

Abstract

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After the Second World War, non-violent direct action protest became the tool of choice for civil rights workers. During the war democratic rhetoric and extended interracial contact inspired many blacks and some whites to work for racial justice. This thesis deals with the efforts of some blacks and whites to integrate parts of Baltimore, and follows community response. Specifically, Chapter One deals with early efforts of the Progressive Party and its supporters to integrate city operated park facilities. Chapter Two follows the integration of Baltimore City schools in the fall of 1954, and the complete integration of city parks in 1956. School integration caused some violent community reaction, which the authorities suppressed. The final chapter explores the origins of the public accommodations movement. As early as 1951 students at Morgan State protested against segregated theaters, stores and restaurants. After 1953 the students members of the Baltimore Committee of Racial Equality and a some other liberal whites sometimes worked with the students. The Morgan students' experiences

before 1960 were crucial to their emergence as leaders of
the civil rights movement after 1960.

INTEGRATING BALTIMORE: PROTEST AND
ACCOMMODATION, 1945-1963

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTEGRATING BALTIMORE'S PUBLIC PARKS:
PART 1

On the twenty-fifth of June 1951 the Baltimore City Park Planning commission met and agreed to a modification of its racial segregation policy. Prior to this date all of Baltimore's public park facilities had been segregated. The commission voted not to end segregation completely but rather to set aside some facilities, specifically tennis courts, athletic fields and playgrounds that would be open to interracial use. Elsewhere in the park system segregation continued. All but one member of the commission believed that most Baltimoreans, black and white, wished segregation to continue.¹

¹Minutes of the Public Park Commission, June 25, 1951. (Hereafter abbreviated "Minutes of the PPC.") The minutes are in bound volumes in the Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore, MD.

Since the Second World War, however, African-Americans had become more aggressive in demanding constitutional rights. At the same time growing numbers of whites were becoming more conscious of the injustice of segregation. Joining together, both groups referred to the democratic ideals so recently trumpeted during World War Two.

These changes did not happen overnight. The change of attitudes by both whites and blacks towards racism and segregation were part of a process that had been underway at least since the New Deal era in the United States. Attitudes and beliefs on the subject continued to change, though not without setbacks, for years after the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision, and indeed are still changing in the 1990's.

The New Deal itself did not contain any plan or intention to improve the plight of African-Americans. In practical reality it did nothing to change the daily lives of black citizens. It did, however, help provoke a change of climate. The Roosevelt administration made some token efforts to end discrimination in government, mainly through the appointment of blacks to some administrative positions and the inclusion of men in the cabinet who were friendly to the cause of desegregation. A few 1930's Supreme Court decisions also struck, though weakly, at discrimination. These changes made little

difference in the everyday lives of most blacks, but they did serve to raise expectations.

Other political and social developments during the decade also aided the cause of African-Americans. In the realm of science and social science new approaches and conclusions tended to replace old theories of race and racial supremacy that designated Negroes as physically and mentally inferior. These changes in thinking by society's leaders gradually began to filter down to the general public through educational and entertainment media. The growing tide of Nazism in Germany, moreover, led to inevitable and uncomfortable comparisons between it and traditional American theories of white supremacy.²

The Second World War also made African-Americans more aggressive in their determination to do something about their social and legal status. In many ways the war drew them together in their efforts. Calls to fight for democracy abroad reminded blacks of the lack of democracy at home. When they attempted to serve their country they were often denied the opportunity, or

²The best study of the effects of the New Deal era for blacks is Harvard Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); John B. Kirby, Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era, Liberalism and Race (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980). An important sociological study of the time is Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York, 1944).

were relegated to inferior positions in segregated units. While this left many disillusioned with American society, it spurred others to take a more aggressive stance in demanding their rights. During the war years the NAACP grew almost tenfold from a membership of 50,556 in 1940 to almost 450,000 in 1946. Likewise, the 1942 March on Washington Movement (MOWM) foreshadowed later events in the civil rights movement. The MOWM's threat to organize 50,000 blacks in a march on Washington helped convince President Roosevelt to create an executive order to establish a President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices.³ In 1942 thousands of Baltimore blacks journeyed to the state capitol in Annapolis to protest against police brutality and to call for black representation on the city's School Board.⁴

Urbanization of blacks increased substantially during the war years. An industrial town, Baltimore attracted thousands of rural blacks who migrated to the city to become part of the war machine. Migration

³Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," Journal of American History, 65 (Jan 1968): 90-106; Louis Kesselman, The Social Politics of the FEPC (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

⁴Robert Brugger, Maryland, A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 532; George Callcott, Maryland and America, 1940-1980 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 149.

brought overcrowding and poor living conditions in black neighborhoods.⁵ It also brought concentrated political power and a measure of independence. In the 1947 mayoral race blacks contributed to Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro's victory, and in return he appointed two blacks to positions in city government, though even this did not occur until he was reminded. One was Dr. Bernard Harris, a local physician who had not previously taken a prominent role in civil rights activity.⁶

Nationwide trends towards black awareness were even more prevalent in Baltimore than in other parts of the country. Baltimore Blacks joined the NAACP in record numbers and soon competed with New York for the largest chapter in the country. A large part of this was due to the spirited leadership that Lillian May Jackson, a local businesswoman and landlady, brought to the

⁵Brugger, 532; Callcott, 145-149.

⁶Callcott's table of state and national elections shows that blacks voted independent of either party for the candidate they believed would benefit them the most. Callcott, 150. Shortly after the election the Afro-American caught wind of a rumor that the mayor did not plan to appoint any blacks in the new administration despite a campaign promise. Whether this is true or not remains unknown, but in a scathing front page editorial the Afro warned that this would be dangerous to the existing goodwill that blacks felt towards the new Mayor. The next week the Afro was happy to announce the appointment of two blacks to city government without any mention of the previous week's threat, see Baltimore Afro-American, 19 July, 1947, 26 July, 1947. On Harris see "Harris, Bernard," Biography File, Enoch Pratt Free Library.

organization. Baltimore was also the home of one of the strongest black newspapers, the Baltimore Afro-American (commonly known as the Afro). This, in addition to a host of black ministers, made for a leadership that had excellent communication with its people.⁷

After the Second World War the Maryland economy faltered a bit, as it had been abnormally reliant on war-related industry. By 1947, however, Maryland made the transition and was settling in to enjoy the prosperity of the postwar economic boom.⁸ It was at just this time that progressive Baltimoreans, both black and white, began new efforts to desegregate their parks. The efforts came on two fronts, initiated by two different groups. Neither was much aware of the other at first, but both aimed at ending discrimination in a part of the city's park system.

The city's municipal golf courses had long been a target of integrationists. Since the 1930's the Board wrestled with the problem of trying to maintain separate but equal facilities. While it managed the separate part, the equal part had always been more troublesome. Still, though, the Board did what it could with limited funding to serve the interests of all golfers; this resulted in a single nine-hole golf course in Carroll

⁷Callcott, 145-150.

⁸Brugger, 554-558.

Park for blacks and three eighteen-hole courses for whites. During the Second World War the Carroll Park course needed renovation. The city, after the NAACP threatened a lawsuit, agreed to allow black golfers the use of the city's other golf courses on an integrated basis while the work was in progress at Carroll Park.

The arrangement worked without incident; but in 1945, after the renovations were complete the commissioners chose to revert to the old segregated system, per the original agreement. Although this represented a setback to expectations, no one immediately came challenged the ruling. After an interval of two years Charles Law, a local undertaker, independent businessman and avid golfer had enough. In December 1947 Law, in conjunction with the Monumental Golf Club, undertook a lawsuit charging that the city failed to provide equal facilities for black golfers.⁹

A second effort represented a new approach by the Fulton Progressive Citizens of America (PCA). Organized into local cells that were as much social clubs as political groups, the Fulton Progressives were just one unit of a state and national alliance made up of liberal New Deal types and an assortment of socialists and other

⁹Minutes of the PPC 30 April, 1936, 6 May, 1942, 3 June, 1942, 5 June, 1945; Baltimore Afro-American, 20 December, 1947, 17 July, 1948.

radicals.¹⁰ In December 1947, Philip Boyer, a member of the Fulton Progressives and coach of a recreation league basketball team quietly added two black members to his team. Boyer wished to bring a quiet end to segregation. His idea seemed good. Actually there was no formal rule instituting segregation, but segregation had been practiced as long as anyone could remember. Boyer's team competed, successfully, against another league team in an uneventful game. Members of both teams reported enjoying the game. In what was probably an attempt to downplay publicity about the game the Baltimore Afro-American gave only a few brief sentences of coverage to the event on the back of the sports page.¹¹ Most likely they hoped that this would become the norm before anyone noticed the difference.

Someone, however, did notice. The referee who officiated the game reported the event to his superiors on the Parks Board. The Board included some of Baltimore's most respected citizens and until the addition of Dr. Harris it was an all white institution.

¹⁰Interviews with Mitzi Freishtat Swann, and Jeanette Fino, January 1989 conducted by Barry Kessler, transcripts located at the Baltimore City Life Museum. Election statistics, which give a glimpse of the Maryland Progressives strength are available in The Maryland Manual, 1948-1949, compiled by Morris L. Radoff (Annapolis: 1949), 232-233. Also see "Progressive Party," Vertical File, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD.

¹¹Baltimore Afro-American, 20 December, 1947.

Not quite prepared to deal with a crisis of this nature, the Board immediately suspended further play by the team without making a final decision. Then, after some hesitation and confusion, the Park Commission decided to hold a special session to deliberate the issue.¹²

In fact the incident generated enough public response that the next two meetings of the Parks Commission in January, 1948 were taken up by the problem of segregation. The records of these meetings portray the conflict in social thought that was developing not only in Baltimore but throughout the nation. Ordinary citizens, not previously associated with civil rights, were increasingly questioning segregation. Many found it impractical as well as unjust. Their protests, however, were met by a Park Board whose concerns about social improvement took a back seat to maintaining civic order. Their main fears were of violent racial clashes, disruption of the established social order, and declining property values in the wake of a "black invasion." As the list of those testifying shows, however, agitation for change was starting to come from a broader cross section of the population than previously, when only blacks and a few white liberals took up the cause. Though the protesters still constituted a minority of the total population, their

¹²Baltimore Afro-American, 10 January, 1948.

numbers were growing and their attitudes becoming more common.

More than seventy-five people, both black and white, attended the Park Board's hearings. All of them were willing to speak against segregation, and none were willing to speak for it. Lillian May Jackson, president of the NAACP, Sidney Hollander, president of the Baltimore Urban League, and other long time members of the local civil rights establishment all spoke eloquently and politely to the Board, pleading it to allow the interracial games to continue. When Dr. J.E.T. Camper, a well known black physician and a member of the Progressive party, spoke, he received so much applause that the annoyed Board chairman threatened to clear the public from the room. It was, he said, no place for a demonstration. Subsequent speakers, however, assumed a more aggressive stance. Samuel Schmerler, an official of the Baltimore Industrial Union Council, CIO, spoke at length. He quoted President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights which called the doctrine of separate but equal "one of the outstanding myths of American history." Noting that the national convention of the CIO had called for an end to discrimination and segregation, he asserted, and probably exaggerated, that 60,000 members of Baltimore's unions stood behind that declaration. Members of both

races, he said, "work together as fellow workers and friends" and socialized together outside of the work place. He further reminded the Board that 15,000 union members of both races had assembled together for a day of picnicking and recreation in a public park without incident. Discrimination, he concluded in a final burst of fervor, was a tool used "to further exploitation of workers," and should be ended "NOW!"

Another speaker, Mitchell Dubow, a member of the National Lawyers' Guild, declared that team members, both white and black, were deprived of their fourteenth amendment rights. He observed that the issue had reached the press and that the people of the city were expecting fair play and it would be a means to ease everyone's conscience if the Board acted favorably.

Along with William Boucher, a member of the American Veterans' committee, several other veterans spoke. Most alluded to the fact that the recent war had been fought in the name of democracy. They noted that bullets did not discriminate and that minority troops had fought admirably in the war effort. Continuing discrimination now seemed hypocritical. A few had experienced some interracial contact in their wartime experiences in the armed forces and could not understand why the Board continued to insist on segregation.

Philip Boyer, manager of the team in question, and

Hy Gordon, an official of the Fulton Progressives, both testified, along with two members of the team. Boyer pleaded for an immediate lifting of the ban so that his team could play the rest of the scheduled games before the season ended. He argued that, being forced to wait, his team was losing its competitive edge. By the time of the second meeting he had grown frustrated with the Board and had moved his team to YMCA facilities, where he reported that the team had played without incident. Gordon, the two team members, and others who testified at the meeting all expressed egalitarian principles. No one could understand how race could have anything to do with athletic performance. One member of the basketball team echoed the sentiments of his peers. He thought that each person should be judged strictly on his own merits and ability to perform. Others expressed the notion that interracial activity would help to break down racist ideas so commonly held among whites, and promote harmony between the races.

Finally Dr. Harris, the lone black member of the Board, spoke. He must have anticipated the Commission's decision, for he berated it in no uncertain terms. He responded to unrecorded comments by some Board members that African-Americans were receiving aid from Communist groups. Blacks, he said, were highly committed to the democratic way and wanted nothing to do with communism.

He noted ominously that the best way to spread communism was to deprive people of their rights. Blacks could no longer "pray" for their rights; from now on they must demand them in an aggressive manner. In the future, he prophesied, this might lead to blacks taking such actions that "police might be required to force them to stop." This implied, he lectured, that interracial social relationships should extend to every phase of life, and that this was a good idea, for whites already had contact with blacks and relied on them for many domestic tasks.

The Board, patiently, heard all the testimony. When it handed down its decision, however, those who testified must have felt as if they had been talking to a brick wall. The Board wasted no time in deliberating the issue. Furthermore, it offered no explanation for its decision, and acted as if no justification were necessary. Democratic processes were necessarily slow and the Board said it did not owe it to anyone to act in haste. One member even asserted that it was undemocratic to compel whites to mix with blacks. Admittedly there was no rule on the books instituting segregation; but segregation had been the practice as long as anybody could remember and the Board saw no reason to change it now. When the votes were cast only Dr. Harris dissented.

With the basketball season nearly over it was too late for any further appeals. All involved seem to have accepted the Commission's decision quietly, just as they had previously when the golf links had returned to segregation. This time was different, though. Those interested in desegregation probably did not anticipate their defeat. Overwhelmed with the righteousness of their position, they were shocked that the Park Board did not concur.¹³ They spent the rest of the winter marshaling their forces for a spring offensive.

Before the Progressives could begin their next protest Federal Judge Calvin Chesnut handed down his decision in Charles Law's suit to desegregate the City's golf courses. In his ruling the judge found that the one lone nine-hole golf course in a noisy industrial section of the city was clearly not equal to the City's other three eighteen-hole golf courses. It was, concluded Judge Chesnut, "roughly comparable, in the field of railroad transportation, to that of the Pullman car with the day coach." He did not, however, rule out the possibility of creating a Jim Crow

¹³No report of charges of communist inspiration remain in either the PPC Minutes or the contemporary edition of the Afro; however, the Afro did report them a year later in its "Big Swindle" series. Despite this omission there is probably no reason to doubt their authenticity, since Dr. Harris obviously appeared to be responding to them, Minutes of the PPC, 14, 20 January, 1948. Baltimore Afro-American, 20 December, 1947, 24 January, 1948, 31 May, 1949.

scheduling system to maintain segregation.¹⁴

Immediately after the judge announced the decision those charged with the day-to-day maintenance of the golf courses began to admit blacks on an unrestricted basis. The Afro went wild with excitement. For a period of about ten days blacks and whites played together on the golf courses without incident and without recorded complaint to the Park Board.¹⁵ The celebration was premature. The Park Commission had yet to strike. In its next regularly scheduled meeting the Board, despite the vociferous protests of Dr. Harris, adopted a Jim Crow schedule that allowed blacks use of the golf course three days per week. One member expressed the fear that if integration proceeded everyone, blacks and whites, would abandon the nine-hole course at Carroll Park, forcing its closure and a loss of revenue for the city. He was, moreover, concerned that interracial activity would cause a general decline in use of all of the City's golf courses.

Ironically the decision, in a perverted way, favored blacks. The total number of regular black golfers in the city amounted only to about three hundred, and in setting aside three days a week for

¹⁴Law v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore et al. Civil Action No. 3837, District Court, D. Maryland, June 18, 1948.

¹⁵Baltimore Afro-American, 19 July, 1948.

their exclusive use it guaranteed them uncrowded conditions. For white golfers the decision only made already crowded courses even more crowded. Further, it inconvenienced some white golfers who had been accustomed to playing on the days now set aside for blacks. Black golfers, of course, did not appreciate the new conditions at all. They saw it as just one more humiliating inconvenience that they suffered based solely on the color of their skin.¹⁶

This time the fight did not end quietly. Dr. Harris used his position on the Park Commission to keep the issue alive for the rest of his tenure. The Afro also kept a vigilant watch and pointed out at every possible juncture the unfairness of Park Commission policy.

Now everything seemed to be happening at once. While the decision to institute the Jim Crow schedule on the golf courses was taking place, Philip Boyer and the Progressives were reappearing on the scene, announcing the formation of an interracial athletic association. A number of Baltimore Progressives and some members of the local Catholic church formed the coalition. Its purpose was to promote interracial athletics throughout the

¹⁶Minutes of the PPC, 29 June, 1948, 20 July, 1948; Baltimore Afro-American 24 July, 1948.

public and private recreation programs.¹⁷

With this organization formed primarily to work behind the scenes the Progressives also set out to make a public splash. 1948 was an election year and the Progressives were probably hoping to generate some publicity for their presidential candidate, former Vice-President Henry Wallace. In a move foreshadowing later types of demonstrations the Progressives organized a non-violent protest of the City's segregated tennis courts. This time they carefully planned the event. The Maryland Young Progressives joined with the Baltimore Tennis Association, a club comprised of talented black players. Some of the black middle-class professional members of the group chose not to participate for fear of damaging their careers. Instead, some of their children participated.¹⁸ Some of the black tennis players were primarily concerned with obtaining better courts. The only two courts designated for "colored" citizens in the park were badly in need of repair. The Progressives notified the Park Commission and the local newspapers of their intentions. In addition, they printed flyers and distributed them throughout the community to encourage supporters to turn

¹⁷Baltimore Afro-American, 19 June, 1948.

¹⁸Interview with Royal Weaver, January, 1989, conducted by Barry Kessler, transcript located at the Baltimore City Life Museum.

out.

The eleventh of July 1948 was a sunny and warm Sunday afternoon. A group of about fifteen blacks and whites met on the courts in Druid Hill Park. In the years before fair housing legislation, Reservoir Hill was the home of Baltimore's black middle-class. Some of the African-American protesters came from this neighborhood; others came from less affluent neighborhoods. Whites lived in other neighborhoods nearby and shared the park with blacks, though naturally on a segregated basis. In any case, most of the protesters lived within a mile or two of the park.¹⁹

The white members purchased playing permits for the whole group. As the group commenced playing, park officials came and ordered them to stop and disperse. They refused and continued to play until police officers came, at which time they sat down on the courts until police officers arrested them. Refusing to cooperate, the protesters sat down, forcing the police to carry them off the courts. By this time a sympathetic crowd had formed and some members hurled insults at the police. Some considered the police action to be akin to the worst kind of Nazism. For their efforts several members of the crowd were also arrested on charges of

¹⁹Ibid. Published arrest records list name, race and address of the protesters and hecklers, Baltimore Evening Sun, 12 July, 1948.

disorderly conduct, bringing the total arrested that day to twenty-four, a number nearly evenly divided between whites and blacks. Later at the station some of the protesters sang patriotic songs while waiting for release on bail.

Days after the tennis court protests the city fathers caught wind of a rumor that the same group was planning a similar test of the segregation policy on one of the City's softball fields in Druid Hill Park. Fearful that such an activity could cause a riot, they called on I. Duke Avnet, the lawyer retained by the tennis protesters, to call off any such event. The rumored event never took place. The City, however, decided to prosecute the tennis court protesters to the fullest extent possible.²⁰ In the meantime Henry Wallace, former vice-president and now the Progressive Party's presidential candidate, was making the most of the tennis incident in his national campaign. Paul Robeson, a popular black musician and political activist, in an opening speech to the national Progressive convention in Philadelphia blasted Baltimore City for its backwardness. Back in Baltimore Mayor D'Alesandro, who had not commented on the issue up until this time, defended the City's position, and accused the

²⁰Baltimore Afro-American, 24 July, 1948; Baltimore Evening Sun, 16 July, 1948, 17 July, 1948.

protesters and the whole Progressive Party of being Communist-inspired and "Moscow directed."²¹ Wary of becoming too deeply involved in a controversial issue, the mayor afterwards chose to remain close-lipped on the subject. During the next several years the Afro frequently appealed to D'Alesandro to override the Park Commission. Although he had final authority in park policy, he always chose to defer to the Board and avoid public comment. The Park Commission, for its part, voted to give the two park commissioners a commendation for "excellent judgment" in handling the arrests of the protesters.²²

A note of sympathy for the protesters came from the "Boys State Legislature." Sponsored by the American Legion, an ordinarily conservative veterans organization, the group was made up of teenage boys who participated in a mock legislature. On hearing of the arrests of the tennis court protesters they immediately set to work drafting legislation to outlaw segregation across the board in Maryland.²³

H. L. Mencken, the "great sage of Baltimore" and a noted civil libertarian, also took aim at the Park

²¹Baltimore Evening Sun, 22 July, 1948, 26 July, 1948, 27 July, 1948.

²²Minutes of the PPC, 20 July, 1948.

²³Baltimore Evening Sun, July 13, 1948.

Board. In his Sun editorial, he blamed the problems on a remnant of "Ku Kluxery." A citizen had "an inalienable right to play with whomsoever he will." The rule was "irrational and nefarious" and should, he declared, be "got rid of forthwith." Another writer to the editor of the Sun also condemned the rule as divisive and detrimental to society. The Afro concurred and gently reminded its readers that it had been making this argument all along.²⁴ Despite these sympathetic offerings, most white Baltimoreans remained ambivalent.²⁵

The City moved forward with the prosecution of the tennis court protesters. In October 1948 the defendants went on trial. In a vigorous defense, attorney I. Duke Avnet attempted to make the validity of segregation the central focus of the trial. The court, however, chose to avoid the question; instead it found seven of the protesters guilty of disorderly conduct and attempting to incite a riot, and acquitted the rest. All seven sentenced were white, and only two were actual participants in the demonstration: Stanley Askin and Harold Buchman, the Progressive Party officials who

²⁴Baltimore Evening Sun 15 July, 1948, 9 November, 1948, a reprint also appeared on November 9, 1988; also see Baltimore Afro-American, November 20, 1948.

²⁵Interview with I. Duke Avnet, January 31, 1989 conducted by Barry Kessler, transcript located at Baltimore City Life Museum.

orchestrated the event. In convicting them of attempting to incite a riot the court ignored the fact that it was the police who almost started a riot by arresting the protesters. The other five sentenced were members of the crowd accused of heckling police officers; they were given eighteen month terms.²⁶ Over the course of the appeal process, the courts reduced the judgment to fines and suspended the jail terms. The case nearly reached the United States Supreme Court, ending only because the high court refused to hear it.²⁷

The tennis court case became a point of reference for the Afro. Any time a similar issue would arise the paper would relate it back to the tennis incident. Furthermore, it undertook its own offensive against the Park Board. Beginning in the spring of 1949 it ran a series of expository articles on the inequality of park facilities set aside for blacks. The city had only one pool for the entire black population, and by the Afro's calculations black patrons were subsidizing less crowded pools for whites. A further calculation determined that

²⁶Baltimore Afro-American, 23 October, 1948, 4 November, 1948; Baltimore Evening Sun 25 October, 1948. Baltimore News Post, 4 November, 1948.

²⁷Baltimore Evening Sun, 22 March, 1948, 17, 18 November, 1949; Baltimore Afro-American August 9, 1949. Interview, I. Duke Avnet, January, 1989, conducted by Barry Kessler, transcript located at Baltimore City Life Museum.

on a crowded day in the pool designated for blacks there were only forty gallons of water for each person in the pool. The pools were overcrowded and poorly maintained.

Holes in the concrete, lack of lifeguards, and second-hand diving boards that were no longer fit for operation in the white pool created dangerous conditions that the Afro found intolerable.²⁸

A hopeful sign came at the expiration of the terms of two of the most racist Park Board members. The Afro, along with other black leaders, and an interracial coalition comprised partly of local civic leaders not previously associated with civil rights, opposed their renomination. A group of them even managed to gain a meeting with the mayor, who was friendly but refused to commit himself. The appointments stood, but when it came time for the City Council to confirm them some members abstained from voting.²⁹ Apparently they themselves were not sure of the exact state of public sentiment, and wanted to follow the Mayor's lead by staying as uninvolved as possible.

As 1950 approached it seemed as if nothing had changed. Indeed, little actually did change. The

²⁸Baltimore Afro-American, 21, 24, 28, 31, May, 1949, 2, 9 July, 1949.

²⁹Baltimore Afro-American, 21 June, 1949, 2 July, 1949; Baltimore Evening Sun 21 June, 1949, 5 October, 1949.

barrage of protest, however, was slowly taking its toll on the commissioners and most likely the general public as well. Dr. Harris kept active on the Board, always the underdog and almost as frequently outvoted on racial issues. The Board was as reactionary as ever. It declined a petition by the Baltimore Tennis Club for permission to use the courts designated for whites until Dr. Harris was able to assure the rest of the members that the participants were genuinely interested in playing and not protesting. The Board allowed the tournament to proceed as long as no whites participated. Even then some Board members exhibited a great deal of attention as to whether or not other white players would play on the surrounding courts while the tournament was in progress.³⁰

Lawsuits and the threat of litigation seemed to become habitual in this period. First there was a half-a-million dollar suit against the Board brought by an interracial group of twenty-one persons. It included Philip Boyer, the basketball coach who had become increasingly active in civil rights, Charles Law the black golfer who was refused admission to a segregated golf course, a white golfer who was refused admission to the Carroll Park course on a day set aside for blacks, and members of the tennis court protest. Though they

³⁰Minutes of the PPC, 1 July, 1950.

lost, the plaintiffs again kept the case moving to the Supreme Court, where it too was turned away. Also in this period Philip Boyer undertook his own suit to force the city park system to desegregate, though it did not achieve the desired effect either.³¹

By 1950 the Afro shifted its emphasis to the national level as more and more the courts ruled that many separate facilities were unequal. Late in the year one headline observed that the "Supreme Court can no longer duck ruling on segregation." Little did the editors know that the cases that would successfully end segregation were just entering the court system.

While all of this was taking place the Park Commission determined that it would not allow any mixing of the races if it could avoid it. When faced with the threat of a lawsuit over obviously unequal facilities in Ft. Smallwood Park, the Board found the idea of integration so repugnant that it prepared to close the park first. Instead it then voted to spend \$78,000 to build a separate bath house, though it did hope to

³¹Baltimore Evening Sun 2 January, 1951; Minutes of the PPC 6 January, 1951. Also at this time the Ober Law was struck down. This law, in the same class as the Alien and Sedition acts, forbade citizens to be members of "subversive" organizations, though it did not define what constituted a subversive group. This law was seen as potentially dangerous to anyone agitating for civil rights or any other cause. Civil libertarians considered its defeat by the court a victory. Baltimore Afro-American, 16 August, 1949.

obtain the funds from the Federal government.³²

Finally two incidents early in 1951 convinced the commissioners that a revision in policy, though not a complete reversal, was necessary. In June a baseball team made up of players from a naval ship that was passing through Baltimore sent a team to Easterwood Park to compete with a local team. With the armed forces integrated since 1948, no one thought to mention that the naval team was interracial. Apparently this was an unplanned incident, and when the Park Police stumbled across the game in progress they broke it up and sent the unprotesting, but disappointed, players home. Hardly a week later a similar incident occurred. This time it was a tennis team from the army. The team just happened to be all white, while the Baltimore Tennis Club happened to be black. The tennis players, like the baseball players, were sent home unable to finish their games. Again no one would admit that this was anything more than an accident, but nonetheless it proved embarrassing for the city.

It was an exasperated group of commissioners that met on the twenty-fifth of June 1951. In a statement inserted in the record the commissioners noted that no issue had taken up more of their time. They had

³²Minutes of the PPC 15 September, 1950, 18 November, 1950.

earnestly tried to form a policy that would be in the best interests of all citizens. They were, they claimed, trying to keep pace with changing conditions, yet they showed no willingness to move forward where they could avoid it. Hence, although some tennis courts would be set aside for interracial play, and the golf courses completely desegregated, the plan to build new segregated facilities at Ft. Smallwood Park would continue, and until they were complete a complicated Jim Crow schedule would go into effect.³³

Just as the Board was ready to make its decision some of the first signs of white reaction began to appear. On the subject of public school desegregation the Sun editorialized that "wise citizens, whether white or Negro, do not try to rush the process."³⁴ At the very same meeting that it desegregated the golf courses the Commission also heard testimony from a small group of white golfers who asked it to keep the segregated schedule in effect. But as in previous decisions the commissioners had already made up their minds and decided to continue with the limited desegregation that they had agreed upon between themselves.

One significant theme that runs throughout the course of these events is the significance of the Second

³³Minutes of the PPC 25 June, 1951.

³⁴Baltimore Evening Sun, 29 May, 1951.

World War to both blacks and whites. The democratic ideals espoused so often during the war caused blacks to find a new spirit of aggressiveness in demanding their rights and not just politely asking for them. This same democratic rhetoric also seems to have affected significant numbers of mainstream whites. Again and again blacks and whites appealed to these principles. Even those members of the crowd heckling police during the tennis court protest compared police actions with fascism and Nazism, the very antithesis of democratic ideals.

In a similar vein, service in the United States armed forces was an educational experience to many whites who for the first time had extended contact with blacks and found them to be normal people. Likewise, after the war many civil libertarians referred to the Truman Commission's denunciation of segregation. Observers often compared Maryland to desegregated branches of the Federal government, and these comparisons usually found that Maryland was far behind the times.

Civil rights gains in this period did not come at any small price. Blacks and whites worked together, but met solid opposition. In the years after the Second World War blacks would no longer "pray" for their rights. Attitudes among whites were also changing; many

were becoming more liberal, but some were becoming reactionary. Many whites had once thought blacks satisfied with their second-class position, but new black aggressiveness would no longer allow this attitude to remain unchallenged.

CHAPTER 2

INTEGRATING BALTIMORE'S PARKS AND SCHOOLS:
PART II

On Monday May 17, 1954, a pleasant sunny day in Washington D. C., United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren climbed to the bench of the court's great ceremonial room. Conducting the day's business as normally as possible, Warren knew what a social bombshell he was dropping on the nation as he read the court's decision in Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka. Eleven pages later legalized racial segregation, an American tradition, became obsolete.¹

¹Though the decision dealt only with public schools, it was the precedent that all future equal access decisions rested on. For the most expansive account of the Brown decision see Richard Kluger Simple Justice (New

Despite its finality, the justices took great pains to be as gentle and unprovoking as possible. Avoiding provocative and accusatory language, the court plainly stated that it believed segregation to be psychologically damaging and "inherently unequal" to blacks, and therefore a breach of Fourteenth amendment rights. The court also attempted to avoid a hostile public reaction. Setting no firm date for implementation, they invited the offending states to help formulate a plan for integration. Thus southern states were neither publicly humiliated nor under undue pressure to bring on a social revolution.

The actions of the high court over the next few weeks, however, could leave no doubts about the death of "separate but equal." Within the next two weeks the high court applied its new doctrine to six cases that involved public housing, higher education, and public recreation and park facilities.² Yet despite the clarion call to integration, many seemed to misunderstand.

York: Vintage, 1977) pp. 700-777 passim. Washington Post, 18 May, 1954.

²In three cases the Supreme court instructed Federal district courts to reexamine their previous decisions based on the Brown decision. In three other cases the court upheld Federal district court decisions, requiring integration, by opting not to hear them, so that their decisions stood. The Supreme Court Reporter, 74 (1955); Baltimore Afro-American, 4 June, 1954.

In Baltimore, the effects of the Brown decision began to blossom almost immediately. Local authorities began to study the issue immediately. That long hot summer of 1954 gave Baltimoreans a chance to consider the decision. Never afraid of using their First Amendment rights, they shared their thoughts freely. As events would show, no one could accuse them of being of one mind on anything.

Three main newspapers provided a forum. The decidedly middle class Baltimore Evening Sun led the way. It had a reputation as a fair minded newspaper; recently it had won the Hollander Foundation award for ending the use of racially offensive language.³ The Baltimore Afro-American, long an unashamed supporter of civil rights and integration provided an outlet for blacks. It also reached out to the white community, in its search for liberalism, and often published the words of less enthusiastic civil rights supporters. The News-Post, a Hearst press contribution to the Baltimore media, geared itself to a more working class audience. It tended to favor less controversial issues. Its

³The Sunpapers won the 1946 Sidney Hollander Foundation award. The Hollander Foundation gave awards specifically to those institutions or individuals that made significant contributions to a racially harmonious society. The Hollander Foundation papers are located in the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center at Howard University, Manuscript Division Collection 50-1. (Hereafter cited as Hollander Papers.)

readers were more given to debating and usually defending Senator Joe McCarthy's entanglement with the Army. Whether by censorship, or lack of reader interest, the News-Post published not a single letter on the subject of school desegregation in summer of 1954.

The newspapers, of course, kicked off the discussion with announcement of Brown. The News-Post, never one to de-emphasize the importance of a story, led the way. Ranking the decision in the same category as Dred Scott, it forecasted that "the document will rank in sociological significance with Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation."⁴

Lending enthusiastic editorial support to the decision, the News-Post also sensed, perhaps better than other observers, the potential reaction. A sensitivity to the rumblings already beginning around the South probably motivated its editorialist to take a defensive posture. In the best tradition of American ideals, it defended the decision as part of the "perfecting of American democracy." Then it moved to defend the Negro as being "ready" for the decision, having made a significant amount of "progress" in recent years. Just since World War Two Negro income had quadrupled, and the number of Negro voters multiplied almost as much.

⁴Baltimore News-Post, 17 May, 1954

Negroes, it went on, were likewise good citizens, having never lost faith "that American democracy was perfectible." To back up this claim it quoted Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics that showed that at no time had there ever been more than 1400 Negroes in the American Communist Party. The decision, it concluded finally, was "in the best interest of all of us."⁵

The more staid Evening Sun approached the decision from a legal angle. Recounting the same legal history as the decision, it more passively reported the high court's action. Quoting the court's observation that "today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments," it recognized the central importance of the school issue. In the modern experience the paper again quoted the court in finding that even when "tangible factors" were equal, the practice of segregation itself created inequality.⁶

The next day's editorial noted correctly the importance of the decision, and warmly praised both its firmness and its gentleness. Noting that the old doctrine placed "the emphasis on separateness rather

⁵Baltimore News-Post, 19 May, 1954.

⁶Baltimore Evening Sun summarized the case largely by selective quotation. Baltimore Evening Sun, 17 May, 1954.

than on equality," it proudly, though wrongly,⁷ proclaimed that in Maryland facilities "have long been equal." While admitting that Maryland had been as "reluctant" as other southern states to "formulate plans" for integration, it assured itself and its readers that "enlightened men of the south" were leading the way in Maryland. "Time, patience and statesmanship" were required of all, but the editors professed confidence that people of the "affected states" would "exhibit the needed qualities."⁸

The last Baltimore paper to report on the decision, ironically, was the Baltimore Afro-American. Not because of lack of interest, but because of a weekly publishing schedule, the paper essentially missed Brown, an old story by its publication. The Afro's coverage, moreover, looked less at the decision itself and began to focus on implementation. The NAACP immediately began to apply the pressure. Recognizing that the legal battle was not yet over, they threatened law suits against all municipalities that might try to delay the

⁷As late as 1953 the school board had declined to admit black students into some specialized vocational programs. Minutes of the Board of School Commissioners Office (Hereafter, Minutes BOSCO), 23 June, 1953. Available statistics also show that "colored" schools had a student teacher ratio of thirty to one, while "white" schools had a ratio of twenty-six to one. Relative to other southern school systems, it may have been one of the better ones. Baltimore News-Post 15 June, 1954.

⁸Baltimore Evening Sun, 18 May 1954.

integration process. Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP lawyer who argued the Brown case, began a petition to the school board in his home town, Baltimore.⁹

Some readers of the Evening Sun approved of the Brown decision, and wrote to say so. One, while urging caution and "careful planning," applauded the decision. Brown was a decision "that was worthy of America," as well as being a good tool to fight "Communist propaganda."¹⁰ Echoing the same sentiments, another reader declared that "the bright sun of justice is at last dispelling the gloomy clouds of bigotry." Linking desegregation with "Christian...[and] democratic ideals," she joined the Psalmist in calling for justice.¹¹

Other Baltimoreans had different ideas. One reader of the Evening Sun, who identified her reflections as "the thoughts of the average white person," declared the end of segregation a "monstrous thing...to society." Smelling a conspiracy, she claimed that people were "covering up" the decision with Bible quotations and was sure that they were interpreting the Bible to "suit themselves." Worried about the social implications, moreover, she wondered where the decision would lead.

⁹Baltimore Afro-American, 29 May, 1954.

¹⁰Baltimore Evening Sun, 31 May, 1954.

¹¹Baltimore Evening Sun, 3 June, 1954.

Would her children have to dance with colored children at the prom? Fearing that old bugaboo of intermarriage she asked rhetorically "would you be happy wondering if your next grandchild would be black or white?" Declaring segregation natural in the animal kingdom, she apparently mistrusted the human animal to be "as wise" without the help of the state.¹²

Another more theoretical debate arose. Would Abraham Lincoln support integration? Both sides drew on the historical record to try and support their case. The first to invoke Lincoln thought not. Not adding his own analysis, he let Lincoln's comments from an 1858 speech stand on their own. Lincoln said, the writer reported, that "I am not nor ever have been in favor of bringing about...social and political equality of the white and black races." The quote went on to catalog the ways that Lincoln thought the races could never mix, which included everything from serving on juries to intermarrying.¹³

In rebuttal, another reader suggested that "Mr. Lincoln was much confused on this subject in his early political days." When it came down to it, he asserted, Lincoln clearly understood "that the Constitution stated very emphatically just what it meant by equality to

¹²Baltimore Evening Sun, 31 May, 1954.

¹³Baltimore Evening Sun, 3 June, 1954.

all." Dismissing notions of white racial superiority, he implored his readers that "with all of this ridiculous squabble...we're letting our real enemy, Russia, make headway."¹⁴ Another reader echoed this sentiment asserting that "it remains an incontrovertible fact" that Lincoln rose above his "own narrow views," to "liberate not only 4,000,000 Negro slaves but twice as many poorer whites."¹⁵

Like Baltimore's citizens, government leaders also reacted in different ways. The Maryland State Board of Education ruled on May 26, 1954, that because Brown did not set a date for integration schools should remain segregated until a final order to do so from the U. S. Supreme Court. Maryland's county school systems, obligated by law, had to follow this advice. Thus most of Maryland's schools stayed segregated that fall.¹⁶

Baltimore City Solicitor Thomas Biddison, on the other hand, advised the city school board that under the Supreme Court decision the City's segregated school system had to go. An independently chartered city, Baltimore had no obligation to follow the State Board. So on the first day of June 1954, not even two weeks after Brown, the Baltimore City School Board took the

¹⁴Baltimore Evening Sun, 9 June, 1954.

¹⁵Baltimore Evening Sun, 11 June, 1954.

¹⁶Baltimore Evening Sun, 31 August, 1954.

radical course, voting unanimously to end its policy of segregation beginning that fall. Baltimore's old system allowed students to attend the school of their choice, so long as they met the racial requirement. Under the new system students could still attend the school of their choice, but with the racial restriction removed.¹⁷ Dr. John Fischer, Superintendent of Baltimore City Schools, noted that "abundant good will and good sense are widely distributed among...both our races." He was sure, moreover, that "White people who oppose the Negro are a small minority."

Other ruling bodies were not so liberal. On the tenth day of June 1954, the Baltimore City Park Board met. Meeting that day only to conduct normal business, most members had no intention of considering desegregating the city's partially segregated park system. Only one black member sat on the board that day. Rev. Wilbur Waters, a respected local minister, was the board's racial conscience, and dissenter on racial issues. Rev. Waters replaced Dr. Harris as the board's single black representative when Harris gained an appointment to the School board. On that day there must have seemed to be a new possibility. The recent

¹⁷The only exception were a few schools that were "districted," or overcrowded schools. These schools were only open to neighborhood children. See the Minutes BOSCO, 1 June, 1954.

Brown decision and the city school board's early decision to integrate must have made rapid desegregation in the parks appear possible.

With the opening of the City's beach and bathing facilities close at hand, Rev. Waters moved that the board consider integrating them. Instead the board, evading the issue, decided to discuss the appropriateness of discussing the matter. Even this proved a tough issue. Finally at the insistence of Rev. Waters the Board moved to discuss it at the next meeting in July, though this would be too late to open the facilities on an integrated basis.¹⁸

At the next meeting the board took up the issue. In the time between the two meetings, to clear the issue up, one member of the board contacted City Solicitor Thomas Biddison's office. An opinion from Deputy Solicitor Edwin Harlan assured the board that it need not integrate just yet. Despite the expected protest from Rev. Waters the board decided to pass on the issue for the time.¹⁹ Meanwhile the Afro helpfully reported that pools and parks in Kansas City, Missouri and Springfield, Illinois had opened on an integrated level, with no reported incidents of trouble.²⁰

¹⁸Minutes of the PPC, 10 June 1954.

¹⁹Minutes of the PPC, 17 July 1954.

²⁰Baltimore Afro-American, 26 June 1954.

In Baltimore, though, the NAACP prepared a lawsuit to challenge the board's decision. Unfortunately the legal process was always lengthy.²¹ For the long hot summer of 1954 Baltimore's public pools and beaches remained segregated. Blacks continued swimming in the overcrowded, ill maintained city pools.²²

Baltimoreans, meanwhile, continued their discussion. In a survey of Baltimore citizens "picked at random from the phone book,"²³ the Afro-American garnered responses to the School Board's decision to integrate in the fall. The response ranged from those who bid God's blessing on the School Board, to those who feared intermarriage and were against it. Harry A. Cole, a black Republican candidate for the State Senate, commented to the Afro-American that now "there will be no excuse for segregation in hotels, parks [and] beaches." Others noted the decision as a step towards progress. One noted that education was the only way to

²¹Baltimore Afro-American, 3 July 1954.

²²The city maintained only one pool for blacks, while maintaining six pools for whites. The condition of the pool was a frequent source of complaint, see, for example Baltimore Afro-American, 7 August 1954.

²³If this survey is representative, then a substantial portion of Baltimore's citizens were doctors, ministers, and civil rights activists. More than likely the Afro-American first surveyed people it knew would be friendly to the decision, then added some truly random responses to give the survey credibility. Baltimore Afro-American, 12 June, 1954.

"elevate any group." Then there were a few who praised the old system of segregation. It "worked all along" observed one so "why start something new now?" Despite the range of thought, however, none of the respondents sounded particularly angry. Most of those against integration displayed a certain amount of apathy more than shock or disgust.

The Evening Sun added its own editorial comment. Although admitting that the old system did not provide equal facilities, it reiterated the notion that "the general picture is one in which no distinctions have been made" in quality of education. More confident than ever, the editors proclaimed that allowing each student to attend the school of his or her choice would allow integration to "come gradually." With satisfaction the paper anticipated a smooth transition.²⁴

Everyone, however, was not so sure. Many wrote to the editor. One reader warned ominously that the decision "was one of the subtlest communistic tricks that was ever pulled out of the hat to cause discord among the nation's people." The court, moreover, was trying to "ram this issue down the throats of the American people-both the white and colored." Not understanding the judicial role he suggested that a vote be taken. If that were the case he was sure "the

²⁴Baltimore Evening Sun, 11 June, 1954.

Supreme Court will find that 90 per cent of the people of this country are in accord with segregation."²⁵

Another respondent, in a similar vein, proclaimed the issue to be "a matter of expedience" designed to bolster the sagging reputation of America in Europe and Asia. Certain of segregation's popularity, he claimed to "know a number of proud conscientious, independent Negroes who have but little taste for the disagreeable medicine" of integration.²⁶

As the summer of 1954 wore on, it seemed that more people got accustomed to the decision. Letters ran more in the direction of supporting integration. Often rebuttals to previous letters appeared. One writer reminded readers that "Negroes fought side by side with our boys," in a reference to the recent Korean conflict.²⁷

Another drew equally on Darwinian theories of climatic adaptation, and Biblical creation trying to explain how all men were "created" the same despite different skin color. Carrying racial segregation to its logical extreme, he proposed separating not only

²⁵Baltimore Evening Sun, 10 June, 1954.

²⁶Baltimore Evening Sun, 9 June, 1954. Not surprisingly the Soviets perceived the issue the same way. They denounced the decision as a "demagogic gesture" that would leave race relations unchanged. Baltimore Evening Sun, 23 June, 1954.

²⁷Baltimore Evening Sun, 17 June 1954.

blacks and whites, but also Christians and Jews. "That," he asserted ominously, "would be the sure path to national disintegration and suicide." He concluded with certainty that "our ideal is the melting pot, not the sorting machine."²⁸

In general, those supporting integration tended to stress Christian and democratic ideals, and the rights of all men. Those speaking against integration tended only to see their own rights violated. One of the most frequent complaints was "why did not we get to vote on integration?" In the midst of the McCarthy era both sides utilized the fear of Communism. Segregationists thought integration a Communist conspiracy. Integrationists, on the other hand, thought segregation a blot on America's image that destroyed its credibility.

By mid summer the debate began to taper off. Finally as the end of summer approached Judge Roszel Thomsen heard debate on the park desegregation case. The case centered on the issues raised in Brown. The NAACP argued that Brown had thrown out the separate but equal doctrine, and that segregation caused psychological damage to Negroes. Baltimore's Solicitor,

²⁸Baltimore Evening Sun, 18 June, 1954.

Thomas Biddison, argued that Brown only applied to public schools, and that anyone who felt "psychologically damaged" did not have to go to the parks. Warning of the dangers of "intimate contact," moreover, the City argued for the necessity of maintaining segregation. Fearing both riots and a decline in attendance, he asked the court to dismiss the suit.²⁹

Judge Thomsen, recently a member of the Baltimore City School Board before appointment to Federal District Court, carefully weighed the arguments. His ruling noted that public recreation, unlike public education, was a voluntary activity. Agreeing that more "intimate contact" took place in swimming than in education, he asserted that the Supreme Court did not intend to "destroy the whole pattern of segregation" in the Brown decision. Therefore Judge Thomsen ruled that separate but equal still applied to public recreation.³⁰

The Baltimore Afro-American immediately and loudly denounced the decision. Chief Justice Earl Warren took only eleven and half pages to abolish segregation in public education, the editors opined. Judge Thomsen, on the other hand, took "thirty-one pages of tortured legalistic verbiage" to maintain segregation in public

²⁹Baltimore Afro-American, 7 July, 1954.

³⁰Ibid., 7 August 1954.

recreation. The Afro offered its more liberal interpretation of the Brown decision, and chastised Judge Thomsen for his misunderstanding.³¹

The Baltimore Evening Sun declined to reinterpret the Brown decision, but stuck with Judge Thomsen. Reaffirming its commitment to gradualism, the Sun was certain that "many" Baltimoreans "will feel the decision was a wise one at the present time." Broadly hinting that too much integration could be dangerous, it advocated avoiding "any action which tends to worsen racial relationships."³²

Too late in the season to effect an immediate change, the issue quickly receded in the public consciousness. The NAACP moved, almost automatically, to appeal the decision, promising to go to the Supreme Court if necessary. The rest of the summer of 1954 passed uneventfully, and Baltimoreans looked towards the fall with a good deal of ambivalence.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the beginning of school in the fall of 1954 was its calm. None of Baltimore's newspapers, including the Afro-American, gave extended coverage to integration. Blacks entered fifty-two of the City's 186 public schools in

³¹Baltimore Afro-American, 7 August, 1954.

³²Baltimore Evening Sun, 28 July 1954.

Baltimore. In most cases only a handful of black students entered the previously all white schools. Neither angry protests nor violent racial conflicts in any way marred the opening. At one newly integrated school "white and colored" went through the registration line together, "chatting now and then." The only complaints heard that day were due to over crowding, a problem that had been growing for some time. Overall, integration "caused no reaction whatever."³³

Beneath the surface, however, a few rumblings of dissatisfaction began. One evening just over a week after the beginning of school, a group of five-hundred parents from all over Baltimore crowded into the cafeteria of Southern High School, in working class south Baltimore. Unhappy about integration, they met hoping to reverse the decision. Maryland's Assistant Attorney General Giles Parker warned them that integration was now a fact of life. The state, Parker assured them, would ask the Maryland Supreme Court to "decree a gradual lifting of racial barriers." The parents, not completely satisfied, formed themselves into the "Maryland P-TA Council for Separate Schools," and appointed a steering committee to pursue their

³³Baltimore News-Post, 7 September 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 6-8 September, 1954; Southern School News, 4 November, 1954.

cause.³⁴

Baltimoreans did not live in a vacuum. A similar crisis heating up in nearby Milford, Delaware no doubt encouraged them. Just a few days after the Baltimore parents met, parents in Milford managed to shut down their schools for a day. More than a thousand Milford residents signed a petition hoping to remove eleven Negro students from the community's schools. Then a few days later, Milford crisis boiled over. Angry students began a school boycott that forced the closing of school. The frustrated School Board refused to reverse its decision, but without strong community and local government support it chose to resign in mass. "The School trouble," sniffed the Sun "clearly has grown out of proportion to the problem." The "surprise approach" to integration does not work, it noted, blaming the Milford School Board's September decision to integrate for the crisis. The chaotic events in Milford contributed to a climate that could only encourage the

³⁴Parker, no doubt, was in a difficult position. On the one hand integration was inevitable. On the other hand Baltimore City's decision for early integration went against the State Attorney General's ruling. At this point it would have been impossible to set up some new integration plan, since so many students registered and settled down in new schools. Yet that is exactly what Parker promised to ask for though he probably knew it would be impossible. Baltimore News-Post, 16 September 1954.

foes of integration.³⁵

On Thursday, September 30, 1954, just days after the climax in Milford, Baltimoreans began their own protest. Just fifteen minutes before classes began at southwest Baltimore's Elementary School Number 34, a group of mothers began picketing. They were armed with hastily made placards asking: "We voted on school loans - Why not this?" and "What about our Rights?" As classes began that morning 390 of the 597 students were absent; as the day progressed, moreover, parents removed another forty children. Two policewomen walked the picket line with the protesters trying to dissuade them from protest. For their efforts, the protesters pushed one policewoman to the ground. No further violence occurred, but the angry mothers kept to the sidewalk most of the day. The parents, not without some informal

³⁵Several similar occurrences appeared. A little farther away in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, twenty-three Negro students, fearing violence from whites, returned to their old schools. Only five of the seventeen states that still practiced segregation agreed to help the Supreme Court formulate a plan for desegregation. The other states threatened to close schools before integrating them. All this certainly contributed to an atmosphere that encouraged latent racism to manifest itself. The Milford case, however, appears to be the most potentially influential because of the similarities. Protesters in Baltimore almost seem to have taken their cues from the Milford protest. The Baltimore movement, however, appears to have been completely organic, not the result of outside agitators coming into the community to stir up trouble. Baltimore News-Post, 15, 21, 25, 27 September, 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 23 September, 1954.

organization, promised to spread the demonstration throughout the City's school system.³⁶

A few weeks earlier when school began, eleven Negro students enrolled in the elementary school. For almost a month classes carried on with no trouble, principal Clara Crockett reported. Now, keeping watch over the protest were several well dressed, but unidentified, black men. Apparently they went unnoticed by the crowd and the newspapers reporters, but not by their cameras.³⁷

Attempting to cut off the rising crisis, Baltimore City School Superintendent, Dr. John Fischer, met with the City School Board. They issued a strongly worded statement that condemned the protesters. Stating firmly that school would continue, the board called for an immediate end to the protest. Speaking to the press that afternoon Fischer tried to project as much confidence as possible. He assured the public that this was only an isolated incident, and otherwise the school system carried on normally. Appealing to the

³⁶Baltimore News Post, 30 September 1954.

³⁷Possibly the men were reporters from the Afro-American, or parents of the involved children. In any case they most likely refrained from challenging the protesters, a move that would have guaranteed them coverage. A News-Post photo documents their presence, but the news stories did not identify them. Baltimore News-Post, 30 September 1954. Minutes BOSCO, 30 September, 1954.

protester's sense of patriotism, he asserted that "what made the United States the great bulwark against Communist and Fascist totalitarianism is the fact that...we accept the principle of government by law." "It looks," he speculated, "like some of the germs have drifted down from Delaware." In Delaware, meanwhile, the new Board of Education hastily rescinded the segregation order.³⁸

The next day, Friday October 1, 1954, events continued to escalate. That morning protesters picked up where they left off at school Number 34, only now with more enforcement. One woman shouted to nearby press reporters, "keep the germs spreading," while a girl on roller skates carried a sign reading, "We voted for school loan, why not this?" More police were on hand to ensure the safety of students attending school. Unfortunately, though, the school was "almost empty." To counter the protesters a group of black parents showed up. Forming themselves into a human wall, they blocked the protesters and formed a channel to protect entering students. At another nearby school police arrested a black man for carrying "a dagger" while

³⁸Minutes BOSCO, 31 September, 1954; Baltimore News-Post 30 September, 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 31 September, 1954.

escorting children to school.³⁹

At three other surrounding elementary schools similar events were taking place. As the day wore on, the "school strike" spread to at least eight other schools, and involved more than 2,000 students. At Southern High School students walked out of their classes in the middle of the day. Some hastily made their own placards and began marching. Some teachers, in a show of authority, approached the students and snatched the signs and ripped them up. This nearly caused a riot, but fortunately the police were on hand to prevent further confrontations. That afternoon the white members of Southern's football team lined up to protect their one black member from the crowds. The team declared that if he could not play, they would not play either. The game went as scheduled. After school that day the police had to escort other Negro students, out of the back of the building, to safety through an ever expanding crowd.⁴⁰

By the end of the day the police had to break up a crowd, growing restless and violent, of more than 800 outside of the school. Then several carloads of students, some hanging out of the windows with "Lets

³⁹Baltimore News-Post, 2 October, 1954; Southern School News, 4 November, 1954.

⁴⁰Baltimore News-Post, 2 October, 1954.

keep Southern White" placards, drove to other high schools in an attempt to spread the protest. Officials hoped that since it was Friday, the weekend would allow time for cooling off, and all would be normal on Monday.⁴¹

The Sun, straining to project confidence, noted that the protesters comprised only a small minority. Yet it could not help but compare the crisis to the one in Milford. Noting that the Milford movement started with only a few protesters but rapidly grew, it feared a similar rise in Baltimore. For the first time the editors admitted the presence of widely held racial convictions among Baltimore's citizens, and feared a violent manifestation of them. Realizing the potential seriousness of the problem the Sun recommended that no action be spared to keep the schools open and "to make sure that parents observe the law."⁴²

Printed letters in the Sun tended to echo the editors' position. As if wanting to let ordinary Baltimoreans convince each other of the rightness of integration, the Sun rushed letters into print.⁴³ The dominant themes included respect for law and order, and

⁴¹Baltimore News-Post, 2, 3 October, 1954.

⁴²Baltimore Evening Sun, 1 October, 1954.

⁴³Ordinarily the Sun took four to six days to print letters, but at this time letters appeared dated just one day before publication.

need to project a positive image to the world. The writers did not concern themselves with defending the rights of African-Americans. Overwhelmingly, they deplored the mob action, one even calling it "the face of American Fascism." More than anything they wished the protesters to cease, and the local authorities to restore order.⁴⁴

Despite the outcry, and a relatively calm weekend, on Monday even more students stayed away from school. All of the city's downtown high schools showed significant absence rates. More troublesome still were the large groups of white students gathering at different locations throughout the city. One group attacked a streetcar, smashing the window, and sending the motorman scurrying for cover. At Federal Hill, near the troubled Southern High School, police broke up a group of more than 2,000 youths.

Another group marched through the city, towards City Hall, picking up students from a variety of schools as it moved. By the time it arrived at War Memorial Plaza, in front of City Hall, the crowd was over a thousand strong. Police cordoned off the building, as the crowd approached. When the mob demanded to see the mayor, police announced that he was not in and that they

⁴⁴Baltimore Evening Sun, 2-6 October, 1954.

should move on.⁴⁵

The crowd marched around the business district for a while, and then returned to War Memorial Plaza. There they sang "God Bless America," and again demanded to see the Mayor. This time a police sergeant, from the safety of a sound truck, managed to split the crowd into three sections. The largest began marching north towards Poly High School. Another group marched off to the new all girls Western High, where it proceeded to "raise a howl."

As the day wore on and more students joined the protest, a new atmosphere emerged. At both Poly and City College⁴⁶ high schools students milled about in a "party like" mood. Smiling and waving to reporters they did not even bother to carry signs. Clearly many were just joining in "the strike" as an excuse to avoid classes for a few hours. At Poly the principal took to the loud speaker to admonish "all real Poly men" to come back to school, and about half obeyed. At City College police ordered the students to either go inside or go home, at which most students moved on. A few reported that they were off to see a movie. As the day ended, however, seriously protesting students promised to return for

⁴⁵Baltimore News-Post, 4 October, 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 4 October, 1954.

⁴⁶Despite its name Baltimore City College is a high school.

another day of "striking."⁴⁷

That night about six hundred of the more dedicated strikers and their parents held a "mass meeting" at a local Race Track. They invited Bryant Bowles, of the newly formed National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP) to be their speaker. Bowles, a leader in the Milford, Delaware school boycott, encouraged the protesters to stand pat. He advocated "rule by force," implying that enough protesters could force a new rule, like the Milford protesters managed.⁴⁸

The strikers, true to their word, appeared the next day for another day of protest. Today, however, the police force and the school board took a more forceful stand. Over night city officials learned from Baltimore Sun columnist, William Manchester, that there was a law on the books prohibiting any sort of demonstrations in the vicinity of any school property. With this new information the mayor was able to direct the police to take a firmer stand, and restore normal order.⁴⁹

Police Commissioner Ober publicly announced that

⁴⁷Baltimore News-Post, 4 October, 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 4 October 1954.

⁴⁸Baltimore News-Post, 4 October, 1954.

⁴⁹Leon Sachs, transcript OH 8136, Lillie May Jackson-Theodore R. McKeldin Oral History Project of the Maryland Historical Society, 1976. (Hereafter cited by participants name with OH transcript number.)

picketing outside of schools was illegal, and promised prosecution of violators to the fullest extent. The School Board issued a warning to striking students that continued unexcused absence would result in suspension or expulsion. As potential protesters showed up at various schools police were on hand and ordered them to either go in to school or move on. Not allowed the privilege of congregation, many suddenly chose to go in. Observers noted a few "roving bands of truants" here and there around town, but with no place to go they soon dispersed.

The protest movement, though fading in some parts of the community where it began, was just catching on in others. In fashionable middle class Charles Village forty mothers with children in the Margaret Brent Elementary School marched to the nearby School Administration Building. Once there they requested a meeting with Dr. Fischer, Superintendent of Baltimore City Schools. Taking them by surprise, Fischer invited them in and began to explain the School Board's ruling. Before he could finish, though, about half of the mothers got up and walked out. One mother asked if he had any children in public schools. He responded that his son attended the now integrated City College. Patiently he answered their questions until they either

tired of asking them, or became satisfied.⁵⁰

The next day, Wednesday, saw a marked return towards normal. Most students returned to school. At Southern High School black and white students entered the school together without friction. Only days before, the black students needed a police escort to ensure their safety. In other schools, student government leaders led the way by voting to accept the decision. A few wrote letters denouncing the protest to local papers. Student leaders claimed damaged reputations, they agreed with Dr. Fischer that the protesters comprised a small number of all students.⁵¹

The official News-Post editorial writer took a round about approach to condemn the protest. Writing his editorial the way he imagined a communist secret agent would report the issue to Moscow, he saw the protest as a victory for communism. Racism was a great tool in the communist arsenal, and though Communists had not invented it, they enjoyed the effects. The Communist cause also benefitted from disorderly protests. These protests would break down respect for law and order, and somehow this was a "long range victory" for Moscow. Although admitting that some of

⁵⁰Baltimore News-Post, 4 October, 1954.

⁵¹Baltimore News-Post, 4, 5 October, 1954; Baltimore Evening Sun, 4, 5 October 1954.

the protesters were using the protest as an "excuse to play hookey," this would tarnish America's international image. Overall, this was a great, though unasked for, victory for Communism, the editorialist resounded.⁵²

Even readers of the News-Post became vocal enough to merit publication. One, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, reminisced of his youth when he had never seen a black person and declared them to be the devil. Being adventurous though he struck up a conversation with the first one he met while traveling. Finding the man to have the same good graces and intelligence of his peers he concluded that all men, no matter their color, had the same kind of soul. Invoking scripture and love of his adopted homeland, he begged his fellow citizens to learn to live in harmony.

Another reader, less enthusiastic for integration, agreed with Dr. Fischer that those responsible for the trouble were a minority, but referred to a different minority. The writer, however, called the School Board the minority, blaming it for trying to "cram this [integration] down our throats." Urging that a vote be taken he declared that people didn't "have to be Communists or traitors just because they do not want to live the way they are being forced to live." Another reader agreed in asking for a vote but, politely asked

⁵²Baltimore News-Post, 5 October, 1954.

everyone else to all other groups to quit offering advice.⁵³

One reader claimed to be a substitute teacher at school number 34 where the protesting began. She held up the children at the school as an example of racial harmony and asserted that their parents could learn from them. She implored the protesting mothers to put themselves in the place of the Negro mothers and ask themselves how they would feel. Urging them further to prayerfully consider the issue in the "church of your choice," she warned ominously that God would judge them for their actions.⁵⁴

Another reader went even further. Judging from recent appearances "this seems to be a Godless country," she opined. Again claiming the fundamental equality of all men's souls, she urged her fellow citizens to "love" one another. Not only would God's judgement come, but "what will the Communists think about us," she queried.⁵⁵

Thanks to the strong position taken by community leaders, the crisis ended quickly and with little fanfare. One News-Post reader thanked the newspapers, the school board, the police and all involved "for the

⁵³Baltimore News-Post, 5, 9 October, 1954.

⁵⁴Baltimore News-Post, 7 October, 1954.

⁵⁵Baltimore News-Post, 8 October, 1954.

fine job they did in upholding and maintaining the Supreme Court's decision."⁵⁶ The rest of the school year proceeded smoothly, and the crisis quickly receded.⁵⁷

The protest began in working class south Baltimore, but spread northward, finally ending up in the heart of middle class Baltimore. Although it involved a small minority of the school system's students, it revealed a latent racism on the part of many Baltimoreans that transcended class lines. The protest also radicalized blacks and some whites. Blacks continued to go to school and black parents took care to ensure their children's safety. Some whites also took a radical position. The white Southern football team lined up to protect its black member. Student councils moved to approve the decision and condemn the protest. Integration prompted many whites to take a radical stand, while others took a reactionary course.

Early in the spring of 1955 the United States Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on the park desegregation case. Citing the "momentous" Brown decision, the

⁵⁶Baltimore News-Post, 12 October, 1954.

⁵⁷Southern School News, 6 January and 8 June, 1955; Elinor Pancoast, Report of a Study on Desegregation, in the Baltimore City Schools (Baltimore, 1956) passim.

circuit court declared that it seemed "obvious that racial segregation in recreational activities can no longer be sustained as a proper activity of police power." The court noted further that use of parks, unlike schools, was voluntary. Those who did not like integrated facilities, the court implied, were not forced to use them. The court went on to cite specific illustrations of cities whose park facilities had integrated without problem. Thus the court unanimously ruled in favor of integration.⁵⁸

The ruling came early enough in the year to allow the Park Commission time to make arrangements for integration when the pools opened in June. In considering the ruling, the Commission turned to City Solicitor Thomas Biddison, who a year earlier had, advised the City Board of Education to integrate public schools. "The law," Biddison advised "is very uncertain...and it would be very healthy for all races if the Supreme Court acted on it." The case, moreover, was identical to a state case, so Biddison thought it proper for the City to join the state.

Rev. Waters, the Park Commission's lone black member, listened politely to the presentation. When Biddison, obviously ill at ease, finished, Waters

⁵⁸Baltimore News-Post, 14 March, 1955. Baltimore Evening Sun, 16 March 1955.

thanked him for taking the time to speak to the board. Then turning to his peers on the board he gently chastised them for not following his earlier advice a year ago when he had recommended that the board desegregate its facilities in order to avoid the inevitable NAACP lawsuit. Confident of final victory, though, Waters did not stand in the way of the board's decision to appeal the case to the Supreme Court.⁵⁹ For the black citizens of Baltimore, though, most of the City's pools and beaches remained off limits in the summer "heat wave" of 1955.⁶⁰

Finally in November 1955 the Supreme Court took up the case. In an unsurprising decision the high court used only eleven words to uphold the Federal Appeals Court decision prohibiting "police powers" to enforce segregation. Now the Park Commission had no excuse not to move on the matter.⁶¹

A few days later the Park Commission met. The president of the commission, James Anderson, could lean back in his chair and proudly recount a "brief history" of the "board's past efforts which showed gradual and

⁵⁹Minutes of the PPC, 15 April, 1955.

⁶⁰The scrap books of the Department of Recreation and Parks make frequent mention of an extended heat wave that summer. Scrap Books of the Department of Recreation and Parks, 1955, Baltimore City Archives.

⁶¹Baltimore Evening Sun, 8 November, 1955; Baltimore Afro-American, 12 November 1955.

steady progress" towards integration. Listening patiently, Rev. Waters did not interrupt to mention that the only progress towards integration the board had made came in response to lawsuits and community protest. At the end of the discourse, Rev. Waters motioned that all park facilities "be henceforward operated on an integrated basis." The board unanimously approved the motion and moved onto other business.⁶²

For Rev. Waters and the African-American community of Baltimore this was an immense victory. The Baltimore Afro-American proclaimed victory, even before the Commission met, and spent a large portion of its next three editions to elaborate the implications, editorialize the decision and survey the citizens of Baltimore. Almost everyone surveyed agreed with the decision. Only a few were against it. One woman, fearful that the black children would beat up the white children, claimed the need for white people to have some retreat of their own. Some were apathetic; one couldn't comment because he hadn't thought about it yet. Most quietly agreed with the decision.⁶³

The Sunpaper's editorialists were less enthusiastic. Parks, unlike schools, were not

⁶²Minutes of the PPC, 18 November, 1955.

⁶³Baltimore Afro-American, 8, 12, 22, 26 November, 1955.

compulsory, and this "raises its own set of questions," the Sun noted ambiguously. It seemed unsure of the high court's ruling. In any case the editors took it as a given that attendance would drop. Though not outright opposed to the decision, it did not favor it either.⁶⁴

Such sullen and evasive remarks did not go unnoticed by the Afro-American. In one of its harshest and bitterest editorials, it lashed out at the Sun, calling it both "wicked and subversive." Harking back to a time before the 1896 establishment of "separate but equal," the Afro claimed that some Baltimore citizens could remember a time when park facilities were available to all. Integration could succeed without violence, and to even hint that it would not was only asking for trouble. The Sun it claimed, did not believe in the people of Baltimore or even in democracy. Reaffirming its faith in Baltimore it predicted a smooth transition.⁶⁵

The November 1955 decision of the Supreme Court left the Park Commission more than six months to prepare

⁶⁴Baltimore Morning Sun, 9 November, 1955; The Morning Sun ordinarily concentrated on international news, and left local news and commentary to its sister, the Evening Sun. The Evening Sun, however, was even more evasive. It only noted that the decision could be taken as logically following from Brown, and avoided commenting on the appropriateness of the decision. That the Morning Sun commented at all probably reflects the degree of discomfort that it felt.

⁶⁵Baltimore Afro-American, 12 November, 1955.

a smooth transition. In that time the board prepared special classes for pool operators, lifeguards, and policemen on the special problems of integration. Just before the swimming season began Rev. Waters dropped dead of a heart attack, denying him the possibility of witnessing integration in the park system.⁶⁶

In the summer of 1956 Baltimore's public pools and beaches finally opened on an integrated basis. A heavy contingent of park police kept watch, but only one minor incident disrupted the peace. At Druid Hill Park two white boys acted as self-appointed park authorities and decided to limit Negro admittance. They stood by the fence counting until the amount they decided was acceptable had entered. When more blacks arrived, they positioned themselves in front of the gate to prevent their entry. The police immediately arrested them and later they were banned from the park for the rest of the summer.⁶⁷

Otherwise the summer of 1956 passed quietly. Often times whites and Negroes engaged in "intimate contact" but with no reported incidents of friction.⁶⁸ By the end of the summer overall park attendance increased, but

⁶⁶Scrapbooks of the Department of Recreation and Parks, 1956. Baltimore Afro-American, 12 March, 1956.

⁶⁷Baltimore Evening Sun, 25 June, 1956.

⁶⁸Scrapbooks of the Department of Parks and Recreation, 1956, Passim.

pool use decreased significantly. Specifically white attendance dropped off as much as forty percent by some estimates. Poor weather in the summer of 1956 kept some swimmers away. An unknown portion, though, probably stayed away out of distaste for the new integration policy. Black use, on the other hand, rose slightly. Many blacks for the first time had pools open to them in their neighborhoods.⁶⁹ Complete park integration, however, did not take place immediately. In predominantly white neighborhoods, existing racial patterns continued for some years after the official desegregation policy took effect.⁷⁰

The Park Commission's move to integration brought about the end of legalized segregation in Baltimore's publicly owned facilities. Just as many white Baltimoreans wished, legalized segregation in public facilities came to an end gradually over several years. Yet even as it did, whites grew increasingly uncomfortable with it as Sun editorials and the declining pool attendance show. White Baltimoreans wanted to see themselves as progressive, but as

⁶⁹Scrapbooks of the Department of Parks and Recreation, 1956; Baltimore Evening Sun, 9 September, 1956.

⁷⁰Barry Kessler and David Zang, The Play Life of a City, Baltimore's Recreation and Parks, 1900-1955, (Baltimore: Baltimore City Life Museums and the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks, 1989), 44-45.

integration came, they showed their hesitancy.

The wide divergence of white public opinion that took place in Baltimore was typical of the diverging thought throughout the country. One major study found that large percentages of whites, both northern and southern believed that African-Americans were inferior to whites, and preferred to keep the races separate.⁷¹ Many Baltimoreans, likewise, held these old racist notions, and were uncomfortable with integration.

Where Baltimore seems to vary most significantly from points further south, is in its serious dedication to law and order. While many Baltimoreans were ambivalent on integration, almost all expressed distaste for violence or disorder of any kind. During the school boycott crisis of 1954 public leaders used this rhetoric to preserve order and enforce integration. The integration of schools and parks did not convince everyone of the inevitability of integration. In the private sector there were still many businesses holding out.

⁷¹Catholic Digest, June 1956 to June 1958, passim.

CHAPTER 3

THE BEGINNING OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Even before the final destruction of legalized segregation in Baltimore City's publicly owned park and school system's, a movement to integrate Baltimore's public accommodations was growing in force and size. It contained a diverse group of participants, but by 1961 the leadership of the Civil Rights movement in Baltimore had largely fallen into the hands of students at Morgan State College. The students, however, did not come to be such critical players by chance. Since at least 1951 Morgan students had been developing the experience, skills and discipline necessary for them to assume effective leadership in the black freedom struggle.

Founded in 1867 by Methodist missionaries, Morgan Seminary flourished in western downtown Baltimore at Fulton and Edmonson Avenues. By 1905 it had become apparent that the school was outgrowing its facilities, and the Board of Trustees began a search for a new site that would allow for the growth of the school. Not until 1917 did the school locate the property at Hillen Road and Grindon Spring (now Cold Spring Lane) in what was then a rural area of Baltimore County, just northeast of Baltimore City. The mainly white community, composed of wealthy estate holders and miners who worked in a nearby quarry, was hardly excited about the prospect of having a black College in the neighborhood. The hostile citizens organized to prevent the school from settling into the property.

In its desperation, the group used both legal and extralegal means to discourage the move. The Morgan faculty held fast through two court challenges, three attempts to ram prohibitive bills through the General Assembly, a hate mail and telephone campaign, and, on one occasion, a "visit" by a "committee" of more than fifty concerned citizens, who though unsettled apparently did not become violent.

One episode in this conflict is particularly telling of the type of relationship that Morgan would have with the community for a long time. During one

public hearing community protesters argued that the presence of Negroes would incite riots. The Morgan lawyer disclosed that there were already at least eighty Negroes living on the campus for some months with no reported incidents. In fact, it appears that no one in the white community was even aware of their presence. With this startling revelation, the judge ruled in favor of the college. In 1918 the school officially took residence at the new site. Although the community never became overly receptive, it did learn to live in peace with the school, if only by ignoring it as much as possible.¹

From 1918 to 1945 the school and the community grew up together. In 1925 Morgan College achieved accreditation, but still had only about 120 students.² In 1939 the state of Maryland bought the school from the Methodist church and began to fund and administer the school under the name of Morgan State College.³ By 1948 housing developers had surrounded the campus with neat little red brick row-houses and established a modern shopping center, Northwood, less than one block

¹Edward N. Wilson, The History of Morgan State College: A Century of Purpose in Action, 1867-1967 (New York: Vantage Press, 1975), 73-77.

²Wilson, 82. Semi-Annual Report of the President to the Trustees of Morgan State College [month and day illegible] 1938.

³Wilson, 99.

from the campus.⁴ Except for small areas immediately around the campus the surrounding community remained white, and most of the nearby public accommodations, like most facilities in Baltimore, declined black patronage.⁵ By the early 1950's the Northwood area was densely populated by Caucasians and Morgan State College

⁴Annual Report of the President of Morgan State College to the Board of Trustees: A Decade of Development, 1948-1958, located at Morgan State University, Davis Room.

⁵Segregation in Baltimore was widespread, but to both locals and out-of-towners it was unusual, even "unique"; and some observed that the general climate was favorable for change. Observers noted that some of the worst segregation was in department stores and lunch counter facilities. On the other hand, public transportation was open on an unrestricted basis, and more than 150 blacks drove buses and streetcars and taxicabs. Much of the existing integration may be attributable to Lillie May Jackson and the pioneering work of the NAACP. See CORE-lator, March-April 1953, CORE Papers; Juanita Jackson Mitchell to George Houser, January 21, 1951, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; [Although dated 1951 the letter is in sequence with similar letters from 1952, and is stamped "Jan 24 1952" which probably indicates the date that Houser received it.] Elizabeth T. Meyer to George Houser, January 4, 1952, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; V[era?] Hoffman to George Houser, January 16, 1952, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; Herbert Kelman to George Houser, January 21, 1952, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; Author's interviews with Douglas Sands, Clarence Logan and Sidney Hollander, Jr. "Up south Baltimore" was Thurgood Marshall's characterization for the odd nature of Baltimore's racial scene, and chapter four of Denton Watson, Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr's Struggle for the Passage of the Civil Rights Laws (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), 81-96, makes this case, as its title implies, that Baltimore was "neither north nor south." See also Callcott, 145-152; Juanita Jackson Mitchell OH 8097. Louis Schub. OH 8100; Lane Berk OH 8146; Rev. Marion Bascom OH 8128; Thelma Turner OH 8105; Marshall Bright OH 8113.

had become a black island in the middle of a white ocean.

In this milieu it was natural for the hardworking students to become discontented with their situation. Most of the students came from Baltimore's working class,⁶ and more than 90% had absorbed the basic principles of Christianity through one denomination or another. Many had middle class aspirations, with the largest single group hoping to become educators. Some of the students had grown up in parts of Baltimore, so isolated from the white community, that they actually knew little of segregated facilities, so that as new students at Morgan they were experiencing and reacting to systematic segregation for the first time.⁷ Indeed, the movement had such organic and informal roots that precisely dating the beginning of it is impossible. As students discovered the segregated facilities, someone, or possibly several of them came up with the notion that if they just kept asking, kept making their presence known, sooner or later they might gain service.

⁶Annual Report of the President to the Board of Trustees of Morgan State College: A Decade of Development, 1948-1958. Wealthier blacks, who could afford the expense, often sent their children to Northern schools where the sting of racism was not so strong, see Watson, 80.

⁷Watson, 82.

By 1952 informal protests had been going on for some time, and often there were as many as a hundred students demonstrating at some of the Northwood shopping stores or at their favorite target, the Northwood Movie Theatre. The standard technique for the students was to take an arm load of books and walk up to the theater around show time. They would go through the line, studying as they went, the ticket agent would refuse to sell them a ticket, then the students would go to the back of the line and repeat the process. Other times they would go to the Arundel Ice Cream store and sit and wait for service. A quirk in Maryland law required that the police read the trespass act to the demonstrators before they could be arrested. Simultaneously the students managed to harass the offensive establishments, work on their academic studies, and avoid arrest and excessive attention.⁸

Even as the student movement was in a preorganizational stage, many others were forming organizational structures that would later channel into the protest movement. In 1948, for example, black and white Catholics established the Catholic Interracial Council. They worked together during the 1950's to integrate the Catholic church. Their work, carried on

⁸Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

behind the scenes, brought black and white Catholics together at social functions and special masses. In 1954 they gently nudged the Catholic church to voluntarily apply the Brown ruling in Catholic schools. Their work helped to liberalize many Catholic Baltimoreans. Later, in the early 1960's, members of the C.I.C. would become sympathizers as well as participants in the student protest movement.⁹

Even as the Morgan protest movement was still in a near embryonic form, and Catholics interested in racial justice were not yet ready or able to move into the public eye, another group was coming together and preparing for action. As early as 1951 Herbert Kelman, a white psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University's Henry Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, began exploring the possibilities of forming a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Kelman was an ideological pacifist exactly in line with the with CORE's Gandhian nonviolent social action philosophy and had previous experience with the CORE chapter in Palisades Park, New Jersey. Apparently he found a lot of people who were interested or sympathetic, but few who were willing to

⁹"Catholic Interracial Council of Baltimore, 1948-1965," Chancery File, Archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. "Baltimore General" clipping file of the Baltimore Catholic Review documents some of these activities, Josephite Archives.

commit themselves.¹⁰

After more than a year of work Kelman managed to gather a small but diverse core group of about 30 people. In the process of organizing, the nucleus of the Baltimore group met in the living room of Ben Everingham, a local high school history teacher, who drew liberal whites into the organization. The group contained middle class whites and blacks, a black minister and his wife, black trade unionists, and a variety of high school students, Dr. Earl Jackson, a Morgan professor, who also headed the Morgan NAACP branch, and some of the Morgan students also became involved in the organization. Kelman considered the liaison with the Morgan students the most important of CORE's accomplishments. Although diverse, members of the group all shared an ideological commitment to nonviolent direct social action.¹¹

¹⁰Herbert Kelman, A time to Speak: On Human Values and Social Research (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1968): 229-237.

¹¹Baltimore CORE affiliation blank, January 10, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. (Although the affiliation form is dated January 10, 1953 other correspondence reveals that Kelman did not request the blank until February of 1953 and did not complete it until March or possibly April of 1953. Most likely Kelman and other members of the group wanted to wait until they had a concrete accomplishment before mailing in the form. The date January 10, 1953, however, was not arbitrary, other correspondence reveals that it was the date that the group first tested the dimestores. The date of this blank is important because it claims two victories, and if the January 10, 1953 date is correct than two other victories,

In 1953 the newly formed CORE group joined forces with Morgan State students to begin an extensive effort to desegregate luncheon counters in the Baltimore area. In this effort there were two important theaters of operation. The first was in Northwood, the area surrounding the Morgan campus. Morgan students, loosely organized in the Student government's Social Action Committee, had already begun their own efforts. The second was the fashionable downtown shopping district. Naturally the Morgan students were most interested in the territory around their campus.¹² The distance between the two, moreover, prevented heavy participation by the students in downtown protests. Likewise, many of the middle class liberals working in the downtown efforts did not participate in the Northwood campaign, probably preferring their own shopping districts.¹³

which are otherwise undocumented, must be added to the record. See specifically George Houser to Herbert Kelman, January 9, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; Herbert Kelman to George [Houser], January 22, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; Herbert Kelman to George Houser, February 9, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers; and George Houser to Herbert Kelman, February 24, 1953.) CORE-lator March-April, 1953, CORE Papers. Meier and Rudwick CORE, 57; "Congress of Racial Equality," Vertical File (Reference Room) Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD. "Everingham, Benjamin C." Biography File, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, MD.

¹²Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

¹³Author's interviews with Helen Brown, Sidney Hollander, Jr., Douglas Sands, Gunther Wertheimer and Joan Wertheimer. Those working in the downtown efforts do not seem to have had as firm a geographic anchor as the Morgan

CORE's policy dictated that interracial teams visit the different luncheon counters to establish, for the record, that service was only extended to whites. Then on the basis of these tests they sent letters to the local manager in an attempt to negotiate for integration. If the negotiations proved fruitless, the next step was to distribute leaflets to the store's customers.¹⁴ CORE intended this to create bad publicity for the business, and hopefully to gently pressure it into changing its offensive policies. If both negotiation and public pressure failed then interracial teams began sitting in at the luncheon counter, determined to wait for service or at least to disrupt business at the counter.

Beginning on the tenth of January, 1953¹⁵ CORE sent interracial teams to the downtown Kresge's and two other unspecified dime stores to establish, for the record, the existence of a Jim Crow policy. This accomplished, the group apparently sent off letters to the manager of each store complaining about the want of service for Negroes. In two of the three stores these

students, although many did come from the Windsor Hills area in northwest Baltimore.

¹⁴Examples of these are "What is CORE," and "A New Road to Racial Justice," CORE Papers.

¹⁵Herb[ert Kelman] to George [Houser], January 22, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers.

letters do not seem to have had any effect. In the third store, the downtown Kresge's, the manager forwarded the CORE letter to Kresge's general offices in Detroit, with the apparent claim that he had no knowledge of the events in question. Detroit responded immediately. In a letter to the Baltimore Committee on Racial Equality, it encouraged the group to retest the downtown Kresge's, and was certain that all patrons would find service. Reluctantly a team from CORE tested it and found the claim to be true. Thus came the first integrated luncheon counter to Baltimore.¹⁶

The letter from Kresge's soon became a popular item. Apparently Herb Kelman, Ben Everingham and some other members successfully used the letter in the negotiations with the downtown Woolworth's.¹⁷ McQuay Kiah, the Dean of Men at Morgan, and a CORE member passed the letter on to the Morgan students, who used it to petition the Northwood Kresge's. The Northwood Kresge's, in the Morgan area, however, continued to deny luncheon counter service to the Morgan students.¹⁸

¹⁶A. B. Fairbanks (S. S. Kresge Company) to Baltimore Committee on Racial Equality, February 16, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers.

¹⁷CORE-lator, June, 1953, CORE Papers. Baltimore Sunday Sun Magazine, 1 December, 1968. "Congress of Racial Equality," Vertical File (Reference Room) Morgan State University.

¹⁸McQuay Kiah to George [Houser], April 10, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers.

Encouraged by the downtown victories the protesters moved on. During the spring and early summer of 1953 the Northwood protesters continued to pursue negotiations with the manager of Kresge's, who maintained his position for "business reasons," until he consented to contact the personnel director in Detroit and arrange a meeting between the three parties. But before this meeting could take place, the Baltimore CORE group received another letter from Kresge's Detroit headquarters urging them to retry the Northwood store. A skeptical interracial team, including one unidentified white and one Negro Morgan College student visited the luncheon counter. Once there, they were surprised by prompt and courteous service, of such quality that the Negro student began dining there regularly.¹⁹

After the early summer victory in the Northwood Kresge's there seems to have been a lull in the campaign. Both at Northwood and downtown protest activity was minimal, although some preliminary negotiations with at least one store, and possibly as many as three stores, began in July. By the fall of 1953, full scale negotiations were under way. Once again the results were mixed. In Shulte-United the management appears to have caved in immediately, and it is unknown whether or not negotiations went any higher

¹⁹CORE-lator, October-November 1953, CORE Papers.

than the local store. In any case, the apparent ease of integrating the store drew few comments from anyone.²⁰

In two other stores a newly opened McCrory's and a Grant's, both downtown, CORE's negotiations were less productive. Both, apparently, reached the point of sit-in protest.²¹ Learning from their past experience, the CORE protesters quickly approached the national headquarters of both businesses. In the case of McCrory's they had an additional advantage. A St. Louis McCrory's had recently integrated, and the local CORE people tried to use this to convince the manager that integration was coming sooner or later. Like the St. Louis McCrory's, however, the new integration policy came only after an order from the company's New York headquarters in October 1953.²²

At Grant's, however, extended sit-ins left the local manager more adamantly against integration than ever. In New York Bayard Rustin took a personal

²⁰Tom O'Leary to George Houser, November 10, 1954, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. One of CORE's undated promotional flyers "Cracking the Color Line" also indicates that the Shulte victory came quickly and easily, CORE Papers.

²¹While sit in activity at Grant's was quite heavy, and easily documentable, there is only oral evidence that reports sit-in activity at McCrory's, author's interview with Gunther and Joan Wertheimer.

²²Tom O'Leary to George Houser, November 10, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. CORE-lator January-February, 1954, CORE Papers. "Cracking the Color Line," CORE Papers.

interest in the case and took on the negotiations with the company's headquarters. The New York based company officials consistently chose to defer to the judgement of the local manager. Kelman and the local CORE group brought in a representative of the Baltimore Council of Churches to serve as a referee. They hoped that it would be easier for the manager to "capitulate" to the Council representative. They even offered to call off the sit-ins if he would agree to integrate at some mutually agreeable date in the near future, but to no avail. With Christmas approaching, and some of the sit-ins foot soldiers becoming disheartened, or too busy with Christmas preparations, Kelman announced that the "fall season" of sit-ins would conclude just before Christmas. Then Kelman, Everingham and the other leaders rallied the troops for two last, but strong, protests complete with about thirty-eight sit-in downers, leaflet distributors and sign carriers. Meanwhile the New York local CORE chapter prepared to demonstrate at Grant's Harlem stores.²³

The Christmas season passed with no change of heart or practice by the Baltimore Grant's manager. So

²³Herb[ert Kelman] to George Houser, December 7, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. Herb[ert Kelman] to Bayard Rustin, December 20, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. Thomas O'Leary to George Houser, December 24, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. Baltimore Afro-American December 15, 1953.

shortly after the holiday season, the sit-ins resumed. The chapter managed to arrange a meeting between the Grant's manager, CORE representatives, and a member of the Governor's Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations. At this meeting Grant's manager looked everyone square in the eye and refused to give an inch on his racial policy.²⁴ Kelman, meanwhile, had discovered that the War Resisters League, of which he was also a member, owned some stock in Grant's, and he talked them into letting a National CORE representative, Jim Peck, act as their spokesman in the next stockholders meeting, scheduled for late April of 1954. The New York CORE went to work picketing the Grant's stores in Harlem. The stockholders meeting on April 27, 1954 was the decisive moment. Peck made his presentation to Grant's Board of Directors and stockholders and a week later the company's vice-president announced a policy change.²⁵

In May of 1954, with the victory at Grant's complete, the CORE group joined the Morgan students who for some time had been carrying on their own protests at Read's chain of drugstores. A locally operated chain,

²⁴Tom O'Leary to George Houser, February 24, 1954, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers.

²⁵Herb[ert Kelman] to George Houser, December 7, 1953, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. Herb[ert Kelman] to Bayard Rustin, Executive Secretary's file, CORE Papers. CORE-lator, May-June, 1954.

Read's was also one of the biggest, with thirty-seven stores in the Baltimore metropolitan area. There was a Read's near the Northwood campus. Getting to the Read's near Morgan required the students to walk through the all white residential neighborhood that surrounded Morgan. Here the students sometimes encountered harassment and intimidation from some of the homeowners.²⁶ Through the October-November CORE-lator, the national newsletter of CORE, the Baltimore chapter helped provoke a nationwide write-in campaign, and also participated in negotiations with the company's management.²⁷

The Morgan students managed to turn out thirty or more students at a time for sit-ins that occurred at about once a week. The CORE group also managed to carry out protests at least two and probably more stores scattered around the city. All through the remainder of 1954 the management held firm. Ironically, Read's had hired some black women as waitresses at the lunch counter at the store near Morgan and expected them to enforce the segregation policy. Finally, in early January 1955, some of the black waitresses broke down and served the students. By way of reprimand, Read's

²⁶Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

²⁷CORE-lator, October-November, 1954, February 1955, CORE Papers.

management transferred them to other stores and sent more loyal employees to replace them.

Even in the midst of this crisis Read's management and lawyers began serious negotiations with three of CORE's leaders. McQuay Kiah, who was also the Dean of Men at Morgan, participated. Joining him were Ben Everingham and Joan Wertheimer. The demonstrators kept the pressure on, until the day in mid January 1955 that Read's finally gave in and announced a policy change in all thirty-seven of its stores.²⁸

The joint efforts of the Morgan students and CORE culminated in the Read's campaign. The two formed a good team. Yet despite the success, at the conclusion of the luncheon counter campaign the two groups parted company. There was a significant change in the leadership of CORE, which may account for the change of direction. Herbert Kelman moved to take a job in California. Ben Everingham ceased active participation for personal reasons that are not entirely clear.²⁹

²⁸Ibid. Everingham, in a letter to the Afro editor, credited the students as being critical to the success of the Read's chain, Baltimore Afro-American, 22 January, 1955. At this point CORE began to get a little well deserved attention from the Afro, which had not been overly forthcoming with publicity articles in the past. With this victory, however, the Afro named CORE to its 1954 "Honor Roll," Baltimore Afro-American January 29, 1955.

²⁹Interviews with those who knew Everingham suggest that he may have been emotionally unstable, and possibly an alcoholic.

The CORE people announced that they were going to begin a campaign to integrate some of Baltimore's higher quality restaurants. For their part, the students still had their own agenda. Topping the list was the Northwood Theatre.

CORE worked for a short time on the restaurants, but then switched its focus to two extended campaigns that would occupy, and frustrate, its members for the next several years. An annual cultural celebration, the "All Nations Day," invited various ethnic groups into privately owned Gwynn Oak park for a day of traditional festivities. Ironically, however, park policy denied African-Americans the opportunity to represent their culture. When asked about this contradictory policy, the owner and former City Council President, Arthur Price, could not see any reason for admitting African-Americans. Perhaps thinking about it for the first time, Price was not sure black participation in the event would be appropriate. He was, he said, not certain to what ethnic group blacks belonged, or even if they belonged to one.

The obvious absurdity of this state of affairs practically invited dissent. September 1955 saw the first annual CORE protest of the "All Nations Day." The effort gained little attention in its first year, even though it mobilized about forty people. Yet with the

passage of the next several years, the protest gained in momentum and community support.³⁰

In addition to CORE's "All Nations Day" protests, the other major campaign that the membership entered was picketing White Coffee Pot restaurants. There was a small local group called the "United Citizen Groups for Better Human Relations," or better known as the "Mondawmin Movement," for the northwest Baltimore area from which the group originated, and where it did much of its protesting. This mostly black group had already been protesting the Coffee Pot's exclusionist policies, and CORE joined with them, in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate with the owners. White Coffee Pot was a locally owned chain of inexpensive restaurants. What made White Coffee Pot's exclusionist policy's so obnoxious was the fact that they had landed a contract from the city to feed city employees, who received vouchers good only in White Coffee Pots.

The White Coffee Pot policy was to sell food to the City's African-American employees, but not to let them eat inside. As a result black city workers had to eat outside, sitting on curbs, park benches, or whatever was available, summer and winter. The practice was unfair, humiliating and probably unhealthy. The weekly or

³⁰CORE-lator Spring [1955], Fall 1955, CORE Papers. Baltimore Morning Sun, 2 September, 1957.

biweekly protests sometimes brought together as many as sixty people, but other times as few as eight. Like the first Gwynn Oaks demonstrations, these too gathered little attention at first. Although beset by interpersonal and ideological conflicts, the small but dedicated group of protesters did their best to keep the issue alive.³¹

After the Read's campaign the Morgan students interests remained centered on the Northwood area. While some businesses had integrated, many others had refused to do so. Accordingly, in the Spring of 1955 the students, with little participation from CORE returned with a renewed vigor to the Northwood Theatre project. The student government's Social Action Committee wrote two letters to John Wyatt, the manager of the theater. When it became clear that the management had no intention of responding, the Social Action Committee began to rally the students for a protest.

In addition to spreading the word on the Morgan campus, the Social Action Committee also sent a letter

³¹Meier and Rudwick, CORE, 74; Author's interviews with Douglas Sands and Helen Brown; Baltimore Afro-American 19 January, 1957, 13 April, 1957, 4 May, 1957, 12 August, 1958; Adah [Jenkins] to Jim [Robinson ?] May 3, 1958, CORE Papers; Helen Brown to [Baltimore CORE Members] April 25, 1958, CORE Papers.

to the Johns Hopkins University's student Newsletter, asking for assistance on the picket line. Someone also had the foresight to alert the Baltimore Afro-American. On Friday April 29, 1955 some 150 students from Morgan and a few from Hopkins met at the Northwood Theatre. Faced with such a crowd of students converging on the theater, the manager posted a hastily scrawled sign in the window informing the students that:

"Until the Motion Picture Theater Owners of Maryland, of which this theater is a member, and the courts of Maryland advise otherwise, this theater reserves the exclusive right to select its patronage.

Please refrain from any activity that might require police action.³²

Denied admission for the first showing, the students disbanded, but returned in time to get in line for the next showing. This time when the first Negro students reached the head of the line the manager ceased ticket sales, claiming that the theater was full. Commenting on the absurdity of the situation one student picket noted that the demonstrators were "fighting to give them our money."³³

Although rebuffing the students, the theater owners

³²Baltimore Afro-American, 30 April, 1955.

³³Ibid.

feared that the protest activity would scare off movie patrons. Therefore the next day the owners promptly agreed to a joint meeting between themselves, the Social Action Committee, the Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations and the Baltimore City Commission on Human Relations. The students were optimistic that the theater owners would succumb to integration just as some of the neighboring drug stores in the plaza had done. In good faith, the students agreed to call off the demonstrations. The theater owners then abruptly changed their minds, deciding not to meet with anyone, or change the policy.

Immediately, on Tuesday May 3, the students resumed the protest. This time more than 250 students from Morgan, and another fifty from Hopkins showed up for the protest. Upon their arrival, the manager shut down the outdoor ticket window and set up ticket sales in the lobby of the theater, screening potential patrons at the door. More than three hundred strong, the students marched peacefully around the theater. The Morgan students, who had become accustomed to studying on the picket line, took the opportunity to practice their French pleading to the management to "Donnez-moi un ticket."³⁴

³⁴Baltimore News Post, 4 May, 1955; Baltimore Morning Sun, 4 May, 1955; Baltimore Evening Sun, 4 May, 1955; Baltimore Afro-American, May 10, 1955.

The theater management also called the police who responded by sending several officers, including two of higher rank. The police, at first merely kept watch. As the protests continued, however, the students reported that some officers developed an antagonistic attitude.³⁵

The students and the Baltimore Commission on Human Relations both repeatedly attempted to set up negotiations with the theater owners and the Motion Pictures Association. The Northwood Theatre management continued to refuse, and as time passed, began to harass the picketers. The owner, manager and other employees began taunting the students with comments such as "Go to your own theatres," or "Sue us if you don't like it." In the face of the management's intransigence and apparent inflexibility the number of stalwart protesters rapidly declined.³⁶

Fifteen days after the advent of the picketing the students branched out and began picketing at two other theaters that did entertain blacks, but were reportedly owned by the same company that owned Northwood. The students, however, had received bad information, for the theaters were actually owned by a different company. After the company presented its ownership papers to the

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Baltimore Afro-American 14 May, 1955.

student's lawyer, the students ceased protest at one of the theaters. Wary of a trick, however, they continued at the other one until the theater's owner threatened a legal action.³⁷

In an additional effort to build support for theater integration, Student Council President-elect Douglas Sands began circulating a letter throughout the local Morgan community. Sands deftly noted that men who were dying for "the privileges and immunities of American citizenship in Korea cannot live with them in Baltimore." Yet he did not despair of American society. Speaking for the students he noted optimistically that "I believe that Baltimore must yield one day to the challenge of democracy and Christianity." Integrating one theater was not the end goal, but participation in and "perpetuation of the democratic heritage." Integrating the theater was just one step in that direction, that would hopefully serve to awaken others, just as participation in the demonstrations stimulated the students.³⁸

For all the sincerity, idealism and belief in the American dream that Sands' letter reflected, it still put the Academic president of Morgan in a difficult

³⁷Baltimore Afro-American May 24, 1955.

³⁸Baltimore Afro-American May 24, 1955. Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

position. Calling Sands into his office, Morgan's President Jenkins counseled Sands that as President-elect of the student council he had overstepped his authority. It was true, Jenkins noted, that he believed in what the students were doing, and that he had even encouraged it. The need, however, to obtain most of the school's funding from the state legislature left him in a vulnerable position. Already the Northwood Theatre's management had suggested that the head of Morgan "be pressured" into ending the demonstrations. Much of the surrounding community, moreover, was known to favor the theater owners more than the students; relations with the community had never been better than stand-offish.

Despite the risk, Jenkins did not expressly order Sands and the students to cease, but left him to use his best judgement in handling the situation. After the meeting Jenkins published a letter in the Afro-American in which he publicly distanced himself and the school from the actions of the students who were, he insisted, acting as independent citizens out of "well-intentioned inexperience." In an effort to protect their school's funding, the students voted to sever their ties with the Social Action Committee, as it was affiliated with the Student government. The new name they came up with for

themselves was the Civic Interest Group.³⁹

The student demonstrations quickly lost force. The numbers of protesters on any given night dwindled as the school year wound down. On one particular evening, May 27, 1955, there was only one white Hopkins graduate student, Sherman Merrill, protesting with the Morgan students at the theater. A plain clothes police officer passing by noticed the young man and his unique status.

Accounts of the details of the ensuing incident vary, though some rough consensus does emerge. Approaching Merrill the police sergeant said "I want to talk to you." Merrill quite understandably doubted the identity of the officer, ignored him and kept walking. One thing led to another, and some minor pushing and shoving occurred. The officer arrested Merrill. While the officer led him away hostile members of the community jeered him, some calling him a Communist and others a "N[igge]r Lover." Although convicted at the first hearing, an appeals court judge later found him innocent.⁴⁰

Although they were unable to retain the impressive numbers that had won them press coverage, the students

³⁹Baltimore Afro-American May 14, 24, 28 1955. Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

⁴⁰Baltimore Afro-American 31 May, 1955; Baltimore Evening Sun 6 June, 1955; Baltimore Morning Sun 16 June, 1955; Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

managed to keep the protest movement alive. By December of 1955 their efforts had stimulated the Governors Commission on Interracial Relations and problems to actively pursue the Northwood Theatre's owners as well as other local theater owners. They discovered, however, that the theater owners were firmly convinced that they would lose business if they admitted blacks. The fear was well founded, as the commission discovered. Two local, white community associations actively petitioned the Commission against integration in the theater. In further discussions with other Baltimore theater owners, the Commission found that none of the owners were particularly anxious to integrate, and most shared the fears of the Northwood Theatre's owners.⁴¹

In 1958, with the combined pressure of the students and the Interracial Commission, one chain of seven downtown theaters caved in.⁴² This chain, however, did not include the Northwood Theatre, and the owners remained as recalcitrant as ever. The students, though, did not let themselves get bogged down with just one project. By 1958 they had started several others, and successfully integrated several stores in the Northwood

⁴¹Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, Annual Report, 1957. Author's interview with Douglas Sands.

⁴²Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, Annual Reports, 1959.

shopping center. Yet demonstrations at the theater and restaurant sit-ins at Hecht-May, the major department store at Northwood, proved unsuccessful.

The years immediately preceding 1960 saw some progress and continued protests, yet they were only the calm before the storm. The national attention that the February 1, 1960 Greensboro sit-ins produced encouraged the Morgan students. In an unprecedented burst of energy more than three hundred members of Morgan's Civic Interest Group descended upon the Northwood Hecht-May restaurant in mid March of 1960. The protests so thoroughly disrupted normal activities that Hecht-May management, claiming a 49% drop in business, obtained an injunction to limit the demonstrations.

Ironically the injunction served the cause of the students better than they could have realized. Closed door discussions between the Baltimore Urban League, the Governor's Commission and the management of some of the other major department stores revealed that Hecht-May and other department stores were willing to integrate if Baltimore's flagship department store, Hutzlers, would agree. Hutzlers, however, was the most recalcitrant, and would not even agree to discuss the problem. The students, who for logistical reasons had refused to demonstrate downtown, were now left with few other choices. Traveling downtown in teams to the major

department stores, the students began to demonstrate. The downtown Hechts placed a guard to block their entrance; and another store closed its restaurant when it saw the students coming. At Hutzlers the students were allowed at first to sit in at the restaurant and the basement lunch counter until closing time. However after a few days, Hutzlers also began closing down when the students arrived. The surprise came when the students reached the Hochschild-Kohn. By previous decision Hochschild's decided to serve the students if and when they showed up. So shocked were the students by prompt service that they hardly had money to buy anything.

This was the first time that civil rights protesters enjoyed mass and favorable attention. Support for the students came from all quarters. Whites as well as blacks lent their sympathy. Some canceled their charge accounts with the offending companies. Organizations, like the YWCA, passed resolutions urging the other stores to follow suit. The Catholic Interracial Council wrote letters to all of the involved stores urging them to serve all customers. Other churches and civic groups came together in an outpouring of support. The Urban League and the United Church Women were especially instrumental in stirring up community support. The students, thus encouraged, kept

up the demonstrations.

Finally Hutzlers president, who for the two weeks since the beginning of the demonstrations had been away on a cruise vacation, called a summit with the students, their lawyers and adult advisors, at which Mr. Hutzler immediately caved into student demands. The next day the other two stores, as they had promised, fell into line behind Hochschild's and Hutzler's.⁴³

With the department store victory, the students set off with a new intensity in at least three major directions. First, they continued with luncheon counter/restaurant demonstrations in various locations. Second, they became actively involved in a voter registration campaign. Third, they began other demonstrations and community improvement projects on the Eastern shore and southern Maryland areas.

In late spring of 1960 the students joined the demonstrations at the White Coffee Pot restaurants, picking up the waning efforts of the local CORE chapter. With the beginning of summer, however, many of the college students left Baltimore and the remaining

⁴³August Meier "The Successful Sit-Ins in A Border City: A Study in Social Causation," Journal of Intergroup Relations 2 (Summer 1961): 230-237. Although largely undocumented this article generally agrees with newspaper accounts of both the Baltimore Sun and the Afro-American as well as with my interviews with Clarence Logan, Douglas Sands, Robert Watts, Sidney Hollander, Jr. and Father Joe Connolly.

student leaders began to draw on high school students. In their discussions with the Coffee Pot's owners, Miles and Jerome Katz, the Morgan students in the Civic Interest Group obtained an agreement from the Katz brothers that they would integrate their facilities if their competitors in the low cost cafeteria market would do likewise. Thus the students began demonstrating at Bickford's and Thompson's restaurants. Out of town firms owned both of these establishments and in the face of protest quickly consented to negotiation and then integration. The Katz brothers, still cautious, agreed to open their Mondawmin store. This store, which had been the scene of some the heaviest CORE picketing, was in an integrated, middle class neighborhood. Other Baltimore area White Coffee Pots, including one in an all black community, retained their white only sit-down policy. A combination of Morgan students, black and white high school students, and some white Hopkins and Goucher students participated in the protests. With many businesses maintaining a segregated policy, they had plenty of restaurants and other establishments to choose from for some time.⁴⁴

The second big project that the students tackled was a voter registration campaign. In the summer of 1960 Clarence Mitchell, Jr., arranged a meeting between

⁴⁴Clarence Logan to Vernon Horn, February 29, 1991.

the leaders of the Civic Interest Group and Adam Clayton Powell. Powell advised them that the best hope for African-Americans was to work within the "body politic."

Taking Powell's advice, the students became heavily involved in the long standing "get out the vote campaign" conducted annually by the Baltimore Afro-American and the NAACP.⁴⁵

In the summer and fall of 1960 the voter registration campaign added "19,549 new colored voters" to the rolls. The registration center had to be moved and expanded to accommodate all the applicants. In the hot dog days of August 1960 the lines of blacks signing up to vote grew so long that volunteers had to bring them water in buckets to prevent heat stroke. Newly registered voters, full of optimism, discussed the relative merits of John Kennedy and Richard Nixon as they looked forward to the 1960 presidential election.⁴⁶

Besides public accommodations in Baltimore, the students also became interested in rural towns in Maryland's surrounding counties. In 1960 Douglas Sands, the Morgan student body president who had been so involved in the demonstrations at the Northwood Theatre,

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Baltimore Afro-American, 8 October, 1960 and January to November, passim. Dr. J.E.T. Camper OH 8134.

became the Executive Secretary of the Governor's Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations. Sands regularly packed his car full of students and drove down to eastern shore communities such as Cambridge, Easton, Salisbury, Denton, Centreville, Ridgely and Crisfield. He would drop them off at the outskirts of town, give them time to begin protesting, and then come along in his official capacity to commence the negotiations. Joining the Baltimore area students on these protests were many white and black students from the northeastern United States. On some occasions several hundred northern students would join them.⁴⁷

As time progressed it became more respectable for liberal whites to join the protests, and many of them did so. The students, however, were more aggressive than many of their elders and white friends thought wise. Some believed the student's actions dangerous to the civil rights and public accommodations legislation perennially pending in both the Baltimore City Council

⁴⁷Author's interviews with Douglas Sands and Clarence Logan. Sue Koskoff [Northern Student Movement Coordinating Committee] to Clarence Logan, March 12, 1962; Joyce Barrett [Fellowship House and Farm, Philadelphia and Pottstown, Pennsylvania] to Clarence Logan, January 24, 1962. August Meier to Marvin Rich, July 21, 1963, The personal papers of Clarence Logan; copies of these documents are in the author's possession.

and the Maryland General Assembly since at least 1955.⁴⁸

The Civic Interest Group persisted in its protests and developed a reputation for "all action and very little negotiation."⁴⁹ In February of 1963 the students returned once again to the Northwood Theatre. Despite numerous other victories in the Northwood area, and many more in the Baltimore metropolitan area, the owners of the theater held out.

Drawing on the experiences of southern protesters, the students of the Civic Interest Group decided that mass arrests were necessary. At the Northeastern police court the ranking police officers and judges decided to go along with the charges of trespass and disorderly conduct, which carried abnormally high bails. This failed to discourage the student protesters. The students, quite by accident, discovered that staying in jail had potential as a bargaining tool. Within a few days the Baltimore jail contained more than 500 students and was becoming overcrowded, unsanitary, and potentially dangerous.

In an impressive show of solidarity, Morgan State

⁴⁸For example, Leon Sachs [Executive Director Baltimore Jewish Council] to Clarence Logan, December 5, 1961, the personal papers of Clarence Logan; copy of document in author's possession. Interviews with Clarence Logan, Douglas Sands, Father Joe Connolly.

⁴⁹Clarence Logan to Vernon Horn, February 29, 1991.

president Martin Jenkins publicly promised that if the theater did not quickly integrate and the police drop the charges "there will be 2400 students in jail." Mayor Goodman, who was soon to stand for re-election, was particularly anxious to resolve the crisis. The Northwood Theatre owners not only faced pressure directly from the mayor's office, but other merchants in the shopping center, themselves integrated, were angry at the loss of business and the poor publicity. After intense closed door sessions, the theater owners finally gave in. After some added negotiations the mayor also managed to get the students released from jail, and two weeks later a grand jury dropped all charges against the students.⁵⁰

The Civic Interest Group did much to popularize the direct action style of protesting. The Morgan students first got white students from Hopkins involved, and more and more other liberal whites, especially clergymen, became involved. The culmination of this involvement came on July 4, 1963 at Gwynn Oak Park. A small band of CORE activists began the protests in 1955. Over the

⁵⁰August Meier, Thomas S. Plaut and Curtis Smuthers, "Case Study in Nonviolent Direct Action," The Crisis 71 (November 1964): 573-578. At the time August Meier was a Morgan State professor and adult advisor to the Civic Interest Group. Thomas S. Plaut and Curtis Smuthers were student leaders of Civic Interest Group. This account generally agrees with accounts in the Baltimore Sun and Afro-American.

years they grew, but never became a popular student endeavor.

By 1963 many clergymen and assorted white liberals were participating in protests on a somewhat frequent basis. Veterans of the protest movement noted that it became the fashionable thing to do. A typical protest consisted of a small interracial group of clergymen meeting at a posh restaurant, and sitting in until they were either served or ejected. By 1962 many clergymen were congregating in the Baltimore Interfaith Committee for Human Rights, and urging their parishoners to support the movements.⁵¹ On July 4, 1963 more than fifty local and nationally prominent church and civic leaders, together with 400 or more local sympathizers descended on Gwynn Oak Park, disrupting the holiday festivities. Apologetic policemen arrested 283 of them and politely carried them away in paddy wagons and school busses. By a prearranged agreement between the defense attorney and the trial judge, the police brought them in in groups of ten, whereupon they all pleaded innocent, and the judge released them on their own recognizance.⁵²

⁵¹"Baltimore General" clipping file of the Baltimore Catholic Review documents some of these activities in 1962 and 1963, Josephite Archives.

⁵²Baltimore Evening Sun 5, 6, 7 July, 1963. Baltimore Afro-American, 13 July, 1963. Author's interview with Robert Watts.

The 1963 Gwynn Oak protest is widely recognized to have "broken the back of segregation," in as much as any kind of significant community sympathy for the institution is concerned.⁵³ Yet even at this protest the largest contingent of police and police dogs was there, not to arrest the peaceful protesters, but keep in line 1000 hecklers who did not sympathize in the least with the protesters.⁵⁴

Just four days before the protests the weak, but long awaited, Maryland Public Accommodations Law took effect. The law, which was so weak that it did not apply to Gwynn Oak Park, was the first step towards mandated equal access to public accommodations. In the first six months of the law's operations, the Governor's Commission on Interracial Problems handled 42 complaints, 41 of which pertained to unequal access in, for the most part, restaurants. The commission boasted of its success in handling these cases, but broadly hinted that many instances of denied access went unreported.⁵⁵

⁵³Author's interviews with Robert Watts, Helen Brown, Joan Wertheimer, Sidney Hollander, Jr., Father Joe Connolly.

⁵⁴Baltimore Afro-American 13 July 1963. "Baltimore General" clipping file of the Baltimore Catholic Review, Josephite Archives.

⁵⁵Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations, Annual Report, 1964.

Beginning at least as early as 1951 the steady, continued efforts of the students and a handful of other activists helped bring on a popular acceptance for the direct action tactics of the civil rights movement, and sensitized many to the absurdity of segregation. Yet even as new attitudes became more prevalent, old ones clung on with some tenacity, and there was serious reaction against the movement. In 1963 a columnist for the Afro-American, sensing the resistance to the movement, warned that it would be impossible for anyone to stop the revolution in progress.⁵⁶ In the fifteen years since direct action protesters first began campaigning, the movement had been through hard times. The perseverance of the protesters was finally paying substantial dividends. Yet despite its progress the movement was still only just beginning.

⁵⁶Baltimore Afro-American, 10 August, 1963.

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