Where No One Stands Alone:
Harvey Gantt and the Civil Rights Movement in the Carolinas, 1943-1987

by

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Abstract

As the first African American student to enroll at Clemson University and the first African American mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, Harvey Gantt served as a trailblazer. Born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1940s and 1950s, Gantt was a direct product of his environment. With the civil rights leadership of his parents, the educational opportunities of Burke High School, and the legal support of Matthew Perry, Gantt achieved academic success and desegregated higher education in South Carolina.

While scholars have recognized Gantt for breaking the racial barrier at Clemson, the influences that led him to that particular moment in time have been overlooked. Likewise, Gantt's enrollment at Clemson began a new process of desegregation and integration in education across the state that continues to this day. A similar situation occurred in Charlotte, where Gantt benefitted from decades of civil rights activism that created the conditions in which his political career thrived. Gantt's leadership on the city council and as mayor of Charlotte brought about an era of balanced growth and increased participation from African American citizens in Charlotte's government.

In this dissertation, I seek to move beyond the moments of desegregation in Clemson and Charlotte in the interest of highlighting Gantt's place in the long civil rights movement in the Carolinas. Although Gantt was driven by personal ambitions, he was aided in the pursuit of his goals by a support network of civil rights activists who spent

decades fighting for equality. Through his efforts to desegregate Clemson University and the mayor's office in Charlotte, Gantt opened the door for further generations of students, activists, and political leaders that followed in his wake. An examination of Gantt's life helps reveal the generational nature of the civil rights movement and the long struggle for equality that continues to the present day.

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Introduction

During a conference on the civil rights movement in South Carolina at the Citadel in March 2003, Harvey Gantt suggested that historians have gotten the history of civil rights trailblazers all wrong. “We didn’t grow up in the South in the 40s and early 50s deciding that we were going to be the first student to go to this institution or the first mayor or whatever. It doesn’t happen that way,” he said. “And often times when I see history written it seems as if these people come full-blown to these rather special occasions.”[1]

Gantt did not arrive into this world predestined to become the first black student at Clemson University or the first African American mayor of Charlotte. Nor did the effort to break those racial barriers begin and end with Gantt alone. Indeed, Gantt’s accomplishments were products of an ongoing battle for civil rights in the United States, an effort that traced its origins back to the earliest moments of black freedom during Reconstruction.[2] Gantt’s experiences reflect recent scholarship on the “long civil rights movement,” the idea that the civil rights movement began well before and continued long after the more traditional periodization of 1954 to 1965. Gantt benefitted from the work

[1] “Voices from the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina,” *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 354.
[2] Historians have suggested that murky definitions of the “civil rights movement” have led to an overlap with a broader “black freedom struggle,” but for the purposes of this dissertation, I will define the “civil rights movement” as the struggle for political and social equality and legal recognition of Constitutional rights in the years since the end of Reconstruction.

of earlier activists while also bringing lasting change to Clemson University and the city of Charlotte.[3]

In this dissertation, I examine the civil rights activism of Harvey Gantt. As a young man in the early 1960s, Gantt successfully sued the state of South Carolina in order to gain admittance to Clemson University and in the process became the first African American student to integrate a public school in South Carolina in the twentieth century. After graduation in 1965, Gantt moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, where he witnessed the changing tactics and strategies of civil rights activists in the 1970s. Twenty years after he enrolled at Clemson, Gantt broke another racial barrier when he was elected as Charlotte's first African American mayor. In both cases, Gantt benefitted directly from the work of an earlier generation of activists. Likewise, his civil rights triumphs inspired countless others who followed in his footsteps. Through a biographical analysis of Gantt, we can illuminate the ways in which individuals within the long civil rights movement served as both beneficiaries and benefactors of the generations that preceded and followed them.

Gantt's experiences highlight that there is indeed a "long" civil rights movement at work in the Carolinas. Gantt is best understood as a transitional figure, a pivot point between eras within the long civil rights movement. Furthermore, this expanded conception of the movement is best understood as a multigenerational struggle. Gantt's enrollment at Clemson represented the end of a protracted battle to desegregate public

[3] Some scholars extend the end of the civil rights movement to the moment of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination at the Lorraine Motel on April 4, 1968. While divergent end points carry their own narrative suggestions – the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 was a positive victory, the assassination of MLK, Jr. was tragic – the end result is the same: a narrative structure that posits an end to the civil rights movement by the end of the 1960s.

education in South Carolina and the beginning of a long, arduous process of integration.[4] Likewise, Gantt's ascendance to the Charlotte City Council and the mayor's office represented the end of a decades-long battle to expand representation in city government, but it also marked the beginning of a new phase as Gantt and other African American city leaders grappled with issues of *de facto* segregation and economic inequality. Throughout, Gantt benefitted from the often unrecognized activism of a previous generation. In turn, Gantt's actions in Clemson and Charlotte have paved the way for the next generation of black leaders who face their own particular battle against inequality.

Gantt occupies a curious space within the historiography of the civil rights movement. When he is mentioned, which is not often, it amounts to little more than citations for individual "firsts." Gantt is defined by being the first African American student at Clemson and the first African American mayor of Charlotte. There has been little written about Gantt beyond his role as a civil rights trailblazer, and historical accounts that include him even in that limited role are few and far between. Walter Edgar's ambitious tome, *South Carolina: A History*, devotes just three paragraphs to Gantt's desegregation of Clemson, itself the first desegregation of a public school at any

[4] At its most basic level, "desegregation" represents the end of segregation in an institution or space; "integration" requires a level of racial representation that more closely approximates broader demographic levels, i.e. Clemson is not yet fully integrated as its African American student body lags beyond both state and national demographics. Despite the state of South Carolina having an African American population of over 30%, Clemson's student body is currently 6% African American. However, it is certainly desegregated, and has been since Gantt arrived in the Winter of 1963. Likewise, the election of Fred Alexander to the Charlotte City Council represented the desegregation of Charlotte politics, as it was never again an all-white affair after 1965. However, only with efforts to end at-large representation did Charlotte come closer to integration in city government. William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 7.

level in South Carolina in the twentieth century.[5] Aside from a handful of individual chapters in edited volumes and unpublished dissertations on issues related to desegregation experiences across the state of South Carolina, the story of Gantt's enrollment at Clemson has received scant attention from historians.[6] Decades after Gantt broke a major color barrier in South Carolina, the conventional narrative remains informed by contemporaneous accounts of Gantt's enrollment and Clemson's own institutional history of the event.[7] The desegregation of Clemson has failed to receive the historical attention granted to the desegregation experience at the University of Georgia, Ole Miss, or the University of Alabama.[8] While recent work has begun the restoration of Gantt's rightful place in the larger narrative, the earliest chronicles of desegregation in South Carolina relegated Gantt to a passive role in his own story.[9]

With Gantt's political career in North Carolina, similar oversight has occurred. Gantt's unsuccessful Senate campaigns against Jesse Helms in 1990 and 1996 have

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[5] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 358, 359. At just under 600 pages in length, and with the admirable goal of chronicling the history of South Carolina from its time as a British colony to the new millennium, Edgar's work can be given a little leeway in not discussing every facet of every story at length. However, Edgar expends roughly as much ink on Hootie & the Blowfish as he does on Gantt, which seems like an oversight.

[6] Orville Vernon Burton, "Dining with Harvey Gantt" in *Matthew Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy*, ed. W. Lewis Burke and Belinda F. Gergel (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 183-220. M. Ron Cox, Jr. "Integration with (Relative) Dignity: George McMillan's Article at 50" in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 274-285. M. Ron Cox, Jr. "1963 – the Year of Decision: Desegregation in South Carolina" (PhD dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1996), 14-69.

[7] George McMillan, "Integration with Dignity," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 1963, 15-21. Jerry Reel, "Clemson and Harvey Gantt," in *Integration with Dignity*. (Clemson University Digital Press), 44-52.

[8] Robert A. Pratt, *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Desegregation of the University of Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002); Charles Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[9] Ron Cox and Vernon Burton in particular have helped illuminate Gantt's role in the desegregation of Clemson. Cox helps restore Gantt to the narrative in his critique of George McMillan's "Integration with Dignity" article, while Burton examines the desegregation of Clemson with an eye towards Matthew Perry's role in the affair. However, there remains in the historiography little consideration for Gantt's experiences before Clemson or the larger network of activism that preceded his enrollment.

received as much attention as his thirteen years of service in Charlotte's city government.[10] Aside from brief mention in works on African American politicians in the 1980s or books that examine the history of the city of Charlotte, little has been written about Gantt's service on the city council and in the mayor's office.[11] In the last decade, historians David Goldfield, Thomas Hanchett, and Matthew Lassiter have produced works that shed light on Gantt's accomplishments as well as the larger historical context around Charlotte's civil rights history, but a definitive account of Gantt's tenure as mayor has failed to materialize.[12]

Across the last three decades, scholars have reshaped our collective understanding of the civil rights movement. While early efforts by historians helped guide consensus away from an organizationally-focused, top-down approach, more recent work has reevaluated the consensus narrative of the civil rights movement from a temporal

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[10] For insight into Gantt's campaigns against Jesse Helms, see: William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008); Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Kenneth A. Wink and Peter Laroche, "The 'Culture Wars' in the South: Partisanship, Race, and Cultural Conservatism in the 1990 North Carolina U.S. Senate Election," *Southeast Political Review* Vol. 26, No. 2 (June, 1998), 469-487. Even with the Senate campaigns, Gantt has received a passive role as a victim of Helms' underhanded politics. Robert Ferguson's otherwise excellent article on Jesse Helms and activist opposition in the 1990 campaign barely mentions Gantt's role in the election, despite the fact that Helm's homophobic rhetoric was employed against the Gantt campaign. Robert Hunt Ferguson, "Mothers Against Jesse in Congress: Grassroots Maternalism and the Cultural Politics of the AIDS Crisis in North Carolina" (*Journal of Southern History* Vol. LXXXIII, No. 1. Feb. 2017), 107-140.

[11] Margaret Edds, *Free At Last: What Really Happened When Civil Rights Came To Southern Politics* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler), 1987. 191-211.

[12] For more on Gantt in Charlotte, see: Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Matthew D. Lassiter, "Searching For Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas," in *Charlotte, N.C.: the Global Evolution of a New South City*. ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 24-49; David Goldfield. "A Place To Come To," in *Charlotte, N.C.: the Global Evolution of a New South City*. ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 10-23.

standpoint.[13] In her widely celebrated article "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," Jacquelyn Dowd Hall notes ways in which the traditionally accepted timeline of the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1965 is not only woefully inadequate in recognizing the full scope of the movement, but part of an effort to frame it as a finished and completed historical moment.[14] In advocating for a longer timeline that examines both earlier and later events than previously recognized, Hall refers to the movement as an "unfinished but undefeated revolution."[15]

While Hall's idea of a "long" civil rights movement has been generally accepted, she acknowledges that her reconceptualization of the movement makes it "harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain" as a historical subject.[16] Steven F. Lawson has reservations about the idea of a "long" civil rights movement, namely that it risks obscuring important differences between eras of the black freedom struggle. "The so-called classic civil rights movement was significantly different in objective, technique, and consciousness from preceding efforts to achieve freedom, whether abolitionism, Black Nationalism, or the interracial Popular Front of the New Deal era," he writes.[17]

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[13] For more on local organizing efforts that illuminate ground-up activism, see: John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2007). For more on the multi-generational nature of the movement, see: John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

[14] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (March, 2005), 1233-1263.

[15] Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1263.

[16] Hall. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," 1235.

[17] Steven F. Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*, eds. Danielle L. McGuire and Matthew D. Lassiter (University of Kentucky Press, 2011), 14.

Lawson argues for an examination of long origins of a short civil rights movement, which is a subtle but meaningful tweak to Hall's work.[18] While he is correct that periodization is important, for our examination of Gantt and the broader story of desegregation in public education, it is perhaps worthwhile to consider just how far back those origins lie. Henry Hayne's enrollment at the University of South Carolina in 1873 marked the first desegregation of a public school in the state. Thirty years later, African American activists in South Carolina struggled to create an adequate school system in the face of general animus for black education from the state's political leaders. The establishment of Avery Normal Institute and Burke High School helped carve out a space for black students, although the battle was far from finished. When Gantt was just a child, John Wrighten III, with the help of the NAACP, launched a legal challenge against segregation in higher education that resulted in a law school at South Carolina State. The intent of their actions is less important than the consequences. Despite their individual goals and divergent tactics, these generations of activists paved the way for Gantt to desegregate Clemson College in particular and the state of South Carolina in general. Similarly, the political activism of Fred Alexander, Julius Chambers, and others in Charlotte ultimately helped Gantt win the 1983 election. That they could never have predicted that unique outcome in 1965 does not dilute the important role they played in Gantt's particular victory.

[18] Part of Lawson's argument centers around recognition that earlier movements, particularly more-economic influenced political activism from African Americans in the 1930s and 40s, held different goals and employed different tactics than activists of the "short" civil rights movement. While I share his concern over periodization, I believe that efforts for economic, educational, social, and political equality cannot be so easily separated. Gantt's desegregation of Clemson was indeed an effort to realize educational equality, but there were long-term economic, social, and political gains that result from Gantt's actions.

Gantt's political life also illuminates the evolution of civil rights activism across the twentieth century. As a high school senior in Charleston, South Carolina, Gantt helped lead a sit-in at the S.H. Kress. The peaceful demonstration by Burke High School students resulted in their arrests. Following his graduation from high school and his enrollment at Iowa State, Gantt further participated in the movement by employing legal remedies against South Carolina's resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In Charlotte, Gantt became politically active as a city councilman before breaking the racial barrier to the mayor's office. Gantt's political trajectory was the realization of what Bayard Rustin identified as "protest to politics," the natural evolution of the movement as civil rights activists across the nation became directly involved in the political process following the Voting Rights Act of 1965.[19]

The idea of a long civil rights movement has the potential to complicate historical analysis. However, the broader scope is vital to understanding the true nature of the civil rights movement and Gantt's place within it. Indeed, the civil rights movement in America, the battle for African American equality in the continued face of white supremacy, is best understood as a multi-generational effort. In that same vein, our understanding of Harvey Gantt and his importance in the civil rights movements of the Carolinas benefits from a new perspective. While Gantt was the first African American student to enroll at Clemson University, he was also the last to be forced to challenge segregated higher education in the state of South Carolina during the Jim Crow era, following in the wake of countless activists that attacked the racial order of the Palmetto State. Although students following in Gantt's footsteps continued the work of

[19] Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary* Vol. 39, No. 2 (February 1965).

desegregation and integration at various institutions across the state, they did so with Gantt's experience as a practical symbol of hope. Likewise, Gantt was elected as the first African American mayor of Charlotte, marking the beginning of a new era of African American political participation, but his victory was also the culmination of decades of work from local civil rights activists who fought to reshape the political climate within the city. In both instances, his achievements were only possible through the hard work and determination of earlier civil rights activists who had direct and indirect influences on Gantt.

Beyond her call for a broader conception of the civil rights timeline, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall notes that political opponents of the civil rights movement have co-opted elements of the movement and crafted self-serving narratives that propel their own agendas. This phenomenon has occurred with regards to Gantt and his civil rights triumphs. In the decades since Gantt graduated, Clemson administrators have embraced Gantt and celebrated the school's relatively moderate response to desegregation. The institution's own in-house history of the event, seen in Lewis Suggs and Jerry Reel's chapters in *Integration with Dignity: A Celebration of Harvey Gantt's Admission to Clemson*, presents a balanced portrayal of Gantt's enrollment, warts and all.[20] However, it is telling that the school continues to frame the event with the descriptive language of a contemporaneous journalist. "Integration with Dignity" has become the unofficial motto of Clemson's own telling of its history. It is certainly true that observers of desegregation at Clemson did not witness political interference or violence like that seen at Ole Miss and the University of Alabama, but the narrative of peaceful desegregation obscures

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[20] *Integration with Dignity: A Celebration of Harvey Gantt's Admission to Clemson*, ed. Skip Eisiminger (Clemson University, 2003).

uncomfortable realities of Gantt's enrollment, namely that it occurred only after Clemson and the state exhausted their legal recourse against him. The positive narrative crafted by the school's administration has also glossed over the difficult and ongoing process of integration on Clemson's campus. Gantt's enrollment is worth celebrating, but there remains work to be done.

A similar scenario has emerged in Charlotte. Local media celebrated Gantt's victory in 1983 as a transformative moment for the city. While the citizens of Charlotte experienced episodes of political unrest across the 1960s and 1970s, Gantt's election as mayor served as an apparent sign of easing racial tensions in the city. During his campaign for re-election in 1985, however, Gantt's opponent Dave Berryhill used Gantt's presence as a sign that racism was no longer a factor in local politics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although contemporary accounts of Gantt's defeat in the 1987 election focused on issues of traffic congestion, taxation, and voter apathy, there were racial elements to Sue Myrick's attacks that have largely gone unaddressed by historians. The conventional narrative of Charlotte's citizens overcoming racial animus has obscured continuing problems in the Queen City, notably the city's resegregation of public education.

Biographical treatments of civil rights figures can expose the vital multi-generational nature of the movement. While much has been written about iconic figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., recent scholarship has attempted to expand our focus beyond the most obvious architects of the civil rights movement. For example, Barbara Ransby's examination of Ella Baker and SNCC illuminates the importance of an older generation

taking leadership roles in training successive generations of civil rights activists. Likewise, Katherine Mellen Charron's masterful biography of Septima Clark highlights the groundwork laid by earlier generations, especially in regards to expanding the quality of black education in the South. Through the use of civil rights biographies, scholars help reinforce the humanity behind the movement.

While these individuals had direct and recognizable influence on later generations, there were countless others whose work was not always obvious. Indeed, Steven F. Lawson notes that some civil rights activists of the 1960s had a "historical amnesia," unaware of the important work of earlier organizations and activists in pushing the movement closer to victory. However, as the following analysis of Gantt's life will show, while recognition of influence can often be missed, that does not make the influence any less tangible. Gantt was certainly aware of the many civil rights figures that directly inspired him, but there were other activists whose influence on his life was perhaps less apparent. However, all involved worked toward the final goal of establishing black equality in the Carolinas.[21]

Furthermore, a biographical examination of Gantt's life exposes the often-personal nature of the movement. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Gantt viewed civil rights activism as primarily a means to achieve practical, tangible goals. In this sense, Gantt was something of a civil rights "part-timer." While Gantt's professional and political ambitions at times overlapped, he admittedly thought of himself as a student, architect, city councilman, and mayor rather than a professional civil rights activist.

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[21] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

Gantt's activism was a personal matter; he was well aware of the impact of his enrollment at Clemson and his election as mayor, but he pursued those goals as part of his own ambitions rather than for a symbolic greater good. And yet, despite his often practical and deeply personal goals, Gantt's actions indeed opened the door for countless others who followed him. Gantt was both an exceptional figure who helped further civil rights progress through his own dogged determination and a bit player in a larger social movement that dwarfed his personal aspirations. As an individual who experienced multiple eras within the long civil rights movement, Gantt's life exposes important relationships between generations of activists who helped pass the proverbial torch to those who followed in their footsteps.

Beyond the importance of "who" I examine in this dissertation, there is also a question of "where" these events occur. Indeed, the important work of activists that preceded and succeeded Gantt illuminates that there was vital civil rights activism that occurred in the Carolinas. While states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi have rightfully received a great deal of attention from historians, the civil rights history of North Carolina and South Carolina has been relatively ignored. William Chafe's *Civilities and Civil Rights* offers invaluable insight into activism in Greensboro, North Carolina, but it stands virtually alone among local studies in the Carolinas. In *Sorting Out the New South City*, Thomas Hanchett illuminates the impact of racial issues in the formation of modern Charlotte, but he is primarily concerned with the city of Charlotte rather than the civil rights movement within the city. *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, an edited volume that collects a variety of articles and papers about civil rights issues in South Carolina, is a fine resource, but it lacks the necessary narrative focus that could

illuminate the unifying threads of the movement within the state. Gantt's experiences reveal the power of local organizing in the Carolinas and suggest that necessary work remains for historians in reclaiming the history of the movement outside of the deepest of Deep South states.[22]

This dissertation is comprised of two parts. The first concerns Gantt's desegregation of Clemson University, expanding the timeline of events in an effort to recognize the origins of Gantt's successful enrollment and the long process of integration that resulted from Gantt's victory. When Gantt was still a child in Charleston, South Carolina, African American challenges to segregated education in Clarendon County served as opening salvos in the final battle to desegregate public education. The activism of individuals like Septima Clark, John Wrighten III, J. Waties Waring, Matthew Perry, and others helped create the environment in which Gantt's victory was born. In the fight against segregated education in South Carolina, they provided the body blows that set up Gantt to deliver the knockout punch.

After he enrolled at Iowa State in the Fall of 1960, Gantt submitted a transfer application to Clemson in 1961. When multiple applications were ignored, Gantt pursued legal recourse against Clemson and the state of South Carolina. Gantt's challenge met with resistance from sources across the South, but it also coincided with the machinations of business and political leaders that sought quiet and peaceful desegregation in the event

[22] William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, eds. Winfred B. Moore and Orville Vernon Burton (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008).

of legal defeat. Despite the school's efforts to exhaust every legal defense, Gantt prevailed, enrolling as Clemson's first African American student on January 28, 1963.

While the examination of earlier origins is vital in understanding how Gantt successfully desegregated Clemson, it is equally important to continue Gantt's story beyond the day of enrollment. Long after the media and onlookers dispersed, Gantt and the Clemson community were left to navigate the uncharted waters of desegregated education in South Carolina. Furthermore, after Gantt's graduation in 1965, the school's administrators, students, faculty, and staff have experienced the long, arduous process of integration that continues to this day. By moving beyond the afternoon of January 28, 1963, we can see more clearly the important foundation of an earlier generation of activists as well as the long-term impact of Gantt's presence at Clemson.

The second part of the dissertation concerns Gantt's emergence in Charlotte politics. When Gantt arrived in Charlotte in 1965, the city had just recently witnessed the election of its first African American City Councilmember. Over the following decade, Gantt devoted himself to his profession while slowly involving himself in local politics. He witnessed a number of major challenges to white dominance in local politics, as well as continued progress towards school integration with *Swann v. Mecklenburg County*. As the movement continued past the major legislative victories of the mid-60s, civil rights leaders employed a variety of tactics and identified a variety of goals. In his work with Floyd McKissick, Gantt saw the limits of racial politics and learned important lessons for his future political career. Witnessing a number of different civil rights philosophies, Gantt carved out his own political identity, directly influenced by the lessons of his father Christopher Gantt and his political mentor Fred Alexander. After his appointment to the

City Council in 1974, Gantt helped expand representation in city government while he set his eyes on higher office.

After losing by a small margin in the 1979 Democratic Primary in the mayoral election, Gantt launched a second attempt to break the racial barrier on Charlotte's highest elected office in 1983. With the help of Mel Watt, Gantt devised an election strategy built around the formation of a biracial coalition of voters. Through his political experience, charisma, and knowledge of major issues affecting the city, Gantt emerged victorious in the 1983 election, becoming Charlotte's first African American mayor.

With the racial barrier to the mayor's office shattered, Gantt confronted the serious development issues that threatened to halt Charlotte's economic growth in the 1980s. Furthermore, Gantt was forced to walk a particular political tightrope as the first African American mayor in a city that was 70% white, torn between the expectations of divergent groups within Charlotte. Despite the inherent challenges, Gantt showed a natural gift for consensus building and was re-elected by an overwhelming margin in 1985.

Despite his effectiveness as Charlotte's mayor, a number of crucial political mistakes in Gantt's second term opened the door for racial politics in the 1987 election. While Gantt's previous opponents failed to gain traction with race issues, Sue Myrick was able to employ racially-charged attacks in the 1987 election that were in part due to Gantt's own stumbles. Due to a convergence of political problems, Gantt was narrowly defeated by Sue Myrick in 1987. However, many of Gantt's most ambitious plans for the city survived his tenure as mayor, resulting in a modern Charlotte. Furthermore, Gantt

has inspired a subsequent generation of activists and politicians that continue to push for racial and economic justice in Charlotte.

Gantt's experiences as part of the ongoing civil rights movement illuminate its long and as yet unfinished nature. While organizations and individuals varied in their tactics and goals, generations of Americans have participated in the continued effort to establish African American equality in the United States. Gantt's particular success in desegregating Clemson and his ascendance to the apex of Charlotte politics resulted from the victories of earlier generations. Those victories marked the end of legal and symbolic segregation, but they also sparked the beginning of the long process of integration that is still ongoing. Gantt's desegregation of Clemson realized the hopes of earlier generations that fought for educational and legal equality in South Carolina, but it ignited a process of integration that continues. Likewise, Gantt's political career in Charlotte represented efforts to both maintain earlier civil rights successes while pushing ever further toward African American political, social, and economic equality. Despite efforts to portray a finished and completed civil rights movement, the generation that followed in Gantt's footsteps continues to fight for black equality in America.

Chapter One

Charleston, South Carolina, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1943-1960

Harvey Gantt remembered exactly where he was when he first learned that a society can change. As a child growing up in Charleston, South Carolina, he often visited the nearby Dart Hall Library after school. Like many kids, Harvey enjoyed playing sports and socializing with his friends, but he also possessed an inquisitive nature. An avid reader from a young age, Gantt walked fourteen blocks to the library on the afternoon of Monday, May 17, 1954. It was there he noticed the headline of the *Charleston Evening Post* announcing the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. In a landmark decision, the court ruled unanimously in favor of the plaintiffs and declared segregated public schooling unconstitutional. The news shocked Gantt, who was just eleven years old at the time.[1]

Of course, Gantt was well aware of the reality of the segregated South. It was impossible to miss for a young African American boy raised in Charleston, as the daily experiences of the city's black citizens were filled with constant reminders of the racial status quo. From the schoolyard to local parks, public buses to lunch counters, the Jim Crow South left no doubt about which public spaces were open to African Americans. Even for a child as young as Harvey, segregation was inescapable.

[1] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina During the Twentieth Century* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 354. For more on the civil rights movement and the judicial system, see Michael J. Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

But as the decision in *Brown* made clear, the struggle for equality was not hopeless. African Americans in the state of South Carolina and across the United States achieved substantial civil rights victories throughout Gantt's life. In the preceding decade, civil rights activists in Charleston succeeded in their challenge for better pay for African American teachers and nurses. As a result of George Elmore's suit against the state, the Democratic primary in South Carolina opened to African Americans in 1947.[2] That same year a young African American student from the Lowcountry sued the University of South Carolina Law School, an effort that applied much-needed pressure on segregated education in the state.[3] The *Brown* decision was one of the most notable victories achieved by 1954, but perhaps most importantly for Gantt it marked the first major civil rights triumph that he witnessed. Furthermore, the Supreme Court's ruling offered the hope of substantive change to an area of American society that directly influenced Gantt's daily life. For Gantt, the news of *Brown v. Board* in the Charleston *Post* was nothing short of life-changing.

As was the case with many others born and raised in the region, it took a number of years before Harvey questioned the segregated South. "For the first ten years of my life I paid no attention to it," Gantt recalled. "The things that happened around me were accepted."[4] When he read the *Post*'s coverage of the Brown decision, a new world of possibility opened to Gantt. "The Supreme Court's decision in 1954 was a watershed

[2] "South Carolina Negroes Win Vote In Democratic Primary Elections," *The New York Times*, July 13, 1947.
[3] "Order On Accepting Negro Student Holds," *The New York Times*, November 22, 1947.
[4] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

moment in my life," he said. "I started to see our society in a different light: blacks, whites, and why we do things. Wow, there were actually people who questioned that!"[5]

For young Gantt, the *Brown* decision offered a number of important lessons. First, it signaled that the courts were an effective battleground for civil rights activism. The plaintiffs in the case brought their suit to trial and appealed all the way to the highest court in the land. With the Supreme Court's unanimous ruling, their cause was given a level of legitimacy through the stamp of government approval. Second, it suggested at the most fundamental level that American society can change. Less than one hundred years before the decision, the United States was locked in a bloody civil war over the fate of American slavery. By 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of the Jim Crow South, conceived over half a century earlier, was unconstitutional. In both instances, what was once legally recognized and accepted was now soundly rejected. The lesson for Gantt and other civil rights activists seemed clear: the most effective means of challenging the Jim Crow South was the judicial system.

And yet, it was another year after the initial decision before the Supreme Court issued its full plan of action, marred by the problematically vague phrase "with all deliberate speed."[6] Despite the joyous reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education* among civil rights activists, it was a symbolic victory that held only the promise of future equality. Americans did not awaken on May 18, 1954, to find their local schools fully integrated. Segregationist politicians in the South exercised every available means of delay to slow the effect of the *Brown* decision in the years that followed. The decision was but a single victory in a protracted war against segregation in the South.

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[5] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[6] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas II*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

Of course, Gantt could not have known the long battle that lay ahead when he read the news on May 17, 1954. Nor could he have known that he would be the first student in South Carolina to realize the full potential of the *Brown* decision by desegregating a state school. But for the first time in his young life, Gantt knew that a new society free from the indignities of segregation was possible.

Harvey Bernard Gantt was born on January 14, 1943, in Yonges Island, South Carolina, the first of five children of Christopher Columbus, Jr., and Wilhelmenia Gantt. Born and raised in the rural areas around Yonges Island, Christopher and Wilhelmenia moved to nearby Charleston shortly after Harvey's birth, where Christopher worked in the naval shipyards during the Second World War. Despite the fact that he received only an eighth-grade education, Christopher found steady employment, working as a rigger in the Charleston Naval Shipyard after the war ended.

When Harvey's parents moved to Charleston in 1944, it marked a deviation from recent family tradition for Christopher. The Gantts had a long history in the rural South Carolina Lowcountry, particularly in the coastal areas to the south of Charleston. Harvey's great-grandfather Hasting Gantt was born into slavery on Edisto Island. Hasting's son Christopher Columbus Gantt, Sr., born in 1874, worked his way up from field hand to independent farmer and eventually owned 108 acres of land in the Adams Run community. [7] While the earliest generations of free Gantts prized land-ownership, Christopher Gantt, Jr., sought economic opportunity through industrial work. In addition to his job at the shipyard, Christopher Gantt, Jr., worked part-time at a local drycleaner and aided a local carpenter.

[7] Dannye Romine. "An Unquenchable Spirit," Charlotte *Observer*, May 1, 1988. 1E, 8E.

In their first years in Charleston, the family lived in public housing. When Harvey was three years old, his father purchased a lot on the Charleston peninsula and built a home for the family. The new home was necessary to accommodate the expanding Gantts, as Harvey was joined by four sisters: Aundrea, Cassandra, Gloria, and Deanna. "My father bought four or five of these books to teach himself carpentry," Gantt recalled. "He read them meticulously, and he built that house with his own two hands. I used to stand around and hold the 2x4s while he sawed them."[8] It was the construction of this home, and the additions made to it to provide ample space for the growing family, that sparked Gantt's first interest in architecture.

The young Gantt family was not particularly well-to-do, but Harvey's parents possessed a determined spirit and belief in the fabled American dream that left a lasting impression on him. Christopher continued to work in the naval yards after the war, while Wilhelmenia remained in the home and raised the children full-time. "I would have to say that my folks were economically the lower, lower income family, what I call salt of the earth working people," Gantt said, "not a lot of frills, but a great deal of love and attention of course to their children, and a great deal of belief in America as a land of opportunity."[9]

The Gantt's financial hardships came with a silver lining; with no television and one radio to the family's name, the Gantts formed a tight bond. "We learned how to talk to each other and to share joys and sorrows, victories and defeats," Harvey recalled. [10]

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[8] Ken Eudy. "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Control Started Young." *Charlotte Observer*. September 18, 1983. 14A.
[9] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[10] Margaret Edds. *Free At Last: What Really Happened When Civil Rights Came to Southern Politics* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1987), 201.

Despite their hardships, Christopher and Wilhelmenia Gantt fostered a sense of hope and optimism in their children. Although they occupied the lower rungs of the economic ladder, Gantt suggests they were "middle class in concept."[11]

Harvey's parents provided him with an important support structure in his formative years. He described his mother as a loving and nurturing figure who instilled good manners in her children. Harvey recalled his mother telling him to "mind my manners on the back of the bus even when white kids at the front would be running wild."[12] Wilhelmenia instilled important values into her children. "My mother did not read Dr. Spock, but she had a great sense of understanding on how to teach the important values of responsibility, accountability, love, and fairness," Gantt said.[13] And while he showed obvious admiration for his father, who he called a "reassuring presence," Harvey described the elder Gantt in a more serious tone. "He would always be stern on discipline," Harvey said. "But he was a great talker about the weightier issues of the time, politics, etc., and it really is in my father that I got more of the inspiration to enter the world of politics."[14] Christopher and Wilhelmenia provided a strong foundation that nurtured and encouraged their children.

Harvey also found support in his sisters. Although he was the oldest of the Gantt children, he often witnessed his younger siblings sticking up for him. Even as a child, he was remarkably even-tempered. "If Harvey was playing marbles and his team was

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[11] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[12] Ken Eudy. "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Control Started Young." *Charlotte Observer*. September 18, 1983. 1A.
[13] Edds, 201.
[14] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

losing," said Aundrea, "Gloria would get very upset. Sometimes she'd just go over and hit somebody."[15] The Gantt sisters felt protective of their older brother because of his kindness. "He really thinks people are basically good," Aundrea said. "And that's not always true."[16]

Through their extended family, the Gantt children were exposed to the realities of life outside the city of Charleston. Harvey and his sisters spent a great deal of time in the summer months visiting their grandparents, as well as an extensive network of cousins, in the Adams Run area. The differences between the busy day-to-day life on the peninsula and the rural coastal areas around Charleston were as stark then as they remain today. If it were possible for young Harvey to miss the distinctions, his cousins never let him forget. "We got an appreciation for the rural life in South Carolina," Gantt recalls. "We were always kidded as being the city kids because my father's brothers and children, our cousins, all grew up in the country."[17] Harvey was born out on rural Yonges Island, but his childhood in Charleston was as close to urban life as then existed in South Carolina.

Gantt benefitted from a strong support network in his immediate and extended families. But as he grew older, he found himself drawn into a larger and broader group, replete with direct and indirect influences on his life. Beyond just his classmates or the fellow church-goers at Morris Street Baptist Church, Gantt found himself drawn into the larger network of civil rights activists. Following Gantt's awakening in the Dart Hall Library, he consumed every book, newspaper, and magazine he could find dealing with the civil rights movement. "It had a great impact on me, because now I wanted to

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[15] Dannye Romine. "An Unquenchable Spirit," Charlotte *Observer*, May 1, 1988. 1E, 8E.
[16] Dannye Romine. "An Unquenchable Spirit," Charlotte *Observer*, May 1, 1988. 1E, 9E.
[17] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

understand what the word *segregation* meant," Gantt said. "The librarian will tell you that I spent every afternoon trying to read everything I could in *Ebony*, *Jet*, the newspapers, and the periodicals."[18]

Gantt's fascination at the news of the *Brown* decision served as a turning point, but it was not his first exposure to the civil rights movement. Harvey's father Christopher was a member of the NAACP, a dangerous organization to be associated with in the state of South Carolina.[19] And the Gantt children often heard the major civil rights issues of the day discussed by their parents and their parents' circle of friends. But something changed for Harvey with the news of *Brown v. Board of Education*: no longer were civil rights issues the purview of adults alone. With each news article and speech he consumed after May 17, 1954, Gantt was engaged in a larger social network that united all activists. While members of the civil rights movement disagreed on tactics, they were united through a shared pursuit of equality for African Americans. From the moment he read the news of *Brown v. Board of Education* at the Dart Hall Library, Gantt was recruited into a larger network of citizens fighting for African American freedom.

Of course, Gantt knew what segregation was before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, even if he was unaware of the terminology. As a young boy growing up in Charleston, the legally-enforced racial order was impossible to overlook. "We knew we were segregated, but it never felt bad," he said. "It was just a way of life." [20] In the wake of the *Brown* decision, however, the Gantt family openly debated the major civil rights issues of the era. Articles in publications like *Ebony* and *the Saturday*

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[18] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 354
[19] The state of South Carolina outlawed membership in the NAACP in the 1950s, causing substantial hardships for civil rights activists in the state. Septima Clark was teaching at Rhett Elementary School when she was fired by the Charleston School Board for her involvement in the NAACP in 1956.
[20] Art Harris. "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.

Evening Post sparked conversations around the Gantts' dinner table as Harvey became increasingly concerned with the national implications of the civil rights movement.

Harvey's primary guide into the world of civil rights activism was his father, Christopher Gantt Jr. When local civil rights leaders came to town, Harvey convinced his father to take him to hear their speeches. "I started to know clearly the civil rights luminaries in the movement, Roy Wilkins, Thurgood Marshall, and so forth and so on," he recalled. "And if they ever came to Charleston, I'd find a way to tag along with my father to go to that meeting wherever it was being held."[21] Christopher suggested a number of books to his children, sparking further contemplation. "We read James Baldwin, Richard Wright…. Dad kept saying, 'A better world is coming, the Gantts are going to overcome,'" Harvey recalled. "'Blacks are going to do better. The South really is going to be a great place to live.'"[22]

At their core, Christopher Gantt's lessons to his children were grounded in the idea of inclusion. While life for African Americans in the Jim Crow South remained extremely difficult, the elder Gantt advocated for changing the South rather than fleeing the region. Throughout his life, Harvey never questioned the fundamental truth that the South Carolina Lowcountry was his natural home and the Gantts had a right to prosper there. "We talked about how the world worked, how to get along with people," Christopher Gantt recalled, "to give the other fella a fair break, even if sometimes he didn't want to be fair to you."[23] Christopher's lessons provided the foundational core of Harvey's political philosophy. While consensus-building and compromise within a social order designed to oppress represented a daunting task, Harvey Gantt committed

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[21] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 355.
[22] Art Harris. "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.
[23] Art Harris. "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.

himself to the belief that differences could be solved through nonviolent means with careful and respectful dialogue.

While his growing social consciousness united Harvey with those then fighting for civil rights, it also placed him as a beneficiary of the work of previous activists. Indeed, the civil rights activists of the 1950s and 1960s in South Carolina continued a struggle that began decades earlier. Whether or not he realized it, Gantt's growing awareness of the important social issues confronting African Americans in the 1950s led to his enlistment in a struggle that began long before his birth.

The struggle for African American legal and social equality began as soon as slaves were freed in the South. In the years following the Civil War, social norms were challenged as both black and white citizens wrestled with the new world left in that conflict's wake. Within South Carolina, African American activists challenged the social order as part of an emerging black freedom struggle. From Robert Smalls' commandeering of the *Planter* in 1862 to the unionization efforts of African American nurses in Charleston in the 1940s, South Carolina witnessed a number of important challenges to white supremacy and Jim Crow. While the many activists were concerned with primarily economic issues like the procurement of land, efforts to provide educational opportunities for former slaves began immediately.[24]

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[24] For more on slavery and Reconstruction in South Carolina, see: Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For more on Reconstruction on a national level, see: Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002).

On the issue of black education in particular, South Carolina has a rich history stretching back to the earliest moments of black freedom in the state. During the era of Reconstruction, newly freed African American citizens experienced a moment of political power and social freedom that proved important if short-lived. In 1868, South Carolina instituted a new constitution; Article 10, Section 10, of this new constitution stated that "all the public schools, colleges, and universities of this State… shall be free and open to all the children and youths of the State, without regard to race or color."[25] Henry E. Hayne, then the Secretary of State of South Carolina, became the first African American student to attend a public college in South Carolina when he enrolled at the medical school of the University of South Carolina on October 7, 1873. With his registration, the University of South Carolina became the only southern public university during Reconstruction to admit black students. In response to Hayne's enrollment, the remaining white students withdrew and the white faculty resigned.[26]

After the end of Reconstruction, black education was largely ignored by state leaders. In the years after Governor "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman successfully installed a system of legally-enforced white supremacy in South Carolina with the 1895 Constitution, activists in Charleston fought to create a black school system virtually from scratch.[27] "Educational authorities acknowledged that blacks needed some schooling,

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[25] South Carolina Constitutional Convention (1868). Constitution of 1868. Article 10. South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[26] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 392. For a more in-depth discussion of the University of South Carolina's experience with desegregation during Reconstruction, see: Daniel Walker Hollis, *The University of South Carolina, Vol 1* (1951) and *Vol 2* (1956).

[27] For more on the creation of the Jim Crow state in South Carolina, see: Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman And the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); George Tindall, "The Question of Race in the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1895," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol 37, Issue 3 (July 1952); Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

enough to be healthy and productive tenants and laborers," writes historian R. Scott Baker, "but they believed that broader opportunities would unsettle a social order built on black subordination."[28] With black education representing a threat to white domination, civil rights activists in South Carolina faced a decidedly uphill battle.

Septima Clark, who later went on to play a pivotal role in the national civil rights movement and is one of South Carolina's most famous civil rights activists, witnessed first-hand the substandard black schools in the South Carolina Lowcountry. In 1904, Clark had her first experience with black schooling at Shaw Memorial School, where she sat on bleachers with other students and received little in the way of actual educational lessons. After three years at a private school, Clark was enrolled at the Charleston Colored Industrial School; following her graduation, she entered Avery Normal Institute and trained to be a teacher.[29] Clark's experiences in Charleston ran the gamut, from the neglected Shaw to the thriving Avery.[30] In some regards, she was lucky; Harvey's father Christopher Gantt, Jr. had no such educational opportunities in rural Adams Run, as the closest black high school was twenty-six miles away in Charleston.[31] In the decades that followed, the efforts of activist teachers like Clark and Mamie Garvin Fields resulted in the steadily improving state of black education in Charleston and its surrounding communities, providing the educational bedrock for generations of students.[32]

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[28] Baker, R. Scott. *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina 1926-1972* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 4.
[29] Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 40-43. The Charleston Colored Industrial School was later renamed Burke Industrial School, eventually becoming Burke High School.
[30] The Avery Normal Institute was founded in 1865 as Charleston's first secondary school for African Americans. While Shaw and the Charleston Colored Industrial School (later Burke High School) were public, Avery was a private institution.
[31] Dannye Romine. "An Unquenchable Spirit," *Charlotte Observer*. May 1, 1988. 8E.
[32] For more on African American education in South Carolina, see: R. Scott Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-*

In the Spring of 1943, just a few months after Gantt was born, a young World War II veteran named John Howard Wrighten III applied to attend the College of Charleston. Wrighten was a native of nearby Edisto Island, not far from the Yonges Island area where Gantt was born. As a teenager, he attended Avery Normal School, which was by that point a vital institution in the Charleston civil rights movement. When his application to the College of Charleston was ignored, Wrighten enrolled at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. On July 2, 1946, Wrighten again challenged segregation in higher education when he applied to the University of South Carolina Law School, which was then the sole state-supported law school. Only this time, Wrighten did not accept refusal of his application without a fight. Enlisting the aid of the NAACP, Wrighten filed suit against the state of South Carolina. To assist Wrighten in his cause, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund provided the legal services of Thurgood Marshall.

On July 12, 1947, District Judge Julius Waties Waring ruled in favor of Wrighten in his suit against South Carolina. The state was left with three options: it could allow Wrighten to attend the law school at the University of South Carolina; it could create a law school at one of South Carolina's historically black institutions of higher learning; or it could close the doors on the law school at the University of South Carolina. [33] Rather than close the law school in Columbia or allow Wrighten to attend there, state leaders established a law school at the Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and Mechanical College of South Carolina in Orangeburg[34]. The law school, which closed its doors in

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1976 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Mamie Garvin Fields and Karen Fields, *Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir* (New York: The Free Press, 1983).

[33] *Wrighten v. Board of Trustees*, 72 F. Supp. 948 (E.D.S.C. 1947)

[34] The school was renamed South Carolina State College in 1954; it is now South Carolina State University.

1966, produced over fifty graduates in its twenty years, many of whom continued to practice law in the state. While the school produced a number of successful African American lawyers for the state of South Carolina, its very existence served as a stark reminder of the entrenched racial order and the lengths to which the state would go to preserve its segregated institutions. John Wrighten's attempt to desegregate higher education in South Carolina failed in its immediate goal, but it set off a chain of events that proved crucial in bringing about change in South Carolina. However, his was not the only effort undertaken to challenge the status quo.

While the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* remains the face of school desegregation in American history, there were many concurrent cases that presented similar challenges to segregation in the United States. One of those cases was *Briggs v. Elliott*. Led by the Reverend Joseph DeLaine, residents of Summerton in rural Clarendon County filed suit against the state of South Carolina in 1949 over the lack of resources provided for black students. While white students were provided buses and adequate facilities, black students were forced to walk, with some students traversing miles of dirt roads each day.[35] In *Briggs v. Elliott*, the students of Clarendon County were represented by Thurgood Marshall as part of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.[36] Marshall argued that the state failed to meet any measure of equality in the education provided to its African American citizens. One of the judges that heard the case in federal court was J. Waties Waring, the same judge that ruled in John Wrighten's favor six years earlier. Waring, who established a reputation as a vocal critic of segregation, proved an important

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[35] Orville Vernon Burton, Beatrice Burton, and Simon Appleford. "Seeds in Unlikely Soil: The *Briggs v. Elliott* School Segregation Case," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 178-79.
[36] Harry Briggs, Sr. and Eliza Briggs, parents of then 8-year old Harry Briggs, Jr., were the first plaintiffs listed alphabetically.

ally; as one historian writes, “Waring did not think Marshall was militant enough.”[37] Judge Waring’s eventual dissent in *Briggs v. Elliott* outlined much of the argument that the Supreme Court echoed in its unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was presented before the Supreme Court as a combination of five similar civil rights cases including *Briggs v. Elliott*. Although *Brown v. Board of Education* persists as the premiere legal decision in the conventional civil rights narrative, the *Briggs v. Elliott* case was an important forerunner that signaled civil rights activists in South Carolina were committed to the fight for equality.

And yet, despite continued attacks against the segregated state that weakened its legal foundation, there were seemingly few changes to the status quo by 1954. The mundane activities that filled Gantt’s daily life, from riding on a bus to using a water fountain, were constant reminders of the unflinching social order. Despite its persistence in every facet of public life, Gantt identifies his experience in school in particular as the source of his most lasting impression of segregation. “From our little house that my father built… I’d walk up to the corner and I’d look to my left and there was a white elementary school,” Gantt remembered, “but I would turn to my right and go four or five blocks to a black elementary school.”[38] Behind the closed doors of the family home, A. B. Rhett Elementary School, and Morris Street Baptist Church, Gantt was afforded refuge from the harsh reality of daily life in Charleston. But outside of those private establishments, he was forced to abide by the written, and sometimes unwritten, racial

[37] Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 93.
[38] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

hierarchy. “While I listened to the politics at the moment spoken by my parents and their adult guests, I grew up in a South that was very segregated,” Gantt recalled.[39]

The *Brown* decision offered new hopes of equal opportunity for young African American students. The efforts of individuals like Septima Clark, John Wrighten, and the plaintiffs in *Briggs vs. Elliott* paved the way for the students of Gantt’s generation. As Harvey entered Burke High School in 1957, he and his classmates were hopeful that substantial change was just around the corner. However, with just four years of school in Charleston remaining, Gantt and his classmates knew that, barring quick action, they may well graduate from high school without experiencing the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The Gantts placed a great deal of emphasis on the academic achievements of their children, identifying education as an integral tool in achieving prosperity. Despite the inherent inequalities of segregated schools, Gantt described his education as excellent. “I didn’t know that the bad books or the books that were out of date were out of date,” he said. “And I thought people were generally interested in me and my classmates and they wanted us to do well.”[40] One of Gantt’s earliest memories involved a feeling of pride in regards to academic achievement. “The first day or two that they put me in the first grade, they found that I had done so well in kindergarten that there was no point in

[39] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 354.
[40] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

keeping me there," Gantt recalled, "and so they placed me in the second grade. My mother was very pleased about that."[41]

Harvey's teachers quickly identified his artistic talent, first exhibited through his constant doodling during class, and directed that talent towards school projects. By the time Gantt arrived at historic Burke High School in Charleston, he had his sights set on pursuing a degree in architecture. "You toy around with a lot of things and I did probably as most kids do, wanting to be everything from a pharmacist to a doctor to a preacher to a lawyer," Gantt recalled. "But finally it was putting together my aptitude for drawing and my interest in the technical aspects of putting things together that led me to architecture."[42]

From the outset, Gantt was informed that architecture was an unusual choice for a young African American kid from South Carolina. "My high school research indicated that it was a profession that was practiced essentially by whites," Gantt said. "I remember my mother was astonished when I said I wanted to be an architect. She could remember only one article in *Ebony* about a black architect."[43] The presence of black architects in Charleston was more than rare; it was virtually non-existent. In an effort to stoke his interest in architecture, a supportive guidance counselor at Burke provided Gantt with books on the subject. As Gantt later lamented, "There were no architect's offices that I could visit in Charleston."[44]

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[41] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[42] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[43] J.A.C. Dunn. "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found A Challenging Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*. July 19, 1987. A13, A22.
[44] "Former Charlotte Mayor On Making History, American Politics," *Tell Me More* (NPR). August 27, 2008. Cheryl Corley

Like many of the students at Burke High School, Gantt was encouraged to succeed in his studies in preparation for life outside of the classroom. "There was a great deal of competition to do well, to achieve excellence," Gantt recalls. As with his interest in the civil rights movement, Harvey received support for his academic endeavors from his parents. "We always told them, 'Don't let anybody else decide what you are,'" Christopher Gantt said. "'You decide by being the best.'"[45] Teachers at Burke recognized Gantt's artistic abilities, encouraging him to nurture his talent. Outside of the classroom, Gantt was the quarterback for Burke, leading the team to the Lowcountry football championship game in his senior season.[46]

In addition to their studies and extracurricular activities, Gantt and his classmates became fixated on social issues beyond the halls of Burke High School. Of particular importance was the continued presence of segregation. In Harvey's first year at Burke, his father Christopher and other parents challenged the city of Charleston in regards to Burke's outdated and inadequate football field. Christopher Gantt convinced city officials to allow Burke's football team to use the new, modern football stadium at the Citadel. "It was very dramatic to see him and other parents get together and cause a change to occur," Gantt recalled.[47] The episode taught Harvey a powerful lesson; Christopher's civil rights victory for Burke High School was the result of persuasion and common sense arguments.

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[45] Art Harris. "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*. November 4, 1990.
[46] "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Discipline, Sometimes Misunderstood, Took Early Root," *Charlotte Observer*. September 18, 1983. 14A. In a twist of fate, Gantt once competed against fellow South Carolinian Jesse Jackson in high school football. Art Harris. "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*. November 4, 1990.
[47] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

Gantt enrolled at Burke in 1957, three years after the Supreme Court ruled segregation was unconstitutional. Despite continued delay in the integration of South Carolina's public schools, there was reason to hope that segregation may end before their graduation. The same month that Gantt arrived at Burke, President Dwight Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division to protect nine African American students in their effort to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The confrontation that occurred in Little Rock served as another important lesson for civil rights activists. While white residents of Little Rock continued to fight against integration, appeals to aid from the federal government were not hopeless.

During Gantt's senior year at Burke, a new wave of civil rights activism began in Greensboro, North Carolina.[48] On February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University led a sit-in at the Woolworth's in Greensboro, triggering a series of student-led sit-ins across the South. For Gantt and his classmates, the sit-ins at Greensboro were an inspiration. In the actions of the Greensboro students, Gantt and the seniors at Burke High School realized that there were methods of resistance and protest that were open to anyone. "They did something that was real," Gantt said. "It didn't require going through a court. It didn't require finding a lawyer. It just required having the courage to go sit down."[49]

Due to the lack of an African American college in the area, Charleston had a young leadership vacuum. The burden fell to the students of Burke High School. "We

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[48] For more on Greensboro, see: William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). For more on student-activism in the South, see: Robert Cohen and David J. Snyder, eds. *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Jeffrey Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South 1960-1970* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).
[49] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 355.

didn't really make a huge distinction between college campus protests," Gantt said. "We just thought anybody could do this."[50] After they witnessed the actions of civil rights activists in Greensboro, the Burke students considered options for protest available to them in Charleston.

On the morning of Friday, April 1, 1960, just one month before graduation, Harvey Gantt and twenty-three other Burke High School students walked into the S. H. Kress store in downtown Charleston and sat down at the segregated lunch counter. When they were asked to leave, they refused, beginning a sit-in that lasted until late that afternoon. While Gantt learned his first lessons on political activism from his parents, he and his classmates took the initiative on the Kress sit-in; their parents were left in the dark. "Our parents were concerned because we did it without their knowledge," Gantt recalled. "Even colleagues at school didn't know because we wanted the element of surprise."[51] When they refused to leave the lunch counter, the store manager called the police. Despite the potential legal consequences, the students of Burke were willing to face the legal ramifications of their actions. "I guess we were caught in that whole thing as it spread across the country," Gantt said. "This wasn't right; it seemed ridiculous now that you really examined it."[52]

While Gantt and his fellow students kept their parents in the dark, they acted on the activist spark encouraged by many of their parents and teachers. James Blake, a classmate of Gantt's and the leader of the Kress sit-in, said, "[Teachers] taught us we

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[50] Adam Parker. "A Lunch Unserved: How the 1960 Kress Sit-In Changed Charleston." *Charleston Post and Courier*, August 3, 2013.
[51] Adam Parker. "A Lunch Unserved: How the 1960 Kress Sit-In Changed Charleston." *Charleston Post and Courier*, August 3, 2013.
[52] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

were first-class citizens and not to let the color of our skin or our background keep us from achieving."[53] The students who organized the sit-in were among the best and the brightest at Burke High School. Mamie Lou White and Gantt were valedictorian and salutatorian, respectively. James Blake served as the editor of the *Parvenue*, the Burke student newspaper. The president of the student council, Cornelius Fludd, also participated in the sit-in. The students acted on the advice of Eugene Hunt and J. Michael Graves, teachers at Burke.[54] In many ways, the actions of the Burke students reflected a series of events sparked by Septima Clark and an earlier generation of civil rights activists in South Carolina. At one time, African American education itself was a radical act in South Carolina. By 1960, the recipients of that defiant heritage expanded their range to extracurricular social activism.

The sit-in at the S. H. Kress, sparked by student activists from Burke, helped jumpstart what became known as the Charleston Movement. While they tried to keep their parents and teachers in the dark about their plans, the sit-in was less spontaneous than the Burke students claimed; in the months before the sit-in, Burke students trained in the methods of nonviolent protest under the tutelage of J. Arthur Branch, the local NAACP branch President.[55] In the years that followed, local civil rights activists participated in more direct methods of activism. Led by Branch and Rev. James Blake, the Charleston Movement led to hundreds of arrests as the local black community participated in protests and boycotts across the city. The actions of the Charleston Movement attracted the attention of Martin Luther King, Jr., who visited Charleston to

[53] Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 142.
[54] Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 142.
[55] Adam Parker. "A Lunch Unserved: How the 1960 Kress Sit-In Changed Charleston." *Charleston Post and Courier*, August 3, 2013. J. Arthur Branch was a graduate of the Avery Institute.

speak at Mother Emanuel AME Church in 1962. From that initial sit-in at Kress, Charleston began to take on a larger role in the national civil rights movement.[56] Ironically, much of this more-spirited activism occurred after Gantt and other seniors from Burke left Charleston to pursue further educational opportunities.

Harvey and his fellow activists were arrested during the sit-in, but they were not led to jail. Instead, the students were taken directly to a courthouse where they were handed over to their parents. As legal counsel, their parents collectively hired a young African American lawyer from Columbia named Matthew Perry. A graduate of the law school established at South Carolina State in the wake of John Wrighten's suit against the state, Perry had a reputation as a gifted civil rights attorney. Although he was but one of many students arrested, Gantt took advantage of the opportunity to introduce himself, and his cause, to Perry. "He was a very, very intelligent, bright, upbeat young man," Perry later recalled of his first impression of Harvey. "And he came over, and he said, 'Hello, I'm Harvey Gantt. I'm a senior at Burke High School, and I'm going to be an architect.'"[57] Gantt let Perry know that he had his sights set on one school in particular: Clemson College. At the time, Gantt had been accepted into the architecture program at Iowa State University. Clemson College, like all public colleges in the state of South Carolina, was segregated.

Gantt was just eleven years old in 1954. The decision in the *Brown v. Board* case served as a triumphant moment for everyone associated with the civil rights movement, but Harvey and others of his generation stood to gain the most. Where the victory was

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[56] Lottie Joiner. "Charleston's Place in the Civil Rights Movement," *Time*. June 19, 2015. http://time.com/3928713/charleston-civil-rights-movement/

[57] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 349.

symbolic for many, hinting at potential future victories in the battle for equality, for Harvey the decision offered the prospect of real, practical change. And yet, that change was never realized during his time in Charleston. When Gantt graduated from Burke High School in 1960, South Carolina's public schools remained segregated, a full six years after the Supreme Court ruled that segregation was unconstitutional.

For African American high school graduates in South Carolina in 1960, the prospects for higher education were limited. While there were a number of HBCUs in the state, including Allen University, Benedict College, Claflin University, Voorhees College, and South Carolina State College, the state's largest and most prestigious public schools remained off-limits to black South Carolinians. As limited as Gantt's options in the state were, there were no African American colleges in his hometown of Charleston. Indeed, the actions of Gantt and his classmates in the Kress sit-in were undertaken in part because there was no black college presence in Charleston. For those who wished to pursue educational opportunities that were not available at the African American colleges in South Carolina, the state provided financial assistance, effectively paying the difference between out-of-state tuition and in-state tuition. "Ultimately after evaluating Howard University, (North Carolina) A and T University, Tuskegee, all of which were all black institutions back in those days," Gantt recalled, "I got a guidance counselor who advised I might want to look at predominantly white schools, also."[58] For a young student interested in studying architecture in the state of South Carolina, Clemson College was the only option.

[58] Gantt interview with North Carolina Modernist Houses, 2013.

Excited by the possibilities that lay before him, Gantt had big plans after graduation. While his mother Wilhelmenia completed the eleventh-grade, his father received only an eighth-grade education; Harvey was the first Gantt to graduate high school. That Gantt's academic record qualified him for higher education was largely due to Harvey himself. From the moment he entered the public education system, Gantt was identified by his teachers as a gifted student, resulting in his being placed a year ahead at Rhett Elementary. Throughout his years at Burke, Gantt maintained high marks while participating in a number of extracurricular activities. However, while Gantt was an exceptional student, he also received substantial support from his parents and his teachers at Burke High School. While Gantt's parents encouraged his academic pursuits and engaged their son in discussions of social issues within the home, Gantt's teachers recognized his skills and helped guide him towards a career in architecture, which was at that time a woefully uncommon profession for African Americans in the South. Furthermore, the conditions at Burke that allowed Gantt and his classmates to flourish were the result of decades of civil rights activism that led to steady improvements in the state of black education in Charleston. While Gantt's hard work was the largest determining factor, years of activism helped establish an adequate education system for African Americans in South Carolina.

Determined and confident in his abilities, Gantt focused on beginning his studies in architecture. The exact school at which he would study, however, was still in question. Gantt wrote a letter to Clemson College during his senior year in which he requested application materials and course descriptions, but he did not submit an application.[59]

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[59] *Gantt v. Clemson*, Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, January 1963.

Gantt reluctantly accepted that the best prospects for achieving his dreams in architecture were in schools outside of the South. He recalled,

> When I watched television on Saturdays, I would see these football players of color, and I was growing up in the segregated South, and it appeared that the Midwest must be a great democratic place to be. They didn't have the legal segregation of the South, and so if I was going to go to school I thought it might be a good idea to go to Michigan or Ohio or Iowa. Sort of get out of the neighborhood.[60]

Gantt was offered a scholarship at Iowa State University, where he enrolled in the Fall of 1960.

At Iowa State, Gantt quickly realized a simple truth: Ames, Iowa, was nothing like Charleston, South Carolina. "Black people were a curiosity," Gantt recalled. "It was the first time in my life that I went somewhere and the black folks were not involved in the domestic and menial tasks."[61] Beyond the lack of interaction with other African Americans, Gantt felt a familiar call of innumerable college freshmen: he simply missed home. Cooped away in a dormitory twenty hours away from Charleston in Ames, Iowa, a weekend trip home was impossible for Gantt.

When Gantt walked to the Dart Hall Library in his youth, he walked through the muggy streets of Charleston. The surrounding beach communities experience what could only generously be referred to as a breeze; the more urban areas of the Charleston peninsula are afforded no such luxury. The humidity of the summer months can be brutal and unforgiving. In Iowa, Gantt experienced sub-zero temperatures. Recalling his time

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[60] J.A.C. Dunn. "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found A Challenging Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A13.
[61] J.A.C. Dunn. "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found A Challenging Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

in Ames, Gantt said, "The forty-two-degree-below-zero weather in Iowa made my stay there much, much shorter."[62] Gantt was simply out of his element in Ames.

Despite his issues of comfortability, practical educational considerations proved most important in Gantt's decision to transfer from Iowa State. "State universities as a rule train their young people to work in their state," Gantt said. "It was clear that the architects who were going to school there were going to practice in Des Moines, Davenport … and I was going to go back home."[63] Clemson College, tucked away in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in the northwest corner of South Carolina, and just a four hour drive from Charleston, offered an excellent, nationally-recognized architecture program. However, six years after the Supreme Court of the United States declared segregation unconstitutional, its doors were closed to Harvey and other African Americans.

Gantt suggests that his motives in challenging segregation at Clemson were primarily educational, but of course they were more than that. Years earlier, his grandfather Christopher Gantt, Sr. was denied access to an education in Adams Run based solely on the color of his skin. In the decades before Harvey's birth, local activists founded institutions such as Burke High School and Avery Normal Institute to provide educational opportunities for generations of African Americans in Charleston. Harvey's legal advisor, Matthew Perry, was a graduate of the newly instituted law school at South Carolina State College, a product of the state's refusal to admit John Wrighten into the law school in Columbia. Gantt's opportunities were the direct result of civil rights

[62] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 353.
[63] J.A.C. Dunn. "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found A Challenging Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

activism from an earlier generation of South Carolinians. By challenging segregation at Clemson, Gantt was further challenging the racial status quo in the state.

In the most practical terms, Gantt wanted an education and Clemson was the logical choice. And yet, the fact that Gantt's pursuit of such a practical, rational decision stood as a radical action in South Carolina only highlighted the inherent irrationality of the system of segregated schooling. Why should Gantt, a talented, qualified South Carolina student, be denied the educational opportunities afforded other South Carolina citizens? Harvey's father Christopher was a hard-working machinist at the Charleston Naval Yard who contributed to the war effort in World War II and paid his taxes throughout his life. Why should his child be denied an educational opportunity? In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, it became increasingly difficult for southern politicians and school administrators to justify their denial of African American applicants. On the advice of Matthew Perry, Gantt enrolled at Iowa State in the fall of 1960, but he never planned on graduating there. By any means necessary, Gantt was determined to enroll at Clemson and fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* in South Carolina.

Chapter Two

Desegregation at Clemson College, 1961-1963

In the Clemson College Progress Report published in 1960, recently appointed President Robert C. Edwards reflected on the school year and offered insight into his vision for the institution's future. Edwards noted that much had changed since Thomas Green Clemson bequeathed his property, inherited from his stepfather John C. Calhoun, to the state of South Carolina for the purposes of building an agricultural college. However, Edwards emphasized that Thomas Clemson was a man of vision who would surely welcome the school's advancements. "I doubt that our fine buildings, our physical facilities, or the size of our student body would astound or even surprise Mr. Clemson," Edwards wrote. "I very honestly believe Thomas G. Clemson, could he see the effects, influences, and accomplishments of Clemson College over its 71-year history, would say, 'Well done.'"[1]

While it was indeed true that the school evolved greatly over its seventy-one year history, the most drastic changes at Clemson occurred only recently. Once an all-male agricultural college with a strong military component, Clemson became a civilian institution in 1955, the same year it accepted its first female students.[2] In 1958, Edwards replaced Robert Franklin Poole as President of Clemson College. The following year, the

[1] The Clemson College Progress Report provided updated information on the state of the college for the use of state politicians and the Board of Trustees. R.C. Edwards, Clemson College Progress Report of the President, 1959-1960. Ernest F. Hollings Papers. Box 20. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.
[2] As a "land grant" college under the Morrill Act, Clemson was required to teach military tactics and train reserve officers. Although the university no longer has as strong of a military presence as it once did, Clemson's military past is often celebrated in histories of the institution. See also: Rod Andrew, Jr., *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Frank Mellette, *Old Clemson College, It Was A Hell Of A Place* (1981).

school awarded its first Ph.D. to Donald H. Petersen, a doctoral student in Plant Pathology. The school's engineering and architecture programs were among the best in the region. However, Edwards envisioned a future in which Clemson competed with top-tier universities not only in the South, but nationwide. "What we have done is in the record. What we are doing is vital," Edwards wrote. "What we are to do will be the true measure of our greatness."[3]

Harvey Gantt was less concerned with Clemson's past or future than he was with Clemson's present. Despite its advancements in expanding academic offerings and its acceptance of women students, the school remained off-limits to Gantt and other African American students in 1960. The history of which Edwards was so proud was also a history of racial segregation. While African Americans served in menial tasks throughout the institution's history, the classrooms at Clemson remained closed to black students. Gantt was determined to break that color-barrier for the practical purpose of gaining a quality education in his home state.

Throughout his time at Iowa State, Gantt wrote letters to Clemson requesting application materials and course catalogues. In a letter dated November 2, 1960, Gantt stated that he hoped to transfer to Clemson from Iowa State. Nowhere in the letter did Gantt mention his race. The admissions department received hundreds of letters like Gantt's every year, but his began a two-year battle that reshaped Clemson and the state of South Carolina. As Robert C. Edwards, Clemson's president, later wrote, "We, of

[3] R.C. Edwards, Clemson College Progress Report of the President, 1959-1960. Ernest F. Hollings Papers. Box 20. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.

course, had no way of knowing that the person writing this letter is a Negro."[4] Once Gantt's race became known, and the full implications of his application were realized, both the institution of Clemson and the state of South Carolina pursued every possible avenue of resistance to prevent Gantt's enrollment. Likewise, Gantt employed every legal resource at his disposal to break the color barrier on higher education in South Carolina.

Looking back on his decision to challenge segregation in South Carolina, Gantt described it as an issue of applying logic and practicality to a situation rife with absurdity. Even before the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the state took great measures to ensure the survival of segregation. South Carolina's resistance to the *Brown v. Board* decision brought with it unnecessary hardships and logistical nightmares for its African American residents who wished to seek an education. The state provided monetary assistance through the South Carolina Regional Education Board for Gantt and other students to attend colleges and universities in other states, covering the difference between out-of-state tuition and comparable in-state tuition for South Carolina schools. Gantt received $149.51 per quarter to attend Iowa State University.[5]

For Gantt, the segregated education system in South Carolina that forced him to attend college out-of-state in order to study architecture seemed preposterous. "Things just came to some logical conclusions," he said. "There are times when truth itself sort of snaps its head straight up in your face and you know that you've got to go in a different

[4] Letter from Robert C. Edwards to Senator Marion L. Gressette, February 2, 1961, Folder 188, Robert C. Edwards Presidential Correspondence, Special Collections, the Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University (hereafter R.C. Edwards Papers).
[5] Jerry Reel, "Clemson and Harvey Gantt," *Integration with Dignity*. 45. Clemson Digital Collections.

direction."[6] While Gantt never doubted the quality of the education he received in the years he attended Iowa State, he questioned the absurd political climate in South Carolina that would force a young man from Charleston to travel all the way to Ames, Iowa, for an education. Describing his thought process, Gantt said, "If you are lonely out here in the Midwest which is hostile to your upbringing in terms of climate and being close to people you know, etc., you ought to be home. That's where you ought to go."[7]

One of the fundamental concerns that guided Gantt's attitudes towards challenging segregation at Clemson was the fact that it was a public school. Years earlier, Gantt's father and grandfather expressed outrage at the lack of educational opportunity for African Americans in rural Adams Run, South Carolina. As Harvey's father Christopher Gantt, Jr., recalled, "My daddy was a taxpayer, too. And that *burned* me up."[8] That same sentiment emerged when Christopher challenged the city of Charleston in an effort to secure the use of the Citadel's football stadium for the Burke football team.

While Gantt was bothered by the inherent inequality of his situation, he also held what, at first glance, appeared to be a more mundane motivation for transferring to Clemson. Like many students both black and white, Gantt wished to attend college close to home. Simply put, Harvey Gantt was southern; the South Carolina Lowcountry was the only home he ever knew. In his youth, Harvey's parents encouraged him to alter situations, not avoid them. It was a remarkably simple sentiment that brought lasting

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[6] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[7] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[8] Dannye Romine, "An Unquenchable Spirit," *Charlotte Observer*. May 1, 1988. 8E.

change to South Carolina. And as Gantt later stated, "It was nice to make that decision on a twenty-three below zero day in Iowa."[9]

Following his request for an application in the fall of 1960, Gantt formally applied to Clemson College in early 1961. When Kenneth N. Vickery received Gantt's application on January 19, 1961, he noticed that Gantt wrote "N" for "negro" in the space reserved for the applicant's race. After a quick investigation into Gantt, authorities at Clemson realized that he was then receiving funding from the state to attend Iowa State. On these grounds, they deflected Gantt's attempt to transfer. "On inquiry we find that the South Carolina Regional Education Board is paying, and expects to continue to pay provided you qualify, the difference in cost between instate and out-of-state enrollment," Vickery wrote. "In view of the above and your satisfactory progress at Iowa State University we are returning your application."[10]

With the letter from Vickery, Gantt's first application to Clemson was returned to him. Gantt was undeterred; in April, he resubmitted his application for enrollment in the Fall semester of 1961. In his second letter to Vickery, Gantt wrote, "As soon as possible, please advise me to whether I have been accepted as a student for next year. As I stated to you in my last letter, I am especially desirous of attending Clemson College."[11] Gantt simply refused to accept Clemson's efforts to discourage his application.

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[9] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

[10] Gantt v. Clemson, Motion For Order Advancing Date Of Hearing Appeal From Denial Of Preliminary Injunction, United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit. Hollings Papers. Box 15.

[11] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Kenneth Vickery, April 26, 1961, Folder 188, R.C. Edwards Papers.

Clemson officials claimed that Gantt's declaration of his race on his formal application marked their first realization that he was African American. However, had Gantt's "secret" remained hidden, it likely would not have remained that way for much longer. For starters, there was the issue of Gantt's high school education. Burke High School, which was known as the Charleston Colored Industrial School until 1921, had a long history as an important African American institution in South Carolina. Likewise, Gantt was attending Iowa State with funding provided by the South Carolina Regional Education Board. The revelation of Gantt's race undoubtedly changed the treatment of his application compared to other students: a copy of his second application letter which was kept in a separate place from other applications had the word "negro" written across the top.[12] With Gantt's quick attempt to re-apply, Clemson officials realized that segregation at the institution was officially under assault.

R.C. Edwards and other leaders in the state were prepared for an eventual challenge to segregation. Between John Wrighten's suit against the University of South Carolina and *Briggs v. Elliot*, the state's leadership was well-acquainted with the growing legal challenge against segregated schooling. At Clemson in particular, the prospect of a civil rights challenge to the school's segregated student body was a practical concern for Edwards. Two African American students applied to Clemson in the preceding decades: Spencer Bracey in 1948 and John L. Gainey in 1956. Neither student pursued the issue beyond the application stage, but they represented a serious challenge on the horizon for Clemson administrators. Indeed, months before Bracey's application in 1948, Clemson's registrar G.E. Metz openly addressed the issue of potential desegregation at Clemson in a

[12] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Kenneth Vickery, April 26, 1961, Folder 188, R.C. Edwards Papers.

paper for the Clemson Board of Trustees.[13] By the time Gantt formally applied in January 1961, a number of southern colleges and universities outside of South Carolina had already experienced moments of desegregation. The University of Tennessee accepted African American graduate students in 1952. The University of North Carolina admitted three black undergraduate students under court order in 1955. Autherine Lucy's efforts to desegregate the University of Alabama in 1956, although short-lived due to the violent reaction of segregationists, showed that change was coming. However, when Gantt sent his first letter to Clemson in his senior year of high school, traditionally white colleges in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee were all segregated at the undergraduate level.[14]

The fact that victory in his efforts could lead to sweeping social change was not lost on Gantt, even if he has long asserted that he wished to avoid a moment of political confrontation. However, Gantt realized that the broader political implications of his actions would require professional guidance. He leaned heavily on advice from Matthew Perry, who helped guide Gantt through the application process. "We did not select Gantt," Perry recalled. "Gantt selected me, and through me, he selected the civil rights structure with which I was associated."[15]

Harvey Gantt's name has become synonymous with desegregation at Clemson, but he was not the only African-American applicant in 1961. Timothy Cornelius Fludd, a classmate of Gantt at Burke High School, submitted a transfer request at roughly the

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[13] H. Lewis Suggs, "Harvey Gantt and the Desegregation of Clemson University," in *Integration with Dignity: A Celebration of Harvey Gantt's Admission to Clemson*, ed. Skip Eisiminger (Clemson University, 2003), 17.

[14] Some of the schools in these states, like the University of Florida and the University of Tennessee, allowed African American graduate students before 1961. However, at the time of Gantt's first contact with Clemson, none of these schools were admitting African American undergraduates.

[15] Matthew Perry interview with SCPC, South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library. South Carolina Digital Collections. 49.

same time as Gantt.[16] The combined applications made for a stronger case; in *Briggs v. Elliott*, Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP held reservations about representing a single client and only proceeded when multiple plaintiffs joined the suit.[17] Multiple applicants helped spread the burden and increased the odds of success. With the case against Clemson, however, Fludd's application helped as much as it hurt. The nature of Fludd's application directly exposed the political ramifications of his request in ways that Gantt's did not: Fludd wished to transfer from Savannah State College, an HBCU.[18] Like Gantt, Fludd was advised in his efforts by Matthew Perry, the same Columbia lawyer that represented them in their sit-in at the S. H. Kress in 1960.

The efforts of Gantt and Fludd were united through their legal counsel, but the two young men were also connected to a larger network throughout the South. The long legal battle to desegregate the University of Georgia ended on January 6, 1961, when Judge William Bootle ruled in favor of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes in their suit against the state. In May 1961, James Meredith filed suit against the University of Mississippi. Fearing the chaotic scene that accompanied desegregation at the University of Georgia, the Georgia Polytechnic Institute voluntarily admitted African American students in the Fall semester of 1961. As Gantt continued to submit transfer applications to Clemson from Ames, Iowa, African American students in other southern states broke

[16] Gantt and Fludd were not the only graduate of Burke High School in 1960 to participate in the process of school desegregation. Fellow Burke graduate Delano Meriwether became the first African American student accepted to Duke University's School of Medicine in 1967. He later achieved fame as a runner, appearing on the cover of the February 22, 1971, issue of *Sports Illustrated*.
[17] Orville Vernon Burton, Beatrice Burton and Simon Appleford, "Seeds in Unlikely Soil: The *Briggs v. Elliott* School Segregation Case," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 181.
[18] Perry interview with SCPC, 51. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library. NYT article claims Fludd attended Morehouse. "Carolina Schools Face Racial Drive," *New York Times*. June 25, 1961. 53.

their respective racial barriers to higher education, providing hope to Gantt that he would soon be admitted at Clemson.

Gantt may have hoped to achieve victory outside of the spotlight, but Edwards and his staff at Clemson were determined to prevent his quiet enrollment. Gantt's first application was returned on the grounds that he was currently receiving funds from the South Carolina Regional Education Board and was performing well at Iowa State. When Gantt submitted subsequent applications, Clemson officials responded with a number of tactics designed to delay. Gantt was informed that he needed to submit his scores for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). When Gantt submitted his scores, Clemson officials responded that Gantt missed the deadline for submitting his application.[19] In June 1962, Gantt again applied to Clemson, this time with his SAT scores. Clemson officials responded with a letter informing Gantt that he needed to submit a portfolio of his design work and schedule an interview with Harlan McClure, Dean of Architecture.[20] By that point, Gantt had spent the better part of eighteen months submitting and resubmitting applications to Clemson's admissions office. Throughout the process, Clemson officials never outright rejected Gantt's application, a deft move that provided plausible deniability against charges of discrimination. Left with little recourse in the face of repeated stalling tactics, Gantt and Matthew Perry filed suit against Clemson on July 7, 1962.[21]

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[19] In court, Clemson's attorneys argued that Gantt waited until August 1961 to take the SAT despite a potential June testing date in Charleston. *Gantt v. Clemson*. United States Court of Appeals Fourth Circuit. January 16, 1963. 320 F.2d 611

[20] *Gantt v. Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina*. United States Court of Appeals Fourth Circuit. January 16, 1963. 320 F.2d 611

[21] Matthew Perry interview with SCPC, South Carolina Digital Collections. 52. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.

Gantt was well aware that his suit against Clemson could potentially change his life forever. He had hoped to pursue his dream of studying architecture in South Carolina without drawing attention to himself, but that hope was dashed by Clemson's refusal to accept his application. While Gantt expected that the coming months would bring attention from the media, he noticed an immediate change following his official legal challenge on July 7, 1962. Gantt recalled, "The evening paper said I was going to Clemson, and my sister got the paper off the front porch and she ran in the house and she said, 'Oh my gosh, we're in trouble. You're on the front page.'" He continued, "My sister started to look at me a little bit differently. I was a little bit more handsome now and a little bit taller… because her brother had the courage to go to Clemson."[22] Beyond his relationship with his siblings, Gantt realized that his new national profile brought with it certain responsibilities. In his challenge against Clemson, Gantt was enlisted into the larger civil rights struggle that he witnessed as a child. While the civil rights aspect of his case was a secondary concern for him, Gantt was mindful of the important work that preceded his case against Clemson and the impact his potential victory in court could bring.

Gantt and his family were also mindful of the potential danger of his actions. Harvey took a substantial risk in challenging the racial status quo in South Carolina. While he maintained his confidence throughout the ordeal, there existed substantial cause for concern. Although South Carolina's civil rights history is often framed as less violent than that of other Deep South states, white supremacists employed stiff resistance to civil rights activism. For their efforts, previous activists in the state encountered a mixture of social ostracizing, intimidation, and outright violence. Following his involvement in the

[22] *Towards the Meeting of the Waters*, 356.

Briggs v. Elliott case in Clarendon County, James DeLaine's house was blown up by white supremacists, a reminder that brutal, racially-motivated violence was not some far-gone relic of the past, but rather an ever-present, existential threat to civil rights activists. Although he survived the attack, DeLaine was forced to flee the state. J. Waties Waring's perceived judicial activism in favor of civil rights resulted in his status as a social pariah in Charleston; he moved to New York City with his wife in 1952.[23] Septima Clark was fired from her job as a high school teacher in Charleston in 1958 as a result of her involvement with the NAACP. On the issue of school desegregation in particular, Gantt challenged the state of South Carolina in the wake of the showdown in Little Rock, Arkansas, and serious resistance to desegregation at the University of Alabama and the University of Georgia. There were no promises that Gantt or his family would emerge from Harvey's challenge against Clemson unscathed.

In the legal suit against Clemson, Gantt proceeded alone. Cornelius Fludd, who remained involved in the application process through the summer of 1962, ultimately decided to remain at Savannah State. To aid Matthew Perry, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund provided the services of Constance Baker Motley. The Gantts were represented without charge[24]. However, despite his stellar legal representation, Gantt was left as the

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[23] Waring's story is complicated. His rulings in favor of desegregating the Democratic Primary and opening a law school at South Carolina State preceded his divorce to his first wife, but the combination of the two issues left him an outcast in Charleston society. For more on Waring, see: Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *A Passion For Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Robert N. Rosen, "Waring Bravely Moved Ahead Of His Time For Racial Justice," *Charleston Post and Courier*. April 10, 2014. http://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/waring-bravely-moved-ahead-of-his-time-for-racial-justice/article_6da043e7-0623-549e-9941-7b6a4e223414.html

[24] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

sole plaintiff with Fludd's removal from the case. He alone was left to bear the brunt of Clemson's resistance.

On July 19, 1962, Clemson's Board of Trustees publicly announced they planned to fight Gantt's suit. Much of Clemson's defense in the Gantt case hinged on school officials' claims that Gantt never completed the application process and was never officially denied admission.[25] While they argued the legality of their actions, Clemson representatives sought any means of discrediting Gantt and Fludd. Clemson's legal team investigated the backgrounds of both young men in an effort to uncover any legal troubles. The background search conducted by the firm uncovered nothing; William Watkins called the lack of evidence "disappointing."[26] Edwards then turned to Governor Hollings, writing, "I shall appreciate it greatly if you will ask the State Law Enforcement Division to check their files to determine if either or both of these persons have criminal records of any kind or if they have ever been arrested."[27] The SLED investigation revealed that both students had been charged with trespassing at the Kress sit-in on April 1, 1960. Edwards feared that Gantt and Fludd were in it for broader civil rights aspirations, and the students' trespassing charges supported those suspicions. Edwards and the Clemson legal team approached the case with the assumption that Gantt's suit was politically motivated.

That Gantt would encounter resistance in his legal battle with Clemson was never in question. Throughout most of Gantt's life, the nation found itself mired in the midst of a heightening social war. It seemed as if each victory for civil rights activists was met

[25] Letter from Edwards to Horn, Clark, and Wynn, October 15, 1962, Folder 190, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[26] Letter from William Watkins to R.C. Edwards, June 14, 1961, Folder 188, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[27] Letter from R.C. Edwards to Governor Ernest F. Hollings, June 21, 1961, Folder 188, R.C. Edwards Papers.

with an equal show of force and resistance from segregationists. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision eight years earlier provided a legal bulwark for civil rights activists, but there was no way to legislate a warm reception from southern segregationists. At the University of Alabama and the University of Georgia, African American trailblazers met with fierce resistance on campus. Gantt and his legal team were prepared for a fight.

From the moment Gantt filed suit against Clemson, he was in a battle against segregationists in South Carolina. This resistance was strong, but it was not monolithic; the opposition to social change was carried out by a patchwork of segregationist groups and individuals. While the ultimate goal of the various segregationists was the same – the preservation of the racial order – the methods by which they defended segregation varied. For unapologetic racists, Gantt's challenge represented an affront to the "natural" order of the races. To politically astute segregationists, the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board* was a clear sign of continued federal overreach. For these individuals, Gantt's legal team was another example of "outside agitation." In South Carolina, figures like R.C. Edwards and Fritz Hollings defended segregation as a means of preserving "law and order." While their methods and justifications varied, each of these groups declared their opposition to Gantt's admission to Clemson.

In the weeks after Gantt filed suit against Clemson in 1962, a number of segregationists exhibited unfiltered racism in their defense of segregation in letters to Clemson's president R.C. Edwards. "The white people of the South do not want to integrate with the Negroes!," wrote a woman from Rock Hill. "We know that our right to segregate is just as constitutional as the desire of the Negroes to integrate, and it is highly

unconstitutional for the Supreme Court to take away that right!"[28] A resident of Shelby, North Carolina, expressed a more radical opinion: "Let Robert Kennedy and father Kennedy match-make for Carolyn in the Congo and their wives Kiss all the Negroes they of their kind like, but because we have a sorry mess in the WHITE HOUSE is no reason for the South to lose all reason and DIGNITY."[29] Some of the letters to Edwards broadened the horizons beyond Gantt's matriculation at Clemson, suggesting desegregation would lead to an end to the white race. Gantt's suit against Clemson threatened to unravel the worldview of these anxious segregationists. "Let them build their own [colleges] and staff them themselves," wrote one South Carolinian. "There is plenty of private Negro money to operate, but they are too negligent and too anxious to mix their blood with white blood."[30] For these individuals, the defense of segregation required little justification: the racial status quo in the South was the result of a natural order of the races. These ardent racists made no effort to disguise their racial ideology and offered no reason to bar Gantt beyond the color of his skin.

One of the clearest differences among segregationists was in regards to their political acumen. Some segregationists lacked the political wherewithal to couch their sentiments in anything other than naked racism. Those with a better understanding of politics employed contemporary language against desegregation at Clemson that served to mask their true intentions. Fears of Communist subversion, African-American conspiracy, and federal control crystallized in the opposition to Gantt.

[28] Letter from Mrs. Mary Smith to Robert C. Edwards, August 19, 1962, Series 11, Folder 214, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[29] Letter to R.C. Edwards, September 27, 1962, Series 11, Folder 214, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[30] Letter to R.C. Edwards, October 8, 1962. Series 11, Folder 214, R.C. Edwards Papers.

As with virtually all southern states, there were a number of politicians in South Carolina whose reputations were built around their defense of segregation. For these individuals, challenges to segregation served as both an attack on their positions and an opportunity to prove their bona fides. Men like James F. Byrnes and Strom Thurmond, staunch defenders of the racial status quo, represented South Carolina on a national stage. In a succinct description of Byrnes' political philosophy, R. Scott Baker writes, "Preserving racial separation in education became the central objective of his administration."[31] Byrnes established the School Committee, charged with maintaining segregation in South Carolina schools, in 1951 as a direct response to the *Briggs v. Elliott* case.

Within state politics, elected officials repeated well-worn defense of segregation. In the wake of Gantt's case against Clemson, Marion Gressette, head of the School Committee, decried what he saw as "further encroachment of the Federal Government upon the right and duty of the State to operate its schools in the best interest of education."[32] Alfred "Red" Bethea served as the unofficial voice of South Carolina segregationists. Following James Meredith's legal challenge against Ole Miss, Bethea called upon Governor Fritz Hollings to lead a procession to Mississippi as a show of support for Governor Ross Barnett. Gressette and Bethea represented serious obstacles to Gantt's admission to Clemson. If any politicians in the state would dare risk making a scene, Gressette and Bethea were the likely culprits.

Matthew Perry and Constance Baker Motley were exceptionally qualified attorneys, but the prospect of a NAACP-sponsored legal team played directly into the

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[31] Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 94.
[32] Statement of Senator Gressette, January 23, 1963, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers

hands of those who saw conspiracy and larger aims beyond the individual admission of Gantt. R.C. Edwards was concerned with the Gantt case becoming a larger civil rights issue, and the appearance of a coordinated desegregation effort worried him greatly. Edwards wrote, “There is no question that Harvey Gantt is being used by the NAACP to force integration upon this institution.”[33] The combined efforts of Gantt and Fludd served as a liability in significant ways. An oversight from Matthew Perry regarding the applications of Gantt and Fludd led to an embarrassing moment that threatened Gantt’s case. The admissions office at Clemson received identical letters from the two prospective students, with the individual names and home addresses serving as the only differentiating features. As Edwards later argued in court, “When you start getting letters exactly alike from two sources you are headed for litigation.”[34] Despite the fact that Gantt, Fludd, and Perry were native South Carolinians, the identical letters played into the longstanding concept of ‘outside agitation.’ Rather than recognizing the homegrown nature of the challenge to desegregation, Edwards and many others focused on the NAACP and its role in funding the Gantt defense.

Throughout the long process of Gantt’s challenge and eventual admission to Clemson, R.C. Edwards continuously voiced his concerns with maintaining order on campus, emphasizing the college as a place of learning first and foremost. Edwards, Governor Fritz Hollings, and other key political and business leaders in South Carolina were essentially “law and order” segregationists. The chaotic responses to Autherine Lucy at the University of Alabama and Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter at the University of Georgia represented worst-case-scenario outcomes for Edwards and

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[33] Letter from R.C. Edwards to Mr. Charles Horn, Mr. Ralph Clark, and Mr. James Wynn, October 15, 1962, Folder 190, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[34] “Clemson Voices Doubt on Negro,” *New York Times*, November 21, 1962, p. 18.

Hollings. When questioned about their response to Gantt's case against Clemson, they offered no ideological defense of segregation and maintained their commitment to "law and order" in South Carolina.

The formidable opposition to Gantt did not deter him. From the outset, he felt that he would be successful in his suit against Clemson. Much of this confidence was informed by his estimation that there was something different about the state of South Carolina. "I always felt that if I had the opportunity to get to school and people understood that I was interested only in getting an education and practicing architecture in the South, that they could buy into that," he said.[35] While Gantt had seen the violence that confronted Autherine Lucy at Alabama and Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter at the University of Georgia, he recognized that the manners and genteel identity of South Carolinians could be exploited. "I always had a feeling that South Carolina was going to be like South Carolina was going to be," Gantt recalled, "which is aristocratic, dignified, stiff upper lip. We are going to resist this to the end but we are going to do it with dignity and when we lose we are going to lose with dignity."[36] Gantt was convinced that if he could just gain admittance to Clemson, his charisma and his devotion to his studies would disarm anyone who opposed him.

Gantt took an awful risk based on his interpretation of white southern cultural identity in South Carolina. Definitions of "honorable" behavior took many forms, and often depended on the eye of the beholder. After all, Preston Brooks and Ben Tillman believed themselves to be honorable men. A sense of aristocratic civility did not prevent the attempt on James DeLaine's life during the *Briggs v. Elliott* trial. Gantt's sense of

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[35] Interview with Harvey Gantt. *Tell Me More* (NPR), August 27, 2008.
[36] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

white South Carolinians' "honorable" impressions of themselves was somewhat evident in Charleston, but the South Carolina Upcountry where Clemson was located was a bastion of secessionism and white supremacy. There was no way of knowing how strong the opposition to desegregation would be before Gantt and Perry filed suit.

The opposition to Gantt appeared daunting, but the lack of cohesion among segregationists ultimately led to their undoing. If Gantt and his legal team could divide and conquer – if they could blunt the attacks of any individual subset of segregationists, or even remove them from the playing field altogether – the path to desegregating South Carolina would become simpler. While it would be difficult, if not impossible, to sway the opinions of the most ardent segregationists, those that emphasized the maintenance of law and order stood on unstable ground. If the courts ruled in Gantt's favor, how would Edwards, Hollings, and others who preached adherence to "law and order" react? Gantt and Matthew Perry intended to find out.

With the fall semester of 1962 fast approaching, Gantt's legal team filed an injunction on his behalf that would allow for his immediate enrollment at Clemson while his case proceeded. On August 22, 1962, Judge Charles C. Wyche presided over the first hearing in the *Gantt v. Clemson* case in Greenville, SC. Clemson College was represented by Watkins, Vandiver, & Freeman, a local firm from nearby Anderson, SC. In addition to Clemson's legal team, the South Carolina School Committee, led by Marion Gressette, acquired the services of Robinson, McFadden, & Morre, a Columbia-based firm. While Gantt had been represented and advised from the outset by Matthew Perry, he was also represented by Constance Baker Motley, who successfully represented

Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes in their suit against the University of Georgia and James Meredith in his recent suit against Ole Miss.

In their testimony, R.C. Edwards and Kenneth Vickery argued Gantt's application, which contained identical wording and even evidence of the same typewriter source as Cornelius Fludd's, suggested ulterior motives. Edwards repeatedly defended against the accusation that Clemson College discriminated against Gantt, noting that Clemson had no policy for barring the admission of African American students. On September 6, 1962, Judge Wyche denied Gantt's petition for a preliminary injunction. In his decision, Judge Wyche noted that indeed Clemson did not have a written policy excluding black students, although he noted that Vickery and the admissions staff repeatedly discouraged Gantt's attempts to apply. Perry filed an immediate appeal to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia.

While Gantt's appeal of the injunction was pending, another school desegregation case captured headlines. For those with a vested interest in the situation at Clemson, the desegregation of the University of Mississippi served as a test case, the results of which proved unsettling. After his legal victory against Ole Miss, James Meredith was set to enroll on October 1, 1962. He moved into his dorm room on September 30; later that evening a riot broke out on the Oxford campus. School officials and local law enforcement agencies found themselves woefully unprepared, further exacerbating the chaos. President Kennedy ultimately ordered the United States Army, the Mississippi National Guard, and other military personnel to quell the violence. While other colleges and universities experienced disruptions and unrest, the deaths of Walter Ray Gunter and

Paul Leslie Guihard and the injuries to hundreds more in Mississippi undoubtedly served as the bloodiest incident related to college desegregation.[37]

No one could have predicted in late 1962 or early 1963 that the desegregation of Ole Miss would be the last major site of violence in college desegregation. Many feared that the bloodshed at Ole Miss could serve as a sign of things to come in Alabama and South Carolina, two states with segregated schools and long histories of resistance. As fate would have it, Gantt and Clemson were tasked with following Meredith and Ole Miss.

The riots at Ole Miss in many ways represented a nightmare scenario for Clemson officials. Although the outcome of the Gantt case was yet to be determined, Edwards and his staff began preparing for the possibility of Gantt's victory in an effort to avoid the violence seen in Oxford. "All of us in South Carolina are extremely conscious of the very difficult position we are in," Edwards wrote on October 15, 1962, just two weeks after the riots at Ole Miss. "Somehow, by the grace of God, we are determined to find a way to resolve this problem in a manner that will reflect favorably to the credit of Clemson College, the State of South Carolina, and, I hope, the United States of America. We are not going to allow a Mississippi situation to develop in South Carolina."[38] Edwards assured his legal team that Gantt would be welcomed at Clemson if he achieved victory in the courts, writing, "I wish to assure you that should the situation develop that Harvey Gantt, or any other qualified Negro student, is admitted to Clemson he will be treated in every way as every other Clemson student."[39]

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[37] Charles Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[38] Letter from Edwards to Horn, Clark, and Wynn, October 15, 1962, Folder 190, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[39] Letter from Edwards to Horn, Clark, and Wynn, October 15, 1962, Folder 190, R.C. Edwards Papers.

The prospect of violence like that seen at Ole Miss manifesting itself on Clemson's campus horrified those who hoped to preserve the reputations of both the school and the state of South Carolina, prompting a number of concerned citizens to write to Edwards. "I know you share with me the intense feeling that Clemson College, community, and the State, must not go through the throes of violence that took place at Oxford because of the admission of a Negro to the University of Mississippi," wrote Berkeley Grimball of Charleston's Gaud School for Boys. "This must not happen to Clemson."[40] Many of those who offered support for peaceful desegregation stopped well short of supporting integration. "I hate to see integration at Clemson and other schools of South Carolina, but resisting is playing into the hands of the NAACP by giving world-wide publicity," wrote a Clemson alumnus. "If Clemson must be integrated, as it appears it will be, please do so quietly… I believe that you, Clemson Trustees, the Governor of South Carolina, and South Carolinians in general prefer not to experience what Mississippi has experienced and still lose."[41] The many letters sent to Edwards expose similar opinions among a number of concerned citizens of South Carolina. While most denied any overt support for integration, many realized that a repeat of the violence at Ole Miss could only harm Clemson's reputation and delay what appeared to be the inevitable moment of desegregation.

R.C. Edwards and the citizens of South Carolina were certainly troubled by the events in Oxford, but no one had greater cause for concern than Gantt. He always knew that the prospect of violence was real and the riot at Ole Miss served as a stark reminder of that fact. Gantt's mother Wilhelmenia was horrified by the violence at Oxford and

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[40] Letter from Berkeley Grimball to Edwards, October 5, 1962, Folder 214, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[41] Letter from Willie A. Collins to Edwards, October 1, 1962, Folder 214, R.C. Edwards Papers.

what it might portend for her son. "Iowa was a long way from home, and it was cold there," wrote one reporter. "But her son had been safe in the Midwest."[42] Gantt recalled that his classmates at Iowa State were shocked that he wished to transfer to Clemson in such a climate. "Somebody would stop and say, 'Harvey, are you crazy? Are you crazy? You're going to school in a very benign and conducive environment for learning. Look at that guy. Look at all those people. They kill folks down there. Those folks in the South are crazy,'" Gantt said.[43] However, Gantt held firm in his belief that South Carolinians would resist violent reaction to desegregation.

The violence at Ole Miss effectively removed "law and order" segregationists from the patchwork of resistance. Gantt's suit remained undecided, but Edwards, Hollings, and other leaders felt that even if Gantt was not admitted, which appeared unlikely, it would not be long before another African American student was victorious. In the spirit of preserving order and harmony on campus, they began planning for an eventual desegregation process in the hopes that they could avoid a "Mississippi situation."

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals found in favor of the District Court and denied Gantt's injunction, which moved the case back to the District Courthouse in Anderson, SC. On November 13, 1962, with the trial fast approaching, Gantt withdrew from Iowa State University. At that time Iowa State was on a quarter system while Clemson was on a semester system. Matthew Perry advised his young client to withdraw from Iowa State so as not to conflict with the beginning of the Spring semester at Clemson. "In tactical terms, we wanted to have Gantt ready to enter Clemson in its

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[42] Dannye Romine, "An Unquenchable Spirit," *Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1988. 1E.
[43] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 356.

second semester," Perry said.[44] Although Perry acknowledged that his advice was "presumptuous and optimistic," he and Constance Baker Motley were optimistic about the outcome of the trial.[45]

Less than a week after Gantt withdrew from Iowa State, *Gantt v. Clemson* officially began in Anderson, SC, on November 19, 1962, with Judge Wyche presiding. Gantt laid out the long history of his applications and the various methods of resistance offered by Kenneth Vickery and the Office of Admissions. Edwards contended that Gantt's application was submitted too late for entry in the Fall semester and there was no official policy barring African Americans from enrollment at Clemson. Perry and Motley pointed to the records of recently enrolled students that contradicted Edwards' claim. Gantt's attorneys noted that one transfer student was admitted "despite a poor academic record." In another instance, a student was granted an emergency entrance examination for the School of Architecture just before the semester began.[46] In addition to their efforts to highlight inconsistencies in Clemson officials' justifications for refusing Gantt's application, Gantt's legal team challenged the assertion that his application was handled like any other applicant. Under Motley's questioning, Kenneth Vickery admitted to sending copies of his letters to Gantt to Clemson's legal team as well as State Senator Edgar Brown, a member of the Clemson Board of Trustees.[47] A number of officials in the Office of the Registrar, including Vickery himself, admitted that Gantt's files were kept separate from those of other applicants. Finally, on December 21, 1962, Judge

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[44] Matthew Perry SCPC Oral History interview, 54. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.
[45] Matthew Perry SCPC Oral History interview, 54. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.
[46] Herbert Johnson, "Gantt Case Not Class Action, Judge Wyche Tells Lawyers," *The Greenville (SC) News*. November 20, 1962. Wyche Papers. South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library.
[47] Zalin B. Grant, "Wyche Will Give Verdict," *The (Clemson, SC) Tiger*, November 30, 1962. 1.

Wyche ruled in Clemson's favor. "If a White person had pursued exactly the same course seeking a transfer from Iowa State University to Clemson College that the plaintiff has pursued in this case," Wyche said, "I should not and would not enter an order to compel Clemson College to admit him."[48] Perry filed an appeal the following morning. Oral arguments were scheduled for January 9, 1963.

On January 9, 1963, the same day that arguments in Gantt's appeal began in Virginia, outgoing Governor Fritz Hollings made his final address to the state of South Carolina. In his speech, Hollings reaffirmed his stance on segregation, but noted that victory in court appeared unlikely. "We have all argued that the Supreme Court decision of May 1954 is not the law of the land," he said. "But everyone must agree that it is the fact of the land." The outgoing Governor called for law and order in the event that the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in Gantt's favor. "As we meet, South Carolina is running out of courts," Hollings said. "If and when every legal remedy has been exhausted, this General Assembly must make clear South Carolina's choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men."[49]

Hollings' admission that segregation was on its last legs annoyed Gantt. While he spoke fondly of Hollings and R.C. Edwards in the years that followed, Gantt saw their resistance to his enrollment at Clemson as essentially a waste of time and money. "What was remarkable about the whole thing is that it was like a charade," Gantt later said. "I mean, the state was going through the motions that had to be gone through in order to

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[48] "Gantt Denied Admission To Clemson By Wyche's Order," *The Greenville News*, December 22, 1962. 8. Clipping in Judge Wyche Papers, SCPC.
[49] From Ernest F. Hollings Collection, Speeches. Located in South Carolina Political Collections.

satisfy the people of South Carolina."[50] Just as Clemson administrators had exhausted all means of denying Gantt's application, the school and the state of South Carolina were now employing every legal means of resistance against an effort they privately acknowledged would succeed. "It was like a play being played out for the benefit of the citizens of South Carolina," Gantt said. "Politically I thought that was wrong for politicians to extend the resources of the state to fight a battle that they knew they were going to lose." Gantt wished that state leaders could have been more upfront and transparent with their constituents. "They didn't trust their citizens to say, 'look, the right thing to do is to admit this guy and let's not go through all this.'"[51]

Although a number of Clemson officials and South Carolinians quietly viewed desegregation at Clemson as inevitable, efforts to prevent Gantt's admission to Clemson continued until all legal recourse was exhausted. On January 16, 1963, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Judicial Circuit found in favor of Harvey Gantt, directing the issuance of an injunction allowing Gantt's admission at the beginning of the following semester. The Court found that "the distinction drawn between prohibition and discouragement is a novel one in legal literature, and we must hold it unacceptable."[52]

The Clemson Board of Trustees recognized that the legal efforts to prevent desegregation had failed. "The College Attorney has exhausted all legal remedies immediately available," the Board acknowledged. "Since neither the filing of a petition for the writ nor the granting of the writ itself would postpone the effective date of the Orders already issued, and in the light of the fact that the preparation of a petition for

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[50] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[51] Gantt, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 357.
[52] *Gantt v Clemson*, Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, January 16, 1963.

certiorari requires more time than is available before January 28, there are no further legal steps that can be taken to postpone the effective date of the Order beyond January 28, 1963."[53] Gantt was victorious; segregation in higher education in South Carolina was officially broken.

Gantt's victory in court did not come as a major shock to Edwards, Hollings, and other major figures in South Carolina. In the wake of his first formal application to Clemson, those with a vested interest in preserving a business-friendly and orderly social climate in South Carolina made preparations to blunt the segregationist backlash. Edwards and his staff at Clemson fought to secure power in the event of Gantt's legal victory while simultaneously appeasing the most vocal segregationists in the state. Aiding Edwards and Clemson in this effort were a contingent of influential powers within the state of South Carolina, including politicians, business leaders, and religious officials. While the problem of desegregation faced R. C. Edwards most directly, a number of concerned citizens did their part to ensure peace at Clemson for the good of the state. In the process, they confirmed Gantt's hopes that South Carolinians would avoid a violent response to desegregation.

Edwards found allies in some of the most influential politicians in the state of South Carolina. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings, who served as governor until January of 1963, shaped a great deal of the official government response to desegregation at Clemson. On January, 9, 1962, months before Gantt's legal team formally filed their suit against Clemson, Hollings told a reporter, "Before 1962 has passed South Carolina's legal

[53] Agenda for the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, January 24, 1963, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.

defense will fall like a house of cards. You might as well start preparing your readers for the inevitable. We are not going to secede."[54] In the fall of 1962, Hollings sent observers to Oxford, Mississippi, to glean any information from the desegregation of Ole Miss that might benefit the state of South Carolina in the event that Gantt succeeded in gaining admission.[55] His successor, Donald Russell, continued the plan set in place by Hollings. While he showed sympathy for Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett during the crisis at Ole Miss, Russell vowed to maintain order in South Carolina at all costs. In a statement released four days before Gantt's arrival on Clemson's campus, Russell stated, "However distasteful these federal decisions may be to us and whatever may be our opinion as to the justice of such decision, we shall meet and solve this problem peaceably, without violence, without disorder, and with proper regard for the good name of our state and her people."[56]

Powerful businessmen in South Carolina aided the cause in statements designed to show support for lawful compliance with the court order to admit Gantt. The South Carolina State Chamber of Commerce, the South Carolina Textile Manufacturers Association, the South Carolina Bankers Association, and the South Carolina Broadcasters Association released a joint statement that addressed the situation at Clemson and pledged public support for peaceful desegregation. "An overwhelming majority of the major business, industrial and professional interests of the state strongly approve the announced determination of the board of trustees and the administration of

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[54] George McMillan, "Integration with Dignity: The Inside Story of How South Carolina Kept the Peace," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 1963, 17.
[55] George McMillan, "Integration with Dignity: The Inside Story of How South Carolina Kept the Peace," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 1963, 18.
[56] Statement from Donald Russell, Governor-Elect, January 24, 1963, Donald Russell Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina Library

Clemson College to maintain laws and order at all times, thereby guaranteeing that control of the institution will remain, without interruption, under the direction of constituted authorities of the state of South Carolina," the official statement of business leaders declared. "Not only must we insure law and order at Clemson College, but we must preserve and protect the good name of South Carolina – demonstrating to the rest of the nation and the world that our dedication to the established and prevailing American way of life is consistent and enduring."[57] Realizing the importance of perceptions of political and economic stability, South Carolina's business leaders supported the plan for peaceful desegregation at Clemson in an effort to ensure that business continued uninterrupted in the state. The Hollings administration prized industrial development and worked to establish a welcoming climate for business in the state. In South Carolina's hour of crisis, business leaders returned the favor.

Newspaper editors across South Carolina urged for peaceful desegregation in the event of Gantt's victory in court. The editors of the *Anderson Independent* noted that state leaders had accepted the verdict despite their serious objections. "[We] are facing the facts – cold and unwelcome they be – rather than fantasies," wrote one editor. "The important thing is for South Carolina's leaders to continue to exercise the cool judgment the responsible ones have exercised to date – and, whatever may transpire, to deny the racial agitators what they would rejoice in promoting in this state – 'another Oxford.'"[58] While few media outlets supported desegregation, editors used their platform to urge peaceful resistance. "There is no area in which the fight can be continued expect the

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[57] Statement of South Carolina State Chamber of Commerce, South Carolina Textile Manufacturers Association, South Carolina Bankers Association, South Carolina Broadcasters Association, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[58] "Win Or Lose In Gantt Case, There Are No Plans To Close Clemson," *Anderson Independent*. January 4, 1963. Judge Wyche Papers.

courts themselves," wrote the editors of the *Greenville News*. "Neither massive public resistance as such, nor harassing incidents precipitated by individuals or groups on or off the campus, will produce anything other than disorder and complete disruption of the best interests of education."[59]

A statement from the South Carolina Conference of Church Leaders addressed the issue of desegregation from both national and religious angles. "Such a ruling goes contrary to the customs and traditions of the South and of our state of South Carolina in particular," the statement proclaimed. "While many of our citizens may resent the decision, it is unthinkable that we, as a nation dedicated to rule by law, should abandon the principles of our American Government and our American way of life to obtain our selfish ends, however desirable they may seem."[60] While these statements seem remarkably similar to those of politicians and businessmen, the Conference of Church Leaders offered thoughts on the proper response of upstanding Christians to desegregation that could only emerge from religious leaders. "Let us remind all men, white and colored, that we are bound by the law of love of God and love of neighbor as the pre-eminent virtue of the Christian way of life," the statement reads. "Therefore, it is our duty by this law of love of God and neighbor to avoid every form of violence and hatred in our relations among ourselves and to use peaceful means to reach conclusion founded on justice and order and the universal law of Christian love."[61] The statement from the Conference of Church Leaders takes a particularly religious tone, but it also

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[59] "The Greater Issue At Clemson," *Greenville News*. January 6, 1963. 2D.
[60] Statement from the South Carolina Conference of Church Leaders, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[61] Statement from the South Carolina Conference of Church Leaders, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.

reflects the sentiments of South Carolina's moderate politicians and businessmen: "Let not the Sovereign State of South Carolina be disgraced by violence."[62]

The reaction of South Carolina's political, business, and religious leaders verified what Gantt had expected all along: despite their objections to desegregation, white South Carolinians preferred peaceful integration to appearing dishonorable and unmannered. Gantt remembered his fellow classmates at Iowa State expressing serious concerns about his desire to desegregate Clemson, noting the violence exhibited against James Meredith. But Gantt felt that there were major differences between Mississippi and South Carolina, and that his experience would be different. "For the strangest reason, I never felt that fear about South Carolina," he recalled.[63] "If I couldn't, in my efforts to get into Clemson, appeal to the morality of the situation," Gantt said, "which is that I had a right to go there, I could ultimately win out on manners. They were going to do the right thing in the end because they were told to do so but they'd do it with dignity."[64]

Gantt's optimistic appraisal of South Carolinians was correct, up to a point. Many of the most influential politicians, businessmen, and religious leaders in the state aided the efforts for peaceful desegregation at Clemson, but there remained a vocal group of segregationists determined to prevent integration in South Carolina, even after the violence at Ole Miss and Gantt's legal victory in the courts. Marion Gressette, a State Senator, was one of the most committed opponents of integration in South Carolina, and Edwards knew that opposition from Gressette could incite disorder on the part of South Carolinians. With this in mind, Edwards made a concerted effort to assuage Gressette's

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[62] Statement from the South Carolina Conference of Church Leaders, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[63] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 356.
[64] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

concerns about integration at Clemson. In a letter to Gressette, Edwards wrote, "I assure you that during the past two years while this case has been developing no one connected with the College has ever attempted to influence the thinking of any student with respect to the question of integration."[65] He stopped short of echoing Gressette's thoughts on segregation, but Edwards' letter was certainly designed to appease the Senator and dissuade any further efforts to defend segregation at Clemson.

Despite the legitimate fears that he might organize resistance to desegregation, Gressette's comments on the outcome of the trial reveal his recognition of the inevitability of Gantt's particular case. Gressette continued to voice his displeasure with the court's decision, but he praised Clemson's Board of Trustees for making the best of what he considered a bad situation. "For more than a decade South Carolina has successfully defended its public schools from ill-conceived and ill-fated sociological experiments which have produced discord and disaster for both races and retrogression of scholastic standards and individual educational opportunity," Gressette said in a statement released to the press. He continued,

> The Clemson College Board of Trustees has reluctantly chosen to comply with the order as best it can. The alternative was to invite enforcement of the order by naked federal force. We believe the Trustees have made the only choice possible under the circumstances. It behooves all citizens to help Clemson make the best of an unwelcome and unwarranted situation. Peace and good order must be maintained both on and off the college campus.[66]

In the weeks leading up to Gantt's arrival at Clemson, those who wished to preserve peace at Clemson identified Marion Gressette and Alfred "Red" Bethea as the most likely troublemakers. As the chairman of the South Carolina School Committee, established by former Governor James F. Byrnes to preserve the racial order of South Carolina's public

[65] Letter from Edwards to Gressette, January 26, 1963, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[66] Statement of Senator Gressette, January 23, 1963, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.

schools, Gressette was the most politically influential segregationist in the state. With Gantt's victory in court, however, Gressette resigned himself to the fact that this particular battle was over. Praising the Clemson Board of Trustees while leaving little doubt as to his true feelings on integration, Gressette vowed to continue fighting, saying, "We have not yet run completely out of Courts."[67] A state representative from Dillon County and a Clemson graduate, "Red" Bethea proposed the immediate closure of the school of architecture. The South Carolina House of Representatives adjourned to prevent it, an action Bethea claimed "cut the feet out from under 90 percent of the people of South Carolina."[68] Despite their best efforts to appear defiant, segregationist politicians in South Carolina offered no real resistance to the order admitting Gantt.

In an effort to ensure a peaceful response from students, Dean of Students Walter Cox sent a letter to the student body reminding them of his continued expectations of the student body. "The sole purpose justifying the existence of Clemson College is a program of education," Cox wrote. "You are expected to continue to carry out the duties of a mature student as you pursue this objective calmness and good judgment on the part of all concerned is necessary." Cox left little doubt as to Clemson administrators' expectations of student conduct. Noting the institution's military history, he wrote, "Lawlessness and disorder will no more be tolerated on the Clemson campus in the future than it has been in the past."[69]

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[67] Statement of Senator Gressette, January 23, 1963, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[68] "Legislation Is Blocked," *NYT*, January 25, 1963. 11.
[69] Dean Cox letter to the Clemson students, Folder 191, R.C. Edwards Papers. The appeal to order held a particular meaning at Clemson. Although the school no longer required enrollment in ROTC, the institution's long history as a military school remained ingrained in many of its administrators and faculty members. For more on the history of Clemson and other military schools in the South, see: Rod Andrew, *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

With confidence that the student body would adhere to law and order, attention turned to the possibility of outside agitators. The violent reaction to James Meredith's desegregation of Ole Miss prompted a serious response from both the politicians of South Carolina and school officials in regards to Gantt's matriculation. Initial planning for Gantt's arrival began before his suit was settled in court; as Gantt's admission shifted from highly probable to legally guaranteed, the planning became more intricate and thorough. The official "Plan for Law Enforcement at Clemson College" reveals in great detail the steps taken by Governor Hollings and Edwards to preserve the peace at Clemson. The security plan addressed a host of issues ranging from protection for Gantt to traffic routes to the familiarity of law enforcement officials with the campus map. Perhaps most importantly, the plan marked a strong play for power on the part of the Edwards administration, stating that "Clemson officials will take the lead and maintain primary authority."[70] Edwards placed as much control and authority as possible into the hands of Jack Weeden, Clemson's Chief of Security, with local police providing support.

In much the same way that Edwards attempted to keep the Clemson campus free from outside distractions, Governor Hollings hoped that order could be maintained without the involvement of federal agencies. On January 10, 1963, Hollings phoned Attorney General Robert Kennedy to discuss the issue of desegregation at Clemson. Hollings' assurance that federal force would not be necessary at Clemson rested on the strength of the extensive security plan.[71] The plan provided a careful outline for the responsibilities of state police, SLED agents, and highway patrol officers, highlighting the efforts taken to prevent any unfortunate incidents from occurring. In regards to law

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[70] Plan for Law Enforcement at Clemson College, Folder 194, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[71] McMillan, "Integration with Dignity," *Saturday Evening Post*, 20.

enforcements agencies, the plan states they should "select personnel that are mature and will act coolly and efficiently with regard to this type of assignment."[72] The plan urges caution and restraint on the part of law enforcement officials, stating, "Verbal abuse or similar harassment will be tolerated so long as the police function is not interfered with."[73] In response to the plan presented by Hollings, Robert Kennedy assured the media that there would be no need for a show of federal force at Clemson, saying, "South Carolina leaders have decided there will be no trouble."[74] While the plan reveals the level of anxiety experienced by representatives of Clemson and the state of South Carolina, its careful execution assured a peaceful moment of desegregation at the school.

On January 28, 1963, Harvey Gantt, accompanied by his father Christopher and Rev. A.R. Blake, traveled from Charleston to Matthew Perry's office at 1107½ Washington Street in Columbia. At Perry's office, Gantt had his first encounter with the media on what would be a long day filled with attention from the press. When asked how he felt, Gantt replied, "I really don't have any special fears, just the normal feeling of anxiety, maybe a little more now, than the average college student going to his school for the first time." While Perry continued speaking with the press, Gantt stepped into a nearby barber shop for a last-minute haircut. Gantt attempted to block a photographer from taking his picture. As one journalist wrote, "It was explained to [Gantt] that he was going to get his picture taken scores of times later in the day and he conceded, lowering his hand and allowing several pictures to be taken."[75] While Harvey received his haircut, Matthew Perry had one last meeting with Lieutenant Governor Robert McNair and

[72] Plan for Law Enforcement at Clemson College, Folder 194, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[73] Plan for Law Enforcement at Clemson College, Folder 194, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[74] Leverne Prosser, "Cast of Hundreds Prepare For Admission Of Gantt," *Charleston News and Courier*, January 23, 1963. 1B.
[75] Joseph P. Barnett, "Talks with Negro Leaders," *The State*, January 29, 1963.

Governor Donald Russell to reiterate the day's itinerary and the importance of a calm and orderly registration process for Gantt.

From Columbia, the group traveled in Matthew Perry's 1959 Buick to Clemson to register for classes and move into his room in Johnstone Hall. While Gantt was well aware of the work that had gone into securing his right to attend Clemson, it was not until the ride up U.S. 123 that Gantt fully grasped the extraordinary undertaking that his actions had spearheaded. The plan called for Perry and Gantt to arrive at Clemson at 1:30 p.m. On the way, Gantt realized that his checkbook and necessary paperwork were in the trunk of Perry's car. He realized that if a crowd gathered to meet them in front of Tillman Hall, it may be difficult to recover what he needed from the trunk. Perry pulled over to let Gantt retrieve his things. All of the cars ahead and behind pulled over as well, and Gantt realized then that most of the traffic on the road that morning was comprised of his police escort.[76]

Those that hoped to witness a repeat of the violence at Ole Miss were sorely disappointed. Gantt and Perry arrived at Clemson at 1:33 p.m. Gantt registered for classes and then spoke to the gathered crowd. One student told a reporter that Gantt's arrival was certainly less exciting than that of Clemson's first female students in 1955.[77] The crowd slowly dissipated as Gantt moved from one administrative building to another, and reporters struggled to find an exciting angle on the story. "The first chapter of the Harvey Gantt story ended about 3:30 p.m. when newsmen rolled up their coat collars against the January cold and began the long walk back up the hill to the Clemson House,"

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[76] Matthew Perry, SCPC interview. Gantt, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*.
[77] Mont Morton, "Gantt Thought Crowd Jovial, But Didn't Know Whether Kidding," *The State*, January 29, 1963.

wrote one reporter.[78] The day lacked any real fireworks, a testament to the careful planning from Edwards and Hollings. "For the press, the day was over," George McMillan wrote. "And nothing had happened. Not one thing. South Carolina, emotionally the deepest Deep South state of them all, had met and peaceably passed its most serious racial crisis since the Civil War."[79] The desegregation of higher education in South Carolina, the last state to experience it, was quiet and peaceful.

In the narrative of college desegregation, individuals have become wedded to institutions. Autherine Lucy will always be associated with the University of Alabama, as will James Meredith with Ole Miss and Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes with the University of Georgia. But this focus on individuals obscures our knowledge of college desegregation and the civil rights movement in important ways.

First, very little attention has been given to the ways in which these experiences of desegregation were intertwined.[80] It would be difficult to imagine the situation at Clemson being as peaceful without the violence that preceded it at Ole Miss. Although Gantt denied that his initial efforts to desegregate Clemson were part of a grand plan to desegregate all colleges in the South, the involvement of the NAACP legal defense fund inextricably bonded his experience with that of other trailblazers represented by Constance Baker Motley. The experiences of these individuals had a great deal in

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[78] Ron Wenzell, "It Was A Long, Busy Day For Gantt And Reporters," *The State*, January 29, 1963.
[79] McMillan, "Integration with Dignity," *Saturday Evening Post*, 16.
[80] *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses*, ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2009). *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement* is perhaps the best single volume on school segregation, but as an edited collection that looks at a variety of issues across various schools it lacks a narrative focus.

common, but they are often presented in a vacuum. The outcome of each desegregation case guided the actions of the actors in subsequent cases.

Secondly, none of the students who desegregated southern colleges walked alone. Gantt's social consciousness was founded in part by his parents' involvement in organizations such as the NAACP. Those same hard-working, blue-collar parents could not have afforded the legal representation Harvey received free-of-charge from the NAACP legal defense fund. The lawyers provided from the NAACP, Matthew Perry and Constance Baker Motley, were themselves civil rights activists of an earlier generation. Extending our field of vision further back, it is possible to view Gantt as the last in a long line of individuals who sought to challenge desegregation in the South in general and in South Carolina in particular. Henry E. Hayne, John Howard Wrighten III, and the parents of the Summerton school district created the political climate in South Carolina that allowed for Gantt's peaceful desegregation of Clemson. Gantt was not alone in the Fall of 1962, nor was he alone in the historical context of the battle to break racial barriers in South Carolina. The effort to desegregate was a communal one that transcended generations.

In the years since Gantt desegregated Clemson, journalists and historians have credited R.C. Edwards, Fritz Hollings, and other state officials for their efforts to secure a peaceful and organized moment of desegregation in South Carolina. While it is true that Edwards and Hollings took steps to prevent a chaotic episode like that of James Meredith's desegregation of Ole Miss, they also held firm to their belief that Clemson College should remain segregated, or at the very least, not admit Gantt. Following Judge Wyche's initial order to deny Gantt's injunction, Edwards told reporters he was

"delighted" with the news. The legal teams that represented Clemson and the state of South Carolina immediately appealed to the Supreme Court when the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Gantt. Edwards and Hollings exhausted all legal options before conceding in the Gantt case.[81]

R.C. Edwards maintained that he was simply following the laws in South Carolina. The Byrnes-era amendment to the South Carolina Constitution that solidified segregation at the states' public schools, a provision that was thoroughly analyzed in court, was cited by Edwards as the reason for Clemson's defiance in the matter. Yet, in the same trial, Edwards repeatedly defended Clemson's policies and highlighted that there was no racial barriers to admission at Clemson. The only threat to Clemson and other South Carolina schools, as far as school closure was concerned, was if they opened their doors to African Americans under court order. By discouraging and even outright refusing to accept Gantt's applications, actions which necessitated legal action from Gantt, the Clemson staff was responsible for creating the only atmosphere in which school closure was an option.

Hollings worked with SLED officials to ensure that rabble-rousers in the state did not invade Clemson's campus on January 28, 1963, but his concerns were firmly rooted in the preservation of South Carolina's reputation. Granted, concerns over the state's image should be expected of the Governor. But it is worth noting that at no point were Edwards and Hollings acting in concert with Gantt's legal team out of a sense of moral obligation.

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[81] M. Ron Cox, Jr., "'Integration with [Relative] Dignity': The Desegregation of Clemson College and George McMillan's Article at Forty" in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), 274-285.

Gantt's own role in bringing peaceful desegregation has been overlooked by scholars. While there were certainly important links between each state's experiences with desegregation, each of the students and institutions involved were unique. To put it simply, Harvey Gantt was not James Meredith. Meredith continued to work as a provocative civil rights activist after his enrollment at Ole Miss, while Gantt followed a somewhat quieter route. And yet, it would be a mistake to overlook or undersell just how radical Gantt's actions were. As historian Orville Vernon Burton writes, "Whites considered any African American who wanted a good education at a white institution to be a troublemaker, and they were surprised that Gantt turned out to be a serious and successful student."[82] Gantt's personality was relatively mild-mannered, but his actions spoke louder than words. His quest for equal access to educational opportunities transformed the state of South Carolina.

To his legal representatives, Gantt represented hope for the up-and-coming generation of civil rights activists. "Gantt proved himself to be a first class young man, just a jewel of a human being," Matthew Perry said. "If we had selected somebody, if we had gone out to look for somebody, he's the type of person we would have wanted."[83] Constance Baker Motley concurred. "Gantt was a superstar even then," she said.[84] Throughout the process, Gantt remained adamant that his sole interest in Clemson was its architecture program. On the day of his registration, Gantt spoke with the media and onlookers who gathered, but at no point did his comments verge into political rhetoric.

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[82] Burton, "Dining with Harvey Gantt," *Matthew Perry*. (University of South Carolina Press, 2002). 202.
[83] Matthew Perry interview, South Carolina Political Collections. University of South Carolina Library. p. 57.
[84] Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice Under the Law: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 188.

While his actions were political in nature, Gantt's serious demeanor and intense focus on academic pursuits disarmed much of the potential resistance to his enrollment.

While it is certainly true that individuals such as Edwards, Hollings, and incoming Governor Donald Russell differentiated themselves from their counterparts in Mississippi and other southern states, by focusing on these figures, historians have relegated Gantt to a passive role in his own story. African American students at schools across the South, trailblazing figures in South Carolina in the decades that preceded Gantt's battle, and the young legal superstars that represented Gantt in court all played a crucial role in breaking desegregation in South Carolina. But on January 28, 1963, the victory was Gantt's. The burden of charting the path ahead was his alone.

Chapter Three

The Long Process of Integration at Clemson

January 28, 1963, was a hectic day for Harvey Gantt. He rode up to Clemson in Matthew Perry's Buick, addressed the crowd that gathered to meet him in front of Tillman Hall, spoke with members of the press sent to cover the story, registered for classes, and moved into his room on Johnstone Hall. The reporters and students that gathered in the cold to witness the newest member of the Clemson family eventually dispersed. After meeting with reporters at his own press conference, Matthew Perry made the trip back to Columbia. After the dust settled, Gantt found himself alone in his dorm room at Johnstone B-502[1]. And he was hungry.

For most students at Clemson, hunger was easily remedied: a quick trip to Harcombe dining hall would solve the problem of a rumbling stomach. But for Gantt, it was not so simple. "I was sitting in my room, and the decision was made that – by me, by my stomach I suppose – I've got to go eat," Gantt recalled. "And so I've got to go through this ordeal, and the flashback came to James Meredith's situation of the kids beating on the table in the dining halls and things being really rough."[2] For Gantt, each action he took at Clemson on January 28, regardless of how mundane, represented a "first." Although he had confronted the crowds earlier in the day, his trip to Harcombe was his first interaction with students in an unscripted environment. Despite the general peace of the day, Gantt had reason to be nervous.

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[1] David Gumula, "Clemson Ends Segregation Peacefully," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 2, 1963. 1.
[2] Harvey Gantt, from 2003 Citadel conference, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 358-9.

Gantt arrived in the Harcombe cafeteria at 5:32 p.m. After a brief moment of silence on the part of his white classmates, the dining hall resumed its regular hum. Six students stopped by during the course of his meal to make brief small talk, but none stayed for long.[3] However, Gantt was quickly put at ease, not through his encounter with other students, but through his interaction with an unexpected subset of Clemson's staff. "I set out for the dining hall, which was just a few steps away from my dorm, and when I hit the door of the dining room, there stood all these people, my people, black people," Gantt said. "I had forgotten that they serviced the university; that they provided all the domestic services, janitorial services. They cooked all the food and had been there all along since the university was opened, I suppose, but I had forgotten that. All of us had forgotten that. People wondered how I was going to exist at this school; I was going to be taken care of."[4] Indeed, African Americans served in a number of roles on Clemson's campus, a fact that quickly separated Gantt's experiences there from his time at Iowa State. Gantt recalled, "I remember going to my room, getting a clue of what the world was going to be like seeing a janitor in the corridor, black, and I realized how different that was immediately from Iowa, where the janitors were all white."[5]

At Iowa State, Gantt was not forced to defend his presence. There were no press conferences to mark his arrival, no comments from segregationists challenging his enrollment, no anxious planning from the school's administration. And yet, despite the

[3] David Gumula, "Clemson Ends Segregation Peacefully," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 2, 1963. 1.
[4] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 359.
[5] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

absence of obstacles on the path to his admission, Gantt was also isolated at Iowa State. To his surprise, "Clemson turned out to be blacker."[6]

It is worth reiterating that the African Americans Gantt encountered at Clemson were those employed in subservient roles. The institution tolerated the presence of African Americans before Gantt's arrival, but in a decidedly unequal position. To his credit, Gantt has never dwelled on that point, focusing instead on the important impact their presence had on him in his first days at Clemson. He also became aware in those moments of the important impact he had in *their* lives. "For the first time I understood," Gantt said years later. "Here was a young man seeking an education, and I said that over and over and I was serious about that, but for the first time it really hit me what this meant, because I could see their chests, their collective chests swell with pride." While Gantt has often praised Matthew Perry and Constance Baker Motley for their important role in his triumphant desegregation of Clemson, his memory of interactions with African American workers is one of the few instances in which he acknowledges the importance of his own role in breaking racial barriers. "Now they could see their children, their nephews and nieces, their cousins could be in that [cafeteria] line, too," Gantt recalled. "And yes they would serve those descendants, but it would be a different day and a different time, and I understood why I had done what I had done."[7]

While he found an unexpected source of support in his first hours at Clemson that gave him reason to be optimistic about his new environment, Gantt's first days, weeks, and months at the school were marked by an increasing awareness that there were those who still opposed his presence there. Much like the resistance he originally faced in

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[6] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

[7] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 359.

challenging segregation in South Carolina, the resistance that Gantt encountered on Clemson's campus was comprised of a patchwork of individuals and groups that were unwilling to accept that the process of integration had begun. For those opposed to Gantt, there was reason to believe that the racial progress his presence represented could be halted or even overturned. Autherine Lucy desegregated the University of Alabama in 1956, but her victory was short-lived as she was forced to flee the Tuscaloosa campus due to threats to her safety.[8] When Gantt enrolled at Clemson in January 1963, the University of Alabama was segregated and had remained that way since Lucy's departure. Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes were forced to temporarily flee the University of Georgia following a riot in front of Hayne's dormitory; the school suspended them for their own safety before reinstating them a week later. While the University of Alabama was already on the path to permanent desegregation when Gantt arrived in 1963, no one could have guaranteed that the progress would be as long-lasting as it has proven to be. When Gantt arrived at Clemson on that cold January morning, segregationists were not without hope, however fleeting, that they could resist the tide of the civil rights movement.

The following morning, Tuesday, January 29, brought an alarming incident. At 4:30 A.M., four students from King's College in Charlotte, North Carolina, were found on campus sitting in a red Chevrolet convertible in front of the textiles building with a case of beer. As Jack Weeden reported to R.C. Edwards, the students claimed they were "driving around out of curiosity."[9] The trespassers may well have been telling the truth; the desegregation of Clemson, quiet though it was, captured headlines the previous

[8] Lucy was actually suspended by the university due to concerns over unrest on campus and eventually expelled following her public criticism of the school's handling of her security.
[9] Letter from Jack Weeden to R.C. Edwards, January 29, 1963, Folder 192, R.C. Edwards Papers.

evening. However, the prospect of four undocumented visitors loitering on campus in the early morning hours, alcohol in hand, was exactly the type of situation Edwards worked so tirelessly to avoid. And while police determined these inquisitive visitors posed no serious threat, their presence revealed an underlying truth about the new state of affairs at Clemson. The day of January 28, 1963, marked the end of segregation, but for Clemson's newest student and those continuing their education, the long process of integration had just begun.

Following his peaceful enrollment, Clemson and Gantt received immediate praise from media outlets across the country. While many journalists described the event as a boring and quiet affair, they made sure to credit Clemson administrators, Matthew Perry, and Gantt for making peaceful desegregation a reality.[10] "Seldom does an event become outstanding because it is dull," wrote a columnist for the *Tiger*, "but the integration of Clemson College last Monday was both outstanding and fairly dull."[11] Clemson students showed up to see Gantt, but most found the events of January 28, 1963, to be a boring affair. "The first coed at Clemson several years ago also received a reception, but with fewer newsmen and more whistle," said one student.[12] Although Clemson administrators and state leaders knew that meticulous planning occurred prior to Gantt's arrival, spectators did not know what to expect. "The picketing, the jeering mobs, and the violence that have sometimes accompanied racial change in the South were missing,"

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[10] Ron Wenzell, "It Was a Long, Busy Day For Gantt and Reporters," *The State*, January 29, 1963. Gumula, Dave. "Clemson Segregation Ends Peacefully," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 1, 1963. P.1.

[11] Bobby Dye, "State Educational Process Flatly Ignores Integration," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 1, 1963. P.2.

[12] Mont Morton, "Gantt Thought Crowd Jovial, But Didn't Know Whether Kidding," *The State*, January 29, 1963.

wrote one journalist.[13] Despite the fears of violence and campus disruption, Clemson experienced desegregation peacefully.

From the outset, Gantt was presented in contrast with his immediate predecessor in the desegregation of higher education in the South. "The tall, well dressed youth who became today the first Negro to enroll in Clemson College shuns the role of the zealot," wrote one reporter. "His attitude is a contrast to that of James H. Meredith… [for whom] education is admittedly a secondary objective."[14] In Raleigh, North Carolina, a young media personality and firebrand named Jesse Helms used his platform on WRAL-TV to opine on Gantt's admittance. "[Gantt] has rejected the fanfare and the trapping of the NAACP," Helms said the night after Gantt enrolled. "He has turned away from the liberal press and television networks which would glorify him. He has refused to make pompous speeches." Helms drew a clear distinction between James Meredith, of whom he was highly critical, and Gantt. "If ever a man put his best foot forward, Harvey Gantt has done so."[15]

By framing Gantt in comparison with James Meredith, and by extension Clemson with Ole Miss, the media helped foster an immediate impression of Gantt as a non-political actor, or at the very least, less aggressive in his activism than Meredith. The *New York Times* quoted an unnamed friend of Gantt as saying, "He doesn't have a chip on his shoulder and he's not a crusader."[16] A columnist for the local Clemson student newspaper, *The Tiger*, acknowledged the important political implications of Gantt's

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[13] Claude Sitton, "Clemson Admits a Negro Quietly," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 1, 4 (this quote from 4)
[14] "Negro At Clemson," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.
[15] Art Harris, "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990. Ironically, Helms later hired James Meredith to work for his Senate campaign against Gantt.
[16] "Negro At Clemson," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.

enrollment, but repeated Gantt's primary motivation was educational opportunity.[17] An article in *The State*, Columbia's primary newspaper and the unofficial statewide paper, noted Gantt's reluctance in commanding the spotlight. When approached by Mikey Dawson, a photographer for the paper, Gantt "explained that he didn't want his picture taken, that he was not seeking publicity." After some prodding from the photographer, and the realization that publicity was his whether he sought it or not, Gantt agreed to have his picture taken.[18]

At Clemson, Gantt confronted a political tightrope, forced to balance his continued interest in civil rights issues and a desire to avoid provoking segregationists that wished to portray him as a pawn of the NAACP. With the overwhelming praise of Gantt's calm and focused demeanor, there was a subtle implication that peace at Clemson depended on Gantt maintaining a singular focus on his academics. However, one of the same newspaper articles that portrayed Gantt favorably to James Meredith also noted that Gantt was not one to back down in the face of injustice. Defending his arrival at Clemson, Gantt said, "It's time we claimed some of our rights."[19] In his first day at Clemson, Gantt made no grand pronouncements about the civil rights movement and offered nothing resembling provocation of segregationist tensions. But he never shied away from recognizing the broader scope of his actions. "I'm happy to know that this is going to give other Negroes an opportunity to go to Clemson," Gantt said.[20]

Gantt's civil rights activism was certainly less visible than that of Meredith, but his presence at Clemson did present a challenge for school administrators who hoped to

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[17] Zalin B. Grant, "Gantt's Acceptance Remains On Individual Student Basis," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 1, 1963. P.2.
[18] Joseph P. Barnett, "Talks With Negro Leaders," *The State*, January 29, 1963.
[19] "Negro At Clemson," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.
[20] "Negro At Clemson," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.

avoid seeing Clemson turn into a warzone. The peace of January 28, 1963, was an excellent public relations moment for the school, but that would evaporate at a moment's notice if violence were to erupt on campus. While Clemson officials feared opposition from Marion Gressette and other segregationists in the days and weeks before Gantt enrolled, internal dissent within the Clemson community, both current students and alumni, posed one of the greatest threats to peaceful integration.

A group calling themselves the Concerned Clemson Alumni exposed serious division within the ranks and served as a clear sign that, despite the rulings of the courts, desegregation would not go unchallenged at Clemson. In a letter to Clemson students, the Concerned Clemson Alumni sought to influence the students' reception of Gantt on campus. "It is obvious from the manner in which Gantt handled his application that he enters the college seeking publicity rather than an education," the letter stated. "He should, therefore, be left to his own devices. Students should ignore him, avoid conversing with him and sitting next to him, should offer no assistance and should ostracize both him and any student who may offer him association in any respect. He should be treated with the cold, silent contempt he has earned."[21] The Concerned Clemson Alumni letter sought to challenge the instructions for student behavior handed down by RC Edwards and Walter Cox. While Edwards and Cox stopped short of encouraging students to engage in a positive manner with Gantt, they certainly did not propose a freeze-out. Unlike Clemson's leaders, the Concerned Clemson Alumni showed no particular regard for the manners and respectability of Clemson students by urging them to openly ostracize and marginalize Gantt.

[21] Letter from Concerned Clemson Alumni to Clemson students, January 24, 1963, Folder 197, R.C. Edwards Papers.

As with the court cases that occupied so much of his time in the Fall of 1962, Edwards received a number of letters from alumni and agitated citizens voicing their displeasure with the peaceful desegregation of Clemson. "The Clemson Tigers died yesterday – yesterday, they became pussycats," wrote one South Carolinian. "The brainwashing they had been receiving since early September was in plain view for all the world to see – how 4200 red-blooded men could be changed into bloodless, gutless and spineless men who were not even allowed to 'purr' to show their disgust over a Negro being thrust into their midst." The letter continued,

> "You publicly stated that Harvey Gantt would be treated as any other student. Do you plan on him attending the college dance and dance with the white co-eds, or for him to invite his Negro date? Do you expect to house his parents and sisters at the Clemson House when they come to visit him? Will Harvey Gantt be seated in the midst of the student section at football games, etc? Will he be allowed to have his 'News Conferences' where he can advise the world how friendly the Clemson men are? I know the above is as repulsive to you as it is to me."[22]

Each of the hypothetical segregationist nightmare scenarios presented in that letter came to pass. But letters such as these offered a continuous reminder that opposition to Gantt would not vanish due to court orders.

Throughout the process of Gantt's enrollment, R.C. Edwards and his staff feared a violent backlash to desegregation at Clemson. However, while he received numerous letters chastising his acceptance of Gantt, many more wrote to Edwards to offer support and praise for his deft handling of the situation. The response of Clemson students to Gantt's arrival, while mitigated by the threat of expulsion, showed a level of compliance with, if not overt support for, Edward's carefully-planned process of desegregation. Those with close ties to Clemson offered praise for his actions. In a letter to Edwards, Alice Benet Hopkins wrote, "My father, Christie Benet was chairman of the Board at

[22] Letter from Leona A. Arant to Edwards, January 29, 1963, Folder 220, R.C. Edwards Papers.

Clemson for many years, and gave a great deal of time and thought to the College. I believe that were he alive today he would most heartily endorse your policy in the present crisis, and would be the first to commend you for your courageous, sensible leadership."[23] Dr. W. H. Goggins, class of 1943, wrote in a telegram to Edwards, "AGREE YOUR STAND PEACEFUL INTEGRATION IN BEST TRADITION OF COUNTRY GENTLEMAN."[24] In addition to praise for the relatively peaceful moment of desegregation, a number of the letters offered continued support for the crisis facing Edwards and the college. Wrote one woman, "Everyone who loves Clemson, and there are thousands such – hope and pray for continued dignity and calmness and to all of you who are in charge – we hope for the best."[25]

While Clemson administrators hoped to preserve the peace, Gantt prepared himself for his new life at Clemson. Although he enrolled on January 28, classes did not begin until February 1, 1963. Gantt had a number of visitors in his first nights on campus, as Clemson students stopped by to greet their newest classmate. Student body president Bill Hendrix and his friend Joe Swann stopped by Gantt's room in those first days. Hendrix said Gantt "did not come across as someone who was there to prove something or someone who had a chip on his shoulder, but a student."[26] Two reporters with the *Tiger* newspaper, Ralph Hood and Dave Gumula, dropped in to chronicle Gantt's first impressions as a student. Hood recalled that their conversation with Gantt

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[23] Letter from Alice Benet Hopkins to R.C. Edwards, January 28, 1963, Folder 220, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[24] Telegram from Dr. W. H. Goggins to R.C. Edwards, January 29, 1963, Folder 220, R.C. Edwards Papers. The term "country gentleman" has a particular meaning for Clemson students and alumni. The "Country Gentleman," represented by a student in stereotypical Old South garb and a top hat, served as Clemson's secondary mascot at sporting events from 1939 until 1972, when it was retired along with the playing of Dixie and the displaying of the Confederate battle flag.
[25] Letter from Mrs. Sara C. Young to Sherman, January 30, 1963, Folder 220, R.C. Edwards Papers.
[26] Orville Vernon Burton, "Dining With Harvey Gantt" in *Matthew Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 202.

quickly turned to common questions from a new student, with Gantt wanting to know what the students did on the weekends. Hood wrote, "It hasn't taken [Gantt] long to realize the importance of a car at Clemson."[27]

Perhaps more than any other source, the *Tiger* student newspaper established Gantt's presence on campus as a normal part of Clemson life. During his court battle against Clemson and in the weeks that followed, Gantt read the *Tiger* to gauge the climate amongst those in Clemson. Whatever the opinions of Marion Gressette, 'Red' Bethea, concerned alumni, and citizens of South Carolina, peaceful desegregation could only be accomplished with a receptive student body and open-minded citizens in the town of Clemson. "I read the [*Tiger*] newspaper and read the editorial pages to see" how students would react, Gantt recalled.[28] The *Tiger* provided an outlet for student opinion that gave Gantt an idea of what to expect during his first semester. But the *Tiger* was more than a mere chronicler of student opinion; it also crafted its own narrative of desegregation. As with national media, a great deal of praise was showered on Clemson students and administrators for handling desegregation in a peaceful manner. "The fact that you can hardly speak of integration attempts in [other southern states], as compared to South Carolina, in the same breath speaks admirably for both the students of Clemson and the people of the state," wrote Associate Editor Bobby Dye.[29] Frank Gentry, the Managing Editor, wrote, "The fact that, as this is being written, no violence has occurred is a tribute to the maturity of Clemson men."[30]

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[27] Ralph Hood, "Gantt Gives Interview To Tiger Representatives," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 16. February 1, 1963. P. 1,3.
[28] Harvey Gantt, from 2003 Citadel conference, *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 356.
[29] "State Education Process Flatly Ignores Integration," *The Tiger* February 1, 1963. P. 2.
[30] "Curiosity Keynotes Student Reaction To Mix," *The Tiger* February 1, 1963. P.2.

In addition to praising Clemson students for their peaceful response to Gantt's enrollment, columnists for the *Tiger* portrayed Gantt as part of the Clemson family, rather than an outsider. One reporter called Gantt "a full-fledged Clemson student"; another noted that Gantt's primary concerns mirrored those of any other transfer student.[31] Perhaps most importantly, the editorial staff of the *Tiger* printed many more letters from students praising Clemson's peaceful desegregation than those opposing Gantt's participation in the Clemson experience. Of the twenty-eight letters to the editor printed in the *Tiger* in Gantt's first semester, twenty-one were directly concerned with desegregation at Clemson. Of those twenty-one letters, fourteen supported Gantt's enrollment and Clemson's handling of the situation. While it is impossible to tell the actual breakdown of the letters sent to the newspaper staff, they certainly were not fearful of printing letters that supported Gantt.[32]

Despite all of the attention given to desegregation at Clemson, only Gantt experienced it from his particular vantage point. While administrators tried to map out the Clemson desegregation experience and students debated what integration would mean for the school, Gantt prepared for his new life in a previously closed environment. After registering for classes on January 28 and adjusting to the campus, Gantt experienced the inside of a Clemson classroom for the first time on February 1, 1963. His first class, an engineering course with twenty white classmates, lasted just a half hour.[33] Gantt experienced his first day of classes with significantly less fanfare than that which greeted him as he initially enrolled. With each passing moment, Gantt's presence on Clemson's campus was normalized.

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[31] Bobby Dye, "State Education Process Flatly Ignores Integration," *The Tiger* February 1, 1963. P.2.
[32] *The Tiger*, Vol. LVI No. 16-29.
[33] "Gantt Attends First Class With 20 White Students," *New York Times* February 2, 1963. 6.

Harvey Gantt never lacked for confidence. Throughout his legal battle against Clemson, Gantt held fast to the belief that he would not only win, but that he could successfully diffuse any opposition to his enrollment. As he began his studies at Clemson, he continued to harbor that attitude. “I don't think there is any environment I can ever go into where I'm not going to make friends with anybody, I don't care how hostile you're likely to be,” Gantt recalled. “I just always have this confidence that if I can get you to sit down and look you in the eye we can talk, we can get to know each other.” Gantt was conscious of those who disagreed with him, but he was sure that if his personality did not sway them, his devotion to his studies would. “All of the business at that time about ostracizing this pioneer, this integrationist, who wants to destroy our way of life,” he said, “all of the efforts to make me something other than a human being, all of those efforts that say that he was an agent of some evil force that was causing some changes, just was ridiculous on its face.”[34]

Simply put, Gantt was confident without being foolish. While he was certain that his personality and his devotion to his studies could convince other students of the true intentions of his effort to desegregate Clemson, he did not bet his life on it. “I made a habit of not sitting in front of an open window, little precautions I took to avoid the fate of some crazy person with a shotgun who might want to do something,” Gantt said. “But generally, I felt quite able to move about the campus quite freely.”[35]

[34] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[35] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

Gantt was not alone in his concerns for his safety. The many letters sent to R.C. Edwards decrying his actions in welcoming Gantt certainly made an impression. Edwards and Dean of Students Walter Cox felt sure that students would treat Gantt with respect, but all it would take was one unruly individual to create an incident.

Shortly after Gantt's matriculation, an underground newspaper committed to the preservation of segregation surfaced on Clemson's campus. *The Rebel Underground*, which claimed to be the true voice of Clemson students, represented the exact type of public opposition to desegregation that R.C. Edwards and his staff hoped to avoid. *The Rebel Underground* provided yet another connection with desegregation at Ole Miss; the paper was modeled after an underground paper of the same name that appeared following Meredith's arrival at Oxford. The editors of the paper sought to unite their cause with that of the Concerned Clemson Alumni, and a number of the arguments presented in *The Rebel Underground* mirror those voiced by Clemson alumni that opposed integration. "We deeply resent the attempts by Clemson officials to depict us as indifferent and too pre-occupied with 'grades' to be concerned over such unimportant matters as States Rights, Racial Integrity, or the menace of the Communist conspiracy," the paper's inaugural issue stated. "We must necessarily work underground due to the police-state methods of the race mixers, but we want the people of South Carolina and throughout the United States to know that every Clemson Student is not a 'lizard sleeping in the sun.'"[36]

The primary goal of *The Rebel Underground* was to rally opposition to Gantt and desegregation. In this effort, the paper was a failure; Gantt experienced very little open opposition from students during his time at Clemson. The editors of the *Tiger* openly mocked *The Rebel Underground* and exposed the fact that it was merely a facsimile of an

[36] *The Rebel Underground*, No. 1, Folder 196, R.C. Edwards Papers.

Ole Miss underground paper. And yet, despite its inability to inspire public hostility towards Clemson's newest student, the appearance of *The Rebel Underground* on Clemson's campus served as a reminder that opposition to Gantt's admission survived the afternoon of January 28, 1963. Undeterred by the orders of the courts and the administration's welcoming reception of Gantt, these ardent segregationists saw opposition to Gantt as a duty in fulfilling their southern heritage. The writers of the paper challenged the southern masculinity of those who accepted Gantt's admission. "Clemson Men, is there anything you will fight for? Is there any principle worth defending? Do you truly believe that apathy is the same as 'law and order?,'" the editors asked. Claiming to fight for "the Southern way of life," the authors of the paper suggested the desegregation of Clemson was but one incident in a larger war against the South. "Make no mistake about it, <u>we are in a battle</u>!," the paper declared. "A battle for our Country and for our Race."[37]

Wary of any hostile segments in Clemson's student body, the administration recognized that Gantt could face problems in his first semester and took a number of stealthy precautions to ensure that he was protected. Joel Collins, a sophomore at the time, was contacted by the Dean of Students Walter Cox and given a special mission. Cox's initial recruit for the task, a senior, had balked. Collins was given a room adjacent to Gantt in Johnstone and a walkie-talkie with which he could directly contact SLED in case of an emergency. While no emergency situation ever presented itself, the

[37] *The Rebel Underground*, Vol. I No. II, March 1963, Folder 196, R.C. Edwards Papers.

administration's placement of shadow for Gantt in his own dormitory suggests they were not willing to take any chances with Gantt's safety.[38]

Undercover security guards watched over Gantt when he moved across Clemson's campus. As the first semester wore on, Gantt was unsure if they were still following him and concocted a plan to test for their presence. "There was once that we played a game with a kid that I got to know in the architecture school," Gantt said. "We were coming from class one day and we were fooling around, we lived in the same dorm, and we faked a fight, you know, we were just trying to see how much of the security that was still there. They came out of the woodwork."[39] Gantt hoped to spend his time on Clemson's campus like any other student, without being treated differently. However, R.C. Edwards and Walter Cox, with the best of intentions, were determined to make sure that never happened. Gantt did not face discrimination that set him apart, but the continued existence of segregationists necessitated extraordinary measures on the part of Clemson officials to guarantee his safety. Whether he liked it or not, Gantt could never be just another student on Clemson's campus.

Despite the administration's watchful eye, Gantt tried to establish something representing a normal life at Clemson. Although the circumstances of his arrival were unusual, Gantt remained a twenty-year-old college student. When he was not secluded with other architecture students in Lee Hall, Gantt spent a great deal of time in his first days at Clemson holed up in Johnstone, listening to Ray Charles and Jimmy Smith

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[38] Burton, "Dining With Harvey Gantt," *Matthew Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 193.
[39] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

records. At Iowa State, Gantt satisfied his athletic interests by playing intramural football.[40] However, that avenue of college life, and indeed most forms of social interaction, was now complicated by his status as the lone African American student on the campus of a conservative college in South Carolina.

Upon his entrance to Clemson, Gantt noted that he hoped he would find friends among the Clemson students, but understood that complications may get in the way.[41] As it happened, a group of white Clemson students who were members of the Baptist Student Union befriended Gantt. The students were encouraged to welcome Gantt by Rev. Charles A. Webster, who served as assistant pastor at Clemson Baptist Church and was directly involved with campus matters as director of student work for the Clemson Baptist Student Union. Webster was not a stranger to Gantt; he communicated his support for Gantt's desegregation to Matthew Perry in 1962, offering to help the young student's effort to secure a necessary interview required of transfer students.[42]

The students under Webster's direction were not alone. Zalen B. Grant, a writer for the *Tiger*, began to sit with Gantt in the cafeteria, and recruited Clemson football players to help his cause. "Sometimes [Gantt's] table filled up and I couldn't get a seat," he recalled. "People found out he was a very nice guy and he quickly developed his own friends."[43]

Off campus, Gantt found comradery from a familiar source. Hoping to find a new church home, Gantt joined the Golden View Baptist Church and sang in the choir. Anna Reid, member of Golden View and a prominent figure in Clemson's African American

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[40] "Negro at Clemson," *New York Times* January 28, 1963. P.4.
[41] Claude Sitton, "Clemson Admits a Negro Quietly," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.
[42] Burton, "Dining With Harvey Gantt," *Matthew Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 188.
[43] Art Harris, "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.

community, often allowed Gantt to stay at her home on the weekends to escape the attention of the media.[44] While Gantt was the lone black presence in Clemson classrooms, he drew on important support from the African American community in the town of Clemson.

In regards to his actual schooling, the sole purpose of his enrollment, Gantt was only extraordinary in the quality of his work. After all, there were no administrative officials or security guards to help him design projects in Lee Hall. In his academic achievements, Gantt was most alone and most free. In his protracted legal battle against Clemson, Gantt found himself amused by those that doubted his academic capabilities. "They said 'architecture is a tough, tough curriculum,'" Gantt recalled. "'The fellow will flunk out if he even gets in.'"[45] Not only did Gantt not flunk out of Clemson's architecture program, he thrived, eventually finishing third in his graduating class.

While his studies provided an environment of equality, Gantt was met with continued resistance in his extracurricular activities. When Gantt learned that Brook Benton was going to be performing at the Midwinters Dance on February 22, 1963, he contacted Clemson's administrators to inform them that he wanted to attend.[46] "I decided I wanted to go and a few people in the administration wanted me not to go because they thought that people would be drunk at the dance portion of the thing and I'm standing around, I might get some lonely young lady who would ask me for a dance and I would

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[44] Anna Reid Interview. Box 2-3, Mss 282, Black Heritage in the Upper Piedmont of South Carolina Project Collection, Special Collection, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, SC. Cassette 1, side 2.
[45] *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 356-7.
[46] Benton was not the only performer to come through Clemson. At that same Winter Dance, the Impressions (with Curtis Mayfield on guitar) and other African American artists opened the show. In the years before Gantt arrived, musical acts including Ray Charles, Clyde McPhatter and the Drifters, Lionel Hampton, and Hank Ballard and his Midnighters represented some of the only visible black presences on Clemson's campus aside from the staff of custodians and cafeteria workers.

be crazy enough to dance with her," Gantt recalled.[47] Complicating matters, Benton, who previously vowed to never perform in Clemson again until the school desegregated, invited Gantt to be his special guest backstage.[48] Gantt was determined to attend.

As was the case with almost every facet of his enrollment at Clemson, Gantt displayed a sense of cautious optimism. He felt that the Clemson administration, from R.C. Edwards on down, were too fearful of an ugly incident. Gantt attended the Midwinters Dance, where he did indeed dance with white women. There was no incident. "[When] someone simply say that because I'm black I can't talk to someone white it insults me in terms of who I am," Gantt said. "You can't confine me that way and I refuse to be confined that way."[49]

Despite the hopes of segregationists, the opposition to Gantt at Clemson became less powerful as the semester progressed. Each day without incident brought a sense of normalcy and routine to Gantt and the college. At the end of his first semester, Gantt told the *New York Times*, "The longer the semester lasted, the more I was accepted."[50] In an interview conducted in 2008, Gantt reflected on his time at Clemson and addressed his treatment on campus in the weeks and months that followed the moment of desegregation. Gantt stated,

> "I knew there was a student once who probably had a bet with some other students that he would go over and befriend Harvey Gantt, about the second day that I was there. And he did so. He came over and I was sitting at a table alone in the dining room. And he came over and he sat down, and I said, hello, and then he said, hello. And we exchanged a few formalities and he got up and left and went back to his table as if to say, see, I told you I would do it. But beyond that kind of

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[47]Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[48] "People Are Talking About…," *Jet*, March 14, 1963, p. 42.
[49] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[50] "Negro Praises Clemson," *New York Times*, May 29, 1963, p. 13.

> an awkward moment for both of us, most of the rest of the time I went to lunch with architecture students and others."[51]

Gantt's memories of desegregating Clemson are generally favorable towards the school and its students, but there were indeed moments of charged resistance. On Gantt's first evening at Clemson, a student waved a Confederate flag outside of his dorm. The incident was quickly handled by Dean Cox, who held a private meeting with the student to re-iterate the expectations of behavior set worth by school administrators.[52] During Gantt's second semester at school, a student on an upper floor of Johnstone yelled out of his window "Nigger go home!" Gantt chalked it up to mere drunkenness following a Clemson football game. "[This was] definitely not the pattern at all," Gantt said.[53] Indeed, while those moments of tension existed, they were the outliers. Opposition to integration at Clemson lasted long after the moment of desegregation, but Gantt's experience proved peaceful in relation to other schools. The resistance to desegregation seen at the University of Georgia, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Alabama simply did not manifest at Clemson.

In March, 1963, long after the reporters and journalists moved on to other stories, an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* briefly returned the story of desegregation at Clemson to the national spotlight. In his article "Integration with Dignity," George McMillan revealed the planning that occurred in the days and weeks before Gantt arrived. While many contemporary accounts credited newly sworn-in governor Donald Russell for the peaceful transition, McMillan highlighted the important role of Fritz Hollings and South Carolina business leaders. Indeed, McMillan framed the peaceful desegregation of

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[51] Harvey Gantt, interview with *Tell Me More*, August 27, 2008, National Public Radio.
[52] Burton, "Dining With Harvey Gantt" in *Matthew Perry: The Man, His Times, and His Legacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004). P. 194.
[53] Reel, "Clemson and Harvey Gantt," *Integration with Dignity*, 51.

Clemson as primarily a victory for Edwards, Hollings, and South Carolina business interests in not succumbing to the fate that met Mississippi. The lack of violence at Clemson was more than mere luck. "When South Carolina's turn came to face the inevitable fact of racial change," McMillan wrote, "its responsible people, its leadership group, its 'power structure' took the initiative and handled the crisis with dignity, dignity for the Negro as well as for the white man." In the words of McMillan, what occurred at Clemson was nothing short of a "conspiracy for peace."[54]

Not everyone responded to the article favorably. Some of the state's staunch segregationists resented the article's depiction of Edwards' leadership on the issue. For example, McMillan suggested that Edwards intimidated Marion Gressette into compliance with the plan for peaceful desegregation, a charge Gressette vehemently denied. Clemson students felt that they were not given enough credit in the article, which is akin to asking for praise for not breaking the law.[55] Most importantly, Gantt himself was presented as a passive participant in his own desegregation experience, a bystander to social change for which he was the engine. Despite its flaws, McMillan's work defined the story of the desegregation of higher education in South Carolina. In many ways, the phrase "integration with dignity" became synonymous with desegregation at Clemson.[56]

As the end of his first semester at Clemson approached, Gantt quietly passed an important marker. Despite all of the reservations of President Edwards and Dean Cox,

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[54] George McMillan, "Integration with Dignity," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 1963, p. 16.
[55] M. Ron Cox, "Integration with [Relative] Dignity: The Desegregation of Clemson College and George McMillan's Article at Forty" in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Winfred B. Moore, Jr., and Orville Vernon Burton (University of South Carolina Press, 2008). 278.
[56] Highlighting the longevity of the phrase, "Integration with Dignity" appears on the historical marker that currently stands in front of Tillman Hall on Clemson's campus.

there had been no attacks, no violent outbursts, no incidents to rival Ole Miss. If support for Gantt was not widespread, tolerance was. Harvey Gantt, and Clemson, survived.

As Gantt entered his first summer break at Clemson, his enrollment continued to have a ripple effect. In an interview about the state of human rights, Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, winner of the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize and Under Secretary for Special Political Affairs for the United Nations, noted Gantt's peaceful enrollment at Clemson as a sign that the national civil rights movement was entering a climactic phase.[57] On a more local level, the civil rights movement in Charleston, which Gantt and his fellow Burke classmates helped reignite after the S.H. Kress sit-in, continued to gain steam while Gantt was away at school. Under the direction of NAACP Chairman J. Arthur Brown and Rev. James Blake, both of whom had direct connections with Gantt, civil rights activism flourished in Charleston, resulting in what ultimately became known as the Charleston Movement.[58] On July 20, 1963, during his first summer break from Clemson, Gantt's mother Wilhelmina was arrested with three other activists as a group of around one-hundred and seventy-five Charleston activists marched through downtown Charleston, blocking King Street.[59] As a result of continued protest and demonstrations, the city of Charleston finally desegregated Charleston Public Schools on September 3, 1963, when eleven black students attended previously all-white schools. J. Arthur Brown credited the important role played by young citizens of Charleston in bringing about social change. "When the

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[57] "Bunche Sees Civil-Rights Fight of Negroes in Climactic Phase," *New York Times*, June 9, 1963. P. 57. Bunche, 1950 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, is credited as a major influence in founding the United Nations, particularly its inclusion of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For more on Bunche and his civil rights background, see: Miller, Eben. *Born Along the Color Line: The 1933 Anemia Conference and the Rise of a National Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
[58] Lottie Joiner, "Charleston's Place in the Civil Rights Movement," *Time* June 19, 2015. http://time.com/3928713/charleston-civil-rights-movement/
[59] "Four Arrested As Negroes March Through Charleston," *New York Times* July 21, 1963. P. 44.

[students] take a positive stand, as they have here, I feel that this is the solution," Brown said.[60] Gantt's desegregation of Clemson was an important milestone for civil rights in South Carolina, but it was only one piece of the larger puzzle. While Gantt worked hard to earn his degree and begin a career in architecture, the civil rights movement in South Carolina continued.

Of course, it was clear from the start that Gantt's desegregation of Clemson was more than just a personal victory. On July 10, 1963, Federal Judge J. Robert Martin ruled in favor of Henrie Montieth in her suit against the University of South Carolina, effectively desegregating the flagship university in the state. For the first time since Henry Hayne was forced to leave in 1877, an African American student would enroll at the University of South Carolina. Like Gantt, Montieth maintained that she wanted an education first and foremost, but she acknowledged the larger impact of the decision. "Since this is a class action I hope that many Negro youths will avail themselves of the opportunity to attend any tax-supported institution of South Carolina," Montieth said.[61]

As fate would have it, Gantt and Montieth had previously crossed paths. In the spring of 1963, Gantt found himself confronted with new opportunities as a result of his status as the first African American student to desegregate a South Carolina college. As newly appointed chairman of the South Carolina Student Council on Human Relations, Gantt came into direct contact with a number of African American high school students in the early stages of the newly opened college application process.[62] As a recruiter for gifted black students, Gantt met a number of young people that later desegregated state

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[60] "Charleston Acts Today," New York Times, September 3, 1963. P. 26.
[61] "University Told To Admit Negro," *New York Times*. July 11, 1963. P. 18.
[62] Marcia G. Synott, "Moderate White Activists and the Struggle for Racial Equality on South Carolina Campuses" in *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 115.

colleges across the South, including Vivian Malone, who helped permanently desegregate the University of Alabama, and Henrie Monteith. He also met Lucinda Brawley, a graduate of Hopkins High School just south of Columbia, who was thinking of applying to Clemson.[63] "I became a very famous person all of a sudden in the period leading up to that and so I went to speak to a lot of high schools and got to meet [Lucinda] and heard that she was interested in being a student at Clemson," Gantt recalled. "So I finished talking to her class and then we talked. She was pretty and I thought it was nice. She matriculated at Clemson the very next semester."[64]

Gantt successfully recruited Lucinda Brawley to join him at Clemson, where she became the first African American female student in September 1963. The relatively quiet and peaceful desegregation led by Gantt certainly transformed Clemson's campus, but Lucinda Brawley's arrival held its own unique challenges as Clemson was struggling to reconcile the presence of both African Americans and women. The college began admitting women in 1955, the same year that it severed its strict military ties, but it completed its first female dormitory less than a year before Brawley enrolled. Where Gantt's arrival provoked a reluctant response from the school's administration, which organized security and the requisite press conferences of his first day, R.C. Edwards and his staff treated Lucinda Brawley as just another student.[65] In an article announcing that a second African American student would enroll at Clemson, there is no mention of Brawley's name or gender. The article stated, "Dr. Edwards refused to identify the

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[63] Marcia G. Synott, "The African-American Women Most Influential in Desegregating Higher Education." *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 59, 2008, p. 50.

[64] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

[65] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 – Gantt described Lucinda as arriving "with no fanfare, no question of her application"

Negro, saying he felt the student's name was confidential until the student himself revealed his identity."[66] Of course, the attention showered on Gantt also served to protect him. On Lucinda Brawley's first day, she was met with racial epithets from students and received slightly harsher treatment.[67]

Whereas Gantt's enrollment at Clemson was the source of widespread media attention, there were no reporters or gawking bystanders awaiting Brawley's arrival at Clemson. The response from the *Tiger* newspaper summed up the sense of student indifference. "Lucinda Brawley has taken her place in the Clemson student body and hardly anyone notices," wrote columnist John Coyle. "She was accompanied by no fanfare and the rest of the nation probably doesn't know that she exists. She and Harvey Gantt are part of a phenomenon that nobody other than the people and students of Clemson expected." Coyle credited changing racial attitudes and Gantt's own role in preserving the peace with creating the conditions that allowed for Brawley's quieter enrollment. "Thanks to a road already paved smooth by her predecessor, Lucinda didn't arrive with an accompanying cordon of law enforcement officers, scores of news-hungry reporters, and groups of inquisitive students," he wrote.[68] Frank Gentry painted a similar story in his portrayal of the student body's reaction to a second African American student. In an editorial entitled "One More, So What," Gentry wrote, "The existence of two Negroes rather than one is hardly as pressing a problem as Freshmen grades or even the location of the new vending machines."[69]

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[66] "Second Negro Will Attend Clemson College This Fall," *New York Times*, July 27, 1963, p.8.

[67] Marcia G. Synott, "The African-American Women Most Influential in Desegregating Higher Education." *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 59, 2008, p. 50.

[68] John Coyle, "Attitudes Changing With Respect To Integration," *The Tiger* Vol. LVII No. 1. September 13, 1963. P.2.

[69] Frank Gentry, "One More, So What," *The Tiger* Vol. LVII No. 1. September 13, 1963. P. 2.

Like Gantt, Brawley experienced Clemson in a unique manner that can never be repeated. However, it is important to remember that Lucinda Brawley was not alone at Clemson. She had the same support from the African American staff at Clemson that Gantt experienced, as well as helping hands from the black community in town. And she had Harvey.

Gantt and Lucinda Brawley spent a great deal of time together after her arrival. "At first I had no idea of ever really dating her, you know, in the sense of carrying her out for a date," Gantt remembered. "I just primarily treated her as a sister for maybe six months."[70] But as time passed, Gantt found himself drawn into a romantic relationship with Clemson's lone black female student. The two attended home football games together and made no effort to hide themselves on campus. "We'd occasionally go out on a date together," Gantt recalled. "I'd introduce her around to the black community… and it turned into other things."[71]

Gantt's relationship with Lucinda Brawley provided a source of companionship free from the judgment and concerns of segregationists. Gantt had attended the dance in February of 1963, and, despite the recommendations of R.C. Edwards, openly danced with white women. But he was always mindful of the backlash that was waiting if he pursued a romantic relationship with a white Clemson student. "There were people who were quite concerned about my dating habits as to whether I would end up seeking to date one of the white girls on campus," Gantt said. "That gave the president and some others a great deal of concern in that first semester with no one else there before Cindy

[70] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986
[71] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

came."[72] Gantt recognized that the fear of racial mixing was a continued concern in the South. Many in the state of South Carolina accepted Gantt's presence at Clemson with peaceful reluctance. There was no guarantee they would be so courteous if Gantt attempted to break other racial boundaries.

After a year of dating, Gantt married Lucinda Brawley on October 10, 1964, during his final year at Clemson. That they wound up together was obviously not a given; while they were the first two African American students at Clemson, that artificial bubble of the University should not obscure the fact that a vibrant black community existed in Clemson and the surrounding towns of the South Carolina Upstate. By the beginning of the 1964-65 school year, other African American students arrived on Clemson's campus as part of the long march toward integration of the student body. Despite that community, however, Gantt and Brawley held particularly unique experiences that united their time at Clemson.

As time went on at Clemson, Gantt and Brawley settled into more normal routines as Clemson students. The student newspaper reported less frequently on integration issues. With each semester, more African American students joined the Clemson community, charting their own paths with the educational opportunity now open to them. The initial moment of desegregation transitioned into the longer process of integration. Gantt's hope for the future never wavered, but it was certainly strengthened by the peaceful response to his tenure at Clemson. "What I found most hopeful in my years as a student was that a good many of us, 18 to 22 years old, had a positive belief that our state and indeed our nation would undergo some struggles, but better days were ahead for

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[72] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986

them and for me and for people who looked like me," he said. "And a lot of us left Clemson with the belief that we could make a difference."[73]

Harvey Gantt graduated from Clemson University with honors on May 29, 1965. Responding to reporters, Gantt declared that he wished to pursue a career in architecture and had no grander plans for participating in any leadership roles in the civil rights movement. This sentiment was consistent with every statement he made in the long battle to desegregate Clemson. "I will do my part but I'm not a Negro leader," Gantt said. He noted his plans to work as a civil rights activist on "a quieter level."[74]

At every turn, Gantt seemed to downplay his importance to the movement. Gantt saw himself as just another student at Clemson hoping to take advantage of educational opportunities. As a child, Gantt dreamed of becoming an architect; he never dreamed of attending Clemson. Like so many other students who set foot on campus, Clemson was a means to an end. Gantt cherished the time he spent and the relationships he made there, but he was ready to pursue his dreams as a working architect. Historians have recognized Gantt's admission to Clemson as a major achievement, and indeed it was. But for Harvey, graduating from Clemson was not the final goal. In the summer of 1965, Gantt was ready to get to work.

From the moment Gantt arrived and registered peacefully at Clemson, partisans have attempted to stake out who deserves the credit for calm desegregation in South Carolina. National media lavished praise on Gantt's role in registering in an orderly

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[73] Carolyn Click, "Gantt revisits historic integration journey," *The State* August 22, 2012. http://www.thestate.com/latest-news/article14408525.html
[74] "Clemson Negro Graduates; Joining Architecture Firm," *New York Times*, May 30, 1965, p. 38

manner and avoiding any sense of antagonism.[75] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the student-led *Tiger* newspaper suggested that Clemson's student body was most responsible for the lack of violence.[76] McMillan's "Integration with Dignity" article praised the role of school and state officials like R.C. Edwards, Fritz Hollings, and others in orchestrating a precise and well-executed plan to preserve the peace on Clemson's campus. While a variety of reasons for peaceful desegregation in South Carolina have been offered, the wide range of people credited reveals an important truth: everyone involved in the process deserves recognition for the outcome.

Peaceful desegregation in South Carolina, a state that had only recently raised the Confederate flag over the capitol building in Columbia, was neither assured nor particularly expected in 1963. A calm, orderly desegregation process involved a number of moving parts which heightened the possibility of failure. Had Gantt sought opportunities to turn his personal educational ambitions into an aggressive civil rights crusade; had any individual Clemson student taken it upon himself to greet Gantt with violence; had law enforcement officials not developed an impenetrable wall around campus, blocking anyone who was not a student or member of the press; had South Carolina business leaders like Daniels not seen disruption of business as more important than Old South racial attitudes; had Hollings taken it upon himself to act more in the manner of Ross Barnett, who openly rallied Mississippians to defend Oxford; had Edwards and Cox not instilled upon the student body the importance of orderly routine; had Ole Miss not experienced such violence in the months before Gantt arrived – had any of these events unfolded differently, the plan would have failed. Nonviolent

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[75] "Negro At Clemson," *New York Times* January 29, 1963. P.4.
[76] "Students… The Real Reason," *The Tiger* Vol. LVI No. 23. March 22, 1963. P.2.

desegregation at Clemson hung upon a razor's edge. Everyone involved in the peaceful outcome deserves a share of the praise.

And yet, of all the actors involved, Gantt deserves the majority of the credit. Had Clemson's desegregation turned out differently, it could have caused widespread problems for all parties involved. A disorderly and chaotic event on Clemson's campus held the potential to derail Fritz Hollings' political ambitions. Had violence like that seen at Ole Miss erupted in the South Carolina Upstate, R.C. Edwards' reputation could have been tarnished and Clemson students could have witnessed an embarrassing moment for their school. However, none risked what Harvey risked. In desegregating Clemson University, Gantt put his life on the line.

Ultimately, Gantt's experience at Clemson was surprisingly routine, the security efforts provided by Edwards notwithstanding. He spent much of his time in class or working on projects. While there were concerns among Clemson's staff regarding Gantt's ability and willingness to attend social functions, Gantt experienced no ill treatment at the dance with Brook Benton or at Clemson sporting events. Although he arrived at Clemson well into his junior year, Gantt found comfort in the local African American community that took him under their wing. His friendship with Lucinda Brawley, Clemson's second African American student, blossomed into a romantic relationship. Despite all of the attention from the media on January 28, 1963, Gantt's time at Clemson was as normal as possible given the circumstances.

This was by design. As he did during the long application process and the trial that followed it, Gantt arrived at Clemson with a stoic, serious devotion to his studies and

a desire to remain firmly out of the spotlight. Gantt enrolled at Clemson to finish his degree in architecture, and that is exactly what he did.

For Gantt, desegregating Clemson College was less important than earning his degree in architecture. That is not to suggest selfishness on his part; he was certainly aware of the importance that his enrollment carried across the state. Indeed, Gantt was enlisted to recruit new black students across South Carolina to attend Clemson and the University of South Carolina. However, Gantt realized that his success and lasting impact of desegregation went hand in hand. While recent scholarship on the civil rights movement has examined the motivations and tactics of various civil rights eras as a means of establishing stricter periodization of the movement, Gantt's experience at Clemson illuminates how the motivations of civil rights activists were often complicated. Gantt's enrollment at Clemson was a major victory in the battle for educational equality in the state, but education in turn held its own unique possibilities. With the increasing importance of a college degree in the post-World War II era, access to educational opportunity served as a chokepoint for economic equality. As Gantt's parents pressed upon him as a child, education, be it at the high school or college level, served as the impetus for economic equality. If Gantt did not complete his degree, his entrance into Clemson would warrant little more than a historical footnote. The true power of Gantt's enrollment at Clemson came in the economic opportunities unleashed by his Clemson diploma.

As Gantt graduated from Clemson and began a long and successful career in architecture, so too did Clemson prosper after 1965. The school officially rebranded as Clemson University during Gantt's time there. What was once an all-male, military-

affiliated agricultural college now stands as a modern, nationally-recognized university. When Gantt registered for classes on January 28, 1963, it marked the beginning of the process of modernization at Clemson. R.C. Edwards, who worked to deny Gantt's admission, eventually accepted Gantt's presence as an important, progressive step for the school as it expanded beyond its relatively narrow foundational mission.

Gantt's enrollment represented desegregation in the strictest sense. On January 27, 1963, Clemson's African American enrollment stood at 0%; on January 28, 1963, that number stood at 0.002%. Five years after Gantt's graduation, there were 111 African American students enrolled at Clemson, representing just under 1.5% of the total enrollment. By 1980, there were 305 African American students, representing 2.6% of total enrollment. By 1990, African American enrollment rose to 1,075 students, representing 6.5% of total enrollment.[77] Since 1990, the African American enrollment as a percentage of the overall student body has essentially plateaued. While the school has made progress in diversification, some racial tension remains on Clemson's campus. In recent years, progressive student groups have raised questions regarding the school's Tillman Hall, which was renamed in honor of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman in 1946.[78] After January 28, 1963, Clemson was no longer a white-only institution. The long process of integration, however, is still ongoing.

While Gantt's enrollment at Clemson had an unquestionable impact on the school and African American students across the state of South Carolina, one of the contributing

[77] 1970 was the first year in which racial enrollment statistics were compiled. Clemson University Office of Institutional Research.

[78] Andrew Shain, "Pepper in the saltshaker: Clemson hears calls for more diversity," *The State*, January 31, 2015. While the building was officially named for Tillman in 1946, it was originally built in 1893. The building was designed by the firm of Bruce & Morgan, who also designed identical buildings at Auburn University and Winthrop University. As with Tillman Hall at Clemson, these buildings were referred to as "Old Main" or the "Main Building" before being rechristened.

factors in the relatively peaceful reception he received lay in the fact that much of the impact was in long-term potential rather than short-term, tangible changes. Indeed, for most students, Gantt's enrollment was a quiet and boring moment for the school. The most visible effect in the first days and weeks of Gantt's arrival was in the continued police presence at the school's entrances. In the days before Gantt arrived, Clemson students were issued ID cards that they referred to as "Harvey Cards."[79] Aside from those instances, there were few signs of change on Clemson's campus. After Gantt arrived at Clemson, the school band continued to play Dixie. The Country Gentleman, Clemson's secondary mascot which resembled an antebellum southern planter, remained a fixture of Clemson student spirit. Gantt's room in Johnstone B was directly between Tillman Hall and Fort Hill, the plantation home of John C. Calhoun that rests at the heart of Clemson's campus. Confederate flags were still flown at football games. To the naked eye, not much changed on Clemson's campus as a result of Gantt's enrollment.

Few could have foreseen the full impact of his arrival in 1963, but the importance of Gantt's enrollment at Clemson is unquestionable. More black students arrived at Clemson before Gantt graduated in 1965; thanks to the trailblazing of Gantt and Lucinda Brawley, none received the attention that was given in 1963. Desegregation continued outside the classroom when basketball player Craig Mobley became the school's first African American student-athlete in 1969. The following year, Marion Reeves became the first African American football player. While Clemson's African American athletes in the decades since have received a level of national attention that dwarfs that of any non-student-athlete, be they white or black, the overwhelming majority of African American students at Clemson have been devoted to academic endeavors. As more

[79] Claude Sitton, "Clemson Admits a Negro Quietly," *New York Times*, January 29, 1963. P. 4.

African American students enrolled, African American student groups emerged. In the fall semester of 1968, African American students at Clemson formed the Student League for Black Identity. The organization's constitution and bylaws stated that the group's goal was "to promote courses in Black History, the study of Black culture and art, and the study of the Black man in today's society."[80] By February, 1972, the group organized a Black Awareness Week on Clemson's campus, complete with multiple nights of events with speakers and musical groups. Their featured guest on Saturday, February 19, 1972, was none other than Harvey Gantt, a young black architect visiting from Charlotte, North Carolina.[81]

Much of the heavy lifting of desegregation was carried out by Harvey and Lucinda Gantt, but the long process of integration was left to the students who followed them. However, that did not preclude the Gantts from playing an ongoing role. In 1988, the school announced the Harvey B. Gantt Scholarship Endowment for future African American students. In the decades since he graduated, Gantt has been embraced by Clemson leaders, who have celebrated both Gantt and the Clemson community of the 1960s with bringing about peaceful desegregation. The anniversary of Gantt's enrollment on January 28, 1963, has become an integral part of Clemson history. In 2003, on the fortieth anniversary of Gantt's arrival, the school dedicated the circle in front of Tillman Hall as Gantt Circle. The Harvey and Lucinda Gantt Multicultural Center at Clemson currently leads on-campus discussion of issues affecting minority and LGBTQ students. The Gantts' presence is alive and well on Clemson's campus.

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[80] R.C. Edwards Papers, Clemson University Archives Series 12, Box 26, Folder 385
[81] Clemson University Archives Series 37:
http://library.clemson.edu/depts/specialcollections/2016/02/12/student-league-for-black-identity/

Despite efforts to raise awareness of minority concerns, the school still struggles with issues of diversity, highlighted by a series of incidents in recent years. The continued presence of Tillman Hall as the focal point of Clemson's campus has brought protests from those seeking to push Clemson forward. Likewise, Fort Hill has received criticism for overlooking the history of African American slaves who resided on the property.[82] In the spring semester of 2016, African American students at Clemson led a sit-in at Sikes Hall in an effort to raise awareness of issues impacting minority students on Clemson's campus. The issue that sparked the sit-in involved the hanging of bananas from a banner commemorating African American history at Fort Hill. Five students involved with the student organization See the Stripes, D.J. Smith, Khayla Williams, Ian Anderson, A.D. Carson, and Rae-Nessha White, were arrested when they refused to leave Sikes Hall on April 14, 2016.[83] One of the issues that the group raised regarded the cramped space occupied by the Gantt Multicultural Center in the University Union. In response, the Multicultural Center was moved to Bracket Hall in September, 2016.[84] Gantt's journey at Clemson represented an important phase in the battle for equality, but it falls to later generations to continue that struggle.

While there remains a great deal of work to be done by Clemson's administration, students, and alumni to ensure a more diverse and inclusive Clemson experience, it is an undeniable fact that Gantt's desegregation of the institution reshaped it forever. In much the same way that Harvey benefitted from the efforts of civil rights pioneers who helped

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[82] Andrew Shain, " 'Pepper in the salt shaker' – Clemson hears calls for more diversity," *(Columbia, S.C.) State*, January 31, 2015.
[83] The students became known as the Clemson Five. Matt Vasilogambros, "Five Arrested in Clemson University Racism Protests," *The Atlantic* April 15, 2016.
https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2016/04/clemson-university-arrests/478455/
[84] Rowan Lynam, "News Brief: Gantt Center," *The Tiger* September 26, 2016.

break down the racial barrier at Clemson, his own efforts opened the door for black students across the state. The long process of integration continues to this day, but the school never returned to segregation; January 28, 1963, marked the beginning of a new age for Clemson. It would have been impossible without the courage of Harvey Gantt.

Chapter Four

The Civil Rights Movement in Charlotte, North Carolina, 1965-1983

When asked why he and his wife left South Carolina after his graduation from Clemson College in May 1965, Harvey Gantt responded without sentimentality. "The reason I didn't stay in South Carolina was that nobody offered me a job," Gantt said. "It was about as simple as that."[1] Although Gantt graduated third in his program at Clemson, the best offers he received came from firms in Georgia and North Carolina. While he transferred to Clemson from Iowa State under the auspices of improving his employment opportunities in the South, Gantt soon realized that his experience at Clemson complicated his prospects in his home state. "I think there were South Carolina firms that might have wanted to hire me, but politically I was still a hot number, you know – a guy who had destroyed one of the sacred customs of the South," Gantt said.[2] Although most of Gantt's classmates found jobs in South Carolina, Gantt was once again forced to leave his home state in order to fulfill his dream of becoming an architect. "I was a little disappointed," he recalled. "I wasn't asking for anyone to give me a job as much as I wanted to get an interview so that they could see what my talents were, and I was third in my class so I expected to get an interview."[3] He was largely unfamiliar with Charlotte before accepting a job with A.G. Odell Associates, Inc., in 1965. "I came to

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[1] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

[2] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home In Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A13, A22.

[3] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

Charlotte because I got the best offer," Gantt said. "But the first time I saw Charlotte I fell in love with it."[4]

Of course, the Gantts' decision was informed by more than just employment opportunities. When Harvey and Lucinda Gantt moved to Charlotte in the summer of 1965, they arrived with a new addition to the family, their first child Sonja. Atlanta, nearly equidistant from Clemson as Charlotte, seemed overwhelming to Gantt. "I was newly married. I thought that we could do better in Charlotte," Gantt said. "God, I'm glad I made that decision!"[5]

In addition to the opportunities that Charlotte held for the young Gantt family, Odell Associates offered an atmosphere in which Harvey could pursue aspects of architecture that appealed to him. "One of the reasons that I went there, besides the fact they offered me a job, was that it was interesting to see the designs that they were using," he said. "They were doing some very cutting edge kinds of things. The first Coliseum here in Charlotte, wonderful churches and schools. They looked like a lot of the things we were doing in college."[6] For an ambitious young architect settling into the profession, Odell Associates provided an excellent home.

To an outsider like Gantt, Charlotte seemed full of potential and opportunity, but his first experience in the city served as a reminder that the civil rights movement was far from over. When he and Lucinda arrived in Charlotte, they were denied service at multiple hotels despite a city ordinance that guaranteed service to African Americans.[7]

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[4] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[5] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[6] Harvey Gantt interview with NC Modernist Houses, 2013.
[7] Charles Whitaker, "Harvey Gantt," *Ebony*, April, 1986. 92.

Indeed, by 1965, cracks began to appear in the city's peaceful façade as racial tensions reached a boiling point. In the wake of racially charged violence, activists in Charlotte launched assaults against the racial status quo in the city that paved the way for important political success in the following decades. In North Carolina, a generation of activists like Fred Alexander, Kelly Alexander, Julius Chambers, Reginald Hawkins, George Leake, Floyd McKissick and others helped redefine the civil rights movement as it entered a new phase following the legislative victories of the mid-1960s. Unbeknownst to Gantt at the time, the actions of these individuals would pave the way for his political career and reshape the course of his life.

Charlotte, North Carolina, has always been a New South city. While cities like Charleston and Atlanta trace their origins further back, the modern city of Charlotte had very little antebellum history. As a result, the city evolved without the historical background that guided those cities' experiences in the postwar era. Population growth by the end of the nineteenth century, spurred by Charlotte's prime location as a trading post between the Carolinas, led to a city that featured what historian Thomas Hanchett called a "salt-and-pepper" system, with white and black residents often living side by side. Despite those racially moderate origins, however, the Jim Crow South arrived in Charlotte following World War I as the city became increasingly more segregated. As a result of city planning decisions led by Charlotte's white business elite, the unplanned integration of the pre-World War I era evolved into segregated streets, which in turn led to segregated neighborhoods and eventually segregated wards. Charlotte's wards, which are divided by Tryon Street and Trade Street, became increasingly rigid as a result of

redlining after World War II. By the time the Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* on May 17, 1954, the city of Charlotte was strictly segregated.

As Gantt began his freshman year at Burke High School in 1957, dreaming of the day when he and his fellow Charleston classmates could see the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* realized, the city of Charlotte experienced its first moment of desegregated schooling. While most areas of public life in Charlotte remained segregated, the passage of the Pearsall Plan in 1956, which allowed local school boards to make their own decisions about desegregation, served as an attempt to comply with the ruling in *Brown v. Board*. Despite its continued segregation, Charlotte was relatively moderate when compared to other cities in North Carolina, and its school board decided to slowly test desegregated public education in an effort to solve the issue on their own terms. Local civil rights activists were also interested in challenging segregated schooling. Kelly Alexander, chairman of the local chapter of the NAACP, recognized that *Brown v. Board of Education* was not the end of the battle against segregation, but the beginning. He began recruiting potential students for desegregation in 1956. "Today, segregation is legally dead," Alexander said in an address at a statewide NAACP meeting on October 20, 1956, "and we must never relinquish our efforts until we transform the historic U.S. Supreme Court Decision of May 17, 1954, into daily reality."[8]

On September 4, 1957, four black students enrolled at previously all-white schools across the city. One of the students, Dorothy Counts, enrolled at Harry Harding High School and received stiff resistance from segregationists. "White boys hurled an

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[8] Kelly Alexander, President's Address to 13th Annual NAACP Convention, October 20, 1956. P. 4. Kelly Alexander Sr. Papers. University of North Carolina at Charlotte Special Collections. 1.2.

eraser and then a sharp pointed piece of tin at Dorothy's back," wrote one reporter. "One group smashed in the rear window of the Counts family car as Herman Counts [Jr.] waited for his younger sister to come out at lunch time."[9] Counts' parents had been approached months earlier by Kelly Alexander to gauge their interest in helping desegregate Charlotte's schools. Like Christopher Gantt, Dorothy's father Herman encouraged his children to follow their dreams regardless of the opposition that stood in their way. Despite the Counts' hopes for a peaceful desegregation experience, the overwhelming response from segregationists forced Dorothy Counts to change schools again after just four days.[10]

Dorothy Counts' brief stint at Harry Harding High School may not have been considered a civil rights victory were it not for what followed in Charlotte. As with so many activists who came before her and followed in her wake, Counts' efforts did not achieve their intended outcome, but she helped probe public reaction to desegregation. In response to the embarrassing treatment of Counts, white business leaders took it upon themselves to help reshape the city's image.

Like their counterparts in South Carolina who hoped to avoid controversy and unrest with Gantt's admission to Clemson, Charlotte's business and political leaders hoped to stave off civil rights confrontations in the Queen City. Charlotte's white business elite invited African American acquaintances to dine with them in inner-city restaurants in the hopes that their example could help spur peaceful integration and

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[9] "Lone Negro Quits Charlotte School," *New York Times*, September 13, 1957, 13.

[10] Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, NC* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 3-4.

coexistence. As David Goldfield writes, "Lunching rather than lynching characterized Charlotte's approach to race relations."[11]

With the election of Fred Alexander to the city council, Charlotte's African American population achieved its first moment of political representation in 1965. Despite the continued de facto segregation that plagued Charlotte's wards, there were signs of progress in the city by the mid-1960s. However, in the wake of violent attacks from segregationists, that progress proved fragile. While racial progress seemed slow and sporadic, a number of major events across the late 1950s and early 1960s offered hope that substantive change could soon come to Charlotte.

On January 25, 1965, when Harvey Gantt was in his final semester at Clemson University, Charlotte-based attorney Julius L. Chambers gave a speech to civil rights activists at Oscar's Mortuary in New Bern, North Carolina. A promising young attorney, Chambers was a major figure in the civil rights movement in the Carolinas and served as legal counsel for the NAACP. During the course of the evening, as Chambers and others discussed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, three white men hurled sticks of dynamite at the back of the building; Chambers' car was destroyed in the explosion. The FBI apprehended the three individuals, each a member of the Ku Klux Klan from the nearby town of Vanceboro, after witnesses at the scene of the blast jotted down their license plate numbers. Aside from the damage to the building and automobiles in the parking lot, there were fortunately no major injuries.[12]

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[11] David Goldfield, "A Place To Come To" in *Charlotte, NC: the Global Evolution of a New South City* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 15.

[12] "Negro Mortuary Rocked By Dynamite In Carolina," *New York Times*, January 25, 1965, p. 19. "F.B.I. Seizes 3 Carolina Whites In Bombings Near Negro Rally," *New York Times*, January 30, 1965. P. 10.

Ten months after Julius Chambers' car was bombed, another attack, this time in Charlotte, sent shockwaves throughout the community. In the early morning hours of November 23, 1965, between 2:15 and 2:30 a.m., a coordinated attack from unidentified individuals damaged the homes of Fred Alexander, Kelly M. Alexander, Julius Chambers, and Dr. Reginald Hawkins. Earlier in the year, Fred Alexander was elected as the first African American member of Charlotte's City Council. Kelly Alexander, his brother, served as the state president of the NAACP. Chambers was a legal force and major figure in the local civil rights movement. Hawkins was a respected dentist and civil rights activist in Charlotte. Each of the men stood as pillars of the local African American community.[13]

The bombings captured the attention of national media and served as another embarrassing moment for the city. At the time, the state of North Carolina had a reputation as a relatively moderate southern state.[14] Certainly no one expected the type of violence that plagued Alabama and Mississippi to assert itself in the Piedmont. "It's a discouraging thing," said Kelly Alexander. "We thought we were making better progress than that. We thought Charlotte was an oasis."[15] Alexander noted that the attacks were not a warning sign or an act of intimidation. "This wasn't done to frighten us," Kelly Alexander said. "It was done to kill us."[16] Despite the ever-present danger, Kelly Alexander was determined to continue fighting for racial equality. As he told a state

[13] Reginald Hawkins interview, June 11, 2001, UNC-Charlotte Special Collections.
[14] William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*.
[15] Roy Reed, "4 Negro Homes Hit By Bombs In South," *New York Times*, November 22, 1965. 30.
[16] Roy Reed, "4 Negro Homes Hit By Bombs In South," *New York Times*, November 22, 1965. 30.

meeting of the NAACP following the bombings, "There is a great price a soldier in the field of battle for equality and justice must pay to be free."[17]

Gantt, who had only recently moved to Charlotte, was appalled by the attacks on Charlotte's civil rights leaders. "We were all shocked and surprised, but blessed that no one got hurt," Gantt recalled.[18] While Gantt was a known figure in the civil rights movement in South Carolina, he did not immediately jump into local political affairs when he arrived in Charlotte. As a member of the NAACP, Gantt knew Kelly Alexander, but he was not closely involved in local civil rights activism at that time. "I always call those my years of running under the radar," Gantt said. "I'd had so much attention the last two years in South Carolina."[19]

At a rally at the city auditorium on November 25, 1965, white and black leaders of Charlotte condemned the violent attacks that occurred two days earlier. "Charlotte should be commended for her reaction thus far, the instantaneous demonstration of outrage," said Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP. "Being an optimist, I believe this meeting is a testimony to the sincere concern of whites and Negroes."[20] Mayor Stan Brookshire took great efforts to make the event a public display of solidarity. "The bombings were a rude awakening to the potential danger that hangs over all cities and towns, but this is no consolation or excuse," he said.[21] The Charlotte Builders Association voted to provide the services of bricklayers and carpenters, without cost, to

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[17] Kelly Alexander Sr, North Carolina State Confederence address. Kelly Alexander Papers. University of North Carolina at Charlotte Special Collections. 1.2.
[18] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/
[19] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/
[20] "Whites and Negroes Condemn Bombings At a Charlotte Rally," *New York Times*, November 29, 1965. 29.
[21] "Whites and Negroes Condemn Bombings At a Charlotte Rally," *New York Times*, November 29, 1965. 29.

rebuild the four homes damaged in the assault.[22] City leaders did everything in their power to remedy the situation. However, no one was ever charged in the police investigation into the incident.

The attacks served as a stark reminder that racial attitudes in Charlotte had not evolved as far as city leaders hoped. Like nearby Atlanta, Charlotte was the site of a number of civil rights advancements directly linked to the pursuit of uninterrupted economic growth. In the years before the bombings, Mayor Stan Brookshire enlisted the help of business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce in desegregating Charlotte on peaceful terms following Dorothy Counts' experience at Harry Harding High School. This was a difficult task given Charlotte's then-recent history. Decades of hardening racial attitudes and city-backed segregation following the end of the First World War resulted in a city with entrenched spatial segregation, a far cry from the salt-and-pepper city it had once been.

When the Gantts arrived in 1965 they were unwittingly thrown into the midst of a city struggling with its past and its future. Gantt was not yet familiar with the city's history and its present racial struggles, but he recalled being impressed by Mayor Brookshire's response to the bombings at the homes of the Charlotte civil rights leaders. "This mayor and others in the community appeared to be very committed to making sure that the wrong message wasn't sent out to the rabble-rousers, that they would not tolerate it," Gantt said. "That stood out as impressive."[23] Like many citizens of Charlotte, Gantt was troubled by the attacks, but hopeful in the abilities of city leadership and neighborhood groups to establish a spirit of harmony.

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[22] "Workmen Rebuilding Homes of 4 Negroes in Charlotte," *New York Times*, November 24, 1965. 54.
[23] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, A22.

While he kept an eye on the efforts of local civil rights activists, Gantt quickly found himself enamored with his new job and his new city. "I immediately got to work on some big-scale design and planning projects," Gantt said. "I was working in a large architectural firm, working on a plan for the central business district that talked about housing… and a real urbane center city." Through his work, Gantt was exposed to issues of city planning and management and developed an affinity for the city of Charlotte. "It seemed moderate enough, genteel enough, hospitable enough, big enough to provide a certain degree of anonymity," he recalled.[24]

Although he did not directly enter the political arena in his first years in Charlotte, Gantt became involved in the African American community. As word travelled that there was a young, promising architect in town, Gantt's services were requested by black citizens looking to build their own homes. "To supplement my income, on my kitchen table, people would come to me, African American professionals in the community, that probably couldn't go to some of the subdivisions that they wanted to, so they often bought lots in fledgling suburban areas that weren't fully developed," Gantt said. "And they needed someone to design a house that they wanted to do, and they heard that this young architect was in town, so they hired me to do their blueprints."[25] In addition to aiding the community, his projects for African American citizens allowed him to further expand on his ideas regarding architecture and design outside of a work setting. Gantt helped a number of African American citizens in Charlotte realize their dreams, and as a

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[24] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, A22.
[25] Harvey Gantt interview with NC Modernist Houses - 2013

result he began to develop a reputation in Charlotte as someone who served the larger community.[26]

As Gantt kept a relatively low profile in an effort to avoid the spotlight that followed him at Clemson, local African American leaders within Charlotte launched institutional challenges aimed at expanding opportunities in the late 1960s. One of the issues that complicated their efforts was the recent success of the civil rights movement itself. In the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, activists were forced to navigate a rapidly changing political climate. The substantial civil rights legislation of the 1960s represented a victorious moment, but it brought into question the necessity for further activism. The "classical" era of the movement, from the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, represented a continued assault on the de jure segregation of the Jim Crow South. With that particular battle seemingly over, activists disagreed over how to proceed.

In 1965, Julius Chambers filed suit on behalf of ten families of African American students in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. When Charlotte's schools desegregated, the citizens were left to contend with the reality of the heavily segregated wards. The de jure segregation of the state was deemed unlawful, but that did little to address the de facto segregation within the city. When a busing plan was developed to transport children to new schools to help integrate the school system, the Second Ward, home to Charlotte's wealthiest citizens, was largely unburdened. The bombing of Chamber's home on November 23, 1965, was a result of backlash to his legal

[26] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

activism. The first ruling in 1965 found in favor of CMS, but Chambers refiled the case, determined to see the promise of *Brown v Board of Education* realized in Charlotte. In 1969, Federal Judge James B. McMillan ruled that the Charlotte busing plan did indeed undercut efforts to desegregate the public school system. Moreover, Judge McMillan stated that the CMS had a duty to satisfy the desegregation intentions of the *Brown* decision.[27]

While Chambers continued the fight for educational opportunities for young black children, others sought political office in the hopes of achieving institutional change from within. In 1968, Reginald Hawkins, another victim of the November 1965 bombings, launched a campaign for Governor of North Carolina.[28] He was the first African American to run for Governor in the state's history. In the Democratic Primary, Hawkins faced off against Lieutenant Governor Robert W. Scott and J. Melville Broughton, both of whom were sons of former Governors. What he lacked in political experience and name recognition, Hawkins made up for with an energetic campaign that sought to bring white and black voters together. "These are the people they said I would never get through to," Hawkins said at the time. "But I have found out there is a common tie between the poorer whites and Negroes in this state."[29] With his focus on raising a biracial coalition, few gave Hawkins a chance to make much of a dent in the Democratic Primary. But for Hawkins and his campaign staff, it was enough to prove that the black vote was a force to reckon with in North Carolina politics going forward. In the May 4,

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[27] Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 74-76.

[28] For more on Hawins' 1968 gubernatorial campaign, see: T. Evan Faulkenbury, "'Telenegro': Reginald Hawkins, Black Power, and the 1968 North Carolina Gubernatorial Race," MA Thesis, University of North Carolina – Charlotte.

[29] Walter Rugaber, "A Carolina Negro Seeks White Vote," *New York Times*, April 30, 1968. 28.

1968, Democratic Primary, Hawkins received 17% of the vote with a huge showing in the state's predominantly black districts.[30] Later that month, Hawkins was arrested on charges that he violated state election laws by illegally registering four black men to vote. He was quickly released due to lack of evidence.

Hawkins did not back down following his defeat in the primary. In August 1968, he openly challenged the national Democratic Party and suggested party leaders were out of touch with new concerns of black voters. "They've been caught unaware of the attitudes of the newly franchised voters in the South," he said. "Negroes have ceased to be concerned about eating in a drugstore. They want to be part of the decision-making process."[31] Hawkins fought for equitable representation for African Americans in North Carolina's delegates at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago, arguing that the black vote would be crucial to keeping the state under Democratic control.[32]

As Fred Alexander continued to serve as the lone African American voice on Charlotte's City Council and Reginald Hawkins sought statewide office, Gantt focused on his career. At Odell Associates, Gantt was once again in uncharted waters; when he arrived in 1965, he was the only black architect at the firm. Although some members of Odell Associates kept Gantt at arm's length, the majority of his co-workers accepted him without condition. One co-worker in particular, Jeffrey Huberman, became a trusted friend. "We used to go to lunch every day, and we were probably a curiosity in

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[30] "Carolina Runoff Likely." *New York Times*, May 6, 1968. 33.
[31] Walter Rugaber, "Negro in South Chides Democrats as Undiscerning," *New York Times*, August 19, 1968. 31.
[32] Interview with Dr. Reginald Hawkins. June 11, 2001. Oral History Collection. University of North Carolina at Charlotte Special Collections. OH-HA0077

downtown Charlotte," Gantt recalled. "You still didn't see a lot of integration in restaurants and places like that, but we went anyway."[33]

On April 4, 1968, Gantt traveled to Columbia, South Carolina, to take his licensing exams to become an architect. After completing the first day of exams, Gantt was stunned when he heard the news: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated in Memphis.[34] "I remember that evening coming in and going to my hotel room, warn down from a day of taking exams, and it really messed me up for the next day," Gantt said. "I just couldn't believe they'd shot and killed Dr. King." Like many, Gantt was heartbroken by King's death, but the anger that erupted in American cities in the wake of the assassination had a major impact on him. The recent wave of civil rights success, from Gantt's own desegregation of Clemson to federal legislation recognizing African American rights, seemed imperiled by King's death. "It was like, boy we were making steps forward," Gantt recalled. "I really just kept feeling that people like King and others were substantially changing minds and hearts of Americans all over."[35] With a less defined focus in the years immediately following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, civil rights activists debated how and why the movement should continue. Following the death of Martin Luther King, the most well-known and influential civil rights leader in American history, the movement appeared to be on even more precarious ground.

Of course, King's death was not the first sign of trouble in the years after 1965. Less than a week after Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965,

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[33] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

[34] King was in Memphis in support of a sanitation worker's strike; before the strike, he was scheduled to speak at an event in North Carolina in support of Reginald Hawkins' gubernatorial campaign.

[35] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

riots erupted in Watts. With rising unrest and inequality, other American cities soon followed. On February 4, 1968, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, a confrontation between South Carolina Highway Patrolmen and students at South Carolina State University left three African American teens dead, an event now remembered as the Orangeburg Massacre. Mayor Stan Brookshire instituted a curfew in Charlotte in an effort to prevent violence from erupting there, but city leaders harbored real fears about unrest in the city.

In the wake of urban violence in America, Gantt became increasingly interested in issues affecting inner-city communities. After passing his examinations and becoming a licensed architect, Gantt decided to pursue a graduate degree in city planning. In 1968, Gantt left his job at Odell Associates and pursued a Master's Degree in City Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Gantt's decision reflected his desire to engage with larger issues affecting cities and communities. "I watched politics occur but really took no interest in it until I went away to graduate school," Gantt said. "I was interested in what made cities go together. I figured that with a background in architecture it made sense to discuss the forces that act upon a city – transportation system, socioeconomic policy, political policy – and how all that affected the shape of a city."[36] As an architect, Gantt was never concerned with projects in isolation. Each building, school, or park was designed with the needs of the client, the neighborhood, and the larger community in mind. In Boston, Gantt had his first opportunity to study city planning and development in local communities outside the city limits.

While Gantt's time at MIT was not his first experience living outside of the South, Boston offered him another perspective on national race relations. "We saw

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[36] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

people eating at restaurants and doing all the other normal things and not being discriminated against by law," Gantt said. "But on the other hand, people lived in separate communities."[37] For Gantt, life in Massachusetts served as a reminder that racism was not just a southern problem, and there remained a great deal of work to be done even after the civil rights victories of the mid-1960s.

While Gantt immersed himself in academic issues of city planning and organizing in Boston, African American civil rights activists began the process of dismantling the racial status quo in Charlotte's politics. By the time Gantt and his family returned to North Carolina, the wheels were in motion for significant African American political victories in the new decade.

As Hawkins battled for greater representation at the state and national levels, a local activist in Charlotte challenged the city's status quo. In 1969, George J. Leake, a bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, entered the Democratic primary for mayor of Charlotte. He lost in the primary to John M. Belk, but received 45% of the vote, a larger share than political observers expected.[38] Despite his defeat, Leake's campaign was the first by an African American candidate for mayor in Charlotte. The lasting impact of his campaign survived his defeat in the primary. "Despite being poorly organized and underfinanced," wrote one political scientist, "Leake's campaign made tangible the idea that an African American could pursue the city's mayorship."[39]

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[37] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

[38] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. p. 226

[39] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. p. 226

Following his graduation from MIT in 1970, the Gantt family returned to North Carolina and Harvey accepted a position as a visiting lecturer at the University of North Carolina. In 1970, the Gantts had their second daughter, Erica. Erica's birth was a bittersweet moment for the Gantts; during their stay in Boston, the couple experienced a personal tragedy when their second child, a son named Harvey Gantt, Jr., was born with brain damage. He lived just 18 months. Harvey recalled how people responded to the couple's decision to have another child. "I recall people saying to me, 'you guys are really courageous,'" Gantt said. "But we just had faith and were not going to be intimidated by the unfortunate circumstances of Harvey's birth and the trauma we went through of watching him struggle before passing."[40] Indeed, the Gantts were not intimidated: they welcomed a third daughter, Angela, in 1971.

While Gantt was focused on architecture and his growing family, he discovered new avenues through which he could engage the citizens of Charlotte and the greater North Carolina area. As a visiting lecturer at the University of North Carolina, Gantt kept one foot in the academic side of architecture while he worked on projects that gave him practical experience on a daily basis. Despite the many programs with which to occupy his time, another new venture, rooted in Gantt's new focus on city planning, helped propel Gantt into the world of politics.

When Gantt enrolled at Clemson on January 28, 1963, it established his place in an exclusive club. Civil rights activists across the country engaged in a variety of tactics

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[40] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

in the battle for equality, but only a select few were trailblazers in school desegregation. In 1951, when Gantt was just eight years old, Floyd McKissick broke racial barriers when he entered the law school at the University of North Carolina. An established civil rights activist before his desegregation of UNC's Law School, McKissick became a national civil rights figure in the 1960s. In 1966, McKissick became the director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), leading that organization towards more militant black activism.

By the time that their paths crossed in 1970, Floyd McKissick was hard at work on a project that appealed to Gantt's desire to affect serious and lasting change on a community-wide level. After leaving CORE in 1968, McKissick began work on a unique, forward-thinking city in rural North Carolina. McKissick envisioned a city that could provide economic opportunities to underprivileged citizens and attract native North Carolinians who had migrated to northern cities to return home. Above all, McKissick hoped to establish a community in which black citizens could live with respect. Christened "Soul City," McKissick's idealized community provided opportunities for rural citizens of North Carolina. While McKissick remained adamant throughout that the development would be integrated, the majority of the first citizens that signed up were African American.

McKissick offered Gantt an opportunity to put his newly cemented skills in city planning to work. While at Soul City, Gantt helped secure federal contracts to provide funding for the new community. In addition to the opportunity to work with McKissick, Soul City offered Gantt a chance to put his newfound skills as a planner to use. "It was very exciting to work on this idea of a new town being grown literally out of the tobacco

fields of North Carolina's eastern corridor where there was a great deal of poverty," Gantt said. The Soul City project also represented new avenues for civil rights activism and political representation in the new decade. "Floyd's idea of a new town where you built an economic base as an alternative to the welfare state, appealed to me," Gantt said. "It was a very Republican idea but it was a very appealing one to a fledgling planner who was looking for experimentation in an area that architects and planners could find fascinating."[41]

Soul City was one of thirteen communities approved with funding from the federal government, but it was wholly unique. Besides the fact that it was the only project led by an African American with a goal of creating a community based on racial equality, it was the only planned city that was designed to stand on its own. "Soul City was built about fifty miles from any large town, and it was the only new town that was going to be holding on," Gantt said. "The others were parasites to larger metropolitan areas and were just better planned housing communities."[42] In rural Warren County, Soul City was built from the ground up. It was up to Gantt and the other planners to figure out how best to use the allocated land and attract business to the area.

From the outset, McKissick hoped Soul City could attract both black and white citizens to the community. In a number of interviews with local and national press, McKissick noted biracial cooperation as the ultimate goal. However, McKissick complicated the issue with statements that framed Soul City as a black enterprise. "I can just see 'ole massa' now," McKissick told the *New York Times*. "Up there on the

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[41] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[42] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

veranda, fanning himself and watching us black folks slaving in the field – and I can't help but wonder what he might say now."[43] The land used for Soul City housed a former plantation, a fact that delighted McKissick. "I have wanted this land for a long time," he said. "It belonged to the family of a state legislator who fought integration like a tiger. This was the only place I ever wanted to build Soul City."[44]

While he believed in McKissick's project, Gantt and McKissick disagreed over how to proceed with Soul City. Gantt felt that the community needed to provide a job market for potential residents, while McKissick pushed for early housing projects. The name of the project itself – 'Soul City' – suggested racial overtones, an issue that Gantt, McKissick, and others who worked on the project argued over for years. From the outset, the name proved problematic for federal officials affiliated with the project. "Many Nixon officials balked at the name 'Soul City,'" wrote one historian, "which they feared would resurrect images of black militancy from earlier in the decade."[45] When confronted with the possibility of a name change, Gantt suggested that McKissick hold firm. McKissick agreed, arguing that to relent would amount to "surrender to white racism."[46]

Ultimately, the project fizzled in the late 1970s. "The town failed because they couldn't sell the land, they couldn't make that concept go," Gantt said. "And when they couldn't sell, it didn't take long for political enemies to think that Floyd had just wasted

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[43] James Wooten, "Integrated City Rising on an Old Plantation," *New York Times*, July 25, 1972. 21.
[44] James Wooten, "Integrated City Rising on an Old Plantation," *New York Times*, July 25, 1972. 21.
[45] Roger Biles, "The Rise and Fall of Soul City: Planning, Politics, and Race in Recent America," *Journal of Planning History*, February 2005, vol 4, no 1, 60.
[46] Timothy J. Minchin, "'A Brand New Shining City': Floyd B. McKissick Sr., and the Struggle to Build Soul City, North Carolina," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. LXXXII No. 2, April 2005. 144.

federal dollars."[47] However, Gantt believed in the project and defended Soul City long after the project was finished. "The good that it did do," he said, "was that it provided Henderson and Oxford with a water source."[48] The town failed to attract ample residents or business interests, but it provided improvements to Warren County that would not have been realized without the work of McKissick and Gantt.

Despite his lofty and noble goals, McKissick never achieved the success he sought with Soul City. However, Gantt regarded the project as a personal success. "Just knowing Floyd McKissick, one of the civil rights lions of the '60s, was very rich," Gantt recalled. "He dreamed these utopian, idealistic dreams. It taught me what would work in cities and what wouldn't."[49]

Indeed, Gantt's experience with the Soul City project offered him an early glimpse into the political realities of North Carolina in the 1970s. Gantt was primarily focused on the project as an architect and city planner, but Soul City served as a political lightning rod from the outset, attracting animosity from North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms. Furthermore, the project served as an alternative to the civil rights philosophy which Gantt had followed since his childhood. From his sit-in at the S.H. Kress with other Burke High School students to his desegregation of Clemson, Gantt embraced a civil rights philosophy that championed integration and direct involvement with an existing political structure. McKissick's Soul City project represented a different vision for the future.

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[47] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[48] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[49] Ken Eudy, "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Control Started Young," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983, 14A.

While Floyd McKissick often denied that the name Soul City had a racial meaning, he acknowledged that he felt the project was indeed a method of civil rights activism, one which he felt was certainly not new. "The whole struggle is for the black man to become equal to the other man," he said, "and each organizational movement might have used a different name." He continued,

> Some said "Equality," some said "Liberation," some said "Freedom." But hell, a man is just like any other man and he's expressing the same sort of mission that Voltaire, Rousseau, and anybody else ever expressed. In other words: get your foot off my back. Period. And if by the time you push it in one direction and the foot is still on there and you get two inches above you, you still can't stand up. So, you push it a little more and if you don't push to the left, you push to the right. It hasn't changed. You push until you get it off you. And you use the strategies that are available to do it.[50]

Like Julius Chambers, Fred Alexander, Reginald Hawkins, and others across the state of North Carolina, McKissick was helping define what the civil rights movement would mean in the era after the Voting Rights Act and King's assassination. While the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the legal protections of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act brought an end to de jure segregation, the movement evolved towards confronting issues which created de facto segregation. Indeed, issues of economic equality and city planning which were addressed by McKissick and Soul City would help shape Gantt's politics for years to come. Perhaps more importantly, Gantt witnessed the limitations of racially charged politics. Although the project was ultimately unsuccessful, the lessons that Gantt learned through his time working on Soul City stayed with him in the years that followed.

[50] Interview with Floyd B. McKissick, Sr. December 6, 1973. Interview A-0134. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007)

While Gantt was teaching at UNC and working with McKissick at Soul City, he remained in contact with his former co-worker Jeffrey Huberman. When Gantt returned to the city, he and Huberman decided to go into business together, co-founding Gantt Huberman Architects in 1971. The firm was committed to projects that served the city of Charlotte and its people. Indeed, as their firm grew, much of their business was the result of contracts with the city designing projects such as schools and parks. Through his work with the new business, Gantt was able to expand his contacts beyond the world of architecture and began to develop a name for himself in the city of Charlotte. With his experience desegregating Clemson, his master's degree in city planning, his experience working on Soul City, and his work for the city of Charlotte, Gantt's ambitions led him to consider more direct ways in which he could serve the city.

The Charlotte to which Gantt returned had changed since he left in 1968. Despite his loss in the Democratic Party Primary, George Leake's campaign for mayor in 1969 helped normalize African American political participation in the city. Kelly Alexander was appointed to the Housing and Physical Planning Task Force of the Model Cities Program by Mayor John Belk in 1970.[51] The following year, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, offering hope for further integration of schools. And Fred Alexander, the city's lone African American City Councilmember, continued to cement his place as a formidable political force in Charlotte. While Gantt was attending MIT, Fred Alexander led an effort to remove the fence separating Elmwood and Pinewood cemeteries. The two historic cemeteries were segregated by race; Elmwood was all-white, Pinewood was all-black. The fence that divided them served as a reminder of Charlotte's segregated past; even in

[51] Letter from John Belk to Kelly Alexander, March 16, 1970. Kelly Alexander Papers. 10.22.

death, there was no escape from the racial order. With the removal of the fence in 1969, the city seemed to be making progress in the march towards equality.[52]

Gantt maintained that he never harbored political ambitions before he arrived in North Carolina. However, Gantt's interest in city planning and his work with Gantt-Huberman led to his involvement in city projects that stoked the flames of his interest in politics. It also helped raise Gantt's profile among Charlotte's political leaders. "I got involved in an [American Institute of Architects (AIA)] task force study of the planning and development going on here in Charlotte that got a lot of attention in '74," Gantt said. "I think that ultimately gave me the visibility."[53] As part of the task force, Gantt made pointed suggestions for what he felt were vital actions that the city council should take. "I made some very strong suggestions that the public posture was reactive, not proactive, in terms of shaping development," Gantt said. He also suggested that private developers in Charlotte were more powerful than the city's planners, a situation he strongly discouraged.[54]

The AIA study certainly aided Gantt's visibility, but it was not the beginning of his rise in Charlotte politics. Gantt's return to Charlotte was partially the result of Julius Chambers' effort to recruit Gantt back to the area.[55] And Chambers was not the only African American leader in Charlotte with an eye on Gantt's work. Gantt and Fred Alexander developed a close friendship, with Alexander harboring similar attitudes as Gantt regarding the future of civil rights activism. "We used to have fireside chats in the

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[52] Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 252.
[53] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .
[54] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.
[55] Reginald Hawkins interview, Southern Oral History Program.

evening and talk about Charlotte and its growth and its development," Gantt said.[56] Alexander's plans for Charlotte politics included Gantt. A June 8, 1973, memo to members of the city council proposed a list of approved architects and engineers for city contracts. At Alexander's request, David Burkhalter, the City Manager, added Gantt-Huberman to the approved list.[57]

In 1974, Fred Alexander won a seat on the North Carolina General Assembly, a move which opened a position on the seven-member Charlotte City Council. A number of qualified African American candidates were considered for the post, including Harvey Gantt. A political neophyte, Gantt's stock rose in Charlotte politics through his work at Gantt-Huberman and his role in the AIA study conducted for the city. Still, his selection as a candidate surprised many onlookers, as Gantt was seen as something of an unknown figure in Charlotte. Despite his work within the African American community, Gantt was not a native of Charlotte and had not been groomed for the position. However, Gantt's 'outsider' status worked in both directions: his name drew no serious opposition from Charlotte's business community. "The white community was looking for somebody who was kind of unknown," said Mel Watt, who was a local Charlotte attorney at the time. "Little did they know what kind of political career they were starting."[58] When the City Council voted for Alexander's replacement, Gantt tied with Jim Polk, a local African

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[56] *Tell Me More* (NPR). 08/27/2008.

[57] Memo from L.P. Bobo, Assistant City Manager, to David A. Burkhalter, City Manager. June 8, 1973. Fred Alexander Papers, UNC-Charlotte Special Collections. Addendum to the Memo, June 18, 1973. 1.10 – Architects.

[58] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

American businessman. With the tie-breaking vote, Mayor John Belk selected Gantt as Charlotte's newest Councilmember.[59]

Gantt's appointment to fill Fred Alexander's seat made him just the second African American to serve on the Charlotte City Council. And following Alexander's election to the North Carolina General Assembly, Gantt was left the only African American councilmember. Relatively inexperienced before he was tapped to replace Alexander, Gantt quickly discovered that he enjoyed his service as a councilman. "It was probably my way of contributing back to the community," Gantt said. "You know, it always feels as if when you live in a place, you ought to be involved with what's happening around you."[60] Despite his expectations that he would finish Alexander's term and allow a more experienced candidate to run in the next election, Gantt found himself contemplating a serious political future in Charlotte. "Politics, it immediately became clear to me, was one way to do things easier," he said, "to be at the table, to stir the soup a little bit yourself."[61]

Gantt was well-suited for his position on the city council. Nominated as a neutral candidate that would appease disparate interest groups, Gantt displayed an ability to work well with others despite differing political opinions. "Many of us came from those middle-class type environments that said, you know, the way to do things is not to destroy them but to try to negotiate power," Gantt recalled.[62] For Gantt, efforts like Soul City were important, but separatism had its limitations. From the earliest political lessons

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[59] Ken Eudy, "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Control Started Young," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983, 14A.

[60] "Former Charlotte Mayor On Making History, American Politics," *Tell Me More* (NPR). August 27, 2008.

[61] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

[62] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986 .

from his father Christopher to his successful desegregation of Clemson, Gantt learned to confront directly issues of inequality. As Charlotte's only African American City Councilmember, Gantt committed himself to serving as a voice for those who had for far too long been unrepresented in city government.

In 1975, just a year after his appointment to the City Council, Gantt launched a campaign for his own term on the council. There was just one problem: Gantt had no experience with political campaigning. He reached out to his friend Mel Watt in hopes that Watt could help run the campaign. Watt recalled that he told Gantt, "I don't know anything about managing a campaign." Gantt responded, "Well, I don't know anything about being a candidate, but this needs to be done."[63] Watt, encouraged by Gantt's optimism and convictions, agreed to the job. With the slogan "Harvey Gantt: For the City," both Gantt and Watt entered the unknown territory of political campaigning.[64]

While Gantt lacked close ties to the community, he was well aware of the issues that faced the citizens of Charlotte. In his work with Gantt Huberman and as a member of the City Council, Gantt saw the ongoing struggle between historic neighborhoods and economic growth in the city. Despite progress in the civil rights movement and the desegregation of Charlotte schools, businessmen continued to dominate Charlotte's politics. With most of the power in the city still situated in the Second Ward, Gantt represented a voice for the African American citizens of Charlotte. However, his support in the Fourth Ward did not come at the expense of his working relationship with Charlotte's business leaders. Like Alexander, Gantt's success depended on establishing

[63] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
[64] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Fred Alexander, September 23, 1975. Fred Alexander Papers. Folder 52.21

support across all of Charlotte's neighborhoods, a necessary condition of electoral success given Charlotte's continued employment of an at-large electoral system. With just one year's service on the council, Gantt's experience as an architect and city planner helped solidify his resume. Gantt established that he was well-qualified to continue serving on the council.

In addition to his knowledge of the issues, Gantt was aided in his efforts by Fred Alexander, the Democratic Party apparatus, and the Black Political Caucus of Mecklenburg County. In mailers sent out across Charlotte, the Black Political Caucus urged citizens to elect John Belk for Mayor and Harvey Gantt and Robert Walton for City Council.[65] Although he was no longer serving in local office, Fred Alexander lent his support to their campaigns. "We need to keep Black representation in government. Harvey Gantt and Robert Walton need our vote – HEAVY!," Alexander wrote in a letter to Charlotte Democrats. "I ask that you join me and progressive minded citizens of Charlotte in support of John Belk and the Black candidates."[66] Gantt shied away from describing himself as the "black candidate," but Alexander's support on that issue carried a great deal of weight in the community and helped Gantt in neighborhoods that were vital to his electoral fortunes.

With strong support from Charlotte's African American neighborhoods, Gantt was elected to serve his first official term on the City Council on November 4th, 1975. Mel Watt's campaign strategies proved effective. As with his initial appointment to the council, Gantt was seen as something of a compromise between Charlotte's disparate communities, someone who could speak to both uptown businessmen and working class

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[65] Black Political Caucus of Mecklenburg County, Fred Alexander Papers. Folder 52.21
[66] Letter from Fred D. Alexander to members of the Democratic Party, Fred Alexander Papers. Folder 52.21

voters across the wards. However, in a city whose local government had for so long served the interests of businessmen in the southeastern areas of the city, a consensus candidate was effectively a neighborhoods candidate. Indeed, Gantt's ability to work across the aisle did not necessarily equate to a moderate stance on policy. Gantt saw his role on the City Council as an opportunity to continue the fight for equality. "This was another way to bring about real change in the community, maybe not even much different than when we sat down at a lunch counter to eat a hot dog or drink a bottle of Coke," Gantt said. "Now we had an opportunity to bring change and not go through demonstrations, but to serve in elected office." [67]

Years after the Supreme Court ruled against the CMS on April 20, 1971, the city of Charlotte finally enforced a new busing plan in 1975. The delay was a result of local politics, but it was perhaps unsurprising given the 1971 decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. "We are concerned in these cases with the elimination of the discrimination inherent in the dual school systems, not with the myriad factors of human existence which can cause discrimination in a multitude of ways on racial, religious, or ethnic grounds," Chief Justice Warren Burger wrote. "One vehicle can carry only a limited amount of baggage."[68] The decision revealed the difficulties that awaited civil rights activists as well as political leaders in the years ahead. If the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was the beginning of a battle rather than the end, so too was the decision in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* the beginning of a new phase in the battle for equality. The Supreme Court affirmed that the intent of

[67] "Biographical Conversation with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016.
[68] *Swann et al. v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education et al*, 402 U.S. 1 (1971).

Brown was to desegregate public education in the United States. However, Chief Justice Burger also made it abundantly clear that the battle for social acceptance of integrated schooling was beyond the power of the courts.

Despite the challenging desegregation experience in Charlotte, local residents ultimately accepted the busing plan in 1975. Although the earliest years of desegregated schooling in Charlotte were not without moments of violence, including a series of bomb threats in 1970, the city largely avoided the chaos that resulted from busing decisions in cities like Boston.[69] Local citizens took pride in the city's relatively peaceful integration of its public schools, especially in light of the treatment shown to Dorothy Counts years earlier. Likewise, business leaders delighted in the preservation of the city's image as a progressive New South city. The relatively measured response to the enforcement of the school busing plan in 1975 helped reshape Charlotte citizens' attitudes toward the busing issue, as integrated public education eventually became a source of community pride.[70]

On April 19, 1977, the city of Charlotte took an important step towards expanding representation within local government. Beginning in the early 1970s, neighborhood organizations arose throughout Charlotte as local citizens sought means of protecting their neighborhood from overdevelopment. As a response to frequent challenges wrought by growth and development, these neighborhood organizations began to raise questions about the very nature of the at-large City Council.[71] In the spring of 1977, a bipartisan, biracial coalition of neighborhood groups who felt underrepresented in city government passed a referendum on district representation in city council elections. The final tally

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[69] Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 64.
[70] Davidson M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 4-5.
[71] Hanchett, 254-5.

resulted in an eighty vote victory for a revamped City Council. The previous system of seven at-large seats was replaced by a format of seven district appointed seats and four at-large seats, increasing the City Council to eleven members. Sam Smith, one of the local politicians who helped raise the issue of district representation, felt that the successful implementation of busing helped foster a community spirit that made the referendum possible. "By the time we were working on districts, busing had come to be accepted as successful," Smith said. "I felt people were starting to take pride in that we had successfully worked through that problem and a harmonious relationship was developing."[72]

Initially, Gantt was one of only two City Council members who supported district representation.[73] While he and his predecessor Fred Alexander were elected under the at-large system, it was undeniable that the African American community within Charlotte was underrepresented in local government. Furthermore, the push for district representation offered a model for a multiracial, bipartisan coalition of voters united by a common cause. Through his work in galvanizing support for these issues, Gantt established himself as a neighborhood-oriented politician.[74]

Gantt proved adept at politics and a quick-learner on the city council. Carrying on Fred Alexander's legacy, Gantt became a vocal supporter of Charlotte's neighborhoods, often underrepresented in local politics. Gantt's arrival in local politics occurred just as Charlotte was realizing its potential with integrated schooling, the result

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[72] Jim Morrill, "After Decade of Districts, City Council More Open," *Charlotte Observer*, September 20, 1987. P. 1A.
[73] The other supporter was Betty Chafin, another neighborhood advocate on the City Council. Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred*, 126.
[74] Ken Eudy, "Decades of Change Primed Charlotte For Gantt," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1983. 10A.

of Julius Chambers' legal activism in pursuing *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*. Issues such as expansion of city council representation and balanced growth became increasingly important in the late 1970s, and Gantt built his political reputation on them. After Gantt easily won reelection in 1977, some in Charlotte considered him a likely candidate for higher office at a later date. In a move that surprised many in Charlotte, Gantt entered the Democratic Party Primary for Mayor in 1979.

Again, Gantt sought out the help of his friend Mel Watt. With Watt's help, Gantt won elections in 1975 and 1977 with strong organization and effective messaging. Watt was not optimistic about Gantt's chances; when asked to run Gantt's campaign, he responded, "Harvey, there's no way in hell you're going to win the mayor's race in this city. Look at the demographics." Gantt argued that he was the most qualified candidate for mayor and that a winning coalition of voters was attainable. He convinced Watt to join him. "So we set out on a race that nobody other than me and Harvey thought there was a chance of winning," Watt said, "and I'm not even sure that I ever thought there was a chance of winning."[75]

Mel Watt's honesty about Gantt's chances was not simple pessimism: Gantt faced serious hurdles in his quest for the mayor's office. Across the South in the 1970s, African American politicians achieved success in mayoral races in areas with large or majority black populations. In Charlotte's idealized rival city, Atlanta, Maynard Jackson won his election for mayor in 1973. That same year, Tom Bradley was elected mayor of Los Angeles. In North Carolina, Clarence Lightner was elected mayor of Raleigh. Precedent for African American success in mayoral elections was set, but Charlotte

[75] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

represented its own unique challenge. If Gantt were to succeed in the Democratic Primary, and go on to win in the 1979 general election, he would become the first African American candidate for mayor to win in a southern city that lacked a large black population. Gantt faced a formidable task.

Gantt's opponent in the 1979 Democratic Party Primary was Eddie Knox. Knox was a well-liked, relatively conservative Democrat with strong family connections in Charlotte. Gantt's campaign focused its attention on positive campaigning around Gantt rather than attacks on his opponent. While Eddie Knox had a strong reputation in North Carolina politics, it was primarily forged in the General Assembly; Knox never held elected office in Charlotte before his campaign for mayor. Gantt had a greater grasp of the intricacies of Charlotte politics and knew the major issues that faced inner-city neighborhoods. And while Knox was popular, Gantt was also a well-liked figure with greater name recognition within Charlotte. Despite the odds against him, Gantt maintained an optimistic outlook. He was convinced he could defeat Knox.

Throughout the 1979 primary campaign, Gantt was one of the few people who believed he could win. Until the day of the election, political observers predicted an easy victory for Eddie Knox. "It was tough going to the Civic Center that night," Gantt said. "Driving down with my children, I heard John Kilgo (a Charlotte radio commentator) say, 'This is going to be a landslide.'"[76] When the votes were officially tallied, Eddie Knox was declared the winner of the Democratic Primary by a difference of 1,287 votes.

While the results confirmed the election forecasts in the broadest sense, the close defeat for Gantt served as a surprise. "The thing that really resulted in our not winning

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[76] Ken Eudy, "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Control Started Young," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983. 14A.

was that the community never really believed that we could win," Mel Watt said.[77] Gantt's showing in the primary was stronger than some expected, but both men felt that victory could have been achieved with a stronger turnout. They believed that the establishment of a winning biracial coalition of voters was possible in Charlotte.

Despite his defeat, Gantt's strong performance in the 1979 Democratic Primary for Mayor served as a sign of progress in Charlotte. When Gantt arrived in Charlotte in 1965, the city was gripped by social unrest and racial tension. From the contentious response to busing to the firebombing of the homes of black leaders, Charlotte experienced a serious crisis that threatened the growing economic prosperity of the city. African American political leaders like Fred Alexander, Reginald Hawkins, Julius Chambers, and George Leake worked tirelessly to carve out new spaces within the city's political structure for Charlotte's black citizens. Alexander's success on the City Council helped normalize African American political participation in the city, while the efforts of Reginald Hawkins and George Leake helped establish the boundaries of political acceptance for black leadership. Crucial political groundwork was laid in the years before Gantt returned from MIT.

With important lessons learned in his work with Floyd McKissick, Gantt returned to Charlotte at the perfect time. In the years while Gantt was at MIT, local activists continued to fight for racial progress, employing a variety of tactics and identifying a variety of targets. While Julius Chambers continued the fight for legal justice, pursuing *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* as a means of finally realizing the

[77] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*, activists like George Leake and Reginald Hawkins tested the limits of political participation in their campaigns for higher political office. Meanwhile, Kelly and Fred Alexander continued to participate in Charlotte politics, offering a valuable black presence on various committees and the City Council. As the decade wore on, however, a younger generation of activists and political leaders were needed to continue the fight. Gantt was one of those leaders.

Following his return, Gantt became increasingly involved in politics and found a role model in Fred Alexander. Gantt represented a particular type of African American politician, one focused almost entirely on the practical issues of government, who appealed to voters across racial and economic spectrums. Rather than stoking the flames of racial division or aggressively fighting for black power in Charlotte, Gantt believed the best possibility for future progress was direct engagement in the political process. His defeat in the 1979 primary, difficult though it was for Gantt to accept, represented a major step forward in Charlotte politics. Gantt's candidacy may have been doubted, but it was certainly treated as more than a novelty. The close margin of defeat suggested that the possibility of black leadership in the city might well be attained in the near future. Gantt sought to tear down one of the final barriers for African Americans in Charlotte politics. While victory was far from assured, Harvey Gantt was determined to try again.

Chapter Five

The 1983 Charlotte Mayoral Election

In January 1983, with the twentieth anniversary of his desegregation of Clemson University approaching, Harvey Gantt was invited by President Bill Atchley to the school to help honor the occasion. Just two decades after he and his lawyers defeated Clemson in court, Gantt spoke at the school on January 28, 1983, at 1:33 p.m., the exact moment that he registered for classes in 1963. R.C. Edwards, Matthew Perry, and other major figures from Clemson's desegregation were on hand as Gantt recalled his experiences as the first African American student. President Atchley presented Gantt with a letter of acceptance for his daughter Sonja, who was then in her senior year of high school. Gantt joked with the crowd that he was glad his daughter was accepted "without a court order."[1]

The event was as a celebration of Clemson University and the progress made in the days since Gantt enrolled. R.C. Edwards told a reporter at the time of Gantt's enrollment, "Certainly it's a historic day. As to whether it's a 'great day,' we will let the historians record that sometime later."[2] Twenty years later, as he helped celebrate that historic day, Edwards declared at last that Gantt's admission was "a great day indeed" for Clemson.[3] By 1983, Clemson's African American enrollment stood at five-hundred and

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[1] Henry Eichel, "Clemson Honors Harvey Gantt 20 Years After Racial Barrier Fell," *Charlotte Observer*, January 29, 1983. 5A. Despite Clemson's offer, Sonia Gantt enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall of 1983.
[2] Claude Sitton, "Clemson Admits A Negro Quietly," *New York Times*. January 29, 1963. 4.
[3] Henry Eichel, "Clemson Honors Harvey Gantt 20 Years After Racial Barrier Fell," *Charlotte Observer*, January 29, 1983. 1A

fifteen students, which accounted for roughly 4% of the student body.[4] While that number certainly dragged behind the larger demographics of the state of South Carolina, it represented real progress since 1963. The commemoration acknowledged the struggle that Gantt overcame, but it also placed the event as firmly in the past, a foundational episode in the construction of a new, more modern Clemson University.

The occasion also served as a reminder of how far Gantt himself had come. Since that cold January morning in 1963, he completed his coursework at Clemson, met and married Lucinda Brawley, raised four children, started his own business, and entered the world of politics in Charlotte. Gantt's lawsuit against Clemson, like his involvement in the S.H. Kress sit-in before it, was a formative moment in his past activism, but that's exactly where Gantt placed it: his past. The desegregation of Clemson was an important moment for Gantt and for every student who attended Clemson after his enrollment, but he was determined to be more than a footnote to history. Like President Atchley and Clemson University, he remained focused on the present with an eye towards the future. And for Harvey Gantt, the future appeared bright.

Gantt was not deterred by his loss in the 1979 Democratic primary for mayor of Charlotte. While he was surely disappointed by the results, the relatively small margin of victory for Eddie Knox surprised political observers in Charlotte, with some suggesting that Gantt's goals were not unrealistic but just premature. "You don't come that close with the issues right for Charlotte and not give it another shot," he said.[5] After returning

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[4] Clemson University Office of Institutional Research. In 1970, the first year that race was tracked with enrollment, there were 121 African American students. Today there are currently 1,535 African American students at Clemson, which accounts for 7% of the student body..
[5] Ken Eudy, "Quest For Mayor Draws 3 Men To Same Dream; Harvey Gantt: His Cool Discipline…," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983. 14A. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.08.

to his work at Gantt Huberman, he again won a seat on the City Council in 1981 and remained a prominent figure in Charlotte politics.

In 1983, a new opportunity appeared for Gantt when Eddie Knox announced he would not seek reelection. A former State Senator, Knox decided instead to launch a campaign for Governor of North Carolina in the 1984 election. Gantt announced his candidacy for mayor of Charlotte on April 28, 1983, with a picnic at Marshall Park. In a letter to Eddie Knox, Gantt requested the mayor's support and offered insight into his vision of Charlotte's future. "We stand at a time in our history when our greatest potential as a city is just ahead of us," Gantt wrote. "I want to participate fully in seeing our city and our people reach that potential."[6] With his admirable showing in the 1979 primary and Knox's support, the Democratic Party solidified around Gantt. He faced no opposition from primary challengers.

There were a number of factors that worked in Gantt's favor in 1983. He was able to campaign in the wake of an accomplished mayor from his own political party. Under Knox, Charlotte's economic prosperity continued with major additions to the Charlotte airport and preliminary plans for a new coliseum. In addition to the boost from his party affiliation with Knox, Gantt was a relatively young and charismatic individual drawing on years of experience on the city council. He offered a message of optimism and faith in Charlotte's potential to become a first-class city. "All of the ingredients were there," said Mel Watt, "the only 'disadvantage' was that he was black."[7]

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[6] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Mayor Edward Knox, April 22, 1983. Gantt Papers. 1.22.
[7] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

As with his unsuccessful 1979 campaign, Gantt faced a major hurdle that no one in Charlotte had yet overcome. While African Americans served as mayors in other southern cities, Gantt's campaign was distinct in that Charlotte remained a majority white city in 1983. In order to claim victory in November, Gantt needed to build an interracial coalition bound together by issues that crossed demographic lines. Although his narrow defeat against Eddie Knox in the Democratic Party Primary suggested that victory was not as unthinkable as it may have once seemed, uncertainty remained until the color barrier on the mayor's office was broken.

Harvey Gantt did not have to look far to gain inspiration for pursuing his political ambitions: he witnessed a number of close friends and mentors pursue political office in the years after he desegregated Clemson. Just one year after she represented Gantt in court, Constance Baker Motley was elected to a seat in the New York State Senate, becoming the first African American woman to serve in that role. In 1966, she was appointed to the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. Motley was the first African American woman to be appointed a federal judge in the United States of America.[8]

In 1974, Matthew Perry, who helped personally guide Gantt through his efforts to desegregate Clemson, ran a campaign for the United States House of Representatives. Perry ultimately lost that race, but just two years later he was appointed to the federal judiciary by President Gerald Ford. After a stint on the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, Perry became the first African American federal judge in South

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[8] Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice Under Law: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 218-226.

Carolina when President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina in 1979.

Fred Alexander, Gantt's mentor in Charlotte, cleared the way for Gantt on the city council when he won a seat in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1974. Alexander passed away in 1980, but his influence on Gantt remained. While Gantt enjoyed his time on the Charlotte city council and grew into his position as a voice for neighborhood groups in the city, he wished to take on a more prominent role in city politics. His defeat in the 1979 Democratic Party primary was difficult for Gantt to accept. He was determined to achieve higher office.

Of course, Gantt had his own history of breaking barriers. In addition to desegregating Clemson, Gantt was the first African American architect in the city of Charlotte and the second black City Councilman. At Clemson, Gantt leaned on the federal government and the judiciary to support his efforts to desegregate higher education in South Carolina. While he was victorious in each of his campaigns for the city council, he was initially appointed to the position through a tie-breaking vote. In Gantt's quest to become Charlotte's first African American mayor, there were no courts to which he could appeal and no city leaders to help his cause. In order to break the racial barrier on the mayor's office, Gantt needed to win over the hearts and minds of the citizens of Charlotte.

In his effort to break the racial barrier on Charlotte's highest office, Gantt again enlisted Mel Watt. Gantt and Watt shared a belief in the unrealized power of the mayor's office. The mayor of Charlotte was a relatively weak position compared to those of other

major urban areas nationwide. When Gantt decided to run for mayor in 1983, the major heavy-lifting in terms of day-to-day activities for the city came from the city manager's office. "At best the mayor's position is a symbolic one in Charlotte," Watt said.[9] And yet, that best-case scenario, "the symbolic mayor," held potential that was recognized by both Watt and Gantt. With the right personality, the "cheerleader" mayor could inspire economic development while serving as a welcoming face for the city. Gantt could also use the office to provide a valuable voice for the African American community. Although he acknowledged the apparent limitations of the position, Gantt planned to unleash the full potential of the office if he was fortunate enough to win the 1983 election.

Were it up to Gantt, the issue of race would never have entered the equation in his campaign for mayor. Gantt felt that he was simply the most qualified man for the job, and his resume supported that claim. In the early 1970s, Gantt saw the particular limitations for racially-charged politicking in the resistance that met Floyd McKissick's Soul City. Likewise, Fred Alexander's careful activism in the earliest era of black political participation in Charlotte offered important lessons for Gantt. By 1983, drastic progress in Charlotte's political climate suggested hope for Gantt's efforts to become Charlotte's first African American mayor.

Gantt's opponent in the 1983 election was Ed Peacock, a forty-one year old insurance agent and Republican member of the city council who emerged victorious from a Republican Primary battle with George Selden. While Peacock had a history of service in the Charlotte area, including three terms on the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners in the 1970s, he was not as well-rounded a candidate as Gantt. By 1983,

[9] E.R. Shipp, "Charlotte: In Quest of an Image," *New York Times*, November 6, 1983. E6.

Gantt completed three terms on the city council while also running his own architecture firm. In his most recent election, Gantt won an at-large seat and was named mayor pro tem as a result of receiving the most votes of any council member in that election. Through his experience on the council, Gantt saw first-hand the issues that plagued Charlotte. Likewise, in his business with Gantt-Huberman, he saw the possibilities of private/public partnership and the potential for a more modern city. Gantt was a fixture of Charlotte politics with name recognition and support from important civic and business leaders. Despite his defeat in the 1979 primary, Gantt entered the 1983 election as the clear favorite.[10]

Mel Watt recognized that Gantt was the ideal mayoral candidate for Charlotte and its particular problems in the 1980s. "How often do you have a mayor of the city who has a city planning degree, who knows how to mend the relations between community forces and the business community and how important each of those things are, who understands the necessity of your transportation system… who is basically a brilliant mind academically?," he asked.[11] And yet, despite all of the merits of his extensive resume, Gantt was still a black candidate campaigning for mayor in an overwhelmingly white city. The issue of race in elected politics was a practical reality that he could not afford to ignore.

By 1983, African American politicians made serious inroads into politics across the country. While national office remained frustratingly elusive, politicians like Shirley Chisholm and Jesse Jackson challenged the racial barrier for the American presidency.

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[10] Ken Eudy, "Ed Peacock: A Brash Image, But Quietly Intent," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983. 1A.
[11] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

African American mayors like Ted Berry, Tom Bradley, George Carroll, Walter Washington, and Coleman Young ran successful campaigns in areas outside of the South in the 1960s and 1970s. Within the region, Atlanta, Birmingham, and New Orleans elected their first black mayors with Maynard Jackson, Richard Arrington, Jr., and Ernest Morial, respectively. In 1969, Howard Lee became the first African American mayor in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Clarence Lightner was elected mayor of Raleigh in 1973, making him the first black mayor of North Carolina's capital city. In 1981, Andrew Young was elected mayor of Atlanta following Maynard Jackson's retirement, representing a string of successive black mayors in Charlotte's closest metropolitan neighbor. While those cities had their own unique conditions and each candidate held individual strengths and weaknesses, there were a number of successful campaigns both nationally and locally to provide hope for the Gantt campaign.[12]

Perhaps most importantly, Gantt and Mel Watt could point to Gantt's own 1979 campaign as a sign of the possibilities in Charlotte. While he acknowledged at the time that race might be a wild-card that made polling and prognostication difficult, Watt later recalled that he felt the 1983 election was relatively easy in the wake of Gantt's unsuccessful 1979 campaign. For Watt, that earlier defeat helped continue a process that began with the political campaigns of Fred Alexander and George Leake a decade earlier. "If there's one thing that the 1979 race did was it created the inevitability," Watt recalled. He continued,

> The 83 mayor's race was a piece of cake, it was an easy race. The 79 race was difficult because nobody believed. The black community didn't believe because

[12] Despite the many African American success stories in mayoral election, there were causes for concern. In April 1983, Harold Washington became Chicago's first African American mayor following a particularly nasty campaign featuring Democratic infighting over Washington's nomination. Even after his election, Washington was met with resistance by members of Chicago's municipal government.

> they didn't think white folks would vote for him. The white community didn't believe because it was a southern city and it just wasn't going to happen. So it was hard to get people to believe, but by 1983 it was inevitable. And so we used that sense of inevitability.[13]

Gantt held similar views about his 1979 campaign, stating that the defeat was both crushing and inspiring. "I thought there was a future, rather than being the end for me," he said.[14]

Although there were promising trends for African American political representation to which he could point, Gantt challenged a particular racial barrier in a particular southern city. With over 70% of the population of Charlotte identifying as white, Gantt was tasked with developing a truly interracial coalition of voters. To attract a high turnout from predominantly black neighborhoods without alienating white voters, Gantt and Mel Watt devised a strategy based on political balance. Indeed, Gantt's path to victory depended on his ability to draw support across race and class divisions in the city.

Gantt performed well with African American voters in previous campaigns for City Council and in his 1979 campaign for mayor. While the turnout in 1979 was not enough to swing the primary in his favor, Gantt and Watt felt comfortable with the ground campaign in predominantly black neighborhoods. The Gantt campaign felt that 90% of the vote in African American neighborhoods was a more easily attainable outcome than 40% of the vote in traditionally white neighborhoods. On Watt's advice, the Gantt campaign aggressively sought early support from Charlotte's business community. If inroads with white leadership could be established early in the campaign, Gantt's path to victory would widen considerably.

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[13] Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill. June 16, 1995.
[14] Biographical Conversations with Harvey Gantt, UNC-TV. February 4, 2016.

In order to attract endorsements from major political leaders, Gantt and Watt offered a vision of Gantt's election as a boon for the city of Charlotte. Gantt saw firsthand through his experience in the desegregation of Clemson how important order and uninterrupted business were to business leaders and elected officials in the South. Indeed, Gantt's desegregation of Clemson was a public relations victory for both the school and the state of South Carolina. "Basically, what we did was just go systematically, one on one, to all the corporate leaders in the community before the campaign even started," Watt said.[15] For these leaders, the preservation of Charlotte's reputation was of vital importance. The Gantt campaign leaned on that fact. Watt said, "We just sat down with them and said, 'Look, we're going to win this election, and we either win it despite you or we win it with your support, and if you will do it the latter way, then what a statement that would make about Charlotte.'"[16] The Gantt campaign received endorsements from Belk and other major players in Charlotte's business community. "Almost to a person, they signed on," Watt said.[17]

Gantt's previous experience on the city council and as an architect helped in his efforts to recruit business leaders. Gantt was appointed to the city council in 1974 largely because of his clean political slate, and by 1983 he had established himself as a known quantity in Charlotte. Gantt benefited from previous interactions with many of the leaders within Charlotte's business community. In 1970, as he and Jeffrey Huberman

[15] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, February 16 and March 4 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
[16] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, February 16 and March 4 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
[17] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, February 16 and March 4 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

planned to open Gantt Huberman Architects, Gantt received his loan for the project from Hugh McColl.[18] By 1983, McColl was the President of North Carolina National Bank, Charlotte's largest bank and the forerunner to what is now Bank of America. McColl served as an early and vocal supporter of Gantt in the 1983 mayoral election.

While some in Charlotte viewed Gantt as primarily a neighborhood advocate on the council, he also demonstrated an ability to work among divergent interest groups. Indeed, Gantt's very presence on the council was the result of consensus building. Mel Watt recalled that Gantt was not the favored candidate of African American community leaders to replace Fred Alexander. "Harvey was kind of a new guy on the block, clean, professional, non-controversial, no political record," he said. "There were two or three political factions in Charlotte, and he was the only candidate not entrenched in those factions."[19] As an architect and city planner, Gantt was certainly not opposed to continued growth in Charlotte. However, Gantt offered a unique vision of balanced growth and more equitable distribution of city resources that offered hope to previously underdeveloped communities within Charlotte.

Although Gantt was not the preferred choice of African American leaders when he was appointed to the council in 1974, he relied heavily on their support to win subsequent elections. In crafting a strategy for the 1983 campaign, Gantt and Mel Watt never lost sight of the absolute necessity of high African American voter turnout. The Gantt team established headquarters in each of the twenty precincts with the largest

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[18] "Biographical Conversations with Harvey Gantt," UNC-TV. February 4, 2016. http://video.unctv.org/video/2365657777/

[19] Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill. June 16, 1995.

African American populations.[20] With the use of computers, campaign staff developed new canvassing strategies, printing out lists of registered black Democrats on each street in those precincts and deploying volunteers to go door-to-door to get out the vote.[21] At an appearance at the United House of Prayer for All People in May 1983, Gantt introduced then-presidential candidate Jesse Jackson and serenaded the crowd with "hallelujahs."[22] Gantt and his staff courted Charlotte's black voters with the understanding that victory was impossible without their support.

Gantt felt that there was no need to alter any of his platforms in order to attract black voters; indeed, Gantt believed that his focus on balanced growth and careful city planning would secure support from African American neighborhoods. "Planning was the kind of issue that had resonance in the black community," Gantt said. "Issues that talk about equity ring clear to folks."[23] While he was a member of the city council, Gantt argued for investment to attract business into the heart of Charlotte at a time when growth was directed almost exclusively towards the southeast areas of the city. Gantt believed that careful growth in inner city areas would help improve the condition of older neighborhoods. He remained committed to inclusive politics as a mayoral candidate. "We tried to make clear that we wouldn't back-pedal on issues like low-income housing and neighborhood and rehabilitation projects," Gantt said.[24]

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[20] Michael C. Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 232.
[21] Ken Eudy, "Gantt Elected Charlotte Mayor," *Charlotte Observer*, November 9, 1983. 1A. Dudley Clendiden, "Small Computers Open Politics to Citizens with Little Money," *New York Times*. February 15, 1984. 14A.
[22] Ken Eudy, "Harvey Gantt: His Cool Discipline, Sometimes Misunderstood, Took Root Early," *Charlotte Observer*, September 18, 1983. 1A.
[23] Michael C. Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 230.
[24] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 230.

The voting coalition that Gantt and Mel Watt constructed was built around business support, neighborhood organizations, and the black community. Indeed, the issues that Gantt raised in the 1983 campaign suggested that these communities had more in common than they may have previously believed. While realtors and developers wished to continue expansion into the southeast corner of the city, business leaders were receptive to Gantt's argument that unbalanced growth was choking off new business opportunities. Likewise, black and white neighborhood organizations felt overburdened with traffic congestion and community disruption. As Watt recalled, "There's not anybody I've run into who understood planning issues better than Harvey."[25]

The establishment of an interracial coalition of voters was not without its complications. Gantt continued his appeals to the business community and his advocacy for neighborhood organizations, many of them with majority-white populations, but some in the African American community questioned how committed Gantt was to issues that affected them. "I'm not sure the black community understood that all the time," Mel Watt said. "They were standing up saying 'where in the hell is Harvey Gantt, over there advocating for those folks. Why isn't he over here?'" While Gantt depended on the support of African American voters, he felt that his best chance at achieving victory was through issues that were, on the surface at least, race neutral. By arguing for new opportunities in the northern and southern areas of Charlotte, Gantt was indirectly

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[25] Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill. June 16, 1995.

advocating for new opportunities for Charlotte's black community. As Watt said, "Harvey saw that bigger picture."[26]

With confidence in his ability to establish a biracial coalition of voters, Gantt and his staff turned their attention to the major political issues in Charlotte. When Ed Peacock emerged from the Republican Party Primary, Gantt's platform became even more focused. Peacock, a former county commissioner, pushed for limited government and increased growth among Charlotte's business community. In response, Gantt touted his plan for planned growth that would benefit all of the citizens of Charlotte.

While Gantt sought a balanced and inclusive political approach that attracted voters of all races, most of the campaigning between Gantt and Ed Peacock was free from overtly racial messaging. Gantt championed causes that attracted black support, but he never allowed himself to be framed as the 'black candidate' in the race. Indeed, much of Gantt's message was built around his impressive resume as an architect and city council member. On the major issues that confronted Charlotte in 1983, Gantt seemed to be an ideal candidate. One observer called Gantt "the quintessential politician for an upwardly mobile, professionally oriented town of the 1980s."[27]

In the 1983 election, Gantt posed a simple question that struck to the heart of the debate about the city's future: "How do we accommodate the growth that's surely imminent without destroying the assets that make Charlotte 'Charlotte.'"[28] Much of

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[26] Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill. June 16, 1995.

[27] Margaret Edds, *Free At Last: What Really Happened When Civil Rights Came to Southern Politics* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1987), 200.

[28] Harvey Gantt speech to the Charlotte Condominium Council, January 25, 1984. Harvey Gantt Papers: UNCC. Folder 5.14.

Gantt's success in the 1983 campaign for mayor can be traced back to his ability to offer an attractive plan for sustained but organized growth. At a time in which many of Charlotte's leaders and prominent businessmen prized economic prosperity and new business above all else, Gantt suggested a balanced approach that incorporated neighborhood concerns into city policy. In an August 1983 interview, Gantt expounded on the issues that he felt were most important for the city in the 1980s. He identified incentivizing business in the uptown area, the revitalization of inner-city neighborhoods to match the progress of Charlotte's suburban areas, and the establishment of "a land-use policy with teeth" for more equitable zoning as major issues facing the city. "Once these basic policies are set, then we can deal with transportation, inner city jobs, and the rest of the city's business," Gantt said.[29]

When asked about incentives that Charlotte could offer prospective businesses, Gantt noted tax exempt loans as an option for stimulating growth in the Third and Fourth Wards, as well as investing city government funds in water and sewer lines to northeast Charlotte.[30] Gantt's platform went well beyond strategies for growth on the edge of the city limits. "I want uptown to be everyone's neighborhood," Gantt said. While city leaders continued to push for expansion along the outer edges of the city, Gantt proposed revitalization of the heart of the city. "We need links between offices, homes, performing arts, the new coliseum," he said. "The inner city must be the focal point, not Southpark, Eastland, or Carmel Commons. Restaurants, the new coliseum, and entertainment

[29] "Mayoral Candidates Debate the Issues," *Charlotte*, Volume 16, Number 8, September 1983, 16.
[30] "Mayoral Candidates Debate the Issues," *Charlotte*, Volume 16, Number 8, September 1983, 17.

uptown should encourage people to spend more than just working hours in the inner city."[31]

Much of Gantt's message in 1983 remained unchanged from his 1979 campaign, but he met with a more receptive audience because the city had changed in the intervening years. Through his focus on balanced growth, Gantt attracted attention from residents in Charlotte's traditionally white southeastern neighborhoods. With continued growth in Charlotte, transportation issues became increasingly important. Commuters spent their mornings and afternoons stuck on unmoving freeways as Charlotte's infrastructure became increasingly stressed. Gantt's ideas of carefully planned growth simply found a new audience.

In some ways, Gantt's experience on the city council served as both a blessing and a curse for his broader political aspirations. Gantt and his fellow council members certainly supported reasonable growth in Charlotte, but the perception within the city was that members of the city council opposed rapid growth while county commissioners were enthusiastic supporters. While Peacock served as a city councilmember for the term preceding the 1983 election, much of his experience came from his time on the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners. Gantt hoped that the support of business leaders in the community would help bolster his reputation and prove to voters that he was a proponent of continued growth.

Ed Peacock, with his campaign theme "New Direction For A Good Government," offered a much more conservative platform. While Gantt touted a progressive and idealistic vision for Charlotte's future, Peacock identified departmental budget reviews

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[31] "Mayoral Candidates Debate the Issues," *Charlotte*, Volume 16, Number 8, September 1983 18.

and incentive plans for garbage collection as the major issues affecting Charlotte.[32] Gantt's optimistic appraisal of Charlotte's future potential stood in stark contrast to Peacock's more sober, grounded political rhetoric.

Despite their differences, local journalists focused on the similarities between Gantt and his opponent. Indeed, both Gantt and Peacock supported economic and industrial growth in the city. Likewise, each candidate acknowledged infrastructure needs and the strains that further growth could place on the city. As one reporter noted, "The two candidates' differences in recent days have seemed so slight that the local press has taken to calling them Tweedledum and Tweedledee."[33] With both Gantt and Peacock running on broad platforms centered on growth, the perception among many in Charlotte was that there were no real differences between the two men. On a general level, that may have been true, but the policy specifics and general tones of the campaigns distinguished the two candidates from one another.

In his efforts to differentiate himself from Gantt, Peacock avoided overtly racial attacks. Peacock's use of language, however, suggested tensions beneath the surface of Charlotte politics. He repeatedly claimed, "Harvey Gantt is a very articulate liberal and Ed Peacock is a caring, compassionate conservative."[34] The implication that Gantt was little more than a smooth-talker angered Gantt.

One of the lasting legacies of the 1983 mayoral race was its supposed civility. According to the conventional narrative, the Gantt and Peacock campaigns surprised political observers with a general lack of racially-charged attacks. From 1981 to 1983, the candidates worked together on the City Council without animosity. As the election

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[32] "Mayoral Candidates Debate the Issues," *Charlotte*, Volume 16, Number 8, September 1983, 16.
[33] E.R. Shipp, "Charlotte: In Quest of an Image," *New York Times*, November 6, 1983. E6.
[34] Ken Eudy, "White Support Key To Gantt Win," *Charlotte Observer*, November 9, 1983. 1A

approached in the fall of 1983, their campaigns largely avoided charged personal attack ads. In comparison with other experiences of black mayoral candidates, especially Harold Washington's in Chicago, the mayoral race in Charlotte appeared well-mannered.

While it is true that the mayoral election lacked overt racial attacks, its civility has been slightly overstated. Ed Peacock's campaign avoided direct confrontations with Gantt, but his stance on a number of race-related issues in Charlotte revealed clear divisions between the candidates. Peacock publicly criticized the Minority and Women Business Program, a local plan to ensure the recruitment of African American and women contractors in city projects. "I'm opposed to mandatory quotas," he said. "The program has increased costs, created fronts, and not helped women and minorities."[35]

At a Jesse Jackson presidential campaign rally held at Johnson C. Smith University, Phyllis Lynch, chair of the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections, conducted an improvised voter registration drive. In response, Ed Peacock suggested the action was a sign that voter fraud may occur on the day of the election. He even suggested that federal officials, in compliance with the Voting Rights Act, should monitor the polls in predominantly black districts.[36] In an effort to circumvent moderate support for Gantt, Peacock attempted to link his opponent to Jesse Jackson. Ironically, Gantt's decision to withhold an endorsement of Jackson's presidential bid caused tension within Charlotte's African American community. While they were not explicitly racist attacks, neither were they subtle.

The narrative suggesting that the 1983 election was race-free also obscures the important ways that Gantt drew upon his African-American heritage. Gantt often

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[35] "Mayoral Candidates Debate the Issues," *Charlotte*, Volume 16, Number 8, September 1983. 36.
[36] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South." *Southeastern Political Review*. Volume 26 No 1 March, 1988, 232.

recalled his battle to desegregate Clemson on the campaign trail. His campaign established headquarters in each of the twenty voting precincts with the highest populations of African-Americans. While his effort to build an interracial voting coalition was crucial to his victory, the first step in that process was securing a high concentration of African American voters. The Gantt campaign had estimated it needed 90% of the black vote and 35% of the white vote to secure victory. Gantt did not attempt to play the races or classes of Charlotte against each other, but he also made sure not to alienate the African American voting base that was crucial to his success.

On November 8, 1983, election day in Charlotte, Gantt campaign staffers were a visible presence in the city. Volunteers for Gantt went door to door to get out the vote, armed with computer printouts of eligible voters on every street of the twenty predominantly black precincts. Decked out in bright red Gantt t-shirts, they provided transportation to residents throughout the city.[37] In the polls conducted in the weeks before the election, Gantt was projected with a lead in the race. But as election day approached, those polls tightened. The first precincts to report were in the largely white neighborhoods of Charlotte's affluent Second Ward, giving Peacock an early lead. When the predominantly black precincts began reporting that evening, however, Gantt established a significant lead that he never relinquished. Continuing years of civil rights activism in the city, Harvey Gantt became the first African American mayor of Charlotte.

Gantt and Watt succeeded in crafting a grassroots strategy that encouraged participation in Charlotte's old neighborhoods. Before the election, the campaign estimated that they needed roughly 90% of the city's African American votes to have a

[37] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 232.

chance at winning. In the neighborhoods that Gantt established as the crucial base of his biracial coalition, Gantt won 92% of the vote. In predominantly white precincts, he achieved a margin beyond even his own lofty goal, with 41% of voters choosing Gantt over Peacock. The overall turnout was the largest recorded in Charlotte's history, with 52% of eligible voters showing up at the polls.[38] At election headquarters that night, Gantt addressed the crowd at the moment his victory became apparent. "We won," Gantt said. "Whoa, let me pinch myself."[39]

Gantt maintained throughout his campaign that he wanted to focus solely on the issues. And on these issues, he proved victorious. While Peacock offered a reserved vision for Charlotte's potential, complete with increased auditing of city services and strict limits on the city budget, Gantt exhibited a sense of contagious optimism. For Gantt, the challenges that accompanied expanded growth in the city were not a crisis, but an opportunity to design a better Charlotte. With important lessons learned from his career as an architect and in his service with Soul City, Gantt was the right man at the right time for an expanding Charlotte.

Gantt's focus on carefully planned growth in Charlotte resulted in a winning coalition of disparate voting blocs. Citizens in Charlotte's old neighborhoods were convinced that Gantt was not going to support widespread development that would eradicate Charlotte's historic appeal. Likewise, those that hoped for continued growth in Charlotte realized that Gantt was not interested in halting that growth and would not oppose development in historic districts if it was undertaken with precision and respect. Gantt essentially offered the citizens of Charlotte the best of both worlds.

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[38] Eudy, "Gantt Elected Charlotte Mayor," *Charlotte Observer*, November 9, 1983. 1A, 6A.
[39] Eudy, "Gantt Elected Charlotte Mayor," *Charlotte Observer*, November 9, 1983. 1A, 6A.

Throughout the campaign, Gantt and his staff walked a fine line on race-related issues. Gantt emphasized his resume to voters and assured the citizens of Charlotte that he would be a mayor for everyone, not just the black community. Immediately following Gantt's victory, however, the election was framed as a referendum on race in Charlotte. Political commentators lauded Gantt's ability to bring together a winning, biracial coalition of voters. Within Charlotte, journalists declared Gantt's victory a transcendent moment of racial harmony for its citizens. Even Gantt's opposition pinned Peacock's loss on the delicate nature of racial politics within North Carolina's largest city. Following Gantt's win, the 1983 election became a metaphorical Rorschach test, seemingly confirming widely varied ideas about race in the city of Charlotte.

Political commentators pointed to Gantt's victory, as well as those of other African American candidates who won office in 1983, as a sign of larger trends in American politics. Gantt's defeat of Ed Peacock was embraced as an example of new strategies of coalition-building that could shape the 1984 presidential election. The victories for Gantt in Charlotte and Wilson Goode in Philadelphia "demonstrated the continuation of a trend toward heavy black voter turnout that has been gaining momentum since President Reagan took office in 1980," wrote one reporter.[40] Amelia Parker, a staff member with the Democratic National Committee, suggested that Gantt's victory was a sign that voters across the country were willing to vote for qualified African American candidates. "I think the entire country is coming of age," she said.

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[40] Howell Raines, "Major Lesson at Polls: Electoral Victories by Blacks and Women Signal Pivotal Constituencies in 1984 Tests," *New York Times*, November 10, 1983, A1.

"Charlotte is at the forefront."[41] On a smaller scale, commentators noted that Gantt's victory in Charlotte could serve as a sign of future trends in voting patterns in the South in general and North Carolina in particular. "Mr. Gantt's visibility raises the possibility of building a statewide coalition of blacks under his leadership," wrote one reporter.[42]

Charlotte journalists were quick to credit Ed Peacock and the Republican Party for running a clean campaign against Gantt. "Charlotte can be proud of Harvey Gantt and proud of itself for electing him, but it also should be proud of Ed Peacock," wrote the editors of the *Charlotte Observer*. "If this could have been an ugly campaign, it wasn't, and Mr. Peacock deserves credit for that."[43] While it is true that Peacock avoided direct confrontations on issues of race, he was critical of Charlotte's minority-hiring programs and accused African Americans who registered at a Johnson C. Smith University campaign rally of voter fraud. Peacock did not engage in particularly nasty politics, but his campaign was not devoid of racial messaging.

Some supporters of Ed Peacock and members of his campaign staff felt that Peacock did not go far enough in challenging Gantt on race-related issues. While Gantt and Watt were concerned with overcoming "the race issue" and their fears of potential prejudice against a black candidate, some felt that Peacock's campaign was forced to pick and choose its battles or risk alienating black voters. "There's a fine line when you go on the attack against a black opponent in Charlotte," said a member of Peacock's staff. "If we'd have been running against [white city council member] Dave Berryhill or Eddie Knox, Peacock could have been tougher."[44] Some felt that Peacock did not apply enough

[41] Kathleen Curry, "Gantt victory seen as symbol," *Charlotte News*. November 9, 1983. 1A.
[42] Curry, "Gantt victory seen as symbol," *Charlotte News*. November 9, 1983. 11A.
[43] "Historic Election: Victory For Gantt, Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1983.
[44] Ken Eudy, "White Support Key To Gantt Win," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1983. 1A, 8A.

pressure on issues such as the minority-hiring policies for city projects approved by Gantt and the city council. "There were not as many attacks on Harvey and his minority quota plan," said city council member Ralph McMillan. "People in Ed's campaign felt like if you attacked Harvey on that, it might have been construed as racist. I felt like we should have treated him as an equal."[45]

Following Gantt's victory, some political observers offered a differing vision of the campaign. Rather than highlight how race hampered either candidate, some chose to highlight Gantt's conventional political skills, bypassing the race issue altogether. Clarence Mitchell, head of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, suggested that Gantt's victory, like those of other black candidates in 1983, was a result of the candidates' conventional political skills. Mitchell described Gantt and Wilson Goode as "two solid practical politicians who learned the rules of the game of coalition building."[46] Mel Watt, who had been an integral part of Gantt's electoral campaigns since his first campaign in 1975, claimed that Gantt lacked any sort of political philosophy regarding race. "I don't know if I would put him in any particular political philosophy," Watt said, calling Gantt's platform "more planning oriented than political oriented."[47]

There is a certain irony in the fact that each candidate felt that race-related campaigning could be their undoing. From the outset, Gantt and Mel Watt identified Gantt's race as a complicating factor in his candidacy for mayor. "I've always said that if Harvey had been white, there never would have been any question about whether he

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[45] Eudy, "White Support Key To Gantt Win," *Charlotte Observer*, November 8, 1983. 1A, 8A.
[46] Ronald Smothers, "Election of 2 Black Mayors is Evaluated by Colleagues," *New York Times*, November 10, 1983. D27.
[47] Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill. June 16, 1995.

would be mayor of the city," Watt said. "He would walk in. He wouldn't even have to campaign."[48] That Ed Peacock's campaign staff felt they did not go far enough in challenging Gantt on issues like the minority-hiring plan for city contracts highlights the fact that both campaigns felt constricted by race-related politics in the 1980s. With moderate political success for African American candidates across the county by the 1983 election, once-effective methods of racially charged political campaigning proved ineffective. The political climate in Charlotte shifted to such a degree since George Leake's first campaign for the mayor's office in 1969 that both Gantt and Peacock were left to navigate uncharted territory. Indeed, many in Charlotte felt that the political climate of the mid-1980s that resulted in Gantt's victory would have been impossible in an earlier era. As Kelly Alexander said following Gantt's victory, "Race relations now are at a very good point."[49] Finding little traction on the few race-related issues they confronted, Peacock's staff was forced to compete with Gantt on more traditional political concerns. In their effort to convince Charlotte voters of Peacock's advantages over Gantt, they proved unsuccessful.

In the wake of Gantt's victory, a number of Charlotteans celebrated what the election results meant for the city. The Charlotte media framed Gantt's victory as a symbolic triumph for the city itself. "At 10 o'clock Tuesday night, when Charlotte's first black mayor-elect careened into the party room at the Civic Center, he was no longer Harvey Gantt, the growth-management candidate," wrote Kathleen Curry of the

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[48] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, February 16 and March 4 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

[49] Smothers, "Election of 2 Black Mayors is Evaluated by Colleagues," *New York Times*, November 10, 1983. D27.

Charlotte News. "He was history."[50] In electing their first African American mayor, the city of Charlotte emerged as a modern, New South metropolis. As Thomas Hanchett writes, "Diversity was becoming the watchword of the modern city."[51] While African Americans had previously served on planning committees, the city council, and the school board, Gantt's victory represented a symbolic moment for Charlotte.

In a congratulatory editorial in the *Charlotte Observer*, the editors praised Gantt and the voters of Charlotte. "Harvey Gantt is a special person," the editors wrote, "whose particular strengths – his training as an architect and urban planner, his understanding of the forces that are shaping the community's future, his record of leadership on the council, his infectious love for the city – seemed uniquely suited to this moment in Charlotte's history."[52] For those invested in Charlotte and its image as a forward-thinking southern metropolis, the election of Gantt served as a confirmation. "Both the turnout – 52%, a record for a city election – and the results demonstrated again that this is a city of extraordinary character, vision, and spirit."[53] Much like the anniversary celebration at Clemson earlier in the year, many in Charlotte viewed Gantt's victory as a larger victory for the city itself.

Gantt's election was certainly a proud moment for Charlotte's citizens, but the impact of his victory was to some degree obscured by the press coverage that followed. As with Gantt's desegregation of Clemson, much of the praise fell to white citizens for not succumbing to violent resistance to social change. Due to Gantt's relatively moderate stance on race-related issues, few traced credit for his victory back to its rightful source.

[50] Curry, "Gantt victory seen as symbol," *Charlotte News*. November 9, 1983. 1A.
[51] Hanchett, 256.
[52] "Historic Election: Victory For Gantt, Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1983.
[53] "Historic Election: Victory For Gantt, Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, November 11, 1983.

Gantt's victory followed decades of civil rights activism in Charlotte and across the state of North Carolina. Without the efforts of Fred Alexander, Kelly Alexander, Julius Chambers, Reginald Hawkins, George Leake, and countless others, the political and racial climate that nurtured Gantt's candidacy may not have existed. Gantt's victory was the realization of civil rights dreams of the generation that preceded him in Charlotte. As he assumed office, he was carrying their mantle.

Throughout the campaign, Gantt focused on issues of balanced growth and more equitable development in Charlotte, issues which he and campaign advisor Mel Watt felt were in some ways race-free issues for the electorate. And while observers at the time may have commended both the Gantt and Peacock campaigns for not engaging in racially-charged campaigning, the issues of which Gantt spoke were directly related to racial inequality throughout Charlotte. The busing suit of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that began two decades earlier was necessitated only by the red-lining of Charlotte's neighborhoods that made desegregated schooling untenable without further assistance. That red-lining, which resulted in a heavy concentration of African American voters in Fourth Ward and the surrounding neighborhoods, created an inherent segregation in the community that could not be easily undone by court order. Indeed, issues of city planning, resource management, and development in Charlotte were by their very nature race-related issues. As previous city leaders guided development towards the predominantly-white southeast areas of Charlotte extending out from Second Ward, the African American community felt increasingly left behind. Gantt's continued calls for balanced growth held their own unique political weight in that climate.

Gantt made a concerted effort to court voters of all races throughout the campaign, but he was certainly aware of what his victory would mean for the black community, both in Charlotte and in the Carolinas. "What happened tonight has to reflect well on Charlotte nationally, considering the percentage of vote we will get from the white community," he said on the night of the election. "We ought to be able to build on that, ought to be able to go out and recruit industry on the basis that we have such racial harmony."[54] Gantt reaffirmed that he was the mayor of Charlotte, not just a mayor for the black community. However, he acknowledged that his presence in the mayor's office would certainly bring a more receptive ear to minority issues in Charlotte and across North Carolina than that provided by previous city leaders. "[I] will support those issues I think are important to Charlotte and other cities in building what I think will be a needed urban coalition," Gantt said. "To the extent that those will include minority issues, I think having a black mayor of the largest city certainly puts you in that position."[55]

Harvey Gantt was sworn-in as Charlotte's first African American mayor at Ovens Auditorium on December 5, 1983. An African American choir began the proceedings that evening with a performance of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Gantt thanked the citizens of Charlotte for the spirit they instilled in the community, which he said, "led me to dream and believe that I could run for the city's highest office and expect to be judged by my character, my competence and my understanding of critical issues – and nothing more."[56] For Gantt, it was a triumphant moment in an unlikely political career.

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[54] Curry, "Gantt victory seen as symbol," *Charlotte News*. November 9, 1983. 11A.
[55] Curry, "Gantt victory seen as symbol," *Charlotte News*. November 9, 1983. 11A.
[56] Curry, "Making History," *Charlotte News*. December 6, 1983. 1A.

Twenty years after he broke racial barriers at Clemson, Gantt was once again tasked with guiding a southern institution through an important transitional period.

Gantt's victory in the 1983 election represented a number of important developments. While it was a traditional political victory for the Democratic Party, and a particular victory for Charlotte residents who hoped for more balanced and equitable city planning, it also held symbolic importance for Charlotte's African American community. It would take time to enact Gantt's political platform, but the symbolic impact was immediate. In the days after his victory, Gantt visited Hidden Valley Elementary School, located on the north end of Charlotte far removed from the growth and expansion of the southeastern area of the city. The reaction from students demonstrated to Gantt just how powerful his election was for the city. "One of the fascinating things I have seen was the young children who just really looked at me, and for the first time I felt as if I was some kind of giant," Gantt recalled. "The look on a lot of little kids' faces that said, 'I can be that.' Many were little black kids. That's just one more thing that's believable to them."[57]

Gantt's 1979 campaign surely helped prepare Charlotte for the 1983 election, but that earlier campaign was also a single part of a larger puzzle. Fred Alexander's election to the City Council in 1965 began a decades-long march towards equality in Charlotte. Although the early responses to busing proved that racial attitudes were beyond the jurisdiction of a court order, the citizens of Charlotte eventually embraced busing and desegregated schooling. Likewise, the battle to bring district representation to the City Council reshaped city government. "With broader participation on the city council came

[57] "Mayor Harvey Gantt's Agenda For Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*. December 4, 1983. 4H.

new faces on planning and zoning boards and other decision-making bodies," wrote Thomas Hanchett. "No longer would municipal actions automatically benefit one particular sector of the community."[58] Gantt's election to the mayor's office in 1983 was not the only black political success story that year; two African Americans, Charlie Dannelly and Ron Leeper, were elected to the city council. Indeed, since the introduction of the district/at-large hybrid in city council elections, there has never again been a lone representative of the African American community like Fred Alexander or Harvey Gantt. Gantt's victory did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, he was propelled into office in the wake of decades of political progress in Charlotte.

While Gantt remained humble following his victory, he was aware of the greater symbolic importance of his political triumph. Gantt saw himself as a particular type of civil rights activist, raised in the shadow of leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., J. Arthur Brown, and Fred Alexander. "We southerners growing up under the shadow of King really did see change occur, dramatic change," Gantt said, "and so there was a certain believability about pushing direct action and then ultimately evolving that into politics."[59] Indeed, Gantt's political philosophy, both in the platform he offered and the method in which he conducted his campaign, reflected the lessons of Christopher Gantt. Decades earlier, Gantt's father encouraged Harvey to confront racism and inequality in a particular way, employing common sense appeals and peaceful protest. From the moment he arrived in Charlotte, Gantt witnessed a variety of methods of civil rights activism, including the focused legal pursuits of Julius Chambers and the more abrasive electoral politics of Reginald Hawkins. However, it was in Fred Alexander's political

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[58] Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*. 256.
[59] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

participation that Harvey saw the realization of his father's promise of a better world. When asked about his own ideas of the civil rights movement, and which methods proved most effective, Gantt responded, "I'm more a believer in taking the benefits that were brought about by Martin…and all the other direct action kinds of things and molding them into long-term, institutional changes."[60] For Gantt, those long-term changes were best realized through direct engagement with the existing political structure, a lesson he first learned in his Charleston home.

Of course, political participation involved much more than the election of black candidates. Following passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and the expansion of city council representation in 1977, Gantt was encouraged by the numbers that revealed a marked increase in African American participation in Charlotte in the 1983 election. "It's been significant enough in this community that I've been elected to public office and it's been in no small part due to the increased amount of participation by black voters in the electoral process," Gantt said. With an awareness of the history that led to such a moment of black political power, Gantt recognized the continued importance of the civil rights victory that kick-started his political awakening, the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. "We see that now as the vehicle for change: to assume and to aim higher in local and state and other places to bring about, carry on that revolution that started back there when the Supreme Court made that decision," he said.[61]

Gantt held a long-term vision that aimed for more than token representation in politics. However, much like his entrance into Clemson, Gantt's election as mayor would

[60] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[61] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

be for naught if he did not follow through on the opportunity. Gantt was left with a stark realization: if his victory in 1983 were to lead to lasting change, he had to produce results as mayor. Never one to shy away from a challenge, Gantt entered office with an optimistic platform and a determined spirit. Charlotte's first African American mayor was ready to enact his vision for the city.

Chapter Six

Mayor Gantt's First Term, 1983-1985

In one of his first speeches as the new mayor of Charlotte, Harvey Gantt addressed a room of local businessmen that seemed comprised of his natural political enemies. Speaking before the developers of the Charlotte Condominium Council on January 25, 1984, Gantt welcomed what he saw as "the beginning of a new era of understanding and enlightenment between those who advocate the preservation of our neighborhoods and those who believe we must continue to grow in a vigorous manner to maintain our health and vitality."[1] Gantt listed a number of accomplishments that he felt should be celebrated by the citizens of Charlotte, notably the city's preservation of its historic neighborhoods, its diversity of job opportunities, and its well-integrated public school system.

However, the bulk of Gantt's speech that evening was devoted to the city's future. "We as a city stand on the brink of great opportunities," Gantt said. "I know this possibility better than most, because I have felt it in the spirit of the citizens I've encountered daily and over the past year as I campaigned for this office."[2] Noting the perceived hostilities between developers and neighborhood organizations, Gantt argued that a spirit of cooperation between the two groups would benefit all of the citizens of Charlotte.

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[1] Harvey Gantt speech to the Charlotte Condominium Council, January 25, 1984. Gantt Papers. UNCC Special Collections.
[2] Harvey Gantt speech to the Charlotte Condominium Council, January 25, 1984. Gantt Papers. UNCC Special Collections.

Gantt's call for balanced growth and a more cooperative atmosphere in Charlotte was more than mere campaign rhetoric. Gantt hoped to bridge the divide between various interest groups throughout Charlotte, a difficult task given the political entrenchment that then existed in the city. Gantt demonstrated to both business leaders and neighborhood organizers that he was committed to his vision of a more inclusive and modern Charlotte. Within the city government, Gantt worked across the aisle with Republican Councilmembers and tried to foster a more cooperative spirit. Beyond those existing divides, however, Gantt was forced to confront the conflicting expectations of white and black citizens. As the city's first black mayor, Gantt navigated uncharted political waters, balancing the expectations of the African American community with the delicate political realities of his position as the black mayor of a majority white city. Despite serious political obstacles in transportation and taxation, Gantt proved to be an effective leader whose presence at the forefront of city government signaled new opportunities for the city of Charlotte.

Although Gantt offered few promises as a mayoral candidate, he proposed substantive changes to the city's fundamental strategies of growth management. Like Ed Peacock, his opponent in the 1983 election, Gantt was committed to continuing Charlotte's growth, albeit in a modified form. In the early 1980s, much of the growth in Charlotte occurred in the southeast corner of the city in the neighborhoods and suburbs extending out from the Second Ward, which were primarily white and wealthy due to decades of redlining.[3] Gantt suggested new avenues for growth throughout the northern

[3] Thomas Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 229-232.

and western sections of Charlotte, which would theoretically alleviate tension among neighborhood groups of the southeast while promoting new business opportunities in underdeveloped areas. Gantt approached balanced growth in Charlotte as a means of ensuring that all of Charlotte's citizens could share in the prosperity that the city was then experiencing.

It is almost impossible to overstate the fascination with growth and development in Charlotte in the 1980s. In the decade following Gantt's election to the city council, Charlotte's leaders aggressively recruited new business to the area. Previous political leaders' embrace of growth and expansion through annexation were crucial to Charlotte's emergence as a major southern metropolis, but the city was far from alone in its pursuit of new business.[4] While Gantt fought the perception of Charlotte as a mini-Atlanta, and indeed offered examples of ways in which Charlotte could retain its unique features while keeping pace with other southern cities, previous mayors and city councilmembers attempted to mimic Atlanta's pursuit of new business opportunities.[5] This obsession with new business and industry was something Gantt encountered indirectly with his desegregation of Clemson, as South Carolina's political and business leaders made contingency plans for desegregation on their own terms in an effort to preserve the state's reputation and avoid disruption of business interests. Likewise, in the years before Gantt arrived in Charlotte in 1965, business leaders attempted voluntary, peaceful integration as

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[4] For more on the business recruitment efforts of Southern politicians see: James Cobb, *Selling the South* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, eds. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*.
[5] Ron Martz, "Charlotte's first black Mayor is a go-getter with low profile," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 16A.

a means of continuing business uninterrupted.[6] Although Gantt was viewed as a neighborhood advocate and voice for the black community on the city council in the 1970s, he campaigned as a consensus candidate for mayor with the support of Charlotte's business elite. As he took office in 1983, Gantt inherited the responsibility of guiding Charlotte's economic future.

In May 1984, in response to local concerns about businesses relocating to nearby York County, South Carolina, Gantt established an Economic Development Study Commission comprised of city council members and local business leaders.[7] Robert Waugh, President of First Federal Savings, was appointed to lead the committee.[8] The commission was divided into three task forces, charged with studying issues ranging from the recruiting strengths of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and the development of training resources necessary to attract new businesses.[9] The commission served as a proactive measure by Gantt and the city council to confront future problems before they began, as well as more efficiently direct investment and recruitment of new businesses.

Gantt undertook a number of measures designed to help the municipal government promote business within Charlotte. On a personal level, Gantt communicated directly with business owners interested in relocating to Charlotte, touting the city's infrastructural advantages and potential for future growth.[10] Gantt also

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[6] Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 131.
[7] Memorandum of Chamber of Commerce meeting, December 27, 1983, mailed from Jim Teat to Harvey Gantt, Gantt Papers, Folder 1.29. Fletman, Abbe. "Crossing the S.C. Border," *Charlotte Observer*, December 26, 1983. 1C, 16C.
[8] Memorandum from Harvey Gantt to Charlotte City Council, re: Economic Development Commission, September 21, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.
[9] Economic Development Study Commission Mission Goals, July 31, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.
[10] Letter from George W. Ansbro, Chairman of Royal Insurance Company, to Harvey Gantt. July 26, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29; Letter from Harvey Gantt to Fred R. Pollak, President of Custom Automated Machinery, Inc. May 21, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29; Letter from Glenn D. Sessoms, Managing

advocated for continued involvement in the U.S. Small Business Administration's Section 503 Certified Development Company Loan Program, designed to recruit new business to the area.[11] During his tenure as mayor, Gantt supported successful programs like the Charlotte Uptown Development Program and loan programs through the Community Development Department.[12] The result was a clear signal to entrepreneurs and established corporations alike that the city of Charlotte was interested in their business. In a letter to Gantt, one entrepreneur who selected Charlotte as the site of a new office noted "the enthusiastic business community leadership" and "supportive state and city government" as major factors in his decision.[13]

While he sought to continue Charlotte's growth and expansion, Gantt brought serious conceptual revisions to previous city planning. In doing so, Gantt addressed the tension in Charlotte's neighborhoods that made his winning coalition possible. Gantt treated the development of inner-city communities and preservation of historic neighborhoods as equally important to the recruitment of industry. The steady development of the southeast area of the city threatened historic neighborhoods and left the citizens of those communities burdened with severe traffic congestion. Indeed, a crucial element of Gantt's coalition in the 1983 election were organizations representing neighborhoods like Dilworth, Elizabeth, and Meyers Park, areas that witnessed disruption

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Director for the Piedmont District for Federal Express, to Harvey Gantt. September 17, 1987. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.

[11] Letter from United States Senator John P. East to Harvey Gantt. April 22, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29. Letter from Harvey Gantt to United States Senator Jesse Helms. April 19, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.

[12] Memo from Wendell White to Mayor Gantt and the City Council. April 30, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.

[13] Letter from George W. Ansbro to Harvey Gantt. July 26, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.

as a result of Charlotte's growth.[14] By directing expansion and growth towards other areas of the city, Gantt tried to appease both developers and neighborhood organizations while extending opportunities to minority communities throughout the northern and western parts of the city.

Were the decision Gantt's alone, new business and economic development would have been directed first and foremost towards Charlotte's Uptown area.[15] Gantt favored development of inner-city districts over increasing sprawl in the outer reaches of the city, a strategy that often put him at odds with members of the Chamber of Commerce and developers who prioritized quick and steady growth above all else.[16] Shortly after taking office, Gantt postponed a March referendum on a new coliseum to May 8, 1984, in an effort to convince members of the council that an Uptown location would be best for all of Charlotte's citizens.[17] Gantt ultimately lost the fight, but it reflected his desire to bring fresh eyes to policy issues and decisions that would impact the entire community.

Gantt's support for development in the urban city center survived beyond the coliseum debate. "The downtown revitalization ideas don't die simply because we fail to put a coliseum there," he said.[18] Throughout Gantt's tenure as mayor he encouraged businesses to consider development in Charlotte's Uptown district, a reflection of his

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[14] Mel Watt interview. June 16, 1995. Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

[15] Charlotte's city leadership began to promote the downtown area as "Uptown" during the 1960s in an effort to rebrand the city center; rather than a seedy, violent downtown area, Charlotte possessed a vibrant, thriving "Uptown." The rebranding did not have much effect on development, but the name stuck.

[16] Matthew Lassiter, "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas" in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 35.

[17] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Mr. E. H. Copeland, Jr., President of Central Charlotte Association. December 12, 1983. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.15.

[18] "Mayor Harvey Gantt's Agenda For Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, December 4, 1983. 4H.

belief that a strong city-center was a marker of the city's overall health.[19] In a discussion of the ideal placement for unique, city-owned properties like museums and coliseums, Gantt said, "Rather than off-balance in some other area that puts a lot of pressure for traffic on that one area, come to the center for those one-of-a-kind types of things."[20] For Gantt, a thriving and vibrant Uptown would signal that Charlotte's ascendance to the forefront of New South cities was complete.

The Uptown area was not the only area of Charlotte that Gantt was concerned with developing. While the city's economic growth over the preceding decades was undeniable, many of Charlotte's residents did not share in the benefits of the boom. In his efforts to alleviate Charlotte's increasingly dire traffic situation, Gantt found an opportunity to fix one problem while addressing another. Both in his service on the city council and as mayor, Gantt advocated for an outerbelt expressway along the northwestern edges of the city. Conversely, opponents on the city council argued that a southeastern belt would alleviate the heavy traffic in that area. From his experience in city planning, Gantt knew that an expressway was more likely to stimulate than relieve growth, a side-effect that would compound issues in the already congested southeastern sections of the city.[21] By applying his city planning background to Charlotte's problems, Gantt hoped to bring about more equitable growth in the city.

Gantt also sought to secure utilities development in the northeastern areas of the city as a means of stimulating growth. Although some questioned the installation of water and sewer lines to relatively undeveloped areas extending out from the First Ward,

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[19] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Mr. Roger W. Owens, Branch Manager for IBM, February 27, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.
[20] "Mayor Harvey Gantt's Agenda For Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, December 4, 1983. 4H.
[21] Ted Mellnik, "Gantt Rebuts Berryhill on Outerbelt," *Charlotte Observer*. October 24, 1985. 1C.

Gantt knew that private development in the area would follow if city leadership paved the way. As Mel Watt suggested, it was simple, common-sense politics. "I remember the time when all of Charlotte was headed southeast," he recalled. "It was Harvey's idea to run water and sewer lines into places where nobody was living." Watt credited Gantt with quietly reshaping the city of Charlotte by directing growth towards underdeveloped areas. "Those early planning decisions of that kind will have impact on Charlotte in ways that the people never really realized," he said.[22]

While Gantt did not win every political battle as mayor, his considerable skill in consensus-building did not go unnoticed. Gantt achieved success as a unifying figure because he realized that the choice between developers and the neighborhood groups of Charlotte was effectively a false dichotomy. Indeed, Gantt was elected with a coalition comprised of neighborhood groups, the black community, and key business figures; he entered office with the belief that politics in Charlotte could be something more than a zero-sum game. *The Charlotte Observer* described Gantt as possessing "a contagious enthusiasm, a deft grasp of issues, sometimes stubborn determination and quiet persuasion."[23] Other members of the city council, including Republicans, admitted that Gantt was well-equipped in the role of mayor. "He's done a better job than I expected him to do," said Herb Spaugh, Jr., a city council member. "I think he's been more of a moderator than I thought he could be. He really will try to get two sides together. And the guy's a man of principle and he shows that."[24]

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[22] Interview with Melvin L. Watt by Caitlin Fenhagen, 16 February and 4 March 1994 J-0008, in the Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

[23] Jim Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A.

[24] Jim Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A

Gantt confronted political decisions with honesty, a quality he felt the voters respected in him. "What I've noticed in Charlotte is that people believe me, they don't agree always with me," Gantt said. "But when I say it they believe it, they don't believe I'm putting them on. And they don't believe that I say things simply for political effect, having no meaning or substance to it."[25] Gantt did not try to obscure unfortunate political realities in Charlotte, and he felt that the potential political backlash for difficult decisions was softened by his direct approach. "You've got to communicate that… we've all got to sacrifice," Gantt said. "That's something politicians are reluctant to talk about. But if we respect the intelligence of the voters, then we ought to treat them as adults."[26] While Gantt did not wish to "dumb down" any of the issues, he realized that he was more versed in the major policy proposals than most citizens; it was his job to find a way to relay the importance of the major issues facing Charlotte. "I had a lot more information in my head and from the advisors around me than the average citizen," Gantt said. "But as mayor I shouldn't make a decision that the average citizen can't understand."[27]

Gantt's ability to work with the business community and developers in an effort to continue Charlotte's growth proved a point that Gantt and Mel Watt made repeatedly during the 1983 election: regardless of his race, Gantt was the most qualified candidate for the job. Like Stan Brookshire, John Belk, and Eddie Knox before him, Gantt was able to recruit business to the community and continue Charlotte's economic boom. Furthermore, Gantt established that he was not just the equal of previous mayors, but

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[25] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[26] Fred Tannenbaum, "Q&A with Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory and 3 former Mayors," *Mecklenburg Times*, August 18, 2009.
[27] Tannenbaum, "Q&A with Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory and 3 former Mayors," *Mecklenburg Times*, August 18, 2009.

even better suited for the job. Gantt's background in city planning provided a vital skill-set that previous mayors lacked, and his focus on balanced growth helped steer development towards communities that had previously missed out on Charlotte's growth.

Despite the perceived weakness of the position of mayor in Charlotte, Gantt realized that his presence on the city council, and later in the mayor's office, brought with it considerable power to reshape the city. When asked by a journalist what attracted him to the office, Gantt responded, "The ability to help [progress] unfold, to see a state where education is a top priority and people are literate, trained using the best of all resources, whether they are black or white, is important to me."[28] Gantt's ability to influence change in the community, especially in regards to directing growth and expansion, was a direct result of his experience in city planning.   "Harvey understood [the importance of planning] better than just about anybody," said Mel Watt. "He was the person who was taking on the development interests who wanted to grow everything to southeast Charlotte, put every resource in southeast Charlotte."[29] Gantt's advocacy for planned growth – directed in new avenues throughout the city – helped reshape Charlotte while appeasing both developers and neighborhood groups. On issues involving development and growth, key issues of the 1983 election, Gantt charted a successful path through difficult political terrain.

For Gantt, the work rarely stopped. His obligations to the city of Charlotte as mayor were compounded by his continued practice as an architect. As the position of

[28] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.
[29] Mel Watt interview. June 16, 1995. Interview number A-0397 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) at the Southern Historical Collection, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill

mayor was a part-time job, Gantt worked on projects at Gantt Huberman Associates throughout the week. One reporter observed, "Gantt runs both the mayor's office and his architectural practice by the simple expedient of sleeping very little." His business partner Jeff Huberman offered a similar portrait of Gantt. "He's a very high-energy person," Huberman said. "He likes to think he gets more done in the same time than most other people would."[30] Gantt was forced to adapt not only to a new work schedule, but an entirely new work environment. "I'm not used to conducting my business from behind a desk," he said at the time. "My normal work habits usually find me behind a drafting table."[31]

Gantt's obligations did not end at his various professional offices. In the years after Harvey and Lucinda Gantt returned to Charlotte, their family grew considerably. When Gantt was sworn in as mayor on December 5, 1983, his eldest child Sonja was a freshman at the University of North Carolina. Gantt's daughters Erika and Angela were enrolled at Piedmont Open Middle School; his youngest child Adam was in the second grade at Irwin Avenue Open Elementary School. The Gantts moved into an historic neighborhood in Second Ward, where they were neighbors with Mel Watt's family. Lucinda completed her bachelor's degree at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and became a certified public accountant, but ultimately decided it was best to stay at home and raise the Gantt children.

For the Gantt family, Harvey's position as mayor was just one more in a long line of responsibilities. "We're pretty low-key about the fact (he is mayor)," Lucinda said.

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[30] J.A.C. Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

[31] Ron Martz, "Charlotte's first black mayor is go-getter with low profile," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. 1A.

"To us, it's just another job, a responsibility to help in the community."[32] Harvey did his best to balance his work load with his family life, and sometimes found that task difficult. In the hours in which Gantt was not working, he tried to fit in quality time with his family, helping with the children's homework and chores around the house. Gantt claimed to require no more than five hours of sleep each night; in his free time he played tennis on a court in his backyard. Between obligations for the city and national events for various political organizations, Gantt's schedule was rarely open. "I have thought that if we had a full-time mayor then, I never would have run for mayor," Gantt said years later.[33] Between political, professional, and family obligations, there was little time for anything else.

And yet, beyond his duties to the city of Charlotte, his architecture firm, and his family, Gantt found himself with another crucial responsibility. For the second time in his life, Gantt was a civil rights celebrity. Following his victory in the 1983 election, Gantt was widely celebrated for becoming the first black mayor of Charlotte. Gantt's ascendance to the mayor's office was a source of pride for many of Charlotte's citizens, but his victory drew attention from political observers around the country. Within the Democratic Party, Gantt's victory was seen as a harbinger of potential success in the 1984 general election.[34]

Gantt's popularity was viewed as a boon to the chances of other Democrats in North Carolina. In 1984, Gantt endorsed a number of Democratic campaigns, including

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[32] Edie Low, "Family life, not politics, is priority for mayor's wife," *Charlotte News*, February 1, 1984. 3A.
[33] Tannenbaum, "Q&A with Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory and 3 former mayors," *Mecklenburg Times*, August 18, 2009.
[34] Gantt's victory was not the only major political victory at the mayoral level for African American candidates in 1983. With the election Harold Washington in Chicago and Wilson Goode in Philadelphia, Gantt was viewed as part of a broader trend in national politics.

David Grier Martin for the House of Representatives and James B. Hunt for the Senate. Gantt also endorsed his former predecessor Eddie Knox in his campaign for Governor of North Carolina. In a letter courting support for Knox, Gantt touted Knox's successful record in Charlotte and his ability to work with citizens in the black community.[35] The Knox campaign used photos of Gantt and Knox together as a means of drawing support throughout the state. A member of Knox's campaign staff wrote, "One of the key factors we're finding around the state of North Carolina is that Harvey Gantt is one very popular person."[36]

Gantt's importance to the Democratic Party spread beyond state lines. His victory in 1983, widely touted as a potential breakthrough that carried national implications, placed him in the spotlight as the 1984 general election neared. In a decision that upset some members of Charlotte's African American community, Gantt chose to support Walter Mondale rather than Jesse Jackson in the 1984 Democratic Primary for President. Gantt defended his decision, arguing that Jackson was a candidate with strong grassroots support, but ultimately a less viable candidate than Mondale.[37] "I'm an admirer of [Jackson's] courage, but that's not the basis on which to choose somebody for president," Gantt said at the time.[38] Mondale gave Gantt credit for helping win the primary in North Carolina. "I know you gave your all to the campaign, and I am grateful," Mondale wrote

[35] Harvey Gantt campaign letter for Eddie Knox (undated). Gantt Papers. Folder 1.22.

[36] Letter from Joe S. Epley to Harvey Gantt, April 3, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.22. When Knox was defeated in the Democratic Primary, Gantt supported the winner, then North Carolina Attorney General Rufus Edmisten. The 1984 Democratic Gubernatorial Primary in North Carolina was a messy affair with a great deal of political infighting. The experience ultimately caused Knox to switch party affiliation the following year.

[37] There is a certain level of irony in Gantt's decision. Following Gantt's 1979 campaign for mayor, both Gantt and Mel Watt felt that they may have been victorious had more citizens of Charlotte believed that Gantt's victory was even possible.

[38] Ted DeAdwyler, "Jesse Jackson: Many Like His Principles, Not His Chances," *Charlotte News*, January 27, 1984. 1A.

in a letter to Gantt. "Your hard work made our win possible."[39] Politicians around the country sought Gantt's advice and strategies for creating intersectional coalitions of voters. Following a meeting with Ted Kennedy to discuss issues plaguing urban communities, Kennedy wrote, "Your insights into problems of urban America will be very useful to me in my role as a U.S. Senator, and as I move around the country to campaign this fall."[40] Gantt was a rising star within the Democratic Party whose insights into multiracial voting coalitions were highly valued by national political operatives.

While Gantt lent a hand to his fellow politicians, his most pressing duty was to the citizens of Charlotte. As the city's first black mayor, Gantt faced an uncertain political landscape. Gantt's victory represented a true coalition, comprised of diverse groups with diverse expectations. As a result, each move for Gantt was into uncharted waters. "This election has meant so much to the black community," Mel Watt said in the days following Gantt's victory. "They wanted it so badly." However, Watt acknowledged that great expectations could cause difficulties for Gantt, as the dreams of the electorate met the realities of local politics. "It could be that some may be disillusioned when Harvey gets in there, with how little he really can do," he said. "I certainly hope not."[41] The black community in Charlotte looked to Gantt as an agent of change and expectations for his administration were high. With a supportive ear in the mayor's office, Charlotte's black voters hoped for stronger representation in the city's government.

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[39] Letter from Walter Mondale to Harvey Gantt, May 30, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.25.
[40] Letter from Edward M. Kennedy to Harvey Gantt, July 25, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.25.
[41] Kathleen Curry, "Making History," *Charlotte News*, December 6, 1983. 4A.

Although he stressed repeatedly that he was a mayor for all of Charlotte's citizens, Gantt tackled a number of issues that directly benefited the city's black community. One of the first projects that Gantt pursued after his election was the establishment of the Afro-American Cultural Center. Gantt served on the Board of Directors for the AACC before he took office as mayor and continued to work on the project after the 1983 election.[42] The city agreed to provide funding to renovate and restore the Old Little Rock AME Zion Church in the First Ward area of Charlotte for its use as the new AACC. In his effort to garner support for the project, Gantt reached out to a number of black church leaders in Charlotte. With the city offering to cover a substantial portion of the expenses, the endeavor represented a prime example of the public/private partnership that Gantt championed. Gantt framed the AACC as an integral part of a broader effort "to recall the memory of an era in Charlotte's history that has been lost due to urban renewal."[43]

Gantt was a staunch supporter of the city's Minority and Women Business Project, which sought qualified minority business owners to fulfill contracts for city projects.[44] Gantt also addressed a number of vital issues in the city that, while not directly involved with the black community, held the potential to benefit African Americans. Gantt initiated a special transit service for participants in city jobs programs, appropriated funding for neighborhood parks on Charlotte's west side, and approved renovations to Memorial Stadium, which hosted Johnson C. Smith University's sporting

[42] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Sammy Davis, Jr., December 19, 1983. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.01.
[43] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Bishop C.M. McCullough of the United House of Prayer, April 13, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.01.
[44] Minority and Women Business Program, City of Charlotte Annual Report, 1983-1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 2.19.

events.[45] Gantt repeatedly praised the city's well-integrated public school system, noting that it was a source of pride within the community. While much of Gantt's time as mayor was spent bridging the divide between developers and neighborhood groups, he was mindful of the importance of the black community – not only to his electoral fortunes, but to the health of the city of Charlotte.

Harvey Gantt occupied the mayor's office alone, but his success in the political arena was directly linked to the activism of previous generations in Charlotte. Gantt acknowledged the important work of earlier civil rights activists who helped pave the way for his own success, but he recognized key differences between his generation and that of the civil rights activists who preceded them. Gantt told one newspaper that he felt that the first African American political leaders elected after passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act were elected as "a kind of reward" for their service in the movement, but that attitudes had changed in the intervening decades. Gantt certainly viewed himself as more than a token figure in Charlotte politics. "Blacks wouldn't have elected me if I couldn't deal with the business community," he said. "Black voters aren't satisfied any longer with just having a black face in city hall. They want results."[46]

For Gantt, the success of Charlotte's predominantly African American communities, and the neighborhoods of the Fourth Ward in particular, was part of the broader platform of modernizing Charlotte. He was mindful of the importance of the black population in his multiracial coalition, but he realized that the entire city of Charlotte deserved his attention. And Gantt believed that African American voters

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[45] Gantt memo to Black Elected Officials, March 22, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.08.
[46] Linda Williams, "Different Mold: New Black Politicians, Skillful and Pragmatic, Transcend Civil Rights," *Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 1986. 1.

wanted more from him. Part of this belief was rooted in his work with Floyd McKissick at Soul City, where Gantt saw firsthand the political pitfalls that accompanied more aggressive racial politics. Rather than focusing on potentially divisive issues, Gantt identified controlled growth and resource allocation as the predominant issues facing Charlotte in the 1980s. As he acknowledged at the time, "These are not black-white issues."[47]

It would be disingenuous to suggest that Gantt downplayed issues that faced the black community in Charlotte, but as the public face of the city, with a vested interest in presenting Charlotte in a positive light, Gantt celebrated what he saw as favorable race relations in the city. At a celebration honoring Martin Luther King Day just one month after taking office as the city's first black mayor, Gantt framed the struggles of the civil rights movement as primarily in the past, saying

> "The memory of Dorothy Count's experiences trying to desegregate Central High in the late 50s grows vague in the minds of many. The civil rights songs of Johnson C. Smith students preparing to march for the right to public accommodations has faded for many. The valiant effort of city fathers to integrate Charlotte's restaurants with black leaders in the early 60s is recounted only by those 40 years and older today. And yet all of those events were steps toward the moderate and more tolerant climate we know today."[48]

Indeed, many in Charlotte pointed to Gantt's election as a clear indication that race relations were no longer a problem in the city. While it was surely a symbolic moment for the city, Gantt cautioned against painting his election as the end of racism in Charlotte. "I have to keep stressing that racism is still here," Gantt told one reporter. "It

[47] Williams, "Different Mold: New Black Politicians, Skillful and Pragmatic, Transcend Civil Rights," *Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 1986. 1.
[48] Harvey Gantt speech at Martin Luther King Day Services at First United Methodist Church, January 15, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.15.

isn't gone."[49] However, Gantt offered an optimistic, hopeful appraisal of the city that suggested that Charlotte's worst moments of racial tension were behind it.

Gantt's representation of Charlotte's civil rights history was generally accurate, but some in the community felt less enthusiastic about the state of affairs. As the honeymoon period following his election wore off, Gantt found himself in a difficult position with regards to the expectations of Charlotte's black community. Although many felt Gantt's election was a sign of a changing racial climate in the city, Gantt never explicitly campaigned on predominantly black issues. That his inclusion of issues that affected Charlotte's black community separated him from his competition in the 1983 election says as much about Ed Peacock's campaign as it does Gantt's.

Nevertheless, the impression remained that Gantt was "the black mayor." Asked about Gantt's record at the time, a local African American barber said, "We thought we had a person in there who would speak up for blacks and know blacks' needs, and we don't. Our expectations maybe were too high."[50] Some accused Gantt of focusing too heavily on issues that concerned Charlotte's business community or affluent white neighborhoods of the southeast area of the city. A local truck driver told one reporter that, rather than involving the black community in business and government affairs, Gantt was "pushing downtown on us."[51]

Gantt acknowledged issues that faced the black community in Charlotte, but he also encouraged more accountability on the part of the city's African American citizens. "We need programs that require people to take some responsibility for who they are," he

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[49] Charles Whitaker, "Harvey Gantt," *Ebony*. April, 1986. 94, 96.
[50] Jim Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A, 16A.
[51] Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A, 16A.

said. "A lot of us are concerned about families, teen-age pregnancy and drugs. It's difficult to blame the entire problem on discrimination."[52] At the same time, Gantt warned of a growing divide between wealthy and working-class African Americans. Echoing the 1968 Kerner Report, which warned of a potential splintering of American society along racial lines, Gantt described his concerns about internal class divisions within the black community. "The fact is that all of the progress made today has been at the expense of the least among us," he said. "Even at this moment, there are two Black Americas."[53] As a wealthy, successful African American, Gantt urged others to contribute what they could to community development, and suggested that those with means owed it to the community to stay involved.

Realizing the political tightrope that accompanied the disparate expectations of his constituents, Gantt and his allies tried to temper some of the expectations of Charlotte's black community. Robert Albright, then president of Johnson C. Smith University, said, "I think one has to realize that Harvey did not campaign and run on a platform as a black mayor. He ran as a qualified individual who happens to be black."[54] Gantt framed the issues of the African American community, chiefly better housing and job opportunities, as integral issues of the broader Charlotte metropolitan area. "I think by and large the black community trusts that [my] instincts and my bent in favor of a public policy that would be fair to them have not diminished at all," he said.[55] Throughout his tenure as mayor, Gantt maintained that his seemingly race-free economic

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[52] Williams, "Different Mold: New Black Politicians, Skillful and Pragmatic, Transcend Civil Rights," *Wall Street Journal*, January 9, 1986. 12.
[53] Gantt speech at the Charleston Grand Reunion, Charleston, SC. July 6, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.
[54] Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A, 16A. Gantt Papers Folder 1.08.
[55] Morrill, "Gantt Emerges As Quiet Persuader Amid Murmurs Of Criticism," *Charlotte Observer*, August 12, 1984. 1A, 16A.

plans would ultimately benefit the African American community as much as any community in Charlotte; the *Washington Post* later described Gantt as a “trickle-down Democrat.”[56] While his stance frustrated some black citizens of Charlotte, Gantt maintained that his commitment to balanced growth and careful city planning would pay dividends for the black community. “What I’m talking about with growth management is the reallocation of resources so that we can make some inroads for black people,” he said.[57]

His campaigns for the city council and the mayor’s office relied on heavy turnout from Charlotte’s black citizens, and Gantt successfully courted their votes for over a decade. But he also benefited from perceptions of white voters that resulted in a race-free image of Gantt. Robert Alston, president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League, suggested that since Gantt was “articulate and successful,” it made him “somehow an exception to the rule” in the eyes of white voters.[58] Ron Leeper, one of three African Americans on the city council during Gantt’s tenure as mayor, offered a similar impression of Gantt. “Harvey has the kind of personality that has allowed him to transcend racial lines in a way that few of us have been able to do,” he said.[59] While Gantt fought for issues that were important to the black community, he often found himself walking a fine line as a result of the divergent expectations of various groups within Charlotte, torn between accusations of doing too much or not enough.

[56] Harris, “Harvey Gantt’s Fight To The Finish,” *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.
[57] Whitaker, “Harvey Gantt,” *Ebony*. April, 1986. 96.
[58] Whitaker, “Harvey Gantt,” *Ebony*. April, 1986. 94.
[59] Whitaker, “Harvey Gantt,” *Ebony*. April, 1986. 92.

Gantt spent much of his first term in office bridging divides between various interest groups in Charlotte. Whether it was the growing rift between developers and neighborhood organizations or the varying expectations of white and black citizens, Gantt directly confronted issues which festered during previous administrations. While he was able to address a number of political issues unique to Charlotte, Gantt also encountered more traditional political obstacles. Along with contentious issues like traffic congestion and taxes, Gantt wrestled with the conflict between his image as a consensus mayor and his role as a partisan Democratic politician. As Gantt's first term as mayor drew to a close, a number of political obstacles sullied Gantt's claim of an entirely successful first term and threatened his prospects for re-election.

On October 8, 1984, Gantt experienced one of his first minor controversies as mayor. President Ronald Reagan, seeking his second term in office, selected Charlotte as one of his campaign stops.[60] The Reagan campaign staff invited former mayor Eddie Knox to greet President Reagan at Douglas International Airport and join in the president's program.[61] Gantt was called the day before the event by Ralph McMillan, a former Republican city councilman, about the President's visit. As the trip was part of a partisan political event – featuring other Republican politicians such as Jesse Helms – Gantt and McMillan agreed it would be best if Gantt did not attend.[62]

Gantt's decision not to attend the Reagan campaign rally illuminates the difficult political realities that confronted his every move. The response from outraged residents

[60] The visit was designed to boost the political fortunes of North Carolina Republicans, like Senator Jesse Helms, who were in tough campaign battles in the Fall of 1984.
[61] Following his loss in the Democratic Party gubernatorial primary in a run-off vote, Knox was involved with the Democrats for Reagan-Bush organization. Although technically a Democrat at the time, Knox was much more conservative than Gantt and ultimately switched party affiliation in 1985.
[62] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Samuel A. Wilson, III, Chairman of the Mecklenburg Republican Party, January 2, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.25.

of Charlotte was swift; in letters to the mayor's office, they declared their revulsion at Gantt's supposed "snubbing" of President Reagan. "Common courtesy and protocol should motivate you to forget personal political differences and represent the city to which you were elected: to represent ALL the people," wrote one Charlotte resident.[63] The coalition that Gantt and Mel Watt constructed in 1983 was impressive, but it could not sustain the loss of any individual constituency. In many ways, white moderates in Charlotte felt that Gantt served at their discretion.[64] "As a registered Republican, I voted for you on a non-partisan basis and would hope to be represented by you in the same manner," wrote one citizen. "Today, politics took precedence over proper manners."[65] A conservative Charlottean who decried Gantt's actions pointed out that they crossed party lines to vote for Gantt, writing, "Although I am a registered Republican, I, along with a lot of Republicans voted for you and what we thought you stood for in breaking down old prejudices and outdated ideas."[66] In a reply to the many complaints sent to his office, Gantt said, "If [the President's] visit had been on official business, I assure you that partisan politics would not have been an issue and I would have gladly welcomed him to the City and made him feel at home."[67]

Gantt successfully navigated the potential controversy – with the help of Ronald Reagan's own political blunder at the rally, no less – but the response of Charlotte's citizens reveals a great deal about the political climate within the city.[68] If conservative

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[63] Letter from William T. Mauney Jr., to Harvey Gantt, October 7, 1984. Gantt Papers, UNCC. 1.25 - 07
[64] Matthew Lassiter devotes much of *The Silent Majority* to the rise of the suburban "ethos of color-blind individualism" in metropolitan areas of the South. Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2007).
[65] Letter from Mrs. Chrysler to Harvey Gantt, October 8, 1984. Gantt Papers, UNCC. 1.25 – 08
[66] Letter from Starr S. Hill to Harvey Gantt, October 8, 1984. Gantt Papers, UNCC. 1.25 - 11
[67] Letter from Harvey Gantt, October 16, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.25.
[68] While Reagan encountered a receptive conservative audience at the event, he was met with silence following his statement that busing led to a scenario in which children were involved in a "social

and moderate voters in Charlotte, many of whom were white, felt ownership of Gantt's campaign, they were not entirely wrong. Gantt would not have won the 1983 election without a coalition of voters across racial, political, and economic lines. Gantt was as beholden to the white citizens of Charlotte as he was to the black community; each demographic in his coalition was essential. As demonstrated by the response of Charlotte's media outlets to victory in 1983, Gantt's candidacy was viewed as an opportunity for the white citizens of Charlotte, across the political spectrum, to vote in a manner that confirmed their own impressions of their city as a racially moderate metropolis. With their good deed in the books, some threatened to abandon Gantt at the first sign of trouble.

While the controversy of Reagan's visit subsided, the daily realities of political service left Gantt with difficult decisions regarding the city's future. Beyond the traditional political divide between Republicans and Democrats, Gantt also faced gridlock when dealing with state and federal agencies. Issues such as transportation and taxation posed serious threats to Gantt's political success and prompted tough choices from the mayor's office.

Gantt did not promise easy solutions for Charlotte's traffic problem in his 1983 campaign for mayor. From his experience on the city council, Gantt knew well that a quick fix was nearly impossible. The city simply grew too quickly for existing infrastructure to meet new traffic demands; road construction and expansion were necessary just to keep pace. Gantt campaigned as an advocate for planned, coordinated

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experiment that nobody wants." Despite their relatively conservative politics beliefs, Charlotte's citizens were proud of their integrated school system.

growth precisely because of the nature of expansion in the previous decade, which was in large part concentrated solely in the southeastern parts of Charlotte. Gantt's message resonated with voters who found themselves spending an hour or more in traffic every day. As residents moved further away from the city center into Charlotte's burgeoning suburbs, commuter traffic became an increasingly dire situation.

One of the complicating factors that prevented Gantt from addressing traffic more directly was the fact that the bulk of the responsibility for the busiest highways and interstates lay with state and federal agencies. The expansion of Independence Boulevard (US-74), which was approved while Gantt was on the city council, represented the most vital transportation project in Charlotte in the mid-1980s. Over the course of six months in 1983, three administrators with the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) resigned. Despite assurances after each departure that the project would continue as planned, Gantt and city leaders within Charlotte found themselves faced with uncertainty regarding the Independence Boulevard expansion. Gantt considered the expansion Charlotte's "number one transportation need" and Charlotte voters approved $8 million in local spending for the project, but turnover within the UMTA left Gantt and others within Charlotte to believe that the project may have to start over from scratch. As Charlotte's new mayor, Gantt reached out to Congressman James G. Martin for aid, writing, "We apparently are faced with the possibility that the project will be delayed or, worse yet, never constructed."[69] Traffic congestion posed a serious threat to Charlotte's continued success, but Gantt faced major hurdles in securing new projects to alleviate the issue.

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[69] Letter from Gantt to Congressman James Martin, April 16, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.16.

Making matters worse for Gantt was a national push for austerity measures.[70] Previous city leadership relied on financial assistance with road maintenance from state and federal governments, but serious budget cuts threatened to curtail Charlotte's expansion. "With declining financial participation from Washington and Raleigh, local governments are having to tighten their belts," Gantt lamented.[71] Seeking aid in dealing with Charlotte's budget issues, Gantt appealed to United States Senators John P. East and Jesse Helms for support in navigating the changing federal landscape. Gantt wrote to both men for support in retaining the United States Small Business Administration's [Section 503 Certified Development Company Loan Program] loan programs in Charlotte, which Gantt credited with supplying funding for over five million dollars in construction projects and two hundred and twelve permanent jobs in the city.[72] While Senator East conveyed his sympathies for Gantt's predicament, the response from Senator Helms offered little hope for continued aid to Charlotte.[73] "Keep in mind that every program has its beneficiaries and supporters," Helms wrote. "We've got to be fair, but we have some tough choices ahead."[74]

The "tough choices" of which Helms spoke caused serious political problems for Gantt. The success of his 1983 mayoral campaign was itself evidence of the problems facing Charlotte; voters responded to Gantt's call for balanced growth precisely because of the unintended complications of prior expansion. The citizens of Charlotte widely

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[70] One of the major symbols of the general atmosphere of austerity measures in the mid-1980s was the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget Act of 1985, which counted as co-sponsor former South Carolina Governor and then-Senator Fritz Hollings.
[71] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Elwood M. Wilcox. February 19, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.
[72] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Jesse Helms, United States Senator, April 19, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.
[73] Letter from John P. East to Harvey Gantt, April 22, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29. (the letter is incorrectly dated 1986)
[74] Letter from Jesse Helms to Harvey Gantt, April 30, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 1.29.

supported new growth, but they pushed back against inconveniences caused by that growth. Gantt's proposals found receptive audiences in communities overrun with construction problems and plagued by traffic congestion, but austerity measures undermined Gantt's ability to deal with Charlotte's infrastructure problems. For Gantt, the message from North Carolina's Senators was clear: in dealing with funding concerns, particularly in regards to transportation problems, the city of Charlotte was largely on its own.

As Gantt and the Charlotte City Council felt the effects of national austerity measures, options for addressing tightening budgets were limited. In an effort to keep vital infrastructure projects afloat, Gantt supported a number of tax initiatives in the growing Charlotte metropolitan area. Gantt was well aware of the potential political fallout from such a decision; taxation was a major issue between Gantt and Peacock during the 1983 campaign, and while Gantt professed his support for new taxes, the implementation of those new taxes carried serious political consequences. Despite the danger, Gantt viewed new tax revenue as the only way to address "federal cutbacks, mounting operation costs, and unanticipated emergencies."[75] If the citizens of Charlotte wanted to continue the city's growth and expansion, they would have to collectively pay the bills.

Throughout 1985, Gantt sought new avenues of income with which to pursue necessary infrastructure projects. One of the first tax initiatives that Gantt supported was a proposed local income tax, often referred to as the payroll tax. Gantt was instructed by members of the North Carolina General Assembly that a local income tax stood the best

[75] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Douglas Bartlam. February 19, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.

chance of passing given the political climate in the state.[76] Local business owners quickly denounced the idea, suggesting that a local income tax would adversely affect the city's growth. A representative of Barclays American Financial suggested that any politician supporting the tax "should surely be turned out of office at the earliest opportunity."[77] In letters to Gantt, business owners strongly denounced the idea as a potential business-killer. "If the local income tax were in place at the time of the location decision," wrote one local businessman, "Charlotte would probably not have been at the top of our list."[78] Even Hugh McColl, Chairman of NCNB and a vocal Gantt supporter, discouraged the mayor from his pursuit of the local income tax. However, McColl acknowledged that Gantt faced a serious political dilemma. "I realize there are no simple answers for financing a city," McColl said. "I am glad you have to solve this and not me."[79]

The backlash to the idea for a local income tax forced Gantt and the city council to abandon the idea, but Gantt was determined to find new sources of income to keep infrastructure projects on schedule. Gantt investigated the possibility of a gasoline tax, which would theoretically place the burden of infrastructure improvements on the many daily commuters into the city. Gantt and other city leaders in Charlotte contacted politicians across the state, from Governor Martin to the mayors of other urban centers, in an effort to gauge the political viability of the potential gas tax.[80] When word reached the

[76] Letter from Harvey Gantt to the Honorable John W. Forbis, Mayor of Greensboro. March 21, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.
[77] Letter from Kenneth A. Black, Sr. Vice President and Controller at Barclays American Financial, to Harvey Gantt. February 29, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9
[78] Letter from William E. Kopatich, Plant Manager of Verbatim Corporation, to Harvey Gantt. February 24, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9
[79] Letter from Hugh L. McColl, Jr., Chairman of the Board of NCNB, to Harvey Gantt. February 24, 1984. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9
[80] Memo from Harvey Gantt to City Councilmembers, March 8, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.

public of another attempt by Gantt and the city council to push for new taxes, citizens from across Charlotte voiced strong opposition. Gantt did his best to persuade Charlotte residents of the importance of new funding for city projects, and openly admitted that city leadership found itself in a difficult situation. "I agree… that elected officials can sometimes get carried away with the notion of progress and forget about the dollar impact on the common man's tax bill," Gantt wrote in response to one disgruntled citizen.[81]

Beyond the negative response from citizens, Gantt faced serious threat from Republican attacks on tax issues. "There have been people who have come up to me and said, 'You poor thing, the Republicans are going to kill you for this,'" Gantt said at the time. "But I know what I'm doing. I have to do this because I want people talking about this issue, about what we're going to have to do in the future." And as Gantt pointed out at every opportunity, he and the city council were merely discussing the tax with the General Assembly. "We will get into the real issues on the tax later," Gantt said, "and we definitely would put it to a vote before the community."[82]

Despite the political danger, Gantt never shied away from speaking frankly with Charlotte's citizens about the need for new revenue. In one of his weekly "Ask the Mayor" segments on WTVI, Gantt addressed the difficult choices facing the citizens of Charlotte. "We can hold the line on the budget this year," Gantt said, "but with continued growth, and a loss of federal funds such as revenue sharing, we will be faced with the future choice of either raising more revenue, or cutting services."[83] Gantt argued throughout his tenure as mayor that new taxes were necessary not only to maintain

[81] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Carl L. Polk. February 19, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.
[82] Kathleen Curry, "Mayor Stands Virtually Alone On Heated Issue In Election Year," *Charlotte Observer*, April 3, 1985. 1A.
[83] "Ask the Mayor" transcript, June 26, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.15.

Charlotte, but to propel the city forward. "We must realize the dollar value of turning our dreams into a reality," Gantt wrote. [84] The public projects that Charlotte citizens craved – the new coliseum, road improvements, new parks and public spaces – required new sources of tax revenue, and Gantt faced serious political consequences in his quest to provide new revenue streams. But it was not in Gantt's nature to back down in the face of difficult choices. As his friend and former campaign advisor Mel Watt said, "I never have known Harvey to take into account the political implications of anything he thought was important."[85]

In addition to his defense of relatively unpopular tax initiatives, Gantt employed another effective tool for increasing the city's tax base: North Carolina's relatively loose annexation laws. As the greater Charlotte metropolitan area grew in both population and economic potential, the city limits expanded into surrounding towns and unincorporated areas. Annexation was a solution that carried its own problems; the expansion of the tax base brought with it an influx of citizens that were often flummoxed by annexation. Many of them lived beyond the city limits by design. Gantt hoped that the use of city services would outweigh any grudges against the mayor and city government, but political observers at the time noted serious political risk for Gantt.[86]

Despite continued problems with traffic congestion and unpopular tax initiatives, Gantt entered the 1985 mayoral race with a number of reasons for optimism. By the end of his first term, Charlotte was thriving. Gantt touted significant economic growth in

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[84] Letter from Harvey Gantt to J.T. Hutchison. February 13, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.9.
[85] Curry, "Mayor Stands Virtually Alone On Heated Issue In Election Year," *Charlotte Observer*, April 3, 1985. 1A.
[86] Hunter James, "Odds Get Tougher As Charlotte Mayor Faces Re-Election." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. September 1, 1985. 4C.

Charlotte, with one out of every ten jobs in North Carolina in Mecklenburg County.[87] In the decade after Gantt joined the city council, the city of Charlotte grew exponentially, adding roughly 1,500 new companies and 28,000 new jobs. By September 1985, the unemployment rate in Charlotte stood at three percent.[88] During his first term, Gantt and the city council oversaw the beginning of construction of the new Charlotte Coliseum as well as renovations to the Mint Museum and the Hezekiah Alexander House. The city of Charlotte cemented itself as the region's largest banking and financial center. In short, the city's growth continued unabated in Gantt's first term. He was unable to achieve victory in every political battle, but his support for issues that were important to Charlotte's citizens helped bolster his reputation as a mayor for all of Charlotte rather than the business community alone.

Opposing Gantt in 1985 was city council member Dave Berryhill.[89] Berryhill emerged from a tough battle with fellow Councilmember Sue Myrick in the Republican Primary, ultimately prevailing by just forty-one votes.[90] In the primary, Berryhill and Myrick spent much of their debate time attacking Gantt and his policies. Like Ed Peacock before him, Berryhill was a pro-business conservative who advocated for less spending from the municipal government. While Peacock switched from a Democrat to a Republican in 1968, Berryhill's party-swap occurred less than a year before the election.

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[87] Harvey Gantt speech, "A Case For Change in the Way We Support Our Future," October 3, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.

[88] William E. Schmidt, "Black Mayor Favored for Re-Election in Charlotte," *New York Times*. November 2, 1985. 8.

[89] Like so many residents of Charlotte, and his opponent Harvey Gantt, Berryhill was not a native-born Charlottean, having moved to Charlotte with his family as a young boy from Greer, SC.

[90] Ted Mellnik, "Berryhill's Margin Cut to 41 in Mayoral Race," *Charlotte Observer*. September 26, 1985. 1C.

Some Gantt supporters felt that Berryhill's entrance into the mayoral race, so soon after his switch to the Republican Party, implied a racial motivation.[91]

Forecasts for the election were mixed from the start. While the Gantt campaign was optimistic, some political observers expected a close race in Charlotte. The continuing problem of traffic congestion and the tax plans that Gantt embraced to help address declining federal and state funding threatened Gantt's claims to a fully successful first term. "Five months before he plans to file for election to a second term, Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt is pushing an idea candidates usually avoid as political anathema – new taxes," wrote one reporter.[92] Pundits cited a number of potential obstacles to reelection for Gantt, including the political ramifications of extensive annexation and "5,000 disgruntled suburbanites who often tend to vote against incumbents."[93] Jerry Ingalls, a Gantt supporter affiliated with the Mecklenburg Democratic Party, said, "(Gantt) can be beaten. He's going to have to run a very strong race and get organized in order to win."[94] Despite Gantt's ability to effectively deliver on the promises of his first mayoral campaign, he faced serious obstacles in his reelection bid. One reporter called Berryhill "an even bet to make Gantt the first *former* black mayor of a major North Carolina city."[95]

While there was indeed cause for concern, Gantt felt confident in his record and his ability to outshine his opponent. The Gantt campaign employed many of the same

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[91] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 233.
[92] Curry, "Mayor Stands Virtually Alone On Heated Issue In Election Year," *Charlotte Observer*, April 3, 1985. 1A.
[93] James, "Odds Get Tougher As Charlotte Mayor Faces Re-Election." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. September 1, 1985. 4C.
[94] Ted Mellnik and Ken Eudy. "Gantt Faces Spirited Competition In Bid For 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. July 23, 1985.
[95] James, "Odds Get Tougher As Charlotte Mayor Faces Re-Election." *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*. September 1, 1985. 4C.

tactics that worked in 1983, such as the mobilization of neighborhood groups and the use of computers for organizing voter data. Although Gantt's 1983 campaign was largely built around his governing potential, by 1985 Gantt had a record of success on which he could lean. And he still had his winning personality: one campaign strategy was as simple as "getting on stage with [Berryhill]."[96]

As with his 1983 campaign, Gantt benefitted from support from major business leaders in Charlotte in 1985. Hugh McColl, Jr., Chairman of the Board of North Carolina National Bank, was a vocal supporter who touted the achievements of Gantt's first term. Noting the particular difficulties that confronted Gantt and the city council following federal austerity measures, McColl said, "I think the combination of the staff, council, and mayor have done a good job in managing the financial affairs of the city in the face of reduced federal support."[97] Worth Williamson, President of First Charlotte Bank, said, "I think [Gantt] has done a good job in trying to bring various big business interests into the community."[98] The general consensus among Charlotte's business community was that Gantt followed through with his earlier promises of continued growth and deserved another term as mayor.

Gantt received crucial support from sources beyond the business community as well. The editors of the *Charlotte Observer* endorsed Gantt, criticizing the negativity of Berryhill's campaign. "Leadership is having the courage, as Mayor Gantt does, to raise the tough issues," they wrote.[99] Both Democrats and Republicans on the city council noted Gantt's success in establishing a strong working relationship within the city

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[96] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 233.
[97] Alden Clark, "Should Harvey Gantt Be Re-Elected?" *Charlotte*, August 1985, 24.
[98] Clark, "Should Harvey Gantt Be Re-Elected?" *Charlotte*, August 1985, 24.
[99] "For Mayor: Gantt Deserves 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. October 30, 1985.

government. Walter Shapiro, a Charlotte neighborhood leader, said Gantt "brought an enlightened and magnetic force to the mayorship."[100] Even with Charlotte's traffic issues and Gantt's relatively unpopular tax proposals, he proved an effective, popular, and respected mayor.

In an effort to chip away at Gantt's substantial support, Berryhill attempted to portray the mayor as an ineffectual leader. Indeed, Berryhill's campaign slogan, "A Return to Leadership," implied that Gantt's tenure as mayor was somehow illegitimate or lacking in real leadership, an implication that angered some Gantt supporters. [101] "[Gantt's] so-called leadership is promotional rather than productive," Berryhill said, "and I intend to hold him accountable for the serious lapses which have become so apparent during his administration." [102] Berryhill argued that Gantt's delay in the coliseum location decision cost the city $20 million in potential revenue. [103] "We're like a ship adrift on the ocean," Berryhill said. "I want to do something about it." [104]

Berryhill was not alone in attacking Gantt's performance. Ed Peacock, Gantt's opponent in the 1983 election, called Gantt "the first mayor of Charlotte for whom containing the cost of government is of little concern."[105] Former city councilman Ralph McMillan employed a similar line of attack in his criticism of Gantt. "I think [Gantt] has made big mistakes that have cost the taxpayers," McMillan said.[106] Jim Cole, a prominent supporter of Berryhill's campaign, openly criticized Gantt's performance as

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[100] Clark, "Should Harvey Gantt Be Re-Elected?" *Charlotte*, August 1985, 24.
[101] Edds, *Free At Last*. 206.
[102] Mellnik, "Berryhill Vows To Ignore Opponent's Barbs," *Charlotte Observer*. August 1, 1985.
[103] Ted Mellnik and Ken Eudy. "Gantt Faces Spirited Competition In Bid For 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. July 23, 1985.
[104] Mellnik, "Dave Berryhill Campaigns on Stronger Leadership," *Charlotte Observer*. September 10, 1985.
[105] Clark, "Should Harvey Gantt Be Re-Elected?" *Charlotte*, August 1985, 24.
[106] Clark, "Should Harvey Gantt Be Re-Elected?" *Charlotte*, August 1985, 24.

mayor with an approach that provoked charges of racial undertones. "To me Gantt has a certain cockiness," he said. "[Gantt has] a laid-back Cheshire cat smile that doesn't always go over too well."[107] Cole even suggested that Gantt's personality might be more of a liability for the incumbent mayor than any of the more traditional campaign issues. Bill Culp, a Democratic election supervisor for Mecklenburg County, was just one of the Gantt supporters who took exception to Cole's comments. "Cole wouldn't have said that if Gantt had been white," Culp said. "If he had been white, Jim would have described that as 'assertive' or 'aggressive.'"[108]

Coincidentally, both campaigns took steps to avoid overt questions about race. Gantt recognized that race would always play a factor, but he knew any semblance of racial animosity could prove disastrous for his unique coalition. In an effort to assuage any lingering white fears of a black mayor, Gantt supporters highlighted his broad appeal and ability to work across race and class lines. "(Gantt) has transcended the perception of being a black mayor," said Jim Black, the Gantt campaign's head of public relations. "He goes into all areas of the city."[109] Likewise, the Berryhill campaign downplayed the role of race in the upcoming election. When asked why he believed that race had no bearing, Berryhill responded, "The very fact that he was elected mayor of Charlotte tells you that."[110] Ted Arrington, a professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, argued that neither side held a political advantage on race issues in Charlotte. "Because [Gantt] is black, some people will vote for him no matter what, and

[107] James, "Odds get toucher as Charlotte mayor faces re-election," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 1, 1985. 4C.
[108] James, "Odds get toucher as Charlotte mayor faces re-election," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 1, 1985. 4C.
[109] Ted Mellnik and Ken Eudy. "Gantt Faces Spirited Competition In Bid For 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. July 23, 1985.
[110] James, "Odds get toucher as Charlotte mayor faces re-election," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 1, 1985. 4C.

some will vote against him no matter what," he said.[111] While some Gantt supporters bristled at Beryhill's attack on Gantt's leadership, Berryhill's method of attack centered more on his portrayal of Gantt as a stereotypical "tax and spend" liberal than on his race. Racially charged issues, such as Berryhill's repeated criticism of the construction of new bus-shelters in inner-city neighborhoods, played a role in the 1985 election, but they proved largely ineffectual in chipping away at Gantt's lead in the polls.

As the campaigns transitioned from the primaries to the general election, early polling showed Gantt as the clear favorite. In a poll conducted by the *Charlotte Observer*, Gantt led Berryhill by nearly forty points in early October. With less than a month until the election, Berryhill's attacks seemed to make little dent in Gantt's approval rating. Despite the woeful polling numbers, Berryhill attempted to show confidence in his chances. "The poll that counts is going to be on November 5," he said.[112] However, with strong support from the business community, continued engagement among African American voters, and the *Charlotte Observer*'s endorsement of Gantt, Berryhill had his work cut out for him.

In an effort to make up ground, Berryhill sought to tie Gantt to the issues of traffic congestion and increased taxes, issues on which Charlotte voters held negative opinions. Berryhill brought up a 1977 city council vote on a potential outerbelt freeway in which Gantt voted against the project, implying Gantt was unconcerned with Charlotte's ever-growing traffic issues. Gantt, in his sometimes overly academic style, defended his vote with a detailed explanation of the impact of new freeways from a city-planning

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[111] Ted Mellnik and Ken Eudy. "Gantt Faces Spirited Competition In Bid For 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. July 23, 1985.
[112] Mellnik, "Gantt Leads Berryhill In Poll: Mayor Preferred By 63% Of Respondents," *Charlotte Observer*. October 8, 1985. 1A.

perspective, arguing that a southern outerbelt would only exacerbate traffic concerns in that area.[113] Berryhill also tried to frame Gantt as a "tax and spend" Democrat that did not have the interests of working people in mind.[114] Whether it was a lack of charisma in messaging on Berryhill's part or general voter apathy toward the issues, Gantt's lead remained solid in the weeks before the election despite Berryhill's attacks. With Gantt's ability to weather the political storm surrounding traffic and taxes, and few opportunities for the Berryhill campaign to deploy racial wedge issues, Gantt proved to be a formidable opponent.

Unlike in the 1983 election, Gantt was able to run on a practical record rather than just governing potential in his re-election campaign. Throughout the campaign, and indeed throughout his entire tenure as mayor, Gantt touted his ability to serve as an open and honest politician with an innate ability to bring about compromise. "There is a lot more communication in this town than in a lot of other places," Gantt said. "It's just as important as getting the community to attract new industry, build the next highrise, build the next park. When you've got the people sort of working together you can get them to put away their thing for our thing, that is the city."[115] Gantt made a strong and convincing case that his re-election was in the best interests of the entire community.

The 1985 election was repeatedly touted as a referendum on Gantt's performance in his first term. When the results arrived on the night of November 5, 1985, Gantt's leadership was vindicated. Again drawing on heavy support from the African American community, Gantt was victorious by a much wider margin than he achieved in the 1983

[113] Mellnik, "Berryhill Links Tax, Mayor's Race," *Charlotte Observer*. October 16, 1985. 1F.
[114] Mellnik, "Berryhill, Gantt Clash Over Taxes, Traffic Woes," *Charlotte Observer*. October 25, 1985. 6D.
[115] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

election. African American voters turned out in staggering numbers, with Gantt pulling in over 90% of the black vote. The results among white voters were even more extraordinary given the circumstances. Gantt won 40.3% of the vote in districts that were over 90% white in 1983; that number climbed to 57.5% in 1985.[116] However, compared to the 1983 election, overall voter participation was down, dropping from 51% of registered voters in 1983 to around 30% in 1985.[117] Gantt's re-election was a resounding victory, with the city of Charlotte providing an undeniable vote of confidence in his leadership.

Gantt's resounding victory suggested serious popularity for both Gantt and his agenda. While the citizens of Charlotte were widely opposed to his tax initiatives, his pursuit of new revenue did little to harm his popularity with voters. Perhaps most importantly, Gantt proved in his first term that he could indeed be a mayor for all of Charlotte. His ability to work with business leaders and neighborhood organizations fostered a sense of good will and a cooperative spirit in city government. Likewise, Gantt's ability to address issues facing the African American community without ostracizing white voters belied a natural gift for consensus leadership. Much as it had been in 1983, the traffic issue remained a serious problem by the 1985 election. Furthermore, Gantt's tax proposals, on which he found little traction, provoked a decidedly negative response from the citizens of Charlotte. And yet, Gantt not only emerged unscathed from those issues, he increased his margin of victory, ultimately leading some in Charlotte to refer to Gantt as the "Teflon Mayor."

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[116] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 236.
[117] Ken Eudy and Ted Mellnik. "Gantt Surges To Victory In Charlotte Mayor's Race," *Charlotte Observer*. November 6, 1985. 1A.

As Gantt emerged from the 1985 election focused on his second term, he saw an opportunity within Charlotte. Gantt proved that he could serve as an ample steward of the city of Charlotte and succeeded in the continuance of the city's economic ascendance. With his leadership style vindicated by the 1985 election, Gantt sought new opportunities for Charlotte and tested the limits of progress in a New South metropolis.

Chapter Seven

Mayor Gantt's Second Term, 1985-1987

When Harvey Gantt spoke before the gathered crowd at Charlotte's Spirit Square on December 2, 1985, he did so with the confidence only an electoral landslide can instill. Throughout the 1985 campaign, Gantt framed his first term as mayor of Charlotte as an unquestionable success, with both practical economic growth and progress toward a more representative city government. The results of the 1985 mayoral election in Charlotte signaled broad support for Gantt's agenda throughout the city. Gantt won almost every demographic of the electorate, a reflection of his ability to unite and provide compromise between disparate interest groups. As Gantt was sworn-in for a second term as mayor, his future, both in Charlotte and in politics, appeared bright.

Gantt delivered his speech that evening in Uptown Charlotte with one eye on the past and another on the future. "There is often the need to continue the development of older programs and initiatives that require time for implementation," Gantt said. "Old Councils of years past have put in place many new programs, ideas, ordinances and plans that need continual reinforcement, implementation, and follow-through."[1] Gantt hoped to continue the policies of his first term as well as effective policies implemented by previous mayors. He also acknowledged the realities of electoral politics, particularly the fact that his second term would feature an altered city council. Noting the contributions of four previous city council members who did not win reelection, Gantt urged new and continuing members of the council to help in his effort to lead Charlotte into the future. "Newness denotes not only continuation of the heritage," Gantt said, "but a willingness to

[1] Gantt speech at swearing-in ceremony, Spirit Square. December 2, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.

know that changes in our society will require changes in our laws, changes in the way we live, and a willingness to make adjustments and to accept fresh ideas that more appropriately address the realities of the present time and the years ahead."[2]

In his first term in office, Gantt proved that he could maintain the existing momentum of economic development in the city while expanding opportunities beyond the limited areas of Charlotte that experienced the majority of that development. As he looked to his second term and to the broader future of the city, Gantt dared imagine Charlotte as something more than just another Atlanta, and indeed more than simply a banking and financial mecca. Through the pursuit of a professional sports franchise, both the maintenance and augmentation of programs that provided opportunities to underprivileged demographics, the development of strong public services and a thriving city-center, and the bold vision of the 2005 Plan, Gantt pursued lasting changes in Charlotte in an effort to produce a more modern southern metropolis. And yet, while he was occupied with both the preservation of previous accomplishments and the broader future of the city, unforced errors opened the door for his political opponents and threatened to erode Gantt's support within Charlotte.

Gantt vigorously defended existing progress in the city while he plotted a course for Charlotte's future. Previous mayors and city councils produced long-term growth and development plans, but few were ever followed through to conclusion. Gantt sought to change that with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg 2005 Generalized Land Use Plan (2005 Plan). Addressing the potential for further growth over the following decades, the 2005

[2] Gantt speech at swearing-in ceremony, Spirit Square. December 2, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.

Plan reflected Gantt's ideals and attitudes about the city. Most importantly, it presented balanced objectives that promised opportunities for all citizens of Charlotte. In a speech on July 25, 1985, Gantt said,

> "It remains my hope that out of this collective community planning process we will arrive at a point where we will have a plan that represents the community's view of our Charlotte – not the view of the Council, or the developers, or the neighborhoods, or the professional planner, or the Chamber – but rather everyone's consensus of what we ought to be by 2005."[3]

Indeed, Gantt argued that a balanced plan – one that addressed the concerns of various demographics while balancing public investment in the community – was the only way to secure lasting, positive change in Charlotte.

The 2005 Plan laid out a variety of initiatives involving balanced growth and land-use strategies. Gantt sought ways to convey its importance beyond the city council, urging increased involvement from the citizens of Charlotte in planning the future of their city. During the November 20, 1985, installment of his weekly segment "Ask the Mayor" on WTVI, Gantt addressed the importance of citizen engagement in the process of crafting the plan. "The plan, in essence, has held a high place of priority among you… and I believe that is because our community is placing considerably greater emphasis on how we will grow, and where we will accommodate that growth," Gantt said.[4] For Gantt, the implementation and approval of the plan was as important as the policies themselves. Gantt envisioned a Charlotte in which citizens were directly engaged in the decision-making process and concerned with the future of their community. "Implementation of our collective dreams and goals for a great city will require a commitment on the part of you as citizens to stay involved and active in this city, and to hold on to a belief that we

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[3] Harvey Gantt speech at SSPACE, July 25, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.
[4] "Ask the Mayor" transcript. November 20, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.

have something special here that needs to be preserved, enhanced, and protected," Gantt said in his closing statements of his "Ask the Mayor" segment. "A city of fine old neighborhoods, a thriving and increasingly vibrant uptown, well-planned suburban areas… all of these things represent a quality of life that… makes for a special and great city."[5]

The 2005 Plan addressed an assortment of problems within Charlotte while offering opportunities for continued growth. However, the nature of the plan itself hinted at a harsh political reality for Gantt: Charlotte's major problems could only be corrected with long, deliberate measures. Some of the ideas for new developments in the northern and western reaches of Charlotte were not realized for decades. The 2005 Plan allowed for the construction of the I-485 outerloop, but construction on the project was not completed until 2015. The 2005 Plan offered real hope for the city, but its realization would test the patience of Charlotte's citizens.[6]

Of course, the 2005 Plan was not the only avenue through which Gantt helped shape Charlotte's future. During his first years in office, Gantt encouraged continued economic expansion and growth in Charlotte while testing the limits of a traditionally ceremonial office. In his second term, he envisioned new avenues of leadership and took bold steps to secure development opportunities. Gantt never wavered from his commitment to recruit new industry and jobs to the area, but he sought out innovative ways to broaden Charlotte's appeal. Rejuvenated by his victory, Gantt strived to make Charlotte a first-class New South city. As it happened, an exciting new opportunity for Charlotte was already in the works.

[5] "Ask the Mayor" transcript. November 20, 1985. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.16.
[6] Charlotte-Mecklenburg 2005 Generalized Land Use Plan. Planning and Development of Charlotte, N.C., Collection, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

When the city council initially investigated the idea of constructing a new coliseum, there were no concrete plans for its steady use. Besides the occasional concert or the potential for ACC Basketball Tournament games, the new coliseum was necessitated not by an active need but rather the outdated status of the existing facility. Due to his background in city planning, Gantt was a strong supporter of the new Charlotte Coliseum, a fact that Dave Berryhill failed to capitalize on during the 1985 election. While Berryhill tried to frame Gantt's apparent indecision regarding the site selection as a facet of Gantt's recklessness with the city budget, Gantt's support for the new coliseum and concern over site selection reflected his acknowledgment of the project's importance to the future of Charlotte.[7]

The new coliseum proved its importance to the health of the city before construction was even completed. In 1985, David Stern, the Commissioner of the National Basketball Association, announced his intentions to expand the league by four teams beginning in the 1988-89 season. George Shinn, an entrepreneur from Kannapolis, North Carolina, expressed serious interest in bringing an NBA team to Charlotte.[8] At that time, Charlotte was one of the fastest growing cities in the country and the area proved an ideal candidate for professional sports as it brought with it a relatively untapped television market. With the success of many of North Carolina's universities in college basketball, the state seemed a perfect fit for professional basketball, and Charlotte the obvious location. The construction of the new coliseum only strengthened Charlotte's appeal.

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[7] Ted Mellnik and Ken Eudy. "Gantt Faces Spirited Competition in Bid for 2nd Term," *Charlotte Observer*. July 23, 1985.

[8] The proposed NBA team stood to be the city's only professional sports team at that time, but it would not be the first. From 1969 to 1974, Charlotte served as one of three rotating homes for the American Basketball Association's Carolina Cougars.

The potential of an NBA franchise in Charlotte was a perfect opportunity for Gantt. Industrial development and new jobs were vital to the community, but a professional sports team could potentially cement Charlotte's place in the new hierarchy of southern cities. By 1985, Atlanta had professional sports teams for three of the major American sports with MLB's Braves, the NBA's Hawks, and the NFL's Falcons. Although Gantt fought against the perception of Charlotte in focused competition with Atlanta, he recognized the importance of a professional sports team in cementing Atlanta's place as the major southeastern metropolis.

While the office of mayor in Charlotte was traditionally viewed as ceremonial, Gantt expanded the position's possibilities and proved the importance of enthusiasm in politics. When negotiations broke down between George Shinn and the Coliseum Authority in Charlotte, Gantt served as an arbitrator, persuading both sides to again sit down at the negotiating table. "There have been proposals made by Mr. Shinn and a bottom line position taken by the Authority but no real negotiations have taken place as far as we can determine," wrote Gantt in a memo to city council members. "We are trying to be facilitators to the discussions rather than taking over."[9] "The contract in this instance is the responsibility of the Authority but from our perspective, especially as negotiations seem to have broken down, we feel we are drawn into the discussions by the nature of our responsibilities."[10]

Gantt went beyond the defined duties of his post and served as a visible advocate for the city during negotiations. In letters with David Stern and other NBA officials, Gantt touted the city's growth and potential for further expansion. With George Shinn,

[9] Memo from Mayor Gantt to city council members, March 28, 1986. Gantt Papers. Folder 3.01.
[10] Memo from Mayor Gantt to city council members, March 28, 1986. Gantt Papers. Folder 3.01.

Gantt effectively lobbied on the city's behalf, framing Charlotte as a city ready to join the big leagues. The long process to acquire a professional sports franchise carried on for years, with Charlotte residents purchasing season tickets before any concrete plans were even announced.[11] After years of lobbying by Shinn and Gantt, the NBA announced on April 22, 1987, that it had reached a deal with Shinn to locate an expansion team, later dubbed the Hornets, in Charlotte for the 1988-89 season.[12] The decision served as a source of pride for the citizens of Charlotte as the city received national attention. In a letter to one NBA executive, Gantt called the awarding of an NBA franchise to Charlotte "the event of the decade, and perhaps longer."[13] Although George Shinn spearheaded the effort to bring the team to Charlotte, Gantt's effort in brokering a deal between Shinn and the Coliseum Authority and his continued advocacy for the city in local and national media played a vital role in making professional sports in Charlotte a reality.

Gantt fought for new endeavors like the 2005 Plan and the acquisition of an NBA franchise while maintaining a commitment to previous progress within the city of Charlotte. Gantt's victory in the 1985 election was a reflection of the changing political climate within Charlotte; many viewed the results as evidence that he and campaign advisor Mel Watt had cracked the code for achieving a multiracial, intersectional coalition of voters. Gantt's 1985 showing was even more impressive; he won roughly 58% of the vote in predominantly white districts.[14] However, the changing nature of Charlotte politics expanded beyond the mayor's office. Once dominated by white

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[11] Leonard Laye, "NBA Ticket Push Gets Fast-Break Start," *Charlotte Observer*. July 15, 1986. 1B.
[12] David Perlmeutt and Stan Olson, "Charlotte Cheers News It Knew Was Coming," *Charlotte Observer*. April 23, 1987. 4B. The NBA committee charged with recommending expansion sites named Charlotte at the top of its list in early April. While the decision to place a team in Charlotte was not officially announced until April 22, 1987, many in the city expected the news.
[13] Letter from Harvey Gantt to Norm Sonju, July 1, 1987. Gantt Papers. Folder 3.01.
[14] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 236.

businessmen, the City Council was remarkably diverse following the 1985 election. Of the eleven Councilmembers selected that November, six were women; two of the five men on the council were African Americans.[15] In the eight years that followed the referendum on district representation in 1977, Charlotte's political leadership was transformed.

Although he acknowledged and applauded the important changes wrought by district representation, Gantt was not content with serving as a "token" mayor. With a more representative government, Gantt sought to address issues that long plagued Charlotte's black community. Gantt acknowledged that many African American citizens, both in Charlotte and around the nation, had not felt much progress as a result of the civil rights successes of earlier decades. "We must all recognize that the dream is not yet a reality for many of us," Gantt said in a speech he delivered at Virginia Union University. "As I survey the scene in urban America, it doesn't take me long to realize that notwithstanding Martin King and great contributions to social justice, there are folks in my town… who have not benefitted at all by the progress made over the last two decades."[16] As someone who directly benefited from the opportunities afforded to him by earlier generations of civil rights leaders, Gantt felt that he had a duty to preserve the progress made while working to expand opportunities to those who may have been left behind.

In an interview in his second term in office, Gantt drew a direct line from the civil rights progress he witnessed as a child to his political philosophy as mayor. "I think I've

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[15] Edds, *Free at Last: What Really Happened When Civil Rights Came To Southern Politics* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1987), 199.
[16] Gantt speech, Virginia Union University Community Learning Week. January 14, 1986. Gantt Papers. Folder 5.17.

seen a different kind of world since being an eleven-year-old boy," Gantt said. "That big decision on segregation being unconstitutional." He continued

> There is a different possibility for the South and for North Carolina and South Carolina and other places. And I think in my own mind I see that unfolding every day. And the ability to help that unfold, to see a state where education is a top priority and people are literate, trained using the best of all of our resources, whether they are black or white, is important to me. If I get an opportunity to get that to happen just a little bit quicker by being mayor of Charlotte, it's important to move us along."[17]

From a civil rights standpoint, Gantt and Charlotte were a perfect fit. By the time Gantt was elected mayor in the mid-1980s, the city's greatest civil rights success story was its school integration and busing plan. Gantt's first moment of awareness of the national civil rights movement came with the announcement of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board*. After his involvement in the NAACP Youth Council and the sit-in at Charleston's S.H. Kress store with his high school classmates, Gantt's first foray into the political arena was in his effort to desegregate Clemson. As mayor twenty years later, Gantt was proud of Charlotte's history of integrated schooling and often highlighted the public school system as a premiere selling point for the city.

While Gantt argued that important work remained in the struggle for equality, some opponents suggested that the civil rights movement had actually gone too far. The citizens of Charlotte begrudgingly accepted busing as a means of realizing fully-integrated schools, but by the mid-1980s certain individuals began to openly question the need for continued action on the busing issue, with some going so far as to question the importance of integrated schooling in general. President Ronald Reagan was chastised at his campaign stop in Charlotte in 1984 for saying that school busing was a "social

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[17] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

experiment that nobody wants," but he was hardly alone in questioning the necessity of programs designed to guarantee integrated education. Former City Councilmember Ralph McMillan echoed Reagan by suggesting that the school system no longer needed busing. Citing the conventional narrative of the city's civil rights history and noting instances of integration that occurred before a court order, McMillan argued that successful integration had more to do with the cooperative spirit of its citizens than the ruling of the United States Supreme Court. In an editorial published in the *Wall Street Journal*, McMillan criticized busing in Charlotte and suggested that it was responsible for a lower quality of education in Charlotte's public schools. "Since substantial integration had occurred prior to court-ordered busing," McMillan wrote, "it is fair to assume that white flight cannot be attributed to latent racism, but to a decline in educational quality."[18] While McMillan admitted that Charlotte's busing experience was certainly milder than that seen in cities like Boston, he wrote, "Even Julius Chambers and other supporters of forced busing concede that educational quality has suffered because of it."[19]

Ralph McMillan's editorial prompted a response from Julius Chambers in which he directly challenged McMillan's statements, noting that it was "difficult to deal with all [McMillan's] numerous distortions." Chambers argued that Charlotte's experience with desegregation in its public schools was better than that of other major American cities, with only 11% of white students having left the public education system in Charlotte by 1985. "Contrary to Mr. McMillan's dubious claims, Charlotte demonstrates that school

[18] Ralph McMillan, "That Busing Success Story," *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 1985.
[19] Ralph McMillan, "That Busing Success Story," *Wall Street Journal*, January 21, 1985.

desegregation can and will work," Chambers wrote. "More important, it confirms that a community dedicated to fairness can provide quality education for all its students."[20]

Gantt was a strong supporter of integrated education in Charlotte and advocated for continued busing plans. Many of the citizens of Charlotte were proud of the city's history of relatively peaceful desegregation, even if many resented busing. As Margaret Edds writes, "There was a deep pride in the way the community had dealt with an issue that elsewhere had decimated harmony."[21] By the mid-80s, Charlotte had one of the most well-integrated public school systems in the country, avoiding much of the white flight from public education that plagued other urban areas in the South.[22] Gantt envisioned alternate methods by which he could have a direct impact on local students. "I want to have more influence on young people," Gantt lamented at the time. "I spend a lot of time worrying about whether or not a forty-three-year-old mayor has any influence on a sixteen-year-old high school kid." As a potential role model for local students, Gantt hoped to guide the children of Charlotte towards new opportunities. "I think I see things about what's going on, what's going to happen in the nation that I'm not sure [students are] seeing," Gantt said. "And I worry a little about it."[23]

In addition to conservative assaults on existing sources of racial progress, Gantt faced existing political problems that plagued the city of Charlotte. Perhaps more than any other issue, Charlotte's ever-growing traffic congestion cast a pall over Gantt's tenure as mayor. The traffic problem in Charlotte was intertwined with the city's rapid

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[20] Julius Chambers, "Courting Fairness in Charlotte, N.C.," *Wall Street Journal*, March 28, 1985.
[21] Edds. *Free At Last*. 198.
[22] Davidson M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 250-254.
[23] Harvey Gantt, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Documenting the American South, Interview C-0008, January 6, 1986.

growth in the 1970s and 80s. In an indirect way, the traffic issue actually helped Gantt win the 1983 election, with neighborhood organizations in the southeastern area of the city supporting Gantt's plans to alleviate congestion. Gantt encountered initial hurdles in addressing the issue due to austerity measures and jurisdiction issues. He also faced new, unforeseen obstacles in solving the traffic problem.

While Gantt wrestled with political issues both new and old, the very nature of the political landscape in Charlotte evolved. As Gantt sought road improvements and expansion projects, he faced opposition from groups that had previously supported him. For example, the expansion of Independence Boulevard brought serious concerns from neighborhood organizations. "We recognize the need for improvements to Independence Boulevard and support efforts to improve Independence Boulevard as soon as is reasonably possible," wrote Richard C. Gaskins, a representative of the Elizabeth Community Association, in a letter to Gantt. However, Gaskins noted "substantive concerns relat[ing] to the effect of the proposals on the residents of and the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods."[24] The organization wanted the city to spend more time reviewing the impact of the project, a decision which would delay further action on a source of much-needed relief of traffic congestion.

The wavering allegiance of neighborhood organizations was not the only sign of a shifting political landscape for Gantt. The business recruitment and economic expansion within Charlotte of which Gantt was so proud also transformed the city's population. When Gantt was first elected mayor in 1983, the city of Charlotte's total population was

[24] Letter from Richard C. Gaskins, Jr., of the Elizabeth Community Association, to Harvey Gantt, September 25, 1986. Gantt Papers. Folder 4.17.

334,782; by 1987, the total population was 388,995, an increase of just over 16%.[25] While there were certainly new residents from towns and cities within North Carolina and the South, many of the 54,213 new residents of Charlotte came from cities across the United States and around the world. These new citizens of Charlotte brought with them their own political and social attitudes, which resulted in a constantly evolving city.[26]

Gantt's hopes for Charlotte's potential were directly tied to his predictions for the future of the state and the region. In Charlotte, Gantt saw potential for a city that would be the crown jewel of the Carolinas. Noting the many changes that had occurred just in his tenure as mayor, Gantt suggested that Charlotte could well become the "urban economic engine for the rest of the state." With Charlotte's increasing importance as a service industry and financial center for the South, and the continued decline of traditional enterprises such as farming and textile work, Gantt envisioned major changes awaiting Charlotte. "I suspect that tobacco, furniture, and textiles are going to continue to move to a period of automation such that there won't be all those workers anymore," Gantt said, "and you're going to see a migration of people from their small towns daily, into the Charlottes and Raleighs and Winston-Salems to work in service centers." Gantt's vision of the future included neighboring cities, but he felt that Charlotte would be at the forefront of a rapidly changing economy in the state of North Carolina. "I think it's going to be world class," he said.[27]

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[25] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department. ww.charmeck.org/Planning/ResearchGIS/HistoricalData/Charlotte_Population_and_Area_since_1980.pdf

[26] For more on the changing demographics of Charlotte and the political ideologies new residents brought with them, see: David Goldfield, "A Place To Come To," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 16-19.

[27] Dunn, "Harvey Gantt: Hard-Driving Mayor of Charlotte Found a Challenging Second Home in Politics," *Winston-Salem Journal*, July 19, 1987. A22.

Gantt viewed Charlotte's future potential with boundless optimism. For Harvey, change was never something to be feared; he was himself the product of an evolving southern society. His father Christopher Gantt, Jr., traded in agricultural work in a tiny community on South Carolina's coast for a job as a machinist in the naval yards of Charleston. Harvey's childhood in that city, with all of its exposures to the outside world and the growing national civil rights movement, was a direct result of the industrialized South. Similarly, civil rights activism of the post-World War II era opened the door for educational opportunities that in turn led to new economic and political opportunities for African Americans. Gantt embraced change in Charlotte and looked to the city's future with hope.

Gantt's optimistic appraisal of change in Charlotte was not shared by all of its citizens. After all, his ascendance to the mayor's office coincided with a major shift in politics throughout the city. At the time of his initial appointment to the city council in 1974, Gantt was only the second African American to serve in that position. In the decade that followed, Charlotte witnessed an expansion of political participation as district representation opened up seats at the table. Despite his accomplishments, some citizens continued to harbor doubts about Gantt's ability to serve as a fair mayor for all residents of Charlotte. "Suddenly it was bad to be like Atlanta," Gantt said. "Atlanta had elected black mayors, and there were some feelings that we would become a city of a black majority, or that the mayor would only be interested in black issues. We had to contend with that."[28]

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[28] Edds, *Free At Last*, 205.

Although Gantt was concerned with the expectations of Charlotte's citizenry, African American mayors across the South experienced difficulties in navigating the political landscape, even in cities with larger black populations than in Charlotte. "The era of the single-note candidacy is over," historian David Goldfield wrote in 1990. "Southern blacks rarely campaign exclusively on a racial agenda, and once they are in office, they are attuned to the shifting alliances of political survival."[29] After all, the economic growth in Atlanta, which Charlotte's business community was so fixated on emulating, occurred under the watch of African American mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young, who were themselves criticized at times for focusing so heavily on economic concerns at the expense of black interests. For Gantt, those issues were one and the same, a political philosophy not always shared by Charlotte's citizens.

Ironically, Gantt himself was used as an example of a "mission accomplished" in the city. By framing Gantt's election in 1983 as a triumphant moment for Charlotte – and effectively co-opting his particular victory as a broader victory for the city – local journalists and political pundits reshaped the conversation regarding the city's civil rights history. A similar situation occurred with Clemson's embrace of Gantt in the decades following his enrollment there. Clearly, Gantt's election in Charlotte marked an important moment as he broke a meaningful and symbolic racial barrier in city government. However, some used Gantt's political success as a sign that race was no longer a factor in local politics. In the 1985 campaign, his opponent Dave Berryhill claimed that racism would not be a factor in the election because of the sheer fact that Gantt was the incumbent. Gantt's presence in the mayor's office may have suggested changing political trends, but it was a gross exaggeration to claim that Gantt's election

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[29] Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 236.

ended all traces of racial animus in Charlotte.[30] As fate would have it, a series of political missteps from Gantt exposed that racial tensions, while perhaps less visible, persisted within Charlotte.

In 1985, Gantt and six other investors, three of whom were prominent African American citizens of Charlotte, received a license from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for WJZY, a television station based out of nearby Belmont, North Carolina.[31] The FCC gave preferential consideration to minority applicants as well as those who were not already involved in broadcasting, criteria that Gantt and some of the other members of his group met.[32] At an FCC hearing in February 1985, Gantt leaned on his interest in minority-owned business ventures. "I have for years been interested in seeing minority and women business operations get involved in what I considered to be nontraditional entrepreneurial activities," Gantt told the committee.[33] One of the competing investment groups dropped out of consideration; Gantt's group bought out the remaining competitor. As the last group standing, the FCC awarded the license to Gantt and his fellow investors.

Gantt did not divulge how much he paid for his 15% share in Metro-Crescent Communications Inc., although it was somewhere in the range of $450 to $45,000. In 1986, the *Charlotte Observer* broke the news that Metro-Crescent looked to sell WJZY to

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[30] For more on the political use of civil rights narratives, see: Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (March 2005): 1233-1263.
[31] The investors included Dr. State Alexander, Dr. Spuregeon Webber, and his wife Jean Webber. Gantt, Alexander, and the Webbers owned all of the group's voting stock. David Wagner, Robert Hilker, and William Robbins owned minority shares. The station used the callsign WMHU at the time of the purchase, but transitioned to WJZY before broadcast. I refer to the station as WJZY throughout to avoid confusion.
[32] Two of the investors in Gantt's group, Robert Hilker and Williams Rollins, were already involved in broadcasting.
[33] Mellnik, "Gantt, Partners Might Make Millions By Selling TV Station," *Charlotte Observer*, March 22, 1986. 1A.

Capitol Broadcasting of Raleigh for a substantial profit. Gantt personally stood to gain $450,000 from the deal, with the possibility of additional payments if the station's value increased significantly in the five years following its sale.[34]

Although he and his business partners broke no laws in the sale, the issue became a negative one for Gantt in the Charlotte area. Gantt and his partners highlighted their race in securing the operation; by selling so quickly after they secured the license, and for such a large profit, some citizens felt that they took advantage of the FCC's application process. Indeed, the station was not yet operating when the sale occurred and at no point was it in operation by the predominantly African American investment group that received the initial license. Despite the controversy surrounding the sale, Gantt maintained that the decision to sell was a simple business decision and that he and his partners had no obligation to hold on to the station. "The question is always arising as to whether you would keep the station for the long-term or the short-term," said Gantt. "Our answer has always been that this is a business investment, and if the right opportunity came along, sure, we could sell it right away." When asked about the minority-owner aspect of the initial licensing, Gantt stated that there was nothing contractual that prevented the sale. "There is nothing, I believe, in our application which said that we want this station because we want to ensure minority input into the station," he said. "The application did not stipulate that we maintain ownership for any particular period of time."[35]

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[34] Mellnik, "Gantt, Partners Might Make Millions By Selling TV Station," *Charlotte Observer*, March 22, 1986. 12A.
[35] Mellnik, "Gantt, Partners Might Make Millions By Selling TV Station," *Charlotte Observer*, March 22, 1986. 1A.

Despite his stance that the acquisition and eventual sale of the station had been by the book, Gantt's role in the deal was criticized within Charlotte. Competitors claimed that Gantt used his role as mayor as leverage in securing the initial license. The issue was further complicated by Gantt's failure to disclose his stake in Metro-Crescent on the city's ethics disclosure form, which he claimed was inadvertent. "I think it's much ado about nothing," Gantt said. "I regret it obviously because I don't want anyone to think I'm hiding anything."[36] Gantt vigorously defended his actions, but the issue did not go away.

The City Council had the power to investigate whether any ethics violations occurred, but they decided against taking action. Richard Vinroot, a member of the council, said, "I think it's a case of no harm, no foul." The editors of the *Charlotte Observer* agreed with the City Council's decision, stating, "There's plenty of evidence that Mr. Gantt made no effort to hide his involvement in the business."[37] With the City Council's decision not to investigate further, the issue was effectively over within the city government.

The decision to turn the television station into a quick payday followed Gantt even after the City Council chose not to pursue an investigation. Indeed, the issue marked one of the most damaging missteps in Gantt's political career. "Mr. Gantt and his colleagues took advantage of the FCC's interest in helping minorities get into the television business, and now plan to take a quick and very large profit by getting out of the television business," wrote the editors of the *Charlotte Observer*. "That isn't illegal.

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[36] Mellnik, "Gantt, Partners Might Make Millions By Selling TV Station," *Charlotte Observer*, March 22, 1986. 12A.
[37] "Gantt's Deal Is Disappointing," *Charlotte Observer*. March 26, 1986.

It may not even be unethical. But it is disappointing to those of us who have so much admiration and respect for Harvey Gantt."[38]

Another unforced error by Gantt on January 16, 1987, proved equally costly. At a speaking engagement with the Tampa Organization of Black Affairs, Gantt addressed growing inequality in America. "The central issue of the 1980s," he said, "is to insure against the development of two societies, one affluent and predominantly white, the other poor, black and minority."[39] Many of Gantt's speeches addressed the success story of Charlotte and the relative racial harmony of North Carolina's largest city. But as he discussed national race issues – at an event honoring Martin Luther King's birthday – Gantt's tone skewed more pessimistic than usual. Gantt even went so far as to suggest that the Reagan administration was exacerbating racial tensions.[40]

And yet, despite the broad content of Gantt's speech that day, it was a particular line that overshadowed everything that preceded it. Noting the continued success of Charlotte's economy, Gantt said, "A mayor is not worth his salt if he can't help create a few black millionaires by the time his term is over." Gantt later clarified that he was referring to his "effort to insure an allocation of dollars going to minority programs," but his comment provoked a minor controversy.[41]

Despite the controversies surrounding the Metro-Crescent deal and his statements in Tampa, Harvey Gantt appeared headed for re-election. In fact, by the Spring of 1987,

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[38] "Gantt's Deal Is Disappointing," *Charlotte Observer*. March 26, 1986.
[39] Adam Nossiter, "Pioneering black mayor talks of new racism," *St. Petersburg* (Florida) *Times*, January 17, 1987. 13B.
[40] Nossiter, "Pioneering black mayor talks of new racism," *St. Petersburg* (Florida) *Times*, January 17, 1987. 13B.
[41] Nossiter, "Pioneering black mayor talks of new racism," *St. Petersburg* (Florida) *Times*, January 17, 1987. 13B.

a potential third term for Gantt seemed the safest bet in North Carolina politics. Barbara Boyce, a local Republican politician, said, "We thought we had a pretty strong case against him two years ago, and he still won rather strongly." Boyce noted that many of the attacks levied by Dave Berryhill and the Republican Party seemed ineffective against Gantt. "I think he's seen as a Teflon mayor," she said. "All these things simply do not stick to him."[42] Local Republican Party leaders felt that Gantt was firmly entrenched in the mayor's office and few looked to the 1987 election with optimism. Compounding the issue was the fact that the most notable Republican members of the City Council agreed with Gantt's tax proposals. Ralph McMillan lamented, "It's hard to distinguish yourself when the Republicans all agree with his policies."[43] Bob Bradshaw, formerly the North Carolina Republican Party Chairman, summed up the major hurdle facing political rivals of Gantt: "I don't think (Gantt) is perceived as having made any serious mistakes."[44] This perception was widely held in Charlotte politics, but Gantt's previous missteps left him vulnerable to attack if a political opponent was willing to reignite those controversies.

Few Republicans seemed interested in challenging Gantt, with local political observers treating a third Gantt term as a sure-thing. However, the eventual winner of the Republican Party Primary was not content with conceding victory. Sue Myrick, who narrowly lost to Dave Berryhill two years earlier, emerged as the Republican candidate by doubling down on her reputation as a fiscal conservative. As a member of a local organization called Citizens for Effective Government, Myrick's political identity was

[42] Morrill, "Gantt Faces No GOP Rival," *Charlotte Observer*. April 17, 1987. 1A.
[43] Morrill, "Gantt Faces No GOP Rival," *Charlotte Observer*. April 17, 1987. 1A.
[44] Morrill, "Gantt Faces No GOP Rival," *Charlotte Observer*. April 17, 1987. 1A.

framed around criticism of government waste.[45] Throughout her time on the City Council, she stood opposed to projects like the construction of the new Charlotte Coliseum and the expansion of Douglas Airport – developments that Gantt pointed to as signs of Charlotte's continued success. In a move that angered many of her colleagues on the City Council, Myrick often took her objections and disagreements with her fellow Councilmembers directly to the people of Charlotte, hosting press conferences to criticize projects that involved government spending.[46]

On a number of issues that Gantt celebrated as positive developments for the city of Charlotte, Myrick argued that the city's "progress" represented unnecessary government involvement in the private sector. "The city shouldn't be in the entertainment business," Myrick said in response to the approval of the new Charlotte Coliseum. "I don't think the ACC Tournament is the most important thing in the city's future."[47] Myrick likewise criticized two of the achievements of which Gantt was most proud – the expansion of Douglas Airport to include a direct London connection and the acquisition of the Charlotte Hornets. "The people aspects of our community are as important as the NBA and London Gateway," Myrick said, framing herself as a champion of the average Charlotte citizen in contrast with Gantt's focus on city-building initiatives.[48]

Myrick wed her fiscal conservatism with the issue she hoped would dominate the 1987 election: traffic congestion. Gantt repeatedly called her financing proposals

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[45] Foon Rhee, "Myrick Moves On To Gantt," *Charlotte Observer*. September 23, 1987. 1A. Myrick later served in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Republican member of the Tea Party Caucus.
[46] Mae Israel, "Divided They Stand: Gantt, Myrick Disagreed In Past," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 1B.
[47] Mellnik, "2 GOP Candidates Take Gantt To Task," *Charlotte Observer*. August 7, 1985.
[48] Elizabeth Leland, "Myrick, Gantt Pull Out Stops," *Charlotte Observer*. November 1, 1987. 1B.

"unrealistic," while Myrick argued that she was best equipped to lead a more efficient Charlotte government. Cost-saving measures and lower tax rates offered the possibility of new revenue streams for vital infrastructure projects designed to ease traffic congestion, but the brunt of Myrick's message framed some of Gantt's proudest achievements as financial diversions from transportation projects.[49] Following her vote against the new coliseum, Myrick held a news conference on N.C. 51 and framed the new coliseum as a waste of money that could be used to alleviate congestion along one of Charlotte's most notorious traffic problems.[50] From the moment she emerged victorious from the Republican Party primary on September 22, 1987, Myrick launched a two-prong attack on Gantt that framed her fiscal conservatism as the best model for combatting Charlotte's most pressing infrastructural concerns. When the state of North Carolina offered to provide funding for construction for the outerbelt, Myrick pointed out that Gantt had opposed outerbelt construction during a 1977 City Council vote and may be inclined to do so again.[51] In the last week of the campaign, Myrick released an ad that offered a bleak image of the future for Charlotte commuters. The ad began with the statement, "This is your future if Harvey Gantt is reelected." The remainder of the ad featured video footage from infamous traffic chokepoints throughout the city of Charlotte, with a final plea for change in the form of Sue Myrick.[52]

Journalists and political observers at the time noted the importance of traffic and financial concerns in Myrick's campaign messaging, but there was an undercurrent of

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[49] In their endorsement of Gantt, the editorial board of the *Charlotte Observer* noted that Myrick's proposals were unlikely to produce any serious savings for the city budget without drastic cuts to popular city services.
[50] Mae Israel, "Divided They Stand: Gantt, Myrick Disagreed In Past," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 1B.
[51] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 236-7.
[52] Foon, "Myrick's TV Ad Campaign Hits Airwaves," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 2B.

racial politics in 1987 that has largely gone unnoticed by reporters and historians. Gantt's previous opponents, Ed Peacock and Dave Berryhill, found it difficult to raise racially charged attacks against Gantt. Beyond criticisms of the city's Minority and Women Business Program, questions about voter registration tactics at Johnson C. Smith University, or loaded language that implied Gantt's leadership was somehow illegitimate, neither candidate made headway with divisive racial politics. But Gantt's own political follies in the course of his second term, especially his involvement in Metro-Crescent Communications' acquisition of WJZY-TV and his comments in Tampa regarding "black millionaires," opened the door for Myrick to play on racial prejudices that spent much of Gantt's tenure as mayor bubbling underneath the surface.

The Myrick campaign took aggressive measures to challenge Gantt's support base. As a member of the City Council, Myrick voted against continuing Charlotte's Minority and Women Business Program and openly questioned government measures that, while not explicitly race-motivated, benefitted the city's black community.[53] In an effort to drive a wedge into Gantt's vital support base in the fall of 1987, Myrick resurrected the controversy over Gantt's involvement in the purchase and sale of WJZY-TV. Beyond the earlier political attack that Gantt had benefitted from a government program to make a quick buck, Myrick argued that Gantt's actions represented a betrayal of the black community. James Barnett, chairman of the local civil rights group People United for Justice, previously called for an investigation of Gantt's involvement with the WJZY deal in 1986. However, in response to Myrick's attacks, Barnett fired back. "We've got problems with Sue Myrick bringing it up saying that Gantt has betrayed

[53] Israel, "Divided They Stand: Gantt, Myrick Disagreed In Past," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 1B.

black people," he said. "If he has betrayed black people, we think black people are smart enough to raise the issue themselves."[54]

Gantt also received support against Myrick's attacks from outside the city of Charlotte. Despite Myrick's repeated claims, the FCC offered no evidence of any wrongdoing. Edythe Wise, director of the FCC's complaints and investigative branch, pushed back against Myrick. "If we had been concerned about [complaints against Gantt], we could have pursued them. That we didn't says something," Wise said. "We felt there was insufficient evidence of wrongdoing to go ahead with an investigation." [55] Both the FCC and the Charlotte City Council decided not to pursue further investigation of the WJZY deal, and Myrick offered little evidence behind cryptic references to new, previously unheard sources on the matter.

Despite his ongoing denial of any moral, ethical, or legal wrongdoing in the WJZY deal, Gantt's remarks at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day event in Tampa, Florida, complicated the issue and allowed Myrick an opportunity to establish a pattern of misbehavior by Gantt. In the last days of the campaign, Myrick's team produced an ad in the *Charlotte Observer* that conflated the two issues. Highlighting Gantt's remarks that "a mayor is not worth his salt if he can't help create a few black millionaires," the Myrick campaign raised serious questions about Gantt's ability to serve as an unbiased mayor. "Since when is it the function of a mayor to create millionaires – black, white, red or yellow?," the ad read. "Just how does a mayor create millionaires? Who are the millionaires?"[56] Myrick tried to publicly distance herself from accusations of racially charged political campaigning. However, she tried to link both the WJZY deal and the

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[54] Leland, "Myrick, Gantt Pull Out Stops," *Charlotte Observer*. November 1, 1987. 1B.
[55] Rhee, "Gantt's Ties to TV Station Coming Into Focus," *Charlotte Observer*. October 29, 1987. 1A.
[56] Rhee, "Myrick Ad Challenges Gantt Quote," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 1B.

"black millionaires" comment, noting that Gantt's comments in Tampa motivated her to openly question Gantt's role in the TV deal.[57]

Though the TV deal and Gantt's "black millionaires" comments represented the main thrust of Myrick's racially charged attacks, she also raised questions about Gantt's apparent lack of attention on black issues in Charlotte. In an appearance on "Open Bible Dialogue," a local radio talk show, Myrick questioned Gantt's success in helping the black community, suggesting that Gantt had not done enough to help bolster Charlotte's majority black neighborhoods.[58] As with many of Myrick's attacks, she wanted to eat her cake and have it, too. How could Gantt be simultaneously guilty of working to create new black millionaires and ignoring Charlotte's black community? The apparent contradiction did not deter Myrick, who continued to attack Gantt from multiple angles in the weeks and days leading up to the election.

Myrick proved a formidable opponent for Gantt, whose campaign confronted unique challenges in the 1987 election. While Myrick's campaign presented her as an agent of change in Charlotte politics, Gantt was tasked with making a positive case about his leadership of the city. Gantt and his campaign manager Don Baker crafted a message of calm, assured leadership in the face of serious challenges to the city of Charlotte.[59] In a television ad aired in the greater Charlotte metropolitan area, Gantt urged caution and patience among Charlotte's voters, noting that "there are no easy answers, no quick

[57] In a local news conference, Myrick tried to distance herself from accusations that she was playing on potential racial division within the city of Charlotte. "I prefer not to do this kind of thing," Myrick said in response to her continued questioning of Gantt and the WJZY deal. "But I feel very definitively… that it's information that needs to get out to the public." Rhee, Foon. "Myrick Ad Challenges Gantt Quote," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 1B.
[58] Leland, "Myrick, Gantt Pull Out Stops," *Charlotte Observer*. November 1, 1987. 1B.
[59] As with the 1985 campaign, Mel Watt was serving in the North Carolina General Assembly during the 1987 election. He returned to run Gantt's campaign against Jesse Helms in 1990.

fixes."[60] In a letter to voters, the Gantt team pushed back against Myrick's suggestions that Gantt's leadership exacerbated the traffic issue. "Traffic congestion is a serious problem facing our city," the letter read. "But some politicians in this campaign would have you believe that I created the problems or at least, that the problems are worsening because of a lack of interest by me. Nothing could be further from the truth."[61] Even Gantt's campaign slogan, "Gantt: Working for the City," attempted to cement the idea that Charlotte's problems were not unattended and a third term for Gantt would be best for the city.

Continuing traffic issues posed a serious threat to Gantt's campaign, but the mayor also had a substantial record of achievements to which he could point. During Gantt's tenure as mayor, the city of Charlotte witnessed the expansion of Douglas International Airport, the acquisition of a professional sports team in the Charlotte Hornets, and new business opportunities in previously underdeveloped areas. Gantt repeatedly displayed his ability to reach consensus between divergent groups throughout the city and provided a steady, unifying presence in city government. Heading into the final stages of the campaign, Gantt was confident that the citizens of Charlotte would reward his hard work by granting him a third term as mayor.

Gantt maintained confidence, but there were a number of causes for concern among his campaign staff. Myrick's campaign caught Gantt off guard; heading into 1987, most political observers in Charlotte expected Gantt to coast into a third term. Myrick's hammering of the traffic issue proved effective with Charlotte voters, and her efforts to erode Gantt's support within the community by framing his political troubles in

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[60] Rhee, "Gantt's TV Spots Stress Experience, Neighborhoods," *Charlotte Observer*. November 1, 1987. 2B.

[61] Rhee, "Myrick Ahead of Gantt?," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 5B.

a racially-charged light proved costly for Gantt. The tightening of the polls in the final weeks exceeded expectations, with Gantt's polling numbers slipping under 50% for the first time in the campaign less than a week before the election.[62] Despite those warning signs, Gantt headed into election day with the belief that Charlotte voters would not be swayed by Myrick's message.

As the election results poured in on the night of November 3, 1987, the citizens of Charlotte were stunned. By 995 votes, a margin of victory of just 1%, Sue Myrick emerged as the winner in a spectacular upset.[63] Despite continued growth and expansion within Charlotte since 1983, the citizens of Charlotte decided a change was in order in the mayor's office. For the first time in nearly a decade, Gantt was forced to make sense of a crushing political defeat.

In the end, Charlotte's residents signaled a loss of patience with Gantt and took a chance on Myrick in the hopes that she could provide new methods to tackle Charlotte's longstanding traffic and infrastructure problems. Or at least, that has been the conventional narrative. In the days and weeks that followed Gantt's defeat, pundits and journalists across the nation attempted to diagnose the reasons for the shocking upset in Charlotte. The consensus that emerged placed much of the blame on Gantt's inability to adequately address traffic in Charlotte. And while Charlotte's particular traffic issues surely contributed to Myrick's victory, there are many facets of Gantt's defeat that have been relatively ignored in favor of that simple explanation.

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[62] Rhee, "Myrick Ahead of Gantt?," *Charlotte Observer*. October 31, 1987. 5B.
[63] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 238.

One of the most damaging elements of Gantt's 1987 mayoral campaign was relative apathy. As Gantt later lamented, "We didn't campaign very hard."[64] Gantt oversaw two successful terms as mayor of Charlotte, and he was genuinely surprised that voters did not reward him with a third. "I had every confidence and faith that somewhere out there the numbers would justify the commitment of thirteen years," Gantt said. "I just knew it was going to happen."[65] Part of his defeat can be attributed to a belief that voters would not be swayed by Myrick's attack ads. Gantt's business partner Jeff Huberman said, "He expects people to be reasonable and rational. But intellectual politicians don't always win."[66]

Some of Gantt's closest family and friends attributed his defeat in 1987 to a partial naivety on Gantt's behalf. Indeed, throughout his life Gantt displayed a sense of boundless and willful optimism that at many times served him well. In his quest to desegregate Clemson College, Gantt gambled that South Carolinians' perception of themselves as distinguished, proper southerners would override any nefarious impulses from those who opposed his enrollment. With the deadly response to James Meridith's enrollment at Ole Miss just months prior, Gantt took an awful risk that was ultimately vindicated. Likewise, Gantt launched a mayoral campaign in 1979 that was nothing if not hopeful. Few beyond Gantt and his friend Mel Watt gave Harvey any chance in the Democratic Primary against Eddie Knox. When Gantt proved a serious challenge to Knox, it justified his belief that an interracial coalition of voters in Charlotte was possible, paving the way for his eventual success in 1983 and 1985. Gantt believed that his record spoke for itself, and that Charlotte voters were satisfied with his performance.

[64] Harris, "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.
[65] Romine, "An Unquenchable Spirit," *Charlotte Observer*. May 1, 1988. 8E.
[66] Harris, "Harvey Gantt's Fight To The Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.

"Everywhere I went people were saying, 'Sure, the city's got its problems, but you're doing a good job,'" Gantt recalled. When the results came in on the night of November 3, 1987, Gantt was stunned. "I was the last person in Charlotte to believe I was going to lose," he said.[67]

As devastating as Myrick's victory was for Gantt, his loss in the 1987 election sent shockwaves through the African American community. "In Charlotte's black community this week, the mood was one of mourning," one reporter wrote. From Dorothy Counts to Fred Alexander, Julius Chambers to Mel Watt, Charlotte witnessed steady progress in civil rights and increased African American political participation that spanned decades. Results were at times slow and unsatisfying, and moments of racial animosity and backlash towards civil rights progress occurred throughout. But for some, Gantt's defeat was a potential symbol of a step backwards. "We were all devastated," said Robert Lee Davis, Jr., a local middle-school principal. A local civil rights activist suggested that many elderly African American citizens feared "they'll never see another black mayor in Charlotte."[68]

Gantt's comments in Tampa reignited issues that had existed since his first campaign for mayor. With a successful interracial coalition, Gantt could ill afford to stoke racial animosity. White moderates' reaction to Gantt's "Reagan snub" exposed the sentiment that Gantt served as mayor at their discretion. The appearance of racial preference in Gantt's comments about creating "black millionaires" did not help matters, nor did the controversy around his involvement in Metro-Crescent Communications. Gantt's multiracial coalition simply did not materialize the way it had in 1983 and 1985.

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[67] Romine, "An Unquenchable Spirit," *Charlotte Observer*. May 1, 1988. 8E.
[68] Robin Toner, "Charlotte Mayor's Defeat Echoes Far," *New York Times*, November 9, 1987. B9.

"We always need 35 percent of the white vote," Gantt told one reporter. "We got 34 percent, which is just not enough."[69] While Gantt's support in predominantly white communities fell in relation to previous elections, he received steady support from the African American community.[70]

Ironically, Gantt's opponents celebrated his defeat as its own form of progress in Charlotte. Theodore Arrington, a political scientist at UNC-Charlotte at the time, noted, "You have to get to the point where you cannot only elect a black politician, but also vote against him if you don't like him." Beyond that curious bit of civil rights revisionism, Myrick's victory was historic for its own reasons. With her defeat of Gantt, Myrick became the first woman to serve as Mayor of Charlotte. "While many black grieved over Mr. Gantt's defeat, other Charlotte residents hailed Ms. Myrick's election as another kind of breakthrough," one reporter wrote.[71]

The conventional narrative of Myrick's victory and Gantt's defeat is accurate, but incomplete. Without question, Gantt's inability to solve Charlotte's traffic problem doomed his political future in Charlotte. Myrick and her campaign staff were able to turn that particular issue into the dominant theme of the 1987 election and wound up unseating a popular, twice-elected mayor. But Myrick's attacks went beyond mere traffic concerns, and her success in raising questions about Gantt's ability to lead Charlotte in an unbiased manner helped Myrick close the polling gap. As is often the case with such a narrow margin of victory, any of the myriad reasons for Myrick's victory could potentially be the single issue that won the election. Furthermore, it would be

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[69] Toner, "Charlotte Mayor's Defeat Echoes Far," *New York Times*, November 9, 1987. B9.
[70] Clemons, "The Mayoral Campaigns of Harvey Gantt: Prospects and Problems of Coalition Maintenance in the New South," *Southeastern Political Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1. March 1998. 239.
[71] Toner, "Charlotte Mayor's Defeat Echoes Far," *New York Times*, November 9, 1987. B9.

disingenuous to suggest that Myrick's victory was achieved solely through racially charged attacks. However, she was able to gain traction on certain race-related issues in a way in which her predecessors on the Republican ticket were not. Gantt's successful tenure as Mayor of Charlotte, especially given the wave of conservative success in the South that coincided with his time in office, depended on the establishment and maintenance of his reputation as a fair and impartial minority mayor. In the face of the first serious challenge to his record as a moderate and unbiased politician, Gantt was unable to rally the same interracial coalition of voters that previously propelled him to office.

Gantt's defeat in the 1987 election marked the beginning of over twenty years of Republican control of the mayor's office in Charlotte. Despite his many achievements as mayor, Gantt felt that his work was incomplete. Gantt maintained his role at Gantt-Huberman while pursuing investment opportunities with his old friend Mel Watt, but he missed politics. Beginning in his first term in office, Gantt attempted to brush off questions about a potential run for statewide or national office. However, as Gantt explored a possible campaign for United States Senate following his loss in the 1987 election, Sue Myrick led Charlotte into the 1990s. While other opportunities beckoned, the city of Charlotte moved on without him.

Although he did not choose to leave office in 1987, and he felt that there was a great deal of work left to be done, Gantt's impact on the city of Charlotte was never in doubt. Throughout his tenure as mayor, Gantt advocated for balanced growth and

equitable development throughout the city. Gantt's vision for the city resulted in a number of drastic changes that further propelled Charlotte into the future.

Following completion of the new Charlotte Coliseum, the Charlotte Hornets launched their inaugural season in 1989.[72] Gantt's ideas for new development in the city, represented in the 2005 Plan, were continued by subsequent mayors and city councils in the decades that followed, resulting in a thriving metropolitan area that featured more balanced growth in the northern and southern areas of Charlotte. In particular, Gantt's advocacy for continued growth and development in Charlotte's Uptown area was realized in the years after he left office. The business community with which Gantt proved himself a team player thrived in the decades after he left office, particularly in the wake of federal banking deregulation that transformed Hugh McColl's regional banking giant North Carolina National Bank into the modern Bank of America, headquartered in Charlotte. The Hornets were eventually joined in 1995 by the NFL's Charlotte Panthers, who host their games in Bank of America Stadium, located in the heart of the city.[73] When the decision came to build a new coliseum, Gantt's original vision was realized: the Hornets currently play in the Spectrum Center, constructed in Uptown Charlotte in 2005.[74] Charlotte's outerbelt, Interstate-485, which was an integral part of the 2005 Plan, was ultimately completed in 2015. The thriving city center of modern day Charlotte, as

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[72] Gantt was the first season-ticket holder for the franchise. Laye, Leonard. "NBA Ticket Push Gets Fast-Break Start," *Charlotte Observer*. July 15, 1986. 1B.

[73] Before the construction of Bank of America stadium, the Panthers played their inaugural season "home" games in Gantt's alma mater Clemson University's Memorial Stadium.

[74] The Hornets routinely led the league in attendance throughout the 1990s, before relocating to New Orleans for the 2002-2003 season. An expansion team, the Charlotte Bobcats, returned professional basketball to Charlotte in 2004. The expansion Bobcats, who later reclaimed the Hornets moniker, were owned by Robert L. Johnson, the founder of Black Entertainment Television and the first African American owner of a major league sports team in American history.

well as the healthy neighborhoods and suburbs that surround it, directly reflects the kind of city Gantt set out to build when he was first elected as mayor in 1983.

Of course, Gantt's impact on the city of Charlotte spreads beyond economic development or the expansion of the city limits. In much the same way that the participation of Fred Alexander, Julius Chambers, Reginal Hawkins, and George Leake normalized black political power in Charlotte in the decade before Gantt joined the City Council, Gantt's presence in city government further cemented black leadership in the city. During his time on the City Council, Gantt helped diversify local government with the advent of district-based representatives. As mayor, Gantt oversaw efforts that established the Afro-American Cultural Center at the Little Rock AME Zion Church in First Ward. Throughout his tenure, Gantt was a vocal supporter of the city's Minority and Women Business Program, a venture that provided opportunities for many African American business owners in Charlotte. Gantt was an advocate for the city's well-integrated public school system and encouraged African American involvement in government affairs. More than any of his predecessors in the mayor's office, Gantt offered an ear to once-marginalized groups within the city and represented hope for a more equitable government in Charlotte. In the decades after Gantt last served as mayor, he helped design a number of prominent buildings in Charlotte, perhaps none more important than the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts and Culture. As a groundbreaking figure in the city's history, especially in regards to the black community, Gantt will be forever linked with Charlotte and its civil rights history.

Gantt received criticism for not focusing more directly on issues that affected African American citizens, but his efforts to stimulate growth and expand economic

opportunity were of vital importance to Charlotte's black community. Gantt's pursuit of economic equality was an extension of earlier civil rights activism, with Gantt believing that the expansion of economic power was an integral part of strengthening and securing the victories of past generations. Gantt was involved in more than mere maintenance of the movement, but he was surely involved in that, too. For each new proposal, Gantt advocated for the importance of sustaining earlier success. Continued efforts to secure integrated public schooling were as important as measures like the Minority and Women Business Enterprise Program. Gantt was concerned with new avenues through which equality could be achieved, but he knew well that the victories of previous generations needed constant guarding from political enemies.

Like the activists that came before him in Charlotte, Gantt had a direct impact on a number of politicians that served in the years after he left office, across local, state, and national levels. Gantt's friend Mel Watt began his political career by running Harvey's earliest campaigns for the City Council. In 1992, Watt and Eva Clayton became the first African Americans elected to Congress from North Carolina in the twentieth century. Watt served in the United States House of Representatives from 1993 to 2014; from 2014 until 2017, he served as the Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. Former President Barack Obama, who appointed Watt to the FHFA, called Gantt an "early inspiration" on his own political career.[75] But perhaps most importantly, his presence in city government from 1974 to 1987 impacted countless others as a generation came of age with normalized participation of minority groups.

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[75] Allen Breed, "Obama On Shoulders Of Men Like Gantt," Associated Press. September 5, 2012. One of the more widely-shared images of Obama's college years depicts him wearing a Gantt campaign t-shirt from Gantt's Senate race against Jesse Helms.

One of the many citizens of Charlotte who felt a direct impact from Gantt's tenure as mayor was Anthony Foxx. As a young boy, Foxx recalled helping his grandfather, James Foxx Sr., place Gantt campaign signs around Charlotte.[76] Years later, Foxx described Gantt as an inspirational figure for young African Americans. "Twelve year old people like me could dream about being on the city council one day," Foxx said.[77] In 2009, twenty-two years after Gantt's defeat at the hands of Sue Myrick, Anthony Foxx was elected as Charlotte's second African American mayor.[78]

Gantt never again held elected office after his defeat in 1987. Like countless civil rights pioneers that preceded him in the Carolinas, Gantt eventually reached a point of resistance that he could not overcome. While Gantt was unable to achieve all of his goals as Charlotte's first African American mayor, he established a governing philosophy that helped shape modern Charlotte while simultaneously inspiring a younger generation to continue the fight for equality and justice. As with his effort in desegregating Clemson University, Gantt's impact on the city of Charlotte endures long after his service in city government ended.

[76] James Foxx Sr. was heavily involved in Democratic Party politics in Charlotte in the 1970s, serving as one of the traditional power brokers to which Gantt was presented as a compromise candidate to replace Fred Alexander on the city council.
[77] Mary C. Curtis, "Why Has Gantt Been The Only Black Mayor?," *Charlotte Observer*. September 6, 2008.
[78] After announcing he would not seek a third term in office, Foxx accepted an offer to join President Barack Obama's cabinet as the Secretary of Transportation in 2013.

Conclusion

"I have always refused to believe that people can be confined to any permanent status in America. There is no permanent poverty, permanent joblessness, permanent hopelessness – not in the land of the free and the home of the brave." – Harvey Bernard Gantt, 1991

In 1990, Harvey Gantt launched a campaign for the United States Senate against Jesse Helms. Helms, who applauded Gantt's peaceful desegregation of Clemson twenty-five years earlier, was a southern political institution running for a fourth term. The two candidates offered drastically different visions for North Carolina. Helms' career was forged in divisive politics; by 1990, he had traded in his earlier, racially-charged focus on anticommunism for rampant homophobia and screeds against San Francisco liberals. In contrast, the Gantt campaign pointed to his inclusive politics as mayor of Charlotte, suggesting that Gantt would be a senator for all of North Carolina rather than a mouthpiece for disgruntled conservatives. Furthermore, Gantt's candidacy put him in the running to become only the second African American United States Senator of the twentieth century, and the first from the South.[1] Though he was mindful of the potential significance of his campaign, Gantt tried to focus on the issues facing North Carolina

[1] Edward Brooke of Massachusetts became the first African American Senator of the twentieth century, and the first ever elected by popular vote, when he defeated Endicott Peabody in the 1966 election.

rather than any historical trappings. "I don't dwell on this 'history-making' business," Gantt said at the time. "I've made enough history."[2]

Gantt held a surprising lead in the election's final week, but he was ultimately defeated by Jesse Helms. The racially charged "Hands" ad that the Helms team employed in the campaign's last days served as a stark reminder of the power of racial politics in the South. The now-infamous commercial depicted a pair of white hands opening a letter. The voiceover stated: "You needed that job. And you were the best qualified. But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota. Is that really fair? Harvey Gantt says it is. Gantt supports Ted Kennedy's racial quota law that makes the color of your skin more important than your qualifications." The commercial helped Helms close the polling gap at the last minute. Despite the obvious impact of the "Hands" ad on the outcome of the race, the polling margin was close enough for the ad to be effective because of the Helms campaign's use of attacks originally employed by Sue Myrick. Like Myrick, Helms pointed to Gantt's deal to sell WJZY and his comments about creating black millionaires in an effort to chip away at Gantt's support. Although Gantt was successful in his earlier attempts to break racial barriers in the Carolinas, unseating Helms proved too difficult a task. And yet, despite his defeat, contemporary observers lauded the Gantt campaign for outperforming expectations.

Undaunted, Gantt launched another campaign against Jesse Helms in 1996. By an almost identical margin, Gantt was again defeated by Helms. Gantt's senate campaigns helped further establish an African American place in North Carolina politics, but the popular focus on those traditional electoral contests has also obscured some of Gantt's accomplishments. While the campaigns held symbolic importance and inspired other

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[2] Art Harris, "Harvey Gantt's Fight to the Finish," *Washington Post*, November 4, 1990.

African Americans to seek higher office, Gantt had achieved lasting civil rights success long before he pursued his greater political ambitions. Thousands of African American students have attended public universities in South Carolina since Gantt arrived at Clemson in 1965. In the decades since Gantt left office in Charlotte, the city has been revitalized through investment in its Uptown area and development of previously ignored areas of the city. Historians and political scientists have given attention to Gantt's Senate campaigns at the expense of the tangible success he achieved in other areas.[3]

By focusing on that sensational moment in Gantt's life, historians have allowed the narrative of Gantt's earlier civil rights activism to be co-opted by the very institutions that Gantt challenged. At Clemson, administrators have crafted their own institutional history of Gantt's enrollment that is defined almost entirely by the tone of George McMillan's "Integration with Dignity" article, which celebrates Clemson President R.C. Edwards and South Carolina political and business leaders as the primary agents of peaceful desegregation. In 2003, on the fortieth anniversary of his enrollment, Gantt was invited to Clemson for the unveiling of a historical marker bearing the "Integration with Dignity" language. The event also marked the designation of Gantt Circle directly in front of Tillman Hall. The narrative of peaceful desegregation that has been so celebrated by Clemson University belies the prolonged legal battle that Gantt endured in order to gain admittance. It also serves to obscure the continuing process of integration that is moving too slowly for some of Clemson's African American students.

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[3] Kenneth Wink and Peter Laroche, "The 'Culture Wars' in the South: Partisanship, Race, and Cultural Conservatism in the 1990 North Carolina U.S. Senate Election," *Southeastern Political Review* Vol. 26, No. 2. (June 1998), 439-487; William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 365-383. Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Hunt Ferguson, "Mothers Against Jesse in Congress: Grassroots Maternalism and the Cultural Politics of the AIDS Crisis in North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* Vol. LXXXIII, No. 1. (Feb. 2017), 107-140.

Likewise, Gantt's election as Charlotte's first African American mayor in 1983 was celebrated by local journalists and city leaders as a proud moment for the city and its citizens. Gantt's victory was the culmination of decades of civil rights activism from individuals like Fred Alexander and Julius Chambers, but it was presented as a symbol of Charlotte's supposedly progressive racial attitudes. Gantt's loss four years later to Sue Myrick was not afforded the same symbolic weight, and many contemporary observers chalked Gantt's defeat up to traditional political issues like traffic congestion and taxation. While those were surely important factors in the 1987 election, the racial undertones of Myrick's campaign went largely ignored. The city continued to treat its election of Gantt as a sign of its modern appeal well into the 1990s, even as it engaged in widespread resegregation of its public school system.[4]

Gantt has involved himself directly in that process of history-making in recent years, restoring his own historical agency in the process. Since the twentieth anniversary of his enrollment at Clemson in 1983, Gantt has attended celebrations at each of the ten-year anniversaries. The Harvey and Lucinda Gantt Multicultural Center at Clemson leads on-campus discussion of important issues involving the school's minority and LGBTQ populations. In Charlotte, the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts and Culture hosts exhibits on African American history and culture, as well as traveling

[4] In the decades since Gantt left office as Charlotte's mayor, the city's integrated school system, once a source of civic pride, has slowly unraveled with the rise of charter and private school enrollment. Although the issue of resegregation of public schooling has been accurately identified as a national problem, it is particularly glaring in cities such as Charlotte that achieved success in integrated education. For more on this issue in the city of Charlotte, see: Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred: The Landmark Struggle for Desegregation in Charlotte, North Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006); Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom?: Education, Desegregation, and Development in Charlotte* (New York: State University Press of New York, 2004); Davidson M. Douglas, *Reading, Writing, and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

exhibits of art from around the world. The building itself, one of the most distinct and modern structures in Charlotte, was designed by Gantt.

In 2012, Gantt helped secure the Democratic National Convention for Charlotte, North Carolina, as chair of the city's Steering Committee. "When I came to Charlotte… could I have ever imagined that I was going to be listening to a black president accept the nomination for the second time in North Carolina?" Gantt asked at the time. "We have, in my mind, exceeded all the expectations I could have ever dreamed about."[5] Local reporters linked Barack Obama's election as the first African American President of the United States back to Gantt. Indeed, much was made of a photo of Obama from his college years wearing a "Harvey Gantt for U.S. Senate" t-shirt. While the link between Gantt and Obama may be yet another instance of Charlotte citizens participating in self-promotion via Gantt, the former mayor certainly paved the way for politicians that followed in Charlotte and North Carolina. Both Mel Watt and Anthony Foxx, Jr., who parlayed political success in North Carolina into positions in the Obama administration, were directly influenced by Gantt. Just as he was propelled forward by an earlier generation of activists, Gantt has influenced African American politicians that followed in his wake.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's idea of a long civil rights movement is illuminated through Gantt's life. From the early activism of African Americans seeking educational improvements in Charleston to the civil rights lessons of his father Christopher, Gantt benefited from the generations that came before him. As a result of John Wrighten's suit

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[5] "An interview with Harvey Gantt," *Creative Loafing - Charlotte*. August 30, 2012. http://clclt.com/charlotte/an-interview-with-harvey-gantt/Content?oid=2842984

against the state and the educational opportunity it afforded Matthew Perry, Gantt was successful in pursuing legal remedies against segregation in South Carolina. In turn, his experience at Clemson paved the way for generations of African American students who have enjoyed educational opportunities that were unavailable before 1963. These generations of African American activists have often held divergent motivations and goals and have employed a variety of tactics in the overarching battle for equality.

The civil rights movement was a long, multigenerational effort comprised of a variety of actors, tactics, and goals. Activists often entered and exited the organizational side of the movement while continuing on with their personal lives. Gantt's involvement in the civil rights movement was a result of the influence of his father and other childhood mentors, but it was also a matter of particular shared interests. While his enrollment at Clemson opened the doors for African American students that followed, it was also a personal matter of gaining access to an educational opportunity. Likewise, his election as mayor of Charlotte helped realize the dreams of earlier activists, but Gantt pursued the opportunity to fulfill his own hopes and dreams. Gantt's political career was essentially an extension of his work as an architect and city planner; he was less concerned with his status as a black mayor than with being a good mayor who happened to be black.[6] As with many involved in the movement, activism for Gantt was not a profession unto itself, but rather a tool for opening doors to new opportunities.

Some activists, like Gantt, participated in the movement across decades, employing a variety of tactics which expose the changing nature of the movement and its

[6] As a member of the National Conference of Black Mayors, Gantt remained in contact with a number of African American mayors across the country, including Marion Barry. However, Gantt proved willing to chart his own path and bucked expectations when he supported Walter Mondale over Jesse Jackson in the 1984 Democratic Primary.

goals. As the movement transitioned from protest to politics, the conventional narrative, both among historians and the general public, posited a victorious civil rights movement that had conquered institutional racism in the United States. With passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act and the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights movement undoubtedly entered a transitional phase. Activists continued to fight for political, educational, and economic equality across the 1970s and 1980s, while the national narrative celebrated the legal and legislative victories of the 1960s as the ultimate victory of the movement.

Stephen F. Lawson is correct that historians should be mindful of important distinctions within the civil rights movement. The short civil rights narrative that posits 1954 to 1965 as the boundaries of the civil rights movement certainly coincides with a particular phase of the movement that is differentiated from its predecessors and successors in its tactics and stated goals. It is worth noting how the civil rights movement changed in the decades that followed Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, at times struggling to define a clear path forward in the battle against continued racial discrimination and inequality. However, in light of Hall's assertion of the "political use of the past" and the negative side effects of the conventional narrative, historians should be mindful of the impact of narratives of a short movement. Indeed, framing the civil rights movement in a manner that implies finality only exacerbates ongoing civil rights struggles.

In the decades since Gantt left office in Charlotte, a series of stunning civil rights reversals and retrenchments have reshaped the political landscape. While political pundits and journalists were quick to declare Barack Obama's election as a sign that

racism was dead in the United States, mass incarceration and police brutality have reemerged as national political issues. The Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* overturned key provisions of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, leading to a series of state-led efforts to suppress African American voters. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* suggests in its very title the severity of the situation that currently confronts civil rights activists in the United States.

The Carolinas have not been free from this resurgence in racial tension. On June 17, 2015, South Carolina State Senator Clementa Pinckney and eight other African Americans were killed by a white supremacist during a prayer meeting at Charleston's Mother Emanuel Church, where a young Harvey Gantt once heard civil rights speakers extoll the virtues of peaceful resistance. Charlotte's public school system, among the most well-integrated in the country during Gantt's tenure as mayor, has resegregated over the last twenty-five years. Continued issues on Clemson's campus pushed African American students to lead a sit-in of Sikes Hall in 2015. As the nation grapples with issues of monuments to white supremacists, Clemson faculty, students, and alumni have debated the prudence of the campus' most notable landmark continuing to bear the name of Ben Tillman. The deaths of Walter Scott of Charleston and Keith Scott of Charlotte, both killed by police officers, were two in a series of African American deaths at the hands of police officers that fueled the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement. As it was in 1965, the movement remains unfinished.

Despite recent civil rights setbacks in America, it is important to remember the progress made by individuals like Gantt. Gantt's desegregation of Clemson, made possible by the tireless efforts of an earlier generation of activists, opened the doors for

thousands of African American graduates of Clemson, the University of South Carolina, and other public colleges in the state. How many of these black graduates have gone on to careers that were previously closed to them? In Charlotte, Gantt's time on the city council led to the expansion of district representation that has reshaped city government over the last four decades. Following the election of November 7, 2017, there are five African American members of the Charlotte City Council: Justin Harlow, LaWana Mayfield, James Mitchell, Gregory Phipps, and Braxton Winston. In addition to those members of the city council, former mayor pro tem Vi Lyles became the first African American woman to be elected mayor of Charlotte. Gantt's tenure as mayor, realized in the wake of decades of civil rights activism from individuals like Fred Alexander and Julius Chambers, helped foster an era of increased African American political participation that continues in Charlotte.

Harvey Gantt's experiences, from his childhood in Charleston to his desegregation of Clemson and his election as mayor of Charlotte, expose the long nature of the civil rights movement. Gantt's activism was the political application of a civil rights philosophy. His greatest influences, among them his father Christopher Gantt, Matthew Perry, Fred Alexander, and Martin Luther King, Jr., were proponents of peaceful, inclusive activism. Rather than go around systemic oppression, Gantt engaged it directly, choosing to challenge Clemson in court rather than continue his education at Iowa State. Gantt's political philosophy of engagement was a perfect fit for the city of Charlotte, where Gantt was forced to create an interracial coalition of voters to win the 1983 mayoral election. His campaign platform of balanced growth spoke directly to his

vision for Charlotte, as Gantt sought to include all of the city's residents in the economic growth of the 1980s.

At a recent speaking engagement in Charlotte, Gantt encouraged the audience to continue fighting to make better communities. "Stay engaged," he said. "Don't become so focused on what your specific career is that you forget that there is a community you live in."[7] Gantt acknowledged that his generation's time as civil rights leaders has long passed and urged the next generation to get involved. "I'm counting on you," he said. "We've done all we can do in an activist way…. You've got to do something. If you end the day not doing anything except caring about yourself, that's one more day lost in making this a great community." Gantt served as an important figure in the civil rights movement in the Carolinas, but his efforts are best understood as part of a longer struggle for black equality. Where Gantt's enrollment at Clemson and election as mayor of Charlotte represented the end of particular struggles to desegregate those institutions, they began the difficult process of integrating those institutions. It is only through the continued efforts of a new generation of activists that Gantt's dreams of a fully integrated society may be realized.

[7] Harvey Gantt, interview with Creative Mornings – Charlotte. April 21, 2017. https://creativemornings.com/talks/harvey-gantt/1

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