¹ It was the rivers that fertilized the fields, and shipped the resultant cotton to market. It was the rivers that made the Black Belt viable for commodity crops. Prior to the introduction of the railroad, there would not have been a cotton boom in the Black Belt had the rivers not been available for transport. According to one report on the Black Belt region, “If the narrow definition of Black Belt is the geologic belt of chalk, then the broader definition of Black Belt includes the counties along the rivers with a heritage of plantation agriculture and rural economics. Both are valid claims to being ‘Black Belt’ Alabama.”¹²

While early in the state’s history, the northern portion of the state was settled by white homesteaders trickling over the mountains from the eastern seaboard states of

⁹ W. Stuart Harris, *A Short History of Marion, Perry County, Alabama: Its Homes and Buildings* (Marion, AL: Private printing, 1970), 1. For more information on Creek removal, see Christopher Haveman, “The Removal of the Creek Indians from the Southeast, 1825-1838” (PhD diss., Auburn University, 2009), <http://catalog.lib.auburn.edu/vufind/Record/3748562>. For more information on Choctaw removal, see Arthur H. DeRosier, *The Removal of the Choctaw Indians* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The Formative Period in Alabama*, 6. The demand for cotton by British mill owners played a large role in the rise of cotton production, and thus slavery, in Alabama. Cotton reached 34 cents/lb in 1818. In perspective, cotton prices by the 1820s stabilized at ten cents a pound. Abernethy, 6 - 7.

¹¹ A valuable discussion of the importance of rivers to Alabama is Harvey Jackson, *Rivers of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1995). While the Cahaba and Alabama Rivers are the most significant in terms of their impact on Perry County, all of the rivers mentioned above played a role in the development of the Black Belt and thus are significant for the development of the county over time.

¹² Wimberly Comer, ed., *Alabama Black Heritage Area, Feasibility Study for National Heritage Area Designation*, 31.

Virginia and the Carolinas, the first European settlers to the Black Belt came from Mobile, on the Gulf Coast. The rivers, which play such a major role in the history of the Black Belt, initially brought soldiers and supplies up from Mobile and into the interior of the state. First came the Spanish, then the French, and finally the British. They were all there to trade with the native inhabitants, but they were not very interested in occupying the land outside their forts. The Spanish, followed by the French, and then the British, occupied and continually rebuilt a fort along the Tombigbee River known as Ft. Tombecbe. At the same time, Bonapartists (French exiles) were building the Vine and Olive Colony above the white chalk cliffs of the Tombigbee River in modern-day Demopolis, about thirty miles south of the fort.¹³

What the early traders and soldiers saw when they arrived in the Black Belt was a somewhat barren-looking land, devoid of many large trees. While there were stands of long-leaf pine, what the Europeans generally found were clumps of low cedar trees surrounded by vast open prairie land, similar to the Great Plains of the Midwest. The creation of the prairies was a millennial-long process that began with the build-up of the Selma chalk. Because rain does not percolate through the chalk, as previously mentioned, there is almost no water table reservoir for plant growth. This means that for much of the year, the Black Belt is extremely dry. Almost no permanent streams originate in the prairies of the Black Belt. Not only was the area flat and open, unlike the topography of the state to the north, it also contained many plants found only in the Great

¹³ For more information about the history of the Ft. Tombecbe site, see James P. Pate, *The Fort Tombecbe Historical Research and Documentation Project*. Unpublished manuscript on file at the University of West Alabama, Livingston, 1980. For more information on the archaeology of the Fort Tombecbe site, see "Archaeological Test Investigations at 1Su7: The Fort Tombecbe Site," *Journal of Alabama Archaeology* 28, no. 1 (1982): 1-104. Information about the Vine and Olive Colony is available in Rafe Blaufarb, *Bonapartists in the Borderlands: French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815-1835* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006).

Plains. This openness was due to the regular burning of the prairies, both by wildfires and by fires set by Native Americans to clear the land for hunting. According to surveys of the area conducted in the 1830s, approximately 144,000 hectares of open prairie were present in the Black Belt.¹⁴

The basic nature of the pH of the soil also inhibited the growth of large trees. The lack of trees coupled with the absence of a consistent water source and a lack of potable water except along the rivers and a few streams, fooled many early visitors into believing that the land was not fertile, or very desirable. The large cracks in the clay that formed after just a few weeks without rain did not make the area attractive. The slick, impassable gumbo that formed when it did rain, turned the dry clay into a sticky, cement-like conglomeration. The Black Belt did not, at first glance, hold much promise.¹⁵

By the time Michael Muckle wandered into the area that would temporarily become known as Muckle's Ridge (later renamed Marion) in 1817, just a few decades after the European's first encounter with the region, white settlers began to realize their mistake and "Alabama Fever" soon spread through the nation.

As landowners on the east coast wore out their land growing cotton without the aid of any substantial type of fertilizer, and as farms in the Carolinas and Virginia became

¹⁴ John A. Barone, "Historical Presence and Distribution of Prairies in the Black Belt of Mississippi and Alabama," *Castanea* 70, no. 3 (2005):170-183. This is equivalent to 355,831.7 acres.

¹⁵ Residents of the Black Belt still dread the long dry spells of the region, and the large cracks that open in the clay, even if the clay is covered with grass. Legends abound of cattle falling in the cracks, and parents still warn their children to be careful when playing outside after long periods of drought. On the other hand, walks on the prairie after a soaking rain are just as dangerous. With each step, the clay forms an additional layer of cement on the walker's shoes, making it almost impossible to walk after eight or so steps. The clay is also very slick when wet, and can injure cattle and horses, as well as people. The roads in the region were often impassable to wagon traffic after a hard rain. In travelling through the region after the Civil War, J.T. Trowbridge, author of *The South: A Tour of Its Battle-Fields and Ruined Cities, A Journey Through the Desolated States, and Talks with the People* (Hartford, CT: L. Stebbins, 1866), 433, describes the clay banks on the landings of the Alabama River. He noted that heavy rains had "made the steep clayey banks as slippery as if they had been greased; and it was quite exciting to see the deck-hands carry up the freight, - many a poor fellow getting a perilous fall."

either too small, through hereditary divisions, or too concentrated in the hands of a few through the practice of primogeniture which left many sons and daughters landless, the necessity to migrate west became more pressing. Letters from settlers in Perry County, even as late as 1834, only encouraged the outflow of planters to the west. George Mulholland Johnston, writing to his brother Charles, described his move to Alabama. His letter, which was mailed back to Hillsborough, North Carolina, declares, “crops here are very promising. . . . There is great difference between this country and Orange [County, North Carolina] in regard to making money and . . . I would advise all my friends to move out [of North Carolina].”¹⁶ By 1850, many seaboard counties in Virginia had seen their populations decreased by half.¹⁷ As their land declined in value, their only source of revenue was to sell their slaves to the lower south, or move south with their chattel.

Thus, the land rush began. Alabama became the new western frontier, and for about four decades, from the 1820s through the 1850s, the region, especially the Black Belt, became the land of opportunity for landless offspring with money and slaves. Everyone wanted to move to the newly opened southwest region of the United States.¹⁸

¹⁶ William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885* (Durham, NC: Sir Walter Press, 1977), 83, 103n10. Originally in Henry Poellnitz Johnson, *The Gentle Johnstons and Their Kin* (Birmingham, AL: 1966), 192-193. Letter dated August 22, 1834. George died just two weeks after writing the letter.

¹⁷ William E. Dodd, *The Cotton Kingdom* (Yale University Press, 1919), 9. Information from 1850 census.

¹⁸ As an indication of the geographic reference point Alabama played in the United States in the 1830s, see Louise Manly, *History of Judson College, 1838-1913* (Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies Co., Assumed 1913), 26. Manly notes that an examination for graduation “was conducted by a Board of Visitors [sic]” who were “gentlemen of high standing throughout the Southwest.” It is important to note that by the 1850s, heavily used land in Alabama, and even in the Black Belt, began to play out, and many Alabamians headed west to Texas, especially after Texas broke away from Mexico. It was often cheaper to acquire new land than try to sufficiently fertilize the land currently in use over long periods of time. The most prominent example of this exodus from Marion was the departure of Margaret Lea Houston from Marion, after her marriage to Sam Houston. For more information on the Houstons, see Madge Thornall Roberts, *Star of Destiny: The Private Life of Sam and Margaret Houston* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1993). Many genealogists from Texas, both black and white, journey back to the Black Belt to research their ancestry.

They knew how to grow cotton for profit, and the rich soil of the Black Belt, especially in the areas around the canebrakes, which covered vast swaths of land near the rivers, coupled with the cheap labor provided by slaves, made the mass production of cotton for market possible, and profitable. Cotton production doubled almost every twenty years beginning in the 1810s, and production exploded from 1850 to 1860, when it doubled from 2,500,000 bales to 5,000,000 bales. Along with the increase in production came an increase in the value of slaves.¹⁹

Samuel Townes provides an excellent example of the rapid lifestyle changes that took place in the Black Belt in his early history of Marion, published in 1844, just 22 years after lots for the town were auctioned. Townes, himself an immigrant from South Carolina, includes a brief history of Gen. Edwin D. King, one of the more prominent members of Marion's planter class. The author notes that "Less than thirty years have passed away, and he [King], who was thankful for a [few] hog potatoes to appease his appetite, and [won his love] with 'corn dodgers,' now travels in his own carriage, and enjoys his siesta on the luxurious sofa, in dreams of happy strains of music elicited from the piano forte."²⁰ Except for listing the number of servants that various planters owned, however, Townes fails to mention the slaves who built the town and made King's wealth possible.

¹⁹ William E. Dodd, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 26-7. For the number of bales of cotton produced, see <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/phillips.cottongin> (Accessed July 10, 2011).

²⁰ Samuel A. Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, 40. Townes' book is important because it was published just 22 years after the town of Marion was established. While many scholars today would disparage Townes' work as facilitating local myths without documentation to confirm his assertions, it is important to note that "Townes wrote of happenings that were never more than thirty years old and were often contemporary with his stay in Marion." Quote from Introduction by Tom Skinner to Townes' republished "History of Marion," xi.

Thomas M. Owen notes that Townes' work is important because it is the "first effort at local history writing" in Alabama. See Thomas M. Owen, LL.D. "Literature, Alabama," in *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. II (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), 888.

Research has demonstrated that the demographic composition of the Black Belt in the early twenty-first century bears a direct correlation to the agricultural productivity of the Black Belt, its fertile soil, and slavery. With 78% of the slave labor force engaged in agricultural production by 1850, those planters willing to make the investment of money, food, clothing and shelter in their human capital would have made sure their slaves worked only the most productive land, and that land was in the Black Belt. According to James Woodruff in his work on characteristics of the Alabama slave population in 1850, the white population in 1850 shows no distinct differentiation in the number of white inhabitants throughout the six or so distinct physiographic regions of the state, with many Black Belt counties having the roughly the same white population as some coastal plain and mountain counties. In contrast, the slave population shows a marked concentration in the Tennessee Valley, Talladega County, Mobile, and most heavily, in the Black Belt. The Black Belt counties averaged 1.4 slaves per white inhabitant, and many of the central Black Belt counties, including Perry County had a ratio of 2:1, while Dallas County had a ratio of 3:1.²¹ These counties also had a larger percentage of male slaves than female slaves as compared to the rest of the state, and plantations with a larger number of male slaves than female tended to average over 200 acres.²² Not only were the males concentrated in the Black Belt, but males age 20-40, considered the most productive, were concentrated in the region. Woodruff noted that the “best ‘units of work’ were associated with the most productive lands” and owners were practicing “selectivity” in the purchase and breeding of slaves to work their land. Thus, according to Woodruff, a slave was more likely to find himself “sold down the Tombigbee rather than the

²¹ James F. Woodruff, “Some Characteristics of the Alabama Slave Population in 1850,” *Geographical Review* 52, no. 3 (July 1962): 382.

²² *Ibid*, 385.

Mississippi.”²³

All of these population changes, black and white, were still to come when Michael Muckle cleared the first acre of land in what would become Marion, Alabama, in 1817, the same year Alabama became a territory. He chose the highest point in the area to clear land and build a cabin. From this central point, streams had gouged a series of ravines that still radiate from the spot where Muckle built his homestead. These creeks provided a consistent source of fresh water for Muckle and later inhabitants of Marion. In its abundance of streams, the northern part of Perry County is different from the prairie portion of the Black Belt. Because it has more hills than Uniontown in the southern part of the county, Marion has the advantage of having multiple water sources, providing fresh water to the area.²⁴

The Perry County courthouse now occupies the spot where Muckle built his cabin. From the beginning of settlement, through the Civil Rights Movement, to the ongoing battle over absentee voting registration irregularities as late as 2010, the first spot of land to be cleared in modern-day Perry County has remained the focal point of the county and its history. It is from this very site that Marion and Perry County have played a role in the history of the state and the nation.

Perry County was created by an act of the legislature on December 13, 1819, just nine days after Alabama became a state.²⁵ In 1821, five commissioners were selected to find a site for the courthouse. Having not fulfilled their duty in a timely manner, seven

²³ James F. Woodruff, “Some Characteristics of the Alabama Slave Population in 1850,” 388.

²⁴ Thomas M. Owen, LL.D., “Perry County” in *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. II, 1108.

²⁵ Owen, Thomas M., LL.D. *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. I and II. The information about Alabama statehood is found under “Alabama, Periods of History,” vol. I, 13. The information about Perry County is under the heading “Perry County,” vol. II, 1108.

other commissioners were elected on February 5, 1822 to choose the site for a courthouse.²⁶ The growth of Perry County in population, and importance, was due to the arrival of cotton planters and their slaves, who moved into the area beginning around 1822. Anderson West, who had settled in the southern part of the county in 1816, and was the first permanent white settler in Perry County, purchased Michael Muckle's cabin in and land in 1820 when Muckle moved on because he felt the area had become too crowded.²⁷ Though as late as 1826, Marion proper still only had about 144 residents.²⁸

While colonial-era settlers to the Black Belt came upriver from Mobile to trade with Native Americans, most settlers during the early-statehood period moved to the region from the eastern seaboard. With their slaves making the long trip on foot or in wagons, white settlers and their slaves moved south from the Carolinas and Virginia. Evidence of the South Carolina roots of many of the settlers is apparent in the name of the town. Joseph Evans, one of the seven commissioners who chose the site for the town, and was the man who swayed the vote for the present location of the county seat, suggested the name "Marion" in honor of Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, a citizen of South Carolina and hero of the Revolutionary War.²⁹

Generally, the first white settlers in the area owned only a few slaves, if any.

Almost every white settler devoted some land to cotton production, for the purpose of

²⁶ Thomas M. Owen, LL.D. *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. II, 1108.

See also Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, p. 12.

²⁷ W. Stuart Harris, *A Short History of Marion, Perry County, Alabama: Its Homes and Buildings*, 1.

See also Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, 6-8.

²⁸ Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, 22. There were only 144 residents "white and black, men women, and children."

²⁹ Samuel Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, 14. A walk through the Marion city cemetery, founded in 1821, reveals the place of origin of many of the white settlers of the area. Along with South Carolina, many residents prior to the Civil War moved to the county from North Carolina and Virginia, as well as Scotland.

selling it on the market. Not only was the soil ideal for planting cotton, but the climate was very favorable to the production of cotton as well, with early settlers noting that cotton grew in Perry County until December 23, 1818.³⁰ With such a long growing season, the area was destined to attract new inhabitants and white settlers began to pour into the region, bringing an ever-increasing number of slaves with them. The goal of the white settlers was not to live a life of agricultural subsistence, growing only enough food to feed themselves, but instead they intended to use the land to earn a profit. As land prices quickly sky-rocketed, it was almost impossible for a poor white subsistence farmer to buy land in the region after the 1820s.³¹

Muckle's home site, which by 1822 was owned by Anderson West, was chosen to be the county seat. West had added several acres to Muckle's original clearing, and when the site was chosen for the courthouse, he quickly drew up a plan for the town, built roads, and drew off lots for homes. In its earliest days as a county in the new state of Alabama, Perry County experienced land speculation. The cost of land continued to climb as more planters moved to the area to take advantage of the soil and the climate. Rampant speculation was in full swing in 1835 when Gray Huckabee, in a letter written from Greene County (modern-day Hale County), on the western border of Perry County, stated, "Men here frequently buy a tract of land and before they pay more than one-third of the purchase money sell it for 8 or 10 thousand dollars profit. We live in a land of speculation, everything is selling almost for two prices . . . I saw more \$1,000 bills

³⁰ W. Stuart Harris, *A Short History of Marion, Perry County, Alabama*, 1.

³¹ There were poor whites living in Perry County, especially in the northern part of the county. Some of them worked Beaver Bend, the Hugh Davis plantation, after the Civil War. For more information, see Weymouth T. Jordan, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1948, reprint 2004), 161, 163, 165 -66.

circulating among the farmers than I ever did one \$100 bill in North Carolina.”³²

Interestingly, the site for the courthouse was not situated on Perry County’s one major river. The Cahaba (Cahawba) River flows about five miles east of Marion, through the central part of the county. There were settlements along the river, and they were widely known to consist of some of the best cotton land in the county, rivaling the fertile swaths of the canebrake near Uniontown, about twenty miles south of Marion. In a letter dated March 14, 1835, William Huntington, who will be discussed later in this chapter, recommended a parcel of land to relatives in Tennessee. He said of the tract, “Mr. Owen, my overseer, has lived on land adjoining [the tract in question] . . . last year with 9 hands he made 60 heavy bales weighing each 500 lbs. . . . Mr. Gedion Seawell offered me \$12.50 per acre for my place which is also on the Cahawba River. . . . His overseer thinks he will make more cotton than he made in the Cane Brake.”³³

While the Cahaba, or Cahawba, was beneficial to planters because of the fertile soil along its banks, the Cahaba is not a very deep river, and then, as today, it did not always provide a reliable lane of travel. Planters were often forced to store their cotton on flatboats while they waited for the river to rise.³⁴ One benefit of the Cahaba, however, is that it terminates at the Alabama River just west of present-day Selma in Dallas County. The bluff that rises above the junction of the two rivers was chosen as the first

³² Henry Poellnitz Johnson, *The Gentle Johnstons and Their Kin*, 145, quoted in William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 83.

³³ Letter from folder 113 of the Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC. Found in William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 85.

³⁴ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 134-5. If it took too long for the river to rise, planters would attempt to ship their cotton by wagon. Given the slick clay roadbeds, this was often impossible. The area finally became accessible by rail in the 1850s, and planters would send their cargo south from Marion to Marion Junction, a town that was built specifically as a railroad stop where the line from Selma turned north to Marion. The cotton was then sent east to Selma, where it was loaded on steamboats on the Alabama River and sent to Mobile. If the Alabama was too low for travel, the cotton could be sold to factors in Selma.

state capital in 1819. This choice acknowledges the importance of these rivers to the development of the region, as well as the importance of the region to the political history of the state.³⁵ When the capitol was moved in 1826, it was relocated to Tuscaloosa, on the Black Warrior River, at the northern periphery of the Black Belt, just above Hale County. Many Black Belt planters kept town homes in Tuscaloosa. In 1846, the capitol was moved for the last time. The final location of the capitol was Montgomery, a river town that made its money on the transportation of cotton down the Alabama River. As mentioned earlier, the Black Warrior and Alabama drain through the Black Belt. The location of Alabama's capitols in or near the Black Belt clearly demonstrates region's importance in the political history of Alabama.

As the Black Belt continued to prosper, white businessmen who were not planters but who could benefit from the large profits others were making selling cotton, flocked to the region. The Huntington family, who were renowned silversmiths, moved from Connecticut to Hillsborough, North Carolina, in the early nineteenth century. As the nation expanded west, the family followed the expansion, moving from North Carolina to Marion, Alabama, in 1833, selling most of their property in North Carolina, including plantations, prior to the move. It is easy to understand why they chose Marion.

According to a letter dated January 29, 1833, Thomas Mulholland wrote, "I think without hesitation that Marion and Perry Counties [sic] generally, are fully, if not more healthy than Hillsborough or Orange Counties . . . as to the prospects for a physician . . . the

³⁵ For more information on Cahaba, see William H. Brantley, Jr., *Three Capitals: A Book about the First Three Capitals of Alabama: St. Stephens, Huntsville, & Cahawba, 1818-1826* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1976). St. Stephens was the territorial capital, Huntsville was the temporary capital where the state constitutional convention was held, and Cahawba was the first official state capital. For information on life in the town of Cahawba, see Anna M. Gayle Fry, *Memories of Old Cahaba* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1905). See also W. Stuart Harris, *Dead Towns of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977). The site of Old Cahaba is now owned by the Alabama Historical Commission and is open to the public.

county is too healthy for a profitable practice.”³⁶ The willingness of planters and would-be planters from the east coast to settle the area is apparent in a letter written by William Huntington in 1835, just two years after he himself arrived in Marion. In a letter to family members in Tennessee who asked about land in Perry County, Huntington encouraged them to migrate to the area, noting that “The immigration from North and South Carolina is immense. They have continued to come during all the winter and the roads perhaps were never so bad and the weather was never so cold since this country was settled.”³⁷ Though the roads were almost impassable, the settlers still came by foot, horseback, or wagon. They brought their worldly belongings, including their enslaved property, with them.

The Huntington story provides a good illustration of the life of prosperous white settlers in the region. Their letters generally do not mention slaves, except for discussions of selling them to make money to pay debts.³⁸ In this, they were not different from many of their counterparts. They often over-extended their credit through speculation in land. They would be forced to liquidate their assets, including their slaves. Many businessmen that lived in town, the Huntingtons included, were able to plant cotton or corn when they wanted, and needed, to sell it for profit to supplement their

³⁶ Henry Poellnitz Johnson. *The Gentle Johnstons and Their Kin*, 186, quoted in William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 83. There is also a letter written by Dr. C.A. Woodruff to Samuel A. Townes in 1844, in which he comments on the healthy climate of the town, noting that he chose to live in Marion for this very reason. See Townes, *The History of Marion, Alabama*, 44-49.

³⁷ Letter from folder 113 of the Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, quoted in William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 85.

³⁸ For a letter regarding the intended sale of “negroes” as he refers to his slaves, see William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 87. The letter, dated “Marion 17 July 1840,” is from William Huntington to Dr. James Webb of the Bank of Cape Fear. Two years later, John and William Huntington had their goods sold by the sheriff at a sale on February 7, 1842. See Perry County Deed Book D, p. 328. The deed book states that the sheriff disposed of “the goods and chattels of William and John Huntington.” Soon after, John moved to Mississippi for a fresh start.

income. They would then pay their debts, buy more slaves and begin the land speculation process again.³⁹

Before the Civil War, the Huntington family did very well at their main line of business – silversmithing and selling watches. According to William Huntington, the father of the Marion branch of the family, he could “get as much work as I can do, get much better prices [than in North Carolina].” Though silversmithing and jewelry repair were his main line of business, he also had “200 acres in cultivation in corn and cotton.”⁴⁰

Education was important for families in Perry County, for their white children and their black slaves, in spite of an 1832 statute that made it a crime to instruct “any Negro, free or slave, in the arts of reading and writing; a fine of from \$250 to \$500 was imposed upon persons found guilty.”⁴¹ Another law passed in 1856 was entitled “To Prohibit the Teaching of Slaves to Read and Write.” It read “if any person or persons shall teach or be engaged in teaching . . . any slave or slaves to read or write, he, she, or they shall be liable to indictment therefore, and on conviction, shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars and be imprisoned in the county jail not less than three months, one or both, at the

³⁹ William Huntington was forced to liquidate his assets at a public sale in February 1842. However, by the time of the slave census in 1850, he owned nine slaves, ranging in age from four to sixty-five. By the 1860 census, William Huntington owned \$6,000 worth of real estate and \$7,000 worth of personal property. See 1850 slave census. For 1860 population in Marion proper – 1,708 – see Thomas M. Owen, *Biography of Alabama*, Vol. II, p. 940.

For more information on the topic of slave owners mortgaging their property to pay debts, as well as to buy more land and/or slaves, see Bonnie Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine: Mortgaging Human Property,” *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 4 (November 2010): 817-866.

⁴⁰ Letter from William Huntington to Dr. James Webb of the Bank of Cape Fear, dated May 17, 1834, quoted in William Johnston Hogan, *Huntington Silversmiths, 1763-1885*, 85. Original letter is in the James Webb Papers, Folder 34, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, and Chapel Hill, N.C.

⁴¹ John G. Aikin, *Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama to 1843* (Philadelphia: Alexander Tower, 1843), 397. See also Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004 reprint), 15; and Glenn N. Sisk, “Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1953): 132. Sisk also references Aikin. \$500 in the antebellum period would be the equivalent of about \$6000 today.

discretion of the jury.”⁴²

In spite of the laws, evidence suggests that many Marion residents taught their slaves to read, laying the groundwork for a strong emphasis on education in the black community after the Civil War. In his book on African American families, Andrew Billingsley traces the roots of strong black families in America and notes that several came from Perry County. He cites the educational advantage former Perry County slaves had in post-bellum black society, “reflecting the high level of literacy in antebellum Perry County.”⁴³ While the majority of planters in the county likely did not teach their slaves to read, the seemingly high number of owners who did educate their slaves at some level made Marion unusual, and set the stage for the formation of the Lincoln Normal School in 1867.

One such white Marion educator was Miss Burke, originally from North Carolina. A teacher in Hillsborough, and the spinster daughter of Governor Burke of North Carolina, Mary Williams Burke moved to Marion in the 1830s as part of the group of settlers that came to be known as the “Hillsborough Colony” in Marion.⁴⁴ Miss Burke had taught Martha Strudwick Young, a relative of Julia Tutwiler, in Hillsborough, where Strudwick had received a Huntington spoon as a reward for good behavior.⁴⁵ But Miss Burke did not limit her teaching to the white citizens of Marion. It was noted, in a letter written by William Huntington shortly after Miss Burke died in the early hours of

⁴² *Acts of the Fifth Biennial Session of the General Assembly of Alabama* (Montgomery, AL: Bates and Lucas, State Printers, 1856), 50. See also Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 15-16.

⁴³ Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 314.

⁴⁴ Johnston, *Huntington Silversmiths*, 85.

⁴⁵ Johnston, *Huntington Silversmiths*, 45. For information about Martha Strudwick Young, see the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame website at <http://www.awhf.org/young.html>.

January 31, 1869, that “she sat in that chair eight long years – reading, mending, knitting and teaching General Johnston’s children and others, white and black.”⁴⁶

Another example of a white slave owner who educated her slaves was Mrs. M.A. Tarrant, who purchased Clarke’s Commentaries for her servant James Childs after she taught him to read. After the Civil War, Childs was ordained by W.H. McIntosh, the white preacher at Siloam Baptist Church, and preached at the African American Berean Baptist Church for the rest of his life.⁴⁷ In his extensive work on the Lincoln School, which will be covered in greater detail in a later chapter, Bertis English notes the unusual tendency for whites in Marion to educate their slaves, and their willingness to assist freed slaves in their quest for education in the post-bellum era.⁴⁸ This emphasis on education and the creation of the Lincoln School would create a class of citizens prepared to lead the black community during the second Reconstruction of the 1960s.

In theory, antebellum education was limited to whites, but it was certainly not limited to white males. In fact, the citizens of Marion created two schools for their daughters before they founded a permanent school to educate their sons.⁴⁹ Antebellum academies, institutes, and seminaries were generally situated in towns of some size and prominence, and schools for white females existed all over the state of Alabama. There

⁴⁶ Heartt-Wilson Papers, Folder 3, document 1373. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., quoted in Johnston, *Huntington Silversmiths*, 109.

⁴⁷ Julia Lovelace Murfee, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church* (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Publishing Company, 1943), 10.

⁴⁸ Bertis English, “Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875” makes this assertion in numerous points throughout his work.

⁴⁹ For information on higher education for women in the United States, see John Mack Faragher and Florence Howe, eds., *Women and Higher Education in American History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988). For information on women’s education in the antebellum South and why fathers in a very patriarchal society viewed women’s education with such importance, see Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

were seemingly more schools for girls than boys.⁵⁰ Many planters left provisions in their wills to provide for the education of their children, and they did not differentiate between their male and female heirs in this matter.⁵¹

Most schools in the antebellum period in the Black Belt, whether for girls or boys, were private schools. Though Barton Academy, the first public school in Alabama, was founded in 1852 in Mobile,⁵² the vast majority of the schools in Alabama prior to the Civil War were private. Black Belt planters sent their children to private schools because they viewed public schools as pauper schools where orphaned and indigent children were sent to be looked after at public expense. In 1857, 41 of the 93 private schools in Alabama, as well as 22 of the 76 academies, which were also private, and two colleges were located in the Black Belt.⁵³ There were no public educational institutions in the Black Belt prior to the Civil War.

When the Alabama legislature voted in 1854 to set up a public school system in the state, the only negative votes cast in the House of Representatives came from twelve

⁵⁰ No thorough examination or survey of educational facilities for females in Alabama has been conducted. The author is aware of several schools, however. There were two schools in Marion, as well as a school in Summerfield in Dallas County, north of Selma. There was a school in Tuscaloosa, Highland Home, and much later, Anniston, and Talladega. The Southern Female University was located in Birmingham. Several schools became co-ed and are still in existence today in an altered form. Those schools include Huntingdon College in Montgomery, which was founded as Tuskegee Female College in Tuskegee in 1854. The University of Montevallo was founded by Julia Tutwiler in 1896 as the Alabama Girls' Industrial School. Tutwiler had previously served as the first president of the Livingston Female Academy, later the State Normal School, and now the University of West Alabama in Livingston. Judson College, in Marion, is the only school in Alabama that is still all women, though they do allow men to take on-line classes. Cadets from the local military academy also took classes at Judson in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁵¹ W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 101-102. Harris provides several examples of wills from Perry County Will Books A & B, with dates ranging from 1824 – 1859.

⁵² Robert Gamble, *The Alabama Catalog: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 281.

⁵³ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900," *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring, 1953): 127. Sisk's information is based on the State Education Report of 1857, 74-75.

Black Belt representatives.⁵⁴ They opposed the bill because it was to be financed by taking the proceeds from the sale of sixteenth section lands in each county and combining them into one state fund that would be distributed throughout Alabama based on school population.⁵⁵ The land in the Black Belt was worth much more than land anywhere else in the state, so the Black Belt planter's tax money would be going to educate poor whites, and possibly free blacks, in other parts of the state. Though the Black Belt was a large population center in Alabama during the antebellum period, the majority of their population was enslaved and therefore would not attend the schools. The miserly attitude of Black Belt planters toward appropriating funds for public education continued in the second half of the nineteenth century. The appropriation of funds for schools for blacks lagged far behind the funding for white schools into the second half of the twentieth century. White taxpayers would use the same excuses for refusing to adequately fund public schools for blacks in the twentieth century as they did for poor whites in the first half of the nineteenth century – a minority of whites paid the majority of the taxes and they did not want their money to educate those who did not pay taxes. And in the case of blacks, especially in the one hundred years after the end of the Civil War, white taxpayers argued that because blacks worked in the fields, they did not need an education.⁵⁶ After the Civil War, white landowners in the Black Belt were able to maintain the political power they first gained during the wealthy days of the antebellum period, and they used that power to ensure that their land would turn a profit through the use of a poorly

⁵⁴ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900," 127. Sisk quotes from the *Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly*, 1853-1854, 441-443.

⁵⁵ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900," 127.

⁵⁶ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900," 128-129. Sisk references an article dated July 19, 1901 in the *Marengo [County] Democrat*. The current state constitution was also enacted in 1901, and it allowed townships to give more money to white than black schools.

educated labor force.

The first school constructed in Marion was built in 1824 by Thomas Billingslea, on the southeast corner of the intersection of Dekalb and Washington Streets, though not much is known of this school.⁵⁷ Just ten years later, the Marion Female Seminary was established for the education of women in Marion, and opened in 1835. Samuel A. Townes, the author of the first history of Marion, which was also the first local history ever written in Alabama, was elected president of the Board. Hon. Andrew Barry Moore, who would serve as governor of Alabama in 1861 when the state seceded from the Union, was secretary of the Board. The school building was completed, and furnished, in 1850.⁵⁸ While religious emphasis was important, the Female Seminary was unusual in that its constitution was written to keep the school “in harmony with . . . variant religious views.”⁵⁹ The school was not to be sectarian in its instruction, and denominational connections were not to affect the choice of principals or teachers.⁶⁰

One of the most famous instructors who taught at the Seminary was the Prussian-born art instructor, Nicola Marschall. Marschall is illustrative of the changes occurring in

⁵⁷ W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 93. For the location of the school, see Thomas M. Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. II, 941. The book notes that the school was built at the site of the present Second Baptist Church. The Second Baptist Church later became Berean Baptist Church, and is still located in this location. For more on Berean Baptist Church, see chapter two of this work.

⁵⁸ The Marion Female Seminary closed in 1915. By 1930, the building was reduced from three stories to two, and had become the home of Perry County High School. See W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 37. This was the school that white students in town attended until a new school was constructed in 1962. The building was sold by the City Board of Education, which was established in 1965 when the county school board was forced to integrate. The Perry County Board of Education sued in 1986 and had the City Board of Education declared illegal. See *Marion Times-Standard*, June 19, 1986. This voided the sale of two buildings – the former elementary school and the former high school, to the private entities that had purchased them. The Perry County Historical Society, which had bought the Seminary Building, reached a compromise and retained the structure, which is still used by the Historical Society as of 2010. The individual who bought the elementary school building was forced to return it to the school board. The building sat empty for over 25 years and is in a precarious state as of 2010.

⁵⁹ Townes, *History of Marion, Alabama*, 52.

⁶⁰ Townes, *History of Marion, Alabama*, 53. The school was eventually taken over by the Presbyterian denomination. See W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 38.

Perry County in 1850, and his work for the Confederacy places him in stark contrast to the events that would occur in Perry County just over 100 years later. When Marschall arrived in New Orleans from Prussia, he went to Mobile looking for work. He discovered that Marion, with its multiple schools – the Female Seminary, the Judson Female Institute, Howard College, and the St. Wilfrid’s School - was a seat of learning, the “Athens of the State.”⁶¹ Marschall traveled to Marion and became the art instructor at the Female Seminary. He arrived, like most other settlers to the area, with almost nothing. He profited from the cotton wealth in the area by teaching art to the daughters of planters who made their fortunes with slave labor. While his art is well-known, he is also remembered as the designer of the gray Confederate uniform, and as the designer of the First National Confederate flag, the Stars and Bars.⁶²

The Judson Female Institute was founded just two years after the Marion Female Seminary. It was Baptist in origin, though students of all Christian denominations were allowed to attend.⁶³ Named for Anne Hasseltine Judson, the first female foreign

⁶¹ Townes, *History of Marion, Alabama*, 31. With the addition of the Lincoln School for newly freed slaves in 1867, the town cemented its claim to being the seat of higher learning in Alabama. Other schools for white students existed before the Civil War, but evidence on them is sparse. These institutions included the Marion Male Academy, in operation in 1839, the Marion Lyceum, in operation in 1841, Madison College, open from at least 1841 until 1843, Hopewell Academy, open in 1839, Speed’s School for Boys, open in the early 1860s, and Uniontown Male Academy, open in 1860. The dates listed are from notices in the local newspapers the *Marion Herald*, the *Weekly Marion American*, and the *Cane Brake Herald*. The institution’s exact dates of operation are not known. Their existence is only known through their notice in the newspapers. See W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 96-98 and 102.

⁶² Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 39. There is some debate as to whether Marschall actually designed the flag. According to Harris, vol. 1, 183-184, Mrs. Napoleon Lockett, the mother of Governor Andrew Barry Moore’s sons-in-law, came up with the idea of asking Marschall to design the flag upon the Governor’s mention that no flag had been designed. This is the “Stars and Bars” national flag of the Confederacy, not the more well-known “Rebel flag” or “battle flag.”

⁶³ Townes, *History of Marion, Alabama*, 55-59. See also Louise Manly, *History of Judson College*, 31-32. This source contains a letter from Milo P. Jewett, the first president of Judson, in which he explains why the Baptists felt led to begin a women’s college in a town of just over 400 people, black and white, when there was already a school of learning for women in the town. He lists many of the obstacles to education in town.

missionary appointed by the Baptist Convention, the school's ties to the denomination make it just one part of the Baptist's connections to the town of Marion. The first Baptist church in Perry County was Oakmulgee Church, founded in 1820 south of Marion, before the town was established.⁶⁴ The founding of Siloam Baptist church in June 1822 predates the founding of the Alabama State Baptist Convention near Greensboro in 1823.⁶⁵ Siloam was the first church founded in the town of Marion.⁶⁶ The founding took place just one month after Marion was chosen as the county seat. Milo P. Jewett, President of Judson, and Gen. E.D. King, Trustee of Judson, began publishing the *Alabama Baptist* newspaper in 1840. Nine years later, they purchased another paper, and joining it with the *Baptist*, renamed it the *South Western Baptist*, an indication of the geographic place that the region occupied in the United States at the time.⁶⁷ The prominence of Siloam and Marion in Baptist circles was demonstrated by the multiple conventions the Alabama Baptists held there.⁶⁸ In 1844, the Baptist Convention at Siloam in Marion adopted the "Alabama Resolutions," which called for a separation of Southern and Northern Baptists due to the conflict of the members of the two regions over slavery.⁶⁹ This separation occurred in 1845 and led to the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention. It was the presence of Baptist leaders in Marion after the Civil War, however, that spurred the creation of the Lincoln School to educate freed slaves.

As previously mentioned, the Baptist denomination founded the Judson Female Institute in 1838. Members of the congregation then founded Howard College, for males,

⁶⁴ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 71.

⁶⁵ Lovelace, Julia Murfee, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church*, vii.

⁶⁶ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 74.

⁶⁷ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 76.

⁶⁸ Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 10; W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 75.

⁶⁹ Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 10. For a full transcript of the document, see Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 10-12.

in 1841.⁷⁰ The buildings at both Judson and Howard were built with slave labor.⁷¹

Slaves performed the manual labor at the schools, including hauling water, building fires in all of the dorm and classrooms, and cooking.⁷² In a letter to Louise Manly, the author of *History of Judson College, 1838-1913*, Elizabeth Bradley McCondichie wrote of dinner that “There were only three long tables [for the students in the dining hall], with colored servants for each.”⁷³ Most significantly, it was slave labor that provided the means for planters to send their daughters and sons to school, to receive an education that, by law, slaves were not allowed to have. It was from the sale of slave-grown cotton that Julia Tarrant Barron was able to donate the land on which Siloam Church and Judson were built. Interestingly, she had no daughters. Her only son, John Barron, one of the first

⁷⁰ For background information on the removal of Howard College from Marion, as well as the founding of Marion Military Institute, see Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 27. Howard later moved to East Lake near Birmingham in 1887, and moved again to the Homewood area of Birmingham, changing its name to Samford University in the process. After Howard moved to East Lake, citizens of Marion took control of the Howard campus and founded Marion Military Institute.

⁷¹ For information on the building of Judson, see Louise Manly, *History of Judson College*, 13. See also, W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 146. The number of educational institutions, coupled with the wealth of the area, as well as a climate that was deemed healthy because of its distance from the sea, allowed Marion to attract several well-known educators. Dr. Milo P. Jewett served as the first president of Judson. Upon leaving Marion in 1855 due to growing personal pressure because of his abolitionist leanings, he returned north and convinced Mathew Vassar to open a women’s school.⁷¹ Vassar College is still in existence today, though it is now coed.

W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 144-146 provides information on the building of Howard, though no information exists regarding the building of the first frame structure that housed the school, and burned 2 years after the school opened. Little is known of the second building, which cost \$13,000 and was used from 1846 until it burned in 1854. Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 146, 169. The burning of the second building led the town to memorialize Harry, the slave-janitor of Henry Jailbird, the school’s president. Harry slept in a room the rear of the President’s office. When a fire broke out, Harry alerted all of the sleeping students and saved their lives, except for one. He subsequently died from burns and injuries suffered when he jumped from the building. For more about Harry, see Manly, *History of Judson College*, 160.

⁷² Louise Manly, *History of Judson College*, 21-22. Fanny Whitfield, class of 1853 and daughter of Gen. N.B. Whitfield, the builder of Gaineswood in Demopolis, wrote this particular remembrance. She mentions that servants must have built the fires in the rooms, and she bemoans the fact that she could not remember the name of “the big fat man who cooked.” Manly, the author of the book in which this quote appears, notes that the cook’s name was Ransom. No last name is given. The fact that the girls drew water from tubs is mentioned multiple times in the book, but the writer’s never make the connection that someone had to be up before the students woke at 4:30 a.m. to put water in the tubs for the girls to draw from.

⁷³ Manly, *History of Judson College*, 161.

graduates of Howard, gave the land for the new site of Howard after it burned the second time.⁷⁴ Townspeople responded to the crisis with donations of “money, materials, and slave labor.”⁷⁵

Baptist preacher Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry made his mark on the educational institutions in Marion, both before and after the Civil War. He became president of Howard College in December of 1865, and remained in that post until 1868. Prior to the Civil War, he served several terms in the Alabama legislature and was noted for his work for public education.⁷⁶ He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1857 and 1859. Curry was instrumental in the founding of the Lincoln School for freed slaves, and he insisted that Baptists remain involved in the lives of freemen and women. He became the leading advocate for public education in Alabama in the second half of the twentieth century.

The names Tarrant, Barron, and Curry appear continuously throughout the antebellum history of Marion. These families were wealthy, and used their wealth to build the churches and schools of the town. The majority of their wealth came from the sale of cotton. Cotton is grown almost exclusively as a commodity crop. Though many plantations used some of the cotton grown on the land to weave cloth for their own clothing and linens, a family would not need more than an acre or so for personal use.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 144. The first home of Judson and, then Howard, was on land located just behind Siloam Baptist Church.

⁷⁵ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 171.

⁷⁶ Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. III, 444-5. In 1903, the Alabama legislature voted to have a likeness of Curry installed as one of Alabama’s two representatives in statuary hall in the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. This honor was in recognition of his work as an educator. His statue remained in the Hall until 2009, when it was replaced by a statue of Helen Keller. The other statue from Alabama is a likeness of General Joseph Wheeler.

⁷⁷ Bluff Hall in Demopolis, Alabama, has a dress on display that is literally made “from scratch.” The cotton was grown on a Marengo County plantation. The slaves grew, picked, ginned and carded the cotton. The mistress of the plantation dyed and spun the cotton, and wove the simple blue and yellow

In the antebellum period, and until mechanization of cotton farming in the 1930s, cotton could only return a profit if the labor costs were low. Thus some type of cheap labor source was necessary for cotton production to achieve the importance it did in Alabama. Prior to the Civil War, planters used the same source of labor that had developed on the east coast and proved profitable for their ancestors: black slaves.

Though, as previously mentioned, there were slaves who learned to read and write prior to the Civil War, the majority of the enslaved population was illiterate. Thus, it can be difficult to know what their lives were like prior to emancipation. It becomes necessary to read “between the lines” of writings produced by whites, such as farm journals, letters, newspaper articles and editorials, financial records of businesses and individuals, and church minutes. Written family reminiscences of blacks and whites are also somewhat useful, though like oral histories, they are not as reliable as primary documents written during the period. Filling in the gaps in those oral narratives with first-hand accounts from the WPA slave narratives is helpful. As with any information that relies solely on human memory, however, it is important to verify events from primary sources as much as possible.

Several sources document the lives of slaves in Marion. Though many early histories of Marion only mention slaves tangentially, two works, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation* by Weymouth T. Jordan, and *My Confederate Kinfolk* by Thulani Davis, provide more direct pictures of the lives of slaves in Perry County. In many ways, the story of Hugh Davis and his Beaver Bend plantation is itself “a representative

check pattern fabric. She then cut and pieced the dress to fit. For more information, visit Bluff Hall, located at 407 N. Commissioners Avenue in Demopolis, Alabama.

plantation of its time and region.”⁷⁸ The farm books and receipts he left chart the day-to-day existence of a Black Belt plantation and the slaves that worked the land. By reading what Davis had to say about the most effective way to run a plantation, modern readers can discover details about the daily lives of the slaves that lived and worked there.

Hugh Davis built his plantation on the Cahaba River in northeastern Perry County, at the point where the Appalachian foothills dissolve away toward the Black Belt prairie. Davis moved to the region in 1834, at the birth of its agricultural boom of slave-grown cotton. He grew rich as the region matured, and he died in 1862 as the old slave system was wrenched away via the Civil War. As with many white men of his day, Davis originally moved to the area to practice a profession, and then turned to planting cotton full time. Even while practicing law, he grew cotton to supplement his income, so he was very familiar with the work involved and the money to be made. Davis’s plantation contributed to Alabama’s position as the foremost cotton producing state in the South. Though Marion had been a sleepy town from its inception choice as county seat in 1822 until around 1830, by the time Davis arrived in 1834, Marion and Perry County were quickly becoming populated with planters, merchants, lawyers, doctors, blacksmiths, silversmiths, and slaves.⁷⁹

The numbers tell the story. In 1830, just before the land boom, there were “three tavern-keepers, one bar-keeper, three merchants, three physicians, four lawyers, one

⁷⁸ Jordan, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation*, 1.
Thulani Davis, *A Twenty-First Century Freedwoman Confronts Her Roots* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006).

⁷⁹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 3. Several authors noted the fact that as late as 1830, tree stumps still marked the streets of Marion.

carpenter, one cabinet-maker, one tailor, and one Negro blacksmith.”⁸⁰ By 1842, there were “9 preachers. 6 Doctors of Medicine, M.D. 3 Botanic or Steam Doctors. 15 Lawyers. 2 Resident Surgeon Dentists. 1 Barber, and shavers of promissory notes . . . two taverns . . . eight dry goods stores . . . two groceries . . . two confectionaries, two drug stores, two shoe makers shops, one tin ware manufactory, two saddler shops, two livery stables, three blacksmith’s shops, four tailor’s shops, two carriage makers, one gin factory, two cabinet work shop, tow printing offices . . . and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.”⁸¹ The inordinate number of lawyers can likely be explained by the need for their expertise to secure land deeds, conduct detailed business transactions, and take care of litigation that arises when large amounts of money and property are at stake.

There had been profound changes in Marion in just twelve years thanks to slave labor and the cotton it produced. In 1830, the Black Belt and the counties to the south, along with Madison County in the Tennessee Valley, and Talladega County in the newly opened lands of the Upper Creeks, produced 102,684 bales of cotton. By 1840, the same area produced 445,725 bales.⁸² Hugh Davis had seen it all and participated in the growth of the town and the cotton trade in Alabama. After he moved from town to his plantation in 1848, he participated in the temperance movement, and just over a decade later, he watched Alabama, led by Black Belt politicians, go to war to protect a labor system that made all of the growth the region had experienced possible.

⁸⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 3.

See also *Marion Standard*, March 26, 1909. Captain W. L. Fagin (Fagan) wrote a history of Marion that was published in the *Marion Standard* in 1886. Reprints of his account appeared in the *Marion Standard* in 1909. Both Weymouth Jordan and W. Stuart Harris reference the 1909 reprint in their works, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation* and *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, respectively.

⁸¹ Townes, *History of Marion, Alabama*, 33-34.

⁸² Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 10. By 1850, the state produced 564,429 bales and was the leading cotton producing state. See also Charles Davis, *The Cotton Kingdom in Alabama*, Alabama State Department of Archives and History (1939), 42.

Davis' arrival in Marion in December 1834 was opportune. In 1835, the *Niles' Weekly Register*, published in Baltimore, Maryland, stated, "The crops of this county [Perry] are exceedingly promising . . . no one will deny that this is not a much better average crop than that of last year; and that a man must be a miser and an ingrate, who would not be satisfied with such a reward of his labor as was yielded last year."⁸³ The initial demand for cotton by British textiles mills increased dramatically after the War of 1812, just one year after Hugh Davis was born. Within a few years, the Mississippi Territory was opened via Andrew Jackson's exploits at Horseshoe Bend in 1814. Cotton was already in the Tombigbee River region by 1772 and the Cherokee were making cotton cloth at least by 1796.⁸⁴ In 1802, three cotton gins were introduced in the territory that would become Alabama and two of them were operated by Indians.⁸⁵ By 1810, just before demand for cotton from Alabama would begin its steep ascent, the use of black slave labor for the production of cotton was already established in the state, having been practiced on the eastern seaboard for over one hundred years. By that time, slaves made up 40 percent of the population of the lower Tombigbee basin.⁸⁶

The slaves that arrived in Alabama from the east coast generally walked to their new home, driving cattle and hogs in front of them.⁸⁷ Moves were often made in the winter, when no planting could be done, so that the family and slaves would be on the new land in time to clear the fields before spring planting. When an entourage arrived in

⁸³ *Niles' Weekly Register*, October 17, 1835. See also Weymouth T. Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 9.

⁸⁴ Abernethy, *Formative Period in Alabama*, 18-19. See also Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, From the Earliest Period* (Charleston, SC: Walker and James, 1851), 326.

⁸⁵ Abernethy, *Formative Period*, 19. See also Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 469-70.

⁸⁶ Abernethy, *Formative Period in Alabama*, 19. For more information on the importance of the cotton gin to United States history, see Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

⁸⁷ Abernethy, *Formative Period*, 36.

Alabama, especially prior to 1830, there were no amenities within several miles from which to get supplies to begin the building process. The planter and his family and slaves were met with a vast wilderness in which they had to immediately become self-sufficient.

Land had to be cleared and log cabins built from the timber cut on the land.⁸⁸ The first houses were not large Greek-revival mansions with porticoes and decorative plaster trim. The earliest houses built for the planters were constructed of hand-planed heart-pine logs. The most common architectural style was the dogtrot cabin, consisting of two-rooms with an open central hallway between them. Some of these early houses were later incorporated into larger structures, or the halls were enclosed with doors and transom windows. Some planters remained in their simple houses for several years.⁸⁹ Regardless of the architectural style, all of the houses were built by hand. All of the timber was cut and planed by hand. The corners were mitered using hand tools. The walls were mortise and tenoned from hard, heart-pine wood, by hand.⁹⁰ More specifically, these houses were built by the hands of slaves, on land cleared by slaves who often worked alongside their masters and his sons. These were slaves that had, the year before, harvested a cotton crop on the east coast that allowed their owners to buy new cotton land in Alabama.

⁸⁸ Abernethy, *Formative Period*, 76.

⁸⁹ "It took \$50.00 to put UNCLE CHARLIE on de FLOOR"! Charlie Van Dyke, interview by Mary A. Poole, ID#0149-4366, WPA Project 3609, Mobile, Alabama, p. 1 of interview transcription, p. 397 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Van Dyke notes that his master, a member of the King family in Dallas County, owned about a thousand acres and a hundred slaves, but for all his riches, they "lived in a plain [sic] plank house." See also B.A Botkin, *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 91. Jenny, a slave in Alabama, describes her master's house saying, "The logs was all hewed off smooth-like, and the cracks all fixed with nice chinking. . . . He didn't have no big plantation, but he keeps 'bout three hundred slaves." Her description is of a log cabin, not a cottage with clapboard siding or large plantation house.

⁹⁰ For detailed information on the building techniques and practices used in early Alabama log structures, see Eugene M. Wilson, *Alabama Folk Houses* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Historical Commission, 1975), chapter 2. For information on the evolution of these structures, see chapter 3.

For many years after a group of slaves arrived in Alabama, they continued the process of clearing land on plantations. Clearing usually began in January or February when the slave's labor was not needed to cultivate a cotton crop. The first step was to ring the trees on the land to kill them. Once the trees were dead, they were cut. The wood was split for fence rails or sent to the saw mill. Other logs were used by the slaves to construct their living quarters. The underbrush was burned and then the land was broken with plows. Interestingly, the tree stumps were not removed in the first few years after a piece of land was cleared.⁹¹ Over a period of several years, slaves cleared 180 acres, built over 30 structures, made at least 50,000 fence rails and dug seven miles of ditches on Hugh Davis' Beaver Bend plantation.⁹² Though there was a burgeoning timber industry in the southern part of the state prior to the Civil War, there were not enough uses for the majority of the felled heart-pine virgin timber on most plantations, including Davis's, and it was burned to clear the fields for planting cotton.

By 1850, there were 2,137,000 whites in the South. There were 1,841,000 blacks, both slave and free. The slave states exported \$102,000,000 of cotton that year, which accounted for just over half of the nation's total exports. Combined with sugar (\$14.8 million) and rice, (\$2.6 million), the South exported \$119,400,000 (58.8%) of the nation's \$203,000,000 in exports for the year.⁹³ Almost all of the South's exports were agricultural products grown by slave labor.

⁹¹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 32. It has already been noted that tree stumps marked the streets of Marion for several years as well. When a piece of land was cleared for a house, the tree stumps were often left in the ground and the house built over them. There are houses in Marion today with stumps under their floors. One house, built on Centreville Street in 1853, has a perfectly preserved 160+ year-old stump under the floor in the front room on the right-hand side of what was once a two-room antebellum cottage with a central hall. The house was enlarged in the 1880s to a six room house with a large central hall. It retains a servant's house in the back yard.

⁹² Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 33.

⁹³ Dodd, *The Cotton Kingdom*, 10.

Alabama was the leading cotton producing state in the United States in 1850. Perry County did its part to put Alabama in that position. The county had 22,285 residents. There were 13,943 slaves (62.5% of population) and 8,342 white (37.5%) residents.⁹⁴ Of that number, 1,081 (4.8% of the overall population and 13% of whites) owned slaves. Of those, 419 (1.8% of the overall population and 41.5% of the slave owners) owned more than ten slaves. Interestingly, eighty-four percent (7,007) of the white farm population owned land, though only about 15% of that number owned slaves.⁹⁵ By 1855, the total population of the county had increased to 22,782, with 14,661 (64%) being enslaved. There were 1,861 white males over age 21, and 457 (24.5% of the white males, and 2% of the total population) owned slaves. Sixty-three (13.7% of the white male slave-owning population) owned between 50 and 100 slaves, and ten (<1% of the slave-owning population) owned 100-200 slaves. By 1860, the population was 27,724: 9,479 whites and 18,245 blacks, who comprised 66% of the population.⁹⁶

Along with building houses and clearing land, the slaves performed the physical labor necessary to keep the plantation functioning, often in conjunction with the sons of the planter. It was noted, for instance, that Hugh Davis' sons were often put to work, and "Sometimes they plowed the fields; at other times they rode about the plantation with

⁹⁴ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 155. Marion had 1,544 residents and Uniontown had 300. The majority of the population lived on the farms and plantations in the country-side. Many Marion "residents" actually owned plantations out in the county and kept homes in town as well. Hugh Davis is a good example of this arrangement.

⁹⁵ Frank L. Owsley and Harriet C. Owsley, "The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Southern History*, VI (February, 1940), 32.

⁹⁶ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 22. Information from Charles Davis, *Cotton Kingdom in Alabama*, 40,42, 194-6. See also Perry County Census returns of 1855, US Census Bureau.

their father.”⁹⁷ Slaves with special skills such as Wright, the carpenter, were hired out to bring in extra money.⁹⁸ Along with being hired out for specialty work, slaves were sent by their masters to perform work on municipal projects on behalf of the planter. Sometimes the planter’s contribution of slaves for municipal work was voluntary and sometimes it was mandatory. Slave labor was contributed by the people of Marion for the rebuilding of Howard College after a disastrous fire. In *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation*, author Weymouth Jordan notes that every year the slaves performed “work on the public roads in the neighborhood of Beaver Bend. According to law, each planter was expected to furnish annually a portion of his Negroes for this work . . . every adult male was expected to put in a few days each year on the roads.”⁹⁹

An examination of Hugh Davis’ “General Rules and Directions Every Year” provides a glimpse of some of the jobs that slaves performed on the plantation itself. Davis directed that the “plows Start the 15th January; Begin to plant corn 15th February; Begin to plant cotton 15th March; . . . Buy neith[er] meat nor bread.”¹⁰⁰ Other items that were not to be purchased included plow stocks, ax handles, hoe helves, harnesses, horse collars and well ropes. All materials needed in the blacksmith shop were to be found on the land, except iron ore.¹⁰¹ Manure was collected and redistributed as fertilizer. At Beaver Bend, 750 yards of roses were planted along the road in front of Davis’s house.¹⁰² Ditches were dug to drain excess rain water from the fields, and to irrigate the fields in

⁹⁷ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 19. Information from Hugh Davis’ farm book, March 24, 1856. Even 15 years after Davis had begun work at Beaver Bend, his sons were working in the fields.

⁹⁸ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 153.

⁹⁹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 28. From the Farm Book for January 1, 1848. For the daily routine of a field slave as evidenced through the daily schedule of an overseer, see Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 52-3.

¹⁰¹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 30.

¹⁰² Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 19.

time of draught.¹⁰³ Fence building and repair along with equipment repair were constant tasks on the plantation.¹⁰⁴ There was also cooking, washing and ironing to be done, for the planter's family, the overseer's family, and the slaves. At Beaver Bend, the "Plantation Cook" did the washing, probably because washing involved boiling large kettles of water.¹⁰⁵ Though except for the washing and ironing, Davis does not specifically mention that slaves performed all of the aforementioned tasks, it is fair to assume that all of the items "not to be purchased" were manufactured by slaves, and all of the tasks listed were performed by the slaves.

Davis lists his slaves by first name only. In his list of names and duties recorded on January 3, 1861, on the eve of the Civil War, he divides their tasks into what he refers to as "Regulars" and "Irregulars." In addition, there were the house servants who were maids, butlers, and houseboys. The regulars hoed and plowed, which was vital to the production of cotton at Beaver Bend. Beside their names, Davis lists their main duties and provides his opinion of the slaves and/or their work. An "0" by the name meant the slave had "tar on their fingers [meaning they stole or were good cotton pickers]." The irregulars were skilled laborers who did exacting work out of the field. Davis does not provide an opinion of their work, but his entries about their duties are more detailed. According to his list, the irregulars included Sol, the carriage driver, orchardist, blacksmith and currier, and Wright, the aforementioned carpenter. Also included were Spot, the ox driver, orchardist, and "Stableman till Sunrise;" Eliza Wright, the cook and

¹⁰³ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 37. At least seven miles of ditches had been dug at Beaver Bend by 1856.

¹⁰⁴ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 55.

food carrier; Hiram, the sheep driver and fire maker; and Y Milly, the milker.¹⁰⁶ There is no indication of what the “Y” in front of Milly’s name indicates, unless it means “young.” Not included in Davis’ list of his slaves in 1861 are the names of the house servants, the children, the slaves living at the house in Marion, or members of the trash gang, which were slaves who could not hoe or plow to Davis’ specifications.¹⁰⁷

By the end of 1860, Davis had 74 hogs, eight milk cows, eight calves, four heifers, 50 sheep and 30 goats. There were over 230 acres planted in corn and 325 acres in cotton. The weather in 1860 had allowed for 94 picking days, and there were 38 slaves assigned as pickers, with an average of 28 picking per day. The largest one-day total picked was 3,513 pounds, and the highest total picked by one slave was 304 pounds.¹⁰⁸ Davis encouraged fast picking by offering contests, the first of which was a team contest, with the winner taking home 2 ½ pounds of tobacco.¹⁰⁹ The first contest among individuals was a picking contest with a choice hat as the reward.¹¹⁰ In both contests, a slave, only known as Lucy, was the lead picker.¹¹¹ These picking contests were only possible at the end of the season, after the slaves had deeply plowed the fields in January to soak up rain, split open the ridges in March and planted the cotton, then chopped and thinned the cotton in late April, and spent the rest of the summer hoeing grass from

¹⁰⁶ Jordan , *Hugh Davis*, 107, 108. The definitions of the terms are found on p. 107. The list is reprinted on p. 108.

¹⁰⁷ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 107.

¹⁰⁸ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*. Acreage chart found on p. 132. Picking season chart found on p. 133.

¹⁰⁹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 105.

¹¹⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 106.

¹¹¹ For more information on slave contests as reward, see Sergio Lussana, “To See Who Was Best on the Plantation: Enslaved Fighting Contests and Masculinity in the Antebellum Plantation South,” *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 4 (November 2010): 901-922.

around the plants. Each hoe hand was responsible for keeping the grass off of 12 acres.¹¹²

There were rewards and breaks in the never-ending cycle of planting, weeding and harvesting. Provided there was a good, clean crop, the male slaves were allowed to take a load of watermelons to Marion to sell, and divide the money among themselves. Payment was also made to slaves for catching animals and for mending fences. Income from a portion of the cotton crop was shared by the slaves after 1850, and beginning in 1857, the slaves were given land to farm in cotton, and they were allowed to keep the proceeds from the sale of their cotton. That year, they also began to sell a portion of the peanut and pea crops in Marion, with the proceeds to be divided among them.¹¹³ Slaves were also paid for overtime work in the evenings if the work was above and beyond their usual assignment.¹¹⁴ When work during the week was satisfactory to Davis, the slaves were given a half-day or full-day holiday. At Christmas, they were allowed to go to Marion or Hamburg to go shopping. If work was required during the normal Christmas break, the slaves were paid overtime.¹¹⁵ All of this extra work was, of course, to Davis' benefit, and was therefore money well spent in his view.

Davis does not include many instances of punishment carried out against his slaves. It is not known whether Davis and the slaves had a general understanding of each other, or whether Davis chose not to discuss the punishment. Given Davis' detailed farm

¹¹² Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 133.

In 1850, there were 3,204,313 slaves in the United States. They produced 2,133,851 bales of cotton that year. That equals .66 bales per slave. However, given that probably 20% of those slaves did not do field work, each slave likely produced 1.2 bales per slave. For information on cotton output, see <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/phillips.cottongin> (accessed July 22, 2011). For information on the slave population, see http://www.dcte.udel.edu/hlp/resources/slavery/slaves_us.pdf (accessed July 21, 2011).

¹¹³ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 105.

¹¹⁴ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 103.

¹¹⁵ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 106-7.

books, it would seem that perhaps both sides had come to some type of understanding. Davis, or his overseers, list several instances of runaways, though usually the slaves are only gone for a few days to the woods, especially on Sunday.¹¹⁶ On one occasion, Hester and Harrison “ran away to get married.”¹¹⁷ They were soon captured by the slave patrol near Cahaba, placed in jail for two days, and returned to Davis after he paid the patrol \$20. Davis never seemed to panic about the loss of his human property, and given the Black Belt’s distance from any free territory, he likely felt assured that a patrol would catch them before they gained their freedom. Davis himself had to serve on patrol once a month.¹¹⁸

Davis does mention a handful of instances where slaves openly refused their punishment. The few punishments he notes reveal that the slaves were not content with their situation. A slave named Old Sol, one of the slaves who would sneak off to the woods for a few days, was caught stealing cotton. Davis allowed four other slaves to barter Sol’s punishment. To keep him from receiving several lashes, the four slaves agreed to take 39 lashes each if Sol was caught stealing again. Though Sol was caught stealing again, Davis does not document who received the lashes, if any were given.¹¹⁹ In another instance, a female slave brandished an ax in the face of an overseer who threatened to punish her for breaking four plough stocks in the span of a week. When he shook his cane at her, she dropped the ax and ran. Though she later returned and

¹¹⁶ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 100.

¹¹⁸ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 100-101.

¹¹⁹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 101-102. Though Davis’ farm books do not contain instances of mistreatment of slaves, either by purposeful neglect, or because the events might not have occurred, there are plenty of sources of information available that paint a different picture of the daily lives that the majority of the slave population had to endure. The WPA slave narratives provide a first-hand glimpse of these conditions. For information on slavery in Alabama, including the oral histories provided by slaves from Perry County, see B.A. Botkin, ed., *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*.

received her punishment, there is clear evidence that slaves exhibited a determination to control some part of their lives on the plantation.¹²⁰

Direct evidence of the lives of slaves in Perry County can be found in the WPA Slave Narratives. These narratives were recorded from 1936-1938, over 70 years after the end of the Civil War, so they should be read with caution. They were recorded by Susie R. O'Brien, who we do not know anything about. She was most likely a white woman, which might dictate what former slaves chose to tell her about their years as slaves. However, the narratives provide one of the few direct accounts of life as a slave in the area. The Perry County narratives tell the stories of the lives of slaves from Prairieville, to the west of Perry County, to Selma, just over the eastern border of the county. They, like most of the narratives in the area, were recorded in 1937.¹²¹

John Smith was born in North Carolina and sold to Alabama at the age of 13. He was purchased for \$1,000 by Saddler Smith of Selma.¹²² John Smith indicated that even though his master did not have many slaves, he took good care of those he had and would not allow them to be beaten or whipped. John worked in the blacksmith shop and drove a stagecoach between Montgomery and Selma. He was trained to fight in the army once the Civil War started, and went to war at age 27 as the body servant of Jim Smith. John was injured in the war while moving some horses to the back of the firing line. Like so many other body servants, John Smith went to the war to carry Jim Smith's knapsack and

¹²⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 102.

¹²¹ According to the Library of Congress, which houses the Slave Narratives, the narratives were first recorded by an African American branch of the Federal Writers' Project in Florida in 1936. Realizing the importance of this work, the Writers' Project began a systemized recording of slave narratives in 17 states in 1937. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro09.html> [Accessed February 11, 2011] For more information on the participation of African Americans in the Federal Writers' Project in Florida, see Gary W. McDonogh, ed., *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers' Project Legacy* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1993).

¹²² Slaves generally cost \$900-\$1,200, depending on age, health, and gender. This is equivalent to \$12,000-\$20,000 in modern currency.

canteen, and to look after him.¹²³ If Jim wanted chicken while they were lying in the tent at night, John would go find chickens and cook them with gravy for breakfast. When Jim was killed at Blue Mountain, the Union troops took John and put him in charge of General Wilson's horse. General Wilson led a group known as Wilson's Raiders, who brought the fighting of the Civil War to the Black Belt in 1865. John was whipped by Wilson if the General's horse did not literally pass the white glove test. He noted that slaves were not allowed to marry, and once he was free, he refused to marry and be tied down, because, as he stated, "Effen I's free, I's gwine to be free."¹²⁴

Of her time in Prairieville, just west of Perry County, Hannah Jones, interviewed in Greensboro, Alabama, recalled being sold from Virginia at the age of sixteen. She described her living quarters as "good houses built out of cedar logs . . . the quarters looked just like this street I live on now." She talks about the good beds and abundance of food, which included free access to the plantation garden. Each female slave had two dresses, as well as a washing dress, and Hannah got a white dress when she got married. The slaves had to get up at daybreak to get to work, and those working the fields had to get up before daybreak in order to be in the fields by light. They would work until dinner at noon, take a two hour rest, and go back to work until sundown. She notes that there was no jail on the plantation and no slaves tried to run away to her knowledge. They had Saturday afternoons and Christmas day off. Jones specifically mentions that they were

¹²³ Many interviewees for the WPA Slave Narratives discuss their work as body servants. Nannie Bradfield, interview by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Bradfield noted that she would be sent into Uniontown to deliver food to her master's son who was at camp in Uniontown. Nannie Bradfield, "What I Keer About Bein' Free?" Interview transcription p. 1, p. 44 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

¹²⁴ John Smith, interview by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 4, p. 352 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

not allowed to learn to read or write. Her job was to sew and spin.¹²⁵

According to Tildy Collins, there was a slave yard where slaves were auctioned in Uniontown, which may explain why all of the narratives relating to Perry County were recorded in Uniontown.¹²⁶ As a sign of the wealth of the area prior to the Civil War, Jeff Anderson Poole owned three plantations in the vicinity. There were a hundred slaves on his plantation near Uniontown, one of who was Irene. Poole raced horses on his land, and bought Irene's mother and three children from a neighboring plantation for \$1400 when Irene's father expressed interest in marrying her mother.¹²⁷ Her father left the night Selma fell to Union soldiers and was never heard from again. Like so many other slaves who gave interviews to the Federal Writers' Project, Irene stayed on the plantation after the war, probably until she married, or the master died. As she said, they did not care about being free because they had good times on the plantation. There was always plenty to eat before the Civil War because the Poole plantation harvested over 1,000 pounds of meat each year. Irene said that before the war, there was more to eat in one day "then I sees now in a year."¹²⁸

Interestingly, none of the narratives related to Perry County relate cruelties or abuse. While there are a substantial number of narratives in the WPA files about the

¹²⁵ Hannah Jones, interview by Pigie T. Hix, Greensboro, Alabama, July 6, 1937. Interview transcription, p. 1, p. 238 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

¹²⁶ Ex-Slave, "Aunt Tildy" Collins, interview by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 84 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Tildy was a slave on a plantation near Linden in Marengo County, southwest of Perry County.

¹²⁷ Irene Poole, "Hush Water for Talkative women," interview by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 1, p. 320 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

¹²⁸ Irene Poole, "Hush Water for Talkative women." Interview transcription p. 3, p. 322 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

abuse and physical torture that numerous slaves throughout the South had to endure,¹²⁹ many note that after the war, things were often worse. They had their freedom after the war, but many former slaves had no education, and no skills for independent living, other than the manual labor they had learned in the fields or as domestic servants. As Nannie Bradfield stated, “What I care about being free? Didn’t Old Master give us plenty good something to eat and clothes to wear?”¹³⁰ Once Reconstruction began, former slaves searched for ways to survive. They turned to churches and worked to form new schools to improve themselves and create an enduring freedom for their children.

¹²⁹ For a candid telling of the cruelties of slavery, see Mingo White, “Jeff Davis Used to Camouflage His Horse,” interview by Levi D. Shelby, Jr., Tuscumbia, Alabama, consecutive pages 413-422 in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. White was a slave on the plantation of Tom White. Mingo White discusses being sold away from his parents, the beatings he endured, the slave patrols, the deprivation of slave life, and hard labor, as well as games, and parties, and the terror of the Klan and the life of sharecropping after the War.

¹³⁰ Nannie Bradfield, “What I Keer About Bein’ Free?” Interview transcription, p. 2, p. 45 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

Chapter 2

“To Feel Within Their Hearts ‘A Possibility of Inexhaustible Happiness’”: Reconstruction and the Founding of Religious and Educational Institutions in Perry County

On the eve of the Civil War, the wealth and political power in Alabama were concentrated in the Black Belt region of the state. This region’s prominence was demonstrated by the fact that all of the state’s capitals had been in the Black Belt or on its periphery, and the permanent capital resided in Montgomery, on the banks of the Alabama River, which was a vital transport artery of the Black Belt cotton trade. No major battles of the Civil War took place in the Black Belt. The closest most Black Belt planters came to experiencing the war was sending family members, slaves, or supplies to the front, though planters, their families, and their slaves suffered deprivations via the blockade of Mobile Bay. They could neither sell their cotton nor buy supplies, including medicine and farming implements, especially tools that required iron ore.

Not until Wilson’s Raiders appeared in April 1865, led by Union General James Wilson, did Perry County experience the War first-hand. Wilson entered the state in the north, then marched through Jacksonville and Columbiana, on his way to the cotton region of Alabama. He made his way to Selma where he destroyed the Confederate

arsenals located there. Troops were sent into the surrounding countryside to quell any possible resistance. At Fike's Ferry, on the Cahaba River in Perry County, just east of Marion, the Union troops met a force of about 300 Confederates. After routing them, no more resistance occurred in Perry County.¹ Leaving Perry County and Selma, Wilson moved east to Montgomery, and then to Loachapoka, and Opelika.²

In 1863, the buildings of Howard College in Marion became the site of the Breckenridge Military Hospital to which wounded Confederate soldiers, mostly from the siege and battle of Vicksburg, were sent. Given its proximity to the Confederate munitions arsenals at Selma, as well as the fact that Marion was the home of Andrew Barry Moore, the governor of Alabama at the time of secession, it is not surprising that Wilson made a point to visit Perry County. Wilson's troops behaved in Marion as they had everywhere on their route, taking food, supplies, and livestock, and burning the cotton gins on each plantation they raided. On the whole, Wilson did not inflict much damage to the area, and except for his raids and the freedom his presence offered to the enslaved population, the General's visit did little to change the lives of the average white Perry Countian, though the Civil War had more than accomplished that task. Compared to Wilson's treatment of the citizens and property of nearby Selma, Marion and Uniontown fared very well.³

¹ W. Stuart Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 219-220. Harris cites information from a letter written by Col. John W. Noble of the 3rd Iowa Cavalry, found in Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.

² For a map of Wilson's path, see J.T. Trowbridge, *The South: A Tour of Its Battle-Fields and Ruined Cities, A Journey Through the Desolated States, and Talks with the People* (Hartford, CT: L. Stebbins, 1886), 434.

³ For more on Wilson's time in Selma, see Trowbridge, *The South: A Tour of Its Battle-Fields and Ruined Cities*, 435-440.

Troops formally arrived in Marion proper in May of 1865 to parole the Confederate soldiers there. Their duty, according to a member of the 2nd New Jersey Calvary, was to take it easy and enjoy the “fruits of a well-earned rest.” They seized all of the cotton they had not previously destroyed and shipped it by rail for sale. By the second day of their presence in Marion, which was a Sunday, “news had spread far and wide among the negroes that the Yankees were at Marion, and they flocked . . . to see us. They were of all ages, colors, sizes, and sexes. Those from the village [Marion proper] were stylishly dressed especially the young women, not a few of whom were nearly white.”⁴

In describing their lives during the war, the slaves from Perry County and the immediate vicinity did not mention a feeling of want or deprivation during the Civil War. This could be perhaps be explained by the fact that they had nothing to begin with, so there was not much for them to feel they were doing without. Also, many plantations were generally self-sufficient before the War, so they could provide the necessities for everyone to at least subsist, though meat would become scarcer as the war continued, especially if Union or Confederate soldiers took their fill as they passed through the area. Soldiers from both sides lived off of the land and fed themselves on food from local farms. Union soldiers also removed all food and animals from southern farms to keep the items from being used for the Confederate war effort. The Union soldiers did not seem concerned that by taking food and draft animals, and destroying fields and farm tools, they were depriving slaves of food. Former slaves indicate that they were not hungry or

⁴ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 220-221. Harris cites a letter from Colin MacDonald, an enlisted man, for information about the 2nd New Jersey’s time in Marion. His letter also is found in Ann D. England, *A Compilation of Documented Information About the Confederate Hospital in Marion, Alabama, May 20, 1863 – May 20, 1865*. Unpublished manuscript.

ill-clad until Union soldiers passed through, or until they left the plantations once the war was over.⁵

At the close of the war, the black population comprised 66% of the population of Perry County. They suddenly found themselves free. The former slaves were free to move around at will, and many did just that, leaving their former owners to seek freedom in the towns and cities. Irene Poole (?) of Uniontown noted that her father left, the night “the Yankees took Selma. It was on a Sunday,” and she never saw him after that.⁶ It is safe to assume that the “Yankees” she refers to were Wilson’s Raiders. Hugh Davis noted that “As soon as the order [freeing the slaves] was issued thousands flocked to Selma to be free . . . they thought that when they crossed the breastworks around Selma they would be baptised [sic] with freedom and have nothing to do the rest of their lives but to kick up their heels and lay in the sunshine and work or not just as they pleased.”⁷ They chose towns like Selma for the protection provided by Federal troops and the food provided by the Freedmen’s Bureau. Once in town, they were sent to camps and given basic necessities. The Bureau could not take care of everyone and by the winter of 1865-

⁵ Transcriptions of the WPA slave narrative interviews are available in the Library of Congress and online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro00.html>. Each of the interviews conducted in Perry County and the surrounding counties which discuss life after the war indicate that the slaves were adequately fed during slavery, and only felt the physical deprivation of hunger after the Union soldiers passed through, or once they left the plantation after the war. This was certainly not the case everywhere.

⁶ “Aunt Irene,” interview by Susie R. O’Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. WPA Slave Narratives. There is a question mark after the last name of ‘Poole’ because the interviewer only refers to the subject as “Aunt Irene.” Irene’s last name is never given. She belonged to Jeff Anderson and Mollie Poole. She refers to her father as Alfred Poole. Her mother’s name was Palestine Kent. The interview does not mention if Irene ever married. I have assigned her the last name of ‘Poole’ in keeping with the tendency of many freedmen and women to take the last name of their former master. There is, however, another interview conducted by Susie R. O’Brien in Uniontown in 1937 of Irene Poole entitled, ““Hush Water for Talkative Women,”” p. 320-322 of consecutive numbering in WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. It is not clear if these two women are the same person.

⁷ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 160.

66, they estimated that 200,000 people, white and black were in danger of starving in Alabama.⁸

Once the euphoria of freedom wore off, many slaves found themselves without food or shelter. Though many flocked to the cities and towns in the spring of 1865, by the spring of 1866, they found themselves back on the plantations picking cotton.⁹ Often, the fields were the same land they had worked as slaves. Hugh Davis recorded that “It [the delusion of freedom] soon passed away and they [former slaves] are *nearly all* at their [former plantation] homes at work. Freedom nor the accursed Yankees were not exactly what they had supposed them to be – They now know they must work for a living – George was the first of my negroes to runaway from home and go to the Yanks . . . but he has found that ‘home is the best place in the world.’”¹⁰

Because most freed slaves could not read or write, and they had almost no experience with any type of math, it was very difficult for them to navigate the system of working for wages. Having only known an existence in which freedom had been traded for the necessities of living, many slaves, especially those that were older, found themselves negotiating with their masters to live in their former slave cabins and work for wages.¹¹

⁸ Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers Nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders During the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867-1878* (Montgomery, AL: Bailey Publishers, 1993), 3.

⁹ Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 9.

¹⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 160.

¹¹ For a white planter’s version of this common situation, see Trowbridge, *The South: A Tour of Its Battle-Fields and Ruined Cities*, 423. According to the planter, a former slave asked his master to buy him. See also Tildy Collins, interview by Susie R. O’Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2 & 3, p. 84 & 85 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Collins’ recollection is illustrative of several of the narratives recorded in and near Perry County.

Many freedmen and women thus stayed on, or returned to, their original plantations and remained there until they married, or until their former masters died.¹² As late as 1869 and 1870, however, free blacks were still on the move. Perhaps it had taken them four years of wage labor, if they were lucky enough to find it, to scrape together funds to move on and begin a new life. The early records of the Colored Baptist Church of Marion contain lists of new congregants who moved to the area and desired to join the church, as well as the names of those leaving the church as they moved away.¹³ Some of these moves were within Perry County and other counties in the Black Belt, while others moved to and from areas farther away, including Jefferson County, Alabama and Chesterville, Mississippi.¹⁴ Ten years after the Civil War ended, James and Chloe Tarrant Curry left Marion, Alabama, for Yazoo County, Mississippi, in search of land to farm, possibly with the intention of purchasing their own land when it became available.¹⁵

Many former slaves, regardless of whether they stayed on the former plantation or found work on another farm, had to work under what became known as the sharecropping system. Several things led to the introduction of sharecropping, the most immediate and basic issue being a lack of specie. Former masters had land, tools, living quarters, seed and some food to offer, but not much cash. Former slaves had field work skills and could provide labor, but because they had no cash, they could not buy food so

See also Nannie Bradfield, interview by Susie O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 45 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

¹² Nannie Bradfield, interviewed by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p.2, p. 45 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

¹³ Minutes of the Colored Methodist Church, May 2, 1869. Sister Harriet Locket "was received by recommendation - her former church being dissolved. Sister Margaret Lido - from the Hopewell Baptist Church in Carlowville, Ala." was also received.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, May 1, 1870, p. 28.

¹⁵ Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 215.

they had to take what work they could in order to receive basic food and housing. Some blacks were already familiar with the sharecropping arrangement prior to the Civil War. Hugh Davis allowed some of his slaves to share in the cotton crop in 1850 and 1851. In 1857, he gave slaves on his plantation a piece of land “which they worked for their own benefit.”¹⁶ He also paid his slaves for extra work and overtime work, so some of his slaves were used to a monetary payment system as well.

Davis’ slaves were also used to a credit system, which became the downfall of many sharecroppers who became trapped in the cropping system. Davis allowed his slaves to buy articles, usually tobacco, on credit from the plantation. They would have to pay for the items from the overtime pay they received for working nights and Sundays at tasks above their regularly assigned duties.¹⁷ It is assumed that the items purchased with credit were paid for before the slaves received any cash in hand. Simon Phillips, a former slave in Greensboro, noted the emergence of the sharecropping system on his former plantation after the war. When northerners convinced former slaves to stake off plots on the plantation because they had worked the land and therefore had earned the property, the former master told them ““You are just as free as I and the missus, but don’t go foolin’ around my land . . . if you want to stay, you are welcome to work for me. I’ll pay you one third [sic] of the crops you raise. But if you wants to go, you sees the gate.”” According to Philips, the master had no more trouble and the freed men stayed and worked, sometimes loaning the former master money. J.L.M. Curry noted the same suggestion about land division from northern Bureau agents, who sought to make masters

¹⁶ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 104.

¹⁷ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 104.

support their former slaves or divide their land among their former slaves.¹⁸ In the case of Philips, as with many other landowners, most of the original slaves that stayed on their former plantations lived out their lives on that land.¹⁹

The extreme poverty of Reconstruction impacted poor whites, and they often worked alongside former slaves in the cotton fields. In May of 1865, Hugh Davis, Jr., noted that 26 slaves had agreed “to remain at home and work as they have heretofore done and to receive 1/5 of the growing crop of cotton, corn and potatoes and to be provisioned as compensation for their labor.”²⁰ Working alongside them was a white man named Ellis, who received a bushel of wheat per day for his work. He soon became the plantation manager and he was provided with a house, three and a half pounds of meat and one peck of meal each week, plus one peck of meal a week for each child.²¹ When Davis could no longer consistently keep freed men and women in the fields, he rented the land to white sharecroppers.²² Davis’s youngest brother, Nathaniel Davis, took

¹⁸ Jessie Pearl Rice, *J.L.M. Curry: Southerner, Statesman, and Educator* (Columbia University, NY: King’s Crown Press, 1949), 52. For more information on the rise of sharecropping and its effects on whites and blacks in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*, 120-134.

For more on the impact of sharecropping on blacks, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, see Theodore Rosengarten, *All God’s Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Nate Shaw is the fictitious name of Ned Cobb. Cobb sharecropped in Tallapoosa County, Alabama, which is east of the Black Belt. His story, however, would be similar to that of black sharecroppers in the Black Belt, especially the cycle of debt and the constant moving that cropping fostered.

¹⁹ Simon Philips, president of the union of ex-slaves, interviewed by J. Morgan Smith, Birmingham, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 3, p. 314-15 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

²⁰ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 160.

²¹ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 161.

²² Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 162. When Albert Davis, the youngest son, took over Beaver Bend in 1866 at age 20, he did hire several new black workers, but he continued to rent to white sharecroppers, opening up more small plots to white sharecroppers. For more information on white sharecroppers in the Black Belt, see Walker Evans and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1939; repr., Boston:

over the farm in 1876, and by 1877, he was providing land to white, and perhaps black, sharecroppers. This change is evident in how Davis refers to those working his land. The men are referenced by their first and last names, while the women are referred to only by their first names. It can be assumed that the male sharecroppers were white and the female sharecroppers were black.²³

While the system of working for no wages and giving the produce of their labor to the land owner in exchange for food and shelter was eerily familiar to former slaves, there were some differences. Former female slaves of the Tarrant family of Marion began spending more time working in their own homes, though out of necessity they still did domestic work in the homes of white families.²⁴ Chloe Tarrant, who married James Curry at age 18 in 1868, worked as a domestic servant for Mary Ann Childs Tarrant, though she did not live in the Tarrant home.²⁵ Both black women and black children left

Houghton-Mifflin, 1988). The stories documented in this work were recorded in Hale County, on the western border of Perry County. Today, the descendants of Perry Counties white sharecroppers live in the northern portion of the county on the border with Bibb County. This land has never been as fertile as the soil in the middle and southern portions of the county.

For a broader look at white sharecroppers in Alabama, see Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1989). See also Paul W. Terry and Verner M. Sims, *They Live on the Land: Life in an Open-Country Southern Community* (1940; repr., Tuscaloosa, AL., University of Alabama Press, 1993). This work examines a small poor rural white community in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, directly northwest of Perry County.

For a look at white sharecroppers in the southern region as a whole, see Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

²³ Jordan, *Hugh Davis*, 166.

²⁴ Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 182.

²⁵ Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 201. Davis notes that the last name of "Curry" most likely came from planter Jabez Curry, who had 165 slaves in Perry County in the 1860 slave census. It is not clear if this is the same Jabez Lamar Monroe (J.L.M.) Curry who became president of the Alabama Baptist Convention in Marion and Howard College in Marion in 1865. While Jabez is not a common name, it was a family name for the Curry's. Until his selection as president of Howard in 1865, J.L.M. Curry had made his home in Talladega County, over 100 miles away, since 1838. See Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 8-36. J.L.M. Curry had a brother, William, who moved to Marengo County, southwest of Perry County, in

the cotton fields, at least in the early years of freedom, to spend more time in their own homes.²⁶

Perhaps women began to work in their own homes to emulate their white former mistresses, feeling that working for their own family and not taking care of the members of other families was a sign of freedom. Perhaps, after decades of caring for others at the expense of their own families, many of whom were separated through the sale of family members, freed women and men agreed that women should mother their own children and work to rebuild the black family unit. Perhaps women working in their own homes were safer from the abuses of white males during the lawlessness that prevailed in rural counties after the Civil War, though the Freedmen's Bureau did not report any outrages against blacks in Perry County in 1866.²⁷ As late as 1871, Joseph Speed, the most powerful white Republican in the county, testified before Congress that Perry County had been peaceful since the end of the War.²⁸ Given the abuses experienced by blacks in surrounding counties, however, blacks in Perry County would have been aware of the types of atrocities that might befall them if the white mood should sour. There was one beating and three whippings in Perry County, though the only recorded lynchings were of a black man in jail for the murder of a white man, and a black man in the northern part of the county, who many asserted was murdered as part of a personal feud of his own

1852, see p. 25. But there were other Curry's already in Perry County, and their descendants still live there today.

²⁶ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 9.

²⁷ See "List of Murders in the Dist. of Alabama 1866" in the Freedmen's Bureau papers. <http://freedmensbureau.com/alabama/alaoutrages.htm> (Accessed January 12, 2011).

²⁸ Bertis English, "A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874," *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 13-16, 22. As a Republican, it would have been in Speed's interest to report abuses against freed men and women in the county in order to shore up the black voting base for the Republican party.

making.²⁹ There were also threats against George Clark, an Englishman who wanted to establish a school for blacks in the county, and once the Lincoln School was established in 1867 by the American Missionary Association, the white teachers at the school were threatened.³⁰

Many freed women did not withdraw from field work completely, but they did begin to focus their time on working in their own homes and caring for their families.³¹ The addition of one or two black males as laborers in many black households suggests that young single black men were hired to offset the field work not being performed by women. The work of these extra males in fields owned by blacks may have been necessary to allow women to earn actual monetary income for their households by taking in washing and seamstress work. This was work that could be done in their own homes, and would have to be paid for in cash.³²

Work and living arrangements provided intensely personal ways in which freed men and women could assert their agency and take control of their lives. Another intensely personal area in which blacks chose to withdraw from white society was the arena of religious worship. Former slaves initially continued to meet in the white churches that had been their religious homes during slavery, but they began the work of

²⁹ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 244. These events were recorded in the local white newspaper. The KKK members who lynched the black man in jail were from neighboring Hale County, to the west.

³⁰ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 243-44.

For information about the threats at the Lincoln School, see Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families*, 317-18. An armed posse of black men took turns standing outside the teacher's residence to keep the vigilantes at bay.

³¹ Steve Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 171.

³² Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 182.

creating their own houses of worship during Reconstruction. By establishing their own churches, blacks led the movement to separate from their former white houses of worship, and their former owners. In the process, freedmen in Perry County received assistance from white members of the community, as well as whites from the North.

Prior to the Civil War, the religious experiences of slaves varied greatly. Some masters insisted that their slaves attend Sunday School and/or church, in hopes that the sermon would address the scripture found in Hebrews 13:17 which extolled slaves to obey their masters. Mathew 10:24 states that a slave is not above his master, while verse 25 entreats the slave to become like his master in actions.³³ Other owners feared having their enslaved chattel hear of the equality of all men before God. After all, if equality was good enough for God, surely all men could experience it as well.³⁴

Tildy Collins recalled the weekly routine of getting ready for Sunday worship. The meeting house was located on the plantation, and all children had to attend Sunday School. They had to wear clean white clothes to church, and they had to have a bath every Saturday night before church. She recalls that it felt as though her mother and grandmother would scrub her skin off trying to get her clean. They would comb their hair with a “jim crow,” which was a comb similar to a wool card or comb, and then tie the sections of hair with thread so tightly, her “eyes couldn’t hardly shut.”³⁵ While some plantations had their own church buildings, slaves on plantations without a church building would construct a brush arbor for religious services, sometimes specifically for

³³ *Holy Bible*, New American Standard Version. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1977.

³⁴ Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 108.

³⁵ Tildy Collins, interview by Susie R. O’Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 3, p. 85 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

the slaves.³⁶ Masters who attended church but did not have a church building on the plantation took their slaves to church with them.³⁷ The slaves sat in galleries or balconies constructed to keep them separate from white attendees. Hannah Jones noted that though she attended church as a slave in Virginia, she did not join a church until she came to Judge Moore's plantation in Prairieville, Alabama.³⁸ This distinction indicates that slaves were accepted as members on the rolls of some churches, and this would become an issue after the Civil War as various white denominations wrestled with the fate of their black congregants.

The Sunday School that Tildy Collins attended was for religious instruction only, and differed greatly from the instruction students would receive at Sunday Schools offered in the emerging black churches and educational institutions after the Civil War. According to one author, "The establishment of black churches was one of the most important developments in the emergence of a new black community."³⁹ The author went on to assert that "Because the churches were the only major organizations actually controlled by blacks, and because the lives of most freedmen were barren of other social

³⁶ Anthony Abercrombie, interview by Susie R. O'Brien, Uniontown, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 7 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Abercrombie mentions that his birth date was recorded in the family Bible.

³⁷ Hannah Jones, interview by Pigie T. Hix in Greensboro, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 239 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Hannah Jones experienced both types of worship. On the plantation near Prairieville southwest of Perry County, Jones recalled that the slaves had a church on the plantation and sermons were delivered by a white preacher. In Virginia, where she lived before she was sold at age 16 to Alabama, Jones worshiped in the same church as her master.

³⁸ Hannah Jones, interview by Pigie T. Hix in Greensboro, Alabama, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 239 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project.

³⁹ Peter Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 107.

activities, the churches quickly became central institutions in the black community.”⁴⁰ As the weight of segregation bore down on the African American throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, black author Richard Wright, in his work *12 Million Black Voices*, explained the appeal of religion to an oppressed people. “What we have not dared feel in the presence of the Lords of the Land,” Wright began, “we now feel in church.” He continued by noting that the service allowed black worshipers to feel within their hearts “a possibility of inexhaustible happiness” that was a salve to the violence and poverty that blacks in the South faced. And as “the soil grows poorer, we cling to this feeling; when clanking tractors uproot and hurl us from the land, we cling to it; when our eyes behold a black body swinging from a tree in the wind, we cling to it.”⁴¹

The power of the clergy in black churches was evident in the formative days of the black church, and the power wielded by ministers guided the black community through Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As early as April 1866, General Howard of the Freedman’s Bureau asked “the preachers of colored churches and all others interested in the well-being of the freed people.” to induce them to leave the Bureau areas in cities and return to work on local farms.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 120.

For more information on Christianity and the church in African American culture, see Joseph R. Washington, Jr. *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). See also W.D. Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1957); and Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless, “‘Of the Least and the Most’: The African American Rural Church,” in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, edited by Douglas R. Hurt (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

⁴¹ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (1941; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969), 68, 73. See also Ted Ownby, “‘A Crude and Raw Past’: Work, Folklife, and Anti-Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century African American Biography” in *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*, ed. R. Douglas Hurt, 43.

⁴² “Getting Tired of Them,” *Southern Enterprise* [Thomasville, Georgia], April 18, 1866. Reprinted in Wayne Dasher and Judy Dasher, *The Negro and the Southern Press: 1866-1869, The Quitman*

Initially, many white congregations had not anticipated that the change in status of the black congregants from slave to free would change the routine of the two races coming together to worship.⁴³ The Alabama Baptist State Convention meeting of 1865 asserted that the changed status “of our late slaves does not necessitate any change in their relation to our churches” and “their highest good will be subserved by their maintaining their present relation to those who know them, who love them, and who will labor for the promotion of their welfare.”⁴⁴ The last statement is in direct response to the arrival of missionaries from the North who saw the South as a fertile mission field. These missionaries brought with them new Christian denominations, as well as educational opportunities. Their presence raised alarms immediately and led to cries of hatred being espoused by “Yankee fanatics” against the former masters of the freed men.⁴⁵ Perhaps this influx turned some white Southerners against education for blacks. Whatever the reason for the growing resentment of whites against blacks, Peter Kolchin notes that segregation prevailed, “in one case [churches] because most blacks wanted it that way, and in the other [schools] because most whites did.”⁴⁶

By 1867, former slaves who had attended church with their masters and sat in the galleries or balconies began leaving white churches and forming congregations of their

Banner, Quitman, Georgia, [and] *Southern Enterprise, Thomasville, Georgia* (Nashville, GA: private printing, 2004), 5.

⁴³ Charles Hays Rankin, *The Rise of the Negro Baptist Churches in the South Through the Reconstruction Period* (New Orleans: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1955), 57-59. See also Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 109.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Forty-third Annual Session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1865* (Atlanta: Franklin Steam Printing House, 1866), 10.

⁴⁵ “Who Shall Teach the Negro,” *Southern Enterprise* [Thomasville, Georgia], April 4, 1866. Reprinted in Wayne Dasher and Judy Dasher, *The Negro and the Southern Press: 1866-1869*, 3.

⁴⁶ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 145.

own. The most prominent example of this type of church formation in Marion was the establishment of the Colored Baptist Church, today known as Berean Baptist Church, in 1869. Berean's founding follows the typical pattern outlined by Peter Kolchin in his book, *First Freedom: The Responses of Alabama's Blacks to Emancipation and Reconstruction*. Kolchin notes that by 1867, many white congregants who thought blacks would remain a part of the white churches began to advocate for the separation of black and whites in worship. Kolchin asserts that one reason for this sudden change in attitude by white congregants was that in many churches in the Black Belt, black attendees outnumbered whites and there was a fear that they would gain control of the churches.⁴⁷ White churches still hoped to maintain influence over the newly separated black congregations, however. This was generally done by playing an active role in the founding of the new black congregation, including providing a separate meeting place and time in the white church until a building was erected for the black congregation. White members often assisted in securing the funding for new church buildings and providing religious education and ministerial training for emerging black preachers.

The members that would form the new Colored Baptist Church, later named the Second Baptist Church and then renamed Berean Baptist Church, had been members of Siloam Baptist Church in Marion.⁴⁸ They had sat in the galleries reserved for them in the

⁴⁷ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 111-112.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church. The original name designation is recorded on p. 11. The name was changed from the Colored Baptist Church of Marion to the Second Baptist Church sometime between the November 12, 1876 meeting and the December 18, 1876. Interestingly, there was no motion in the November meeting or any meeting prior to change the name. The clerk simply recorded the name "Second Baptist Church" in the December 1876 minutes. The minutes provide a wealth of information about the lives of freedmen through Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era.

back of the church.⁴⁹ On February 13, 1869, members “of the Colored portion of the Church [Siloam] by their own request, were granted letters of dismissal for the purpose of organizing a church of the Colored members belonging to said church. The first signature on the petition for dismissal is that of James Childs, who would become the first black preacher of the new congregation.⁵⁰ On February 21, 1869, “A Presbytery consisting of Rev. Wm. H. McIntosh, Rev. S.R. Freemon, assisted by the Rev. Geo. C. Conner of Atlanta, Ga. met in council” with several deacons “for the purpose of constituting a Colored Baptist Church for the members dismissed from the Siloam Baptist Church.”⁵¹ The three ministers were white. The white pastor and deacons of the church led the meetings and performed other religious functions for the members of the black church. Such was the case for Chloe Tarrant and James Curry, who were married by Dr. William H. McIntosh, the white pastor of Siloam, in 1868.⁵² McIntosh led the monthly

⁴⁹ Lovelace, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church*, 109. A letter from Mrs. J.C. Bush (Ruth Tarrant) notes that Dr. McIntosh “had the large interior galleries of the church reserved for their [the black members] use, until their membership in Siloam became large enough to justify a separate service.” On page 108, Mrs. Paul V. Bomar, the wife of a former pastor of Siloam, notes that the galleries were removed when the church was renovated in 1906-07. Interestingly, histories of the church today note that the balcony was for the use of the slaves. It is unclear if the slaves sat in the balcony and then sat in the galleries once they were freed, or if people today assume that the galleries and the balcony were the same, not realizing that the galleries have been removed. See Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 87.

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, p. 14-15. Information about Childs becoming pastor is found in Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 109, and Idella J. Childs, “Perry County Personalities,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 4.

⁵¹ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, now known as Berean Baptist Church, in Marion, Alabama. p. 3

⁵² Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 202. James Curry joined the Colored Baptist Church via Baptism in October of 1873. Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, 42-3. He later rejoined the church, which by then was named the Second Baptist Church, on February 6, 1878 via letter. No wife is mentioned as joining with him. Minutes of the Second Baptist Church, February 6, 1878, 61.

In 1885, according to author Thulani Davis, James and Chloe Tarrant Curry divorced. Thulani Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*, 253. Chloe had become the common law wife of a white man named William Campbell, p. 242. After the divorce, James went back to Marion full-time and Chloe stayed in the Delta where she and James had moved a few years after the end of the Civil War. Will and Chloe’s only

“conference” meetings of the new Colored Baptist Church, even after he left Siloam in 1871. He last served as “chair” of the “regular conference,” in September of 1872, though he made a cameo appearance as moderator (chair) in 1877.⁵³ Between September of 1872 and January of 1873, Rev. I.B. Vaiden was selected to be the moderator for the church’s monthly conferences.⁵⁴ Vaiden was apparently white, because a Professor I.B. Vaiden taught classes at a small school that he founded in 1845, until he moved to Marion to teach at Howard College in 1863.⁵⁵

Though white ministers led the earliest meetings of the church, the black members played a role in the church’s leadership, but as long as the services were held at Siloam, two white members had to be present at the black service “to insure order and biblical teachings.”⁵⁶ In keeping with this order, McIntosh led the meetings of the new black church while the congregants met in the Basement Hall at Siloam, as requested in the petition to begin the new church.⁵⁷ The Colored Baptist Church members were

child, Georgia, was born eight years before the official divorce, and the same year that James A. Curry joined the Second Baptist Church of Marion. For Georgia’s birth year, see family tree in the introduction of Thulani, Davis, *My Confederate Kinfolk*.

⁵³ Minutes of the Second Baptist Church, April 4, 1877, 57.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, 37. There is discrepancy about when Vaiden was actually called because there are no minutes recorded between September 1872 and January 1873. It should be noted that the minutes Berean Baptist Church has as its official documents were apparently rewritten at some point, and the documents they have are not the originals. The transcriber noted that “The minutes from Sept. 1872 to January 1873 was [sic] miss placed [sic] before the books came into my charge. Chas. N. McGhee” Another note reads “The minutes from Jan 1873 to March 1873 was [sic] not recorded in the old books,” 39. Page 41 has a note that there were “No minutes recorded in the old books for July 1873.” It is known that Rev. Vaiden was not associated with the pastorate at Siloam. See Lovelace, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church*, list of pastors, iii.

⁵⁵ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 76. The Vaiden School building is still standing and is now owned by the Perry County Historical Society.

⁵⁶ Lovelace, *A History of Siloam Baptist Church*, 109. The information is found in a letter entitled “Recollections of Siloam Church” by Mrs. J.C. Bush, nee Ruth Tarrant. The letter was sent from Los Angeles, California, on March 29, 1940.

⁵⁷ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church – February 13, 1869, 16.

granted use of the Siloam bell.⁵⁸ McIntosh ordained James Childs, a former servant of Mrs. Mary Ann Childs Tarrant.⁵⁹ During slavery, Tarrant had taught Childs to read and bought him a set of *Clarke's Commentary*. He may have preached to the black members of the congregation before the war as well.⁶⁰ After he was ordained, Childs became pastor of the new church on McIntosh's advice. He died before the church building was completed.⁶¹

While members of the Colored Baptist Church still gathered at Siloam, they set the afternoon of the first Sunday of each month as their meeting time, though the time soon changed to the Thursday night before the second Sunday of the month on the motion of the clerk, A.H. Curtis.⁶² Curtis had bought his freedom, and that of his wife, working as a barber prior to the Civil War. In the church minutes, he is later referred to as "Brother A.H. Curtis." He served as the black member of the Perry County Board of Registrars beginning in 1868, was the only black Senator in the Alabama legislature, was a founder of the Lincoln School and Vice President of the Perry County Labor Union, which strove to ensure fair wages for black farm laborers.⁶³ As an indication of his frequent contact with the white community, Curtis remained the clerk of the Colored

⁵⁸ Minutes of Colored Baptist Church – February 13, 1869, 16.

⁵⁹ Childs took his last name from Mary Ann Tarrant's father, Captain Childs. Mary Ann Tarrant was born Mary Ann Childs and she married a Tarrant. She took James Childs with her when she married. Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

⁶⁰ Harris, *History of Perry County*, vol.1, 90.

⁶¹ Idella J. Childs, "Perry County Personalities," 4, in Stuart W. Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2.

⁶² Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, September 5, 1869.

⁶³ Bertis English, "A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874," *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 13-16, 23.

Baptist Church, alternating occasionally with J.W. Curtis, until 1878, when he died after falling from his buggy.⁶⁴

The Alabama Baptist State Convention sold a church property in Greensboro, Alabama, and sent \$1,000 of the proceeds to Siloam Baptist Church in Marion “to aid in purchasing a lot and erecting a church for the colored members.”⁶⁵ In 1871, a parcel of land on the southeast corner of Washington and Dekalb Streets, just one block from Siloam, was purchased for \$480 from J.B. Cocke, who was, interestingly, a leading Perry County Democrat.⁶⁶ The cornerstone was laid in 1873 and lists Rev. W.T. Coleman as the first pastor, though there is no mention of Coleman in the church minutes. Members of the new congregation, whose forebears had formed the bricks and built the Siloam church, had themselves been trained as builders during their time in slavery.⁶⁷ They used these skills to build their own church.⁶⁸ The exterior of the Colored Baptist Church resembled Siloam, including the shape of the steeple.⁶⁹ The following year, in 1874, when the now mostly white Baptist State Convention met in Marion, three ministers from the convention preached at the Colored Baptist Church in one day. As late as 1893, some

⁶⁴ The change to a different clerk takes place on p. 65, dated August 2, 1878, though no reason is given for the change in clerks. Minutes of the Second Baptist Church. The information about Curtis’ death is in Idella J. Childs, “Perry County Personalities,” 4, in Stuart W. Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2.

⁶⁵ Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 21.

⁶⁶ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 86.

For information about Cocke’s political ties, see Bertis English, “A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 20. The location of the church had also been the site of the first school building in Marion. The log cabin was constructed by Thomas Billingslea in 1824. See Thomas M. Owen, *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. 2, 941.

⁶⁷ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 86.

⁶⁸ Harris, *History of Perry County*, 90.

⁶⁹ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 86. The current steeple on Siloam is a replacement of the original steeple, which was struck by lightning. The current Berean steeple is a replica of the original Siloam steeple.

type of relationship between Siloam and the Colored Baptist Church still existed because Siloam gave its hymnbooks “to the colored church.”⁷⁰

The Colored Baptist Church licensed Brother Joseph Underwood as a “minister of the Gospel” on December 7, 1873.⁷¹ This was the first minister the church affirmed. The qualifications for ordination were outlined in the “Articles of Faith” put forward by the pastors and adopted by the members of the Church.⁷² The Second Baptist Church received Rev. N.H. McAlpin as pastor on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1876.⁷³ McAlpin may have been the first African American to lead the church as moderator of the monthly conferences. He was called to lead the church as Reconstruction was coming to a close.

Sunday School instruction, sometimes referred to as Sabbath School instruction, was important and formed the bridge between the church and educational instruction, both of which were very important to the black community. Though Sunday School in the modern context consists solely of religious instruction, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Sunday School was comprised of as much school instruction as it was religious instruction. Teachers would use religious topics to teach students the basics of reading and some elementary writing skills.⁷⁴ In its early years in the Basement Hall of Siloam, whites most likely taught the Sabbath School for the Colored Baptist Church meetings, though this is not clearly indicated in the church minutes. In the summer of

⁷⁰ Lovelace, *History of Siloam*, 35.

⁷¹ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, December 7, 1873, 44. I.B. Vaiden, the white teacher, was moderator. Underwood and his wife were later excluded (kicked out) of the church for non-attendance. See minutes of the Second Baptist Church, 97, June 1885.

⁷² Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, 9, article 10.

⁷³ Minutes of the Second Baptist Church, 55, December 24, 1876.

⁷⁴ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 120.

1865, Jabez L.M. Curry, a newly ordained Baptist preacher, presided over a mass meeting in Marion to advocate for the provision of funds for schools for the freed men and women. The following November, the Alabama Baptist Convention, a unit of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Marion, elected Curry president. Upon taking the chair as president, Curry “urged that religious instruction be given the former slaves ‘liberally, speedily, and on a large scale’ to prevent their lapse into barbarism. He stated that if ‘not done by us, it will be done by those alien and somewhat hostile to us.’”⁷⁵ With this remark, Curry could have easily been referencing groups such as the American Missionary Association, which founded the First Congregationalist Church in Marion shortly after the founding of the Lincoln Normal School. There was no separation of church and state in the area of education during Reconstruction in either the black or white community.

Formed in 1869, the First Congregational Church quickly became one of the more prominent black churches, and unlike the Colored Baptist Church, the Congregational Church was established by freed men and women with the help of white missionaries from the North. Ministers of the Congregational Church would serve as leaders in the black community from the first Reconstruction in the 1860s through the next century and the second Reconstruction of the 1960s. Though the members of the Congregational church may have attended white churches during slavery, the creation of the Congregationalist church was not accomplished by pulling the black congregants out of a specific white denomination and forming a church that still maintained ties to the former white congregation. The Congregational church house was built in 1871, and is the

⁷⁵ *Montgomery Daily Advertiser*, November 25, 1865. See also Jessie Pearl Rice, *J.L.M. Curry: Southerner, Statesman, and Educator*, 193-194n 9.

“oldest and most unaltered example of an early black church in Marion.”⁷⁶ The AMA was influential in the establishment of the Lincoln School, located just one block from the church, in 1867, and the church was organized on the Lincoln campus in 1869.⁷⁷

The Congregational Church in Alabama never had many members as a whole, but their impact was substantial, especially in Marion. Because of its association with the Lincoln Normal School, which will be discussed shortly, the congregation was well-educated and some of the more influential members of the African American community in Marion worshipped there. So powerful was the pull of the First Congregational Church in Marion that in September 1872, members of the Colored Baptist Church noted that “Sister Melissa Parrish having joined a Congregational Church on motion she was excluded.”⁷⁸ It is important to note that no other denominations in the records of the Colored Baptist Church were listed by name when members were excluded for attending different churches.

There were few Congregationalists in the South before the Civil War, and the “self-controlled nature of Congregationalism contrasted strongly with the emotional character of most Southern black religion.”⁷⁹ However the Congregationalists were persistent, and the fact that almost all of their congregations in the South were coupled with a learning institution gave them a willing and receptive audience in Marion,

⁷⁶ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 61.

⁷⁷ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 61.

⁷⁸ Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, September 1872, 37. This is the only time the minutes mention a denomination by name. On other occasions, the minutes simply note, for instance, that someone was excluded “for joining a church of a different order.” Minutes of the Colored Baptist Church, April 5, 1874, 45. Brother Noah Lowery was excluded this offense.

⁷⁹ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 113.

Talladega, and Montgomery, where they founded schools and then churches.⁸⁰ Though by 1876, there were only 607 Congregationalists in Alabama, mostly concentrated in these three cities, the members were well-educated and therefore played prominent roles in the black community.⁸¹ Descendants of these first congregants continued their organizing zeal and impacted their communities in the fight for Civil Rights in the twentieth century.

Though James Childs served as pastor at the Colored Baptist Church, later Berean, shortly after the Civil War, the Childs family became members of the First Congregational Church after its founding in 1869. The Childs' ran the only bakery in Marion in the first half of the twentieth century, and served white and black customers alike, with no Jim Crow era restrictions on service. Judson College had a standing order with the bakery for their daily bread, and the black-owned bakery bought ads in the yearbook of the all-white women's college.⁸² Idella Childs, the matriarch of the family during the mid-twentieth century, was widely known as the historian of the black community in Perry County. She was the first African American to serve on several committees and to seek to bring the black and white communities together, while maintaining a sense of dignity for African Americans.⁸³ The early prominence of the

⁸⁰ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 114.

⁸¹ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 114.

⁸² Mary Cosby Moore, the daughter-in-law of Cora Childs Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010. Photos of the Childs family at the bakery can be found in the Book Committee and Friends of the Perry County Historical and Preservation Society, "Memories of Perry County," 6, in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

⁸³ Childs' youngest daughter, Jean, did housework for local families. When her mother found out that the female head of one of the households would not let Jean use the main bathroom, but instead had her use the bathroom in the back of the house, just off of the kitchen, she would not let Jean continue her employment there. The female employer explained that no one, not even her own sons, used the front bathroom but her, but this did not change Childs' decision. Interview of former homeowner with the author

family became evident when Stephen Childs, a son of Rev. James Childs, bought property on Clay Street, just one block from the Congregational Church, in 1883 and 1905.⁸⁴

The Congregational Church became the Congregational Christian Church in 1931. It then joined with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to become the United Church of Christ in 1957. One of the most notable preachers at the Marion church was Reverend Andrew Young. While at the church, Young met and married Jean Childs, the youngest daughter of Idella and Norman Childs.⁸⁵ Andrew and Jean Childs Young will be discussed in a later chapter.

Another African American church of note in Marion is the Zion United Methodist Church. The church grew out of the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church to establish separate places of worship for African Americans after the Civil War. The church was begun in 1866 by Rev. A.S. Lakin, a white Methodist minister. Like the Baptist denomination, the Methodists, both black and white, were struggling to determine the fate of their races within an existing denominational framework. And like the Baptist denomination, the Methodists had split before the Civil War between a Northern and Southern contingent over the issue of slavery. As with members of the American Missionary Association (the Congregationalists), many whites in Alabama thought the Northern Methodist association was “more interested in spreading hatred and mistrust of Southern Methodists and in disrupting established church relations, than in providing

when the author moved into the house in question in 2004. The former occupant’s name is not used because she died shortly after this discussion with the author, before the author began writing about this topic. Thus permission was not expressly given by the interviewee to use this comment.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 59 – 60.

⁸⁵ Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 61.

religious instruction.”⁸⁶ In a letter to James F. Chalfant, superintendent of the West Georgia and Alabama district of the Methodist Episcopal Church who served with the Freedman’s Aid Society, J.G. Wilson, secretary of the Alabama Conference of Methodist Episcopal Church South in Alabama, complained of just such a thing, noting that the new rival to his branch of the Methodist Church was “employed in vilifying & misrepresenting . . . Southern Churches.”⁸⁷ Lakin, the minister responsible for the founding of the black Methodist Church in Marion, was a member of the Northern Methodist Church association. While in the Huntsville area in north Alabama, he founded many Union Leagues to build black voting support for the Republican party, and boasted to Chalfant, the same man who Southern Methodist Wilson complained to about the Northern Methodists, that “We [the Union League in Huntsville] have a perfect organization in this city and can carry this country almost to a man (col’d).”⁸⁸

While Lakin did most of his work in northern Alabama, he spent time in other areas with large black populations, including Perry County. When it came to organizing religious institutions and voter registration, Lakin seemed to have no problem combining the functions of church and state, perhaps realizing that power in and over the black

⁸⁶ Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 114.

⁸⁷ J.G. Wilson to James F. Chalfant, Huntsville, Alabama, June 3, 1866, in Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 114-5. The original letter is in the Freedmen’s Aid Society Papers for Western Georgia and Alabama of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Chalfant was superintendent of the West Georgia and Alabama district of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The papers are located in the Interdenominational Theological Library in Atlanta, Georgia.

A.S. Lakin to James F. Chalfant, March 19, 1867, in Kolchin, *First Freedom*, 115. The original letter is in the Freedmen’s Aid Society Papers for Western Georgia and Alabama of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Detailed information on the Union Leagues can be found in Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

community was gained through the pulpit and the ballot box. As white politicians and later, black politicians learned, political offices carry a lot of power, and that power comes from the voters. The Union Leagues created a black voting bloc in order to tell that bloc how to vote and thus elect politicians from one party. This type of voting continues in the Black Belt in the twenty-first century and is used by black politicians to maintain control of government offices, just as white politicians did prior to 1965.

When Lakin founded the black Methodist Church in Marion, it was known as the Marion Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. In 1880, the church acquired its own property, located on the courthouse square, directly across from the east entrance to the Perry County Courthouse. A white clapboard structure was soon constructed. Though now covered with a brick facade, the church, renamed the Zion United Methodist Church was, and remains, the only church structure on the square. While its founding did not have as much direction from a white congregation as that of the Colored Baptist Church, and the Methodists in Alabama did not found a school and a church as the Congregationalists did, under the name Zion United Methodist Church, the twentieth century descendant of the Marion Colored Methodist Church became the site of the second freedom movement for African Americans in Perry County. A march, and a funeral, left this church and changed the voting rights of African Americans in the United States forever. The work that led to that march was carried out by members of Berean Baptist Church, the First Congregational Church, and Zion United Methodist Church. Many of those leaders were graduates of the Lincoln Normal School.

Along with the necessity for religious instruction, newly freed slaves and some white citizens agreed on the necessity of education for blacks. Religious education was

often combined with the rudiments of a basic education through the Sabbath Schools, but freed men wanted more and were willing to work with whites from the North and the South to accomplish that goal. Many southern whites were not interested in educating former slaves, seeking instead to have them labor in their fields. Though the state constitution of 1867 provided for the education of all citizens of Alabama, the state of Alabama was not inclined to provide the funding necessary for blacks to attend school. As late as 1911, in *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs*, the seven authors, four black and three white, noted the prejudice against the education of blacks in the South in the opening of the fourth chapter of their work, “The Education of the Negro.”⁸⁹ They point out that knowledge is power and suggest that the reason many whites did not want blacks to receive an adequate education was out of fear that “education will lead to negro dominance in politics and to promiscuous mingling in social life. The Southern white man will never be enthusiastic for negro education until he is convinced that such education will not lead to either of these.”⁹⁰ By the twentieth century, much of this fear of dominance in politics and social intermingling may have been left over from what many Southerners, especially in the Black Belt remembered

⁸⁹ W.D. Weatherford, et al., *Negro Life in the South: Present Conditions and Needs*, 85-114. Work on the book began at a meeting in Atlanta in 1908 between President John Hope of Atlanta Baptist College, professor John Wesley Gilbert, W.A. Hunton and J.E. Moorland, secretaries of the Colored Department of the International Committee of Young Men’s Christian Associations, Dr. W.R. Lambuth, Missionary Secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Dr. Stewart Roberts, former professor at Emory, and Dr. W.D. Weatherford, the author. The first four authors listed were black, the last three were white. Their goal was to produce a text book on the “negro in the South, which could be used in the Home Mission classes.” of the YMCA, v-vi.

Weatherford was International Secretary of the Young Men’s Christian Association. He graduated from Vanderbilt in 1902. Weatherford founded the Southern YMCA College in 1919 and taught there until the school closed in 1936. In the fall of 1936, Weatherford accepted an invitation to teach at Fisk University where he taught for ten years.

⁹⁰ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 87.

from Reconstruction, or at least what they had heard about Reconstruction. By 1867, for instance, voting lists for ratification of the state constitution mentioned above, included 104,518 blacks and 61,295 whites. One white widow bemoaned that she could not understand why she, the mother of five and the wife of a dead soldier, was forced to work while “negroes are kept at public expense.” She went on to say that there was a “poor-house for the wives and families of soldiers” and a “bureau for negroes. If we were negroes the Government would care for us. . . . We have a white population and a black Congress.”⁹¹

Many whites at the turn of the twentieth century did not want to live with the possibility of another round of what J.L.M. Curry referred to as “Radical misrule . . . where a generation or more would be needed to recover from the disastrous consequences of war.”⁹² White southerners feared the power that education would give to blacks, specifically black politicians and the large underclass of black laborers. These fears were not unwarranted in their minds, as many blacks did leave the fields in large numbers after the Civil War and there were many black politicians. Most of the black politicians were educated in the north and moved to the South after the war, or they were of mixed ancestry and had lived as free blacks in southern cities such as Mobile and New Orleans.⁹³ This differentiation did not seem to matter to most whites, however.

⁹¹“The Widow’s Soliloquy,” *Southern Enterprise* (Thomasville, Georgia), November 8, 1866, in Wayne Dasher and Judy Dasher, *The Negro and the Southern Press: 1866-1869*, 12.

⁹²Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 60.

⁹³Bertis English covers t this topic in thorough detail in “Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875.” See also Bertis English, “A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 3-36.

Many newly freed slaves throughout the South had almost no reading or writing skills to build on. Illiteracy ranged between 90-100 percent in 1865.⁹⁴ Hannah Jones did not indicate that she was purposely not taught to read and write as a slave. Perhaps she was not aware of the restriction against educating slaves. When asked about educational opportunities during slavery, she simply replied that “nobody [had] no time to learn us [slaves] how to read and write.”⁹⁵ As previously noted, not all Perry County slaves were illiterate. According to Eli Heidt, co-owner of the *Marion Commonwealth* newspaper, which had several black subscribers in the 1870s, few Perry County blacks under the age of 30 were unable to read or write.⁹⁶ Teaching slaves to read and perhaps write was done at the pleasure of the master or mistress, and the masters and mistresses of Perry County seemed more inclined to do educate the blacks around them, both before and after the Civil War.

Though Southern whites tended to resist the idea of education for blacks, newly freed men and women in Marion immediately found a strong advocate for black education in white Baptist preacher and former Congressman J.L.M. Curry. Curry, mentioned previously, served as President of the Alabama Baptist Convention beginning in 1865. The same month that he was elected president of that body, he was also elected

For a general look at black politicians during Reconstruction in Alabama, see Richard Bailey, *Neither Carpetbaggers nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders during the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867-1878*.

⁹⁴ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 88. By 1909, the illiteracy rate for blacks was 43 percent.

⁹⁵ Hannah Jones, interview by Pigie T. Hix and John Morgan Smith, Greensboro, Alabama, July 6, 1937. Interview transcription p. 2, p. 239 of consecutive numbering. WPA Slave Narratives, Alabama project. Though the interview took place on Tuscaloosa Street in Greensboro, Alabama, where Jones was living with her daughter, Jones came to Alabama at age 16 when she was bought by Judge Moore, who had a plantation in Prairieville, on the southwest edge of Perry County.

⁹⁶ Bertis English, “A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 16. Information found in the *Marion Commonwealth*, June 19, 1873, as well as the Ninth Census of 1880.

president of Howard College in Marion. In 1866, he was ordained as a Baptist preacher at Siloam Baptist Church.⁹⁷ His diaries record multiple sermons on behalf of Howard College, as well as sermons to black congregations.⁹⁸ After meeting with white ministers McIntosh and Raymond of the Baptist and Presbyterian churches respectively, Curry called for a public meeting to address the education of the newly freed men and women in Marion in 1866.⁹⁹ On May 17, he attended a meeting at the Presbyterian Church to aid freedmen in efforts to obtain education. He made a speech to that effect, and with the support of the two ministers and former governor Andrew Barry Moore, Curry “introduced resolutions favoring the education of the colored people by the white people of the South.”¹⁰⁰

Educational institutions were not new to Marion. The Marion Female Seminary, founded in 1835, was followed in 1838 by the Judson Female Institute. Both institutions were created solely for the education of women. Given the patriarchal nature of white antebellum society, the fact that white planters had founded two schools in the town

⁹⁷ Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 53.

⁹⁸ Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 55, 181. According to Rice, upon Curry’s death in February, 1903, *The Reformer*, a black newspaper, stated “whenever opportunity would permit, he would preach in our churches or lecture to our teachers, not as a white man to a Negro, but as a man to a man.”

⁹⁹ Edwin Anderson Alderman and Armistead Churchill Gordon, *J.L.M. Curry, A Biography* (New York: McMillan Company, 1911), 201.

¹⁰⁰ Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 194.

See also Rice, *J.L.M. Curry*, 60. Curry’s statue was one of Alabama’s two statues in Statuary Hall in the United States capital building in Washington, D.C., because of his work for education in Alabama, both black and white. Though he was born in Georgia and only spent 30 years in Alabama, later moving to Virginia and North Carolina, he represented Alabama in the U.S. Senate just prior to the Civil War, and worked tirelessly for education and religious instruction in Alabama during his tenure. He served on the Board of the Peabody Educational Fund. His statue was replaced by a statue of Helen Keller in 2009. Curry wrote a book on George Peabody, as well as a book on the government of the Confederate states. Quote from Edwin Anderson Alderman and Armistead Churchill Gordon, *J.L.M. Curry, A Biography* (New York: McMillan Co., 2911), 201.

Moore was governor of Alabama when the state voted to secede from the union.

before they founded Howard College to educate their sons in 1841, perhaps demonstrates the forward-thinking ideas many whites had regarding education. According to one author, it was this “enlightened antebellum environment” that “softened many prosperous whites’ positions on race and symbolized the general mood in the county. As a result, local slaves were afforded more educational, economic and religious opportunities than most Black Belt slaves received.”¹⁰¹

Due to the proportionally large number of freed men and women in Perry County who had received some form of education during their enslavement, there was a strong desire among the free population to develop educational institutions similar to Judson and Howard for themselves. In Marion, there was a movement among both the white and black communities for black educational opportunities, and from that work, the Lincoln School of Marion was founded. Just as the Female Seminary, Judson, and Howard had denominational ties, so too did the Lincoln school. Though a connection with the northern-based American Missionary Association may not have been what whites had in mind when they espoused the founding of a school for freed men and women in Marion, the AMA sent white teachers from the north and financed their salaries, as well as maintained the buildings and agreed to keep the school open for at least seven months each year.¹⁰²

On July 17, 1867, nine trustees presented a petition for incorporation of the Lincoln School of Marion. Among the trustees were James Childs, the former slave who

¹⁰¹ Bertis English, “A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 17.

¹⁰² Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 29 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

had been taught to read by the wife of his master, and Alexander H. Curtis, who, among other things, served as the clerk for the Colored Baptist Church (Berean). Also included was Thomas Lee, who was a delegate to the 1868 state constitutional convention and was elected as a state representative.¹⁰³

After acquiring a lot with a small building on the west side of town, the trustees found it difficult to keep the doors open, and they decided to lease the school to the AMA for ten years. The AMA expanded the school through the purchase of an old plantation house and farm adjacent to the property. The house, which was the headquarters of the short-lived Ku Klux Klan in Marion, was remodeled into teacher housing and named “Forest Home,”¹⁰⁴

While the AMA had schools in Talladega and Montgomery as well, the Lincoln School was unusual because it remained a primary and secondary school, and did not become a college level institution like Talladega College. The state of Alabama did create the Lincoln Normal University at the school in 1873. This was developed as a teacher education and certification program, known as the “normal” department. There were four normal schools established in the state to train black teachers. The black

¹⁰³ Idella J Childs, “Perry County Personalities,” 2, in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2. Lee died before he could take his seat in the legislature. See also Bertis English, “A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874,” *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 23.

¹⁰⁴ Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 29 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

Childs’ history is very brief, and was written by an alumna of the Lincoln School. For a more extensive review of the founding of the Lincoln School, as well as an exhaustive review of Reconstruction in Perry County, see Bertis English, “Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875.”

The home may have been named after Nathan Bedford Forrest, the founder of the KKK. General Nathan Bedford Forrest had a headquarters in Marion during the Civil War, and he lived in Marion after the War. See Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 2, 28 and 99. There is no documentary proof that the home was named for Forrest.

institutions were associated with the AMA and there was not much opposition to having them funded because the funding came out of the common school fund for black children.¹⁰⁵ The state made Lincoln's funding permanent in 1873, and in a move to assuage black members of the legislature who were pushing for a black university equivalent to the state school for whites at Tuscaloosa, the department of education declared the Normal School at Lincoln to be the setting for the black state university. By 1874, the one hundred students enrolled at the Normal University in Marion received instruction in the basics, as well as Greek, Latin, trigonometry, physiology, natural philosophy and chemistry.¹⁰⁶

Though local whites had been instrumental in the founding and initial support of the Lincoln School, not all white citizens in the area were happy with the prospect of having a large, educated, black population. After a fire, believed to have been intentionally set, destroyed the building that housed the normal school, that portion of Lincoln was moved to Montgomery in 1889, and renamed the State Normal School, which is today Alabama State University.¹⁰⁷ The American Missionary Association then helped to rebuild the school facility in Marion.¹⁰⁸ Though the normal school portion of

¹⁰⁵ Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 105-6.

¹⁰⁶ Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 110. Two original trustees from Lincoln, Dozier and Curtis, also served on the Board of Directors for the State Normal School and University for Colored Teachers and Students.

¹⁰⁷ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Black Belt, 1875-1900" *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 188.

See also Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1, 244-245.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 120. Once the building was rebuilt, Northern members of the AMA sent a large box labeled "Bibles" to Lincoln School to help the young pupils get started on the proper path of learning and forgiveness. When the faculty at the Lincoln School opened the crate, they found a layer of Bibles neatly stacked on top of the remaining contents of the crate, which

Lincoln was moved to Montgomery after the fire, the primary department remained under the direction of the AMA in Marion.¹⁰⁹ The elementary and high school remained open and situated on the same lot where the school was originally built, until Lincoln was closed, ironically, by integration in the 1970s.

The presence of the Lincoln School provided an educated black class in what became, by the early twentieth century, according to one black author, a “predominantly rural, black, impoverished and culturally deprived county” in Alabama.¹¹⁰ Though in the public schools there were more black students per teacher than in the white schools, at a rate of 2.5/1, the Lincoln School offered a more balanced student/teacher ratio than even the white schools.¹¹¹ With a curriculum that in 1873 included grammar, history, physiology, natural philosophy, arithmetic, algebra and composition, the courses taught at Lincoln were more advanced than what was taught in the white public schools.¹¹² Students were also instructed in proper table manners, with an emphasis on correct posture, and they learned skills in the manual trades.¹¹³ Tuition was required, and some students would work in the fields to earn tuition money, which meant they were only able

included several rifles and ammunition. The letter accompanying the crate’s contents expressed hope that the school would only have to use the Bibles.

¹⁰⁹Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 28 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1. Also, interview of Mary Cosby Moore with author, November 11, 2010.

¹¹⁰Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 29-30 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

¹¹¹Bertis English, “Perry County Public School Data, 1870-71” in “Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875,” Appendix N, 724.

¹¹²Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*, 108.

See also Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder*, 318 and Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

¹¹³Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 33 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

to attend part of the year. Many students boarded at the school, including students from outlying areas of Perry County.

For African American students who could not attend the Lincoln School, their public school instruction in the nineteenth century took place in one-room schoolhouses that dotted the landscape. These schools were generally underfunded. This problem was compounded by the fact that in 1872, the public education system in Alabama faced bankruptcy. Though by 1875, the state of Alabama allotted \$100,000 for education, all but 4% of the money had to be used for teacher's salaries.¹¹⁴ Constitutionally, counties were to receive funds based on the number of students in the county, regardless of race, but by 1890, the towns were allowed to distribute the funds "according to the number of children 'who will probably attend school.'"¹¹⁵ From 1875 until it was outlawed by the twenty-fourth amendment in 1964, counties were allowed to use the revenue from the poll tax to supplement funding to their local schools, which Perry County did.¹¹⁶

Though the public education system in Alabama in the second half of the nineteenth century was underfunded by the state and lacked the support of the community, the Lincoln School was always open, providing a superior education to that offered by the state. Those who were lucky enough to attend Lincoln became the leaders of the educational and Civil Rights Movements for blacks in Alabama. Lincoln graduates

¹¹⁴ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900" *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 127.

¹¹⁵ Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900" *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 128.

¹¹⁶ "837 In Perry County Pay 1964 Poll Tax," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964. Though the announcement that the poll tax was outlawed was published on p. 7 of the same edition of the *Times-Standard*, the January 28, 1965 edition of the paper noted that the February 1 deadline to pay the tax was approaching and only 290 of the roughly 800 persons required to pay the tax had done so. See "Poll Tax Payments Lag; Deadline Near," *Marion Times-Standard*, January 28, 1965.

earned bachelor and doctorate degrees in higher percentages than their white counterparts graduating from any other school in Alabama.¹¹⁷ Through his examination of the number of African Americans with doctorate degrees, Horace Mann Bond found that a large percentage of those with terminal degrees had ties to Perry County, and more specifically to the Lincoln School. These degree-holders would become the black middle-class in the South and serve as a reminder that blacks, even when allowed only a segregated existence, could participate equally with their white counterparts in the classroom, and therefore should be allowed to participate equally with whites in other areas, including the political arena.

It was the African American religious and educational institutions founded in the 1860s that furnished the leaders and participants of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in Perry County. The Lincoln School provided an educated populace that was well-suited, and more than qualified, to demand the right to vote. The churches, born out of a “liberating” forced separation, provided a place of peace for blacks who struggled under the heavy hand of segregation. Importantly, the churches became the meeting places for the Movement, and provided the leaders of the local movement and a support network to sustain the struggle.¹¹⁸ As Wayne Flynt noted in his work on Southern Baptists in Alabama, “Ultimately, it would be from black Alabama Baptist churches that they [African Americans] would launch the final assault on segregation.”¹¹⁹ Thus, it was

¹¹⁷ Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama*. See also Idella J. Childs, “The Lincoln Normal School,” 28 in section 2, “Memories of Perry County,” in Harris, *Perry County Heritage*, vol. 1.

¹¹⁸ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 141. Flynt used the term “liberating” to describe the separation of blacks from white churches.

¹¹⁹ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 142.

from the segregated churches, which blacks pushed to create, that they launched their crusade to end segregation in the rest of society. While the role played by churches is not unique to Perry County, the role played by whites in the founding of these institutions did make Perry County unique, and this fact provided a fading glimmer that perhaps whites and blacks could once again meet each other by extending the “right hand of [Christian] fellowship” for mutual uplift, as they had done for a few years immediately following the end of the Civil War.¹²⁰ Ultimately, however, this would not be the case.

¹²⁰Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 141. The quote comes from a description of the conversion of the son of a former planter who was saved upon hearing a sermon by J.L.M. Curry in Marion. Two elderly black men, both former slaves of the youth’s father, rushed forward after his baptism to give him “the right hand of fellowship.” This term is also used in the papers of the Berean Baptist Church.

Chapter 3

The Rising Star: The Life of African Americans in Perry County in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Though there were events in the first few years of Reconstruction in Perry County that indicated that black and white relations might follow a path of mutual benefit and cooperation, by the end of the nineteenth century, feelings between blacks and whites had cooled considerably. Following Redemption and the fraudulent elections of 1874 which swept Democrats into the controlling state offices, African Americans quickly saw their rights vanish.¹ The compromise of 1877, which ended military occupation in the former Confederate states, assured that the vote which all males, regardless of race, had been guaranteed by the 15th Amendment, would be taken away from the black male electorate.

As soon as blacks throughout the nation began exercising their rights during Reconstruction, white resistance began. In Perry County, white resistance to black rights began in the second half of the nineteenth century with the presence of the Knights of the White Camellia. One of the more active members was a former Confederate surgeon named G.L.P. Reid. When the smokehouse behind Reid's residence on Bibb Street was dismantled in the 1920s, an original copy of the KoWC charter was found buried under the floor boards. Violence by vigilante groups against blacks continued into the

¹ For more on the elections of 1874, see Bertis English, "Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875," chapter 9. See also William Rogers Warren et al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), chapters 16 and 19.

twentieth century. Some of the reasons that whites gave to explain the violence they committed against blacks were common excuses given by whites throughout the United States. In one case, a white Perry County landowner shot a black man for making advances towards his wife in the 1930s. Another man was shot for stealing a chicken. The grandfather of Mary Cosby Moore, the Perry County Circuit Clerk in 2010, was cut on the neck for refusing to address a white man as “Sir.” Moore recalled instances of blacks being whisked out of town in coffins to avoid retribution from whites.²

As violence increased, educational opportunities for African Americans decreased, along with their voting power. Quality education for blacks became so elusive by 1897 that the president of the Teachers’ Association in Alabama noted that “black students had not received a fair share of the state’s public-school funds since 1868.”³ As Reconstruction drew to a close, however, the AMA funded Lincoln School in Marion experienced a banner year in 1875-6, with buildings valued at \$5,000 and a strong enrollment, especially in the newly created Normal School. The value of the physical plant of the school put Lincoln on par with Judson and Howard.⁴ While individuals from both races worked together in public businesses and private homes, culturally, the paths of the two races had diverged by the 1890s. The white race had segregated by choice, except in religious worship where segregation was pursued strongly by African Americans, while the black race was forced to create its own sphere because it was excluded from participation in the culture of whites.

² Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

³ Bertis English, “Civil Wars and Civil Beings,” 634.

⁴ Bertis English, “Civil Wars and Civil Beings,” 635.

One arena in which the races were separated by the color line, though their experiences and suffering were very similar, was in the sharecropping system. There were both white and black sharecroppers in Perry County and throughout the South. Sharecropping toughened its grip on the landless as they tried to make the land as productive as it had been in 1860.⁵ The reliance on cotton was stronger after the Civil War than before. Though the sharecropping system existed, along with the growing divide of segregation, whites and blacks prospered in Perry County after the Civil War and into the twentieth century. Examples of successful African American families include the Scotts, who owned their own land in northern Perry County. Their farm and other business interests prospered for decades, allowing the family to work without the fear of being evicted for offending whites. The security afforded by land ownership proved to be a key component in the decision of individual African Americans to participate in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The Movement began in the western part of the county, where more African Americans owned their own land and homes than in other sections of the county.⁶ A.H. Curtis, the prominent African-American clerk of the Colored Baptist Church and a Senator and Representative in the Alabama legislature during Reconstruction, continued the barber shop business he had started during slavery, having used the proceeds from it buy his freedom prior to the Civil War. John C. Dozier, a fellow trustee of the Lincoln School, as well as an educator,

⁵ For a list of the cotton production in Black Belt counties between 1860 and 1900, see Bertis English, "Civil Wars and Civil Beings," 739. In 1860, Perry County produced 44,603 bales of cotton. By 1900, that number was 26,690. While this amount doubled the 1870 output, the pre-Civil War numbers were never again achieved. Crop diversification played a small role in this change, but not a significant amount.

⁶ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Avery was serving as a county voting registrar at the time of the interview. Della Maynard, speech given at a mock rally staged for Spring Valley High School (PA) students at Zion Methodist Church, Marion, AL, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author. Maynard reiterated the importance of land ownership in her speech.

legislator, minister, politician, and physician, had landholdings alone worth \$1,600 in 1870.⁷ The Childs family prospered immediately after emancipation and operated their successful bakery, serving black and white patrons for several generations. Their establishment was the only bakery in town for decades.

The Childs family bakery was started by Stephen Childs whose father, a slave named James Childs, had been the first black preacher to the African American congregation at the white Baptist church. After serving as his master's body-servant during the Civil War, Stephen Childs traveled to Mobile often to sell cotton, while trading cotton futures on the New York Stock Exchange.⁸ Childs also served as one of the founding members of the Lincoln School.

Members of the Childs family went to Chicago to learn how to make candy and bread, and they brought their knowledge back to Marion, where they opened the only bakery in town, making what are today known as Almond Joys and Mars Bars. Though the bakery was successful for decades, Amzie Childs sold the Bakery in the late 1950s, most likely because of pressure from whites, who according to Andrew Young, resented the fact that a black family owned a successful bakery and store on the courthouse square.⁹ The sale of the business was difficult for Norman Childs, whose life's work was in the bakery. Unlike most educated blacks, Childs had chosen to stay in the rural South. But like other educated and successful blacks who chose to stay in the area, Childs found

⁷ Bertis English, "A Black Belt Anomaly: Biracial Cooperation in Reconstruction-era Perry County, 1865-1874," *Alabama Review* 62, no. 1 (January 2009): 18. For more information on African Americans who held major offices in Alabama between 1867-1875, see Bailey Richard, *Neither Carpetbaggers nor Scalawags: Black Officeholders During the Reconstruction of Alabama, 1867-1878*. Curtis was elected to the House in 1871 and served a full term, which ended in 1872. He was then elected a Senator for the 1872-76 term. He died in 1878.

⁸ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), 65-66. Andrew Young married Jean Childs, the granddaughter of Stephen Childs.

⁹ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 70.

himself routinely denied opportunities to use his talents and skills because to his race. Like many others who were denied the opportunity to work to their fullest potential, Childs turned to alcohol, though only until he was able to train for a new career and buy a shoe repair business.¹⁰

While both blacks and whites patronized the Childs' bakery, by the twentieth century, the Childs were not afforded the same privileges in white stores that they extended to all of their customers. At Barker Drug Store, located across Washington Street from the bakery, members of the Childs family, and all other black members of the community, could only order ice cream to go. They were not allowed to sit on the stools at the ice cream counter. A member of the family once ordered ice cream, and after being told to walk to the far end of the counter to wait on her order, she turned around and walked out of the store, leaving the employee behind the counter holding the cone of melting ice cream in her hand.¹¹

African Americans were relegated to the balcony of the Neely Theater downtown, just a few doors down from Barker Drug. They were not allowed to use the restroom in the courthouse, and there were segregated water fountains. They were not allowed to try on clothes at the local stores, and they were not allowed to return items that did not fit. Blacks were also not allowed to try on shoes at the store. To determine if a shoe was the

¹⁰ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 69. Young tells the story of the town drunk who approached him in a barber shop shortly after Young came to Marion. The man challenged Young to finish Bible verses. The man was a WWII veteran and had a master's degree, but due to his race, he could not find a job. Out of frustration, he turned to alcohol according to Young.

¹¹ Cora Childs Moore and Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

right size, they could only stick their hand in the shoes to gauge the fit.¹² At the local hamburger stand, blacks could only order from the window outside and wait in the elements for their order to be prepared. The job openings advertised in the *Marion Times-Standard* for the Burger Treet [sic] noted when there was a “POSITION OPEN – For a young white woman.”¹³

Even health care was segregated, from the waiting room to the hospital. At the local doctor’s office, whites were treated first, and many blacks passed out in the waiting room. Evidence of the discrepancies in the supposedly separate but equal living and health facilities, and access to health care in general, can be seen in the death rates, as well as the infant mortality and fetal death rates. The death rate for non-whites in Alabama in 1960 was higher than the death rate for whites in 1925, the first year that statistics were kept.¹⁴ Though infant mortality rates had declined steadily for whites and blacks since 1930, the infant mortality rate for blacks (43.9 per thousand live births) was almost twice the number as the rate for whites (23 per thousand live births) in 1962.¹⁵ The fetal death rate for blacks was 30.5 per 1,000 live black births, while the rate for whites was 14 per 1,000 live white births. It is important to note that there were more

¹² Mary Ward Brown, interview by author, Hamburg, AL, July 16, 2009. Mrs. Brown’s father owned a general store in the Hamburg community, south of Marion in Perry County. Her father ensured that everyone that worked for him, whether at the store or in their home, had shoes that fit.

¹³ Want Ads, *Marion Times-Standard*, September 5, 1963. For a personal account of the range of emotions experienced by an African American male in the United States in the 1940s and at mid-century, see J. Saunders Redding, *On Being Negro in America* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1951).

¹⁴ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.” The death rate for whites in 1925 was 9.5 per thousand of the white population, and 15.2 per thousand of the black population. The white population in 1925 was about 1,574,000. The black population was around 923,000. The death rate for blacks in 1960 was 11.4 per thousand of the black population, and the toll per whites was 8.2 per 1,000 of the white population. The black population was 983,000 and the white population was 2,284,000. See p. 5 for death rates, and see p. 3 for population numbers by year.

¹⁵ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 6. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.”

black births (33 per thousand) in 1960 than white births (22 per thousand).¹⁶ Statistics such as neonatal death rates (24.7 black v. 17.9 white per 1,000 births in each racial group) and maternal mortality rates (1.41 black and .29 white per 1,000 live births in each racial group) were also indicators of the state of health care for blacks in Alabama in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁷

In those rare instances when health care services were equal, access was still segregated. When the Alabama Health Department X-Ray Mobile, under sponsorship of the Perry County Tuberculosis Association and the Three Arts Club of Marion, was scheduled to visit Perry County in 1963, the front-page announcement in the paper noted “any person in the county 15 years of age or older” could receive a free x-ray. From that point on, however, differentiation occurred. When the unit arrived in Uniontown on August 29, whites were given first priority and x-rayed in the morning. “Colored people,” it was noted, “will be x-rayed in the afternoon.” When the unit parked on the south side of the courthouse square in Marion, whites were “served on Friday, Aug. 30” while “Negro residents” were seen on Saturday, August 31.¹⁸ This is likely one of the few instances where the doctrine of “separate but equal” was upheld as far as services were concerned. Interestingly, the black patients were likely given the better day for their services because unlike their white counterparts, they would not have to miss work for the screening and Saturday was the day that blacks and whites came in to town from the outlying farms to shop.

¹⁶ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 4. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.”

¹⁷ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 8-9. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.”

¹⁸ “State X-Ray Mobile To Be In County On August 29, 30, 31,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 29, 1963.

There were black patients at the Perry County Hospital, and they did go to the local hospital for emergency treatment and long-term care. Once black patients were stabilized at the Perry County Hospital, many African Americans were sent to Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma, twenty-five miles to the southeast, for surgery, childbirth, and any medical procedures that could not be handled in the local doctor's office or at the hospital.¹⁹ In 1965, Good Samaritan would play a role in the lives of Perry County's citizens beyond the medical attention afforded to individuals, when it received a young gunshot victim named Jimmie Lee Jackson, who would die while in their care. Jackson was first taken to the Perry County Hospital in Marion, but because the hospital was not adequately equipped to handle his gunshot wound to the stomach, Jackson was sent to Good Samaritan.

Blacks were segregated from whites in public accommodations and gatherings, as well as in religious and educational settings. This led to a complete social segregation of the races. Because of the public and social exclusion imposed by whites against blacks, as well as the religious and social exclusion imposed by blacks against whites, African Americans developed their own businesses along with social and cultural organizations similar to, but separate from white organizations. One of the earliest racially-exclusive black social groups, and the most important organization for this study, was the Rising Star Association.

The association was founded in the 1920s by Hampton D. Lee. Because many businesses were segregated, Lee had opened a funeral home and established himself as a business and political leader in the black community. According to one report, he was

¹⁹ Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

the only trained embalmer in the county in the 1960s.²⁰ Lee had been a card-carrying member of the NAACP for decades, even when the group was barred from operating in Alabama in 1956. He kept up his membership during those years via the NAACP in Mississippi. Lee kept voting interest alive in the county during the decades between WWII and the flowering of the Movement in the 1960s. As part of this work, he helped found the fraternal and educational Rising Star Association for blacks. The Association had fifteen branches in the county by 1965. The members met monthly, paid monthly dues to help provide death benefits, and raised money for scholarships. Each year, eight to ten high school graduates received grants from the Association to attend college. The purpose of the scholarships was to help young blacks get started in life so that they would continue to achieve and thus benefit the entire community, though many educated blacks left the South once they finished their post-secondary education.

In 1965, the Association's membership included Cager Lee and Jimmie Lee Jackson, as well as Albert Turner. Not only did African Americans in Perry County benefit from Hampton Lee's leadership in the county, as well as from the monetary benefits provided by the Association, the Movement also benefited from the Association through its use of the Rising Star lodge for its monthly planning meetings in 1964 and 1965.²¹

The use of the black-owned building allowed the Movement participants to conceal their early activities from the white community, and avoid retribution to some extent, though there were instances of Klan activity in the era of the "third Klan" in the 1950s and 1960s. While there were no newspaper reports of violence against blacks, acts

²⁰ Jack Mendelsohn, *Martyrs: Sixteen Who Gave Their Lives* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 135.

²¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 135 and 138.

of intimidation did occur. T.O. Harris, who served as chief of police in Marion from 1958-1965, recalled an incident in which the police were summoned to the hospital early one morning because a man had been shot. The shooting had taken place near the Lincoln School. When the police arrived, they discovered, to their surprise, that the victim was a white man. This was unusual since almost all of the residents in the vicinity of the Lincoln School were African American. Along with the school, all of the churches and other public facilities in the area were used almost exclusively by the black community, and then, as now, the roads through the area are used by local residents only and do not lead to any public-use facilities.

The victim did not want to discuss the circumstances surrounding the shooting, so the police “went to the home of a negro man who lived near Lincoln School and talked with him.”²² According to Harris, the resident reported that a group of white men had appeared at his home the night before the police were called to the hospital, and “demanded that he come out and talk with them. He said [to the police that] he was afraid to go out and they finally threw something into his home that smelled awful.” Harris reported that the interior of the man’s house smelled like rotten eggs, and the group likely threw sulfur dioxide into the home to force the man to run out of the house. The African American man ran out the back door of his home, shooting a gun as he ran. He thought he hit someone, and it turned out to be the white man the police questioned in the hospital.

The investigators found the white man’s weapon at the scene. He had dropped the gun when he was hit, and the other perpetrators abandoned their pursuit of the black

²² T.O. Harris, *Law Enforcement and Civil Disobedience* (Marion, AL: 1987), 52.

man in order to take the wounded man to the hospital. In his memoirs, Chief Harris indicated that he did not approve of any group that took the law into their own hands. Because of the group's vigilante tactics, Harris called in the district attorney, the Alabama Bureau of Investigation, and the assistant Attorney General for the state of Alabama to investigate the shooting. The group of white men turned out to be members of a local Ku Klux Klan group, though Harris implies that they were not from the immediate area. The KKK member who was shot, as well as one of the other accomplices, was found guilty of the shooting. The black man who shot the KKK member was neither indicted nor tried for the shooting. Harris noted that while the leadership in the black community knew of his efforts and the efforts of the state agencies to convict the white men, he felt that he did not communicate adequately with the black population overall. There already existed a feeling of distrust among members of the black community toward the police force, and though the police tried to be fair, the efforts that they made were not well-known in the black community.²³

The most poignant example of racism carried out by the government in Marion began on July 27, 1957, when Jimmy Wilson, age 55 or 56, allegedly stole \$1.95 from a white woman. After Wilson was arrested, he was charged with burglary, robbery, and robbery with intent to attack by Circuit Solicitor Blanchard McLeod. The hearing took place before Justice of the Peace E.C. Washburn, on July 31, 1957. Wilson was held without bail in the Dallas County jail until the Perry County grand jury convened in September.²⁴

²³ TO Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 52-3.

²⁴ "Capital Charge Faced by Negro," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1957.

The local paper, the *Marion Times-Standard* refers to the victim, Estelle Browning Barker, as an “aged Marion matron” and “an elderly white widow.”²⁵ One source lists the victim as being 76 years of age, while another lists her as 80 years old.²⁶ There were also subtle accusations of attempted rape. As previously mentioned, Wilson was initially charged with burglary, robbery, and robbery with intent to attack, according to the August 8 edition of the *Marion Times-Standard*.²⁷ By the time Wilson was tried in October of 1957, the *Times-Standard* listed the charges as robbery, night-time burglary with intent to steal, and “night-time burglary with intent to ravish.”²⁸

Wilson was represented by two court-appointed attorneys who did not cross-examine the state’s witnesses.²⁹ The trial began at 9:00 am and final arguments were over by 1:30 that afternoon. The jury deliberated for less than an hour before finding Wilson guilty of robbery. Wilson was only tried on the robbery charge. Curiously, he was never tried on the two burglary charges, including “burglary with intent to ravish.”³⁰ This is especially ironic since most of the violent actions perpetrated by whites to keep

²⁵ “Capital Charge Faced by Negro,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1957; “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

²⁶ The particulars of the crime and the victim can be found in multiple news clippings about the event, including “Capital Charge Faced by Negro,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1957 and “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

Additional information is available in *The Gazette* (Montreal), August 8, 1958. This source lists the victim as 80 years of age. *The Gazette* lists Wilson as being 55 years old, though the *Marion Times-Standard* lists him as being 56 and 53 – August 8, 1957 and October 31, 1957.

The Gazette clipping is one of many in the papers of Gov. Jim Folsom. Folsom received thousands of letters, often with news clippings and checks for \$1.95 enclosed, protesting Wilson receiving the death sentence for the theft of \$1.95. Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Papers of Governor James Folsom, 1955-59. This particular clipping is found in box SG0113825, Box 3 of 8, letters dated August 22. Correspondence regarding Jimmy Wilson, 1958, in the Alabama Governor papers (1955-59: Folsom).

²⁷ “Capital Charge Faced by Negro,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1957.

²⁸ “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

²⁹ Finding Aid, ADAH, Correspondence Regarding Jimmy Wilson, 1958, in the Alabama Governor Papers (1955-59: Folsom).

³⁰ “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

blacks “in their place” were committed in the name of protecting white women. However, robbery was a capital offense in Alabama at the time, which may explain why the Circuit Solicitor who prosecuted the case only tried Wilson on the robbery charge. He understood that if Wilson was convicted of robbery, he would be sentenced to death by electrocution. According to the *Times-Standard*, the jury returned their verdict “without recommendation for mercy, which automatically calls for capital punishment under Alabama law.”³¹ For stealing \$1.95 from “a prominent Marion resident,” who also happened to be an elderly white widow, Wilson was sentenced to die in the electric chair for his crime.³²

For admitting to breaking into the home of a white elderly widow, demanding money, choking and threatening her because she did not give him enough money, only to be frightened when a neighbor turned on a porch light, the two-time inmate received the death penalty. Interestingly, during the same set of Circuit Court trials in which Wilson’s case was argued, a man named Levi Jones was sentenced to seven years in the penitentiary for manslaughter, first degree.³³ Jones’ race is not known.

Wilson’s execution was scheduled for January 10, 1958. While many white citizens in Marion may have been glad to see the case finished and their version of justice and order maintained, many people in other parts of the world viewed the case differently. The records of Governor James Folsom contain thousands of letters sent to the governor regarding the case, many containing newspaper clippings of the verdict, as

³¹ “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

³² “Capital Charge Faced by Negro,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1957.

³³ For a list of all cases tried in the Circuit Court for Perry County in October 1957, see “Criminal Cases to Be Tried Here in Circuit Court,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 10, 1957. For a list of the outcome of those cases, see “Death Sentence Given Negro on Robbery Charge,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 31, 1957.

well as checks for \$1.95. The governor returned the checks with a note stating that he could not accept the money. The letters poured in from around the world, and John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State, informed Folsom of the letters and petitions received at U.S. Embassies in other countries.³⁴ About 95% of the correspondence blasted Folsom, the state of Alabama, and its white citizens for their treatment of blacks. Several letters went so far as to say that the charge of rape was a farce that was simply used to ensure that a jury would convict Wilson to die. Though Wilson was not tried on the assault charge, the all-white jury would have been aware of the charge. The NAACP could not get involved because they were banned in Alabama at the time. Under pressure from the State Department, and with a written argument from Wilson's new attorney, Fred Gray, Folsom granted Wilson an indefinite stay of execution and later commuted Wilson's case to life in prison on September 29, 1958.³⁵

Though Wilson was not a desirable character, given that he had already been convicted of several crimes and served two prison sentences for larceny when he was charged and sentenced for the theft of the \$1.95, the case served as a reminder to African Americans in Perry County, and the South, to remember the place assigned to them by whites. Though Wilson was not from Perry County, having recently moved to the area from Tuscaloosa, he was most likely the product of one of the small public schools for blacks, much like those in Perry County. One reporter noted that Wilson scratched his

³⁴ Dulles' telegram and correspondence with Folsom are found in, Correspondence regarding Jimmy Wilson, 1958, in the Alabama Governor papers (1955-59: Folsom), box 8 of 8, ADAH.

³⁵ The fact that Folsom granted an indefinite stay of execution is found in multiple clippings throughout the collection including the *Independent* [Altadena, California], September 23, 1958. See Alabama, Governor (1955-1959: Folsom) papers, Correspondence Regarding Jimmy Wilson, 1958, Box 7, ADAH. The information about Folsom commuting the sentence to life in prison is found in the response letters sent by the governor to those who wrote to him after September 29, 1958. See Alabama, Governor (1955-1959: Folsom) papers, Correspondence Regarding Jimmy Wilson, 1958, Box 7 and 8, ADAH.

Wilson was paroled in 1973, after serving 16 years in prison, at the age of 71 or 72.

head as he “puzzled two syllable words” in the interview.³⁶ Outside of the thorough educational foundation provided by the Lincoln School, the public schools for blacks, as well as whites living in the rural areas of the county, were less than adequate. In the first half of the twentieth century, there had been one-teacher schools for whites in places like Heiberger and Perry Ridge, located in the county.³⁷ By the 1960s, however, the white schools, whether in Marion, Uniontown, or the rural parts of the county, were superior to all of the black public schools in the county except Lincoln School. In 1963, for instance, the editor of the *Marion Times-Standard* noted that, due to proration, free new textbooks would only be supplied to grades 1-3.³⁸ Due to the fact that the editor of the paper tended to ignore the black community almost entirely, there is a good chance that the report on the schools only dealt with the white public schools in the county.³⁹ Therefore, the black schools were likely not to receive new textbooks, but instead would receive the books no longer used by the white schools.

³⁶ Marty Goodman, “Robs White Widow, Can’t Read, Write, Aware He’ll Die,” *Toronto Daily Star*, August 20, 1958. Found in Mary Dudziak, “The Case of “Death for a Dollar Ninety-Five” in Austin Sarat, When Law Fails: Making Sense of Miscarriages of Justice (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 30.

³⁷ “Holley Funeral Conducted August 2,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 9, 1962. The article notes that Mrs. W.A. Holley (Lula Fretwell) “conducted one-teacher schools at Heiberger and Perry Ridge.” This was probably in the first decade of the twentieth century.

³⁸ “What’s Happening in Perry County Schools,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 7, 1963.

³⁹ There are numerous examples throughout the *Marion Times-Standard* of this discrepancy, but the front page article “Fall Term For County Schools to Open Sept. 4,” which appeared in the August 16, 1962 issue, provides a good example. Though the article notes that the training “institute for colored teachers” would be held at the black Marion Public School, no teacher assignments for any of the black schools in the county were listed in the article. The teaching assignments for all seven white schools are listed.

The same trend is found in the August 15, 1963 edition of the *Marion Times-Standard* as well. This article only listed the teaching assignments for four of the white schools – the Heiberger Junior High and the three high schools: Perry County, Suttle, and Uniontown. This article noted that there would be 51 school buses to transport students. It does not specify if they are for whites specifically, but this may have been the case. Coretta Scott’s mother had to provide a bus and drive it herself for the Lincoln School in the 1940s.

The most thorough coverage that the *Marion Times-Standard* gave to positive events in the life of the black community occurred in articles about events that took place at the Lincoln School. The articles always appear on the back page of the paper. Such was the case of an article in the May 2, 1963 paper, entitled, “Annual Play Day Scheduled Friday By Negro Schools.” The article noted that around 3,000 students and 2,000 parents and other adults were likely to attend the events, which gathered all of the black public school children for a day of “athletic contests, dances, plating the maypole, races and other events.” A parade of students was to begin at the courthouse and make its way through the business district to the Lincoln School to start the activities. Bands from Lincoln and Perry County Training School in Uniontown provided the music.⁴⁰ That fall, the public was invited to the Lincoln School to see “Previews and Progress,” which was touted as “an educational stage demonstration depicting science in action . . . to encourage American youth to pursue studies in science and engineering, and to point out some of the many opportunities available in these fields.” The production was sponsored by General Motors.⁴¹

One of the few mentions of the Lincoln School that was not posted on the back page of the paper was a press release issued by the state regarding Veterans benefits. In order for the children of veterans to receive information about free tuition at state colleges, the Alabama Department of Veteran Affairs sent information to Perry County High School, Uniontown High School, Suttle High School and Lincoln High School. This was probably done as a requirement of the federal government. The notice does not

⁴⁰ “Annual Play Day Scheduled Friday By Negro Schools,” *Marion Times-Standard*, May 2, 1963, back page.

⁴¹ “Demonstration Set at Lincoln School,” *Marion Times-Standard*, September 5, 1963, back page.

state that R.C. Hatch, the black high school in Uniontown, received notice.⁴² The inclusion of these notices is interesting because the paper generally did not provide coverage about life in the black community outside of articles about crime and murder. The handful of articles listed in the preceding paragraphs cover the extent of the *Times-Standard's* information about the black educational experience in the early to mid-1960s.⁴³

Though the paper does not provide much information about the educational experience of blacks in the first half of the twentieth century in Perry County, African Americans that navigated the educational system can provide a great deal of insight. Idella Jones Childs, an African American educator, began teaching in 1921 with a certificate from Lincoln School.⁴⁴ Over the next several summers, she attended Alabama State in Montgomery to receive her B.S. Degree. Alabama State grew out of the normal school established at Lincoln to train black teachers. Childs taught up to eight classes at a time in one of the many one, two and three-room rural schools for blacks in Perry County, including places like Hopewell and Pope's Beat.⁴⁵ These rural schools were wood structures heated with wood stoves, while the Marion Elementary School for white children in town, which was built with a brick exterior in 1928, was heated with coal. The schools often had little to no equipment, and before Julius Rosenwald began his school

⁴² "Educational Benefits Offered to Children of War Veterans," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 12, 1964.

⁴³ "Third Round Set For Polio Clinic In Perry County," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 26, 1964. One other mention of the Lincoln School was the note on the first page in the article which noted that Lincoln was one of ten locations in which the first and second rounds of the Sabin vaccine were administered. Lincoln was one of only two locations in Marion proper. Lincoln was to be the site of the third round of vaccines on April 5, 1964.

⁴⁴ Cora Childs Moore and Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

⁴⁵ Cora Childs Moore and Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

building program in conjunction with Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee, many black students gathered for their public school education in community church buildings.⁴⁶

There were ten “Rosenwald” schools located in Perry County. There was one five- teacher school, the County Training School, along with two three-teacher schools, one at Pope’s Beat and one at Uniontown. The remaining seven schools each employed one teacher. Eight of the schools were built “Under Tuskegee,” which means they were built between 1914 and 1920 during the period when the Rosenwald Fund was administered from Tuskegee. In 1920, the Fund was moved to Tennessee. Two of the larger schools, County Training and Pope’s Beat, were built between 1924 and 1927, while the Fund was administered in Tennessee. The black population contributed \$12,488 (52.25%) of the funds to purchase land and build the ten schools. The Board of Education for the public school system contributed \$4,600 (19.25%), and the Rosenwald Fund contributed a matching amount (\$4,600 or 19.25%). The white population contributed the remaining \$2,210 (9.25%). The public school system paid the instructors and the maintenance costs of the structures once they were built.⁴⁷

Even though a mandatory school attendance law was passed in Alabama in 1915, teachers such as Idella Childs had to struggle constantly to convince “plantation owners

⁴⁶ Glenn N. Sisk, “Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 130. For more information on the Rosenwald Schools, see Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006). See also Stephanie Deutsch, *You Need a Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011); Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴⁷ Information about each Rosenwald School may be accessed via the Rosenwald database at Fisk University at <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search>. The database is searchable by state and county.

to allow kids out of the cotton fields so they could go to school.”⁴⁸ The school year for blacks was often abbreviated due to inadequate funding, with some schools in session just over four and one-half months at the turn of the century.⁴⁹ By the middle part of the century, the school terms for whites and blacks had equalized, though many black students often missed several days in order to work in the fields.⁵⁰ In 1950, the median number of years of school completed by blacks in the rural areas of the state was 4.5 years. By 1960, that had increased to 5.5 years. The number of years completed by whites was 7.9 in 1950 and 8.7 in 1960. Blacks and whites in urban areas received more years of education. Urban blacks received 6.2 years in 1950 and 7.3 in 1960, while their white counterparts completed 10.8 years in 1950 and 11.6 in 1960. Easier means of travel, and more funding, partly explain the advantage of urban schools.⁵¹ Also, they were not close enough to the fields to make fieldwork a necessity for family survival. As the United States industrialized and moved away from an agricultural economy, African Americans in the public school systems in the South were increasingly left behind in the modernizing economy. Not only did they lack industrial skills, the inadequate education they received compounded their difficulties in obtaining meaningful employment, even if they left the rural South for Northern industrial cities.⁵²

⁴⁸ For information about the attendance law, see Glenn N. Sisk, “Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 130. For information on the teaching career of Idella Childs, see Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 65.

⁴⁹ Glenn N. Sisk, “Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 129.

The white school in Uniontown was in session for nine months of the year as early as 1889. *Linden (Alabama) Reporter*, January 4, 1889.

⁵⁰ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 65.

⁵¹ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 22. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.”

⁵² Oscar Handlin, *Fire-Bell in the Night: The Crisis in Civil Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 50-52. In nostalgia, whites viewed the transition from human pickers to tractors differently. See Maud Kennedy Elliott, *Ballad of Cahawba* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1949), 20.

The 1901 Alabama constitution reaffirmed an act passed in 1891 which based the amount of funds a district would receive on the number of children who would likely attend school. The districts then administered the money as they deemed “just and equitable.”⁵³ The whites in charge of administering the funds in all of the Black Belt counties, including Perry, justified diverting most of the funds to white schools because, in their view, whites paid most of the taxes and therefore had a right to spend it as they saw fit. And in their opinion, blacks did not have much need for an education since they were most useful as field hands. Blacks did not feel this way, however. Idella Childs was not alone in her struggle to get students out of the field and into the classroom. Even though many black parents knew their children might always be consigned to a life of work in the fields, they still wanted their children to receive an education. Parents would have to deal with their landlord and employers, however, in order for their children to be released from the fields to attend more than a few months of school at an under-funded public school facility.⁵⁴ Perhaps landowners made sure that the already inadequate funding was reduced even further to guarantee that they had enough hands in the field.

Many black teachers did not have certified teaching degrees until the 1950s, when Perry County, following the state’s lead, started requiring that teachers have a bachelor’s

Beginning on line 5 of the poem entitled “Cotton,” the verse reads, “Once dusky fingers pulled the fleece, To melody and mournful rhyme, But bending backs have found release, With clank of gears instead of song, Machines now waddle down the rows; Day after day they chug along, Taking the place of hands and hoes.”

⁵³ *Acts of the General Assembly of Alabama, 1890-91* (Montgomery, 1891), p. 554, in Glenn N. Sisk, “Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 128.

⁵⁴ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 82. A great example of this struggle is the case of the congregation of Evergreen Church in Beachton, Georgia near the Georgia/Florida state line. The congregation moved en masse from Alabama in 1911 when their minister, who had been trained in an AMA school, had his life threatened for teaching his congregation to read, write, and do basic math. In one night, the entire congregation packed their belongings and moved to Beachton because it was the home of the Allen Normal School. Though they knew their kids would work plantations just as they did, they still wanted them to have an education, though it was hard to get landowners to allow sufficient time out of the fields for the students to attend class.

degree and a teaching certificate. This was difficult, however, because with the exception of Alabama State Normal School (University) in Montgomery and Tuskegee Institute in Macon County, there were very few post-secondary schools for blacks to attend in Alabama. Several teachers who had been in the classroom for years did not have time to go back to school and they were forced out of their jobs.⁵⁵

A large number of black teachers did manage to meet the requirements over time and became more qualified than many of their white counterparts. In February 1963, there were 107 black teachers, and 55 white teachers in Perry County. Of the black teachers, 20 (18%) had their Master's degree and 87 (82%) had their Bachelor's degree. Of the white teachers, 14 (25%) had their Master's degree and 38 (69%) had their Bachelor's degree. Three whites (6%) were allowed to teach with three or less years of college education.⁵⁶ The black and white teachers attended segregated training institutes before the beginning of each school year.⁵⁷ The white teachers met at the Marion Grammar School on Monroe Street for their institute, which was conducted by employees of the State Department of Education. The black teachers met at the Marion Public School on Centreville Street for their session. The sessions took place on the same date and at the same time. No information is given about the leader of the black workshop.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Mary Cosby Moore and Cora Childs Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010. Mary Cosby Moore suggested that the steady increase in the requirements required to teach was an effort to push blacks out of teaching jobs.

⁵⁶ "What's Happening in Perry County Schools," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 21, 1963.

⁵⁷ "Fall Term for County Schools to Open Sept. 4," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 16, 1962. There was only one school system in Perry County in 1962. All schools, whether in the city limits of Marion or Uniontown, were part of the Perry County School System. This is still the case as of 2011. Whites in Perry County set up the Marion City School System in an attempt to maintain a white majority in the city schools, but this system was ruled to be unlawful.

⁵⁸ "County Public Schools to Open on Sept. 3," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 29, 1963; "Perry County Schools Open Session Tuesday," *Marion Times-Standard*, September 5, 1963.

Teachers were only paid at the end of the semester, after their paperwork was turned in. Idella Childs, an African American teacher, taught eight classes in a rural one-room school house, but had not received her paycheck at the end of a spring semester. When she tracked down Superintendent L.G. Walker on the second floor of the Marion Bank on the corner of the courthouse square at the intersection of Green and Washington Streets to ask why she had not been paid, he said she had not turned in the paperwork, which she was sure she had done. When she pressed the issue, he turned from her and pushed her away. She punched him and was fired. She did not return the classroom until Walker retired, 13 years later.⁵⁹

When the daily struggles for access to education and an equal part in society seemed almost too overwhelming, blacks in Perry County could receive encouragement from the presence of the Lincoln School. Graduates of the school, and their descendants, benefited from the education they received at the private school. The school provided nurses for students and taught academic as well as vocational classes.⁶⁰ During the construction of one of the school's educational buildings, the brick masons left the project half completed because of a lack of funds. Mary Phillips, the principal, learned

⁵⁹ Mary Cosby Moore and Cora Childs Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010. Cora noted that Idella considered those 13 years to be some of the best years of her life. She was able to be at home with her children, and she made a living by sewing for blacks and whites. Childs made more money by sewing than she did teaching, and she was able to be more involved in her church, as well as Girl Scouts. She took her Scouts to the regional convention in Demopolis each year, and they were the only black troop there.

If the 1907-08 expenditures for salaries provide any indication of what Mrs. Childs received, it is easy to understand how she was able to earn more income through seamstress work. In that year, white teachers were paid \$10.50 for each student in the state system, while black teachers were paid .37 per child. In 1900, 54% of the white students attended school regularly, and 25% of the black students. There were 424 white teachers in the Black belt, and 560 black teachers. There were more black students than white students in the Black Belt, even though the percentages are lower, which explains why there were more black teachers. Since black teachers were paid less, almost all black students had black instructors. Glenn N. Sisk, "Negro Education in the Alabama Black Belt, 1875-1900," *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1953): 129, 131.

⁶⁰ Mary Cosby Moore and Cora Childs Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

how to lay brick and taught her students how to do the same, and they finished the building themselves. Though the line between the work of professional masons and the student's work was obvious, to say the least, the finished building provided a point of pride for the students. The school stopped charging tuition in the 1940s and became part of the public school system in the 1950s, at which time the dormitories were closed.⁶¹ The school was closed in 1970 once the public schools were fully integrated.

The graduates of the Lincoln School became doctors and professionals, and earned a disproportionate number of doctorate degrees compared to their black and white counterparts at public schools. The descendants of the Curry and Childs families previously mentioned in this paper attended the Lincoln School. Author Andrew Billingsley writes about these families in *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families*.⁶² Both Billingsley and Horace Mann Bond, a black educator and scholar of black education in the first half of the twentieth century, noted the influence of Lincoln on African American life and achievement. In researching the birth counties of the grandparents of African Americans in Alabama that held doctorates in 1963, twenty counties totaling fifty doctorates were recorded. Thirteen of those doctorates had grandparents that were born in Perry County, the highest number of any of the counties in the state of Alabama. The next highest number was Wilcox

⁶¹ Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

⁶² Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families*. Billingsley also published *Black Families in White America; Children of the Storm, Black Families and the Struggle for Survival; The Evolution of the Black Family; and The Role of the Social Worker in a Child Protective Agency*.

County, with five doctorate degrees, no doubt due to the presence of the Snow Hill Institute. Mobile County had four, with the other counties ranging from one to three.⁶³

Many Lincoln graduates served as a bridge between the black and white communities, and when the Civil Rights Movement began, Lincoln graduates were in the forefront of the local, and later, the national movement. Many male Civil Rights leader's wives were from Perry County. Ralph Abernathy's wife, Juanita, was from Uniontown, twenty miles to the southwest of Marion in the southern end of Perry County. She grew up in "a big farmhouse from another era, with a huge porch . . . and white clapboard walls that always seemed as if they were newly painted."⁶⁴ Two Lincoln graduates from Perry County, who became notable female participants in the national voting rights movement were Jean Childs, who married Andrew Young in June 1954, and Coretta Scott, who married Martin Luther King, Jr. a year earlier, in June 1953. Both couples married in Perry County. Both women, who were well-educated, married well-educated ministers who would play an integral role in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement, signifying the importance of education and religion to the Movement, especially among the leadership. The Youngs married at the First Congregational Church in Marion, and the Kings married at Coretta's home in the northern section of Perry County.

⁶³ Bertis English, "Civil Wars and Civil Beings: Violence, Religion, Race, Politics, Education, Culture, and Agrarianism in Perry County, Alabama, 1860-1875," 748. English gives credit to Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, and Wayne J. Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992) for this information. Billingsley and Bond generously acknowledge the role Lincoln played in black education in the South. In addition to *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1939; repr. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), Horace Mann Bond also authored *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (Octagon Books, 1934). Bond served on the faculty of several HBCUs, as well as a dean and President of Lincoln University and Fort Valley State College. He is the father of Julian Bond, past chairman of the NAACP from 1998-2010.

⁶⁴ Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 70-71.

Jean Childs and Andrew Young married on June 7, 1954, less than a month after the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board*.⁶⁵ Their marriage would end with Jean's death from stomach cancer forty years later, on September 18, 1994. Andrew Young had been raised in the Congregational Church, the same denomination that sent the American Missionary Association to Marion in 1867 to found the Lincoln School.⁶⁶ Not as outwardly expressive as the black Baptist services, the sermons of the Congregationalists were serious and introspective, and highly charged with humanitarian direction.⁶⁷ The more educated blacks, who tended to be Lincoln graduates, attended the Congregational Church, whose traditional service is "extremely restrained, befitting its New England Puritan origins. The tone of the service is one of rationality and intellectual appreciation of the Lord and His works. There is rarely, if ever, a passionate expression by the minister, and seldom any outbursts from members overcome with the spirit. Congregational services are usually short, to the point, with a spare liturgy and ritual, and follow a planned order of service."⁶⁸ This is, according to one pastor, in direct contrast to the emotional and dramatic style of most Southern African American churches.⁶⁹

In 1952, Andrew Young became a minister in the Congregational Church, which would later join with the Evangelical and Reformed Church and become known as the United Church of Christ in 1957.⁷⁰ His first pastorate began in the summer of 1952 at the

⁶⁵ Andrew J. DeRoche, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador* (Washington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), xv.

⁶⁶ Young and Martin Luther King met at Talladega College, another AMA offspring, in the spring of 1957 when they each delivered speeches and served on a discussion panel. See DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 10.

⁶⁷ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 1.

⁶⁸ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 81-82.

⁶⁹ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 82.

⁷⁰ See history of the United Church of Christ, www.ucc.org/about-us/short-course/an-ecumenical-age.html (accessed September 17, 2011).

end of his first semester at Hartford Theological Seminary. His mother convinced his family's New Orleans pastor to arrange a congregation in the South so he would be close to home, and Young was sent to Marion, Alabama. He was to be housed by members of the church for a week at a time until he could set up his own room in a former dormitory at the Lincoln School. The first week, he was assigned to stay with Norman Lorenzo and Idella Jones Childs.⁷¹ Young was intrigued by the successful black family. Not only did they own the only bakery in town, but Norman Childs was one of only a handful of black men in Marion who had paid the poll tax and was eligible to vote.⁷²

Young became even more intrigued as he learned about the Childs' youngest daughter, Jean, who was away at Manchester College in Indiana. Not only did Jean have a copy of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, which had just been published a few years before by the National Council of Churches, but several of the passages were underlined with notes in the margins. Additionally, Jean had a lifesaving certificate, which allowed her to serve as a lifeguard. This was unusual for black women at the time, according to Young, because most black women did not know how to swim, and those that had the opportunity to swim, in spite of segregated pools and beaches, usually chose not to do so because they did not want to dry out their hair.⁷³ Jean must have had the opportunity to swim in Perry County, and must have had access to a pool, perhaps at the Lincoln School.⁷⁴ When Mr. and Mrs. Childs went to visit their son Bill, who lived in

⁷¹ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 65-66. The dorms at Lincoln were closed in the 1950s when the AMA gave the school to the Perry County Board of Education.

⁷² Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 92. While Young stated that only six black men had paid the tax and could vote, there were over 200 blacks registered less than ten years later, so the source of Young's assertion is unclear.

⁷³ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 66.

⁷⁴ There was a public pool in Marion, but it was segregated. It was located under the water tower on Washington Street, which is the main north-south street through Marion. Though the pool was

Tuskegee, Young met Jean, who had just returned home from Manchester College for the summer. Jean Childs, following in the footsteps of her older sisters Cora and Norma, was the only black student at Manchester.⁷⁵ Childs and Young soon fell in love.

The young couple, not wanting to patronize the local Neely Theater and be forced to sit in the balcony, which was the only seating option for blacks and was referred to as the “Buzzard’s Roost,” had their first date at a recreation center in Selma.⁷⁶

Unbeknownst to the couple, Selma would play a monumental role in their lives just a decade later, following the shooting of a fellow Marionite, Jimmie Lee Jackson, in February of 1965. In the summer of 1953, Jean won a fellowship to work in refugee camps in Austria, and Young borrowed money from his parents to join her. Seeing the effects of the Cold War and the Marshall Plan on Europe, and not experiencing racism in restaurants, hotels, theaters, and hostels, gave Childs and Young a new perspective on the world. The following summer, the two were married in Marion, just a few weeks after

integrated in the 1970s, its segregated past is still an issue. As of 2010, the pool was in such disrepair that the city was advised not to open the pool because it leaked thousands of gallons of water daily, would cost too much to repair, and given its location on a main thoroughfare, it was a liability issue. The city began to look into alternate sites to build a new pool. African American members of the community accused the black and white members of the city council, along with the white mayor, of attempting to discriminate against blacks by getting rid of the pool. Some members of the community went so far as to assert that whites simply did not want to see blacks enjoying themselves at the pool, and did not want to see black bodies in bathing suits, and therefore they were trying to have a new pool built away from the main road, under the guise that the current pool was unsafe.

⁷⁵ Cora Childs Moore and Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010. All of the Childs’ graduated from Lincoln School. Norman was the only one to stay in Marion. All of Norman and Idella’s children attended Lincoln School and the daughters attended Manchester College in Indiana. They often won awards, and Jean was selected May queen in her senior year. Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 71. See also Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 66, 68. According to Young, both blacks and whites thought the Childs girls were beautiful. The girls were light-skinned, just like their mother. Young noted that Mrs. Childs was striking and Mr. Childs resembled Clark Gable. He went on to say that “Even her grandmother had lovely legs, which she proudly displayed by wearing high heels with her elegant Sunday dresses.”

⁷⁶ Carl Gardner, *Andrew Young, A Biography* (New York: Drake Publishers, 1978), 88.

the announcement of the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which called for an end to the injustice of the doctrine of separate but equal.⁷⁷

Young's first pastorate after their marriage was in Thomasville, Georgia. Jean taught at the segregated elementary school, and scandalized church elders by wearing shorts. Their first child was born in 1955. In 1956, the Youngs began a voter registration drive, which brought the Klan to Thomasville. Hearing of the group's arrival, Andrew Young instructed his wife to sit in an upstairs window of the pastorate with a shot-gun pointed at the Klan members while he spoke with them. Though she was good with a rifle, Jean refused to follow her husband's instructions, saying she would not point a gun at another human being. She sternly reminded her husband that he needed to practice the non-violence he preached. Jean's pacifism, coupled with the commitment to non-violence advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr., the husband of a fellow Lincoln alumnus, Coretta Scott King, had a profound impact on the career of Andrew Young.⁷⁸

Jean moved with her husband from Thomasville, Georgia, to New York City, when he took a job as one of two African Americans serving on the National Council of Churches. They then moved to Atlanta in 1961 when he began work overseeing a citizenship program. Though the program was not under the auspices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Young's office was located in the Conference's building. With similarities in mission, coupled with the location of his office, Young would soon become an integral part of the SCLC leadership. Both of the Youngs worked in the Civil Rights Movement, with Andrew Young serving as a link between the black community and white politicians. He was by Martin Luther King's side for many

⁷⁷ DeRoche, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, 8.

⁷⁸ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 9.

of his most important speeches and rallies, as well as the mass meeting speeches he gave at churches across the South.⁷⁹ Young accompanied Coretta Scott King on the plane that escorted King's body home to Atlanta in 1968. He carried the King's youngest child, Bernice, off the plane, and marched, wearing denim, behind the mule-drawn cart which carried King's body to its final resting place in Atlanta.⁸⁰

In the midst of all of their work in the Movement, Jean Young gave birth to four children and continued her teaching career. In the 1970s, she and her husband took their Civil Rights work to the newly independent countries of Africa, speaking against apartheid. They personally got involved when they housed the two oldest children of Robert Sobukwe, an anti-apartheid activist from South Africa, while they attended Atlanta Junior College for two years.⁸¹

Jean supported Andrew during his pastoral, Civil Rights, and political careers. The family participated in the first day of the final Selma to Montgomery March and she was right behind Martin and Coretta Scott King as they entered Montgomery at the conclusion of the March on March 25, 1965.⁸² She campaigned for her husband when he won his first Congressional seat in 1972 and became the first African American elected to Congress from the Deep South since 1901.⁸³ She held the Bible when he was sworn in as

⁷⁹ Wayne Greenhaw, "Requiem for Jimmie Lee Jackson," *Alabama Heritage* 101, Summer 2011, 20. Photo of Martin Luther King speaking at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, AL. Seated in the foreground is Sheyann Webb, one of the two individuals whose Civil Rights work was chronicled in the book *Selma, Lord, Selma*. Seated behind her and next to the podium where Martin Luther King is speaking is Andrew Young. Though the caption states that the picture, courtesy of Jim Pepler and the Alabama Department of Archives and History, was taken in 1966, it was more likely taken in 1965.

⁸⁰ Carl Gardner, *Andrew Young*, 141.

The mule-drawn cart was led by Albert Turner, Sr. of Marion, Alabama, a Lincoln graduate who would play a leading role in the Movement in Perry County before and after the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

⁸¹ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 54.

⁸² Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, see photo on p. 4 of photo section following p. 374.

⁸³ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 172.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations by Thurgood Marshall in 1977.⁸⁴ Jean prepared meals of soul food for visitors and diplomats who visited with them in New York.⁸⁵ She chaired the American Commission for the International Year of the Child in 1979, and when the Youngs moved back to Atlanta and Andrew was sworn in as mayor in 1982, she continued her work for children, women, and international issues.⁸⁶ She cried for her husband when he was heckled off the podium at the Democratic National Convention in 1984 for supporting the primary system.⁸⁷ So important was Jean Young to her husband that when she was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1991, he recalled, “I could not live without Jean. Her leaving us was a tragedy that no one could consider.”⁸⁸

Jean demonstrated the courage and faith that had sustained the Youngs through forty years of Civil Rights work when she noted that they were fortunate to be married for forty years, since Martin Luther King, Jr., the husband of her Lincoln classmate and a leader of the Movement, did not live to forty years of age.⁸⁹ Jean had been planting a peach tree, which would bear fruit the year Andrew Young helped Jimmy Carter secure the presidential nomination, when her husband called to say that Martin Luther King had died.⁹⁰ Jean Young was on the plane to Memphis with Coretta when she flew to claim

⁸⁴ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, xii, xix.

⁸⁵ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 79.

⁸⁶ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 123.

⁸⁷ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 129.

⁸⁸ Andrew Young, *A Way Out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 164.

⁸⁹ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 156.

⁹⁰ Gardner, *Andrew Young*, 141.

Martin Luther King's body after he was assassinated.⁹¹ At Jean Young's funeral, Coretta Scott King noted that Jean was Andrew Young's source of comfort and understanding.⁹²

The same could have been said for Coretta Scott King. Though a vital helpmate for her husband, Coretta Scott King was a Civil Rights leader in her own right. Her life was built on the legacy of a Lincoln School education and a family that had owned land in north Perry County since the end of the Civil War. Obadiah Scott, Coretta's father, was born in Perry County in 1899. He married Bernice McMurray and they had three children. Coretta, born in 1929, was the second. The census for 1920 lists 695 white farms operated by their owners, and 464 farms operated by "Negro and other nonwhite" farmers. The Scott farm was one of these. Obie Scott was in the minority of the black population in Perry County, which had a majority African American population, because he owned his own land and operated his own farm, among other businesses, instead of working as a tenant farmer or sharecropper. In the listing for "Farms Operated by Tenants," white tenants operated 411 farms, while black tenants operated 3,539.⁹³ Thus, 37% of the farms operated by whites were farmed by tenants, while 88% of the farms operated by blacks fell under the tenancy system. Of the 5,109 farms listed in 1920, only 9% were owned and operated by African Americans, while only 13% were owned by whites.

Though Scott and his wife never attended high school, they made sure that their three children received a college education. Coretta initially attended the Crossroads

⁹¹ Octavia Vivian, *Coretta: The Life of Coretta Scott King* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 87. The plane that took Coretta to Memphis was chartered by Robert Kennedy, who would be assassinated just two months later.

⁹² DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 156.

⁹³ Census information found in Thomas M. Owen, *Alabama History and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. 2, 1109.

School, a county school five miles from her house. She and other students walked to the school while the school bus ferrying white students to schools in the city drove past them each day.⁹⁴ The elementary school was a one-room frame building with a wood stove, as were most of the rural schools, even those constructed via the Rosenwald Fund.⁹⁵ Along with her siblings, Coretta attended high school at the Lincoln School in Marion. The Scotts lived almost ten miles northwest of Marion, and initially, Coretta had to board at Lincoln because there was no bus service for the school. Bernice Scott secured a vehicle and drove students to and from school each day.⁹⁶ Not only was it unusual for an African American to obtain a bus, it was especially unusual for any woman, black or white, to drive a school bus. Ironically, it may have been Bernice Scott's race that allowed her to drive the bus, since black women were not under the same social constraints as their white counterparts, at least in the minds of whites. Black women could not be ladies after all, because they were laborers. Therefore, a black woman driving children around would not have seemed as out of place as if a white woman attempted to do so.

Though Coretta experienced discrimination as the bus of white students passed her while she was walking to Crossroads School, the experience in town while attending Lincoln brought Coretta face to face with discrimination, and she began to read more about the condition of African Americans in the United States. While walking in town, she and her friends would meet groups of white kids on the sidewalk who were also headed to their schools, in the opposite direction. Scott noted that the white kids would fill up the sidewalks, and the black kids would have to walk off of the sidewalk to let the

⁹⁴ Octavia Vivian, *Coretta*, 31.

⁹⁵ Cora Childs Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010, by author.

⁹⁶ Vivian, *Coretta*, 32.

white kids pass. She went on to explain that if “you didn’t walk off you would get knocked off, or bumped into. . . . Or else you might end up in a fight, and nobody wanted to get into a fight, because . . . you could be arrested and that would be a real serious situation there. . . . so it was always a very uneasy kind of thing when you saw a group of white youngsters coming down the street . . . and you had a similar group of black youngsters.”⁹⁷

Coretta graduated first in a class of 17 from Lincoln in 1945, and followed her sister, Edythe to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Edythe had entered the school in 1943 as the first African American student at the college. She received a scholarship after the Lincoln choir performed at Antioch and the school sent scholarship applications to Lincoln.⁹⁸ Like her sister, Coretta studied voice at Lincoln and chose music as her life’s work. She continued studying music at Antioch while working on a degree in elementary education. At one point, with the help of scholarships and because Obie Scott owned his own land and business, all three of the Scott children were enrolled in college at the same time.⁹⁹ Coretta Scott became disillusioned with teaching, and Antioch, when the school tried to force her to do her practice teaching at an African

⁹⁷ Coretta Scott King, transcript of interview, December 20, 1985, for “Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years (1954-1965),” produced by Blackside, Inc. Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection. Information on Coretta Scott King’s time at the Lincoln School is found in Question 5 of the transcription. Interestingly, Coretta Scott King’s views about jail changed. In Question 21, she responded that she and her husband realized the necessity of going to jail. King noted that going to jail “for my freedom . . . it’s quite different from going to jail because I’ve committed a crime.” In Question 22, King noted that her husband often knew ahead of time that he would go to jail before marches, meetings, or demonstrations even began. He occasionally found himself serving jail terms several years after his arrest for involvement in a demonstration.

See Octavia Vivian, *Coretta*, p. 9 of first photo section, following chapter 3. The photo caption notes that Coretta and her husband were at the Atlanta airport on October 30, 1967, en route to Birmingham, where he was to “serve a five-day jail term stemming from a 1963 civil rights protest.”

⁹⁸ Vivian, *Coretta*, 32-33.

⁹⁹ Vivian, *Coretta*, 28.

American school nine miles away from campus, instead of at the local white public school which was closer to the Antioch campus.

After graduation, Coretta attended the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Interestingly, Scott's tuition for her second year of graduate school was paid by the state of Alabama. This "out-of-state-aid" was provided to African American students who were not allowed to attend segregated graduate schools in Alabama.¹⁰⁰ While in Boston, she met Martin Luther King, Jr., who was working on a Ph.D. in philosophy at Boston University. They were married at her father's home in Perry County on June 18, 1953, by Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr.

The Kings moved to Montgomery when Martin Luther King accepted the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954. Their first daughter was born in November 1955, just two weeks before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. The Montgomery Improvement Association was formed to direct the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in order to protest Parks' arrest and the segregated seating system on the city's buses. The group chose Martin Luther King, Jr., as their leader. The young minister was the newly appointed pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Because of King's leadership of the MIA, a bomb was detonated at the King home on Scott Street just two months after the birth of the Kings first child. King received word of the explosion while he was leading a mass meeting at church. When he arrived at the

¹⁰⁰ Vivian, *Coretta*, 37. One of the NAACP's first successful attacks on the idea of "separate but equal" in education came in 1936 in *Murray v. Maryland*, which led to the desegregation of the University of Maryland's Law School. Two other graduate school cases, *Sweatt v. Painter* in Texas and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma* received unanimous Supreme Court decisions that held that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment required states to admit blacks to their graduate schools. These cases paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, KS* in 1954, which outlawed segregation in all public schools. Many scholars have noted that the fact that black teachers that attended graduate schools in the North prior to the 1950s often received a better education than their white counterparts who were educated in the South.

house, Coretta remained calm and reminded her husband not to be angry. Just as Jean Childs Young reminded her husband, Andrew, of his commitment to non-violence, so too did Coretta demonstrate the importance of non-violence and forgiveness in the bombing of their home, serving as a bastion of the principle of non-violence to her husband.

The Kings had three more children, and through trying events, Martin's frequent absences, and his multiple terms in jail, Coretta remained the stabilizing force in the family, often answering the phone and opening mail, and sometimes filling in for King when he could not attend a speech due to a jail sentence, or when he was delayed at a speaking engagement because of a previous commitment. In one example, Andrew Young asked Coretta to address the crowd gathered at Brown Chapel in Selma, Alabama, in February 1965 for a mass meeting. At the time, Coretta was simply waiting at the church for her husband to arrive. Malcolm X had just finished speaking to the crowd, and his inflammatory rhetoric had agitated the gathering and stirred up their anger. Young was worried that Malcolm X might turn the crowd away from non-violent agitation. As one author stated, Young hoped Coretta and Juanita Abernathy would bring the crowd "to a less truculent mood."¹⁰¹ King was successful. Before he left the church, Malcolm X assured Coretta that he was not there to interfere with the non-violence campaign and the work in Selma, but wanted his presence to serve as a notice to the crowd that if they did not follow King's non-violent approach, X's ideology of violent resistance was the alternative. Malcolm X was assassinated just two weeks later.¹⁰²

As a woman in the 1960s with the double burden of being an African American woman in the South, Coretta Scott King had to search for strategies to deal with a police

¹⁰¹ Gardner, *Andrew Young*, 90.

¹⁰² Gardner, *Andrew Young*, 90.

force that was paternalistic and racist. In April of 1963, just two weeks after the birth of their fourth child, Bernice, Coretta received word that her husband was in jail in Birmingham, but he was not allowed to make a phone call. Though still on bed rest, Coretta phoned the ranks of SCLC and the group decided that she should call President John F. Kennedy. Her persistence with the White House switchboard operator paid off, and King received word that, although the Attorney General could not get the Birmingham police to allow Martin Luther King to make his phone call, her husband was alright. He was finally allowed to make his call the next day.¹⁰³ Just as her mother had obtained and driven a bus for blacks, while no other women were allowed to drive buses, Coretta Scott King tracked down the President of the United States and convinced the operator to connect her to him in Palm Springs, Florida, where the President was with his ill father. This determination to complete a task in spite of the social, gender, and racial obstacles against a black woman driving a bus, or calling the President of the United States, was necessary for African American women to accomplish their goals.¹⁰⁴

Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee. Thirty years earlier, in an effort to increase their income to send their

¹⁰³ Vivian, *Coretta*, 51-53.

¹⁰⁴ For more information on women in the Civil Rights Movement, see Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughter's: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001). See also Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, eds., *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009). Both books dedicate each chapter to a specific female participant. Interestingly, none of the books devotes a chapter to Jean Childs Young or Coretta Scott King. Just as society overlooked the contributions of wives, so too do writers seeking to point out the injustice experienced by blacks and women in the Movement overlook the contributions of the wives of male Movement leaders. There are a few biographies of Coretta Scott King, but there are no published works about Jean Childs Young. The biography of King referenced in this paper was written by Octavia Vivian, the wife of Dr. C.T. Vivian, a member of Dr. King's executive staff at SCLC. Octavia Vivian herself deserves a biography written about her work in the Movement alongside her husband. *Freedom's Daughter's* and *Women and the Civil Rights Movement* contain information about black and white women in the movement. For specific information about white women in the Movement, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1980). See also Ed Baker et al., *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

children to college, Obie Scott purchased a truck. Scott was one of the first African Americans in Perry County to own a truck, and he began a hauling business. He also raised chickens and worked beside white men hauling lumber to earn extra income. As the Depression deepened, Scott's work placed him in competition with whites for jobs that were becoming increasingly scarce. In 1940, Scott invested all of his savings in a sawmill, which mysteriously burned two weeks later.¹⁰⁵ He lost his entire investment. Yet in just a few years, all three of his children were enrolled in college at the same time.¹⁰⁶ Showing a determination that would serve his daughter well, Scott redoubled his efforts in the trucking business and in 1951, he built his own home. He defied the white establishment of the South by becoming a successful businessman. At the same time, Martin Luther King, Sr. led the fight for African American causes in Atlanta. This will to overcome obstacles and do for the good of all was passed along to their children. Coretta had watched her father suffer a devastating setback, yet faced with what seemed like an insurmountable situation, Coretta's father continued to persevere and refused to be defeated. She would follow his lead in keeping her family together while continuing the Movement work begun by her deceased husband.

The day before her husband's funeral, Coretta went to Memphis to lead the sanitation worker's march in place of her husband. She gave a speech at the march in which she stated, "We want to carry on the best we can in the tradition in which we feel he would want us to carry on. . . . we are going to move forward." This determination to move forward was the manifestation of the legacy of perseverance she had learned from

¹⁰⁵ Vivian, *Coretta*, 29-30.

¹⁰⁶ Vivian, *Coretta*, 28.

her parents growing up in Perry County.¹⁰⁷ Just as she had seen her mother and father overcome obstacles in a rural Black Belt county in the deep South without giving in to hopelessness, so too did she demonstrate that mindset to her children, and to those who followed her husband's lead. The segregation she experienced as a child, and her parent's response to it, gave her the foundation she needed to work for an end to segregation.

The day after the march, she attended her husband's funeral at Ebenezer Baptist Church, then walked behind the wagon drawn by two-mules carrying the wood casket. The mules were led by Albert Turner, a fellow Lincoln graduate from Perry County, who was leading the freedom struggle in the county with the help of the SCLC, headed by Martin Luther King.¹⁰⁸

Just as her father did not express hatred towards whites that intentionally harmed him because of his race, Coretta would not allow her children to nurture hatred against whites, in spite of the bombings, threatening phone calls, and death of her husband. She admitted, however, that this was not always easy in a world where everything told them they were rejected by society because of their color.¹⁰⁹ Because of the work of the Kings and others, Coretta participated in many events during the remainder of her life that would have been beyond the dreams of an African American girl growing up in Perry County in the 1930s. She served on multiple boards, advocating the advancement of women and peace, and this work culminated in her appointment to the American

¹⁰⁷ Vivian, *Coretta*, 96-97.

¹⁰⁸ His organizing work under the SCLC led to the march that brought State Troopers to Marion in February of 1965. During that night march, Trooper James Bernard Fowler shot Jimmie Lee Jackson, who died from infection eight days later. Jackson's death sparked the Selma-to-Montgomery March, and led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, a high-water mark in Martin Luther King's Civil Rights work.

¹⁰⁹ Vivian, *Coretta*, 63.

delegation to the UN General Assembly in 1977.¹¹⁰ After the opening of the King Center in 1982, she worked to establish the Martin Luther King, Jr. national holiday, which was first celebrated in 1986. In 1996, she carried the Olympic torch past the Martin Luther King Chapel and then passed the torch to her son, Dexter. After Andrew Young gave the official welcome on behalf of the city of Atlanta at City Hall, the flame went to Martin Luther King's grave and then to Olympic stadium.¹¹¹

Jean Childs Young and Coretta Scott King never returned to Marion or Perry County to live. They both made their homes in Atlanta, Georgia. Like other educated African Americans, they moved out of the rural South once they graduated from high school. They attended colleges out of state. The primary, secondary and collegiate schools founded by the American Missionary Association trained African Americans for professions in which they could not find employment in the South. Educated blacks started entering professions beyond the fields of teaching and the ministry, which had been the only professional careers generally open to African Americans in the South.¹¹² The Congregational Church, and the South, experienced a hemorrhaging of educated blacks as those with professional skills headed to northern enclaves where there were more job opportunities and less racial discrimination.¹¹³

While most educated blacks were moving to the North to find meaningful employment, many poor blacks also took part in the mass migration out of the South as they were forced off the land via mechanization. As one tractor took the place of five sharecroppers, poor blacks who had limited skills due to an inadequate education, moved

¹¹⁰ DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 89.

¹¹¹ Andrew DeRoche, *Andrew Young*, 158.

¹¹² Young, *An Easy Burden*, 78-79.

¹¹³ George Brown Tindall and David Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 7th edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 981.

north in search of work. This trend toward mechanized farming took longer to catch on in Perry County because unskilled black labor was still relatively inexpensive compared to the cost of buying equipment, but the sharecropping system was rapidly declining by the time the Civil Rights Movement began in earnest in the county in the 1960s.¹¹⁴

While many of the college-educated graduates of AMA schools left the South to pursue opportunities elsewhere, and many poorly educated blacks left the South for whatever jobs were available in the North, there were some Lincoln graduates that did not move away. These people would become the leaders of the local Civil Rights Movement in Perry County. Though most of the foot soldiers of the local Movement attended the smaller, rural and city public schools, the leaders of the Movement attended the Lincoln School. Albert Turner is the most prominent example. He finished Lincoln and attended Alabama A&M in Montgomery to become a brick mason. While studying at A&M in 1955, he began following the work of a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr., who had just been appointed to lead the Montgomery Improvement Association after the launch of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. King's words led Turner to explore the history section of the library, where he began reading about the rights of United States citizens under the system of democracy. Turner told one author that in school in Perry County, "I learned the white man's history. You can learn a lot from history, but not the way I was taught – that Reconstruction was a bad thing, and never a word about the Negro voters and Negro officials in the Alabama of the eighteen seventies [sic]. I sort of knew what was true all the time, but I didn't really find out until I did some reading of

¹¹⁴ For a contemporary account of life in the South versus life in the North from the perspective of poor African Americans, see Oscar Handlin, *Fire-bell in the Night: The Crisis in Civil Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964). See specifically chapter 5, "The Isolation of the Negro." See also J. Saunders Redding, *On Being Negro in America* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1951).

my own at college.”¹¹⁵ Armed with the knowledge that things had been different at one time, Turner returned to Marion to ensure that things would be different again.

Turner was the fourth of twelve children. According to one source, his father, Emerson Turner, was a sharecropper and Albert Turner was born in a four-room shack on the outskirts of Marion.¹¹⁶ According to another source, his father owned 111 acres south of Marion.¹¹⁷ The latter is probably true. Turner was born February 29, 1936, and as mentioned earlier, he attended the Lincoln School and Alabama A&M. He would have been considered very well-educated for an African-American living in Perry County in the first half of the twentieth century.

After graduating from A&M in 1956, Turner returned to Marion. He apprenticed as a bricklayer and joined the Local 16 Bricklayers and Plasterers Union. Though he was studious, having served as president of his class at Lincoln and president of his fraternity in college, he chose bricklaying so he would not, he thought, have to have much

¹¹⁵ Jack Mendelsohn, *Martyrs: Sixteen Who Gave Their Lives*, 136.

¹¹⁶ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 137. See also “Albert Turner is Dead at 64; Strove for Civil Rights in the South,” *New York Times*, April 15, 2000. www.nytimes.com/2000/04/15/us/albert-turner-dead-at-64-strove-for-civil-rights-in-south.html (Accessed August 1, 2011). The quote in the *New York Times* is almost identical to the statement Mendelsohn made in his 1966 publication. It is possible that Turner had modified his story for outside whites who came to the South to write about the Movement in the late 1960s. The assertion that he was a sharecropper’s son would have endeared him to poor rural blacks, as well as northern whites.

¹¹⁷ The source that claimed that Turner’s father owned 111 acres is www.crmvet.org (Accessed August 1, 2011). This website is set up as a source for Movement participants to record their stories in their own words, though the page about Turner was written by someone who had a memory about Turner. Turner died in 2000 before the website was created. Mary Ward Brown, interview by author, Marion, AL, July 16, 2009. Brown corroborates the fact that the Turners owned land south of Marion. She had legal dealings with the Turners regarding access to land that she owned adjacent to the Turner’s land. Albert Turner, Jr., confiscated a road that ran through Brown’s land and made it a county road so the county would be responsible for the upkeep of the road that split Brown’s land and accessed the Turner’s land. The land that Albert Turner, Sr.’s father owned is now known as Emerson Turner Park, named after Albert Turner, Sr.’s father.

interaction with whites, though this turned out not to be the case.¹¹⁸ As with many leaders of the Movement, Turner was active in his local church, serving as a deacon at Hickory Grove Baptist Church. He was also in the leadership of the Rising Star Association and became a founding member of the Perry County Civic League. Turner was later joined in these groups by a young man named Jimmie Lee Jackson.¹¹⁹

By 1962, Turner was earning \$5,500 a year, which was higher than the average income for a family, black or white, in Alabama. The median family income for white Alabamians in 1960 was \$4,764. For African-American families, it was \$2,009. For rural workers in areas like Perry County, the median income was much less. White, rural non-farm families earned \$3,829, while rural, black non-farm working families, which is where Turner would be classified, earned \$1,550.¹²⁰ Though Turner was prosperous, the lessons he had learned from his college reading lingered in his mind.

In 1962, the formation of the Perry County Civic League was spearheaded by Rev. A. Edward Banks and Albert Turner. Banks had been conducting voting work since at least 1960 and he was in constant communication with the SCLC. Turner served as the Civic League's first president.¹²¹ Thus began the organized local movement for voter registration. The Civic League was a home-grown organization, not the product of a national organization coming into the area to start the Movement there. By December of that year, Turner felt he had enough support to begin a visible voter registration push for

¹¹⁸ Allen Tullos, "Rebel with a Cause: Albert Turner, Sr.," *Southern Changes* 22, no. 2 (2000): 24-26. http://beck.library.emory.edu/southernchanges/article.php?id=sc22-2_025 (accessed August 10, 2012).

¹¹⁹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 136.

¹²⁰ Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," March 1965. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 - "Direct Action Files." SNCC got their information from the U.S. Census.

¹²¹ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Voting Rights Act*, 114.

blacks and he led 300 potential voters to the Courthouse to register.¹²² This would be the start of the community organizing and political career of the most famous Movement participant within Perry County.

Although there were older members of the community, such as Hampton D. Lee, Lusa Foster and Rev. A. Edward Banks, who had laid the foundation for a movement among African Americans in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Albert Turner pulled the pieces together and launched an official movement in Marion with ties to the SCLC. Turner was also on the front lines in the local movement in Greensboro, Alabama, and he was on the second row of marchers on Bloody Sunday, on March 7, 1965, setting the stage for the majority of the population in Perry County to become the majority of the voters in the area.

¹²² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 137.

Chapter 4

“Perry County Negro Activities”: The Beginning of the Movement in Perry County

Though African Americans comprised a majority of the population of Perry County almost since the county’s founding, little is known about the life of blacks in the county prior to the 1960s. Information about the cultural and daily lives of African Americans from the African American perspective prior to the 1960s is available almost exclusively from court and church records, and from interviews with citizens who lived in the area at the time. Interviews are also the major source of information about the mobilization of the Civil Rights Movement in the county prior to the entrance of SCLC just after 1960. The local newspaper did not record the activities of the black community, nor were any actions of the Civil Rights Movement mentioned until early 1965. What the content of the paper does reveal, by reading “between the lines” is the segregation that blacks experienced in the minority white community.

The local weekly newspaper, the *Marion Times-Standard*, was founded in 1839. The paper has remained the most consistent source of news in the county almost since the county was established in 1822. The paper, under its current banner, is the result of a merger of the *Marion Times* and the *Marion Standard*, which occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. For decades, the masthead of the *Times-Standard* has carried the

quote “Here shall the press the people’s right maintain, unawed by influence, unbribed by gain.” While the front page of the *Times-Standard* of February 16, 2011, carried a headline story about the forty-sixth year anniversary of the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson, as well as a quote by Booker T. Washington and a logo for Black History month, along with a list of all birth and death announcements sent to the paper regardless of race, prior to 1970, the *Times-Standard*’s coverage of African American life in Perry County was selective, to say the least. As one Perry County resident stated when questioned about the paper’s coverage of the black community and the Civil Rights Movement, Mr. Albert Stewart, the editor, “just ignored the issue.”¹

This “black-out” of African American life by the local paper put many blacks in danger, because if they were harmed during a protest movement or while attempting to fight segregation, no one outside of the area would know about it, at least prior to the entrance of the SCLC in the county in 1962. As one author noted, if blacks had trouble prior to the national emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, who would listen? Certainly not be “a grand jury of white segregationist farmers dependent on a single segregationist ginner to buy their cotton [nor] a lone segregationist banker to lend them money. Not a sheriff elected to keep niggers docile. Not preachers, white or black, dependent on the approval of their congregations for survival.” And for the purposes of this chapter, “Not the weekly newspaper, dependent on advertising support from white merchants.”² Just as Andrew Young’s local paper in Thomasville, Georgia, “was unreliable as a source of information on matters of particular concern,” for the black community, so too was the *Marion Times-Standard* deficient in its coverage of life and

¹ Mary Griffin Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

² Jack Mendelsohn, *Martyrs: Sixteen Who Gave Their Lives for Racial Justice*, 134.

politics for the majority of the county's population.³ The paper simply did not need the black readership in the county and generally chose to ignore their existence.

In the late 1950s, a regular column entitled "Perry County Negro Activities," was published in the weekly paper. It was written by Mrs. Anna N. Lewis of 319 Graham Street. It included information on church services, the P.T.A. of the Marion Public School, travel plans of local residents, visits by out-of-town guests, mostly from Detroit and Chicago, as well as news of servicemen, their current assignments, and their families. The programs of ladies clubs were also included, along with the mention of changes in the weather. No serious matters within the black community, such as economics, politics or voting, were addressed. It is interesting to note that the "Negro Activities" column often appeared on the page adjacent to the full page intended for women readers entitled "News of Interest to Women." The women's page included wedding, party, tea, and club announcements of white women's groups, as well as updates on the latest trends in fashion. African Americans and women were only allowed to be entertained by the most trivial social information, and both were relegated to the interior pages of the paper. General household hints provided by extension agents to make living cleaner and more efficient, were scattered throughout the publication and presumably meant for all women, regardless of color.

The "Want Ads" section of *Times-Standard*, which was often located on the back page of the paper, occasionally contained announcements about job openings available to blacks. Opportunities for employment included the search for a "White or colored family to operate [a] dairy farm" at a salary of \$325 a month. Applications had to be submitted

³ Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 90.

in writing, which caused a hardship for many blacks due to an inadequate educational system and the limited number of years blacks attended school on average throughout the state.⁴ Another job opening was a two room house provided “rent free for [an] elderly colored lady” to stay with the home owner at night and help around the house 30 minutes a day.⁵ Domestic work was the most common occupation for African American women in the mid-twentieth century, with 52.6% of black women employed as “private household workers” according to the 1960 census.⁶ The articles that ran on the front page of the paper carried announcements for job openings at local industries that invited applications exclusively from white women.⁷

By the 1960s, the “Negro Activities” column was no longer included in the paper, and the only consistent acknowledgement of the black population of Perry County in the *Marion Times-Standard* was the weekly “Hospital List,” which noted that “The following persons were listed as patients at the Perry County Hospital” for the given week. The

⁴ Want Ads, *Marion Times-Standard*, January 30, 1964. For information about the average number of years that blacks spent in school in 1950 and 1960, see Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 22. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.” In 1950, blacks in rural areas averaged 4.5 years of school, while whites averaged 7.9 years. By 1960, blacks in rural areas averaged 5.5 years of school, and whites averaged 8.7 years.

⁵ Want Ads, *Marion Times-Standard*, March 19, 1964

⁶ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, “The General Condition of the Alabama Negro,” 18. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – “Direct Action Files.” The next largest category of employment for black women was “service workers, except private household workers,” which constituted 19.3% of the black female population. The remaining 12 categories carried single digit percentages.

⁷ “Ames Plant Here To Accept Applications For Women Workers,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 9, 1962. The opening sentence reads, “The Ames Bag & Packaging Corporation will take applications from white women for employment in their Marion plant on Saturday, August 11.” There is no mention of the company accepting applications from black women at any time. The announcement is listed directly below the photos of the contestants sponsored by civic organizations for the Perry County “Maid of Cotton” contest. Previously mentioned in this work is the Burger Treet opening “For young white woman,” *Marion Times-Standard* September 5, 1963. A similar announcement was included in “Local Plant Seeks Machine Operators,” *Marion Times-Standard*, November 14, 1963. The article stated, “Most workers . . . needed will be white women interested in becoming sewing machine operator trainees for the Biflex Marion, Inc. plant.” They could apply with the Employment Service at the courthouse on Wednesday mornings. Applicants had to have at least a sixth grade education and be between the ages of 18 and 45.

first paragraph would contain a list of patients, with no statement to indicate that the first portion of the list was white patients. The second paragraph began with the heading “Colored patients.” The females in the white patient list received the salutation of “Mrs.” followed by their husband’s name, and the unmarried white females received the salutation of “Miss” before their given names. The females in the “Colored patients” section received no such formalities.⁸ They were simply listed by their first and last name. Ironically, though this was meant as a slight by the editor, he actually gave the black women their own identity, while the white women were given the “honor” of being listed only under their husband’s names if they were married. Interestingly, the weekly arrest reports never differentiate the offenders by race, which some papers do in the twenty-first century.⁹

As previously stated, the *Times-Standard* of the 1950s and 1960s is not reliable as a source of information about the daily lives of the black community. Given this fact, it is doubtful that the paper had a large black readership. There were no announcements about voting rights meetings, voter registration drives, marches or voter education classes. For obvious reasons, this information would not have been revealed to the white community, but even if the black community wanted to use the local paper as a vehicle to disseminate information, it appears that the *Marion Times-Standard* would not have been

⁸ All of the *Times-Standard* “Hospital Lists” in the first half of the 1960s are written in this format. A specific example is January 10, 1963.

⁹ “Four Are Arrested By Local Police,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 20, 1964, provides an example of a typical police report from the time.

There was an on-going debate in the editorial section of the *Perry County-Herald* in 2006 and 2007 about the fact that the paper listed the race, gender and age of those arrested. As of 2010, the *Sumter County Record-Journal* listed the race, gender and age of all arrested persons, with no conflict about any of the designations. When asked why they included race in the arrest record in the paper, a former employee stated that it was only to prevent confusion and mistaken identity of two people with the same name.

an option.¹⁰

Not only did the paper leave out any positive recognition of members of the black community in Perry County, it also did not include coverage of interactions and altercations between the black and white communities which would prove embarrassing to white readers and bring attention to racial problems in the county. In his memoir, *Law Enforcement and Civil Disobedience*, Marion police chief T.O. Harris included details of an event that was not mentioned in the *Times-Standard*. Harris recalled that in January 1965, a cross was burned in front of a local church by white high school students. He specifically mentioned that the cross burning was not carried out by the KKK. Harris had approached the leader of the local Klan and asked that the group not cause any trouble. The leader agreed and kept his word, according to the police chief. The students who burned the cross were not local residents. Harris notes that the mayor, the sheriff, the commandant and the students met with the pastor and deacons of the church where the burning took place. The presence of the commandant indicates that the students likely attended Marion Military Institute. The chief viewed it as nothing more than a badly placed prank, though the church members likely viewed the situation differently.¹¹ The deacons and pastor decided not to press charges. The strengthening affect of the Civil Rights Movement on members of the black community was evident, however, when one of the deacons told the boys “‘Y’all think we are scared but we aint [sic] scared no more.’”¹²

¹⁰ For more information on the coverage of the Civil Rights Movement in southern newspapers, see Gene Roberts, Jr. and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, The Civil Rights Movement, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

¹¹ T.O. Harris, *Law Enforcement and Civil Disobedience*, 57.

¹² Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 58.

Any recognition of the black community in Perry County in the pages of the *Times-Standard* only occurred when crime or death was involved. Black-owned businesses did not advertise in the *Times-Standard*, probably through voluntary exclusion on their part, and because the publisher likely did not solicit their advertising dollars. There was a large white business district in town, and there were likely too few black readers to make it worth the black business owner's investment or the publisher's effort. The only mention of black-owned businesses occurred if a crime took place at the establishment. Burglaries, robberies, stabbings and murders garnered the attention of the editor. If the crime was especially sensational, it made the front page.¹³

Generally the only way that an African American was included in the paper was when they died. This is not to imply that they were included in the obituaries. There was no section of the paper devoted to an obituary list; the editor simply provided short articles on the deceased. If the funeral occurred before the weekly publication ran in a given week, details of the event were included as well. The more prominent the white individual, the closer their write-up appeared to the front of the paper. To make the front page signaled the editor's view of the deceased as a pillar of the white community. The article "Last Rites Are Held for D. K. Barker" appeared on the front page of the *Times-Standard* on May 30, 1963. Mr. Barker was noted as having taken "an active part in the business life of the city in the operation of a dry goods store . . . and more recently was

¹³ For example, see "Negro Funeral Home Burglarized Monday," *Marion Times-Standard*, April 4, 1963.

In his book *On Being Negro in America*, J. Saunders Redding discusses the inclusion of African Americans in newspapers. He notes that, at the time his book was published in 1951, "it is still a general practice in newsrooms in a large part of the country to specify race when Negroes are involved in a crime," 119.

connected with his brother in the operation of Barker Drug Company.”¹⁴ This is the same drug store that would only allow members of the Childs family, who owned the bakery across the street, to order ice cream to go.¹⁵

On the back page of the same paper is one of only a handful of write-ups about the non-violent death of an African American in the paper over a multi-year span. Entitled “JAMES McGHEE DIES,” the small piece notes that “James McGhee, Marion Negro, died at Perry County Hospital McGhee was popular with both races . . . and although totally blind for the past several years, operated a store on the outskirts of Marion, under sponsorship of a program for rehabilitation of the blind. Prior to losing his sight he was employed for many years in cleaning establishments here.”¹⁶ It is unusual, and a sign of McGhee’s acceptance by the white community, that his name appears in the title of the article. Most articles that deal with African Americans only include the word “negro” in the title.

Perhaps the fact that McGhee’s store was on the outskirts of Marion, and he was employed by a state agency to assist him, made his success palatable to the white community. Though he was a businessman just as D.K. Barker, his race made his death back page news instead of front page news. But to be included in the paper as an African American male that passed away via natural causes would have been considered an honor and a signal of McGhee’s standing in, or at least acceptance by, the white community.

¹⁴ “Last Rites Are Held for D. K. Barker,” *Marion Times-Standard*, May 30, 1963.

¹⁵ See chapter 3 of this work for the earlier reference to Barker Drug Company.

¹⁶ “JAMES McGHEE DIES,” *Marion Times-Standard*, May 30, 1963, back page.

Another example is the *Marion Times-Standard*, July 11, 1963. The front page carried a 50+ line article entitled “Barton Funeral is Held Sunday” and details are given about the service for the “well known Marion resident . . . [who] was a member of a well-known Perry County family and had a large family connection in this section.” Barton was a member of the Methodist Church. The back page contains a short five-line item entitled “Funeral Rites Held,” which notes that funeral services for Berry Moore, “well-known Marion negro” had been held on Saturday, July 6, 1963. The only other information provided about Moore was that he had “served for many years as janitor of the Marion Bank & Trust Company.”

In the June 20, 1963 edition of the paper, on the back page. Next to the segregated hospital list and above an advertisement for “Hamburg Day,” which included free swimming, free parking, gumbo, hot dogs and cold drinks at the Hamburg Community Pool, which was only open to whites, Mrs. Lunett McGhee had a “Card of Thanks” printed in the paper. The card began with the sentence, “I wish to thank the many friends, both white and colored, for their kindness shown during the brief illness and death of my husband.”¹⁷ It is unusual for McGhee to specifically address those of the black community that were kind. McGhee may be the wife of James McGhee, the blind African American mentioned earlier in this work. His obituary occurred in the May 30 paper. If Lunett McGhee was in fact the wife of James McGhee, the printing of the note is especially unusual in that she made note of her connection with the white community, and the paper was willing to run a piece written by a black woman. If McGhee was black, she still listed the members of the white community first. Regardless of whether Mrs. McGhee was black or white, given the treatment that the black community received from the *Marion Times-Standard*, it is unlikely that many of Mrs. McGhee’s many “colored” friends read her note.

The same could be said for Willie Cade Banks, “well known Marion Negress,” who was believed to be 117 years old at the time of her death in on January 2, 1965. Her marriage certificate stated she was born on March 6, 1847, in Dallas County. Thus, she was born a slave. The article notes that Banks was “widely known and respected in the Marion area, having devoted much of her life to caring for the sick and the young. She

¹⁷ “Card of Thanks,” *Marion Times-Standard*, June 20, 1963, back page.

In a letter to the editor, which appeared in the February 20, 1964, paper, Kathyne and J.C. Webb thanked the Marion Fire Department, and “many others – both white and colored” for their efforts to save the Webb’s home, which was ultimately destroyed by fire. “Letters to the Editor,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 20, 1964.

attended church services regularly. . . . A highlight of her life came on her one-hundredth birthday when she received an orchid from radio star Tom Brenneman, who also announced her birthday on his nation-wide show.”¹⁸

Unlike white obituaries, survivors of Mr. McGhee and Ms. Banks are not mentioned. Because Ms. Banks cared for children and the sick, participating in what was considered the proper role for a woman, especially a black woman, and because she had received national recognition due to her age, Ms. Banks’ passing was noted on the back page of the paper. This was the recognition she received for the 117 years of life she lived and served as an African American woman in the Black Belt.

As previously noted, most blacks were only included in the paper if they were murdered or killed in an accident or fire, or if, like James McGhee, they were especially liked by the white community. In an unusual occurrence, the February 28, 1963 paper carried a front-page article about the drowning death of an African American. It is unusual for the article to appear on the front page, especially given the fact that it was an accidental death, not a brutal murder.¹⁹ A more common mention in the paper occurred in the March 14, 1963, edition of the *Times-Standard*. This edition included an article on page 9 entitled “Knife Wound Fatal for Negro Youth.”

A tragic, and often violent death, was the only way that an African American had their name listed on the front page of the paper, though their names did not appear in the title. An example is the short piece “Altercation Results in Death of Negro,” which notes that “A Marion Negro, Lude Smith, died at Perry County Hospital.” from being hit in the head with a chair. The article appeared on the front page of the February 13, 1964 paper.

¹⁸ *Marion Times-Standard*, January 7, 1965, back page.

¹⁹ “Negro Drowns On Fishing Trip,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 28, 1963.

Very few front page articles about black deaths are listed above the fold, where the major headlines to attract buyers were published. The June 13, 1963 paper was an exception. That paper included an article placed above the fold and just under the masthead, entitled, “Negro Killed Sunday By Hit-Run Driver In Sprott Section.” The writer notes that “Tom Rutledge, 28-year-old Negro, became Perry County’s third highway fatality Saturday night, when he was apparently struck by a passing vehicle while walking along State Highway 14 in the Sprott Community.” Sprott is located east of Marion, on Alabama Highway 14, just over the Cahaba River. The article continues with the explanation that the coroner and sheriff were contacted at 2:30 a.m. “by Robert Nalls, a Bessemer [Alabama] Negro. They [the sheriff and coroner] said that their investigation showed that the badly mangled body of Rutledge was lying in the road about one mile south of the Sprott Store on Highway 14, and had apparently been hit by at least three vehicles.” The sheriff believed the victim had been dead two hours when they arrived, and there were no leads in the case. The article ends by noting that “Tom Rutledge was a farm hand on the Place of T.J. Jones of the Sprott section of Perry County.”²⁰ Though the editor does not openly suggest the possibility that this was a lynching, given the prominence of the article’s placement, along with the facts of the case, it is highly possible that Tom Rutledge was murdered. He was supposedly walking

²⁰ “NEGRO DROWNS ON FISHING TRIP,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 28, 1963. See also, “Negro Killed Sunday By Hit-Run Driver In Sprott Section,” *Marion Times-Standard*, June 13, 1963. The Sprott Store mentioned above is located where Alabama Highway 14 turns to the right in front of the store and heads south toward Selma, and parallels the Cahaba River. Alabama Highway 183 splits away from Highway 14 at the store and continues east to Chilton County. It runs along the left (north) side of the store. The store was made famous by a WPA photograph that shows a two-story wood structure with “U.S. Post Office, Sprott, Ala.” painted on a sign at the top of the building.

See also, “Negro Fatally Cut in Altercation Here,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 8, 1963. The front-page article describes the stabbing of Ludie Mitchell by Robert Griffin “at a Negro pool hall in Marion.” The victim died at the Perry County Hospital from wounds received when he was stabbed in the neck with a broken wine bottle.

along a dark, rural state highway around midnight. He was apparently hit by a car that did not report the accident, perhaps out of fear of arrest. But for three different cars to hit him, and then a black man from Bessemer to actually have the courage to call the police and report the crime, is unusual. In a small community with only a couple of car repair shops, it would not be difficult to determine who had hit something recently. Yet no arrests had been made. The body was badly mangled, which could also indicate that the victim had been tortured at some point, and perhaps his body was left at the side of the road. Rutledge's place in the community was clarified by his job listing as a "farmhand" on the "Place of T.J. Jones."

The one positive event in the black community that was noted in the paper occurred in 1962. The article was entitled "Veteran Negro Agent Retires in County." Lawrence C. Johnson was fortunate to receive a good education and find employment that allowed him to use his talents. Johnson graduated from Snow Hill Institute in Wilcox County, Alabama, and then received a degree in Agricultural Education from Tuskegee Institute. He also did graduate work at Tuskegee. After serving in the public school system for 25 years, Johnson moved to Perry County to become the "first Negro agent" to serve the county. He served the black community in the county for 24 years. Prior to Johnson's arrival in 1938, the black population had its own extension agent, but the agent was white. There was a white extension agent to serve the white population throughout Johnson's tenure in service to the black community. The editor extended the courtesy of referring to Johnson by his last name throughout the article.²¹

There was extension news, as well as home demonstration news, included in the

²¹ "Veteran Negro Agent Retires in County," *Marion Times-Standard*, November 22, 1962.

paper each week. It is not clear how Johnson disseminated information to his constituents, but given that the paper did not offer much for the African American community, it is not likely that they were able to take advantage of all of the farming and domestic tips offered in the *Marion Times-Standard*. The editor must not have been aware that Johnson was listed as a contact for Marion in a list provided to the SCLC in June of 1962, though Johnson was registered to vote in 1962.²² The editor of the *Times-Standard* might not have been so generous to Johnson had he been aware of Johnson's involvement in the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement in Marion.

Another area where the lack of coverage about the lives of members of the black community in Perry County, and the subsequent small group of black readers, may have caused a problem that would have national implications, is the posting of notices from the Perry County Board of Registrars. As previously mentioned, it is likely that there was not a large readership of the *Marion Times-Standard* among the black community due to the paper's scant coverage of black life in the area. Thus, when the Perry County Board of Registration gave notice "Pursuant to the provisions of the Code of Alabama 1940, Title 17, Article 26(1)" that they would not receive applications at the courthouse on the regular meeting date of August 5, 1963, because they had to use that day to catch up on clerical work since the Board was not "furnished clerical assistance," there is a good chance that any African Americans that showed up that day to register would have

²² Letter from Hampton D. Lee to Mr. W.E. Shortridge of Birmingham, AL, on Lee Funeral Home letterhead, June 26, 1962. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 30 - "Alabama Membership Lists Folder." Lee sent the letter to Shortridge who had visited Marion to organize for SCLC. S.S. Seay, president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, also visited Marion around the same time as Shortridge, and noted that Shortridge had made contacts in the area. Seay informed Andrew Young of his findings.

For the 1962 list of registered voters, see "LIST Of Qualified Voters For Perry County, Alabama, For 1962," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15, 1962. Johnson is listed in Marion, Beat 1, Box 3, to vote at City Hall.

thought the Board had simply not opened in order to prevent blacks from registering to vote.²³ The board only met one day a month, and though 1963 was not an election year for the president or governor, there was a state special election scheduled for August 13, 1963 for the purpose of raising taxes.²⁴ The upcoming election, along with increasing pressure by blacks for access to the ballot for all citizens meant that applicants would likely try to register at the board's August meeting, and potential black voters would not have seen the notice in the paper. The upcoming election could explain why the board needed to close their doors to complete all necessary clerical work before the ballot boxes opened the next week.

For those that could not register in time for the August election, they were given another chance to register for the December 1963 state-wide election, which included several possible amendments to the ever-expanding state constitution. The Board of Registrars gave notice that "In accordance with the provisions of Registration Laws, Title 17, Section 26, Code of Alabama, 1940 . . . the following appointments are set for the purpose of registering those qualified under the law." The article then listed twenty-four locations and dates at which voters could register. Applicants could only register at the courthouse "or in the precinct or ward where he or she resides."²⁵ Again, given that the *Times-Standard* did not have a large African American reader base, it may be likely that many blacks were not aware of the opportunities to register. Thus, there would have been assumptions that the Board purposefully tried to discourage blacks that wished to

²³ "Public Notice," *Marion Times-Standard*, July 18, 1963, back page. The *Times-Standard* did not number the pages at this time, so the apparent pagination is p. 4, though only one sheet of a regularly 3-4 sheet paper was available.

²⁴ "State of Alabama: A Proclamation by the Governor," *Marion Times-Standard*, July 18, 1963.

²⁵ "REGISTRATION NOTICE," *Marion Times-Standard*, September 19, 1963. See also September 26, 1963.

register by not informing them of the available dates and locations of registration.

The tax collector finished his preparations for the election early in the year because poll taxes were due February 1. Only veterans and those over 45 years of age were exempt from the tax. In 1962, there were 4000 whites and 239 blacks registered to vote in Perry County. Of the 239 blacks, about 117 were male, with the remaining 122 being female.²⁶ It is likely that some of the black males were eligible to vote due to their service in WWI, WWII, or Korea.

Though there was no announcement about the voting rights work taking place in the black community in Perry County, white citizens must have been aware of the stirrings of the young movement, because they began to react against their black counterparts towards the middle of the 1950s. In 1955, the Perry County Citizens Council, the local group of the White Citizens Council, was formed, less than one year after the Supreme Court issued their decision in *Brown v. Board*. In December 1957, the paper announced that Alabama's sixth district Representative, Hon. Armistead I. Selden, would be the principal speaker at the third annual meeting of the Council. Following a speech at the courthouse, the group elected officers for the upcoming year. The article ended by noting that "All white citizens, both men and women, as well as school children are invited."²⁷

²⁶ "LIST Of Qualified Voters For Perry County, Alabama, For 1962," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15, 1962. The male and female numbers are based on the gender of the names. Some of the gender neutral names, such as Johnnie or Tommie, were differentiated based on spelling, with the default being toward female if it was hard to determine the gender. Those with only initials listed for first and middle names were added to the male category.

²⁷ "Selden To Speak At Council Meet Tonight," *Marion Times-Standard*, December 5, 1957.

For more information on the White Citizen's Councils, see NAACP administrative file, General office file, "White Citizens Councils and Ku Klux Klan, 1956-1965," University Publications of America, 1996, microfilm. See also Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction 1954-1964* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971). No study has been done on the Citizens' Council in Perry County. For information on the Council in neighboring Marengo County, see

Many white citizens may not have felt threatened by the prospect of integration in 1957 and therefore did not attend the 1957 meeting. By 1962, however, many whites were beginning to feel the rumblings of the Civil Rights Movement, even among local blacks. That year, concerned whites were given the opportunity to attend a Citizens Council meeting in Selma to hear governor-nominee George Wallace speak at Memorial Stadium.²⁸ Beyond the meetings and rallies, the Citizens Council found an effective means of spreading their message to a broad audience through the “Citizens Council Forum,” which aired every Sunday from 12:30-12:45 pm on WJAM, 1310 on the AM dial.²⁹

The Perry County Citizens Council met at the courthouse in January 1963 to hear Robert Patterson, secretary of the Association of Citizens’ Councils of Mississippi, speak on the “recent events at the University of Mississippi,” referring to the desegregation of the school. There was also a front-page announcement in the *Times-Standard* about a Citizens Council meeting at the Bibb County High School cafeteria in Centreville in 1964.³⁰ Unlike the 1957 invitation, the 1963 invitation simply noted that the “public is

Stephanie Carol Hardin, “Civil Rights and White Resistance in the Black Belt: A Case Study of Marengo County, Alabama, 1954-56” (Master’s Thesis, University of South Alabama, 1987).

²⁸ “Wallace to Speak Tonight in Selma,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 11, 1962. Wallace is referred to as the governor-nominee, and not the governor-elect, because the November election had not yet taken place. Wallace had won the Democratic Part primary in May and was understood to be the winner since he won the Democratic primary in a one-party state that only voted for Democrats except for rare occasions in the Presidential race.

²⁹ *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962.

³⁰ “Patterson To Speak In Bibb County,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 20, 1964. Former Gov. John Patterson, who had been in office when the Freedom Riders came through Alabama in 1961, was the guest speaker. Patterson was elected in 1958, beating out George C. Wallace in a campaign laden with racial rhetoric. After that election, Wallace swore he would never be “out-niggered” again. For information on the impact of Patterson’s campaign, see James Sheppard Taylor, *An analysis of the Effect of John Malcolm Patterson’s Campaign Speaking in the 1958 Alabama Democratic Primary* (Tallahassee, FL: s.n., 1968). For more on Patterson, see Gene Howard, *Patterson for the People: The Life and Career of John Patterson* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2008). See also Warren Trest, *Nobody But the People: The Life and Times of Alabama’s Youngest Governor* (Montgomery, AL: New South Books, 2008).

invited to attend.”³¹ The 1964 announcement did not even bother with listing any target audience. Perhaps by 1963 and 1964, it was understood, or could be assumed, that everyone was aware of the purpose of the Citizens Councils, as well as the “appropriate” audience for attendance.

The white public was given another front-page invitation in the *Times-Standard* to attend a meeting of the Dallas County Citizens Council in Selma to hear Governor Wallace speak in August, 1963. The event was to be held at the Memorial Stadium on the west side of Selma and barbecue would be served to the estimated 5,000 attendees.³² Just two years later, a group of newsmen, at the invitation of Governor Wallace, toured Alabama to see for themselves what the state was “really like” without what Wallace decried as the pro-integration national media. Part of the journalist’s tour included a barbecue in their honor at Selma’s Memorial Stadium. When the newsmen arrived at the Stadium on June 7, 1965, a picket line composed of African Americans protesting their treatment by the state and the governor, surrounded the stadium. According to SCLC reports, the newsmen got back on their bus and left.³³ The picket line of June 1965 was a far-cry from the Citizens’ Council Meeting of August 1963 and poignantly illustrates the dramatic changes that took place in the Black Belt of Alabama in just two years.

Although the local newspaper did not carry much information about the lives of

³¹ “Patterson To Speak At Council Meet Here,” *Marion Times-Standard*, January 17, 1963.

³² “Governor To Speak In Selma Tonight,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 29, 1963.

For a contemporary discussion of Wallace’s antics as governor, see Robert Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South: Stars of the New Confederacy, A Close Up of George Wallace and Other Stylish Politicians of the Old South* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968). Sherrill examines the political machinations of Wallace, Orval Faubus of Arkansas, James Eastland of Mississippi and Lester Maddox of Georgia. The book explains how “Dixie’s Darlings . . . control the most powerful committees in government . . . run for President and almost overthrow the electoral process . . . defy the U.S. Government and counsel others to do so.

³³ SCOPE, “Report of Saturday, June 12, 1965.” SCLC papers, MLK Center, Atlanta, GA. Box 168, folder 16 – “SCOPE Field Reports.” See Dallas County in the report. SCOPE only worked in Black Belt counties in Alabama.

blacks in Perry County, and there was absolutely no coverage of the mobilization among black citizens to work for their rights, the Civil Rights Movement in Perry County was well underway by 1962. According to a release from the Southern Regional Council of Atlanta in 1956, there were 6,351 Non-Whites age 21 and over in 1950 in Perry County. There were about 300 registered black voters that year, which is equal to about 4.7% of the eligible non-white voting population.³⁴ About 6% of the registered voters in the state of Alabama in 1956 were black, though blacks constituted 30% of the state's population. This was the case in 1960 as well, when there were 983,131 blacks, comprising 30.1% of the total population of 3,266,740.³⁵ Whites made up 70% of the state's population over 21 in 1956, but they constituted 94% of the registered voters. Thus, 10 out of every 15 (2/3) eligible whites were registered, but only 3 out of 15 (1/5) eligible blacks were registered in the state.

Though only 20% of blacks of voting age were registered in 1956, by 1962, the number of registered African American voters had actually dwindled.³⁶ The overall population in Perry County declined by 15% from 1950 to 1960, and most of the out-migration was among the black population. The county's declining black population was illustrative of the overall decline in the black population throughout the state as many African Americans left the South to find jobs in the North. This migration likely explains most of the loss of population in Perry County from 1950 to 1960.³⁷

³⁴ Southern Regional Council information is found in a table listed by county in C.G. Gomillion, "The Negro Voter in Alabama," *Journal of Negro Education* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1957): 281-282.

³⁵ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files."

³⁶ C.G. Gomillion, "The Negro Voter in Alabama," *Journal of Negro Education* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1957): 28.

³⁷ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," p. 12. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files." By 1957 alone, the

The largest population decreases for blacks in Alabama were in the 20-34 and 35-44 age categories. The only age group of whites that saw a decrease was the 20-34 years of age category.³⁸ There were 239 African Americans registered to vote in Perry County in 1962, out of a total black population of just under 11,400. There were 4,000 whites registered.³⁹ The white population was just over 6,000.⁴⁰

The county Boards of Registrars, which were composed of three members in the smaller counties, were appointed by the governor. The registrars generally met once a month. In Perry County, the board met in a courtroom since they were not provided with regular office space devoted solely to the work of registering voters. Consequently, the days the board was open to accept applications were determined by the court schedule. It is not clear if board members received financial compensation for their time, but it is known that the board did not have clerical staff. Consequently, the group would meet once a month, but would not always be open to the public on the days that they met. The board would run an announcement in the *Marion Times-Standard* prior to the monthly meeting of the board, announcing when the group would meet. The board typically closed in February of each even-numbered year, so that a voting list could be published in the *Times-Standard* that March as required by law.⁴¹ The group also held a closed work day in October of the even-numbered years in order to compile the final voting list for

population was down 7%. "Alabama Shows Population Gain Over '50 Census," *Marion Times-Standard* November 14, 1957. Nineteen counties showed an increase. Wilcox and Dallas Counties were the only two of the 19 Black Belt counties that registered an increase. Dallas County's population increased by 6.2% and Wilcox's increased by .7%.

³⁸ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files."

³⁹ For a complete list of registered voters, see *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15, 1962.

⁴⁰ Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," 12. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files."

⁴¹ "County Voting List To Be Published," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 19, 1964. The March 26 issue was designated for the voter list. According to the article, "The list of qualified voters in the county is published every two years as required by law."

each precinct for state and national elections.

Portions of the registration process in the mid-twentieth century were subjective. In the 1950s, an applicant had to be a *bona fide* resident of Alabama for two years, a county resident for one year, and a resident of their precinct or ward where they would vote, for three months.⁴² The third residency requirement varied from three to six months throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Each applicant was required to complete a questionnaire “prepared by the Justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, as provided for in the Voter Qualification Amendment to the Constitution of Alabama, ratified by the [white] electorate on December 11, 1951.”⁴³

Each applicant, white or black, was required to fill out the questionnaire on their own, though registrars could, at their discretion, fill in the answers as the applicant responded to the questions read aloud. In some counties in the state, applicants could be required to answer oral questions prepared by the registrar, and/or read and interpret portions of the United States constitution. Applicants were required to swear an oath to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Alabama” and the applicant had to swear that he or she had not been a member of a group that advocated the overthrow of the government. The applicant also had to swear that he or she had not been convicted of an offense that would preclude them from registering.

In 1962 and 1963, under pressure from the Department of Justice, the state of Alabama asked voters, the vast majority of whom were white, to vote on a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would, in words at least, provide for an unbiased

⁴² “State of Alabama Proclamation by the Governor,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 18, 1962.

⁴³ C.G. Gomillion, “The Negro Voter in Alabama” *Journal of Negro Education* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1957): 283.

voter registration procedures. The amendment, proposed by a special session of the legislature in 1961, was announced in all of the county papers by Governor John Patterson. Though the poll tax was still required to be paid yearly and for all elections prior to 1964, even in non-election years, the proclamation issued by Governor John Patterson for the May 1, 1962 special election stated that each applicant would be administered a written application form “and a sealed examination, which shall be uniform in all cases with no discrimination as between applicants.” The proclamation also noted that those “who can read and write any article of the constitution of the United States in the English language . . . [and] are of good character and who embrace the duties of citizenship” shall receive an examination written by the state board of examiners. The state board was charged with the task of grading the exams, which were assigned a number for identification purposes. The exam was to be filled out in writing in the presence of the board of registrars, without assistance, and the examinee would have to answer an oath to support and defend the constitution of the United States and of the state of Alabama. The idea of an African American swearing to defend the constitution of the state of Alabama is especially ironic since the opening presidential address given by John B. Knox for the 1901 constitutional convention began with a lengthy speech about the necessity for removing blacks from the ballot box.⁴⁴

The amendment was rejected at the May 1, 1962 primary election, so it appeared on the ballot for the December 1963 special election, along with at least eight other amendments

⁴⁴ For a full account of the proceedings of the constitutional convention, see http://www.legislature.state.al.us/misc/history/constitutions/1901/proceedings/1901_proceedings_vol1/1901.html (Accessed September 14, 2011).

for various matters.⁴⁵ By this time, the state was under legal pressure from the Department of Justice, and within a year, the amendment was declared invalid.

Black applicants had to have a registered voter vouch for them. It is unclear whether white applicants also had to have a “voucher.” The “voucher” had to reside in the same county as the applicant. The purpose for this according to John Allen Blackburn, one of three Perry County registrars, was because there were “So many Niggers coming from one county to another, registering. We caught them . . . in Perry County. We require a registered voter to witness the application, so we know they are legal residents of that county.”⁴⁶ Given that there were 300 registered black voters by 1964, out of an eligible black voting population of 5,200, the “problem” of African Americans pouring in to Perry County to register to vote and defraud the system, contrary to Blackburn’s assumption, simply did not exist.

An eligible voucher had to swear that he had known the applicant for a certain period of time, had to acknowledge that the applicant had lived at their stated address for a certain period of time, and the voucher had to state that they knew of no reason why the applicant should be disqualified from registering to vote. A white person vouching for a black registrant could lead to serious repercussions for white vouchers, however. J.C. Griffin, who served as Probate Judge, was asked by an African American man by the last name of Agnew, to vouch for him. Agnew had lost a son in WWII. Griffin agreed and asked Agnew to have Joe Dozier, a local businessman, to cosign. Dozier, however, was president of the local Citizens Council. When Griffin’s position as Probate Judge came

⁴⁵ For the amendments in the 1963 special election, see “State of Alabama,” *Marion Times-Standard*, November 14, 1963.

⁴⁶ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 112.

up for reelection, the Citizens Council sent out a questionnaire to all of the candidates running for office that year. One of the questions asked if the candidate had “ever recommended [vouched for] a negro.” Though his family begged him not to respond to the questionnaire, Griffin responded that he had recommended a black man for registration. The Monday before the election took place on a Tuesday in May 1958, every white voter in Perry County received a postcard in the mail with the results of the questionnaire. All of the candidates listed had a “No” by their name, except for Judge Griffin. According to Mary Auburtin, Griffin’s daughter, the county went crazy. Members of the Klan rode around in their cars that night with the interior lights on, holding signs calling for the defeat of J.C. Griffin. Griffin was not necessarily against segregation, but he felt that he was elected to represent all of the people and he refused to join the Citizens Council. His refusal to join, coupled with his support of a black voter registration applicant, brought the wrath of the Citizens Council against him. The Council’s campaign against Griffin’s reelection as Probate Judge in 1958 was successful. When he lost his reelection bid, Auburtin said the realization of how much bias people felt against blacks took a toll on her father’s health. Joe Dozier, the man responsible for Griffin’s loss, resigned his post in the Citizens Council after Griffin’s defeat.⁴⁷ Griffin was a white victim of the entrenched prejudice against blacks. Just as Jimmy Wilson’s death sentence for stealing \$1.95 served as a reminder to the black community that they remember their “place” in society, Griffin’s case served as a poignant reminder to whites that attempting to help blacks was not acceptable, and they would be reduced to the position of blacks in society.

⁴⁷Mary Griffin Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

At least two members of the Board of Registrars had to sign the Certificate of Registration once the applicant met, to their satisfaction, all of the requirements for voting. Boards typically reviewed all applications at the close of the registration day and mailed the certificates to those that they deemed qualified to vote. Given the number of black applicants throughout the state who testified that they never heard the results of the Board's decision, it was apparently left to the Board to decide if they would notify applicants who were not ultimately registered.⁴⁸

Once the Board of Registrars registered an applicant, the registered voter had to pay the poll tax. As of 1964, only "veterans of the armed services who served during wartime and recognized campaigns," as well as any registrant over age 45, were exempt from paying the poll tax. A registrant could register after the poll tax deadline, but they had to pay the tax between Oct. 1 and Feb. 1 of an election year.⁴⁹ In 1964, 837, or about 1/5, of Perry County's 4,200+ registered voters were required to pay the tax. There had been 572 registrants to pay the tax in 1963.⁵⁰ Thus, about 111 registrants had to pay the tax for 1963 and 1964, since the tax was due each year, and back taxes had to be paid before the registrant could vote. The poll tax was \$1.50.⁵¹ The \$1,588.50 collected in taxes that year went to support the county school system, as they had done since 1875. Interestingly, the same paper that contained a note on page 7 that the poll tax had been outlawed by the 24th Amendment, also carried a front page announcement that the poll

⁴⁸ C.G. Gomillion, "The Negro Voter in Alabama," *Journal of Negro Education* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1957): 283-84.

⁴⁹ "Poll Tax Payments Lag, Deadline Near," *Marion Times-Standard*, January 28, 1965.

⁵⁰ "837 In Perry County Pay 1964 Poll Tax," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964.

⁵¹ *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964 provides number who paid in 1963 and 1964, as well as total receipts for 1964. Calculations reveal that the poll tax was \$1.50. The total poll tax receipts for 1964 were \$1,588.50. Given that this number ended with .50, the author multiplied 837 (the number that paid the tax in 1964) by \$1.50. This equaled \$1,255.50. When \$1,255.50 is subtracted from \$1,588.50, the difference is \$333. Since the tax for two years was \$3.00, 111 people had to pay for both 1963 and 1964.

tax deadline was near.⁵² Though the poll tax to vote in federal elections was outlawed by the 24th amendment in 1964, there was an announcement in the 1965 *Times-Standard* reminding voters to pay the tax.⁵³ This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the constitutional amendment only outlawed the poll tax in federal elections. This, differentiation, however, created two types of voters, those who paid their poll tax and could vote in all elections, and those who had not paid the poll tax and could therefore only vote in federal elections. In 1966, the Supreme Court outlawed the poll tax in all elections via *Harper v. Virginia Board of Electors*.

In a memorandum from 1964, the SCLC noted that the Civil Rights group had decided to kick off their drive for democracy in Alabama in Selma. They chose Selma, the seat of Dallas County, because it was known as “the ‘capital of the Black Belt,’ it has long been famous for segregation in all its forms and worst of all, its unfair voter registration practices.” The memorandum continued by asserting that the “plan of action in Selma will be repeated in other areas across the state.”⁵⁴ Because there was already an established affiliate group working through the SCLC for voting rights in neighboring Perry County to the north and west of Selma, it was probably understood that Perry County was an obvious satellite location for the drive.

The memorandum noted that the affiliates of the SCLC had invited the group to bring their entire resources to bear on the state and local governments in Alabama in

⁵² “Washington Notes: Outlaws Poll Tax,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964; “837 In Perry County Pay 1964 Poll Tax,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964.

⁵³ “837 In Perry County Pay 1964 Poll Tax,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 13, 1964. Though the announcement that the poll tax was outlawed was published on p. 7 of the same edition of the *Times-Standard*, the January 28, 1965, edition of the paper noted that the February 1 deadline to pay the tax was approaching and only 290 of the roughly 800 persons required to pay the tax had done so. See “Poll Tax Payments Lag; Deadline Near,” *Marion Times-Standard*, January 28, 1965.

⁵⁴ SCLC, “Statistics for the State of Alabama.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 165, folder 15 - “Field Reports – Alabama – no date.”

order to change voting laws and ensure that “Negroes are registered and represented in all the governments of the state.” The plan of action outlined in the memo included mass meetings to “inform the community of the need to change the voting law and to have Negroes registered; Recruiting and organizing ward, beat or block captains, canvassers, telephone committees, etc.; Workshops and meetings to discuss voting, methods of canvassing and creating interest...; Canvassing [and] contacting people; Freedom Day (preferably but not necessarily a day when the registration office is open) when large numbers of people will go to the county court house for the purpose of registering to vote; [and] Registration and education efforts to continue until either 1. Large numbers of Negroes are registered promptly and under a reasonable process or 2. Other action is required to gain the right to freely vote for the Negro citizens of Alabama.”⁵⁵

With their plan in place, the SCLC began their democracy drive in Selma, where SNCC was already at work. The beginning of their coordinated effort in Selma, and its subsequent spread to Marion and Perry County, brought the quiet work of the Citizen Education Schools into the streets of Marion in vocal, and visual protests. As the black population began to formalize protests and boycotts, the white population generally did not react, other than to express surprise, and a sense of weariness with the situation. One white resident of rural southern Perry County noted that she had no idea they were unhappy with their situation. She continued, “They never told me ‘We want more, we are unhappy.’ They never said anything about it. They just marched and left.”⁵⁶ But blacks in Perry County were unhappy with their work, living, educational and voting situations. Since 1962, they had been quietly working with the SCLC, and by 1965,

⁵⁵ SCLC, “Statistics for the State of Alabama.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 165, folder 15 - “Field Reports – Alabama – no date.”

⁵⁶ Mary Ward Brown, interview by author, Hamburg, AL, July 16, 2009.

every citizen in Perry County would witness the effects of those efforts.

The earliest work of the Department of Justice recorded in the county began in 1962 when the DOJ sought an injunction against the Perry County Board of Registrars, composed of Neely B. Mayton, chairman, John A. Blackburn and Floyd Bamberg, who was a member of the White Citizens Council.⁵⁷ Though the case was supposed to be heard September 14 in Judge Daniel Thomas's court in Mobile, it was postponed until October 26.⁵⁸ On that day, the three members of the Perry County Board of Registrars, along with Probate Judge David S. Lee, appeared before Judge Daniel Thomas. They were to bring "all applications for registration questionnaires and oaths accepted, rejected and pending filed with the Perry County Board of Registrars since Dec. 1, 1959. . . . Also copies of all lists of registered voters including those prepared for submission to the Secretary of State of Alabama since Dec. 1, 1959, and copies of lists of qualified voters in Perry County completed and used since Dec. 1, 1959."⁵⁹ Thomas handed down his ruling in November.⁶⁰

In their suit, the DOJ contended that the Perry County Board of Registrars "used higher standards in examining Negroes than it did for white persons seeking to register as voters."⁶¹ This double-standard was evident in the testimony at the hearing. Testimony was heard from local blacks, including Rev. A. Edward Banks. In April 1962, Banks had

⁵⁷ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 112.

⁵⁸ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 122.

See also, "County Registrars Are Summoned By Justice Department," *Marion Times-Standard*, October 25, 1962.

⁵⁹ "County Registrars Are Summoned By Justice Department," *Marion Times-Standard*, October 25, 1962.

⁶⁰ "Justice Department Seeks Injunction Against Registrars," *Marion Times-Standard*, September 27, 1962.

See also Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 120.

⁶¹ "County Registrars Are Summoned By Justice Department," *Marion Times-Standard*, October 25, 1962.

told the DOJ that the blacks in Perry County were organized and waiting for the DOJ to give them the go-ahead. Banks told the Department of Justice that once the DOJ filed suit against the Board, he and his followers were ready to testify against the registrars and they had proof of discrimination.⁶²

This is the group that the DOJ called on to testify. While literate black college graduates, such as Albert Turner, along with numerous Lincoln School graduates including Jimmie Lee Jackson, were not allowed to register, illiterate and semi-literate whites were allowed to register, and received assistance from members of the Board of Registrars. One white witness, Sam Stephens, had a fifth-grade education. He stated that he could neither read nor write “too good” and that his wife had filled out his registration form for him. He could not read question #20, which asked him to name the duties and obligations of citizenship, on demand at the hearing.⁶³ The registrars had also registered white voters in the hall of the courthouse, while telling black applicants that the registration office was closed.⁶⁴

Brian Landsberg was sent to Perry County to investigate voter discrimination and file suit for the DOJ. In his book, *Free At Last to Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Civil Rights Act*, Landsberg asserts that the methods of discrimination and the recalcitrance of the Perry County Board of Registrars, coupled with the slow actions of the federal judge in Mobile, and the failed effectiveness of the federal voting referee that was assigned under the auspices of the 1960 Civil Right bill, pave the way for and direct

⁶² Memorandum from Rev. A. Edward Banks to Rupert J. Groh [DOJ], April 10, 1962, found in Landsberg, *Free at Last to Vote*, 114.

⁶³ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 122.

⁶⁴ Mary Griffin Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009. Auburtin also confirmed that the registrars would let illiterate whites register.

the wording of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.⁶⁵ The writers of the 1965 Voting Rights Act looked specifically at the actions of the Board of Registrars and Perry County and included wording in the act to forbid the actions practiced by the Perry County board.

The case in Perry County was Landsberg's first solo case and his purpose in bringing suit against the registrars was to test perceived deficiencies of the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts. One of the provisions of the 1960 act allowed for the appointment of a federal voting referee to physically register voters in places where a pattern of discrimination was apparent. This was the case in Perry County, though the slow actions of Federal Judge Daniel Thomas proved that the provisions of the bills were not adequate.⁶⁶ So slow was Thomas to act on Civil Rights litigation that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 actually contained a provision known as the "Thomas Amendment" which called for a three-judge federal district court to hear voting rights cases.⁶⁷ The three-judge panel procedure was in place by 1965.⁶⁸

Rather uncharacteristically, Thomas heard a case and made a decision on the 1962 preliminary injunction within just a few months. He decided in the government's favor, noting that since at least 1959, "the defendants [Board of Registrars] have engaged in acts and practices which have had the purpose and effect of depriving Negroes of their right to register without distinction of race or color." He included a general injunction against engaging in "any act or practice which involves or results in distinctions based on race or

⁶⁵ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 109.

⁶⁶ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 109-110.

⁶⁷ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 118.

⁶⁸ "Voter Hearing Test Postponed," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 10, 1965. The article begins by stating, "A three-judge panel has acceded to a request by state attorneys that a motion to dismiss be heard prior to a hearing on a U.S. Justice Department suit asking an injunction against use of parts of Alabama's voter registration test."

color in the registration of voters in Perry County, Alabama.” Thomas ordered the board to cease several of their practices such as failing to meet and process applications in order to pass on them timely or to notify applicants of action taken and reasons for rejection. He also took the board to task for failing to register all applicants who met age, citizenship residency and character requirements and could demonstrate the ability to read or write. Thomas concluded by informing the board that they could not disqualify voters for inconsequential errors.⁶⁹ However, just as the Supreme Court’s suggestion that school desegregation proceed “with all deliberate speed” provided ample room for segregationists to drag their feet and stall school integration for over 12 years, Thomas’s recommendation that the registrars receive and review applications in a “timely” yet undefined timeframe left the Perry County Board of Registrars with plenty of room to evade the order. And the fact that Thomas declined to order the Board to immediately register those that had clearly been denied the right to vote based solely on their race was likely viewed by the Board as a sign that they need not worry about strong enforcement of the judge’s decision.⁷⁰ As one author noted, the generality of the injunction “doomed it to failure, unless the registrars would act in good faith. Instead, however, the board continued the charade of pretending to apply neutral standards to all applicants while discriminating in almost every way imaginable.”⁷¹

Though Judge Thomas slowed down the voting push by the DOJ, the group’s work served as a source of hope for potential black voters in Perry County, while simultaneously annoying the white leadership in the county. As the police chief, T.O.

⁶⁹ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 120-121.

⁷⁰ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 121.

⁷¹ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 122.

Harris noted, “These people [the lawyers from the Department of Justice] were very brazen. They told me that 65.8 percent of the people of our county were black and they should be running the county and that they were going to see that they did. . . . It was a losing battle to try to talk with them. We were being accused of being prejudiced but I have never tried to talk to any person in my life who was so prejudiced as they were.”⁷²

Both Chief Harris and DOJ lawyer Brian Landsberg noted the importance of the Department’s work, knowledge, and presence, to the Voting Rights Movement in Perry County, though their personal approval of the outcomes varied greatly. In his memoir, Harris asserted that “The first time we knew for sure trouble was coming was when U.S. Attorneys in the civil rights division came into town and began organizing the blacks. I checked the first one that came to town and he resented me checking him. He said it was not any of my business. He finally showed me his identification and when the others came in they would come by and let me know who they were.”⁷³ Landsberg also commented on the favorable relationship between the DOJ and the black community, noting that although “official DOJ policy was to maintain distance between the Civil Rights Division and the civil rights groups, with each acting independently. . . . In the field, that distance sometimes disappeared, at least in the eyes of local leaders such as Albert Turner.⁷⁴ In a congressional hearing on the Civil Rights Implications of Federal Voting Fraud Prosecutions, which took place before the 99th congress in 1985, Turner himself noted that he had a “personal relationship with [DOJ official] John Dorr . . . in

⁷² T.O. Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 58.

⁷³ T.O. Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 58.

⁷⁴ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 124.

the early sixties, and we worked very close together.”⁷⁵

Bolstered by the work of the Department of Justice on behalf of voting rights for African Americans, blacks began to visibly work for their civil rights, ultimately focusing on obtaining the right to vote. By late 1962, the SCLC recognized the Perry County Civic League, founded that year by Rev. Banks and Albert Turner, as an affiliate group. As part of the work of the League, Banks and Turner led three hundred potential voters to the courthouse on December 17, 1962, to attempt to register to vote.⁷⁶ Though the *Marion Times-Standard* published the special notices provided by the registrar, they did not mention the voting attempt led by the Civic League. The Department of Justice had helped the League obtain a court injunction to force the Board to register qualified black voters, but according to one source, the registrars only accepted the application of one black applicant, late in the day. After spending two hours examining the applicant, the board failed him. Among those that attempted to register that day were Jimmie Lee Jackson, his mother Viola, and his grandfather Cager Lee.⁷⁷ Testifying in 1964 before a Federal committee, registrar John Allen Blackburn, who began his term on the board in 1954 and had been reappointed by Wallace in 1964, said the accusations that the board

⁷⁵ House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, “Civil Rights Implications of Federal Voting Fraud Prosecutions,” 99th Congress. (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1985), 85. Also found in Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 124, 222n96.

⁷⁶ Landsberg. *Free at Last to Vote*, 125.

⁷⁷ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 137.

“Justice Department Files Complaint Against Registrars,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 30, 1962. The article appeared on the front-page, below the fold. The suit was brought against the Perry County Board of Registrars “charging discrimination against Negro voter applications.” District Judge Daniel Thomas set the hearing for September 14 on motion for an order directing the registration officials to halt any racial discrimination. The suit was filed under the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts and was the 32nd such suit in various Southern states. The hearing was delayed until October, and Thomas issued his ruling in November.

had only taken one application at times was a lie.⁷⁸ He continued by insisting they had taken up to 15 applications at a time, and that was too many at a time “to be frank.”⁷⁹

In response to the board’s recalcitrance, Turner organized a letter-writing campaign aimed at Federal Judge Daniel Thomas in Mobile. Jimmie Lee Jackson helped draft the text of the form letters which each person would personalize and mail or have delivered to Judge Thomas.⁸⁰ The Department of Justice had already done a lot of work in Perry County, so Thomas would have been familiar with the situation. The basic text of the letters was as follows:

Dear Sir: My name is _____, I am a _____ [occupation]. I have a _____ [high school or college] education. I have lived in Perry County all my life [or list # of years]. I am ___ yrs. of age. I am a Negro. I was born in Perry County. [if applicable] I went down to the courthouse on December 17, 1962 at 10 A.M. and stayed until I was told that the board of registrars wasn’t taking anymore people in for filling blanks. It was about 12:10 in the afternoon. I didn’t get to take the test. I am asking the Court to register me. [name]⁸¹

In January 1963, 173 applications arrived at the Federal Courthouse, requesting that the court register them as voters.⁸² Virginia S. Johnson, the wife of S.L. Johnson, confirmed to the SCLC the sending of the 173 letters, and outlined the problems they

⁷⁸ “Blackburn Appointed on Registration Board,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 10, 1963.

⁷⁹ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 112.

⁸⁰ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 137.

⁸¹ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 124.

⁸² Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 124.

were having getting African Americans on the voting rolls when she noted, “We have been able to get only 3 persons registered out of 450 negroes who have gone up to apply. We have written 173 letters to the Federal Judge asking that we be registered.”⁸³ On August 6, 1963, Albert Turner, his wife Evelyn Turner, and James Carter hand-delivered another 142 letters to Judge Thomas from black Perry County citizens who had been denied the right to vote. The third wave, which arrived in September, added an additional thirty-three letters. Because 77 of the letters in the second batch were duplicates, they were not considered. The total number of unique individuals who sent letters was 271.⁸⁴

According to Landsberg with the Department of Justice, Thomas announced “that he did ‘not have the slightest intention of doing anything’” with the letters, including registering the potential voters. He acknowledged that he saw a pattern or practice of discrimination, but he still would not act on the letters or requests because he doubted that the applications were properly filed. Rather than relying on statute 42 U.S.C. 1971, according to Landsberg, and acting on the applications himself, Thomas ordered the Perry County Board of Registrars to take action on the first batch of 173 letters. The board followed Thomas’s ruling to the least of their abilities by notifying the letter writers that they would be allowed to apply. All but 17 reapplied. Of the 156 that applied after Thomas’s order, the Board rejected 117.⁸⁵ Thus, after a physical attempt to register, a nine-month letter-writing campaign, and even with a federal statute supporting the right of the federal judge to register the applicants, only 39 of the 156 applicants, or 23% were added to the voting roles. In a county with over 5,200 African Americans of

⁸³ Virginia S. Johnson, “Citizenship School Semi-Annual Report.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - “Citizenship Schools, Alabama, Marion – Virginia Johnson, 1963.”

⁸⁴ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 124, 222n99.

⁸⁵ Landsberg, *Free At Last to Vote*, 125.

voting age as of 1960, only 39 or .749% of the eligible black voting population was allowed to register after almost a year of struggle.⁸⁶ Along with a handful of other registrations, the 39 registered via the court order brought the number of blacks registered to vote in the county from 239 in 1962 to 300 in 1964.⁸⁷

The Department of Justice continued to pursue the Perry County Board of Registrars. By 1963, two of the board members, Floyd Bamberg and chairman Graham Mayton, had left the board. They were replaced by Mrs. F.W. Barnett and S.D. Buck.⁸⁸ Perhaps the government pressure quickly took its toll on S.D. Buck, who was replaced by C. Dudley Pearson of Uniontown in January 1964.⁸⁹ He must have remained on the board less than a month because the announcement of his appointment appeared in the October 10 edition of the *Marion Times-Standard*, but the January 30 article that announced his replacement said there had been a vacancy on the board since October. Sometime between January 30, 1964 and May 25, 1965, the entire board changed, with at least one position changing more than once. In May 1965, W.F. Harper was appointed to replace Emmett C. Moseley on April 1. Harper joined Joseph T. Scarbrough, chairman, and Joe E. Bennett on the Board. Moseley had resigned because of ill health.⁹⁰

The 300 registered blacks would have been motivated to turn out at the polls in 1964 because there were several white candidates who campaigned on a platform of continuing to exclude African Americans from public life. There were also several

⁸⁶ SNCC, "The General Condition of the Alabama Negro," March 1965, 24. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 11 – "Direct Action Files." SNCC info is based on the 1960 US Census.

⁸⁷ Voting List, *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15 and March 26, 1964. The *Times-Standard* breaks down the voting lists in each beat alphabetically by race.

⁸⁸ "Blackburn Appointed On Registration Board," *Marion Times-Standard*, October 10, 1963.

⁸⁹ "Pearson Is Named On Registration Board," *Marion Times-Standard*, January 30, 1964.

⁹⁰ "Harper Is Named As County Registrar," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 25, 1965.

amendments on the ballots in 1962 and 1963 that directly impacted the political position of blacks, including the previously mentioned voting registration amendments. Not only was the campaign racially contentious in the county and especially in the state elections, but the outcome of the state elections would play a significant role in national politics that no one could have foreseen.

The issue seemed not to be the presence of African American voters, but the necessity of keeping them excluded from the voting process itself that became the focus of the candidate's racist campaign rhetoric. All eight U.S. House of Representative seats, as well as one of Alabama's two federal Senate seats, were up for grabs.⁹¹ The race for the governor's office was also on the ballot. Alabama was still very much a one-party state in 1962, and it was understood that the Democratic primary, or a subsequent Democratic Party run-off, would determine the final outcome of most of the contests. As the *Marion Times-Standard* noted, "The candidate winning . . . the . . . election will become the Democratic nominee, which is usually tantamount to election in Perry County" and the state.⁹²

Though no one realized it in the early days of 1962, the outcome of the gubernatorial race would have implications for white voters as well as disfranchised blacks. The actions of the successful 1962 candidate would unintentionally ensure that African Americans would vote by the time the office was once again on the ballot in the 1966 election. The field of candidates for the 1962 governor's election included Ryan

⁹¹ In the 1962 primary on May 1, Democratic voters were asked to elect candidates from the nine House of Representative districts. Because Alabama lost population between 1950 and 1960, the state lost a seat in the House. Consequently, in the May 29 run-off, the entire state was asked to choose eight of the nine officials elected on May 1 to be Alabama's House delegation.

⁹² "County Election Will Be Held On Tuesday, Aug. 28," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 23, 1962.

DeGraffenreid, George Wallace, and MacDonald Gallion, who at the time of the election was the attorney general for the state of Alabama. He had successfully obtained a temporary injunction against CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), accusing the group of having communist ties. Gallion campaigned before civic clubs and political rallies about addressing “the ‘menace of creeping Communism’.” The commentary about his campaign went on to highlight Gallion’s work against communism via his attack on CORE. The mention of a racially focused group and its associations with communism are the only issues mentioned in detail about Gallion’s candidacy.⁹³

Just before the primary, gubernatorial candidate Ryan DeGraffenried realized that in spite of Gallion’s racially charged campaign, George Wallace would be his most formidable opponent. Though Wallace is remembered as being a rabid segregationist due to his 1962 campaign and subsequent actions as governor, DeGraffenried labeled himself as the front-runner in the fight against integration. Commenting on Wallace’s campaign rhetoric, DeGraffenried responded that “It’s time to do more than talk segregation.” The candidate then labeled himself as “the only candidate for Governor with a fighting record of action to keep segregation on every front in Alabama.” The article noted that DeGraffenried was a “leading member of the hard working committee that approved all bills to safeguard segregation and resist Federal force to destroy it. . . . DeGraffenried is the only candidate who proposes a workable plan – an Alabama Department of Rights – to stand guard and defend our way of life all the way and all the time.” The bottom half of DeGraffenreid’s campaign ad listed Wallace’s record on segregation: Got the [black] bloc vote in the 1958 governor’s campaign, voted “no” as a legislator on the Engelhardt

⁹³ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962.

plan to withhold state funds from any integrated school, and had no workable program to keep segregation in schools, colleges, parks and playgrounds. DeGraffenried concluded his appeal to voters by proclaiming “Talk won’t keep segregation in Alabama, action will!”⁹⁴

Rounding out the gubernatorial candidate pool was Albert Boutwell, Wayne Jennings, Bruce Henderson, Eugene “Bull” Connor, and “Big Jim” Folsom. While Boutwell, Jennings, Henderson and Connor were non-players in the election, they still played the race card in their campaign rhetoric. Henderson took the segregation talk to the national level when he stated, “We shall never win until we vote down those who live under the sham of party loyaltyism [sic] and vote for national candidates who sell out all true Democrats, and seek through national candidates to keep the White South enslaved to the Negro bloc vote. . . . We need to organize white political voting blocs greater than the colored political voting bloc.”⁹⁵ Connor followed up Henderson’s quote by saying, “Don’t give up! Integration won’t come if you fight for segregation.”⁹⁶ In a quote that African Americans marching from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 would find both hypocritical and ironic, George Wallace stated, “The governor should be a servant, not a monarch!”⁹⁷

While the white male candidates were making their stand for segregation, there was some concern over the increased number of “Negro candidates” in the 1962 election,

⁹⁴ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, May 17, 1962 and May 24, 1962.

⁹⁵ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962.

⁹⁶ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962.

⁹⁷ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1962.

as well as the impact of the “Negro Bloc Vote.”⁹⁸ While no one expected the Negro candidates to make much of a showing, the speculation was that there was a sudden surge in black candidates, even though, according to the commentator, ““These Negroes know they can’t win but that if there is a runoff between two white men, then the Negro just might endorse one or the other of the runoff candidates (A snicker was put in here).” You know, this might just politically kill the white man the Negro endorses.’ Such a move, if it happens, was further termed ‘strategy play.’”⁹⁹

The growing power of the black bloc vote soon became much more worrisome, however. By 1963, Perry County’s representative in the U.S. House, Armistead Selden, blasted a Republican-introduced Civil Rights Bill, “which – if passed – would place the federal government bulldozer in the backyard of every Alabama community” by making the Civil Rights Commission permanent and endowing it with “far-reaching powers including the right to investigate voter discrimination.” The bill would call for the removal of House of Representatives seats in states that practiced voter discrimination and would compel businesses and labor unions to “eliminate discriminatory practices.” All of this, according to Selden, was an effort by Republicans to beat the Democrats’ bill to the table in “an obvious effort to line up the Negro bloc vote. Unfortunately,” Selden continues, “the growth of this [black bloc] vote makes it increasingly difficult for the views of those who live in areas affected by these measures to be impartially

⁹⁸ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, March 8, 1962. The candidate discussion is under the subheading “Periscoping.” For the discussion about the “Negro Bloc Vote” see Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, March 22, 1962.

One ad is published for a female candidate and she only mentions her fight against communism. She does not mention segregation. Lamar Aileen Lathan political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, April 26, 1962.

⁹⁹ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, March 8, 1962. The candidate discussion is under the subheading “Periscoping.”

considered.”¹⁰⁰

Carl Goggins, the political commentator that touted the support of black candidates as a detriment, asserts that the 1962 governor’s race would be decided in a run-off between Folsom and Wallace.¹⁰¹ The placement of the bloc vote shows up in the run-off election as well. Interestingly, even though the commentary lists black support as a detraction, an article by the same author appeared in the *Marion Times-Standard* in March of 1962 that gave the “Negro bloc vote” to Folsom. The writer states, “While he [Folsom] has been talking freely during the past several weeks, how he has kept Negroes out of white schools and as the next governor, will continue to do so, just about any political observer will tell you, ‘Folsom can cuss the Negro all he wants. But it’s no secret that they’ll probably vote in a 75,000-plus bloc for him.’ With this apparent bloc and reported financial resources at his disposal, it’s not hard to see how he has been able to muster batteries of political workers to comb every nook and cranny for votes.”¹⁰² While the support of black candidates was seen as a liability, the support of the black bloc vote was seen as a campaign boost. No explanation is offered as to the contradiction in the author’s logic. This does point to the fact, however, that blacks did wield some political weight, even though they could not register in numbers representative of their percentage of the population.

Acknowledging the power of the bloc vote, Wallace asked white voters in the May 29 run-off to “Make your vote count Again! Beat The Bloc Vote.”¹⁰³ Ironically,

¹⁰⁰ Congressman Armistead Selden, “Report From Washington,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 7, 1963.

¹⁰¹ Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, March 8, 1962.

¹⁰² Carl Goggins, “Alabama Political News,” *Marion Times-Standard*, March 22, 1962.

¹⁰³ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, May 24, 1962.

Wallace had been the beneficiary of that bloc vote in 1958. After coming in third in the primary, Folsom urged his followers, including his black followers, to vote for DeGraffenried, Wallace's opponent. The use of the bloc vote was the only way for the mostly disfranchised black community to wield any political weight. The African American community continued to effectively use this tool into the twenty-first century to ensure that black candidates were elected to office. The bloc vote would be enforced by the leadership of the black community to the detriment of any individual African American who might prefer to vote for the candidates they personally felt to be the most qualified.

The black bloc vote was also an issue in the Attorney General's run-off race. Though MacDonald Gallion, the state Attorney General, had succeeded in forcing CORE to halt its work in the state, even if temporarily, he could not run for reelection to the Attorney General's office in 1962 because he was running for governor. Assistant Attorney General Willard Livingston and attorney Richmond Flowers were the main contenders for the position. Livingston attacked Flowers with an ad entitled "NAACP Bloc Negro Vote Launches Drive Against Willard Livingston. Negro Bloc Vote Backs Richmond Flowers." The ad cites the May 1 primary results from a precinct in Birmingham in which 1,290 of the 1,300 or so registered voters were African American. Flowers received 795 votes, while Livingston received 11. A list of Livingston's accomplishments in the area of segregation included his assistance in the state Attorney General's suits "against the NAACP, Core [sic], Freedom Riders, and agitators." The ad asserts that Livingston will continue to fight "every foe of our Southern way of life. The Attorney General must be free to defend segregation against radicals and

troublemakers.”¹⁰⁴ No mention of how Livingston planned to deal with white troublemakers such as the KKK was offered.

The U.S. Senate race in Alabama also saw its share of race baiting. The 1962 election saw incumbent Lister Hill campaign on a platform of protecting “Our Southern Rights.” Interestingly, he was initially appointed to the Senate to fill the seat left vacant by Hugo Black’s appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1936. In 1956, Hill signed the “Southern Manifesto” which objected to the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling, which Black had supported. Hill had been elected to fill the seat left vacant by the resignation of Dixie Bibb Graves, and was subsequently elected to four more full terms. He was reelected in 1962, and retired from public office in 1969. Because of his long tenure in office, he was the chairman of several powerful committees, and was a force to be reckoned with in the Senate.¹⁰⁵

The political ads of the 1962 campaign are consistent with Hill’s signing of the “Southern Manifesto.” After thanking the citizens of Alabama for their support, Hill noted that “I have always worked and fought to protect our Southern rights and traditions. I have fought against every anti-South measure in Congress, FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission], anti-lynching, anti-poll tax, so-called Civil Rights bills, anti-filibuster moves – and as Southern team captain have lead many of these fights. I will

¹⁰⁴ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, May 17, 1962.

¹⁰⁵ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, April 26, 1962. Hill served as chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Veterans Affairs. He also served as chair of the Appropriations Committee on Health, Hospitals, Health Centers and Medical Research and Education, and he was instrumental in promoting medical research at the nation’s top research institutions, along with establishing mental health hospitals. Along with serving on the Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Rivers and Harbors and Waterway Development, he was chair of the Appropriations Committee on TVA and Atomic Energy, a member of the General Appropriations Committee, a member of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, a member of the National Defense and Armed Services Committee, the DEA, the Rural Telephones Committee and the Veterans Affairs Committee.

continue to do everything in my power to preserve our Southern way of life.” Hill then lists his accomplishments on various committees, including slum clearance and assistance for veterans.¹⁰⁶ Himself a veteran of WWI, one is left to wonder if Hill differentiated between black and white veterans.

In the November election, Hill faced a tough Republican challenge from Jim Martin, and for the first time a Republican candidate made a strong, though unsuccessful, showing. Martin actually won Perry County. Hill continued to boast of his segregation work, and he enlisted the help of Senators from other Southern states to brag on his work for the South. Senator Dick Russell of Georgia bragged about Hill’s fight to maintain literacy tests and Georgia Senator Herman Talmadge praised Hill’s “defense of constitutional government and individual liberty.” Senator Jim Eastland of Mississippi praised Hill’s logical and profound speeches in support of the poll tax, while Senator John Stennis of Mississippi referred to Hill as “General Lee” and said Hill was always at his best when “fighting for Alabama and the South.”¹⁰⁷ The Democratic Party of Perry County encouraged its supporters to vote for Hill by reminding them to “Save Alabama’s Political Power” and “Vote Under the Rooster.”¹⁰⁸ Hill’s Republican opponent, Jim Martin, ran on an anti-Kennedy platform and vowed to oppose Kennedy’s “oppressive, dictatorial military and Supreme Court steamrollers, now smashing Southern liberty, our State sovereignty, and our good name.”¹⁰⁹ Martin had been a state’s rights Democrat, and

¹⁰⁶ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, April 26, 1962.

¹⁰⁷ Political ad - “Lister Hill – on the job for Alabama,” *Marion Times-Standard*, November 1, 1962.

¹⁰⁸ Political ad – “Save Alabama’s Political Power,” *Marion Times-Standard*, November 1, 1962. The symbol of the Democratic Party in Alabama showed a white rooster with a banner underneath its feet or over its head that read “White Supremacy.”

¹⁰⁹ Political ad for Jim Martin, *Marion Times-Standard*, October 25, 1962.

apparently recognized the changing relationship of the white voters of Alabama with the national Democratic Party. He criticized the one-party system in the state and said that it served as a chain holding the state down by prohibiting the state's political influence. Martin labeled Hill a socialist, and predicted that once conservative voters began voting their convictions, the state would elect Republican officials.¹¹⁰ Though Martin was far ahead of his time and was not elected in 1962, his prediction would later materialize.

The *Marion Times-Standard* ran a front-page announcement in the March 29, 1962 paper with the headline "Absentee Voting To Open On April 11." The article noted that thirteen people in Perry County "had been certified by the Board of Registrars to vote by absentee ballot in the May 1 election [Democratic primary]." This was out of a registered voting list of 4,239. Thus, .003% of the registered voters signed up to vote absentee in the May 1962 primary. The absentee registrants were required to appear in person at the courthouse to cast their ballots with the Registrar of the Circuit Court between April 11 and April 26. The absentee voting law specified that absentee balloting was to open 20 days before the scheduled election and close five days before election day. The 1962 election was the first election in which those with physical disabilities were allowed to fill out a ballot without having to physically appear at the courthouse, by returning the ballot to the Circuit Clerk's office via the United States Postal Service. According to Act No. 77 of the special session of the Legislature of 1961, those physically confined to their home could make application to the Registrar to apply by absentee ballot. The application had to be signed by a physician and describe where the applicant was confined. The application also had to describe the applicant's physical

¹¹⁰ Carl Goggins, "Alabama Political News," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 2, 1962.

condition and state that the applicant could not appear in person to vote because of their disability. The head of a hospital, nursing home, or sanitarium, or a notary public, had to execute the affidavit that accompanied the application.¹¹¹ The number of absentee ballots cast in the 1962 election (.003%), and the change in procedure for those that were not physically able to cast their ballots, is noted here because by 2010, roughly 25% of the ballots cast in Perry County elections were absentee ballots, with more ballots being cast in Perry County than in Jefferson County, which boasts Alabama's most populated city as its county seat. From the 1970s forward, absentee voting fraud dominated Perry County politics and effectively influenced the outcome of every local election.

In the May 29, 1962 run-off election, Perry County followed the rest of the state in voting for George Wallace for governor. By a 3 to 1 (1,951 to 620) majority, Perry County voters chose Wallace over DeGraffenried. There were 4,239 registered voters in 1962, and 2,600 descended on Perry County's 20 polling places to cast their ballots.¹¹² Though pundits had expected a run-off between Wallace and Folsom, this was not the case. Many political writers thought that Folsom's black followers would give him the edge in the primary, but they may have in fact hurt him with white voters. Folsom then asked his 40,000 to 50,000 black voters to throw their hat in with DeGraffenried in the run-off.¹¹³ This may have ultimately hurt DeGraffenried more than it helped.

There were a few local elections that would have been of importance to African

¹¹¹ "Incapacitated Persons May Vote Absentee Ballots In Election," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 29, 1962.

A notice also appears in the January 16 and February 20, 1964 editions of the *Marion Times-Standard*. The deadline to register for eligibility to vote by absentee was March 1. Both notices occur on the front page. The 1964 election would be the last election where absentee ballots would not play a major role in an election in Perry County.

¹¹² "Heavy Vote Cast In Perry County, Tuesday, May 29" and "How Perry County Voted In May 29 Election," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 31, 1962.

¹¹³ Carl Goggins, "Alabama Political News," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 31, 1962.

Americans, though the vast majority of them were denied the right to decide on them. One special election in the county was for the purpose of extending a three mill property tax for the Pope's Beat school. The tax had been in existence since 1939, so this was not a tax increase, but simply a vote about whether or not to sustain funding. The three mills would amount to .30 on every \$100 of taxable property and had to be renewed before September 30, 1964. Because there was no regular voting place in the Pope's Beat School District area, the election was to be held on June 12, 1962 in the home of J.W. Daniel.¹¹⁴ The voters chose to continue with the special funding, which lasted until September 30, 1989. The only school mentioned being located in or near Pope's Beat was the "Rosenwald" School, so it appears that the voters of Pope's Beat School District voted to maintain some type of funding for the local black school. It is hard to know how many voters were registered to vote in the district because it was not a regular voting precinct, but was based on the boundaries of the residency assignments for the school. There was also a vote that year to continue the three mill tax for the Uniontown school district, as well as a county-wide tax for all of the schools.

The run-off election for 1962 included the governor's race between Wallace and DeGraffenried, as well as the Lt. Governor and attorney general positions. Local run-offs were for the Perry County Sheriff and the County Commission seat for North Perry. The U.S. House of Representatives race was unusual in that the voters were asked to choose eight of the nine officials that had been elected to represent Alabama in the House. Because Alabama lost population between 1950 and 1960, the state lost a seat in the

¹¹⁴ "Notice of Special Election," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 31, 1962.

House.¹¹⁵ Because of declining population within the county, voters had to go to the polls for yet another special election on August 28 to choose between two members that were already elected to the county commission. A court-ordered reapportioning of the state legislature resulted in Perry County losing one seat in the legislature.¹¹⁶

In the run-off election for the governor's seat, the Wallace campaign placed an ad which noted that Wallace risked five years in prison while serving as a Circuit Judge in 1959 for refusing to turn over voter records to the Civil Rights Commission.¹¹⁷ Another ad read, "And we shall have . . . Honest, Southern, God-fearing leadership in Montgomery . . . George Wallace has clearly demonstrated in every phase of his . . . life, the integrity, the sobriety, the deep-felt Christianity, the leadership ability and dedication which Alabama needs . . . now. . . . Because everything in George Wallace's past record proves that, when he stands on the hallowed spot where Jefferson Davis stood and takes the oath of office, a better and brighter day will dawn for all of us and for our state."¹¹⁸ Less than three years later, Wallace watched marchers from Selma descend on the capital, but refused to allow the group's leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, to speak from the top of the steps, where Jefferson Davis stood.

Another special election of importance to Perry County took place on August 28, when, along with deciding which state representative would lose their job because Perry County lost a seat in the state legislature, voters in Perry County were asked to chose

¹¹⁵ "Second Primary Election Is Set Tuesday, May 29," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 24, 1962.

¹¹⁶ "Light Vote Cast In Election Held In Perry County," *Marion Times-Standard*, August 30, 1962.

¹¹⁷ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, May 24, 1962. In the same ad, Wallace appealed to the family voter when he said "George and Lurleen Wallace are proud of their children, and they want the same things for them that *you* want for *your* children. They want the public schools they attend to be top-notch." This is just one more example that the politicians knew they were only appealing to a white electorate because a black voter would have found this comment to be laughable and unimaginable.

¹¹⁸ Political ad, *Marion Times-Standard*, May 24, 1962.

between the existing county-wide system of electing the Court of County Commissioners versus a proposed change to electing commissioners by district. The bill was passed by the state legislature and also included the election of the members of the Board of Revenue by district. It had to be approved by the voters. At the time of the special election there were four Road Districts in the county. Each district had “a member of the Court of County Commissioners elected on a county wide [sic] vote. They form the county governing body, along with the probate judge, which transacts all county business and expenditures. They have regular meetings twice a month and draw salaries from the county.”¹¹⁹

There was a light turn-out for the special vote regarding the election of county commissioners. Of the 1,650 votes cast, 807 voted to retain the current system of county-wide election, while “723 favored electing them [county commissioners] by district vote.”¹²⁰ Of note is the fact that, out of 1,738 votes cast, only eight were absentee votes.¹²¹ At some point after 1962, the method of choosing county commissioners was changed so that they were elected by district. Ironically, the change to electing commissioners by district instead of on a county-wide basis is the only reason that there are any white elected county officials in Perry County as of 2010. Apportionment guidelines were put in place to ensure the election of candidates that represent the racial minorities in cities and counties. In the case of Perry County, this statute guarantees that the city and county district lines are drawn to ensure that there are black and white

¹¹⁹ “Perry To Vote On Way Of Electing Commissioners,” *Marion Times-Standard*, July 19, 1962.

¹²⁰ “Light Vote Cast In Election Held In Perry County,” *Marion Times-Standard*, August 30, 1962.
The September 6, 1962 edition of the *Times-Standard* noted that 922 votes were cast for maintaining the current system, while 766 voted to change to district voting. See front page, “Official Count Tabulated For Election Here.”

¹²¹ “Official Count Tabulated For Election Here,” *Marion Times-Standard*, September 6, 1962.

elected officials equal to the percentages of the black and white population in the county. Thus, as of 2010, there are three black county commissioners and two white commissioners. There are three black city councilpersons and two white city councilpersons as well.

While the white state and local candidates in 1962 were expending effort and money to be elected on a platform of maintaining the *status quo*, including a promise to pursue [white] southern rights, and thus exclude blacks from politics and other public arenas, African Americans were taking matters into their own hands to ensure that they would not be excluded from voting because of their race for many more election cycles. The campaign rhetoric of the 1962 candidates, especially on the state level, stirred both whites and blacks to visible action. Whites turned out to support candidates who wanted to maintain white supremacy, and blacks began a more visible campaign to secure voting rights. The vicious racial rhetoric of the campaign helped encourage the establishment of and support for groups such as the Perry County Civic League. The necessity of creating groups such as this had been growing among members of the African American community for several years. As previously noted, the Rising Star Association had served to bring the black community together since the 1920s.

In 1961, the SCLC only had two affiliate groups in Alabama, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and the Alabama Civic Affairs Association (ACAA).¹²² Rev. A. Edward Banks of Perry County began communicating with the SCLC in 1962. By the end of that year, the SCLC listed seven affiliates in the state. Two of those seven groups were located in Perry County: the Perry County Civic League under the direction

¹²² SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 6.

of Rev. S.L. Johnson and another group in the county under the direction of James Russell Carter. By 1964, both groups were listed as the Perry County Civic League, with one headquartered in Marion and one in Newbern, in the western part of the county.¹²³ Interestingly, there were no churches in Perry County that listed affiliation with the SCLC in 1962.¹²⁴ The fee for an affiliate group in a town with a population under 2,500 was \$25 and the fee for a town with a population over 2,500 was \$100.¹²⁵ The group in Marion would have paid the \$25 fee.

The initial contacts listed for Perry County included Rev. Walker, Mr. Hampton Lee, the funeral home director and founder of the Rising Star Association, and Rev. A.A. [sic] Banks. Curiously, Banks's name is in parentheses, but most of the correspondence in the SCLC files from 1962 is from Banks. Rev. Seay, president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, who is mentioned in a footnote earlier in this chapter, is listed as the SCLC contact for the area.¹²⁶ Hampton Lee provided a list of contact names to S.S. Seay on June 26, 1962. Included were L.C. Johnson, the county extension agent, James Carter, who became the leader of the Newbern branch of the Civic League, Rev. S.L. Johnson of Oak Grove M.E. Church in Newbern, Edward C. Moore of Uniontown, Andrew Hayden of Uniontown, Rev. G.V. (Governor) Sanders of Marion, David E. Perry of Marion and E.C. Watters of Sprott. Interestingly, all were registered voters in 1962 except Rev. Johnson and Hampton Lee.¹²⁷

¹²³ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 8.

¹²⁴ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 7.

¹²⁵ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 28.

¹²⁶ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 27.

¹²⁷ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 30 – “Alabama Membership Lists Folder.”

Note from Lee Funeral Home, dated June 26, 1962.

Voting roll, *Marion Times-Standard*, March 15, 1962.

James Wood, C.T. Vivian and Randolph Blackwell served as directors of the Affiliate program between 1961 and 1965. Early on, the SCLC developed a four-page procedural document to help groups become established and then become affiliates of the SCLC.¹²⁸ The Perry County group was one of the earliest groups in the state to affiliate with the SCLC. The procedural document noted that each affiliate needed to meet at least once a week, and during periods of intense activity, weekly mass meetings might be necessary. When meetings were called without enough time to send out a notice by mail, the president or another officer of the affiliate group was to announce the meetings in the pulpit of their churches on Sunday morning. With this suggestion, the SCLC demonstrated that it took for granted that the church was an integral part of the Movement process.

By October 1962, the SCLC affiliates in Alabama decided to form a state SCLC chapter. The group began monthly meetings in November of that year, and vowed to make possible “some cooperation among local civic and civil rights organizations around the state and extend to them the services of the Southern Christian Leadership staff and program.”¹²⁹ The organizational meeting took place at First Baptist Church of Montgomery, and the first meeting was held at St. John C.M.E. in Gadsden. The meetings rotated to various regions of the state each month. Rev. S. L. Johnson from Perry County served on the Tuscaloosa-Selma region committee. Because the SCLC’s basic aim was “achieving full citizenship rights, equality, and the integration of the Negro in all aspects of American life,” they were a natural ally for the African Americans

Edward C. Moore was the husband of Cora Childs Moore, who was interviewed, along with her daughter-in-law, Mary Cosby Moore, the Circuit Clerk in Perry County as of 2010, for this work.

¹²⁸ SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 14.

¹²⁹ Memo from Martin Luther King on SCLC letterhead. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 29.

fighting for their basic citizenship rights in Perry County.¹³⁰

In trying to win citizenship and voting rights for African Americans, the SCLC espoused non-violent direct action and civil disobedience. The group also created action programs to educate blacks on the tenets of citizenship, and provide information on effective voter registration practices, and later voter education schools. The Perry County Civic League followed the SCLC's lead in all of these matters. Their protests remained non-violent, but the group did practice civil disobedience, especially by 1965. The League had several active citizenship schools as well, and once those were established, they began Voter Education Schools. Once the vote was obtained, they continued both the citizenship and voter schools suggested by the SCLC.

From its inception, the Perry County Civic League practiced non-violence and began citizenship schools. According to the SCLC, "Interested persons, who have a general knowledge of reading and writing, are trained [at the Dorchester Center in Midway, Georgia] intensively in the skills of adult education using subject matter relevant to the struggle. They return to their individual communities as instructors and set up a Citizenship School that the 'grass-roots' people may be trained for full participation in civic life."¹³¹ Rev. A. Edward Banks, James Avery, S.L. Johnson and Theola Ward were the first applicants from Perry County to register with the SCLC to become Citizenship School instructors. In order to teach the schools, they had to attend training at the Dorchester Training Center.¹³² While there is no record of Theola Ward's teaching service, the schools led by Banks, Avery, and Johnson, were the first of several

¹³⁰ SCLC, "This is SCLC." (1962?). SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 123, folder 28.

¹³¹ SCLC, "This is SCLC." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 123, folder 128.

¹³² Applications from Perry County for 1962 training session. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 26 - "Ala., Newbern - Avery, James, 1962-63."

schools in Perry County from 1962-65. The schools experienced a fairly steady attendance.

By December 1962, Banks informed Dr. Andrew Young that he had turned over the leadership of the Civic League to Albert Turner in order to focus on leading the “Leadership Training schools” in various areas of the county.¹³³ In his letter to Young, Banks requested 26 training books, as well as tablets and pencils for the class. He informed Young that the school would take place at the Springhill Church, but he would need \$10 from the SCLC to pay rent to the church. This would cover three months of rent, however. Banks also inquired about the honorarium the teachers would receive and how payment would be sent. The question about pay is a recurring theme in most of his correspondence with the SCLC office in Atlanta regarding the schools. Banks noted that he had lined up teachers in the next two places “that we are looking to invade,” and he wanted to know what to tell the potential instructors.¹³⁴

On the last day of 1962, Banks wrote Young again, expressing frustration that he had schools set up, but had not received any materials from Atlanta. He had started the first school on December 4th, 1962 and on January 28, 1963 he was requesting payment for Dec. 4 through February 4. Banks noted that the first class would end in March, and he requested that someone from the main SCLC office be the speaker at the closing

¹³³ Letter from Dorothy F. Cotton, SCLC Educational Consultant, to Rev. A. Edward Banks, March 26, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - “Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63, Marion.”

¹³⁴ Letter from Rev. A. Edward Banks to Dr. A. J. Young, December 20, 1962. Typed on Banks Conservatory of Music letterhead. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - “Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63, Marion.” Banks also mentions in his letter that the IRS is harassing Obie Scott, Martin Luther King’s father-in-law, about paying his taxes. Banks asserts that Scott paid his income taxes for the year, but the agents came to his house and asked him how much money he has taken in on interest, apparently with the intent of taxing that money as well. Banks suggested that Scott contact King, and Scott asked Banks to do so, since Banks was good friends with King. Banks chose to contact King through Andrew Young at the SCLC in his letter requesting materials for the Citizenship School.

ceremonies.¹³⁵ As a sign that the schools, and the work of the Civic League, were still under the radar of the white establishment, Banks requested that all correspondence from the national SCLC office be sent on plain paper with no letterhead, and that all packages just include Young's name for the return address, instead of the SCLC address. As he concluded his request, he stated "We are not stable enough yet for you to give us the real name."¹³⁶

Banks' first class was named the Springhill Leadership Training School and took place at Springhill Baptist Church. It began on December 4, 1962 with 26 students. The class met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for four weeks. There were seventeen men and nine women.¹³⁷ The next school, which met in March one day a week for four weeks, had 13 students: eight women and five men and was named the Wallace Community School class at the Marietta M.E. Church. In April, it met on Monday and Wednesday nights. Another woman was added to the class in April. Six of the students were 60 years of age or above, with the oldest being about 75. The youngest student was 23.¹³⁸ Two of the men in the class were registered to vote at the time they took the class. None of the women were registered. Banks indicated that all would be ready to become voters once they finished the class on May 5.¹³⁹

Banks noted in March 1963 that his next school would be held in the Mt. Tabor

¹³⁵ Letter from Rev. Edward A. Banks to Rev. A.J. Young, January 28, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63, Marion, Ala."

¹³⁶ Letter from Rev. Edward A. Banks to Dr. A.J. Young, December 31, 1962. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63, Marion, Ala."

¹³⁷ "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance Sheet," Wallace Community School. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

¹³⁸ "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance Sheet," Springhill Leadership Training School. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

¹³⁹ "Citizenship School Report," Wallace Community School, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

community. Coretta Scott had grown up in Mt. Tabor Church, and the Scott family still lived in the area. Obie Scott, Coretta's father, was the contact person for the church where the class was held, and had to ask Banks about the rent payment for the church. Miss Sanders taught the class at Mt. Tabor.¹⁴⁰ Banks noted that "Interest is very high there. In fact, all over the county the interest has taken an upsurge. We are working hard and the people, seemingly, are anxious for what we are trying to give them."¹⁴¹ In her reply to Banks, Dorothy Cotton reminded Banks to make sure that he was teaching "the folk to read and write and to study local government – your officials and what they do, community problems and what they can about them."¹⁴²

Once another qualified teacher that had completed training at Dorchester was available, Banks began the school at Mt. Tabor, as well as another school in the New Hope community. When asked on a Citizenship School Semi-Annual Report about the success of registering class participants as voters, Banks replied that none of the students had been able to vote "due to the tactics of the registrars."¹⁴³ Even with this difficulty, the class at Mt. Tabor continued. Helen G. McMurry began teaching the class in March 1963 with 20 students. She taught the class until May, when she had a child.¹⁴⁴ At this

¹⁴⁰ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Septima P. Clark, May 6, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 53 - "Citizenship Schools."

¹⁴¹ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Dorothy Cotton or Rev. A.J. Young, March 8, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

¹⁴² Letter from Dorothy Cotton to Rev. A. Edward Banks, March 26, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

¹⁴³ "Citizenship School Semi-Annual Report." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 57 - "Citizenship Schools, Edward Banks, 1962-63."

¹⁴⁴ Letter from (Miss) Annemarie Quiring to Mrs. Helen G. McMurry, May 7, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 6 - "Helen McMurry Citizenship Schools, 1963-64."

time, Mary Lou Sanders began teaching the class.¹⁴⁵ The class met on Monday and Thursday nights. The goal was for 16 of the 20 students to register to vote, since four were already registered.¹⁴⁶ Sanders began teaching another class at Mt. Tabor in May 1963. This class had 15 students, two of which were registered to vote.¹⁴⁷ Sanders apparently enjoyed teaching so much that she taught another class in Marietta community in the fall.¹⁴⁸

Though class participants were still having a difficult time registering to vote, Banks and the other teachers continued conducting classes. In September 1963, Banks began a class in the Mt. Nebo community. He also hoped to start a new class in the Mr. Gilead community. In an effort to increase the number of classes offered, Banks hoped to bring ten new teachers to training at the Dorchester Center in November of that year. The Mt. Nebo school was able to meet in September, October, and November and had 13 attendees, almost all of which were over the age of 50. One of the attendees was already registered, and Banks hoped to register six from the class. Because of a perceived lack of interest in the community, Banks turned the class over to Miss Sanders, who was scheduled to go to training at Dorchester in November 1963, and thus was allowed to teach. Banks decided to try to set up schools in Hale County next, but just as he made his

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Mary Lou Sanders to Dorothy Cotton. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 7 - "Citizenship Schools, 1963, Mary Sanders."

¹⁴⁶ "Citizenship School Report," Mt. Tabor Community/Church, April 8, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 6 - "Helen McMurry Citizenship Schools, 1963-64."

¹⁴⁷ "Citizenship School Report," Mt. Tabor Church, July 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 7 - "Citizenship Schools, 1963, Mary Sanders."

¹⁴⁸ Mary Lou Sanders, "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet," June 26, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 8 - "Marion Citizenship Schools, 1963, Mary Sanders."

decision, six of his Perry County students were allowed to register to vote.¹⁴⁹ Teachers were paid \$30 for a course upon completion of the course.¹⁵⁰ As a reward for over a year's worth of hard work, nine of the 53 attendees in the classes were able to register to vote, joining the four attendees that were already registered.¹⁵¹

Though Banks insisted the classes were going well, by July 1964, his relationship with the SCLC had soured. The SCLC would not reimburse him for work he did, canvassing from house to house, because he only met with three students, and the class minimum was eight. This regulation was apparently a surprise to Banks.¹⁵² He insisted that the house-to-house format was necessary because there were just a handful of women who were brave enough to risk being associated with the schools. The women were interested, but they risked losing their jobs and being beaten up, and no ministers in Hale County were willing to let the schools use their church.¹⁵³

Banks also noted in a July 9 letter to Dorothy Cotton at SCLC headquarters that he had requested legal assistance multiple times, and none was forthcoming. Banks

¹⁴⁹ "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 53 - "Citizenship Schools."
"Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 54 - "Citizenship School Reports, Marion – Edward Banks, 1963."

Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Septima P. Clark, December 9, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 54 - "Citizenship School Reports, Marion – Edward Banks, 1963."
Alabama consistently sent the largest number of attendees to the training sessions at Dorchester. In 1963, 88 (42%) of the 204 attendees were from Alabama. "Workshop Participants by States." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 153, folder 20 - "Teacher Training Workshops, 1963-64."

¹⁵⁰ Letter from (Mrs.) Septima Clark to Rev. A. Edward Banks, November 1, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 53 - "Citizenship Schools."

¹⁵¹ "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet" for Mt. Nebo A.M.E. Zion Church. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 54 - "Citizenship School Reports, Marion – Edward Banks, 1963."

¹⁵² Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Dorothy F. Cotton, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 55 - "Citizenship School Reports, Marion, Edward Banks."

¹⁵³ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mr. Eric Kindberg, Director, Voter Education Project, Montgomery, Ala, office, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 1 - "Alabama 1965."

expressed frustration that every time he tried to claim expenses, there was some unknown loophole that SCLC always found to keep from paying him. The most frustrating thing he dealt with was fear on the part of local participants. The unknown SCLC class requirement of a minimum of eight students was hard to meet, at least initially, because “the people are afraid, [so] we have to work along with what we can get till we can wear some of that fear off of the others. Always there are those who are interested, but will wait to see what the outcome will be to those who have ventured out.” Banks noted that he had spent time in jail “trying to carry out the mandates” of the Movement, and SCLC would not help with legal assistance or fines.¹⁵⁴ The only fine Banks mentions in detail is a fine owed to the Justice of the Peace because he was “caught going over there [to Greensboro, Alabama] to class.”¹⁵⁵ One is left to assume that he received a ticket for a traffic violation. Banks notes that he sent receipts for the fines, and he is trying to keep up the good work of the citizenship schools, and the SCLC is looking for yet another way to refuse to pay him.¹⁵⁶ He asserted that if he had received legal assistance from SCLC while he was in jail in March 1964, the impact on the local black community would have been substantial. Instead, the aftermath was “YOU ARE WORKING FOR THE SCLC AND THEY DON’T SEND YOU ANY ASSISTANCE[.] WHAT WILL THEY DO FOR US IF AND WHEN WE GET IN JAIL?”¹⁵⁷ On top of that, Banks noted that he

¹⁵⁴ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Dorothy F. Cotton, July 9, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 55 - “Citizenship School Reports, Marion, Edward Banks.”

¹⁵⁵ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Dorothy F. Cotton, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 55 - “Citizenship School Reports, Marion, Edward Banks.”

¹⁵⁶ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mrs. Dorothy F. Cotton, July 9, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 156, folder 55 - “Citizenship School Reports, Marion, Edward Banks.”

¹⁵⁷ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mr. Eric Kindberg, Director, Voter Education Project, Montgomery, Ala, office, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 1 - “Alabama 1965.”

Use of all caps follows the original type on the letter sent by Banks.

needed the money, both for the small classes he taught, as well as reimbursement for the fines. He pleaded with the SCLC, “I have bills, and the Crackers are saying to me now, that “MARTIN LUTHER KING IS GETTING ALL OF THE MONEY AND YOU ARE GETTING NOTHING.” Banks concluded his letter with a hand-written addendum pleading for SCLC to send lawyers to the area, noting “A group of our men have been molested by a group of teenagers, burning crosses and they are planning on fighting.”¹⁵⁸ This may be the same incident Chief T.O. Harris references. There is a definite feeling in Banks’ remarks that he feels that the organization is sitting safely in their offices in Atlanta while the grass roots members are going to jail with no legal assistance. He notes that the poor cooperation and lack of support he feels he is getting from SCLC, “coupled with the already fearful element of Negroes, keeps them back.”¹⁵⁹

James Carter, another early SCLC contact in Perry County, also led Citizenship Schools. While Banks’ schools were in the northern part of the county, Carter was in Newbern in the western part of the county near the Hale County line. Newbern was an important area for Movement organizing in Perry County, according to Willie Nell Avery, the registrar in 2010, because most blacks in west Perry owned their own land.¹⁶⁰ Carter led a school at the Sportsman Community Center on Tuesdays and Thursdays in

¹⁵⁸ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mr. Eric Kindberg, Director, Voter Education Project, Montgomery, Ala, office, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 1 - “Alabama 1965.”

Use of all caps follows the original type on the letter sent by Banks.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from A. Edward Banks to Mr. Eric Kindberg, Director, Voter Education Project, Montgomery, Ala, office, July 27, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 1 - “Alabama 1965.”

¹⁶⁰ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Della Maynard corroborated Avery’s assertion when she noted that, as a child, she was shielded from discrimination and racism because her family owned their land and did not sharecrop, so she was able to lead a less racially-dictated life. Della Maynard, speech given at a mock rally staged for Spring Valley High School (PA) students at Zion Methodist Church, Marion, AL, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

November and December 1962. There were fourteen in attendance, none of which were registered to vote at the time of the class. In February and March of 1963, Carter led a school at the Training School in Uniontown. There were 16 students in that class, ranging in age from 16-60. He hoped all of them would be able to register to vote. For February through April, Carter led a class at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Uniontown. At various times, 26 people attended, though the average attendance was 14. Carter hoped all 14 would be able to register, but he was skeptical because, he reported, “They dont [sic] register no negroes in perry [sic] County but we are working with the Justice Dep. trying to break this down.” Carter was aware of the 173 letters that Turner had sent to the court in Mobile, and he also knew that the Perry County registrars were under an injunction to register eligible voters.¹⁶¹ Unlike Banks’ correspondence with the SCLC, there are no acrimonious notes between Carter and the organization. It appears that he had no trouble filling out his reports, and he received his reimbursement in a timely fashion.

Virginia S. Johnson, the wife of Rev. S.L. Johnson of Oak Grove M.E. Church in Newbern, began teaching classes in the Newbern community in November 1962. She taught the Oak Grove School at the Oak Grove Methodist Church from November until February 1963.¹⁶² The class met on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and had 14 students from Newbern and Marion.¹⁶³ Her next class was at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Uniontown in the southern part of the county. There were 14 enrolled in the class that

¹⁶¹ James Carter, “Citizenship School Semi-Annual Report.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 27 - “Ala., Newbern – Carter, James, 1962-1964.”

¹⁶² Virginia Johnson, “Citizenship School Semi-Annual Report.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - “Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion – Virginia Johnson, 1963.”

¹⁶³ Virginia S. Johnson, “Citizenship School Monthly Attendance Sheet.” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - “Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion – Virginia Johnson, 1963.”

met on Tuesdays and Thursdays from February to April. None of the students was registered to vote.¹⁶⁴ In March of that year, Septima Clark from SCLC headquarters in Atlanta visited the citizenship schools in the area and met with the teachers. She specifically asked that Rev. Banks be advised of her visit.¹⁶⁵

Once Johnson's class at Mt. Calvary ended, Johnson began a school at Mt. Gilead Church in the Sprott community, on the eastern side of the county. There were 14 students in the Tuesday/Friday class that lasted from April through June.¹⁶⁶ James Avery, also from Newbern, apparently co-taught the class with Johnson because they each submitted attendance and record sheets and each received pay for their work.¹⁶⁷ When the class began in April, only two of the students were registered to vote. The class began at the same time that Rev. S.L. Johnson led a county-wide mass meeting at Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church in Uniontown. The April 10 meeting began at 8:00 p.m. The speakers included the officers of the Perry County Voters League, and staff members from the state registration project and the SCLC. The meeting was dubbed a "Special Voter Registration and Citizenship Education Mass Meeting." The meeting also stressed the value of the citizenship schools for the registration and voting processes.¹⁶⁸ By the

¹⁶⁴ Virginia Johnson, "Citizenship School Report." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - "Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion – Virginia Johnson, 1963."

¹⁶⁵ Letter from Septima Clark to Rev. S.L. Johnson, dated February 25, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - "Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion – Johnson, S.L., 1962-63."

¹⁶⁶ Virginia Johnson, "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, Ga. Box 157, folder 4 - "Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion – Virginia Johnson, 1963."

¹⁶⁷ James Avery, "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet," Mt. Gilead Church, April 30. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, Folder 26 - "Newbern – Avery, James, 1962-63." Avery does list voter registration numbers that differ from those submitted by Virginia Johnson for the same class.

¹⁶⁸ SCLC, "County-Wide Mass Meeting" flier. SCLC papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 3 - "Ala., Marion – Johnson, S.L., 1962-63."

time Virginia Johnson's Mt. Gilead class ended in June, five students were registered.¹⁶⁹ Sometime between June and September 1963, the Johnson's moved to Toxey, Alabama, in Choctaw County, on the Mississippi state line. Rev. Johnson did return to Marion by 1965, however, because he was injured in a night march on February 18 of that year.¹⁷⁰

Shortly after it began Citizenship Schools, the SCLC also began the Voter Education Project (VEP), which was specifically designed to register black voters. As part of their training, every student received a sample registration ballot. Because the state of Alabama added new provisions almost every year from 1960 to 1965, it was somewhat difficult to keep up-to-date ballots in the hands of potential voters. In a letter dated July 15, 1964, Eric Kindberg, the Alabama SCLC unit program director, urged black civic groups in Alabama to take advantage of the services offered by the VEP. The program operated to provide money and assistance to any group willing to run a voter registration campaign. Eligible expenses included funding to print materials such as handbills, placards, and survey sheets, newspaper and radio advertisements, transportation for surveying and transporting people to and from the registration office, and subsistence pay for full-time "conscientious" [sic] workers.¹⁷¹ From 1962-63, the VEP saw an additional 13,487 black voters added to the rolls in Alabama.¹⁷²

Like their Citizenship School counterparts, VEP instructors had to receive training at Dorchester. According to SCLC reports, there were 25 VEP projects in

¹⁶⁹ Virginia Johnson, "Citizenship School Monthly Attendance and Record Sheet." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 157, folder 4 - "Citizenship Schools, Ala., Marion - Virginia Johnson, 1963." See the three separate reports, one for April, May and June 1963.

¹⁷⁰ See chapter 5 of this work.

¹⁷¹ Letter from Eric Kindberg to potential VEP participants, dated July 15, 1964. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 7 - "Direct Action, VEP."

¹⁷² SCLC, "Results of VEP Programs, April 1, 1962 to December 31, 1963." SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 139, folder 3 - "VEP Statistics, 1962-63."

Alabama in 1963. Along with encouraging people to vote, VEP workers also conducted NAACP membership campaigns, assisted voters at the polls, worked with SNCC, conducted workshops on non-violence, helped provide access to welfare programs, worked with the Justice Department, worked to improve infrastructure in neighborhoods, and help set up credit unions for African Americans.¹⁷³

The work of the Perry County Civic League, the Department of Justice, the Citizenship Schools, and the Voter Education Project prepared the black community to begin mass demonstrations and protests when the new year began in 1965. Armed with the knowledge of the law, and the confidence that the federal government and a national Civil Rights organization were supporting them, black citizens launched a protest movement centered on downtown Marion in January 1965. The nation would never be the same.

¹⁷³SCLC, "Statistical Report, 1962-63," Semi-Annual report dated July 1962-January 31, 1963. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 139, folder 3 - "VEP Statistics, 1962-63."

Chapter 5

“Troopers, Negroes Clash in Marion”: The Climax of the Voting Rights Struggle in Perry County

The events of 1965 forever altered the political, educational, judicial, economic, and social fabric of Perry County. The year opened with a decision by the Marion City Council to create a Marion City Board of Education, which would separate the four schools in the Marion City limits from the Perry County Board of Education. It is unclear if this action was racially motivated, especially since the all-white Perry County Board adamantly protested the decision of creating a separate school board for the city. African Americans believed the creation of the board was racially motivated, as did Judge Myron Thompson, who ruled in 1986 that the City School Board was illegal.

The year 1965 also saw a dramatic rise in visible protests by African Americans in the county who were unhappy with the political, economic, and social position assigned to them by whites. African Americans chafed under laws passed by white lawmakers elected by a majority white electorate in a mostly black county. George Bess, a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), noted that SNCC's purpose for coming to Perry County was to secure voting rights, elect African Americans to jobs in the courthouse and city hall, obtain better housing, receive more welfare funds and more help for illegitimate children, and make blacks welcome in public

accommodations.¹ Mattie Atkins and Albert Turner, Sr., noted that political control, as evidenced by the black politicians that controlled the courthouse by 2008, was one of the principal aims of the Movement.² Forty-five years after the apex of the Movement for voting rights in Perry County, Atkins announced to a group of white middle-school children from Pennsylvania who were attending a mock voting rights rally at Zion United Methodist Church in Marion, that as of 2010, “We have control of the County Commission, the school board and the whole courthouse.”³ In Atkins’ view, this control was proof that the Movement in the County had been successful.

Just over a month before the Movement participants began to carry out public demonstrations in Perry County in early 1965, and about six weeks before his previously referenced conversation with George Bess, T.O. Harris, the chief of police, came into contact with the head of the KKK in Perry County. Standing outside the county courthouse, Harris informed the group’s leader that there were going to be demonstrations and protests. Harris made it clear that, as police chief, he would arrest anyone, white or black, who violated the law. Harris also let the man know that he did not approve of the Klan taking the law into their own hands, and violence would not be tolerated from any group. The leader, who Harris does not mention by name, informed the chief that there would not be any trouble from his group, and if any members of his group caused trouble, the police chief only needed to let him know and he would put a

¹ T.O. Harris, *Law Enforcement and Civil Disobedience*, 60. It is important to remember that this is Harris’s personal recollections of the events that took place, and just as with other memoirs, people tend to cast themselves in a positive light. All memoirs, even those included in this work by people such as Andrew Young, should be read in the same light.

² Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, Alabama, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

Allen Tullos, “Rebel with a Cause: Albert Turner, Sr.,” *Southern Changes* 22, no. 2 (2000): 24-26. http://beck.library.emory.edu/southernchanges/article.php?id=sc22-2_025 (accessed August 10, 2012).

³ Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, Alabama, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

stop it. Harris noted that only twice did members of the Klan threaten to cause trouble, and in both cases, the leader kept his word and quelled the situation.⁴

Though blacks had worked quietly in their churches and homes to become educated about the political process, while attempting to register to vote, public protests and boycotts were delayed until 1965. The visible protests were spurred in large part due to the work of SNCC and SCLC in Selma and Dallas County, 25 miles to the southeast of Marion. The SCLC declared Selma the heart of the Black Belt and the capital of racism in the region. The group proposed to attack racism head-on in Selma through protests and repeated attempts by large groups of African Americans to line up at the courthouse and attempt to work through the voter registration process. The Movement groups knew there would be arrests and beatings, and one of the reasons both groups ultimately chose Selma was because of the violent temperament of Jim Clark, the Dallas County sheriff. By 1965, both groups, especially the SCLC, understood the importance of staging their events in towns that were guarded by white racist public safety officers with short tempers. Each outburst of violence on the part of club-wielding, tear gas shooting police officers and sheriffs against peaceful, unarmed black protestors who were simply attempting to exercise their constitutional rights to petition, assemble, and vote, gave SCLC national media exposure and shed light on the violence against blacks in the Black Belt.

The violent nature of Sheriff Jim Clark in Dallas County was a stark contrast to that of Laurie Pritchett in Albany and T.O. Harris in Marion. Dr. King had said that in order to achieve the desired results of the Movement, blacks must participate in civil

⁴ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 56.

disobedience that aroused white men to violence. That violence would then arouse the conscience of the nation to demand Civil Rights legislation that would benefit African Americans. With this in mind, the SCLC, followed by the television cameras headed to Selma to stir the ire of Jim Clark. Their efforts to bring police chief Wilson Baker of Selma to violence generally bore little fruit, but Clark more than compensated for Baker's seemingly endless patience.

In addition to his duties as Selma's chief, Baker was a member of the Trade and Industrial Education Department at the University of Alabama. Baker invited Laurie Pritchett from Albany to speak at a one-day seminar on the role of public safety officials in dealing with civil disobedience. The seminar was for sheriffs, police chiefs, and state officers and was held in Montgomery. Chief Harris from Marion attended. It is apparent that although Baker and Harris followed Pritchett's advice about remaining non-confrontational and watching where the TV cameras went in order to know where the next protests would occur, Jim Clark and Al Lingo did not follow Pritchett's lead.⁵

The SCLC had learned from Pritchett, the reserved chief of police in Albany, Georgia, that well-behaved police chiefs did not advance the cause of the Civil Rights Movement on a national scale. Their initial experience with Wilson Baker confirmed this. By mid-January 1965, Dr. King had arrived in Selma to bring attention, and the media, to the voting registration efforts there. Baker managed to keep the local white population, and other troublemakers such as the Nazis, away from them.⁶ So successful was Baker that the SCLC had a staff meeting to discuss what to do about the lack of action. After all, they noted, the press "could not be expected to stay around and give the

⁵ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 54-55.

⁶ Charles Fager, *Selma 1965: The March that Changed the South* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 31.

movement the national exposure it must have unless there was some action to photograph and write about.”⁷

In his memoirs recounting his time as chief of police in Marion, T.O. Harris noted that he visited Pritchett in Georgia while Harris and his wife were on vacation in 1962. During his visit, Harris asked Pritchett how he always knew where the trouble would occur. Pritchett told Harris to follow the TV cameras, because there was never trouble until the TV cameras arrived. Harris noted that he once saw a group of 400 people delay their meeting over an hour just waiting on the television crew to get there.⁸ The night march that led to the shooting of Jimmie Lee Jackson was the only march in Marion in which violence erupted. It was also the only march at which TV cameras were present.

The SCLC’s early work in Selma in January 1965 had not received much exposure due to the diligence and calm demeanor of Selma police chief Wilson Baker. Before Clark exploded in early February 1965, the SCLC had decided to head to Marion and Perry County if the lull in Selma continued.⁹ Even though Clark did ultimately make it worth their while to bring the news crews to Selma, the SCLC still followed their plan to head to Marion. When the SCLC went to Perry County, the television crews followed. The state troopers, in turn, followed the television crews. When someone spotted Jim Clark in civilian clothes at the February 18 night march in Marion, they questioned why he was there. He replied that things had gotten too quiet in Selma.¹⁰

Had the February 18 night march in Marion of been the work of local activists only, under the gaze of the local police department which had generally allowed the

⁷ Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 31.

⁸ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 54.

⁹ Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 31.

¹⁰ Fager, *Selma 1965*, 74.

marches to take place without interruption, the Movement in Marion might have followed the path of marches in most small rural Black Belt towns. In the typical scenario, a group of African Americans would proceed to the courthouse and march around the building singing songs and holding banners. After a time, the police would tell the group to disperse. They would sing a few more songs, pray, and then return to their churches and homes.¹¹ Police Chief Harris noted that as a rule, he let the marchers stay out as long as they wished, though he made sure the marchers were confined to the courthouse square and did not impede traffic. When the marchers prayed during the day marches, Harris writes that he removed his cap and bowed his head. Several of the local police officers supposedly learned the words to the freedom songs and would hum along while the marchers sang.¹²

This would change on February 18. The tension of a night march, coupled with the presence of the national SCLC leaders, TV crews and state troopers who were not needed at the moment in Selma, sparked the fire that would lead to the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson and the resulting Selma to Montgomery March. While Governor George Wallace was responsible for actually ordering the troopers to Marion, local police Chief Harris had sent Wallace a note in 1964 indicating that Marion did not have the resources to handle large-scale protests, and state assistance might be needed. Wallace assured Harris that he would send help whenever needed.¹³ On February 18, 1965, when Harris requested more state troopers, Wallace kept his promise.¹⁴

The SCLC had an affiliate group in Marion since mid-1962 via its association

¹¹ Mattie Atkins speaking at a mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, Alabama. February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

¹² Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 67.

¹³ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 57.

¹⁴ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 70.

with the Perry County Civic League. In January 1965, representatives from SCLC as well as other national organizations including SNCC, began visibly working in the area in force. As with earlier events in the Movement, the meetings at the Rising Star Association lodge building on the Alabama Highway 5 bypass were unknown to the white members of the community.¹⁵ Civil Rights and voting registration events were generally announced from the pulpits of black churches on Sunday mornings, and occasionally notes were sent home with students in the public schools.¹⁶

The police chief noted that he was not aware of the Movement meetings until traffic flow became an issue around the Rising Star Lodge. On the evening of the January 21, 1965, meeting, Chief Harris indicated that he went to the lodge before the scheduled meeting that night to talk with the organizers and try to work out parking arrangements so that the highway would not be blocked. He met a man named George Bess (Best) who was a member of SNCC. Bess indicated that Albert Turner was in charge of the meetings, which would imply that SCLC was organizing the meetings and SNCC was providing on-the-ground support.¹⁷

Bess came to City Hall the next day to pick up a city map. He then filed a complaint that some cars had been moved during the meeting the night before, and he accused the officers that were sent to the Rising Star lodge to direct traffic of tampering with the cars of attendees. Harris noted that he checked the officer's reports and there had been an issue with a car that was left out of gear, as well as a car blocking the road. In Harris' opinion, Bess was accusing the officers of intimidation, while Harris thought

¹⁵ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 138.

¹⁶ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 61.

¹⁷ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 59. Harris spells the last name as "Bess" while another author spells it "Best."

that Bess was overreacting and being unreasonable. After Bess indicated that the city of Marion was “strife torn, violent, full of unrest” and that he [Bess] was there to correct the town, Harris wrote that “I recognized him [Bess] as a paid professional agitator.”¹⁸

Though Bess’s thoughts on his conversations with Harris are not known, it is apparent through Harris’s assessment of the situation that Bess and he were likely not going to come to agree about the status of the racial situation in Marion.

The same day that Bess stopped by City Hall to complain to the chief about local police officers, the Superintendent of the Perry County schools, L.G. Walker, stopped by City Hall to complain about George Bess to the police chief. According to Harris, Supt. Walker informed him that Bess was entering school property without permission and “distributing circulars about meetings.” According to Harris, Walker’s main concern was not the distribution of fliers so much as Bess’s unauthorized entry into school property and the disruption of school business.¹⁹

The meetings at the lodge, the rallies at churches, and the classes in private homes led to a series of public protests in Marion beginning in January of 1965. African Americans in Perry County began testing public accommodations at the beginning of February. Upon the arrival of George Bess of SNCC and James Orange of SCLC, white leaders in Marion began to pressure Hampton Lee and the Rising Star Association to disassociate from the Movement.²⁰ Perhaps out of fear of retribution from whites, the

¹⁸ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 59.

¹⁹ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 61. This is the same superintendent who refused to pay Idella Childs when she supposedly did not turn in her paperwork at the end of the spring semester several years before.

²⁰ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs* and Fager, *Selma, 1965*, spell the SNCC workers last name as “Best” while Chief Harris, *Law Enforcement*, spells his last name “Bess.” Harris’ spelling of “Bess” is correct. George Calvin Bess, Jr., would continue his work with SNCC after leaving Perry County just before the night march of February 18. He was murdered in 1967 while working with SNCC to register voters in Mississippi.

Association prohibited the use of their meeting hall for Movement planning, and the meetings moved from the Rising Star Lodge Hall to Zion United Methodist Church.²¹ The white clapboard structure was located on the southeast corner of the courthouse square, to the right of the post office, and diagonally across the intersection from City Hall. Rev. Lionel Langford of Zion United Methodist Church offered the use of his building, noting that unlike other denominations, he did not need the permission of a cautious and fearful leadership board to grant him approval to open his church to mass meetings. The meetings immediately moved to the church, and became almost nightly events.²² The FBI informed police chief Harris that there was a direct connection between the increased rate of, and attendance at, the meetings at Zion United Methodist Church and the SCLC work in Selma.²³

One of the first visible assemblies of the protestors occurred on February 1, when “An estimated 300 Marion Negroes, dressed warmly against a brisk, cold wind, filed out of a church [Zion United Methodist] this morning and entered the courthouse.”²⁴ The potential voting registrants “assembled at the Zion United Methodist Church . . . and then proceeded to the Perry County Courthouse in orderly fashion. . . . Negroes taking part in the drive attracted little attention as they walked up to the second floor of the courthouse. In the courtroom they were given numbers and sat down to wait their turn to make application to vote. . . . No incidents were reported in connection with the voter registration drive.”²⁵ Though the registrar’s office opened at 9:00 a.m., the marchers did

²¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 138.

²² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 138.

²³ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 61.

²⁴ “No Trouble At Marion Registration,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1965.

²⁵ “Negroes Hold Voter Registration Drive,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 4, 1965.

not leave the church to walk to the courthouse until 11:00 a.m. Local law enforcement was on hand to direct traffic on Jefferson Street.²⁶ There were complaints from potential black registrants that the Board of Registrars would not allow assistance for those who could not fill out the registration form. The DOJ had already filed an injunction against the board for this practice in 1962, pointing out that white registrants received assistance, but the board did not allow blacks to receive assistance. Similar were voiced in Selma during the same time. A federal judge ordered a speed-up of the registration process in Selma in response to a case filed by the NAACP.²⁷ The order did not affect Marion, however.²⁸ Chief Harris noted that until that march, the Board had led everyone to believe that they were registering all of those qualified to vote, regardless of race. Harris's notes about the situation lead the reader to understand that Harris realized that the board had been lying to everyone, including the police chief.²⁹

On the same day that the voter registration drive began in earnest, African Americans in Perry County also began to test the segregation policies of public accommodations. Groups of five to six students and young adults began entering public

²⁶ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 62. See also "No Trouble At Marion Registration," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1965.

²⁷ The NAACP had been allowed back in Alabama in 1964, when the Supreme Court ruled in *NAACP v. Alabama* that Alabama's law requiring some organizations, but not all, to turn over their membership lists was unconstitutional. The NAACP's suit stated that "It had local affiliates in Alabama and opened an office of its own there without complying with an Alabama statute which, with some exceptions, requires a foreign corporation to qualify before doing business in the State by filing its corporate charter and designating a place of business and an agent to receive service of process. Alleging that petitioner's activities were causing irreparable injury to the citizens of the State for which criminal prosecution and civil actions at law afforded no adequate relief, the State brought an equity suit in a state court to enjoin petitioner from conducting further activities in, and to oust it from, the State. The court issued an ex parte order restraining petitioner, pendente lite, from engaging in further activities in the State and from taking any steps to qualify to do business there. Petitioner moved to dissolve the restraining order, and the court, on the State's motion, ordered the production of many of petitioner's records, including its membership lists. After some delay, petitioner produced substantially all the data called for except its membership lists. It was adjudged in contempt and fined \$100,000 for failure to produce the lists. The State Supreme Court denied certiorari to review the contempt judgment, and this Court granted certiorari."

²⁸ "Court Tells Registrars Speed Process, No Test," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 5, 1965.

²⁹ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 62.

facilities and sitting in the “whites only” areas. On February 1, a group went to the Neely Theater on Washington Street and bought tickets to the 7:30 show. Instead of being sent upstairs to sit in the “Buzzard’s Roost,” they walked in the front door and sat in the main gallery. There were only a few white people already watching the movie. Because of the noise caused by the late arrivals, the white patrons left the movie, under the pretext that they felt unsafe in a dark room with so much noise and confusion.³⁰

The integration of the Korner Kafe seemed to be an important moment for the opening of seating in public spaces.³¹ The events surrounding the desegregation of the Kafe also led to further strife and demonstrations in the town. Mrs. C.A. Middlebrooks owned the Kafe, and according to one source, she served all of the customers, black and white, when they came in and took a seat at the counter on the first day of the desegregation push. According to the local newspaper, “school-age young Negroes tested Marion public facilities and were served without incident.”³² The report in the *Montgomery Advertiser* noted that many of the events took place during the day, and because February 1 was on a Monday, the students must have skipped school in order to try to desegregate the facilities.³³ The Korner Kafe closed on schedule at 5:30 that evening.

The next day, February 2, groups of five and six African Americans continued testing the accommodation practices of white-owned businesses downtown. They returned to the Kafe and were again served without issue. At 5:30, Mrs. Middlebrooks prepared to close the Kafe as usual. She asked her customers to leave and locked the

³⁰ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 63.

³¹ The Korner Kafe is visible in the downtown scenes of Marion in the 1960s in the film, “The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.” It was located across Washington Street from the public bus station.

³² “Negroes Hold Voter Registration Drive,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 4, 1965.

³³ “No Trouble At Marion Registration,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 2, 1965.

door to prevent other customers from entering. She could not get the twenty or so black students and young adults who were no longer spending money at the restaurant, to leave.³⁴ They began pushing and kicking the tables and chairs around, while another group stood outside the locked door kicking on the door and yelling.³⁵ When everyone still refused to leave, she asked that the police chief escort them from the building so she could close. Upon warning from the chief, four of the students left. The remaining 16, including George Bess, remained and were arrested and charged with trespassing after warning.³⁶ Bess tried to keep the group stirred up while they were being booked at city hall. An impromptu protest march was held outside city hall, as African Americans sought entrance into the booking room for the jail, which was too small to accommodate the crowd. As a result, there was a large turnout for the mass meeting that night, and the news media was informed of the situation. The next day, February 3, several members of the media came to town.³⁷ This was their introduction to the Movement in Marion and they remained in the general area, driving back and forth from Selma to Marion, throughout the month.

Along with the incident at the Kafe, there were other accommodation issues as well. Roy Barnett bought “Scruggs for Drugs,” which was later renamed College City Drugs, in 1963. The store was originally a long, narrow building (28’ wide x 68’ long) with a soda fountain running down the left side of the back half of the store. The pharmacist’s counter was located in the back right corner of the space. As the

³⁴ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 63-64.

³⁵ “Why Did Violence Flare In The Darkness At Marion,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 25, 1965.

³⁶ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 63-64.

For information on the specific charge, see “Over 700 Arrested in Demonstrations,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965.

³⁷ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 64.

pharmacist, Barnett noted that he wanted to be more accessible to his customers, so shortly after purchasing the drug store, he decided to remove the soda fountain, which only had seating for eight, and place a long open counter across the back of the store for the pharmacist to work behind. When the Movement began to boycott white-owned stores, Barnett took advantage of the slow business to close the store for remodeling. During the march, while the store was being remodeled, Barnett recalled seeing someone carrying a picket sign that read, “I want a Coke at College City Drugs.”³⁸ Shirley Robinson, who was about eight years old at the time of the Movement protests, insists that Barnett closed the store and removed the soda fountain in order to avoid integrating the seating and dining area. In her view, Barnett would rather take the soda fountain out of the store than have to integrate the counter.³⁹

Because so many adults had to worry about losing their jobs and being kicked off of the land they farmed, school children from Lincoln and the public schools were recruited to march, even during school hours.⁴⁰ Though they could not vote because they were too young, the students wanted to be a part of the Movement. On February 3, over 700 students walked out of the Lincoln School and headed toward downtown, against the request of their principal that they stay in school.⁴¹ Thus began a three week boycott of the Lincoln School in which hundreds of students refused to attend school to protest

³⁸ Roy Barnett, interview by author, Marion, AL, May 10, 2010.

³⁹ Shirley Robinson, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010.

⁴⁰ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Avery noted that when an adult from the household did march, they did not take gender into consideration when choosing who would march. They simply made sure that at least one parent and worker would not be in jail, but it did not necessarily matter if it was the father or mother. This was the case in southwest Georgia as well, where “someone would have to stay out [of the marches] to go to work or tend to the baby.” See Lynne Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970*, 246.

⁴¹ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010.

segregation.⁴² At the same time, students as young as third grade left the Baptist Academy public school on Centreville Street on the north side of town and headed toward downtown.⁴³ James Orange with the SCLC was arrested on a charge of contributing to the delinquency of minors for organizing the march which took children out of school on a school day during the school session.⁴⁴ As had been the case since Reconstruction, the educational institutions of the black community provided a network for the community to grow from.

Once the students arrived downtown, law enforcement officials ordered them to disperse. Those that did not leave were arrested by the Perry County Sheriff Bill Loftis for causing a disturbance at the local businesses located and “failing to disperse after warning by a lawful officer.”⁴⁵ Most of those arrested were marched across the courthouse square and corralled within the fenced yard of the Perry County jail, located on the northeast corner of the square. The rest were hemmed against a wall of the courthouse by “Blue-helmeted state troopers and sheriff’s deputies.”⁴⁶ Superintendent Walker, who was elected to his position by the white minority, sent taxpayer-funded

⁴² “Marion” - a continuation of a front page article entitled “Demonstration Postponed in Marion,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 20, 1965. The demonstration ended February 20 when Albert Turner informed parents that the students must return to school or the parents would be arrested on state charges. The *Marion Times-Standard*, in an article titled “Why Did Violence Flare in the Darkness At Marion,” February 25, 1965, states that Superintendent L.G. Walker notified parents that their children had to attend school under state law. According to the *Times-Standard*, 440 of 711 students returned.

Some students never returned, with hundreds of students boycotting their senior prom and graduation. Students from Hale, Perry, Greene and Dallas Counties held a special four-county graduation at Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma. Hosea Williams issued special certificates to the 500+ graduates. See “CEP News: Citizenship Education Project of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the American Missionary Association,” September 1965, Vol. 1, No. 1. “State News: Alabama,” 2. Several Marengo County graduates received official diplomas in 2009.

⁴³ Mary Cosby Moore, interview by author, Marion, AL, November 11, 2010.

⁴⁴ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 139.

⁴⁵ “Over 700 Arrested in Demonstrations,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965.

⁴⁶ “800 More Arrested As Tension Builds,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4, 1965, continued on page 2 under the subheading “Selma.” The number 800 refers to those arrested in Selma and Marion between Monday, February 1, and Wednesday, February 3.

school buses to the downtown area to haul the 547 arrested students to jail.⁴⁷ About 500 of the students were shipped to Camp Selma, the state prison camp on U.S. Highway 80 just outside of Selma, as well as detention facilities in Hale and Bibb Counties.⁴⁸

Massive arrests began in Selma at the same time that the marches and arrests began in Marion.⁴⁹

When the students did not return home from school that afternoon, their parents came out in force the next day to protest.⁵⁰ After hearing Dr. Martin Luther King speak, about 350 protestors vowed to continue their struggle to register to vote.⁵¹ Many adults who might not have otherwise participated in the protest aspect of the Movement got involved when their children were arrested.⁵² In that particular march, which took place on Thursday, February 4, 173 adults, mostly the parents of the jailed students, were arrested because they “failed to disperse after warning.”⁵³ Mattie Atkins, a Movement participant, stated that after the parents were released, they marched around the courthouse seven times a day for several weeks, just as the Israelites had circled the walls

⁴⁷ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Information about the number of protestors arrested is found in “Over 700 Arrested in Demonstrations,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965. The number 700 in the title refers to arrests over the span of a week. The article specifically states that 547 marchers who “appeared to be of school age” were arrested on February 3.

⁴⁸ Mary Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. “800 More Arrested As Tension Builds” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4, 1965.

⁴⁹ “800 More Arrested As Tension Builds” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4, 1965.

⁵⁰ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Mattie Atkins, speaking at mock mass meeting at Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

⁵¹ “King Seeks Talk With LBJ: Federal Voting Law Urged,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 5, 1965.

⁵² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 138.

Mattie Atkins, speaking at mock mass meeting at Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

⁵³ “Over 700 Arrested In Demonstrations,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965. See also “State Congressmen To Visit Selma, Watch Work of ‘Rump’ Delegation,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 5, 1965.

of Jericho seven times.⁵⁴

The parents arrested on February 4 were sent to jail in Thomaston, Alabama, on the same school buses that hauled their children to jail. With only one commode to share among them, 85 women were confined to one jail cell.⁵⁵ The drinking water in the cell was placed next to the one available toilet.⁵⁶ The cell had a concrete floor, but there was no room for the women to sit down, much less lie down.⁵⁷ Once the women were released, almost all of them began to protest and attend the mass meetings. Though state troopers had not yet made their presence known in Marion, Alabama Public Safety Director Al Lingo experienced chest pains on the day that the parents were sent to jail in Selma.⁵⁸ For a few days, at least, things were quiet in Selma while Lingo was undergoing tests.

By the time of the February marches, a somewhat effective boycott of white owned businesses in the downtown area was in place.⁵⁹ Nightly mass meetings and daily marches from Zion United Methodist Church continued. On Friday, February 5, there were minor demonstrations, but no arrests.⁶⁰ After being released from a Selma jail that day, Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke to a crowd of about 350, presumably at a mass

⁵⁴ Mattie Atkins, speaking at a mock mass meeting, Zion Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author. The idea of marching around the courthouse seven times a day likely came from the Biblical account of the Israelites marching around Jericho, led by Joshua. On the seventh day, the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho seven times. When they gave a great shout, the walls of Jericho fell and the city became theirs. This likely explains why the parents walked around the courthouse seven times because, much like the walls of Jericho, the courthouse represented an impenetrable fortress that blacks could not occupy. See the book of Joshua, chapter 6.

⁵⁵ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010.

⁵⁶ Shirley Robinson, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Robinson was not arrested and was not incarcerated in the jail in Thomaston because she was only eight years old at the time of the protest. However, her aunt was arrested, and this is how she knew of the conditions in the jail.

⁵⁷ Willie Nell Avery, interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010.

⁵⁸ "Chest Pains Let Lingo Rest," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4, 1965.

⁵⁹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 139.

⁶⁰ "Over 700 Arrested in Demonstrations," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965.

meeting at Zion United Methodist Church.⁶¹ On Monday, February 8, there was a protest march which left from Zion United Methodist Church and proceeded across the street to the courthouse. When the marchers were informed “that Circuit Court was in session and they faced arrest for contempt of court, they returned to the church.” On Tuesday, February 9, “Negroes marched through the city carrying signs but no arrests were made.”⁶² On February 10, “Rainsoaked [sic] Negro demonstrators staged two kneel-ins . . . in front of city hall and in courthouse square. There were no arrests and no incidents during the brief prayer sessions. Police Chief T. O. Harris kept close watch on the proceedings, however. He bowed his head while the group prayed.”⁶³ At some point during this time, several African Americans staged a sit-in in the main courtroom upstairs in the courthouse, to protest the voting exam. Sheriff Loftis simply walked in and turned the light off in the room. The protestors left and went back to Zion United Methodist Church across the street.⁶⁴ This is the basic pattern of the marches for the two weeks between February 4 and February 18.

There was no violence and no arrests were made in the Thursday, February 11 and Friday, February 12 marches. As with the other marches, participants, mostly of school age, left Zion United Methodist Church and walked to the Perry County courthouse and Marion City Hall. The children carried signs. On Monday, February 15, about 400 adults “assembled at the church and then moved to the courthouse. There they assembled in the court room and registrars accepted applications throughout the day [while] a group of over 200 school age [sic] young people marched to the side of the courthouse, some

⁶¹ “King Seeks Talk With LBJ; Federal Voting Law Urged,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 5, 1965.

⁶² “Over 700 Arrested in Demonstrations,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 11, 1965.

⁶³ “Negroes Kneel-In On Marion Square,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 11, 1965.

⁶⁴ Mary Griffin Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

carrying signs. The march was repeated in the afternoon.⁶⁵ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., came to Perry County on the Monday, February 15, which was registration day.⁶⁶ The news cameras came with him. He walked upstairs to the main courtroom, which was full of people waiting to register. When he arrived, people began to throw their applications away. King asked the registrars several questions about the registration process, but the police chief and sheriff sensed growing tension in the room. They escorted Dr. King from the courthouse.⁶⁷ Of the 365 people in the courtroom that day, the Board took 108 applications. Many of those present were either already registered, or had already been rejected because they were illiterate or had a criminal record.⁶⁸ King later learned from the FBI that “several whites had been ready to shoot him in Marion, but there were so many people around him that they could not get a clear shot.”⁶⁹ Interestingly, though they were willing to take King’s life, they were not willing to kill bystanders.

On Tuesday, February 16, “about 100 took part in a march to the side of the courthouse. Most of the marchers appeared to be school age.”⁷⁰ For the February 17 march, “Negroes assembled once more in Zion’s Chapel [sic], then streamed out the door onto the town square to march again quietly around the white-columned courthouse

⁶⁵ “Demonstrations Are Held During Week,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 18, 1965.

⁶⁶ Though Harris’ writings do not specifically list the date, Charles Fager notes in *Selma, 1965*, 78, that the FBI later informed King that “Several whites had been ready to shoot him in Marion on February fifteenth.”

⁶⁷ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 68-69.

⁶⁸ “Why Did Violence Flare In The Darkness At Marion,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 25, 1965.

⁶⁹ Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 78. There is no mention of a planned shooting in any information from Marion sources.

⁷⁰ “Demonstrations Are Held During Week,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 18, 1965. All of the articles about the Movement activities occur “below the fold” in the local paper. The information about the marches from February 11-16 was printed in the February 18 edition of the *Marion Times-Standard*. The editor could not have known the significance of the events that would occur that evening.

almost directly facing the church itself.”⁷¹ There was singing and praying, and then the group returned to the church. There was a watchful, non-interference policy on the part of the mayor, R.L. Pegues, and Police Chief T.O. Harris, between the day of the children’s march and the night march of February 18. In his autobiography about his time as police chief during the Movement, Harris noted that the leadership in the African American community “kept making demands of one kind or the other and kept helping people to register to vote for about two weeks and were not making much progress. It was obvious they had to make some changes. They began spreading the word that they were going to make me whip one of them.”⁷² Harris felt that because there had been no arrests for two weeks and because the Board of Registrars had been registering voters, even if slowly, the leadership felt that it needed to provoke white officials to violence in order to gain attention and reignite the Movement in Perry County. If this is the case, the local Movement leaders, working with the SCLC, were following the SCLC plan in Selma as well.

The one thing that consistently defined the marches, until the night march of February 18, was a lack of violence against the protestors by law enforcement officials and the general public. Unlike Jim Clark, his contemporary in Dallas County, Sheriff Bill Loftis left the control of the marches in the city to Police Chief T.O. Harris, even when the marches took place on the courthouse square, which is technically the jurisdiction of the county sheriff. Unlike Dallas County, no evidence exists that protestors or potential voting registrants were harassed or physically threatened or assaulted in Marion.

On the morning of February 18, Albert Turner and Rev. Langford of Zion United

⁷¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 139.

⁷² Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 68.

Methodist Church had about 120 students miss school in order to march downtown. There were no adults in this march. The local police took down the names and addresses of all of the students, and Turner and Langford signed an affidavit affirming that they organized the march. Unlike the February third student march, no students were arrested.⁷³ Another 100 marched that afternoon. They soon returned to the church, but later that afternoon, 100 marched and stayed outside for two hours.⁷⁴ They would return to the square that night to attend the mass meeting at the Zion United Methodist Church to hear C.T. Vivian of the SCLC speak. While they may not have been aware of it at the time, their participation in the night march marked the first night march in Alabama. The events of that night changed the lives of African Americans in the United States forever.

Local law enforcement officials learned about the march around noon on February 18 from the news media and the FBI, which informed Harris that five Civil Rights workers were coming to Marion from Selma to show the local protestors how to put on a night march. When Harris realized that the media would be arriving in large numbers, he knew outside help was needed. Watching the members of the black community gather for the mass meeting, Harris called Montgomery to request state troopers. The police chief and the county sheriff cordoned off an area in front of city hall for the media, and put them under the protection of reserve officers. The sheriff and a group of officers were stationed at the southwest corner of the post office property, about 75 feet north of the entrance to Zion United Methodist Church. The chief was stationed at the southeast corner of the square. The rest of the officers formed a semi-circle between the sheriff and

⁷³ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 69.

⁷⁴ "Negroes Continue Demonstrations Here," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 20, 1965.

the chief.⁷⁵ If the marchers came toward either the sheriff or the chief, Harris was to make an announcement on the loud speaker mounted to his patrol car that the march was an unlawful assembly and the marchers needed to return to the church, just as they had always done.⁷⁶ The marchers would not likely move toward Harris since he was stationed on the opposite side of the square from the jail, but they would move directly toward Loftis on their way to the jail.

On the night of February 18, Rev. C.T. Vivian of SCLC arrived at Zion United Methodist Church to lead the mass meeting and night march to protest the arrest of James Orange, the SCLC organizer who had come to Marion and been arrested for contributing to the delinquency of a minor.⁷⁷ Vivian spoke to a packed crowd of 400 marchers in the church. Because they could not get inside the church building, another 100 waited outside the church for the actual march to begin. Among the possible attendees at the rally were Cager Lee, his daughter Viola Jackson, Viola's daughter, Emma Jean, and son, Jimmie Lee Jackson.⁷⁸

While night mass meetings were nothing new, all of the marches prior to February 18 took place during the day. Chief Harris was not even aware of the night march until the television crews arrived in town from Selma and informed him of the planned

⁷⁵ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 70.

⁷⁶ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 71.

⁷⁷ *c Montgomery Advertiser*, February 19, 1965.

⁷⁸ I use the term "possible" here there has been debate about which members of the Lee and Jackson family were actually at the march. The main controversy has been over the presence of Jimmie Lee Jackson. While it is known that a state trooper shot Jimmie Lee Jackson in the stomach at Mack's Cafe, there is debate about whether Jackson was already in the Cafe during the march, or whether he ran into the Cafe when the troopers began beating marchers.

Most of the sources of information state that Jackson was at the march. One example is Charles E. Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 74. Shirley Robinson, a Marion resident, noted that Jackson was already at the Cafe when the march started, and did not attend the march. Interview by author, Marion, AL, February 12, 2010. Mary Griffin Auburtin, who was Circuit Clerk at the time of the shooting, also stated that Jackson was not demonstrating, but was at a stool at the bar in Mack's Cafe. When the troopers entered, he allegedly broke a beer bottle and charged them. Interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

march.⁷⁹ While black residents of Marion knew of the march through announcements from church pulpits and the on-going mass meetings, whites were informed of the march by the arrival of state troopers from Dallas County. As Roy Barnett, a white business owner noted, he found out about the march when a friend from Selma called and said they heard on the radio that troopers were headed to Marion because of race riots. The white business owner later recalled that there were no riots taking place at the time, but just in case violence might occur, he decided to head down to his store across the street from the courthouse for the evening. He sat in his store that night, but could not see the church or the march because the courthouse blocked the view between the drug store and the church. The state troopers formed a line between the marchers and the courthouse, so the marchers were confined to a small area. When the lights went out on the square, however, Barnett realized that something was going on. He left his store in time to see a car back down the steep hill next to the jailhouse, going at least 50 miles per hour in reverse.⁸⁰

There are no consistent eyewitness accounts of the night march that took place on February 18. This is largely due to the fact that the march took place at night, and once some of the lights were turned off downtown, it was hard for anyone to accurately see what was going on. While there were at least two national news crews at the march, the lenses on all of the cameras were spray-painted black and subsequently broken, most likely by white bystanders. The reporters themselves sustained severe injuries. Police Chief T.O. Harris had specifically told the reporters to stay in an area he set aside for them in front of City Hall, but they did not heed his advice. While one of the injured

⁷⁹ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 70.

⁸⁰ Roy Barnett, interview by author, Marion, AL, May 10, 2010.

news people did not need treatment, Richard Valerianie “had a cut on his head that required sutures and further treatment. He would not go to a Doctor [sic] unless I [Harris] carried him. I explained that I could not leave but assigned a bank vice president and a car dealer who were good friends of mine to take him to the hospital and assured him he would be safe in their hands.”⁸¹ Valerianie (Valeriani) had been beaten with a wood club by a man wearing a hat and a tan coat. Six stitches were required to close his wound. State troopers apparently stood by and watched the assault on the news crews and did not intervene.⁸² Three local white men were arrested in connection with the attacks on the newsmen by local officers who came to the aid of the newsmen and arrested Sam Dozier and two accomplices.⁸³

While multiple versions of the events of that night exist, Chief Harris’s version of the night’s proceedings is succinct. As the marchers came out of the church, they turned right on the sidewalk in front of the church and walked toward Sheriff Loftis. Harris announced that the march was unlawful and the marchers needed to return to the church. Harris made the announcement three times. There was a surge forward and then a command was heard from within the group that they should return to the church. At that point, the flood lights came on in front of city hall and the reporters began taking pictures with flash bulbs. Lingo ordered the lights turned out, and he threatened to shoot them

⁸¹ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 72.

⁸² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 141.

⁸³ “Negroes Continue Demonstrations Here,” *Marion Times-Standard*, February 25, 1965.

“Demonstration Postponed in Marion,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 20, 1965. The demonstration referred to in the title of the article was a demonstration scheduled for Friday, February 20, but Albert Turner said the Friday night demonstration was cancelled, and “night marches had been ruled out ‘since last night,’ referring to an incident Thursday night in which one Negro was shot, several hurt and three newsmen and one state trooper injured.”

There were a total of eight people injured that required medical assistance – 3 newsmen, Jackson, his mother and grandfather, 1 trooper, 1 officer, and two other demonstrators. “King Says Montgomery Again Target of March,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 23, 1965.

out. The lights went off, but it is uncertain if other lights also went off, as some have claimed. Harris noticed that the five Movement workers who had come over from Selma that day were on the front steps of the church encouraging the marchers to go back to the street, and refusing to let them back in the church. Because about 100 or so marchers could not get back into the church, they ran around the south side of the building along Alabama Highway 14 and ducked into the cafe behind the church. One source claims that the marchers then obtained bottles and bricks and began throwing them at officers,⁸⁴ while other reports say the demonstrators either ducked into the cafe to hide, or only threw bottles to protect themselves. At least one trooper and a local police officer were hospitalized with injuries. The trooper's injury required 12 stitches to close a head wound, and the local officer was hospitalized overnight due to a head injury.⁸⁵

Harris recalled hearing a gun shot, and said that a short time later, "a black man came around the church and fell near me. I learned that he had been shot. I called two deputies nearby and told them to bring a car and take this man to the hospital. . . . They carried him to the hospital in Marion where a doctor gave him a shot and called an ambulance to take him to Selma where they were better prepared to care for this type of injury."⁸⁶ Harris later learned that the young black man's name was Jimmie Lee Jackson. According to Harris, "An investigation revealed that some state troopers had followed the people who had not gone back into the church to the cafe back of the church. The troopers were standing in the street in front of the cafe when Jimmie Lee threw a drink bottle and hit a trooper in the forehead. The trooper standing beside him raised his gun

⁸⁴ "Negroes Continue Demonstrations Here," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 25, 1965.

⁸⁵ "Negroes Continue Demonstrations Here," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 25, 1965.

⁸⁶ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 71.

See also "Report From Washington by Fifth District Congressman Armistead Selden," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 25, 1965.

and shot Jimmie Lee.”⁸⁷ Harris commented that, although he was not trying to put the blame for what happened on any person, he did feel that Marion would have had “less trouble if Col. Lingo had not showed up.”⁸⁸ James Bevel of SCLC corroborated Harris’s assertion, noting that he blamed “the State Police for the incidents in Perry County.”⁸⁹

Another version of the events of that night appeared in Jack Mendelsohn’s book *Martyrs: Sixteen Who Gave Their Lives for Racial Justice*, which was released the year after the march. Though Mendelsohn was not present at the march, his account of the march revealed that things proceeded very differently from Chief Harris’s rather calm recollection of the night’s events. Mendelsohn states that C.T. Vivian, Rev. Lionel Langford, and Albert Turner called for a march to the jail to protest Orange’s arrest. After gathering at Zion Church and singing freedom songs, the black marchers emerged from the church around 9:30 pm., walking two abreast out the front door of the church and turning right on the sidewalk in front of the church, toward the jail. The sidewalk was lined with helmeted state troopers and local “deputized sheriff’s men.” Mendelsohn notes that Chief Harris did make an announcement over a loud speaker that the march was “an unlawful assembly” and the marchers were ordered to disperse and go home or go back into the church. By this time, however, over 100 people were on the sidewalks and the line stretched back to the church door. The line stopped moving, but at that moment, Mendelsohn notes that “all the street lights in the square went out. Reporters, who had been confined to an area near the quaint, cottage-style city hall, across the street from the church and in the opposite direction from the march, could just make out

⁸⁷ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 72.

⁸⁸ Harris, *Law Enforcement*, 71.

⁸⁹ “No Barriers To Voting Here, Rights Advisory Group Told,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 26, 1965. Bevel blamed “the sheriff’s department in Dallas County for the violence there.”

Troopers [sic] struggling with someone at the head of the line.” The “struggle” as Mendelsohn labeled it, was actually an attack by state troopers on Rev. James Dobyne, a local Baptist minister who was leading the line of marchers.

Mattie Atkins, a local participant, noted that because C.T. Vivian had been in an altercation with Jim Clark in Selma prior to the night march in Marion, he was sent out the back door of the church as the marchers began heading out the front door, so that he could avoid the state troopers. At the same time, Albert Turner and Rev. J.T. [?] Johnson went out a door on the north side of the church so they could quickly move to the front of the line.⁹⁰ As Turner and Johnson headed to the front of the line, Rev. Dobyne, after hearing Harris’ command to disperse and return to the church, knelt down at the front of the line, which had reached the post office, to pray. According to Dobyne, “I was one of the leaders of the attempted march. . . . We were stopped by the Troopers and I knelt down to pray. While I was praying, a Trooper struck me across the head with his stick, opening a bloody wound. They drug me off and carried me to jail, beating me all the way. I was charged with unlawful assembly. I kept praying all the way to the jail. They kept telling me to shut up, but I kept praying. When I got to jail, the blood was streaming down my face like water. Someone at the jail said, ‘You black bastard, you ought to bleed to death.’”⁹¹

According to Mendelsohn, the “clubbing of Dobyne set off a general assault by

⁹⁰ Mattie Atkins speaking at a mock mass meeting, Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

The Rev. Johnson that is referred to is possibly S.L. Johnson. He was listed as an initial SCLC contact in 1962. He was pastor of Oak Grove M.E. Church until 1963, when he and his wife, Virginia, moved to Choctaw County. Virginia taught at least three citizenship schools in Perry County in 1963. The other possibility is that the reference is Rev. J.T. Johnson. J.T. Johnson gave the opening prayer at Jimmie Jackson’s funeral at Zion Methodist Church in Marion. See Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 149 and Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 85.

⁹¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 140.

police and panic among the Negroes, who milled around screaming and struggling to protect themselves or to push their way back into the church. Reporters and photographers broke from their restricted area and streamed across the street toward the melee, but at that point a crowd of white men, who had been standing around the corner, rushed to the attack. When a television cameraman turned on his lights, his equipment was smeared with black paint. . . . Pete Fisher, a cameraman for United Press International, was slow to move, and a middle-aged man in white work clothes, knocked him to the ground, while two other men grabbed his camera and stomped it to bits.”⁹²

Those still inside the church could hear the commotion outside. Albert Turner ran back in the church and met Mattie Atkins as she was about to come back in the front door. He told her not to come back in.⁹³ Fellow marchers, such as Lee Jones, from Marion, were coming back into the church bleeding and with knots on their heads. Jones was struck just after he heard Police Chief Harris instruct the troopers to “Get ‘em back in there, get ‘em back in there [the church]”. As Jones reached up to grab the stick of a trooper who was about to hit him, another trooper struck him across the forehead.⁹⁴ Turner calmed those in the church as well as those coming back into the church with injuries. He then walked outside and addressed the troopers, asking them to let those in the church that were injured leave in peace.⁹⁵ It is not clear how much the violence had subsided at this point and if any of the troopers could actually hear Turner.

Any marchers that could not get into the church ran around the south side of the

⁹² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 140.

⁹³ Mattie Atkins, speaking at a mock mass meeting, Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

⁹⁴ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 142.

⁹⁵ Mattie Atkins, speaking at a mock mass meeting, Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

building, between the church and Alabama Highway 14. Della Maynard, who was 14 at the time, had already been arrested and sent to the prison camp in Selma where she had slept on a cement floor, so she was not afraid of being arrested. She had worked her way to the front of the march line just in time to see Rev. Dobyne get hit in the head and to feel the line begin to retreat. She ran around the side of the church and was caught on the elbow by a mounted trooper on horseback. She ran to the cafe and saw Cager Lee sitting by the door of the cafe. Jimmie Lee Jackson tried to protect him and was chased up the street back toward the post office, where he was shot in the stomach by a trooper.⁹⁶ Her version is similar to that of Harris', in which Jackson is shot running away from the Café.

According to the report given to the FBI by George Baker, a white college student from Downers Grove, Illinois, who had been working for two weeks in Selma and had come to Marion that day as one of five people assigned to plan the march, Dobyne and the group had followed the prescribed plan as it was discussed. Baker's job had been to organize the march line. Once the attacks began, three troopers surrounded him and began beating him with their hands. They then took him towards jail, but once they got away from the crowd, they began beating him with their sticks on his thigh and back. At the jail, they slammed him into the metal fence surrounding the jail courtyard. Once inside, they slammed him into a brick wall. He was shoved down the hall and let go, and immediately struck in the back of the head with a club. With a bloody, gaping wound in the back of his head, he was shoved into a jail cell. He was retained without medical attention until he was released on \$75 bond the next afternoon. His head wound

⁹⁶ Della Maynard, speaking at a mock mass meeting, Zion United Methodist Church, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author. Maynard's account differs slightly from Jackson's own account of his shooting, because he states the he was shot in the cafe.

required seven stitches.⁹⁷

George Sawyer, who had to wait outside the church for the march to begin, tried to leave the scene, but was chased down by troopers over two blocks away from the church. In an affidavit to the Inter-Citizens Committee, he stated that he was beaten and fell down into a dark, deep ravine near the Piggly Wiggly. This was one of the ravines that had lured Michael Muckle to settle Marion 145 years earlier. Sawyer groped along in the dark and followed the stream at the bottom of the ravine to safety.⁹⁸

Mendelsohn asserts that Viola Jackson grabbed her daughter Emma Jean, who was ten years younger than her brother, and ran out the door into the street toward Mack's Cafe, while Cager Lee, her father, slipped out the back door and into the yard between the church and the cafe. Mendelsohn contradicts himself however when he also states that Cager Lee was already standing in the backyard of the church. When the turmoil began, "he could hear the shouting and cursing of the police, the thuds of the clubs, and the screaming of the Negroes. His first thought was to get back into the church, but before he had a chance to do so . . . a blue-helmeted officer ran up and struck him on the back of the head with his stick. 'I went down to the ground, and while I was trying to get up, he kicked me twice. I got up and they pushed me out to the sidewalk and knocked me down again. Then one of them said, 'G.D., this is old Cager, don't hit him anymore.' At that moment, Lee realized that the men hitting him were not Troopers, but local whites who knew him, but in the darkness he could not recognize them."⁹⁹

Mendelsohn continues Cager Lee's story by noting that after Lee found his grandson,

⁹⁷ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 141-142.

⁹⁸ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 143.

⁹⁹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 143.

Jimmie Lee Jackson, in Mack's Cafe, Jimmie Lee helped his bent, bleeding grandfather out the cafe door and toward the sidewalk. At that moment, troopers rushed the cafe, pushing everyone back inside. Normareen Shaw, the owner of the tiny 20' x 40' café, stated that troopers chased people into the cafe, and then came in and told her to close the door, but more troopers rushed in before she could do so. She saw them beating Cager Lee in the kitchen. They searched her purse and found a gun. She was taken to jail, barefoot and without a coat, for carrying a concealed weapon.¹⁰⁰

Neither Cager Lee nor Viola Jackson saw Jimmie get shot. Both saw him beaten, and both were beaten themselves and sustained severe injuries. Lee did remember seeing his grandson run past him up the hill toward the church, with Jimmie Lee insisting that he had not hit anyone, which corroborates Harris and Maynard's version of events. The most commonly accepted version of Jimmie Lee Jackson's shooting was provided by Wilson Harris, a young black man that was at the cafe. He stated that when Viola Jackson was struck and knocked to the floor, "Jimmy [sic] Lee lunged at the trooper and was struck across the nose with a club, the blow sending him to the floor. As Jimmy tried to get up one Trooper shoved him against the cigarette machine, and another, standing near the counter, fired into Jimmy's stomach from a distance of about five feet." Harris stated that he did not see Jimmie Lee Jackson throw a bottle at the trooper.¹⁰¹

Testifying under oath three weeks later, Al Lingo conceded that a trooper shot Jimmie Lee Jackson, but Lingo did not identify the trooper. Blanchard McLeod, the prosecutor, vowed to convene a grand jury in March and let them decide if the trooper

¹⁰⁰ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 144.

¹⁰¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 145. Jackson also stated that he did not throw a bottle. The examination at Good Samaritan Hospital noted that the powder burns on Jackson's stomach indicated that the gun was fired 4-5 feet from his stomach, which corroborates Harris's assertion.

acted in self-defense, as he claimed, or if he should be indicted. McLeod suffered a massive stroke, however, and the grand jury was delayed.¹⁰² The jury ultimately decided not to bring charges against the trooper, whose identity remained a mystery until 2004, when James Bonard Fowler admitted in an interview for the *Anniston Star* that he shot Jackson in self-defense.¹⁰³ Fowler recalled the events of February 18 differently from accounts of Movement participants, including Jackson himself. The trooper insists that “Jimmie Lee Jackson was not murdered. He was trying to kill me, and I have no doubt in my mind that under the emotional situation at the time, that if he would have gotten complete control of my pistol, that he would have killed me or shot me. That’s why my conscience is clear.”¹⁰⁴ In support of the trooper’s claim that he fired in self-defense, Col. Al Lingo visited Jackson in the hospital and served him with a warrant charging him with assault and battery with intent to murder an officer.¹⁰⁵

Jimmie Lee told his own story as well, while he was in Good Samaritan hospital in Selma. He was admitted at 11:55 p.m. on the night of February 18. An ambulance from Tubbs Funeral Home in Marion delivered Jackson to the “Good Samaritan Hospital [which] is operated primarily for Negroes by the Roman Catholic Sisters of St. Joseph,

¹⁰² Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 145-6.

¹⁰³ *Anniston Star* information found in Robbie Brown, “45 Years Later, an Apology and 6 Months,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2010. [Http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal) (Accessed September 29, 2011). A version of the article appeared in the November 16, 2010 print edition of the *New York Times*, on page A14 of the New York edition.

¹⁰⁴ *Anniston Star* information found in Robbie Brown, “45 Years Later, an Apology and 6 Months,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2010. [Http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal) (Accessed September 29, 2011). A version of the article appeared in the November 16, 2010 print edition of the *New York Times*, on page A14 of the New York edition.

¹⁰⁵ “King Says Montgomery Again Target Of March,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 23, 1965. See also, Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 80.

under the supervision of Father John P. Crowley of the Edmuntine Fathers.”¹⁰⁶

According to the hospital records of Jackson’s statement, Jackson said he was shot by a state trooper, but could not identify which one. He noted that he had attended a mass meeting in Marion and stopped at the cafe where a riot erupted between the patrons and the troopers. Jackson said a trooper accused him of throwing a bottle, but he had not done so.¹⁰⁷

On February 25, a day before his death, Jackson provided more details to his lawyer, Oscar W. Adams, Jr., of Birmingham. Jackson told Adams and another attorney, Demetrius Newton, that when he saw his mother being “struck by a trooper, he ‘couldn’t stand it, ‘cause Mother wasn’t doing anything.’ He said he remembered having a bottle, but that if he used it at all, and he wasn’t sure, it must have been after he himself was clubbed.” Jackson continued by asserting that as he was thrown against a cigarette machine, he was shot by a trooper, but he didn’t realize what had happened until he fell to the ground from repeated blows by troopers. He continued, ““they were just clustered all up on my head and back and when they did let me get out of there, they followed me clean on up to the bus station [located on the southwest corner of the courthouse square at the intersection of Washington and Jefferson Streets] . . . they beat me up the street.”” Jackson ran out of the cafe and through a line of troopers who beat him as he tried to find his car. Because he could not find it, he went toward the bus station, one block west of the church at the southwest corner of Washington and Jefferson Streets.¹⁰⁸

Though the route from Marion to Selma usually takes 30-40 minutes, Jackson

¹⁰⁶ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 146.

¹⁰⁷ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 146.

¹⁰⁸ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 146 and 147.

arrived at Good Samaritan more than two hours after he was shot. Surgery was soon performed by two surgeons, one black and one white. Though a spokesperson originally asserted that Jackson was brought to Good Samaritan because the hospital in Perry County refused to treat him, the hospital later recanted that assertion once the head of the Perry County hospital noted that they could not perform surgery because they did not have enough blood for a transfusion.¹⁰⁹ Though there were 18 black patients in the Perry County Hospital at the time of the shooting, blacks may not have immediately taken Jackson to the local hospital, believing that those injured in Civil Rights demonstrations might be refused care.¹¹⁰ The two hour delay in treatment may have contributed to the infection that Jackson developed in the following days.

Powder burns on Jackson's stomach indicated that the bullet that entered his stomach was fired at point blank range. The trooper who shot Jackson was no more than four or five feet away from Jackson. The victim also had numerous bruises and a laceration on his scalp.¹¹¹ Though Jackson did fairly well after his surgery, Dr. William Dinkins, his physician, noted that he was stable, but his situation was not improving.¹¹² When Martin Luther King visited Jackson at the hospital on February 22, he noted that Jackson was still in critical condition, and did not know that his mother and grandfather

¹⁰⁹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 147.

See also "Report From Washington by Fifth District Congressman Armistead Selden," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 25, 1965. Selden notes that Jackson was attended at Perry County Hospital by two white physicians and was rushed to Selma because there was not an adequate supply of blood available at the Perry County hospital.

The nurse who performed transfusions was also out of town the night of the shooting, and she often blamed herself for Jackson's death. She had mentioned this to several people in town, but she passed away before the author began writing this work, so her name cannot be included.

¹¹⁰ For the number of people in the care of the Perry County Hospital, see *Marion Times-Standard*, February 18, 1965.

¹¹¹ "Youth Shot in Melee Said Still Critical," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 21, 1965.

¹¹² "Youth Shot in Melee Said Still Critical," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 21, 1965.

had also been hospitalized with injuries from the demonstration.¹¹³

On February 25, Jackson began to have difficulty breathing. When doctors opened his stomach to see what was wrong, they discovered a massive, overwhelming infection.¹¹⁴ Jackson slipped into shock, and died of peritonitis at 8:25 a.m. on the morning of February 26.¹¹⁵ Rufus Head, with the Alabama Bureau of Investigation, was in the room when the autopsy was performed. Even though the hospital staff had tried to clean out the infection to save Jackson's life, Head said the smell when they cut him open for the autopsy was awful.¹¹⁶ Jackson's body was literally rotten inside.

There were two services held for Jimmie Lee Jackson on March 3. The funeral in Selma was held at Brown Chapel. Rev. Ralph Abernathy noted that Jackson had joined the ranks of martyrs such as Crispus Attucks, Abraham Lincoln and Medgar Evers as a hero. In imagery befitting a martyr, Abernathy declared that those at the service were "gathered around the bier of the first casualty of the Black Belt demonstrations."¹¹⁷ When the service ended, more than three thousand people walked past Jackson's coffin.¹¹⁸ Those who remained outside the church held signs that said "Racist [sic] Killed Our Brother."¹¹⁹

That afternoon, though Jackson was a member and deacon of St. James Baptist

¹¹³ "King Says Montgomery Again Target of March," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 23, 1965.

¹¹⁴ Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 81.

¹¹⁵ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 148.

¹¹⁶ Mary Griffin Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009. Auburtin was not the witness, but an investigator who was present told her about the incident.

¹¹⁷ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 148. Considering the protests and the long-entrenched system of segregation that existed in the region, it is interesting to note that Jackson's death in 1965 was the first in the Black Belt. It would soon be followed, however, by the death of Rev. James Reeb, Viola Liuzzo, and Rev. Jonathan Daniels. Reeb and Liuzzo's deaths were directly linked to the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson via the Selma to Montgomery march.

¹¹⁸ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 148.

¹¹⁹ Photo taken by UPI, in the possession of the author.

Church, a funeral was held at the Zion Methodist Church on the square in Marion. The church was the heart of the Movement in Marion and played a pivotal role in the chaos that led to Jackson's death. The funeral was attended by John Lewis of SNCC, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Dr. Martin Luther King and Rev. Andrew Young.¹²⁰ Viola Jackson, still bruised from the night march of February 18, sat utterly still at the Selma service, but wept quietly at the Marion service.¹²¹

A light rain fell on the procession as it moved into the church. Four hundred filled the space inside, while another 600 stood outside in the rain. Rev. J.T. Johnson, who was possibly one of the leaders at the night march of February 18, opened the service by praying, "Our Father, we pray for the policemen of this town and this state, who would rather see blood in the streets and a man shot down than sit down and talk."¹²² John Lewis continued by saying "We must recognize the fact that the evil climate created by men like Gov. Wallace and Sheriff Jim Clark was responsible for the death of Jimmy [sic] Jackson."¹²³

The words of Dr. Martin Luther King were especially poignant. King asked who killed Jimmie Lee Jackson. His response to his own question placed the blame on "the brutality of every sheriff who practiced lawlessness in the name of law. He was murdered by the irresponsibility of every politician from governors on down who has fed his constituents the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism. He was murdered by the timidity of a Federal Government that is willing to spend millions of dollars a day to defend freedom in Vietnam but cannot protect the rights of its citizens at

¹²⁰ Robbie Brown, "45 Years Later, an Apology and 6 Months," *New York Times*, November 15, 2010. [Http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/16/us/16fowler.html?emc=etal) (Accessed September 29, 2011).

¹²¹ Selma information – Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 148. Marion service – Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 84.

¹²² Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 85.

¹²³ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 149.

home. He was murdered by the indifference of every white minister of the gospel who has remained silent behind the safe security of his stained-glass windows. And he was murdered by the cowardice of every Negro who passively accepts the evils of segregation and stands on the sidelines in the struggle for justice. . . . Jimmy [sic] Lee Jackson's death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly to make the American dream a reality. His death must prove that unmerited suffering does not go unredeemed. We must not be bitter and we must not harbor ideas of retaliating with violence. We must not lose faith in our white brothers."¹²⁴ The service concluded with the singing of "We Shall Overcome." Most of the mourners walked or drove behind the hearse down Alabama Highway 14, past Mack's Cafe, where Jackson was shot. They proceeded, in the rain, to the small wooded dirt cemetery on Alabama Highway 183, several miles east of town, that became Jackson's final resting place.

On Monday night, February 22, Dr. Martin Luther King announced that there would be a large demonstration in Montgomery to take their grievances to the capitol steps. On February 25, the night before Jackson's death, Rev. James Bevel, Alabama Project Director for SCLC, expanded on that idea and came up with a plan to march from Marion, where Jackson had been shot, through Selma, where Sheriff Clark had jailed them, down US Hwy. 80 through Lowndes County where no blacks, in a county with a black population that was over 80%, were registered to vote, to the capitol itself, where Wallace could not ignore them.¹²⁵ They would make their cries for justice known, while imploring the nation to protect them from state-sanctioned brutality. Surely the nation

¹²⁴ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 149-150.

¹²⁵ Fager, *Selma, 1965*, 81. Some sources assert that Bevel announced the idea of taking Jackson's body to Montgomery while walking behind the hearse that was carrying Jackson's body to the cemetery. Wayne Greenhaw, "Requiem for Jimmie Lee Jackson" *Alabama Heritage* 101 (Summer 2011), 24.

could not ignore them. When Jackson died the next morning, Bevel announced that four days after the funeral, which was to be held on March 3, the march would take place.¹²⁶

In Perry County, credit for the idea of taking Jackson's body to Montgomery and laying it on the capitol steps at the feet of George Wallace is given to Lusa (Lucy) Foster, the "mama" of the movement in Perry County.¹²⁷ When the group realized that physically taking the body to Montgomery was impractical, they decided to move ahead with the march. Regardless of the origin of the idea, just a few hours after Jackson's funeral, Dr. Martin Luther King announced that there would be a march from Selma to Montgomery, beginning on Sunday, March 7.¹²⁸ The rest, as they say, is history.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 150.

¹²⁷ Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, Alabama, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author. For more information on the "mamas" of the Movement, see Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970*.

¹²⁸ There is debate about whether King or Bevel announced the March.

¹²⁹ The Selma to Montgomery March has been thoroughly documented in hundreds of books and articles, so it will not be thoroughly examined in this work. For more information on the March, see among others: J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Frye Gaillard, *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement That Changed America* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004); Wally G. Vaughn, et al., *The Selma Campaign, 1963-1965: The Decisive Battle of the Civil Rights Movement* (Dover, MA: Majority Press, 2006); David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978); Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); and Laurie Collier Hillstrom, *The Voting Rights Act of 1965* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2009).

Chapter 6

To “Demand Loyalty and Unity Throughout the Negro Electorate”: The Political Landscape of Perry County Since 1965

As the marchers passed out of Brown Chapel in Selma on Sunday, March 7, 1965, to protest the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson and their treatment by the government of Alabama, they could not have known that they were marching into history. Walking two by two through the housing projects toward the Alabama River, John Lewis and Hosea Williams led the group. Behind Lewis and Williams were Albert Turner of Perry County of SCLC wearing a white cap, and Bob Mantz of SNCC from Lowndes County. Topping the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Lewis, Williams, Turner and Mantz faced a sea of blue helmeted state troopers and Dallas County officers wielding bats. When the march line stopped at the bottom of the bridge, they were given a minute to turn around. Instead, they knelt to pray. The troopers, carrying clubs and wearing gas masks, were ordered to advance on the unarmed marchers wearing church clothes and carrying pocket books. The four men at the front of the line felt the full brunt of the attack by state troopers on horseback, swinging clubs and throwing tear gas. Turner recalled his experience on Bloody Sunday, noting that he ran back toward the bridge, he fell down, he ran, he fell

down, and he kept running until he got back to the church where he was safe. Just as with the Movement itself, Turner and the blacks in Perry County pushed for their rights, stumbled against segregation, pushed some more, stalled, and kept pushing until they gained their rights.

The third, and successful attempt to march to Montgomery in memory of Jimmie Lee Jackson and in protest against the treatment blacks received at the hands of the very government that was supposed to protect them, took place from March 21-25. Cager Lee, Jimmy Lee Jackson's grandfather, began the final march from Selma to Montgomery on March 21, only a few paces behind Dr. Martin Luther King. As the marchers first walked out of Selma, Lee linked arms with a Methodist bishop from California and John Lewis of SNCC. After he crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he agreed to ride the rest of the way in a car.¹ At the end of the first day, the 600 or so marchers had covered seven miles. Most of the marchers then returned by train to Selma. The courts allowed no more than 300 marchers to walk on the highway in Lowndes County because the road narrowed to only two lanes. Those that were allowed to continue the march slept on the David Hall Farm. The 280 marchers that were chosen to walk the stretch through Lowndes County were the only marchers to walk the entire route. Of that number 89 were from Perry County, including Albert Turner, who proudly boasted in a speech at the end of the march that he had walked over 50 miles.²

As over 25,000 marchers descended on Montgomery for the last day of the March, Cager Lee was once again walking the route. After the original 300 were allowed to enter the city, Lee, along with Rev. Martin Luther King, Ralph Bunche, A. Philip

¹ Mendelsohn, *Martyrs*, 152.

² Renata Adler, "Letter From Selma," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 1965, 124, 156.

Randolph, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Charles Gomillion, and Rev. F.D. Reese, as well as Rev. Orloff Miller, who had been beaten along with James Reeb, walked into Montgomery.³ Five months later, Cager Lee registered to vote with the help of federal registrars.⁴

Immediately after Jackson's death, African Americans in Perry County escalated their attempts to register to vote. On February 28, 100 blacks registered to vote when the Board of Registrars met.⁵ Long-time board chair John Allen Blackburn had a heart attack on February 2, just one day after the registrars had worked late into the night processing the applications of 119 potential voters.⁶ When the Board met on February 28, Blackburn had been replaced on the board by Joseph T. Scarbrough of Uniontown.⁷ The Board of Registrars met on March 15, 1965, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm on the second floor of the courthouse.⁸ They received 112 applications.⁹ This pattern continued through the summer of 1965.

In August 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. Among other things it called for voting referees to register applicants in counties that showed obvious discrimination based on race in the application process. The effect on voter registration

³ Renata Adler, "A Letter From Selma," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 1965, 153.

⁴ Letter from Ben Owens to Randolph Blackwell, August 23, 1965. Sent from Marion, AL, to SCLC headquarters in Atlanta. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 146, folder 5.

⁵ "Registration Drive Continues Here," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 4, 1965.

⁶ "Why did Violence Flare In The Darkness At Marion," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 15, 1965.

⁷ "Scarbrough Named As County Registrar," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 4, 1965.

⁸ "Board of Registrars Will Meet March 15," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 11, 1965.

⁹ "112 Appear Before Registrars Monday," *Marion Times-Standard*, March 18, 1965. An adjacent article, "Memorial Service Held Here for Reeb," noted that "More than 400 Negroes gathered at the Zion Methodist Church here Sunday for a memorial service for the Rev. James Reeb, of Boston, Mass. Rev. Reeb lost his life in Selma last week following demonstrations there." The inclusion of an item of interest to the black community, which has no bearing on the white community, is unusual and shows a shift in the attitude of the editor.

in Perry County was immediate. Federal examiners arrived in Perry County on August 18, 1965.¹⁰ On August 22, 1965, on their first day at work registering black voters in the county, Cager Lee, the grandfather that Jimmie Lee Jackson had been trying to protect the night he was shot registered to vote.¹¹ The Federal government registered an estimated 165,000 voters in Alabama by October of that year.¹²

Many blacks needed assistance with the voting process early on because not only were there few blacks with experience in the voting process, but many of the newly registered blacks had received a substandard education that made the voting process almost beyond comprehension.¹³ As previously mentioned, the SCLC began the Voters Education Project (VEP) to assist newly registered voters and Perry County was one of the sites chosen to receive VEP workers and monetary assistance.

In an effort to capitalize on their growing voting power, several black candidates ran for office in the May 3, 1966 primary elections. There were 59 black candidates for offices in Alabama that year. Of that number, nine (15%) were in Perry County. Only Barbour County, with 14 African Americans running for office, had a larger number. Pat Davis ran for sheriff, Rev. Obie Scott, Jr. (Coretta Scott King's brother) ran for tax collector, Willie Lester Martin ran for County Commissioner, Isom Watkins ran for County Commissioner, Albert Turner ran for state representative, Lusa Foster (the "momma" of the local movement) ran for a seat on the Democratic Executive Committee,

¹⁰ "Federal Examiners in the South," 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 165, folder 11 - "Field Reports, Ala. Sept-Oct 1965."

¹¹ Letter from Ben Owens in Marion, AL, to Randolph Blackwell, SCLC Headquarters, Atlanta, GA, August 23, 1965. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 146, folder 5 - "Direct Action Files."

¹² "Federal Examiners in the South," 2-3. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 165, folder 11 - "Field Reports, Ala. Sept-Oct 1965."

¹³ Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally, Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, AL, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

Rev. Liona Langford (of Zion United Methodist Church) ran for a seat on the Board of Education, and Raphael Nelson ran for a seat on the Democratic Executive Committee, as did Andrew Hayden, who later became mayor of Uniontown.¹⁴

Hosea Williams formed the Confederation of Alabama Political Organizations (COAPO) in February 1966 to “rid Alabama’s body politic of racism, whereby an electorate could vote for a candidate on the basis of how he deals with issues involving human dignity rather than emotions.”¹⁵ COAPO served as the gatekeeper, to decide which black candidates would run for office. The organization was constructed to “demand loyalty and unity throughout the Negro electorate.”¹⁶ The organization’s “sole intent is to mold the Negro vote into a political bloc and insure support of both Negro and white candidates concerned about just rights for Alabama’s Negro communities.”¹⁷ Williams asserted that COAPO was the first time “a people’s organization has been formed on a non-partisan basis to protect and guide Negro voters.”¹⁸ Though it was non-partisan in its founding, the bloc vote soon became the voting tool of black politicians who ran almost solely on the Democratic ticket. To maintain their political control, black

¹⁴ “Alabama Candidates Running For Public Office in the May Primaries,” SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 165, folder 10 - “Field Reports, Ala., April – August 1965.” It is questionable as to whether the folder, or the document itself, was mislabeled and should have been labeled 1966 instead. The paper itself did not have a date.

An SCLC publication entitled the *SCLC Newsletter* III, no. 2 (March-April 1966), 3, notes that the Democratic primary is set for May 3, and Patt J. Davis was running for sheriff of Perry County. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 51, folder 2. It is likely that the earlier document mentioned in this note was misfiled. Also, SCLC Papers, box 50, folder 28, contains a list titled “Candidates who Participated in the Historic May 3, 1966 Primary.” The exact list of candidates is listed on this document.

¹⁵ Coalition of Alabama Political Organizations, 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 28.

¹⁶ Coalition of Alabama Political Organizations, 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 28.

¹⁷ Coalition of Alabama Political Organizations, 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 50, folder 28. See also *SCLC Newsletter* III, no. 2 (March-April 1966), 7. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 51, folder 2.

¹⁸ *SCLC Newsletter* III, no. 2 (March-April 1966), 7. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 51, folder 2.

politicians began handing out sample ballots that instructed black bloc voters to vote the straight Democratic ticket.

The efforts of SCLC, COAPO and the results of the Voting Rights Act were apparent less than a year after Johnson signed the Act. Due to the efforts of SCLC, more than 200,000 of the state's 250,000 registered black voters cast a ballot in the May 3, 1966 primary. More than half of the 106,000 federally registered voters in four states were registered in Alabama. In less than a year, black voters outnumbered white voters in 15 Alabama counties, all of which were in the Black Belt.

As part of their effort to secure a place in the political and judicial system, a suit was filed in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Alabama (Northern Division) by "Albert Turner, Patt J. Davis (who ran for sheriff in 1966), James Carter, Robert Billingsley, Reece [sic] E. Billingsley [sic] (who became the first African American elected to the Perry County Commission), Willie N[ell] Avery (who later became the voter registrar), Lawrence C. Johnson, Willis M. McMurry, William Oakes, and Spencer Hayne, Jr. "for themselves, jointly and severally, and for all others similarly situated," against V.K. Spencer, Robert Woodson, and C.C. Hughey, as members of the Jury Commission of Perry County. The purpose of the suit, and similar suits filed using the exact same language in several Alabama counties such as Sumter County, accused the jury commission of violating the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.¹⁹ The plaintiffs sought

¹⁹Copy of filing in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Alabama (Northern Division). Albert Turner, Patt J. Davis, James Carter, Robert Billingsley, Reece [sic] E. Billingsley [sic], Willie N[ell] Avery, Lawrence C. Johnson, Willis M. McMurry, William Oakes, and Spencer Hayne, Jr. "for themselves, jointly and severally, and for all others similarly situated." Plaintiffs, against V.K.

common relief against the commissions “systematic exclusion of Negroes from service upon the juries in the Circuit Court for the Fourth Judicial Circuit of Alabama (Perry County).²⁰ Because jury rolls are pulled from voter registration rolls, this successful outcome of this suit would be a benchmark for the emergence of a strong African American voter base.

In 1976, Reese Billingslea became the first African-American elected to serve on the Perry County Commission.²¹ He served two terms and is remembered for doing a good job.²² He was not reelected to a third term because he did not have the endorsement of the Perry County Civic League. In an affidavit read before a Congressional hearing in 1986, Billingslea stated that he was challenged by Cecil Howard, a black man, in 1984. During the campaign, he was informed by his supporters of blatant falsehoods against him. He noted that many of his closest supporters were receiving absentee ballots in the mail which they had not requested. Billingslea requested help from the Department of Justice, and was referred to Jeff Sessions in the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern Division, State of Alabama.²³ The investigation that followed inaugurated a series of

Spencer, Robert Woodson, and C.C. Hughey, as members of the Jury Commission of Perry County, Defendants, p. 1. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 28 – “Direct Action Files.”

²⁰Copy of filing in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Alabama (Northern Division). Albert Turner, Patt J. Davis, James Carter, Robert Billingsley, Reece [sic] E. Billingsley [sic], Willie N[ell] Avery, Lawrence C. Johnson, Willis M. McMurry, William Oakes, and Spencer Hayne, Jr. “for themselves, jointly and severally, and for all others similarly situated.” Plaintiffs, against V.K. Spencer, Robert Woodson, and C.C. Hughey, as members of the Jury Commission of Perry County, Defendants, p. 4. SCLC Papers, MLKC, Atlanta, GA. Box 147, folder 28 – “Direct Action Files.”

²¹Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, AL, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

²²Mary Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009.

²³“Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session on the Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, of Alabama to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, March 13, 19, 20, and May 6, 1986, Serial No. J-99-120.” Printed for the use of the Committee of the Judiciary by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1987, 280-281.

fraud accusations and investigations that continues to shape politics in Perry County into the twenty-first century.

In 1978, Mattie Atkins was elected as both the first black and the first woman to serve on the Perry County Board of Education.²⁴ James Hood, an African-American, was elected sheriff in 1984 and served over 25 years. Eldora Anderson became the first black Probate Judge in 2006, following the retirement of long-time Judge Donald Cook. Mary Cosby Moore became the first African American Circuit Clerk in 1989 when Mary Auburtin retired. Mattie Atkins had run against Auburtin in 1970 under the National Democratic Party of America (NDPA) banner.²⁵ The NDPA was established in 1968 and, with the bald eagle as its symbol instead of the white rooster of the local Democratic Party, the NDPA provided an alternative party for African Americans running for office, helping over 100 black candidates get elected throughout the Black Belt.

Albert Turner began politicking in Perry County once blacks gained the right to vote. In 1970, he began visiting the Circuit Clerk's office to pick up absentee ballots. He was campaigning for Jean Sullivan, who was running for Congress. The trend of using absentee ballots to get candidates elected in Perry County increased dramatically over the next decade. In 1982, there were 1,000 absentee ballots cast. Thus, one out of every five voters in Perry County voted by absentee ballot that year. In comparison, one out of every 1,000 voters in Jefferson County, the most populous county in the state, voted by

²⁴ Mattie Atkins speaking at mock rally at Zion United Methodist Church, Marion, AL, February 19, 2010. Recorded by author.

²⁵ Mary Auburtin, interview by author, Marion, AL, September 12, 2009. Though Atkins was unsuccessful in her bid for Circuit Clerk, she later served as the clerk for the County Commission.

absentee ballot.²⁶ Just two decades before, there were 2,627 ballots cast in the 1962 election in Perry County, of which 45 (1.7%) were absentee.²⁷

In 1984, there were over 800 absentee ballots cast in Perry County.²⁸ By 1985, Albert Turner, Sr., was being investigated for voting fraud.²⁹ Jeff Sessions was the lead prosecutor in the case, having been contacted by Reese Billingslea, an African American candidate who lost reelection due to fraud. In retaliation against Sessions, Senator Joe Biden, among others, blocked Sessions' nomination to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama because Sessions had dared, according to Biden, to bring to trial an icon of the Civil Rights Movement.³⁰ When he was denied the judgeship, Sessions moved into politics and was elected to Congress in 1996, joining Biden in the U.S. Senate.

²⁶ "Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session on the Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, of Alabama to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, March 13, 19, 20, and May 6, 1986, Serial No. J-99-120." Printed for the use of the Committee of the Judiciary by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1987, 277.

²⁷ "How Perry County Voted In May 1st Democratic Primary," *Marion Times-Standard*, May 3, 1962.

²⁸ "Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session on the Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, of Alabama to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, March 13, 19, 20, and May 6, 1986, Serial No. J-99-120." Printed for the use of the Committee of the Judiciary by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1987, 277.

²⁹ Turner was tried in the District Court of Alabama in Mobile. He was found not guilty. His trial carried political implications, however. Congress launched an investigation to try and determine if the voter fraud trial of Albert Turner had intimidated black voters. For a complete transcript of the hearing, see "Civil Rights Implications of Federal Voting Fraud Prosecutions, Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, First Session on Civil Rights Implications of Federal Voting Fraud Prosecutions, September 26, 1985, Serial No. 55." Printed for the use of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1986.

³⁰ "Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, to be a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, Hearings Before the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Ninth Congress, Second Session on the Nomination of Jefferson B. Sessions III, of Alabama to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Alabama, March 13, 19, 20, and May 6, 1986, Serial No. J-99-120." Printed for the use of the Committee of the Judiciary by the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington: 1987.

The voting fraud trend via the misuse of absentee ballots has continued to the present. The typical absentee ballot fraud follows this methodology:

1. The fraud begins with the vote-fraud conspirator filing an application requesting an absentee ballot for a voter either by forging the voter's signature on the application or obtaining the voter's signature through coercion, trickery, or bribery. Applications are freely distributed to anyone who asks for them, so this gives offenders easy and ready access to the forms needed to obtain ballots.
2. Upon receipt of the application, the election official mails the absentee ballot and the voter affidavit to the mailing address listed on the application, which is either the true voter's address or an address controlled by the conspirator.
3. Since election officials usually post the names of registered voters who have been sent absentee ballots (and the date on which the ballots were sent), the conspirator knows when the mailed ballots will arrive and can intercept them; in other cases, the absentee ballots are sent to addresses directly controlled by the conspirator.
4. The absentee ballot is completed by the conspirator and the voter's signature forged, or the voter signs and completes the ballot as directed, or some combination thereof.
5. The ballot is then either mailed or hand-delivered by the conspirator to the election official.³¹

In the 2006 off-year election, Perry County once again saw a high number of votes by absentee ballot at the June primary. Out of 5,045 votes cast, 1,477 (29%) were absentee ballots.³² Albert Turner and Carlton Hogue assisted dozens of voters throughout the day. Carl Crocker, a freelance photographer, took a series of photographs showing Turner violating federal voting rules and assisting multiple voters. Later that day, Turner violated a Federal rule that prohibits anyone from parking a car within 30 feet of front door of the polling station when he pulled up in front of the polling station just before the polls closed in order to drop off a voter. The 30 foot perimeter around the door was

³¹Hans von Spakovsky "Absentee Ballot Fraud: A Stolen Election in Greene County, Alabama," <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/absentee-ballot-fraud-a-stolen-election-in-greene-county-alabama> (Accessed February 12, 2012).

³² June 2006 Alabama primary statistics received from the Alabama Secretary of State's office via email to the author, February 23, 2012.

clearly marked, and Turner's entire car was within the perimeter. When a poll watcher approached the sheriff about asking Turner to move his car, Sheriff James Hood refused to speak to Turner.³³ It should be noted that Hood is Turner's cousin. Carl Crocker took a picture of Turner violating the 30 foot perimeter. As Turner drove off, he hit Crocker with his car. Turner said that he simply did not see Crocker, but upon developing the photograph, Turner could be clearly seen looking straight at the camera. Sheriff Hood also denied seeing Turner hit Crocker, but he can also be clearly seen in the background of the photograph looking at the camera.³⁴

In the June 2008 primary election, there were 8,361 registered voters in Perry County and 4,027 voted in the primary. Almost a quarter (1,114) of the ballots cast were absentee ballots. While the statewide turnout for that election was 15%, almost 50% of the voters in Perry County cast a ballot.³⁵ The percentage of absentee ballots cast in Perry County is six times higher than the state average. Jefferson County, which has 60 times the population of Perry County's 10,600 people, had 365 absentee ballots cast. A Federal observer reported to Beth Chapman, Alabama's Secretary of State, that a candidate [Albert Turner, Jr.] had "free reign" of the polling place, passing out sample ballots and instructing voters how to vote.³⁶

Though the black and white community made attempts to work together in the 1980s and into the 1990s, through groups such as Crossties and the Committee of 100, which was composed of 50 African Americans and 50 white citizens, the rhetoric of

³³ Brian Burnes, interview by author, Livingston, AL, February 10, 2011.

³⁴ John Allan Clark, phone interview by author, February 20, 2012.

³⁵ "The Birmingham News on Absentee Ballots," *Daily Home (Talladega)*, June 29, 2008.

³⁶ Adam Nossiter, "Officials Investigate 3 Alabama Counties in Voter Fraud Accusations" *New York Times*, July 10, 2008. www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/us/10fraud [Accessed October 20, 2010].

racial politics in the twenty-first century has eroded many of those gains. Black political leaders can be heard at rallies, screaming over loud speakers that “We got to get whitey out of Perry County.”³⁷ Voter fraud is still rampant in the county, and the region. Politicians retain control by threatening to cut off voter’s government checks, and by offering them cash and drugs to request an absentee ballot and allow the candidates to fill the ballot out for them.³⁸ One commentator noted that “People running for office in the Black Belt are expected to give people money, not raise money” and that money was going to churches as well as relatives and voters.³⁹ Political signs line the roadways in front of many rural black churches throughout the county, violating the IRS injunction that religious institutions not endorse any one particular candidate or party.

Voters are still encouraged to “Vote the Straight Democratic Ticket” to ensure that the candidates chosen in the Democratic primary retain their power.⁴⁰ In many of the

³⁷ Speech heard by author while in Marion, May 2006.

³⁸ Kim Chandler, “Big Absentee Numbers in Small Counties Questioned,” *Birmingham News*, June 23, 2008; *Secretary of State: Voter Fraud Allegations Flooding In* (WSFA-12 News broadcast Jun. 12, 2008); *Chapman Receives Complaint of Voter Fraud in Perry*, Assoc. Press, July 17, 2008. See also Adam Nossiter, “Officials Investigate 3 Alabama Counties in Voter Fraud Accusations,” *New York Times*, July 10, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/us/10fraud.html?pagewanted=2> (Accessed October 10, 2010); and Hans von Spakovsky, “Absentee Ballot Fraud: A Stolen Election in Greene County, Alabama” http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/absentee-ballot-fraud-a-stolen-election-in-greene-county-alabama#_ftn67 (Accessed February 12, 2012).

³⁹ Barbara Evans, “Esther’s Trumpet: News and Views from the Black Belt,” *Marion Times-Standard*, October 10, 2010.

⁴⁰ *Sumter County Record-Journal*, October 7, 2010.

As of 2012, Sumter County is also witnessing a rise in voter fraud. In 2010, the Circuit Clerk reported to the state Attorney General’s office and the Secretary of State’s office that over 700 absentee ballots were submitted by October 28 for the November 2 election, and the number was expected to climb. If the final absentee count reached 800, as predicted, 7.7% of Sumter County’s ballots would be absentee, which is more than twice the percentage of absentee ballots cast in areas outside the Black Belt. See *Sumter County Record-Journal*, October 28, 2010. “Election Fraud? Clerk has questions about absentees.” Due to pressure from local politicians who informed the Circuit Clerk that he would not be reelected because he was working against the black community by reporting the fraud, the clerk chose not to run for reelection in 2012.

For information about absentee voting fraud in Greene County, AL, see Hans von Spakovsky, “Absentee Ballot Fraud: A Stolen Election in Greene County Alabama”

counties where local citizens are brought to trial for voter fraud, the SCLC and the NAACP defend those charged, saying that the charges are simply an attempt to intimidate black voters. Interestingly, black citizens often lead the cry for charges against those committing fraud, just as Reese Billingslea did against Albert Turner, Sr.⁴¹

Though it was not always the case after integration began in earnest in the 1970s, the school system is now almost completely segregated, with black students attending the public schools, and white and black students attending the local private academy.⁴² Both black and white students attended the high school at the private Marion Military Institute, but a local county commissioner only allowed the school to become part of the public two-year college system in Alabama, on the condition that the high school close.

In 2006, former state trooper James Bonard Fowler admitted to shooting Jimmie Lee Jackson in Marion in February 1965. District Attorney Michael Jackson got a racially diverse grand jury to indict Fowler on first and second degree manslaughter charges in May 2007.⁴³ Even when he came to Marion to turn himself in on May 10,

http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/absentee-ballot-fraud-a-stolen-election-in-greene-county-alabama#_ftn67 (Accessed February 12, 2012).

⁴¹ Hans von Spakovsky, "Absentee Ballot Fraud: A Stolen Election in Greene County Alabama" http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/absentee-ballot-fraud-a-stolen-election-in-greene-county-alabama#_ftn67 (Accessed February 12, 2012).

⁴² Roy Barnett, interview by author, Marion, AL, May 10, 2010. The children of Roy Barnett, a local white business owner, attended the public schools during the 1980s, as did Elijah Rollins, Jr., the son of a black funeral home owner. He was one of only a few blacks to attend Francis Marion High School. Even after integration, most blacks attended West Side High School. Rollins' children now attend the private academy in Marion. For information on Elijah Rollins, see "A Progressive Manner," *Marion Times-Standard*, February 16, 2011. Bobbie Bean became the first black teacher to teach in the all-white Perry County High School. She recalled that she did not have much trouble from the students or their parents. But the integration of the schools and the subsequent closing of the Lincoln School was very hard for the black community. Bobbie Bean, interview by author, Marion, AL, May 14, 2010.

⁴³ *Daily Home*, "Civil Rights Slaying Slow to Get to Trial," September 6, 2009.

Michael Jackson and Jimmie Lee Jackson are not related.

Michael Jackson is the first African American to serve as District Attorney in the Fourth Judicial Circuit, and is the only African American District Attorney in Alabama as of 2012.

2007, Fowler insisted that he shot Jackson in self-defense. It was the first time he had been to Marion in 42 years.⁴⁴ His attorney, George Beck, had prosecuted Klan member Robert Chambliss for the September 1963 bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.⁴⁵ In November 2007, Albert Turner, Jr., made a mockery of the justice system at Fowler's change of venue hearing. When asked if he was Albert Turner, Jr., he denied that was his name and for several minutes refused to answer any other questions. It was finally understood that his legal name does not include "Jr.," though all of his campaign billboards include the "Jr." so that he is associated with his father's legacy.⁴⁶ Fowler was denied a change of venue, and after more than three years of legal wrangling, the trial was set to begin in Perry County on November 15, 2010.⁴⁷ Before the trial began, however, Fowler pleaded guilty to the charge of second-degree manslaughter and was sentenced to six months in prison. He served his jail time in Geneva County, his home county. This was viewed as a safer location for Fowler than the jail in Perry County.

At his sentencing, Fowler apologized to the Jackson family. Michael Jackson, the District Attorney, said he and the family of Jimmie Lee Jackson were satisfied with the outcome. According to the District Attorney, "I wanted him to admit his guilt, apologize to the family for what he has done, and serve some jail time." Jackson concluded by pointing out that the family was satisfied with the results of the long ordeal, and they

⁴⁴ "Fowler turns self in on murder charges," *Perry County Herald*, May 17, 2007.

⁴⁵ "Grand Jury indicts former trooper in 1965 shooting death of Jackson," *Perry County Herald*, May 10, 2007.

⁴⁶ The author was present at the change of venue hearing. She and a group of undergraduate college students heard Turner's testimony. Fowler was not present.

⁴⁷ "Fowler murder trial begins Monday," *Perry County Herald*, November 11, 2010.

“showed more mercy towards the defendant than the defendant showed toward Jimmie Lee Jackson.”⁴⁸ Thus ended the forty-five year saga of the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson. In his apology, Fowler noted that he had come to Marion in 1965 “to save lives, not take lives.”⁴⁹

African Americans have been a part of the fabric of Perry County since its earliest days of non-native settlement in the first decades of the nineteenth century. From slavery until emancipation in 1865, they cleared the land, built the houses, cooked the food and grew the crops that allowed Perry County to prosper and grow. Immediately upon gaining their freedom at the close of the Civil War, they drew upon the emphasis that white members of the community placed on education, and began the Lincoln Normal School to educate the newly freed slaves, regardless of age or gender. Through the first half of the twentieth century, blacks in Perry County quietly fought against segregation and the growing grip of Jim Crow laws that, among other things, did not allow them to vote, even if they were more qualified than many white voters. They began a homegrown movement to organize and educate themselves about the voting process, and took steps to register to vote, in spite of consistent rejection by the Board of Registrars. Once the local Movement joined forces with the SCLC, and later on with SNCC, the local Movement participants expanded their protest tactics and became more visible and vocal in their demands. The Department of Justice began investigating the claims of the black community in Perry County, and found systematic abuse of the process coupled with blatant discrimination. The problem was so apparent in Perry County that the

⁴⁸ “No trial; Fowler pleads Monday in Jackson case,” *Perry County Herald*, November 18, 2010.

⁴⁹ “No trial; Fowler pleads Monday in Jackson case,” *Perry County Herald*, November 18, 2010.

Justice Department specifically addressed the problems in the county in the wording of the Voting Rights Act.

In the first attempted night march of the Movement, a young black man named Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot by state trooper James Bonard Fowler. The death of Jimmie Lee Jackson sparked the Selma to Montgomery March. That march led President Lyndon Johnson to call on Congress to pass true voting registration reform. Because of the voting rights abuses that the Department of Justice had dealt with in Perry County, the Voting Rights Act directly challenged the practices in the county and changed the law of the land. The Selma to Montgomery March, which was spawned by the shooting of a young black man from Perry County, led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The actions of whites fighting against black voter registration, and the actions blacks fighting to exercise their constitutional right to vote, changed America, forever.

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