Ecclesiastical Homogeny and Splintering Spirituality: White Ecumenical Christianity and the Church in Norfolk Virginia's Civil Rights Movement

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ECCLESIASTICAL HOMOGENY AND SPLINTERING SPIRITUALITY:
WHITE ECUMENICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH IN NORFOLK,
VIRGINIA’S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

by

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B.A. May 2006, Luther College

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ABSTRACT

 ECCLESIASTICAL HOMOGENY AND SPLINTERING SPIRITUALITY: WHITE ECUMENICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE CHURCH IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA’S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Joshua Wesley Wilson
Old Dominion University, 2013
Director: Dr. Maura Hametz

The Norfolk, Virginia school closing crisis of 1958-1959 has served as a painful symbol of the Civil Rights political and social violence that gripped the region in the 1950s and 1960s. As political battles and legislative actions designed to prolong segregation made their way through the halls of Virginia government institutions, thousands of secondary school students were left without a formal public education program for months in the city. Extensive research has been conducted on the political rhetoric and government posturing but has often ignored the sentiments of Christian religious bodies functioning throughout the city and the region. This thesis seeks to address the relationship between predominantly white Christian ecumenical bodies throughout Norfolk and Virginia and the religious response to the greater Civil Rights movements through the Commonwealth and the South. The response of individual parishioners, independent congregations, and larger ecclesiastical bodies all played a role in the growing call of Civil Rights in Norfolk and Virginia.

This paper seeks to explain the role of white Christianity within the larger Civil Rights movement and attempts to offer a view into the mind of a Southern Christian attempting to find meaning in the traditional church while either seeking to support or reject the social liberation of a traditionally marginalized segment of the population. This paper uses the experiences of major mainline Protestant denominations including a study
of regional Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches. Further research includes work on the Unitarian-Universalist church and the Roman Catholic Church. By examining archives and manuscripts throughout Virginia at Old Dominion University, the Library of Virginia, the Norfolk Public Library, the Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, and the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, this paper offers new understandings of the religious life of a city, state, and region struggling to define its religious mission in the 20th century.
Copyright, 2013, by Joshua Wesley Wilson, All Rights Reserved.
To my mother, Jillmarie Delaney-Wilson: Your courage, determination, and perseverance are a continued source of inspiration. Thank you for all of your support and your unwavering faith in me as a student, a son, and a man.

To my wife, Darci: Your love and understanding has always been a source of motivation in pursuing my academic and vocational goals. Thank you for understanding the importance of my research, for sympathizing with my frustrations, and reveling in my successes. Thank you for listening to me when I discussed my research, and yes, thank you for all of your paper ideas over the course of my time at Old Dominion University.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is the culmination of a year of research and review and it would not have been possible without the assistance of many key people. In preparing this paper I have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work many wonderful scholars and academics whose support and guidance molded and developed this work. These next few paragraphs are dedicated to all of the individuals who were willing to assist me in this project.

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Historical scholarship includes extensive research at archival resources and libraries. I am extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with archivists who were always supportive and exceedingly gracious in answering questions, providing manuscripts, and making themselves available to me on short notice and with extended hours. I am indebted to Edie Jeter at the Diocese of Richmond Archives, Rev. Ed Tracy at the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Debra Madera at Emory University’s Pitts
Theology Library, Dr. Paula Skreslet at Union Presbyterian Seminary, and Darlene Slater Herod and Fred Anderson at the Virginia Baptist Historical Society at the University of Richmond, who were instrumental in this paper’s completion. I am further thankful for Dr. Ed Ayers at the University of Richmond who has graciously agreed to serve as a member of my thesis committee. Dr. Ayers’ expertise in the history of the American South has been sincerely appreciated as I have worked on this paper. Finally, the Interlibrary Loan office at Old Dominion University has been fantastic in obtaining materials from universities and colleges throughout the nation and to ensure that I access to materials that existed outside of the institution.

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tremendous assets to the academic community at Old Dominion University and are the reason why I will always remember my time at the school with great fondness. Words cannot express my gratitude for all Dr. Finley and Dr. Hametz have done for me in helping me become a better student and historian.
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INTRODUCTION

The study of religion is often intensely visceral and can easily be confused with individual theological viewpoints and denominational dogma. It is extremely difficult to distance oneself from one’s own personal beliefs in order to create an unbiased and accurate interpretation of history. The job of a historian is to be honest, truthful, and precise in analyzing available documents, manuscripts, archival material, and monographs in providing a clear synthesis of reliable information. When I began this project, I found myself especially eager to dive into the troves of archival materials available throughout Hampton Roads and Richmond. While I am not a native Virginian or Southerner, I have come to find my adopted home state a fascinating blend of religious cultures, traditions, and spiritual beliefs.

I was raised in a homogenously religious Lutheran community. The majority of my friends were Lutherans. Our congregations practiced similar religious ceremonies; we had similar experiences with Sunday School and confirmation classes. We attended churches after completing our undergraduate education that mirrored the churches of our youth. Our mothers called us Sunday afternoon to make sure we attended our local church service that morning and when asked, we would invariably respond that we had and it was similar to a sermon heard back in Northern Minnesota. While I had close friends who were raised in other Lutheran denominations and Christian sects, we rarely spoke of our faith. We rarely discussed personal connections to Christianity, and never considered the benefits or detractions of our individual religious traditions. We were raised in a particular church and we saw no reason for denouncing or relinquishing our
religious background. It is a part of our family, our region, and our Northern Minnesotan culture.

I am careful in using the term “culture” as I had never considered what the term meant when applied to a religious construct before I made my home in southeastern Virginia. The term culture is not found in Minnesota to the extent that is in the South. I experienced uniquely Minnesota cultural traditions of language, food, and activities. I made Norwegian lefse with my family, unwittingly spoke with a stereotypical Minnesotan accent of elongated vowels and prepositional phrasing, and spent countless hours ice-fishing and ice skating. Yet, until I moved to Virginia, I had never considered these experiences to be a part of a culture or culturally definitive practices.

I have always carried with me a connection to the American South. My father’s side of my family is from Memphis, Tennessee. I often would visit my beloved grandmother in Memphis as a young child and always knew that her city was different than my hometown. People spoke differently; they ate different food, and obeyed different cultural norms. I would be chided by my grandmother for not saying “ma’am” or “sir” when speaking to someone even though those words are uncustomary in the North. After a visit to my Grandmother’s home I knew that when I returned to my town in Northern Minnesota, I would be without the city’s famous barbecue and that I would have to order to a “pop” instead of a “coke”. When I moved to Virginia in the summer of 2006, the concept of Southern culture crystallized in my mind and thought. This was a uniquely distinct region that often tried to explain, justify, and rationalize its distinctive way of life.
I have always been interested in religion and faith and as a transplant to southeastern Virginia I have become enthralled with the study of the American South. This paper is a combination of my interests and represents a topic that I believe is of immense importance. The American Civil Rights movement is often categorized into one of two major fields of study; either historians discuss the political and legal ramifications of dismantling entrenched segregation laws or historians examine the social liberation of African Americans and the power of Christian theology and the social gospel applied to the democratization of political enfranchisement. While this historiography is tremendously important and serves as the academic core from which to analyze the Civil Rights record of the United States, further work needs to be done in examining the denominational mentality of individual Christian faiths and religious traditions.

The purpose of this paper is to add the religious reactions of traditional white Christianity to the dialogue of greater Civil Rights scholarship to the current scholarship. It is my intention that this work serves as an unflinching examination of the religious traditions of the “Lost Cause” and its often shameful impact on the course of the Civil Rights movement. This paper specifically emphasizes the plight of Norfolk, the city that captured the attention of the American public as it struggled in handling the school closing crisis of 1958-1959 in order to circumvent federal desegregation legislation. Within the context of this paper, five major mainline Christian denominations are examined including Methodism, Episcopalianism, Roman Catholicism, Presbyterianism, and Baptism. In addition, the religiously liberal Unitarian-Universalists are addressed as a fascinating entry into the scholarship of the region’s religious plurality.
This paper addresses the religious traditionalism of a conservative region when confronted with calls for social liberty and political equality. The established church often serves as a beacon for hope, a voice for peace, and an opportunity to provide solace in a confusing world. Unfortunately, the church can often serve as a haven for animosity, resentment, and fear rationalized or justified with the unwavering belief in fulfilling the work of the Almighty for the achievement of nefarious political goals. What function does the church have in times of immense social change? Can it disassociate itself from its past of repression and cultural exclusion to form a new spirituality for the evolving American religious landscape? The purpose of this paper is to address the role of predominantly white Christian faiths in a tumultuous period in a rapidly changing city and region. The religious conservatism of Norfolk, Hampton Roads, Virginia and the South was borne from the "Lost Cause" and defeat in the Civil War. It was solidified through decades of self-examination and explanation for maintaining the "Southern Way of Life" against external infiltration. The religious leaders of post-World War II Norfolk sought to maintain Christian denominational traditionalism in a greater society demanding social reform. African Americans used their churches as bases for religious liberation while many white Christian Protestant denominations used their churches to find answers to justify continued racial ostracism and repression.

While this paper sheds light on the role of predominantly white Christianity within Norfolk, further works needs to be conducted that is even more religiously inclusive. Protestantism within the American South can be broken into a dizzying array of spiritual traditions. The inclusion of these denominations into a greater analysis of a Civil Rights discourse would be invaluable in exploring the connection between the
tumultuous era and the religious thought of contemporary spiritualists. Further study into the subject should include the study of Judaism and non-Christian faiths active in the American South and their relationship with the Civil Rights movement. Although this paper stops short in providing a fully inclusive view of Southern religious views, it does offer analysis of major Protestant faiths and the Roman Catholic community. This paper focuses on the predominantly white response of one city's Christian community and should offer a reminder of the pain that can be caused by rejecting the purpose of a spiritual mission purported to be founded on acceptance, tolerance, and reconciliation.
“GOD ALMIGHTY DREW THE COLOR LINE AND IT CANNOT BE OBLITERATED”: WHITE PROTESTANTISM IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA AND THE IMMEDIATE ECUMENICAL REACTION TO BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

On April 20, 1964 a short article appeared in the Norfolk Virginia-Pilot that mourned the death of Lucretia Armstrong DeJarnette, a Norfolk resident who had passed away at the age of 104. The article provided a biographical sketch of an elderly woman devoted to her friends, family, and church yet the printed eulogy was of greater municipal interest than a succinct description of a life concluded. DeJarnette’s death represented the end of a historical era and the subliminal severance of a link to an antiquated “Old Virginia” ethos whose mortality had become painfully obvious for a conservative white aristocracy clinging to the decaying corpse of Southern exceptionalism. DeJarnette’s father, George Dodd Armstrong, served as the reverend of Norfolk’s First Presbyterian Church. For forty tumultuous years, Armstrong guided the congregation of First Presbyterian from 1851-1891 through the city’s yellow fever epidemic in 1855, the Civil War, Union military occupation, and Reconstruction. Armstrong was lauded for his loyalty to his church, his congregation, and to the South, serving as a chaplain in the Confederate Army. His body is interred at a family plot in the city’s Elmwood Cemetery and a marker has been placed within First Presbyterian dedicated to the “...preacher of

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righteousness.”³ Although Armstrong died in 1899, his legacy as a Confederate chaplain and long tenured spiritual leader of the Southern Presbyterian congregation became evident as his daughter took her seat every Sunday morning in the sanctuary of First Presbyterian on a shaded tree lined street in Norfolk’s fashionable Stockley Gardens section.

In the year of DeJarnette’s death, Norfolk and the American South were witnessing a cultural revolution as the peculiarities of regional exclusion and legislative disenfranchisement were systematically dismantled by federal authorities who could not defend church bombings and race riots in a democracy that advertised itself as a shining beacon of humanitarianism to the world. The South was burning, and DeJarnette’s death exposed the latent fears of white Protestantism in Norfolk as it struggled to define its mission in a changing municipality, region, and nation. Deeply entrenched in Southern culture, regional spiritual exclusivity, and self-imposed ecumenical isolation, white Protestant congregations in Norfolk found modernity thrust upon them as the Brown v. Board of Education decision and integration orders were handed down in 1954 and 1955. In the wake of the watershed event, churches scrambled for answers and congregations sought advice from spiritual leaders who reinforced white dominion within the changing sociocultural landscape of Norfolk and the emerging “New South”.

Most predominantly white Protestant church leaders in Norfolk originally sought to placate the fears of their spiritual constituents through commitment to Southern regionalism, sectional pride, and the religious support for continued disenfranchisement

of the city’s black population. While many white Protestant ecumenical bodies openly supported *Brown* and integration orders, resistant laymen in Norfolk’s white Protestant church were often committed to maintaining an atmosphere of social segregation in defiance of church orders. The continued marginalization of African Americans was justified through Biblical interpretation, “Lost Cause” symbolism, and religiously inspired cultural exclusion built upon generations of exclusionary theology and racial rhetoric formed by the denominational power structures to obstinately demand racial exclusion and religious resistance.

The development of the racial attitudes among mainline Protestantism in the American South is indicative of a greater adherence to a regional “Southern” religious experience. The major religious denominational congregations that populated Norfolk in the post-Civil War era included Southern Baptists, the Presbyterian Church (US), the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Episcopal Church. While a clearer historical record depicting the major Protestant faiths active at any given point within the post-Civil War city and greater region may serve to provide a greater inclusive depiction of Norfolk’s religious landscape, it would be an impossibility to accurately and conclusively include all religious traditions active in the city at the time. Smaller, predominantly white congregations called few congregants to their pews on Sunday morning. While Pentecostalism and Holiness traditions emerged as powerful voices of evangelism and mystical spirituality in post- Civil War America, such traditions found far more fertile ground in the Deep South and the rural countryside of central and western Virginia than in burgeoning cosmopolitan Norfolk.
Increasing tensions between proponents and opponents of slavery were integral to Southern and Northern Protestant denominational separations in the antebellum period. Prior to the outbreak of the American Revolution, African Americans throughout the eastern seaboard accepted the doctrines and dogmas as Methodism's English founder, John Wesley wrote extensively about his rejection of institutionalized slavery. American Methodism grew rapidly during the immediate pre-Revolution years and created a tenuous relationship between Northern and Southern church leaders. In the early Federal era, nearly 90 percent of American Methodists lived in the Southern states. In 1844 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South formed as a separate and distinct entity to provide religious toleration for institutionalized slavery. By 1850 Methodists doubled the number of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians combined. Most antebellum American Methodist converts found their home in the South and created an evangelistic climate that called white parishioners to worship by soothing their fears over joining a denomination with a known abolitionist wing.

The Baptist tradition mirrored the split between Southern slaveholding or slave-supporting parishioners and Northern congregants opposed to human bondage. Early Baptists in Virginia had included African Americans within the spiritual fold of the church. While the white hierarchical leadership publically espoused adherence to racial and social segregation and Biblical supported slavery, African Americans were allowed

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7 Maura Jane Farrelly, "'God is the Author of Both': Science, Religion, and the Intellectualization of American Methodism," *Church History* 77 (2008): 663.
and even encouraged to participate within the religious life of interracial Baptist churches in the antebellum era. Baptist history in Norfolk follows this patrimonial system as the city’s First Baptist Church was formed as a congregation attended by both black and white congregants who attended worship services simultaneously. Formed in 1800 as an interracial evangelistic community, the First Baptist Church of Norfolk experienced an irreparable rift only five years later when African American members split from the white leadership of the church. White Norfolk Baptists quickly joined the Southern Baptist Convention that had been created in 1845 as a response to internationally sponsored missions banning slave owners from participating in their Christian evangelizing endeavors. Although the organization created a loosely affiliated regional spiritual network, the focus of the denomination had a distinct regional mission in promoting sectional spirituality. After the conclusion of the Civil War, black Baptists distanced themselves from their white counterparts with the creation of the National Baptist Convention as “its constituency is composed of a historically oppressed population that has endured...slavery and...Jim Crow oppression.” The white Southern Baptist Convention became the dominant ecclesiastical force in regional Protestantism. Although Norfolk Baptists had been a comparatively small church population relative to the greater

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9 *The Fellowship*, 1978, Sargeant Memorial Collection of the Norfolk Public Library, Ocean View Branch, Norfolk, VA.
Southern religious landscape, their numbers increased dramatically in the early 20th century.

Norfolk Presbyterianism was similarly engulfed within the broader 19th century theological debate. In 1857 Rev. George Dodd Armstrong of Norfolk’s First Presbyterian published a small book entitled The Christian Doctrine of Slavery that explicitly defended slave ownership among the Protestant population of the antebellum South. Armstrong’s book provided a theological backing of institutional slavery as he wrote:

Do the ministers of Christ, in the Southern states teach from the pulpit all that the Bible teaches on the subject of slavery? Yes, we reply: as freely as they do the doctrine of God’s word on any other subject...There are practical difficulties to be encountered, both in teaching and administering the discipline of the Church touching domestic relations, as every Northern pastor must have learned from his own experience in the case of husband and wife, parent and child. But we believe that the Southern Church is as faithful to her duty, in so far as the relations established by slavery are concerned, as the Church, either North or South, is respecting the duties growing out of the marriage or parental relation. It is not to Scriptural teaching from the pulpit, that Southern Christians or men of the world object, but to the unscripted teaching of men 'puffed with pride though they know nothing, having a morbid fondness for so-called philosophical questions and logomachies.'

American sectional Presbyterianism had largely been united until the Civil War despite an earlier rift between “New School” and “Old School” theological interpretations of evangelism and experiential grace. The Southern Presbyterian Church formed as a direct result of deep theological divisions over the meaning and promulgation of slavery and Armstrong’s words foreshadowed the break between Northern and Southern

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Presbyterianism. Although a formal split of Northern and Southern Presbyterian factions did not take place until 1861, “Southern Presbyterian ministers led in the defense of slavery.” After the end of the Civil War, “Old School” and “New School” factions in the Northern states had resolved their theological differences but “by that time defense of the Union and disparagement of the Confederacy had become so intense that numerous Presbyterians in Border States were expelled and joined the PCUS.” The Southern Presbyterian denomination was formed in the wake of warfare and violence. It emerged in the post-Civil War period and was determined to maintain itself as a distinctively provincial religious institution that preserved regional traditionalism until the late 20th century.

The Civil War forever changed the sociocultural structure of the South. The citizens of Norfolk clearly understood the totality of sweeping change as they watched Union troops parade throughout the city as an occupied territory. The outcome of the war had irreversibly altered racial and social relations within the defeated Confederacy. White Norfolk Protestantism became a source of defiance and solace to a defeated population and an occupied state committed to protecting its Southern spiritual heritage. In this era religious distinctiveness was firmly established as an integral component to the creation and advancement of Southern spirituality. Although Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists split into Northern and Southern factions prior to the outbreak of the Civil

14 The Southern Presbyterian Church became known as the Presbyterian Church in the United States or the PCUS. Although issues of realignment between the northern United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and the PCUS were often discussed and voted on in the 20th century, reunification did not take place until 1983. Prior to reunification, the Presbyterian Church in America formed in Alabama in 1973 as a conservative sect of the PCUS and continues to operate as an independent Presbyterian entity today.
16 Alvis, Religion and Race, 5.
War, the true test of Southern spirituality and the character of a regional ecclesiastical spirit became a quintessential component of the emergence of the “Lost Cause” mentality of the former Confederacy.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Southern religion came to embody a region still smoldering from conflict and eager to define its future. Southern religion hinged on its ability to ingratiate itself to the defeated region and to vindicate Confederate military and civil action in the post-Reconstruction era. Clergy supported the “Confederate myth” to deify the South’s military dead and the sanctity of the region’s spirit that suffered the agony of war and the torment of defeat. Southern spirituality had become an inextricable component of the region’s civil religion. White Southerners wanted desperately to believe that the conflict that had ended in defeat, military occupation, and intense suffering could become justified through faith. Granite memorials and marble obelisks adorned with carved soldiers sprang up throughout the South with a dizzying pace. Many monuments contained Biblical allusions, spiritual references, and mournful passages lamenting the loss of Southern independence. Norfolk’s Confederate memorial, dedicated in 1907, was typical of the memorials commemorating a Southern civil religion that had become firmly entrenched within Virginia. The massive monument had a soldier stationed at the summit, defiantly waving a flag as he cast a steely gaze across his native city streets and harbor. The monument suggests the implied stoicism of a defeated city, a sentiment that was instilled within the citizens of Norfolk by their religious leaders attempting to find solace for their parishioners in the smoldering ruins of the Civil War

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17 Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 57.
and Reconstruction. As Norfolk struggled to determine its financial and social future in the early twentieth century, Richmond had become the "holy city of the Confederacy" complete with massive statues and military cemeteries cementing the link between past and present creating a trans-urban network of Southern commemoration and Confederate fidelity.¹⁹

Southern spirituality evolved from a defense of slavery and secession to defense of morality, ethical behavior, and the "Southern way of life". This seemingly linear development of thought became the hallmark of Christian spirituality in the region. A changing regional perspective and the increased demand for African American equality in the early twentieth century led to a pressing need of Southern Protestantism to define its mission in the Jim Crow era. The evangelistic mission of Southern faith was tempered with its prolonged devotion to the maintenance of enforced racial exclusivity. Historian Kurt O. Berends asks "if the religious sanctioning of killing of the cause of the Confederacy fostered ritualized violence in the New South, how did the patterns of violence crystallized in lynching keep white southern honor pure?"²⁰ Berends' thoughts evoke a Southern religious experience reflecting the intent to defend regional behavior from a national and international focus that has come to identify the Jim Crow South as a function of a hypocritical American democracy. Many white Virginians of the religious gentry of eastern Virginia expressly condemned lynching, associating the act with the murderous actions of a vicious minority intent on intimidating African Americans with violence. Yet, despite the Tidewater's condemnation of racial murder, church bodies of

¹⁹ Shepherd, Avenues of Faith, 19.
the region refused to adopt policies of racial integration and social egalitarianism.\textsuperscript{21} By the 1920s, white Southern Protestantism had developed a moralistic tone to preserve an impermeable racial barrier. Appeals for African American equality were deflected with fears of interracial marriage and miscegenation through moral ideology and the fear of a disintegration of racial castes.\textsuperscript{22} Protestant literature and denominational presses stoked fears of racial interaction. White ecumenical presses simultaneously promoted their stated agenda of maintaining white superiority while defending white femininity in the face of an invisible assault on established cultural institutions.\textsuperscript{23}

The greater issue of Southern civil religion and civil rights emerged within Norfolk as the city struggled to address its religious pluralism with the modernization and increasing urbanization of the post-World War I city. Norfolk’s long-standing tradition of racial exclusion is prominently displayed in a massive 360 page, three volume set of books celebrating the 300\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the founding of the city. Sponsored by the Norfolk Advertising Board and the Norfolk Association of Commerce, Through the Years in Norfolk, published in 1937, is a monograph celebrating the growth of “prosperous cities, busy towns, expanding suburbs, pleasant villages, and a thickly populated countryside” that dotted the landscape of southeastern Virginia.\textsuperscript{24} The vast bulk of the manuscript is devoted to self-professed civic pride and industrial power embodied by the city; a mere two pages is dedicated to the African American experience,

\textsuperscript{21} Shepherd, Avenues of Faith, 222.
\textsuperscript{24} W.H.T. Squires, F. E Turin, and W.E. Bennett, Through the Years in Norfolk (Portsmouth, VA: Pinecraft Press, Inc., 1937), 82.
and both described a parade conducted by the "Colored Committee," were reprinted from the city's Norfolk Journal and Guide, the city's African American newspaper.25

Through the Years in Norfolk was a 360-page advertisement and self-serving flyer espousing the power and potential of the city in the midst of the Great Depression. While the volume was filled with self-congratulation, it failed to critically examine the realities of the festering metropolis on the shores of a stygian river simmering with slums, racial turmoil, and economic stagnation. As the city grew to accommodate workers and soldiers during the First World War, slums became rampant as permanent ramshackle dwellings for the city's destitute population. In 1937 nearly 12 percent of the city's population resided in these lodgings, and African Americans were the preponderant residential demographic.26 Slum clearing initiatives were met with resistance as the citizens of Norfolk made wild accusations stating that African Americans were unable to flourish in upgraded living conditions.27 The black population remained in degrading circumstances with improper sanitation, an intermittent water supply, rampant crime, and a lingering fear of contracting communicable disease.28 Attempts were made to alleviate the city's blighted central core in the midst of the Great Depression, but African Americans continued to be relegated to such areas. The 1930 census of Norfolk counted 129,710 residents; by 1942 that number had nearly doubled and included an additional 60,000 military personnel that inhabited city.29 After the United States entered World

25 Squires, Turin, and Bennett, Through the Years in Norfolk, 242-243.
27 Thompson, "Slum Clearance", 3.
War II, Norfolk grew in response to the increasing federal need for wartime supplies, armaments, and personnel. At the conclusion of World War II, Norfolk contended with a swelling population, a changing sociocultural landscape, and an altered demographic composition that challenged the established religious paternalism of the “Lost Cause” and forced the city’s white Protestants to affirm or deny the new racial order thrust upon the metropolitan population.

While white Southern Protestantism advocated the preservation of racial barriers and the maintenance of color lines well into the twentieth century, an increasingly emboldened African American population proved unwilling to accept continued political and social disenfranchisement. In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South united with the greater Methodist Episcopal Church to create a unified interracial body that had not existed until the antebellum period. Although this unification process was overwhelmingly supported by regional jurisdictions and ecclesiastical bodies, the laity’s dissent was substantial and often intense. B.W. Crouch, a Methodist layman from Saluda, South Carolina and representative of the Layman’s Organization for the Preservation of the Southern Methodist Church, led 50 members of the Methodist Church of Saluda out of the congregation and into the arms of the PCUS in a defiant action of anti-unionist sentiment.30

As Northern and Southern factions united under a new flag of amalgamated Methodism, geographical organizations were created to meet the needs of independent “jurisdictions” or regional governing bodies that reported to the greater national

ecumenical hierarchy. Independent jurisdictions were explicitly created for the purpose of decentralizing mainline Methodism, but African Americans found themselves excluded from participating completely in the newly reunited body. African American members of the post-1939 Methodist Episcopal Church were placed into the Central Jurisdiction as a separate black entity within a larger white dominated ecclesiastical polity. Unlike other Methodist segments, the Central Jurisdiction was not a geographically based polity and its existence was based entirely upon race. African Americans within the Methodist Episcopal Church were undoubtedly cognizant of their continued marginalization and in post-World War II Norfolk, the issue of racial exclusion forced white church bodies to define their continued adherence to white supremacy in the Civil Rights era.

Religious resentment grew in Southern Protestant denominations with the emergence of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and its anti-segregationist announcements. The ecumenical alliance comprised of mainline Protestant denominations and was formed in 1908 with white and black congregants. In 1934, African American Churches broke from the white domination of the Federal Council of Churches and established the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches (FCNC). Serving African American congregations throughout the nation, the FCNC offered ecclesiastical support for African American churches and vociferously promoted equality and social

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33 Independent African American Methodist groups formed in response to earlier church ostracism. The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church are representative of the desire to create separate church bodies.
liberty through public epistles. Although the FCNC was founded with the idea that its “interests were neither doctrinal consensus nor structural merger,” the founding of the organization represented a fundamental break from white ecumenical authority and denominational command. The FCNC eventually merged with the NCC, a Protestant organization formed in 1950. Yet, the severing of its ties to a predominantly white ecumenical organization expressly indicated that African Americans were interested in using national church structures to advocate for equality even if they were located in the South. Southern congregational alliances with the FCC and the NCC caused tremendous tension within the independent ecumenical structures that combined to form regional mainline Protestant support of the status quo in the region as both national organizations offered support for racial equality and Civil Rights legislation. In the early 1950s, the NCC publically stated its opposition to segregation and Jim Crow policies throughout the South. A public statement reflected the ideals of a socially conscious Protestant organization but had the unintended consequence of alienating white organizations which threatened to leave the national body for its failure to understand the idiosyncrasies of Southern life. In response, the NCC created subordinate organizations such as the Commission on Religion and Race and the “Southern Project” to address Civil Rights issues and simmering racial tensions in the South.

The post-World War II argument against integration and the segregationist ruminations of Virginia’s elected leadership echoed the covert concerns of Norfolk’s white Protestant leaders. While this position seemed archaic in the wake of a global

battle to destroy the grim specter of Nazism and Aryan supremacy, Southern Protestant leaders quickly defended racial barriers and the justification of segregation as a social policy condoned by Christ against charges by a greater national and international spiritual population drew easy parallels between the Third Reich and Jim Crow. White Protestantism in Norfolk was forced to address the concerns of an increasingly socially conscious African American population that demanded new opportunities for political participation and social progress emboldened by larger socially liberal ecumenical assemblies.

In Prince Edward County, Virginia students staged a walkout from the all black R.R. Moton High School in 1951 in objection of abhorrent conditions within the segregated educational facility. The mass protest led to legal proceedings sponsored by the Richmond branch of the NAACP and were eventually combined with similar demands for desegregation leading to Brown. As the cases worked through Virginia and other state jurisdictions, local politicians felt the undulating waves of African American discontent and addressed fears of their conservative white constituents in public orations and media publications. In the fall of 1952, an article was published in the Norfolk Journal and Guide reporting the words of then Attorney General of Virginia, and future governor of the Commonwealth J. Lindsay Almond, that harshly criticized integrated facilities and especially condemned the notion of a desegregated school system, vowing

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that “white children in Virginia would not be taught by Negro teachers in a tax supported system.”38

At the dawn of the 1950s, racial reconciliation had already been a topic frequently discussed within white Southern Protestantism and denominational literature. At the 128th meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia held in Norfolk, the Committee on Inter-Racial Relations issued a statement acknowledging that “it must be observed that White Baptists and Black Baptists live in comparative isolation from one another...Is it to be feared that we are strangely unfamiliar with the background of present Colored Baptist and White Baptist relations?”39 This statement is remarkable in its simplicity. African Americans were viewed by their white counterparts as misinformed and misled in their new struggles to attain equality in 1950s America. Virginia Protestants funded African American schools, colleges, and medical facilities through church collections and monetary offerings as tokens of implicit paternalism. African Americans were expected to accept the contributions with gratitude and appreciation; any change to this long established patriarchal hierarchy would certainly unleash the unrestrained venom of segregationist Southern Protestants.

Handed down in 1954, the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision created a legal foundation for the dismantling of the entrenched Southern segregation policies synonymous with post-Civil War regional life. Desegregation orders were a body blow to institutionalized Southern social exclusion, and white Protestants in Norfolk had to contend with a perceived attack on cultural traditions. The first theological salvos

against the Brown ruling were in the fiery rhetoric of segregationist preachers who spoke of the "Curse of Ham" to provide a scriptural validation of segregation. Further denouncements of federally mandated integration led to recitations of the alleged dangers of interracial marriage and the deterioration of society that white Protestant clergymen proclaimed in sermons that labeled God as the "original segregationist." Southern Protestants were eager to have clergymen soothe their fears of integration. In a speech to the South Carolina legislature, Reverend W.A. Criswell of Dallas stated that the Biblical Paul was a Southern Baptist as he often said "you all", which Criswell interpreted to as antiquity's version of the regional colloquialism "y'all." While Criswell's speech to the assembled body offered a break in the often vitriolic and malicious theological and political debate surrounding Brown, it nonetheless represented the continued willingness to combat integration orders handed to the South.

The promotion of national ecumenical policies aimed at eliminating racism found throughout Southern ecclesiastical and secular bodies provided popular sentiments of white anger at Northern domination and criticisms of Southern suppression. Southern Protestants held to a belief in the faith and religion of the "Lost Cause," but the growing post-World War II Civil Rights movement pressed them to reconcile their spirituality with public policy. Andrew Michael Manis asserts:

The Southern civil religion is thus a Southernized version of the American public faith with the necessary changes. It is distinctively Southern not because it gives sole allegiance to the South, but because it mixes the symbols of allegiance to both America and the South. Moreover, it very often interprets loyalty to the Southern way of life as the epitome of

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41 Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 113.
42 Chappell, A Stone of Hope, 114.
allegiance to America: One best fulfills his or her loyalty to America by being loyal to the Southern way.\textsuperscript{43}

Manis’ examination relies on the assumption that Southern spirituality is not only an extant component of regional religiosity, but that it is integral to the composition of sectional distinctiveness. The creation and absorption of the autonomous civil religion of the American South is therefore considered to be an integral component to white Protestantism and the “Southern Way of Life” developed as a justification for the spiritual, racial, and cultural peculiarities of the South.\textsuperscript{44} Southern white Protestants had devoted themselves to the application of Southern civil religious emblems, symbols, and practices to a greater national religious structure while remaining distinctively provincial. While this was done as an attempt to reconcile Southern spirituality with Northern ecumenism, \textit{Brown} and policies pursued by the FCC and NCC disrupted Southern Christianity. As result of the \textit{Brown} decision and the aftermath of World War II, Southern Protestantism had to defend its prolonged racially exclusive policies against the socially liberal rhetoric of inclusionary politics and the implied egalitarian philosophy of Soviet-inspired communism. Rather than fully embrace the ecclesiastical ethos of the social Gospel, Southern Protestantism retreated into the preservation of provincial polemics and a regionally distinctive Southern spirituality.

Unlike Presbyterianism, Baptism, and Methodism, the Episcopalian Church continued as an undivided entity. In the antebellum period, the Episcopal Church had existed as the preferred domination of the upper class Virginian aristocracy of the


\textsuperscript{44} Charles Reagan Wilson, \textit{Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit in the U.S. South} (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 83.
colonial period. Episcopalianism emerged as “the church of the planter class” with membership concentrated in Virginia, and Southern regions dominated by the plantation gentry. The Episcopal Church in Norfolk, representative of this planter ethos, and had developed distinctively separate black and white congregations with little to no interracial communication. Virginia Episcopalianism offered a home for the city’s wealthy Protestants and while publically espousing its spiritual mission of Christian charity and religious mores, was unwilling to adopt an integrated body until the post-World War II era for fear of alienating core members of the white aristocratic congregations throughout the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

In the first years after Brown, white Protestant clergymen often adamantly defied integration, although Virginian ecumenical bodies quickly publicized stances supportive of the high court’s decision. Support for Brown among the Diocese of Southern Virginia can be found in Bishop George Gunn’s statement in July of 1954 that responded to the Supreme Court’s decision.

Realizing that the Christian ideal of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man applies to all men, regardless of their race and color, the Diocese of Southern Virginia will continue to follow its long established policy of peaceful, mutually cooperative, and steady advancement toward the attainment of this ideal.

Although Bishop Gunn fell in line with the larger Episcopal hierarchy, resistance to Brown was not removed entirely from the Diocese of Southern Virginia. Gunn’s response offered superficial ecclesiastical support to federal legislation but failed to provide a clear directive regarding the future of educational integration and post-Brown

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desegregation policies. Gunn’s impersonal and ambivalent response was politically safe; he refrained from inflaming the political passions in the perilous racial climate that existed in Norfolk and the notoriously conservative Southside of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia. The hierarchical structure of American Episcopalianism enabled Gunn to make passive integrationist statements.

Virginia Methodists echoed their white Episcopalian brethren as they openly supported the Brown decision and subsequent integration orders. A statement made in 1954 at the Virginia Annual Conference held in Richmond, read:

Relations of the races is perhaps the most crucial problem before our world today. In light of the impact of the decision of the United States Supreme Court, rendered May 17, 1954, in which segregation in public schools was declared unconstitutional, it becomes the responsibility and obligation of the Christians to give leadership in forming and directing public opinion...this being true, there is no place in the Methodist Church for racial discrimination or racial segregation.47

Virginia Episcopalianism and Methodism implied acceptance of the greater national polity of compliance to federal legislation. Ministers and laypeople who opposed the decision were obliged to keep silent lest fear condemnation from the national religious leadership that controlled local church politics.

In addition to Methodist and Episcopal hierarchies in Virginia openly supporting Brown, the regionally distinct Presbyterian and Baptist churches issued public statements supporting the Court’s decision as well. Frank W. Price, moderator of the Southern PCUS General Assembly argued:

The Supreme Court decision is profoundly important as a ringing affirmation of our American faith in liberty, equality, and of the 14th and 15th amendments. It is evidence also to our people and to all peoples that

we are a nation devoted to justice and democracy...as a Southerner, by long ancestry and present residence, I will appreciate the strains that desegregation in public school education will bring to the social life and relations in our region...I welcome the Supreme Court opinion as necessary, wise, and right.48

The PCUS had publically vindicated the Supreme Court’s decision and the announcements set forth in Brown but its affiliation with the National Council of Churches created rampant animosity amongst the laity. Presbyterian publications were under a near constant barrage of accusations condemning the PCUS’s affiliation with the NCC. Conservatives maliciously attacked the PCUS as catering to the integrationist sentimentality implicit within NCC commissions and social policies.49 Presbyterian congregants who opposed their denominational support of integration and Brown were unwilling to openly violate church policy and grew increasingly frustrated with the conflict between the incontrovertible conception of the separation of church and state.

Virginia Southern Baptists mirrored the public stances of fellow Protestants throughout the Commonwealth as they appealed for public calm following the Brown decision. In 1954, Baptists dominated Virginia Protestantism and accounted for “1,293 Baptist Churches...and approximately 393,000 Virginia Baptists.”50 The Religious Herald, a denominational publication of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, provided an especially powerful opportunity to discuss and debate the issue of segregation. Baptists in Virginia had historically adhered to the doctrine of separation of church and state and felt compelled to defend their Constitutional dogma due to

48 “Supreme Court Decision Praised by Moderator,” The Presbyterian Outlook, April 5, 1954, William Smith Morton Library Special Collections, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA.
49 Alvis, Religion and Race, 116.
persecutions imposed upon them in the Commonwealth's colonial era. Southern Baptists who supported integration and the Brown ruling used the Religious Herald as an outlet to express legislative devotion as a core tenet of Southern Baptism. Reverend Jack H. Manley, pastor of Court Street Baptist Church in Portsmouth, VA wrote in July of 1954:

> We must realize that we cannot, in the light either of good citizenship or good religion seek to dodge the law. We are already hearing about ideas which are being generated for the purpose of circumventing the law. We cannot afford to be parties, even in our sympathies, to such suggestions or plans...If democracy is ever to prove its case on the world scene, there is a crying need for more than words and offers of our sympathies toward oppressed peoples.\(^{51}\)

Manley’s plea, a theological interpretation of the Brown, acknowledged the impassioned and defiant attitudes of Virginia Congregations that opposed the Court’s decision. The Baptist General Association meeting in 1954 publically declared its support of Brown while expressing gratitude to the federal government in delaying the enforcement of an admittedly unpopular idea throughout the white Protestant South.\(^{52}\)

As official Southern Baptist and Virginia Baptist organizations offered public support of Brown and the requisite federal legislative actions affecting Southern ecumenical jurisdictions, the Religious Herald concurrently reflected the vicious resentment of integration to the Baptist laity of the state. In 1954 the Religious Herald routinely published pro-segregationist articles that condemned not only the Supreme Court, but also the greater Baptist General Association of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Convention. An article published by J.L. Rosser in 1954 argued that “...the law has gone forth from the supreme authority, and no good Christian or citizen will become

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\(^{51}\) Jack H. Manley, “The Next Step in Racial Adjustment,” The Religious Herald, July 1, 1954, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.

a rebel; but we would that some honorable way might be found to maintain peaceful segregation instead of a forced integration with its inevitable animosity, submerged perhaps, but everywhere present and continuing.” 53 A similar statement published in an editorial of October 1954 referred to the potential integration of public schools stating, “I really think you have to have police officers on each bus, at each school, and at some schools 2 or 3 officers. Lots of school buildings would be destroyed, I expect. Do away with Federal help and run our schools as we know best. If the Supreme Court wants to...marry some other race, just so they are above the Mason-Dixon Line, we have no objection.” 54 Early in 1955, a letter to the editor again addressed the concerns of Virginia Baptists as it asserted that “the question of segregation...is not a religious issue, it is a purely political issue.” 55 The same letter denounced the Baptist General Association’s support of Brown writing that “the press and the general public think that the resolutions of such bodies represent the sentiment of the membership of the constituent Churches. This situation must be corrected.” 56

While the Virginia Baptist General Association publically condemned racism and pleaded for support of federal legislation by the clergy and the denomination’s communicants, pastors and churches throughout the state publically fought the church structure using the Religious Herald as a forum for their dissent. On November 28th, 1954 a letter was addressed to the editor of the Baptist publication from the South Quay.

53 J. L. Rosser, “Integration or Segregation,” The Religious Herald, December 16, 1954, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
54 H.A. Ransom, Editorial, The Religious Herald, October 14, 1954. Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
55 S.J. Thompson, Letters to the Editor, The Religious Herald, January 6, 1955, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
56 S.J. Thompson, Letters to the Editor, The Religious Herald, January 6, 1955, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
Baptist Church of Nansemond County that read "the members voted unanimously in favor of the present policy of segregation of the races in our church. We feel that the Negro race in Nansemond County has equal opportunities to develop spiritually, and are happy worshipping in their own churches... therefore, the members of South Quay Baptist Church would like to go on record as opposing integration of the races in the churches." In the same edition of the Religious Herald, an editorial written by the church clerk of South Hill Baptist Church stated "we do not approve of the resolution adopted by the Baptist General Association of Virginia... regarding the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in our public schools. We believe that the public school system as now operated in Virginia is best for all parties concerned." Editorials and correspondence addressed to the Religious Herald continued to pour in adamantly defying the Virginia General Association's compliance orders. Baptist churches throughout Virginia used the publication to support resolutions opposing integration and withdrawing from membership in the Southern Baptist Convention. Although many of the resolutions addressed to the editors of the Religious Herald were sent from the overwhelmingly segregationist Southside of Virginia, James F. Burks, pastor of Bayview Baptist Church in Norfolk wrote in 1956 that "my first charge is that the amalgamation of races is part of the spirit of the anti-Christ... If I were black, I would not praise the Lord

57 Robert P. Chappell, "Segregation Approved", The Religious Herald, January 20, 1955, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
58 G. I. Smith, Editorial, The Religious Herald, January 20, 1955, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
59 "Resolutions," The Religious Herald, February 10, 1955, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
for it, and would not want to make myself anything else contrary to what God made me to be... social integration is not the answer to America’s problems.”

Burk’s racially antagonistic rhetoric is representative of a greater voice in social politics offered by predominantly white Protestant bodies affiliated with Southern regionalism. In the months immediately following the *Brown I* and *Brown II* decisions, anti-integrationist rhetoric became increasingly violent and irrational. Virginians who opposed integration quickly found membership in local segregationist organizations established for the continuation of the Commonwealth’s Jim Crow laws. In Virginia, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties formed as a segregationist group determined to find legal means to circumvent *Brown* and the integration implied. The Defenders abhorred the Ku Klux Klan as a violent and murderous band of poor Southern whites. They were also known to publish inflammatory articles accusing Norfolk public institutions of bowing to African American legal pressure in the face of federal action. The Defenders used their segregationist newspaper and print media to condemn Southern Protestantism for supporting integration. A May 1955 article from the Defender of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties publication, “The Defender’s News and Views”

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60 James F. Burks, “Integration or Segregation,” *The Religious Herald*, May 3, 1956, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.


62 The Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties to the Norfolk City School Board, personal correspondence, undated, Norfolk Public School Desegregation Papers, Series I Box I, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Perry Library, Norfolk, VA.
derided PCUS cooperation stating “pronouncements of this national and international organization on several issues have offended many Southern laymen and ministers.”

By the mid-1950s, segregationist reaction to Brown and integration orders had begun to reach a critical juncture as white Protestant laypeople clashed with the official policies set by their larger denominational ecumenical structure. While Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptist church leaders throughout Virginia publically supported desegregation, their voices appeared hypocritical to the average congregant who could plainly see that houses of worship and church affiliated colleges and institutions remained segregated. Southern church bodies understood that a continuing conflict between church organizations and independent congregations could damage church membership and hinder the functionality of Protestantism in the South. Denominational presses of Virginia began to restrict editorials and articles condemning or supporting integration initiatives reflecting growing ecumenical concerns of a fissure between official bodies and the laity. In 1955, an Episcopal Priest within the Diocese of Southern Virginia publically called for the creation of a “Bishop’s Commission on Race Relations.” In that same year, the larger national Episcopalian hierarchy produced a pamphlet that offered a multitude of reactions to the Brown decision ranging from vehement defiance in the press of the Deep South to open acceptance and support in The

63 “Presbyterians Vote to Continue Affiliation with Church Councils,” Defenders’ News and Views 3 (1958): 3, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, VA.
64 Melissa Kean, Desegregating Private Higher Education in the South: Duke, Emory, Rice, Tulane, and Vanderbilt (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 177.
65 Newman, Getting Right with God, 120.
66 Calvert S. Buck, personal correspondence, August 2, 1955, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.
Daily Tar Heel, the University of North Carolina’s student newspaper. Episcopalian integrationist doctrine built upon previous action of the Diocese of Southern Virginia that integrated the all-white Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria in 1950 as “a necessary step to preserve and enlarge the work of the Church among Negroes.” Integrationist sentiment within the leadership of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia was promoted and shared within the denominational press of church but infrequently attacked entrenched racism within the congregations of the Diocese.

Published in Norfolk, the Diocese of Southern Virginia’s denominational publication, The Jamestown Churchman, asked its members to be “patient, moderate, [and] tolerant” in 1957 with regards to the issue of school integration and Civil Rights.

The Religious Herald and the Virginia Methodist Advocate both published a limited number of articles on segregation issues through the mid-1950s, rarely printing testimonials from state or national ecumenical bodies. The Presbyterian Outlook, representing the Virginia denomination continued to publish articles regarding segregation but shied away from making a specific stand regarding the issue of integration. By distancing themselves from attacks on entrenched segregation throughout the American South, Protestant church leaders allowed for the laity to feed into the impassioned racial rhetoric of the era without fear of rebuke from their larger denominational bodies. Certainly white Protestant ministers spoke out against the

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69 Edwin A. Penick, “A Statement on Integration and Segregation,” The Jamestown Churchman, November 1957, the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.
doctrine of segregation engrained in the Southern mindset, but they did so at their own peril. Owing to the decentralized congregational polity, Presbyterian and Baptist ministers were often dismissed for advocating integration.

In 1954, a Georgia pastor was forced to resign from Bronwood Baptist Church in Lumpkin for delivering a sermon in which he called the recent Supreme Court decision a "just and right... Christian decision." Forced resignations were common in white Protestant denominations, and they were not confined to the Deep South. Rev. R Stuart Grizzard of Norfolk’s First Baptist Church advocated for racial progressivism and social equality despite his congregation’s reluctance to support his religious liberalism. On October 1, 1954 Grizzard preached:

We have a stake in race relations because... the church of Jesus Christ cannot afford to be on the wrong side of any moral issue, what ever the cost to use personally and the church has too often been but the reflectors of society, prejudice rather than the molder of opinion. The church is the most segregated institution in society. It is to our shame that every other institution in society will be desegregated before the church will.

Grizzard acknowledged his congregation’s unwillingness to hear his socially conscious message and as the Reverend gazed at his captive audience, he continued:

I do not like to see you squirm like some of you are doing right now; or to see you sail by me after this service is over with your head held high in disdain and disapproval, but necessity is laid on me by the Spirit of God whom I serve.

Grizzard’s words proved prophetic. Letters urged his removal from First Baptist’s pulpit and threatened physical violence against him. In 1956, recognizing the growing
animosity among church members opposed to his leadership, Grizzard wrote in a sermon, “you should always stand by your church. Even when you disagree with the leadership, stand by your church. People of goodwill can always work out a solution in the light of God’s will.” By the end of 1959, Grizzard was forced to resign due to his continued support for the integration of Norfolk’s public schools and his opposition the creation of a private whites only academy on church grounds.

Grizzard’s departure from his position at Norfolk’s First Baptist Church was emblematic of the broader Southern resistance to Brown, integration, and the looming Civil Rights, a resistance that would soon place the city squarely in a national debate of racial equality. In the political fight that led to the closure of Norfolk’s public secondary schools in September 1958, prominent laymen affiliated with the city’s white Protestant churches demanded continued segregation and vehemently opposed federal intrusion into state regulated institutions. As the Norfolk school closing crisis shuttered public secondary educational facilities in the city until February of the following year, William J. Story, Jr. of Norfolk’s Royster Memorial Presbyterian Church, an affiliated PCUS congregation, wrote a letter to the city’s First Presbyterian Church urging the congregation to “desist from making any recommendations to the Governor’s committee concerning the continuance or the end of segregation in the public schools of Virginia.”

Story served a critical role as the “staunchly segregationist superintendent” of South Norfolk and opened the doors of the city’s Oscar Smith High School to white students.

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73 R. Stuart Grizzard, “Will Ye Also Go Away,” R. Stuart Grizzard Sermons 1937-1957, Box 1, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
74 William Latane Lumpkin, “First Baptist Church of Norfolk, 1805-1980,” 140, Sergeant Memorial Collection, Norfolk Public Library, Ocean View Branch, Norfolk, VA.
75 Minutes of the Meeting of the Session of First Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, VA (Microfilm VN40), William Smith Morton Library Special Collections, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA.
barred from Norfolk's secondary schools in the fall of 1958. Avowed segregationist Norfolk mayor W. Fred Duckworth served in an official lay capacity in Norfolk's First Presbyterian Church. Duckworth's policies contributed to the school crisis as he sought to "continue separate and unequal schools even if it meant closing them." Hal Bonney, Jr., a Methodist from South Princess Anne Church served as delegate to the Virginia Annual Conference in 1955 and was a harsh critic of desegregation, withdrawing from his teaching position at Norview High School to become the superintendent of the all-white Tidewater Academy.

Protestantism in Norfolk evolved from a greater regionally distinctive religious plurality. Southern Protestantism established for the purpose of advocating sectional provincialism and the maintenance of religious traditions synonymous with popular faith of the 19th century continued to propagate regional exclusivity well into the twentieth century. The Confederate military defeat in the Civil War ended Southern hopes for political independence but did not assuage demands for regional autonomy. The Southern civil religion that developed in the post-Civil War provided a justification for loss embodied by white Protestants of the region. The mentality of Lost Cause Christianity successfully molded Southern white Protestantism into a religion that blended faith and spirituality with the protection of provincial identity, mannerisms, behavior, and social customs. As the Brown v. Board of Education decision became a part of the combined American vocabulary, predominantly white Protestant faiths in Norfolk were forced to reconcile pronounced devotion to federal jurisprudence with the

77 Littlejohn and Ford, Elusive Equality, 51.
78 Virginia Annual Conference 1955 Manual (21), Virginia Wesleyan College, Norfolk, VA.
religiously inspired resistance that had existed since the conclusion of the American Civil War. While white Protestant clergy often supported the Brown ruling, they quickly resigned their political stances and theological postulations regarding the decision in favor of keeping their congregations complacent and amenable. The effect of clerical submission created a vitalized, resistant laity and a division between clergy and communicant that would loomed over a disjointed Southern Protestant polity in the Civil Rights era.
In response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and the subsequent *Brown II* ruling demanding that desegregation proceed with “all deliberate speed,” white dominated newspapers and publications throughout Virginia and the South exploded with vitriolic headlines condemning the Supreme Court’s decision. Articles printed in the *Richmond News-Leader* seethed with the rage of white conservatives attacking integrationist policies and harshly condemning the racial implication of a radicalized egalitarian state. James Jackson Kilpatrick, a long serving columnist for the *Richmond News-Leader*, filled his writing with socially divisive political thought for the purpose of racial provocation and rhetorical inflammation. Jackson, a fervent segregationist, was determined to provide a legislative and academic framework from which to attack *Brown*. Kilpatrick’s highly visceral editorials and publications emphatically denounced federal attempts to institute egalitarian social policies that he and other agents resistant to change charged would disrupt the quintessential “Southern Way of Life.”

In 1957 Kilpatrick published *The Sovereign States: Notes of a Citizen of Virginia* denouncing Federal interference in Virginia and Southern school districts using arguments culled from early anti-Federalist speeches of Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson to rally against federal intrusion into the affairs of an autonomous state.¹ In 1962, his book *The Southern Cause for School Segregation* argued, “We of the South

live...in a dual society...remove the pillars, tamper with them, undermine them, and the structure falls.”² To further support his cause of racial exclusivity, Kilpatrick sent an article to the Saturday Evening Post in 1963 entitled “The Hell He is Equal.” He wrote that “the Negro race, as a race, is in fact an inferior race.”³ The article was not published in the wake of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama by white supremacists but its existence served as a reminder of white Upper South conservative resistance to Civil Rights in the post-Brown era. While Kilpatrick openly advocated for racial exclusion and social polarization, he often confronted a distrusting public suspicious of his Roman Catholic religious background.⁴ In Virginia, Roman Catholicism had been openly supportive of integration within the Commonwealth and Kilpatrick had often clashed with his own congregation over his rejection of Brown.

Kilpatrick’s work was emblematic of social policies that caused a rift between the laity and the church hierarchy of predominantly of various white Christian Southern religious traditions and also of a break between the states of the Upper South and the Deep South. Kilpatrick’s books and editorials were read by the citizenry of Richmond, Norfolk, and greater Virginia who were keenly aware of the explosive racial climate in the post-Brown era. Kilpatrick’s inflammatory rhetoric ingratiated itself to conservative whites of Virginia who were eager to justify their animosity with the pseudo-academic rhetoric of Kilpatrick and his contemporaries. In the raucous post-Brown political cauldron of

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Virginia and Southern politics, white Protestant leaders quietly recused themselves from legislative debate and handed the politicization of the *Brown* decision to their impassioned congregants creating an exclusionary religious climate imbued with the antagonistic dogma of white segregationists.

Kilpatrick appealed to the sentiments of Virginians who had become fearful of white power dismantling under the weight of the liberal democratic implications of the *Brown* ruling. Kilpatrick routinely made references to the virtues of Thomas Jefferson, enticing his predominantly white readership to compare their devotion to segregation to the thoughts of the famed Virginia orator and statesman on the topic. Contemporary studies argue that Kilpatrick used Jefferson to examine the impact of “state’s rights” on the post-*Brown* American South and often averted arguments of racial reconciliation and integration essentially placing conversations of egalitarianism within a larger conceptual framework of decentralized government in a Federalist administrative system. The examination of the impact of Kilpatrick’s work also stresses his devotion to state autonomy, and subsequent influence on Southern senators who “expressed their support of interposition” frequently referring to Kilpatrick’s editorials concerning the influence of Jefferson on Virginia political discourse of the mid-1950s. Kilpatrick’s interpretation of Jeffersonian anti-Federalism provides insight into the complexities of Virginia religious dogma in the post-*Brown* and early Civil Rights era. Jefferson had long been venerated as the embodiment of the gentleman statesmen, the illustrious but genteel Southern academic who was more at home in the hills of Albemarle County than the bustling metropilises of America’s eastern urban centers.

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5 Parkinson, “First from the Right,” 8.
6 Parkinson, “First from the Right,” 11.
Jefferson eschewed most discussions of religion and espoused the virtues of a "primitive Christianity... the religion of Jesus himself, which would reject nearly all traditional Christian doctrines." Jefferson would have felt at home with Søren Kierkegaard studying Christian Existentialism and the rejection of formalized and institutionalized faith. Kilpatrick and his fellow Virginia conservatives continued to fetishize Jefferson and his thoughts of rational and liberal democracy, but they were unwilling to break through pre-existing social barriers. Kilpatrick's adherence to Roman Catholicism placed the fiery writer in an untenable situation. But, like many other white conservatives across Virginia and the South, Kilpatrick was unable to reconcile his religion with his politics.

African Americans appealed to God and Christ to assist them in their efforts to obtain long sought after social freedoms and civic equality. Southern white supremacists and acid tongued demagogues pounded on podiums denouncing Brown as an affront to the racial stratification established by the Almighty. White Protestant clergymen throughout Norfolk, Virginia, and the South delicately championed calm and peace, ignoring the festering animosity of racial paternalism in the minds of their conservative congregation. While the city of Norfolk shuttered its public secondary schools in the fall of 1958 to reopen only for the spring 1959 semester, mainline white Protestant denominations in the city and the Commonwealth rationalized their resistance to Brown and racial equality by explaining that the Upper South's resistance to integration was far less violent and destructive than the experience of their white coreligionists in the Deep South. Norfolk citizens set to work demonizing the conflagration of the Deep South racial antagonism in the face of national and international social pressure.

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As the states in the Deep South struggled to find ways to maintain Jim Crow policies, Norfolk and Virginia Protestants looked to their Southern neighbors as the promoters of unrestrained and fervent racism based on inflammatory and irrational polemic social rhetoric. In the Upper South, men like Kilpatrick justified their support for continued segregation on the basis of superficial writings of racists supporting social exclusion. Kilpatrick used misguided legal codes and controversial pseudoscientific propagations in offering his readers arguments condemning Brown, while he struggled to maintain his position within the Catholic Diocese of Richmond that supported integration and quickly desegregated parochial schools. Although Kilpatrick could be highly inflammatory and bombastic, to Protestants of Norfolk and Virginia, he offered a seemingly tempered and judicious template from which to continue to denounce integration. As the fires of the Deep South’s Civil Rights movement raged, Virginia conservatives disapproved of the violence found in Alabama and Mississippi but remained eager to hoist the banner of segregation, advocating the continuity of the status quo. Segregationist attitudes became a source of sustained animosity between Virginia Protestant leadership and independent congregants. While the world and the nation watched the South’s struggle to address the growing Civil Rights unrest, conservative congregants of Virginia’s Protestant denominations tried to distance themselves from the violence of the Deep South and at the same time maintain the social separation that marked Southern institutions. The contradictory aims created a hypocritical ecumenical structure that splintered in the early 1960s as a result of an inability to defend duplicitous ecclesiastical policies.
Virginia’s political system had been dominated by the staunchly conservative and segregationist Harry F. Byrd and the so-called “Byrd Organization” that had found power in rule controlled by “upper-class, white males.” The Stanley Plan and the Gray Commission of the mid-1950s had sought to implement many of the most austere and resistant policies aimed at publicly opposing integrationist policies imposed by Brown and subsequent federal legislation. While the legislative fight against integration was waged in the halls of the Virginia capitol building and local jurisdictions throughout the state, politicians of the state were aware of appealing to the white power structure of the Commonwealth’s Democrats in rallying their fellow conservatives in opposition to integration. While Norfolk’s white public secondary schools remained closed during the fall and early winter of 1958 and 1959, Governor of Virginia J. Lindsay Almond travelled throughout the state delivering messages aimed at galvanizing the anti-integrationist rhetoric and policies initiated to support Massive Resistance and to increase the Governor’s executive power.

Through Almond’s state excursions, he frequently stopped at houses of worship that formed a powerful core of his electorate. He drew from the galvanized voting blocks of conservative white Christianity and on January 20, 1959 Almond took the opportunity to address the congregation at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in rural New Kent County. Almond turned to a crowd of Episcopalians in the old Anglican hall of worship to deliver a statement on the imminent collapse of the state’s Massive Resistance policies. St. Peter’s had been the childhood church of Martha Washington, the first president had attended worship within the red brick structure, and, according to church legend, Martha

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and George Washington exchanged vows within this vaunted hall. St. Peter’s was saturated with the ecclesiastical history of colonial Virginia and the established gentry of the Tidewater. As Almond approached the pulpit, he certainly noticed the prominent painted coat of arms of Queen Anne and the faded tablets installed in the corners of the altar dedicated to members of the church who had served the fledgling community in the earliest days of the Virginia colony. Almond was aware, no doubt, that the Episcopalian Church had condemned racism and that his audience was reluctant to define racial segregation in a religious context for fear of creating a further wedge between the denomination’s hierarchy and the laity. Nonetheless, he proceeded:

Virginia will not weaken in her allegiance to the compact which forms the basic structure of this ‘indissoluble union of indestructible states,’ she will not dilute and desecrate her concept of honor, she will not abandon or compromise with principle to have it lost never to be regained. To those of faint heart; to those whose purpose and design is to blend and amalgamate the white and Negro race and destroy the integrity of both races; to those who disclaim that they are not integrationists but are working day and night to integrate our schools...to those who defend or close their eyes to the livid stench of sadism, sex, immorality and juvenile pregnancy infesting the mixed schools of the District of Columbia...as Governor of this State, I will not yield to that which I know to be wrong and will destroy every rational semblance of public education for thousands of children of Virginia.9

Almond’s words were chosen carefully. He was addressing the descendants of a congregation of wealthy, white, Episcopalians who were concerned over the integration of a public school system that had separated black and white students as a matter of course for decades. Ever the shrewd politician, Almond addressed the religious sensibilities of his audience as he continued, “With your unwavering loyalty under the

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guidance of Almighty God we shall go forward to higher and greater
accomplishments.\textsuperscript{10}

As the Governor of Virginia, Almond openly condemned integration and the
measures of the federal judiciary to dismantle separated social and civic institutions. In a
speech to the Annual Convention of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, he proclaimed
to the cheering throng, "I urge the support of all the people in Virginia in the efforts to
save our Constitution, our freedom, and our society...with God's help we will prevail."\textsuperscript{11}

Almond's religious background offers further evidence to the dangerous rift between
church and laity. Raised in the Lutheran church, a denomination that has relative few
communicants in overwhelmingly Baptist and Methodist Virginia, Almond was a
member of a church that denounced racism, segregation, and African American
disenfranchisement. While Norfolk had a Lutheran congregation that assembled at the
corners of Maury and Colley Avenues in the chic Ghent section of the city, the
preponderance of Lutherans found their homes in the western part of the state owing to
the settlement of Germans Protestants in the Shenandoah Valley during the middle of the
18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{12} Liberal segments of American Lutheranism had supported the training of
African American ministers and in 1954 the Virginia Synod "advocated the integration of
Negroes into the full church life as soon as possible."\textsuperscript{13} Lutheran congregations in
Virginia were comparatively small to their Midwestern counterparts; the Synod of

\textsuperscript{10} J. Lindsay Almond, Untitled Speech, 20 January 1959, J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. Papers, 1950-1957,
Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
\textsuperscript{11} J. Lindsay Almond, Address to the Annual Convention of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation, J.
Lindsay Almond, Jr. Papers, 1950-1957, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
\textsuperscript{12} Aaron Spencer Fogelman, \textit{Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in
\textsuperscript{13} Gregory Freeland, "Lutherans and the Southern Civil Rights Movement," \textit{Journal of Lutheran Ethics} 6
Virginia’s willingness to support integration and civil equality as components of its larger evangelistic message was not powerful enough to assuage the fears of white politicians who made careers of inflaming racial tensions amongst a conservative public. Almond felt a religious kinship with the conservative Christians of Virginia. He had made a career from the support of staunchly segregationist voting sections of the Commonwealth. His political livelihood depended upon his willingness to accommodate this white, evangelical, Southern constituency. Like other powerful Christian denominations, Almond’s church condemned racial antagonism. As a result, Almond understood the fears of his audiences and the anxiety white Virginia Christians experienced as they struggled with devotion to their church and their nervousness in accepting a changing national sociopolitical landscape.

The separation of clerical and political spheres of post-Brown Virginia was representative of a white Protestant willingness in the Commonwealth and in the South to continue providing religious instruction and theological validation of a disintegrating ecclesiastical patriarchy. Clerics in Norfolk and Virginia were often unwilling to alienate their congregations despite the larger church ecumenical bodies’ efforts to endorse the inclusiveness and the accepting nature of white Protestantism. The message of white Protestantism in Norfolk contrasted sharply with the reality of its pragmatic application. Legislative subversion clashed with ecclesiastical backing for Brown and Civil Rights and ecumenical bodies became a microcosm for Southern resistance to the imposition of federal policies. As a result, local religious institutions came under intense national scrutiny during Norfolk’s school closing crisis of 1958-1959. With the city’s secondary schools closed, religious institutions confronted an intense political environment in which
the students of the city turned to a variety of makeshift school accommodations in private homes, community centers, religious halls, and neighboring school districts.

In the Fall of 1958 a heated discussion took place in Norfolk as the school closing became an impending concern for the citizens of the city. At a session held September 30, 1958 representatives of the Norfolk Minister’s Association pleaded with Norfolk Mayor Fred W. Duckworth and the Superintendent of Norfolk Schools, J.J. Brewbaker, to refrain from closing the public school system. After the closing, Reverend Edgar Potts of Epworth United Methodist Church informed Duckworth and Brewbaker that the all-white Protestant organization argued that it had created a tremendous problem for the students of the city. Duckworth became furious with Potts and his organization’s demand for the reopening of the schools. A steadfast anti-integrationist, Duckworth accused Potts and his organization of rousing the sentiments of the audience, and he placed the blame of the entire school closing crisis on the seventeen African American students who had sought entrance into the local white secondary schools. The larger question of educational opportunities for the city’s students barred from classrooms had been placed at the hands of private citizens and religious bodies desperate to provide an education for local pupils.

Secular segregation academies created in Norfolk during the school closing crisis of 1958 and 1959 solved the immediate concern for some of the city’s students who had found themselves unable to attend a regularly convening educational institution. But, with the city’s secondary institutions closed amid the clamoring of segregationist political

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15 Littlejohn and Ford, Elusive Equality, 81.
rhetoric, religious organizations struggled to explain the impact of desegregation to their congregants. Baptists had long been agents for the separation of church and state and had refused to provide for the funding of private education. Large portions of the denominational press of Virginia Baptists, including The Religious Herald, were devoted to appealing to the state’s coreligionists desire to maintain an effective and efficient public secondary educational system. The Religious Herald informed the public that private education might be funded through public taxation, a violation of the long held Baptist tenet of the separation of church and state.16 State involvement in private education was criticized further in the pages of the publication stating “the assignment plan, advocated by the Gray Commission, seems to be the more reasonable approach to solving our school problem. Such a plan of assignment ‘will permit local school boards to assign their pupils in such a manner as will best serve the welfare of the communities and protect and foster the public schools under their jurisdictions.'”17 Virginia Baptist representatives spoke harshly of the full imposition of Gray Commission policies and Almond’s plans for instituting Pupil Placement Boards, voucher programs, and other measures that affected the authority of local school boards.

Sharing the view of The Religious Herald, the Richmond based Presbyterian Outlook carried further denouncements of Massive Resistance. The Presbyterian Outlook, printed for members of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), the United Presbyterian Church of North America, and the Southern-based Presbyterian Church, US (PCUS), was decidedly more liberal than its fellow Virginia

denominational publications, but the editors of the journal remained acutely aware of the Southern sympathies of its reading public. The *Presbyterian Outlook* made its position quite clear with its condemnation of Massive Resistance writing that "racial segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all crave in Christ. Segregation is a tragic evil that is utterly un-Christian. It substitutes the person-person relationship. The philosophy of Christianity is strongly opposed to the underlying principles of segregation."\(^{18}\) The *Outlook* also mirrored the *Religious Herald* concerning its opposition to the use of public funds for private schools. Condemnation of the use of private funds for Catholic parochial education, combined with unwillingness to support the introduction of private academies for the purpose of creating a denominationally based system of private education throughout Norfolk and Virginia echoed previously stated Virginia Baptist accusations of a state and national plot to infringe on the religious freedom.

Mainline Protestant denominations were discouraged from creating private educational facilities for displaced students. An article published in the *Presbyterian Outlook* in January of 1958 responded to a reader's letter that asked openly about the potential for utilizing private religious buildings for the creation of temporary schools. Francis P. Miller, representing the Virginia Council of Churches, responded that Presbyterians should never accept the use of churches as replacement schools stating that "to do so would make the church connive with the evil policy of the state, and is so far as the policy of the state was in violation of the law of the nation the church through conniving would become 'particeps criminis.'"\(^ {19}\) In June, the Virginia Conference of the

\(^{18}\) "Church and the Public Schools," *The Presbyterian Outlook* 23 (1957): 5.

Methodist Episcopal Church reiterated its previous pronouncements of support for the

*Brown* ruling by declaring,

...the Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, in regular session assembled, is opposed to the use of Methodist Church property to house any part of or substitute for the state school system in the event public schools are closed; urges the Methodist Churches of the Virginia Conference to resist all efforts to have their property so used, and recommends that, when and if such use of Church property is proposed in their communities, the trustees, pastors and District Superintendents of Methodist Churches in the Virginia Conference call upon the Official Boards of their Churches to go on record as being unwilling for their property to be so used.20

Residents of Norfolk sought methods to circumvent or alleviate the concerns caused by the shutting public schools. The secular Tidewater Academy was developed as an alternative education institution, but certainly not all displaced students could be accommodated in a fledgling private educational enterprise that suffered from continual problems of staffing and funding.21

Although the structural hierarchy of Norfolk churches condemned the use of halls of worship for secular pedagogical instruction, students throughout the city found educational opportunities in churches while Norfolk’s schools were closed for the fall semester of 1958 and January of 1959. In October 1958 students from Blair Junior High School met in study groups at Larchmont Methodist Church, Larchmont Baptist, and Christ and St. Luke’s Church, an Episcopal congregation.22 A letter dated the same day and typed on Maury High School stationery shows a list of teachers instructing displaced

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20 Virginia Conference Annual, 1958, 142-143, Virginia Wesleyan College Archives, Norfolk, VA.
22 “Blair Junior High School—Tabulation of Tutoring Groups,” *Memorandum*, October 9, 1958, Norfolk Public School Desegregation Papers, Series 1 Box 2 Folder 8, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Perry Library, Norfolk, VA.
Maury High students at Larchmont Baptist, Larchmont Methodist, Miles Methodist, Chesterfield Methodist, Ghent Methodist, Chesterfield Methodist, First Methodist, and the Episcopalian Church of the Good Shepherd. Students enrolled at Granby High School were provided temporary education at Grace Methodist, Ghent Methodist, Larchmont Methodist, Miles Memorial Methodist, and First Methodist. Predominantly white Protestant institutions were clearly willing to ignore the remonstrance of their larger ecumenical organizations and opened their doors to aid in the education of displaced students. While Norfolk continued to operate small, secular white private academies, "segregation academies" began to sprout up throughout the Southside of Virginia in largely rural and agricultural counties with comparatively large African American populations.

In February 1959, Norfolk's public schools reopened and students returned to the public secondary education institutions. But while students returned to their classrooms they found a significant number of classmates conspicuously absent from the class rolls. Granby, Maury, and Norview had all lost members of the senior class to white flight, parochial education, and private secular institutions. Granby High's senior class of 1959 returned with 352 students out of an original 417 students, Norview's senior class

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23 Maury High School Tutoring Groups, Memorandum, October 9, 1958, Norfolk Public School Desegregation Papers, Series I Box 2 Folder 8, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Perry Library, Norfolk, VA.

24 Report of Granby High School Students Tutoring Groups, Memorandum, October 9, 1958, Norfolk Public School Desegregation Papers, Series I Box 2 Folder 8, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Perry Library, Norfolk, VA.

numbered 299 out of 353 students, and Maury lost one hundred students returning seniors leaving 265 students in total.\textsuperscript{26}

The Norfolk Protestant laity’s support for the continuation of Jim Crow era policies had led to students being offered an opportunity to continue their education in the makeshift accommodations of churches and homes. As Norfolk’s schools opened in the spring of 1959 to receive the students of the city, recognition of the Deep South’s experience with Civil Rights dawned and forced the clergy and laity of Norfolk to examine the impact of Southern segregation and their role in the promulgation and enforcement of the archaic bars of social segregation. As the nation’s gaze shifted from Norfolk to the Deep South, the concern of the city’s religious institutions became evident as part of the larger issue of American and international importance. Could Norfolk’s ministers continue to quietly discuss integration, fearful of the laity’s response or was it now a necessity to assert the power of Christianity to compel congregants to support Civil Rights legislation and reform?

White Norfolk residents’ self interpretation and sense of self-importance began to change in the aftermath of the school closing crisis. The impassioned and irrational racially antagonist statements and announcements made by Southern politicians had grown louder in the Deep South. While white Southern conservative politicians demanded adherence to segregation and resistance throughout the South, Virginian Protestantism found itself in a position where the defense of the racial barriers and Jim Crow policies that defined the Southern way of life lent indirect support to the violence that had crept into the Civil Rights movement of the Deep South. The Deep South had

\textsuperscript{26} Undated Letter, Norfolk Public School Desegregation Papers, Series I Box 2 Folder 8, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Perry Library, Norfolk, VA.
experienced moments of tense interracial conflict with the violent Emmitt Till Case of 1955, the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 to late 1956, and the Little Rock Central High School crisis of 1957. The Freedom Rides of 1961 were the first major example of Southern violence and white resistance to the introduction of Civil Rights legislation that forced Virginians to examine the impact of Southern racism within the context of regional faith. While the Freedom Rides began in Washington, D.C. and moved relatively peacefully through Virginia, legal scholar Michael J. Klarman argues that national media exposure of public beatings and violent retribution distributed to African American and white protestors supporting Civil Rights galvanized Northerners and revealed their shock over the state of Southern race relations. Klarman argues,

> When Southern sheriffs used beatings, police dogs, and fire hoses to suppress protestors...media attention escalated, and Northerners reacted with horror and outrage. Brutal assaults on peaceful demonstrators by Southern law enforcement officers transformed Northern opinion on racial issues and enable the passage of landmark civil rights legislation.

The fight over desegregation had become a secular issue and while the established Protestant churches of Virginia and the South had officially supporting egalitarian measures, the public spectacle of vicious assaults of innocent citizens revealed the rift between the shepherd and the flock.

In the wake of the Brown ruling, Virginia denominational presses often published measures supportive of the larger ecumenical bodies alongside the textual posturing of rabid segregationists. In 1960, PCUS synods in Virginia and North Carolina finally "acknowledged the role of Civil Rights as a watershed movement in the changing social

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landscape of the American nation." By 1961, in the wake of the Freedom Rides, Virginia Protestant presses frequently published impassioned articles in support of the Civil Rights movement, further distancing church leadership from the explosion of violence erupting throughout the Deep South. On February 2, 1961 an article was published in the *Presbyterian Outlook* that discussed the Atlanta Presbytery’s refusal to include African American congregations within their religious fold. In June this refusal to support African American congregational membership was rescinded and African Americans were permitted to join the Atlanta Presbytery. The abrupt about-face from lack of support for denominational integration within the PCUS’s Atlanta Presbytery to the opening of the sectional faith’s doors to African American congregants indicates the quickness with which the ecumenical authority grasped the implications of the Civil Rights movement or at least represented a means to save themselves from the embarrassment of their own insincerity. Virginia Baptists responded to the incendiary actions of the Deep South in the annual session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia stating that “Christians should act as Christians toward all races, and it is the inherent obligation of the churches of our denomination to take positive steps to build bridges of understanding between the races and at the same time protect those ministers and laymen who seek to do so from prejudiced censure.”

International events relating to the African decolonization and Cold War political rhetoric had worked to further undermine the unanimity of white Protestant resistance to

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the Civil Rights movement. In 1960, the PCUS made a public statement concerning the effects of proselytizing missions introduced within South Africa. The PCUS understood that “the witness of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was seriously damaged because of apartheid, which should serve as a warning to the PCUS not to make the same mistake.” The PCUS acknowledged the role of quiet inaction and the need to work for tangible examples of social change rather than simply to make hollow public pronouncements encouraging its congregants to support and approve egalitarian domestic legislation. PCUS Presbyteries throughout the Upper South, including Virginia and North Carolina understood that the church would play an extraordinarily influential role in the desegregation of public accommodations.

American support of an international democratic state in the Cold War era further influence white Southern Protestants denominational leadership was further influenced in their public support of racial equality. The Freedom Rides had pushed the agenda of religious and social liberalism within a reluctant and conservative Southern population. In 1961, the same year of the entrance of the Freedom Riders into the Deep South, the African National Congress declared that the “time had come” to mark African autonomy and independence in the establishment of a government controlled by indigenous Africans. As Africans demanded the creation of a socially liberal state based on pragmatic democracy instituted for the enfranchisement of indigenous voting blocs, African Americans pushed the American federal government to enact meaningful change

33 Alvis, Religion and Race, 110.
in a hypocritical state that promoted equality internationally while failing to implement it within its own borders.35

The Freedom Rides of 1961 pushed a social agenda on the American public that gave rise to the violence and inflamed the rage of conservative white Southerners determined to protect the concept of racial stratification. In his classic book on the concept of Southern identity, Wilbur J. Cash argues that Southerners tend to deify the region, seeing their upbringing and the peculiarities of the region based on a mythical romanticism thrust upon on this unique American colony extant within the boundaries of the republic. When The Mind of the South was published in 1941, Cash emphatically announced that white men understood the impermeable boundaries of social stratification contingent upon membership within the established Southern gentry.36 While Cash argued that white men united regardless of social caste to continually disenfranchise African Americans within the American South, Cashian theory and white Protestantism had begun to splinter by the end of 1961. The Freedom Rides laid bare the full racist horror of white conservatism. Combined with American attitudes in the emerging battle between Soviet and American political ideologies, the erosion of the Cashian model of white domination must be analyzed in the context of the American white southerner’s realization of a decaying social order that was unable to sustain discrimination at home while promoting liberty abroad. Historian Thomas Borstelmann indirectly questions the concept of Cash’s theory when he asked, “What does the world need to be freed from first? Communism or racism?”37 Borstelmann’s argument is an essential question that

35 Borstelmann, American Race Relations in the Global Arena, 134-135.
forces an examination of the continued resistance of the Southern white Protestant laity in Norfolk, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and the greater American South. The Protestant congregations of the white South had felt their faith questioned, attacked, and degraded as the spiritual embodiment of entrenched segregation and archaic racial paternalism and met criticisms with ferocious animosity. The denominational leadership had publically supported the Civil Rights movement, Northerners had watched news reports with disgust as innocent African Americans and white supporters were mercilessly beaten at the hands of overzealous police and robed Klansmen determined to enforce racial compliance and social order, and the international diplomatic community had challenged American segregation as an insult to the perceived democratic beacon of the Cold War western superpower.

While domestic and international pressure on Southern Protestantism began to mount by the end of 1961, white resistance continued to exist as a palpable force opposed to change. The Cashian theory of white racial identity overcoming class distinctions was adopted by those who advocating domination over Southern African Americans and served as a painful reminder of the peculiarities of a regional spirituality. The white Protestant laity remained resistant to the promotion of African American equality and continued to use to the pulpit to admonish congregants who refused to support Civil Rights legislation. The social consciousness developed in the early 1960s fostered a greater American attitude that sought to actively dismantle an established racial and spiritual segregation that threatened to destroy ecumenical bodies throughout much of the South. After the chaotic reaction to the Brown decisions in 1954 and 1955, hardened segregationists relinquished control of their respective Protestant denominations and
established independent political platforms from which to attack the dismantling of segregation and the overthrow of Jim Crow. Segregationists in Virginia had long portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as the insipid voice of violent white separatists. Middle and upper class whites had developed White Citizen’s Councils throughout much of the Deep South and the similar minded organization of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties that operated within the Commonwealth promoting segregation through legal circumvention. The arch-conservative and long influential Virginia Democrat Harry F. Byrd had distanced himself from the violence of Alabama and the racial antagonism of the state’s Ku Klux Klan as he realized that “that national coverage of the Ku Klux Klan’s continued disregard for constitutional, legal, human, and civil rights had [the] potential to damage the Southern cause.” Byrd’s utilization of the Defenders for the purposes of continuing discriminatory policies exemplifies the willingness of Virginia and the Upper South to distance itself from the inflammatory violence and rhetoric on display throughout the Deep South.

While Virginia’s Protestant institutions publically abhorred the viciousness of the Deep South’s reaction to the Civil Rights movement, the rift between church and laity continued to make it painfully clear with continued discriminatory policies and the enforcement of long established racially restrictive ecclesiastical policies that support for desegregation was limited. Throughout the denominational presses of Virginia Protestantism, advertisements for private secondary and post-secondary institutions were

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routinely published. The Religious Herald advertised plans of education for the state’s Baptist institutions including the University of Richmond and Averett University in Danville, Virginia. The Presbyterian Outlook supported the religious education of Hampden-Sydney while the publication of the Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church discussed the financial and educational situations of denominational institutions such as Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. As Southern Presbyterianism, Methodism, and Baptism espoused Civil Rights through their ecumenical collective hierarchies, these institutions remained segregated in stark opposition to denominational pronouncements. Southern private higher educational religious institutions continued to be segregated in the early 1960s and the promotion of religious liberty amongst the laity was pushed only to the extent that funding and donations to the independent institutions remained unharmed and uninterrupted. The April 27, 1962 edition of the student newspaper of Randolph-Macon College, “The Yellow Jacket” challenged the continued racial restrictions supported by the institution and its Methodist overseers. The private institutions of the South continued to discriminate on the basis of race well into the 1960s but eventually capitulated as “they could go along with the federal government, the national foundations, and the professors and thrive, or they could defy them and whither.”

Lingering resentment amongst the laity aimed at the professed egalitarianism of Southern Protestantism continued to exist within Virginia in 1962. The congregants of

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41 Virginia Annual Council of the Methodist Church, 59, (1962) Virginia Wesleyan College Archives, Norfolk, VA.
42 Virginia Annual Council of the Methodist Church, 59, (1962) Virginia Wesleyan College Archives, Norfolk, VA.
Protestant Churches throughout Norfolk continued to exist within a complex system of social norms and instilled separatist values while attending church services ostensibly controlled by a national ecumenical hierarchy amenable to momentous social change. The Norfolk-based Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia had previously established a Committee on Race Relations and although the organization had token meetings in which they discussed racial reconciliation, the meetings had an implicit paternalistic tone. An African American Episcopal congregation had existed since the Reconstruction Era but had operated independently, and Norfolk’s white Episcopalians had blithely assumed that relations between the city’s white and black communities were pleasant and free from resentment. At a meeting at Portsmouth’s colonial Trinity Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Southern Virginia recited a prepared statement in which the creation of conference centers and youth organizations needed to continue as segregated bodies due to a “strong division of opinion in the Diocese” and suggested future conferences at an integrated center “not now be established.” Racially restrictive policies were routinely enforced within mainline Protestant denominations in Virginia’s white churches and were evidence of the disconnection between church governance and the implementation of its policies within congregations.

By the beginning of 1963, racially progressive ecumenical policies established by their denominational hierarchies began to embolden white Protestant leaders in Virginia. But, despite church leaders stress for the support of civic peace and religious liberalism, resistance continued to exist. An editorial published within the Religious Herald in July of 1963, by Reverend Walker N. Stockburger of Trinity Baptist Church in Norfolk,

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44 Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, *Annual Meeting of the Diocese of Southern Virginia*, 1962, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.
refused to condemn the work of Dr. Martin Luther King. While Stockburger attacked Elijah Muhammad, he wrote that “In spite of the fact that most people in the South would brand Martin Luther King, Jr., an extremist, he is really a moderate.” In the same issue of the Religious Herald, a young man is photographed with a stack of books. The photograph is titled “On to College Day” and in the student’s hand are the requisite course texts for calculus, science, and interestingly a copy of George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four and Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. Stockburger’s words and perhaps the image of a young man reading the pages of an anti-racist Southern Gothic novel had an inflammatory effect on the conservative readership of the publication. Correspondence and letters to the editors in subsequent editions of the Religious Herald attacked the publication and Stockburger for discussing politics in the pages of a denominational press that had devoted itself to the continuation of the separation of church and state.

Ecclesiastical segregation continued to exist within Norfolk throughout 1963, and by 1964 denominational presses’ attacks against the anti-liberal segments of their congregations became more pronounced. Ministers and clerical officials throughout Virginia pushed the Commonwealth to accept a changing social landscape. Church officials pointed to the violence of the Deep South and appealed to the perception of Virginia as the home of rational Southerners who eschewed racial violence for passive non-compliance. In an impassioned presentation to the congregation of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA, Reverend Samuel S. Hill, Jr. stated:

We have, until comparatively recent years, been a comparatively homogenous people. We are not so any longer. We must resist pressures towards uniformity...We must recognize that the comprehensiveness of the Gospel prevents any group within any denomination or any denomination at large from fastening on to the breadth of truth in the dynamic Christian Gospel. It appears that we may become guilty of something of which we have accused other denominations, namely, of becoming a class church. Unless some changes are made, we may turn out to be a denomination ministering almost exclusively to the lower middle class...Could there be development within our ranks a kind of inverse snobbishness?  

Concerns over the mission of the white Protestant church were echoed by the Annual Virginia Conference of the Methodist Church. The yearly meeting for the denomination was to be held in a segregated facility but was moved at the council request for contradicting its stated agenda of social inclusion. The *Presbyterian Outlook*, a denominational newspaper that discussed the policies the Northern based PCUSA church and the Southern PCUS church, outwardly challenged the Southern Presbyterian church to accept social action and Civil Rights. The *Presbyterian Outlook*, based at Richmond’s Union Theological Seminary, that had often refused to outwardly attack the PCUS church in the past but let loose an unrestrained editorial in 1964 that openly discussed the religious conservatism within the denomination stating, “The Presbyterian Church, U.S., through its local sessions can be a saving factor in the life of every community large or small, in our Southland...there is yet time for every elder to ponder the dignity of his office and the sacredness of his calling and apply himself, along with his colleagues in

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Christ, to the construction of a new society in which every person is accorded the quality of life due him as a child of God and as a citizen of man."

Ecumenical leaders of white Southern Protestantism continued to attack segregation within the Upper South and Virginia throughout 1964. Due to increasing demands for racial equality, Rev. George Gunn, the Bishop of the Diocese of Southern Virginia finally made a public announcement supporting Civil Rights in 1964 when the 61st General Convention of the Episcopal Church outlined its goal to "proclaim unfailingly in the worship, in the sacraments and rites, and in what it does in the world that racial discrimination, segregation or exclusion of any person...because of race from the rites or activities of the Church...are contrary to the mind of Christ and His Church..." Gunn was backed by the American Episcopalian hierarchy but his open statement was crucial to dismantling segregation within the aristocratic denomination resistant to any real change. With continued resistance to desegregation amongst the laity, Walter du Bose, the Reverend of Norfolk’s Second Presbyterian Church removed himself from office. Du Bose cited his frustration at the unwillingness of the congregation to accept social changes and his disappointment with his denominations refusal to support socially progressive initiatives. While official church records of Norfolk’s Second Presbyterian Church do not make clear where Du Bose went following his resignation from the leadership of the church, an article published in the Norfolk

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51 Second Presbyterian Church of Norfolk, Microform VN44: June 26, 1964, William Smith Morton Library Special Collections, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Richmond, VA.
Ledger-Star in August 14 informed readers that Du Bose had accepted a position with the
Covenant Presbyterian Church, an African American congregation in the city.52

As white Protestant congregations in Norfolk and Virginia struggled to convince
their conservative congregants to relinquish the socially restrictive policies that
dominated Southern evangelism and spirituality, global, national, and regional
developments assisted members of the clergy in promoting their ecumenical
denomination’s broader stated agenda of religious liberalism. The massive and sweeping
change that came with the introduction of Brown led to intense violence and fury from
Southern conservatives quick to use Christian and Biblical interpretations that cast
theological denouncement on integration. While certain organizations and institutions
throughout the Protestant denominations of Virginia remained segregated until the early
1960s, Virginia Protestantism forced the Commonwealth’s conservative laity to examine
the implosion of the Deep South and the national and international perspective of
Southerners as racist demagogues unwilling to accept civic equality. Denominational
presses in the 1963 and 1964 periodically published apologies for racial antagonism.
Editorials and letters appeared from ministers who had been hardened segregationists for
decades but after witnessing church bombings and mob attacks had renounced their
positions in favor of civil equality. Although these letters often elicited venomous and
malicious attacks, white Protestant ministers used the chaos of the South and the
cataclysmic fear of Cold War nuclear annihilation to push for social change for white
Protestantism in Virginia and the Upper South. After the introduction of the landmark
Civil Rights Act of 1964, Virginia’s Protestant leadership continued to attack Jim Crow

and the unremitting resistance to Civil Rights. While many lay members of Protestant congregations throughout Norfolk and Virginia opposed their church’s efforts to seek racial egalitarianism, clerical officials and ecumenical leaders emboldened by denominational policy and federal law sought to crush the spiritual disenfranchisement of their churches and the political resistance of their congregants.

Their success hinged on the introduction of policies supported by their ecumenical structures. Still, the introduction of policies to the laity created resentment and animosity between the church and its people. With the dawn of 1965, segregation and Civil Rights resistance became entangled in a larger discussion of Cold War politics. Communism was denounced by Southern religious institutions as atheistic and the demand for racial equality was viewed by white conservatives as Soviet inspired radical antagonism. In its last grasp for political influence, social segregation could be sponsored by the laity and resistant church leaders who attacked civic equality as communist inspired apostasy. By linking religion within Soviet-American relations, religious conservatives were able to exploit the fears of white congregants and to maintain the racial status quo following the introduction of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
THE UNITY OF HIERARCHICAL EPISCOPACY AND DECENTRALIZED CONGREGATIONALISM: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALISTS, AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

As the landmark case of Brown vs. the Board of Education and the logistical ambiguity of Brown II compelled public school officials in Norfolk, Virginia to prepare their metered responses to satisfy their impassioned constituency, the city’s religious groups were forced to either publically oppose or condemn the court’s ruling. In the aftermath of the 1954 and 1955 decisions, the concept of “Massive Resistance” and the less-utilized and antiquated antebellum theory of interposition became firmly entrenched within the political dialogue of Virginia. White citizens of the Commonwealth were bombarded with the impassioned and racially charged rhetoric of the era and often looked to church leaders to determine their own political stances on such divisive social issues. As a result, church officials were required to take sides in the seemingly socially definitive public debate over the issue of integrated public education.\(^1\) By the dawn of the twentieth century, citizens of Norfolk had become firmly rooted in the various Protestant theological interpretations and denominational dogmatic precepts of their independent faiths that dominated both the city and the greater Southern religious landscape. With the advent of the Brown ruling, white Southern Protestant ministers often publically promoted devotion to the law, the American Constitution, and the authority of municipal organizations while condemning the Supreme Court’s decision to

their congregation and private audiences. The pluralism of this religious stance was echoed in ecumenical journals and communication offered by various mainline Protestant denominations within Virginia and the greater American South. While most predominantly white Christian organizations and ecclesiastical bodies operating within the city of Norfolk felt compelled to hide their animosity over the Brown decision in veiled references to feigned support of federal legislative supremacy, powerful pro-integration voices emerged that condemned the implicit racism rampant in the city’s pulpits. Despite such anti-integrationist religious denominational rhetoric, an unexpected alliance would form within Norfolk through the combined efforts of the Roman Catholic and Unitarian-Universalist Churches that would combat the city’s resistance to the Civil Rights movement. While these two ecumenical bodies represented diametrically opposed hierarchical structures and varying concepts of religious liturgy, they united over their mutual devotion to promoting social liberation and racial tolerance within the devotional atmosphere of the city, a response that would splinter the largely noncommittal and often ambiguous Norfolk pulpit during the city’s school closing crisis and the greater Civil Rights era.

Roman Catholicism and Unitarian-Universalism in Norfolk have a similar story of nascent survival within the hegemonic Protestant religious community that dominated the port city. As large Protestant denominations within Norfolk refused to make definitive pronouncements in support of or opposition to the Brown decision, the Roman Catholic Church and the Unitarian-Universalists were eager to champion the Brown verdict and lent their voices in support of the integration of public education and the desegregation of
social accommodations. At a meeting of the Baptist General Association of Virginia in Norfolk in 1954, a blanket statement was issued by the organization that declared,

We accept the fact that, regardless of our own personal views, the decision of the United States Supreme Court declaring segregation of races in our public schools to be unconstitutional is the supreme law of the land which does not violate any cardinal principles of our religion, and as Christian citizens we should abide by the law...We commend the Supreme Court for allowing additional time to enable the areas accustomed to such segregation to propose plans and methods by which the transition to non-segregated schools may now be accomplished.²

Such a statement was issued for the politicization of the Brown decision. Southern Baptists enjoyed tremendous support within Virginia and the Southern states and were unwilling to make declarations that would alienate core portions of their congregations; a stance followed by other mainline Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterian Church (US), the Episcopalian Church, and the recently reunited Methodist Episcopal Church. The smaller church going population of Norfolk’s Catholic and Unitarian-Universalists were placed in a position where the public declaration of a pro-integrationist stance emboldened their congregations and attracted new members who were unwilling to listen to the ambivalent or pro-segregationist stances of their fellow parishioners and church leadership.

While Unitarians and Universalists served as a minor faith on the periphery of nineteenth century Southern religion and operated in a relatively unimpeded position until the 1950s, Catholicism in Norfolk had historically been forced to display its commitment to the city and the Commonwealth against attacks questioning national loyalty and Southern fidelity since its earliest days in the new American Republic. In the

tumultuous period leading to the outbreak of the American Civil War, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches of the nation found themselves divided and dissolved into sectional fragments over the issue of slavery and the implied erasure of a uniquely Southern religious experience. The Catholic Church remained steadfastly united during this period and firmly rooted within the public expression of the Southern civil religion inextricably linked with the ecclesiastical polity of the Confederacy and the subsequent post-war “Lost Cause” symbolism engendered within the South that would come to know military defeat and the pain of Reconstruction.

While the Catholic hierarchy sought to define and interpret civil rights and racial interaction over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholicism in Norfolk served an important role in the religious life of its African American congregants. According to church records, African Americans began worshipping at St. Mary’s in 1886 with a white congregation. St. Mary’s was the home of the oldest Catholic congregation and the “mother church” of Norfolk Catholicism. Although St. Joseph’s, an African American Catholic church, was constructed three years later near St. Mary’s, the two congregations remained intimately linked as they progressed through the post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and Civil Rights eras.\(^3\) While the churches acted as independent congregations until 1961, the Catholic Church had administered to the needs of the city’s Catholic faithful with a devotion that ignored political and social polemics. The Diocese of Richmond, serving as the administrative head of the Roman Catholic Church in Norfolk, managed and operated separate religious institutions within the city.

prior to 1961 as the Catholic clergy of the post-Civil War city were acutely aware of the church’s need to position itself as a stalwart institution against anti-Catholic nativism and ultramontanism. The Catholic Church had to establish itself as an institution simultaneously dedicated to the American South and the nation at large, publically proclaiming itself as a fundamentally loyalist regional and national ecumenical body.4

The Norfolk Catholic clergy were forced to fulfill their obligated religious duties within a resentful and often hostile public as the city’s Catholic laity were often forced to quickly recall the civil religion of Confederate nationalism and the symbolism entrenched within the promotion of denominational fidelity to the “Lost Cause”. During the American Civil War, Norfolk’s Catholic congregants were administered to by Father Matthew O’Keefe, a young Irish priest sent to serve the spiritual needs of the fledgling Catholic community on the banks of the Elizabeth River in 1852.5 Catholics within the city had previously been targeted in the antebellum period by the virulent anti-Catholic rhetoric of the Know-Nothings who believed Virginia to be a key source of political power in elections of the pre-Civil War era and yet, as the Civil War approached Norfolk, Father O’Keefe remained a loyal advocate of Southern independence.6 Father O’Keefe strongly supported the Confederacy and “maintained to his death his pride in being the last surviving brigade chaplain in the Confederate Army.”7 Following the conclusion of the Civil War, a raffle was held by the white parishioners of St. Mary’s where a gold-

7 Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 155.
headed cane made of wood salvaged from the ironclad C.S.S. Virginia was given away. Further attempts to engrain the symbolism of the “Lost Cause” within the Catholic Church were made through the formation of fraternal organizations named after former Confederates and formal declarations of pride and gratitude towards Catholic clergymen who supported Southern secession through the American Civil War. While such outward attempts to encourage acceptance of the “Lost Cause” mentality within the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction mind of the Southern Catholic surely gained inroads in the parishioners who viewed their defeat as a proverbial test from God, the clergy representing their flock felt compelled to resist the animosity and vitriolic racial antagonism embraced by their white members in the aftermath of defeat and in reconstruction.

The clergy of St. Mary’s was inspired by the anti-racist stance of their church leaders in the Diocese of Richmond in the post-Reconstruction era. In 1885, St. Joseph’s, a Catholic Church for black congregants within the city of Richmond, was dedicated with enthusiasm and an outpouring of religious sentiment. The dedication was attended by the Bishop of the Diocese, various Catholic religious orders and organizations, and became a public spectacle as “the streets in the vicinity of the new church were packed with people.” This public dedication ritual had the effect of firmly establishing the Catholic Church’s role in the religious spectrum of Richmond. While an institution was created for the sole purpose of operating as an African American body of the greater white Catholic religious structure, the white clergy had committed themselves to the public

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10 *The State*, “St. Joseph’s Colored Church,” April 6, 1885.
perception of racial interaction. As post-Reconstruction Jim Crow policies hardened racial lines and created impermeable boundaries of cultural exclusion, the Catholic Clergy of Norfolk and the Diocese of Richmond were preparing a religious onslaught against the segregationist sympathies of their congregations.

Socially progressive policies adopted by the Diocese of Richmond were reflective of greater Catholic missives promulgated by the Vatican and domestic ecumenical bodies. By the end of the nineteenth century, St. Mary's church in Norfolk operated a school for African Americans that had roughly fifty regularly attending pupils. In 1914, St. Joseph's established a school for African Americans in Norfolk. Although African Americans were largely excluded from participation in the priesthood, the introduction of the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart for Foreign Missions in 1866 and the independent American Josephites in 1892 were integral for the promotion of Black Catholicism in Norfolk. Despite the inherent paternalism of a white dominated religious hierarchy, Josephites were essential to the cause of Black Catholicism in the American South as,

They sought to preserve the faith of the relative handful of black Catholics in the United States and to win converts among nonchurched and Protestant Afro-Americans. In that effort, the Josephites built churches and school throughout the South, where the majority of blacks lived. More dramatically, in the years around the turn of the century, they championed the cause of a black clergy in the United States; indeed that issue helped define the early Josephites' mission and identity.

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11 Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 298.
12 Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 492.
14 Ochs, Desegregating the Altar, 3.
The existence of the Josephites continued to support black inclusion within Norfolk’s Catholic religious structure. In 1919, Fr. Vincent Warren of St. Joseph’s in Norfolk had completed a social hall for the African American community and the congregants of his church.\footnote{Fogarty, \textit{Commonwealth Catholicism}, 493.} Warren’s devotion to his congregation and his willingness to promote the well-being of his black constituency was often attacked by hardline segregationists intent on promoting the social standards of the Jim Crow era. In the fall of 1926, Warren was kidnapped by a group of Ku Klux Klan members while travelling in nearby Princess Anne County. As he was driven to an isolated location in the rural community he was told by a Klan member that “it was not that they didn’t want the Catholic Church in their section, but they objected to white people associating with Negroes…”\footnote{George H. Tucker, “The Night When the Klan Kidnapped a Priest,” \textit{Norfolk Virginia-Pilot} (Norfolk, VA), May 30, 1965.} Although Warren was not killed and was able to make his way back to Norfolk early the following morning, the story made headlines in local newspapers as they broadcast the violence metered out against a member of the clergy who had devoted his life’s work to a religious order determined to assist the lives of African Americans throughout the nation.

Further attempts by the Catholic Church to dismantle entrenched segregation and racism among the greater white resistance are exemplified by public attacks against the established color barriers in the South. In 1931, white Richmond civic leaders and community members had advocated a plan to create a public memorial to the “Black Mammies of the South”.\footnote{J. B. Glenn, “Letters to the Editor,” \textit{Richmond Times-Dispatch} (Richmond, VA) July 1, 1931.} The creation of a monument would serve as a reminder of the accepted limited and subservient social position of the city’s African Americans. Such a
monument would exist as an eternal municipal monolith dedicated to the diminished social standing of African Americans and as a degrading paternalistic testament to the subservient nature of a harangued social group. Rev. J.B. Glenn, a Josephite priest in Richmond responded to the ruminations of a proposed monument with palpable contempt. Glenn wrote a letter to the Times-Dispatch of Richmond stating,

What group is this monument intended to glorify? The mammies and children of these mammies are stifling in the alleys of the city—no park or bathing pool is provided for them—just a few duty makeshift vacant lots bordering on dumps or graveyards...If a memorial is to be provided to honor the mammies let their whited bones and their bitter tears bear fruit in the betterment of the treatment afforded to their children in their hour of woe. In the meantime City Fathers and others responsible for the oppression of the poor, you provide a really excellent argument for the existence of an eternal Hell.\(^{18}\)

While Reverend Glenn had continued to voice his opposition to the prescribed social stratification employed in the Jim Crow South, the Roman Catholic Church continued to place itself at the forefront of racial tensions within the city of Norfolk in the defining moment of the city's school closing crisis of 1958-1959.

To understand Norfolk's entrenched resistance to integration it is imperative to examine the city's explosive post-World War II growth. Norfolk's population had grown as a result of the global conflict peaking at 168,000 military personnel and 200,000 civilians during 1943, and although victim to the inevitable post-war drop in population, certainly emerged from the international conflict as the core metropolitan center for southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina.\(^{19}\) As America returned to a postwar sense of normalcy, pressure had been placed on the parochial schools of the

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\(^{18}\) J. B. Glenn, “Letters to the Editor,” Richmond Times-Dispatch (Richmond, VA), July 1, 1931.

Diocese of Richmond to accommodate this increasing student population. The Diocese of Richmond had operated separate and distinct white and black parochial schools to maintain the Southern status quo but had funded and promoted Catholic education in cities such as Norfolk that had historically limited financial resources to the black public schools of the city. St. Joseph’s High School had functioned as the parochial high school for the city’s Black Catholic secondary students but would fall victim to high operating costs and low student population while a new Norfolk Catholic High School opened in 1950 to the applause of the staunch segregationist and mayor of the city, Fred W. Duckworth.²⁰

The growing call for desegregation had been heeded by the American Catholic hierarchy. In 1951 the Catholic Committee of the South had vocally supported integration and by 1954, African American students had been enrolled at previously all-white Catholic schools in northern Virginia.²¹ White parents were not in complete favor of the acceptance of parochial integrated education and some withdrew their students from Catholic schools, yet this represented a minute percentage of the overall student body and can be measured as the reactionary fear of an intermittently fanatical parent.²² Despite the actions of a limited minority of white parents, the Norfolk Catholic School Board continued with its practice of integration and in the days immediately following the announcement of Brown v. Board Monsignor Louis Flaherty, superintendent of diocesan schools, stated that “most certainly Catholic schools will not remain segregated

²¹ Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 511.
²² Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 511.
when the public schools are integrated." While St. Joseph's High School in Norfolk would continue to function as a separate entity until the closing of the school, by the opening of the 1955-1956 academic year African American students were enrolled in the newly built Norfolk Catholic High School with little to no public opposition. Whereas the delayed acceptance of black students within the city's previously white parochial secondary school can be viewed as the reluctant posturing of a religious minority feigning moral and ethical supremacy, the Catholic Church within Norfolk had quickly and willingly adopted a policy of racial acceptance in the face of destructive and inflammatory rhetoric aimed at the inclusion of black students. Norfolk Catholic High school had saved itself from the closure, public conflagration, and virulent condemnation that would disrupt the educational order of Virginia.

While Norfolk and Virginia found itself embroiled within the controversy surrounding the Brown v. Board decision and the burgeoning Civil Rights movement, the Catholic Church within the city and the greater Commonwealth served as a beacon for social change and progress within a locality that appeared to be crumbling from a mass exodus of white citizens to the suburban reaches of Norfolk and Princess Anne Counties. Catholic laypeople in the Deep South vehemently opposed their religious leaders and clerical officials. While white parishioners would invoke Gallican ideology as a theological maintenance of public separation and condemned "southern liberalism" in the

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furthest reaches of regionalist Catholicism, the Virginia church hierarchy publically
called for the acceptance of *Brown* among the church laity.25

The introduction of the *Brown I, Brown II*, and their orders for the desegregation
of public schools, threw segregated school divisions across the South were into near
hysteria expressed in impassioned anti-integration rhetoric. School divisions throughout
the South responded with reactions ranging from utter contempt and dismissal to
determined legislative actions threatening years of legal battles to delay integration.
Virginia avowed resistance to the Supreme Court's decision. Antiquated terminology of
"interposition" culled from the antebellum Nullification Crisis, gave way to the accepted
policies of "Massive Resistance" that dominated the political scene of Virginia in the
aftermath of *Brown*.26 Although Norfolk’s public school system was thrown into a
seemingly endless spectacle of open sparring among segregationists and integrationists,
the Catholic Church in Norfolk quietly accepted the decision with dignity and a sense of
religious responsibility. Catholic schools throughout the Deep South were reluctant to
open their doors to African Americans for fear of retribution but finally began to do so
under threat of hierarchical condemnation. In an attempt to circumvent the desegregation
of Virginia public schools, Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. ordered the closure of six
secondary schools in Norfolk in the fall of 1958.27

26 Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, “Massive Resistance Revisited: Virginia’s White Moderates
and the Byrd Organization,” in *The Moderate's Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in
Virginia*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press,
1998), 51.
As opponents of the Brown decision in Norfolk and the South loudly voiced their resentment over the court decision, Virginia’s Catholic leaders remained intent on breaking traditional Southern segregation while the laity and clergy grew emboldened in their positions regarding court-ordered integration. In the same year as Brown I, a charter was granted that led to the formation of a Norfolk branch of the Knights of Columbus named after Father O’Keefe, the city’s steadfast Confederate priest. In 1960, the Diocese of Richmond’s Civil War Bishop, John McGill, was reinterred in the capital city’s Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. His sarcophagus was led in procession by the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the Daughters of the Confederacy in a public display of “Lost Cause” symbolism and Confederate imagery. While the public display of Confederate Catholicism reinforced the devotion of Richmond’s white Catholics to Southern nationalism in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy had been receptive to social justice issues for the past century.

The First Council of the Vatican had ended with the continuation of the ecclesiastical concept of “papal infallibility” and sustained the policies of religious conservatism despite its premature closure due to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. Although key dogmatic shifts in the Roman Catholic Church were hampered by war and the modification of international diplomacy in the industrial world, Catholic officials were interested in addressing the societal ills of the contemporary period. In 1891, the papal encyclical Rerum Novarum was issued by Pope Leo XIII and addressed concerns over wages and the role of the church in global industrialization. The

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announcement implicitly supported the worker and was viewed by many Catholics as
“authorization to organize workers in labor unions.” Although the Catholic Church
would harshly condemn Marxism and atheistic communism, the Church understood the
social appeal of such egalitarian rhetoric and attempted to stem the growth of religiously
damaging ideology. *Rerum Novarum* has been referred to as “…the charter of Social
Catholicism…” and shows the direct willingness of the Catholic Church to administer to
the working poor and economically impoverished that were spiritual citizens within the
greater Catholic religious fold. Further adding to the Catholic Church’s increased
social awareness was the introduction of *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931 by Pope Pius XI.
A celebration and reiteration of *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*’s most significant
contribution to the growing Catholic commitment to social inclusivity was the concept
that “government intervention for the sake of social justice would be the rule rather than
the exception…not to discourage private initiative or eliminate competition, but to assure
the free participation of workers and unions in modern economic life.”

While these documents concern themselves more with the response of the
Catholic Church to questions of economic egalitarianism in an increasingly disparate
global financial climate, it is imperative to appreciate the Church’s compassionate stance
regarding those members of society on the social fringe of the industrial world. The
development of a Catholic Church that was receptive to understanding the social and
spiritual needs of all congregants was further realized with the later announcement of the

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revolutionary *Vatican II* in the midst of the violent Civil Rights backlash in the United States during the 1960s. Yet, prior to the innovative document's creation and issuance, Norfolk Catholicism would continue to be torn between a socially progressive clergy and a resistant laity.

Virginia Catholicism had been led in the post-World War II period by the leadership of Bishop Peter Ireton who had served as the head of the Diocese of Richmond from 1945 until his death in 1958. Ireton's replacement, Bishop John J. Russell, continued to lead the Catholics of the state into the Civil Rights era armed with the progressive stances made by the pronouncements of earlier ecumenical entities. Russell had previously served as the Bishop of South Carolina and his Southern vocational background made him especially suitable for a new sociopolitical landscape that was in its embryonic state within Virginia. Russell was intensely aware of the racial tensions festering in Virginia and quickly exploited his ecclesiastical powers to pursue a policy of integration and acceptance of Civil Rights. By the time Russell was appointed Bishop of Richmond, the Civil Rights era had begun in earnest. Catholicism, which had already been under attack by previous insinuations and accusations questioning the denomination's American and Southern sympathies, now had to defend and deflect new verbal indictments that associated Civil Rights with communist inspired racial and social revolution. The language of *Quadrageismo Anno* had specifically rejected the acceptance of socialism and communism as an anti-religious movement and the *Catholic Virginian*, the denominational press of the state, consistently declared that Civil Rights actions were

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33 Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 489.
Virginia Catholicism had awakened and had often inflamed racial tensions in Norfolk and the state and had, at times, been subjected to the segregationist rage implicit within the Civil Rights Era. Public rejection of communism was a critical component of the Catholic Church’s agenda to maintain its existence within Norfolk.

While publically condemning communist inspired Catholic social action, Russell was forced to face a hostile congregation of St. Mary’s in Norfolk as he confronted the changing social landscape of the city. By 1937, Norfolk had begun holding municipal meetings designed to address the slums of the city that had exploded along major thoroughfares throughout the city. These public meetings were designed to address public issues such as deplorable housing and living conditions for the city’s poorest inhabitants. The Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority became an offshoot of the 1937 meeting and by 1960 had targeted “485 blighted acres” in an effort to redesign Norfolk’s “downtown area so people can use it comfortably and profitably.” As specific arterial corridors and dilapidated buildings were removed and replaced with new municipal buildings, the area immediately surrounding St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Norfolk was replaced with a public housing project while St. Joseph’s Church, the historical Catholic home of African American parishioners was scheduled for demolition. Bishop Russell responded to the changing demographic landscape of the neighborhood surrounding the church by relocating the congregants of St. Joseph’s to St.


36 Norfolk Housing and Redevelopment Authority, “Downtown Redevelopment: The Birth of a Metropolitan Heart,” December 1960, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

Mary's stating that "...most of the former parishioners of Saint Mary's are now members of other parishes in Norfolk. Through the years the neighborhood has changed considerably and our planning for Saint Mary's has to change with the circumstances."  

Although Russell was essentially forced to combine the congregations of St. Mary's and St. Joseph's into a singular ecclesiastical entity, his decision to unite white and black parishioners within a cohesive parochial unit can be viewed as relatively progressive. While many white parishioners angrily denounced Russell’s unification order and either left the parish or sought religious solace in other denominational bodies, Russell continued his assault on institutional segregation within Virginia Catholicism. In 1963 Russell condemned the Tidewater Deanery for its perceived lack of institutional integration throughout the Norfolk region. Russell’s public denouncements were soundly defended by the clergy of the city’s religious institutions as the “clergy were solidly behind the civil rights movement.”  

In 1963, Russell supported Father John J. McMahon, moderator of the Catholic Interracial Council of Richmond, as he took part in the March on Washington held in August of the year. By 1964, Russell further pushed the issue of establishing a Catholic Interracial Council in Norfolk writing, “our Negro brethren are determined on the removal of injustices and discrimination and are justly seeking their civil rights.”

Russell and his anti-segregationist policies were further emboldened by the introduction the Second Vatican Council, the ecumenical council instituted to discuss the

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38 John J. Russell to John Joseph Beecher, March 14, 1961, St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Papers, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.
40 Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 535.
social needs of the church’s global congregants. While a full contextual analysis of the ecumenical assemblies that met from 1962 to 1965 lies beyond the confines of this paper, Vatican II was monumentally important in Catholic religious history as a revolutionary movement placing emphasis on relevant social justice and ecumenical action for equality and human dignity. Russell’s staunchly anti-segregationist policies had been bolstered by Vatican II as he continued to undermine the racist rhetoric of fiery politicians and public orators vociferously condemning racial justice throughout the American South. In 1963, Russell was quoted in The Catholic Virginian as stating, “...a Catholic cannot fail to recognize the right of the Negro people to secure proper housing, equal opportunity for work, full participation in educational facilities, both public and private, and the right to equal accommodation...”\footnote{Wilde, Vatican II, 15.} In September of 1964, Russell implored the members of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Men to realize that “…it is not enough to know that all men are brothers, children of the same heavenly Father and that discrimination, deprivation of the rights of a minority because of race or color is immoral, but we are obliged to exercise Christian justice and charity in our daily lives.”\footnote{John J. Russell, personal correspondence, letter to “My Dear Men of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Men,” September 20, 1964, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.} In 1965 Russell demanded that priests throughout northern Virginia understand that “…our people will be reminded forcibly of the teaching of the Church opposing racial discrimination as immoral and urged to accept in a Christian spirit any Negro who many move into a neighborhood.”\footnote{John J. Russell, “Letter to Priests of Northern Virginia,” personal correspondence, February 9, 1965, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.} Later that year, Russell sought donations from congregations within the Diocese to fund
the rebuilding of African American churches that had fallen victim to racial violence throughout Mississippi. Bishop Russell further combated racially exclusive policies through his efforts to desegregate Catholic fraternal orders and social institutions, such as the Knights of Columbus, which he felt harbored true segregationist sentiment. The fraternal organization’s power was of greatest influence in the Deep South, especially concentrated within the heavily Catholic city of New Orleans where it often clashed with the leadership of Joseph Rummel, Archbishop of New Orleans, who threatened to excommunicate any parishioner who reacted negatively against the Diocese’s wish to desegregate parochial education within the administrative region.

Russell confronted and admonished parishioners who angrily challenged the integrationist policies adopted by the Catholic Church in the wake of Vatican II as well as those unlucky souls who challenged his own policies. In 1965 Russell responded to a letter a parishioner in northern Virginia had written concerning the integrationist stance of the Diocese. As the parishioner questioned why the segregated church in which he had been reared was changing its social policy, Russell responded with an unwavering theologically confrontational voice as he wrote,

The Church is now trying to see that all of God’s children, our brethren in Christ, redeemed by the same savior, citizens of the same country are all receiving their rights of education, jobs they can fulfill, the right to buy and occupy a house wherever they can afford it. We now have a moral obligation to try to see that the Negroes have these rights which we have

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47 Fogarty, *Commonwealth Catholicism*, 537.

had all along, so as Christians we repent the evils of the past in this regard and try to correct them.\footnote{John J. Russell to H.G. Odenthal, personal correspondence, April 2, 1965, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.}

Further denunciations were addressed to Catholics throughout the Southern Civil Rights movement as Russell responded to a letter received from Texas by stating,

The Negroes waited a hundred years and failed to receive these rights until they began to demonstrate. I would not want any Catholic to remain entirely aloof from a movement designed to secure the rights of a minority...Let’s hope that the rights of citizens actually be given to them in Alabama; if so, we can be proud that some of our fellow members of the Church had a part in this achievement.\footnote{John J. Russell to Arthur Leman, personal correspondence, April 12, 1965, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.}

Russell devoted Sunday services to sermons espousing progressive theories on the need for equal housing, the function of the Catholic Church in addressing social concerns throughout Latin America, and working to alter the minds of parishioners throughout the Diocese of Richmond by explaining that “laws may not remove prejudice, but they can remove some of the effects of prejudice. The change of heart must come from persuasion, preaching, and hopefully, religious conversion.”\footnote{John J. Russell, personal correspondence, June 10, 1968, Diocese of Richmond Archives, Richmond, Virginia.}

While Russell was often frustrated with his parishioner’s lack of response to the socially enlightened and reformist principles of a modern Catholic Church, he continued to pursue social action within a reluctant and often staunchly conservative diocese. As the greater Catholic ecumenical structure fundamentally altered its social mission to address greater concerns of global communism and the religious needs of its African American community, Russell criticized parishioners, diocesan polities, and priests who were unwilling to accept the changing nature of Catholic collective service. Russell’s
tenure within the Diocese of Richmond built upon previous anti-segregationist policies employed by Ireton, and was followed by Bishop Walter Sullivan, the eleventh Bishop of the Diocese of Richmond who took office in June of 1974. Sullivan further supported the policies instituted by Russell as an advocate for racial integration and spiritual interaction. Although his involvement in the continuity of the Diocese of Richmond’s support for Civil Rights policies and legislation was more reflective of a greater societal shift towards racial inclusion and social acceptance, his involvement was nonetheless responsive to the changing spiritual needs of a community. Norfolk’s Catholics had been forced to confront segregationist social attitudes and deeply engrained racial stigmas associated with their fellow African American coreligionists. Bishop Russell had developed a cohesive plan designed to provoke discomfort among the laypeople and profoundly alter white congregant’s conceptions of racial exclusivity and religious elitism within the Catholic Churches of Norfolk.

As Roman Catholic social action within the Diocese of Richmond pushed a racially progressive faith-based agenda, its actions were bolstered by the support of a structured hierarchy and a receptive local clergy. Local decisions instituted by priests and diocesan bishops were therefore representative of a larger ecumenical system that disseminated encyclicals and official church policies dedicated to alleviating inflamed racial tension and implicit racism within the greater church superstructure. Progressive social policies could be pursued further by the Catholic Church due to a relatively low diocesan membership and a small congregational body within Norfolk.

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52 Fogarty, Commonwealth Catholicism, 544-545.
Yet, Catholicism was not the sole body advocating religious liberalism within the city. The Unitarian-Universalists of Norfolk espoused racial impartiality and cultural egalitarianism within the city further supporting a radicalized socially progressive agenda. While Catholicism sought influence, guidance, and religious support from an international spiritual hierarchy, Unitarian-Universalism within Norfolk garnered divine sustenance from its decentralized congregationalist ecumenical structure. Although the religious alliance between Unitarians and Universalists was not formally declared until 1961 with the formation of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Boston, Massachusetts based church had historically been at the forefront of religious liberalism.\(^{53}\)

While Unitarianism and Universalism can trace their historical lineage to the Protestant Reformation with the respective concepts of anti-Trinitarianism and the total heavenly predestination of humanity, the American branch of both faiths explicit emphasized socially conscious religious liberalism. Both Unitarianism and Universalism grew in New England as a religious byproduct of spiritual and political agitation amongst the population. The once separate and spiritually distinct entities of Unitarianism and Universalism encompassed diametrically opposed socioeconomic sections of the American populace. By the mid-19\(^{th}\) century, adherents to the doctrine of Unitarianism were pulled from the working class societies of the American republic and "stressed direct experiences of faith through the heart and not the head."\(^{54}\) As Universalism quietly found roots among social classes that existed outside the social elite of New England with


its message of collective salvation, Unitarianism appealed to the economic and intellectual select of the region’s inhabitants. Early supporters of post-Revolutionary American and antebellum Unitarianism were presidents of Harvard College, prominent philosophers, and highly educated men and women who were the descendants of socially established progenitors. Theologian H. Reinhold Niebuhr described early American Unitarianism as the faith of the “privileged, comfortable, and prosperous.” While this may seem like a damning indictment of elitist paternalism in the early American Unitarian church, both Unitarians and Universalists inclined toward greater social acceptance and religious liberalism, albeit often with an inherent patriarchal tone.

The concept of ecumenical decentralization appealed to Unitarians and Universalists alike who were firmly committed to the vision of an independent church devoid of doctrinal restraints imposed by a rigid ecclesiastical hierarchy. The mission of Unitarian-Universalism is indivisibly linked to its social agenda of applied religious liberalism. Despite the Unitarian mission of religious liberalism and a projected racially progressive ecumenical structure, racism continued to be found within the greater movement well into the early twentieth century. While Unitarianism was often found as the faith of the New England intellectual and social elite, Universalism had found pride in the “practical applications of their teaching”, a faith where religious thought was placed into action. Although American Unitarianism and Universalism originated in Boston and New England, the relatively progressive and racially inclusive religious policies of

55 Buehrens, Unitarians and Universalists in America, 26.
57 Floyd-Thomas, The Origins of Black Humanism, 63.
the two religious traditions would make their way to southeastern Virginia by the closing decades of the nineteenth century and would foster a unique spiritual tradition in the fight for social justice in a conservative region.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, African American Universalist preachers could be found throughout New England and the Midwest. By 1920 Rev. E. Ethelred Brown had established the Harlem Unitarian Church in the heart of an urban center witnessing American race riots and a conscious cultural movement within black America. While Brown’s congregation served as a center of African American Unitarianism within a specific northern urban locality, Joseph Jordan, the first ordained African American Universalist minister, found his home in Norfolk. By 1885, Universalist congregations nationwide had determined to support a denominational mission in the American South and looked to southeastern Virginia to sponsor educational opportunities for African Americans of the area. In 1893, the Universalist General Convention supported the fledgling educational and spiritual institutions headed by Jordan in Norfolk and nearby Suffolk, Virginia which were constructed the following year. While the Jordan School in Suffolk served the area’s African American community and became a stalwart temple of Universalism in the region, the white dominated Unitarian Church in Norfolk was not established in the city until 1912 and disappeared by 1918. A permanent Unitarian Church in Norfolk was not constructed

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59 Floyd-Thomas, The Origins of Black Humanism, 1.
60 Buehrens, Universalists and Unitarians in America, 104-105.
62 Buehrens, Universalists and Unitarians in America, 105.
63 Will C. Frank, “Two Centuries of Unitarianism and Universalism in Norfolk and Vicinity,” Unpublished manuscript, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
until 1930 and unfortunately, early Unitarianism within Norfolk was marked by a series of scandals and abrupt changes in congregational leadership that weakened its appeal.

In 1938, Reverend Gerald Fitzpatrick resigned from church leadership after four years due to clashes with the congregation and the greater national ecumenical leadership. Fitzpatrick was described as “crude” and the product of a post-war military community that had seen its congregation decline following the conclusion of the First World War. Although the larger Unitarian national ecumenical body condemned Fitzpatrick’s congregation, declaring that “the wealthiest man in the church and one of the most active in the congregation makes his living by manufacturing gambling machines” they provided limited support for the embattled reverend by stating that “he may be lacking in certain respects, but both he and his wife are a very deep cut above their constituents.” The Unitarian ecumenical hierarchy debated the resignation of Fitzpatrick. The reverend’s chief complaints were salary-based and expounded with his frustration with the limited and unwilling financial support of a small congregation. Although Fitzpatrick’s congregation numbered 35 parishioners and 12 families, the congregation was vilified as a group that did “rather well financially, but many of them are not interested enough to attend or to take any interest in the church.” Further scandal cast a negative light on religious liberalism within Norfolk. In 1946, Reverend Frank White, who served as the pastor of the Norfolk Unitarian Church from 1944 to

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64 George F. Patterson, Memorandum to the Staff Council, Will C. Frank Collection: Church Years (General) 1936-1940, Old Dominion University Special Collections, January 6, 1938.
65 Robert C. Dexter to George C. Davis, personal correspondence, Will C. Frank Collection: Church Years (General) 1936-1939, Old Dominion University Special Collections, January 15, 1938.
66 George C. Davis, memorandum to the president, Will C. Frank Collection: Church Years (General) 1936.
67 Robert C. Dexter to George C. Davis, personal correspondence, Will C. Frank Collection: Church Years (General) 1936-1939, Old Dominion University Special Collections, January 15, 1938.
1945 married an African American woman named Anne Anderson. The congregation of the city’s Unitarian church had forced his removal as he had violated an impermeable social barrier strictly observed by the membership of former congregation upon the publication of intent to enter into marriage with Anderson.

Despite Reverend White’s dismissal in 1945, Universalism and Unitarianism began to realize its stated socially liberal religious agenda a few short years later. In 1950 the Department of Education of the Universalist Church in America instructed church bodies throughout the nation to show support for Suffolk’s African American affiliated institution. With growing, but still deficient public educational opportunities for African Americans in the South, the focus of Suffolk’s Jordan School changed to a neighborhood institution serving the greater needs of the community’s African American population. Still, the support of American Universalists continued to foster the mission of the Jordan Neighborhood House. A memorandum distributed by the Universalist United Appeal specifically addressed children throughout the denomination in enlisting assistance to support the Jordan House. The contents of the memorandum included a racially inclusive verse and accompanying song for the stated purpose of introducing “...6, 7, and 8 year olds to the work of our denomination at Jordan Neighborhood House.” While Universalism and Unitarianism continued to struggle with an implied patriarchal and paternalistic tendency towards African Americans within their

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69 Department of Education of the Universalist Church of America, “American Friendship Program, 1950”, memorandum, Will C. Frank Collection (Box 50), Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.

70 Philip R. Giles, “A Message to all who seek to interpret Jordan Neighborhood House, Suffolk, Virginia,” undated memorandum, Will C. Frank Collection (Box 50), Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
denominations, the leadership of the Unitarian Church in Norfolk affirmed its social mission through the assistance of the charismatic, confrontational, and devoted leadership of Reverend James C. Brewer. In 1956, Rev. Brewer was dedicated as the leader of Norfolk’s Unitarian Church. Although Brewer served a short stint as head of the congregation, the leadership of the impassioned clergyman strengthened the resolve of a once ambivalent flock and fortified the resolve of religious liberalism within the city.

The same year that Brewer became the leader of Norfolk’s Unitarian Church, Governor Thomas Stanley of Virginia firmly supported the state’s policy of “Massive Resistance” as the General Assembly initiated a series of legislative acts that had the effect of prolonging segregation in the aftermath of the Brown I and Brown II. In the period immediately following Brown and Brown II, Brewer fostered an ardent congregational support network through his fervent spiritual postulations and truly socially liberal religious rhetoric designed to shock his parishioners from social complacency. Brewer’s installation in October 1956 empowered Norfolk’s most racially integrationist and progressive predominantly white church as he openly confronted the racism and social exclusion found throughout Norfolk. In 1957, Brewer delivered a sermon to his congregation concerning the school crisis at Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in which he stated that

We of the Unitarian Church in Norfolk reaffirm our belief in the dignity and worth of the individual and the right of every human being to enjoy

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71 “Service Installation of the Reverend James Culps Brewer as Minister of the Unitarian Church in Norfolk, Virginia,” October 12, 1956, Will C. Frank Collection Series II: Unitarian Universalists (Unprocessed A2013-05 Box 46), Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.

the freedoms provided in our federal Constitution. We state our opposition to all attempts to circumvent the law, including the use of church facilities as a substitute for the public school system. We call upon the state, authorities to put an end now to their practice of enforced segregation and to permit localities to maintain the free public schools in accordance with the ruling of the Supreme Court...this is a true and official copy of the statement passed by unanimous vote at a congregational meeting of the Unitarian Church of Norfolk...73

The sermon was delivered in the days immediately following a confrontation between federal troops deployed by President Dwight Eisenhower and Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas and made a clear public pronouncement regarding the anti-segregationist stance of the Unitarian Church within Norfolk.74

Brewer launched unceasing attacks against the avowed anti-integrationist policies of Governor J. Lindsay Almond and the Democratic Byrd Organization that dominated Virginia politics. In January 1958 Brewer openly attacked the introduction of Pupil Placement Boards throughout the state that effectively denied African American enrollment in the state’s white schools as he spoke to his congregation stating,

Charles Saunders Pierce, writing in the 19th century, describes the fixing of belief quite succinctly when he said, and I quote in part: ‘Let the will of the state act, then, instead of that of the individual. Let an institution be created which shall have for its object to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually, and to them to the young...Let all possible change of mind be removed from men’s apprehension. Let them be kept ignorant, lest they should learn of some reason to think otherwise than they do’...I shudder to think that this description so aptly describes what is now taking place in Virginia...75

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73 "A Statement on the Present School Crisis in Virginia," Unitarian Church of Norfolk, Will C. Frank Collection (Unprocessed: Folder-Unitarian Church of Norfolk, General 1957-1961), Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia


75 Jim C. Brewer, “An Open Letter to the Citizens of Virginia”, Delivered at the Unitarian Church of Norfolk, January 26, 1958, Will C. Frank Collection, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
Further in the sermon Brewer compared the actions of the Pupil Placement Board to an insidious communist inspired plot that served as a greater representation of civil religion and public theology in the Cold War era.

As the impending school closing crisis threatened the very existence of public education in Virginia, Brewer devoted himself to condemning and dismantling the policies of Massive Resistance. On September 15, 1958 Brewer penned a letter to the chair of the Norfolk School Board, Paul T. Schweitzer writing that “the possible closing of public schools and the consequent destruction of the public school system in Virginia makes it imperative that this statement expressing the strong feelings of my congregation be brought to your attention.”

Brewer was committed to public education and his leadership of the integrationist Norfolk Committee for Public Schools found itself in pitched conflict with the segregationist Tidewater Education Fund intent on establishing a system of white academies housed in churches throughout the city. Norfolk’s public secondary schools closed indefinitely in September of 1958, despite Brewer’s pleas.

During the school closing crises of 1958-1959 in Norfolk, Brewer continued his public condemnation of massive resistance in the confrontational and theologically combative manner of religious liberalism in the era. Brewer used his pulpit to ask congregants to write to local senators and press the issue of school closing. Brewer appealed to the historical heritage of Virginia’s early leaders as he preached that "Virginia should take pride in its past, for here in the early days of our democracy men

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76 James C. Brewer to Paul T. Schweitzer, personal correspondence, September 15, 1958, Old Dominion Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
77 Littlejohn and Ford, Elusive Equality, 75.
78 Unitarian Church of Norfolk, Newsletter, January 28, 1959, Will C. Frank Collection, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
were born who could think and act with reason... What has happened to that heritage of greatness, of freedom, and of universal education? Can Virginia take pride in its present? What has happened to freedom of speech when people are threatened by loss of jobs or life, just for their belief in public education?"

Brewer’s public stance rejecting segregationist educational policies was often condemned by clergy members from other religious denominations throughout the South. A Southern Baptist pastor within Norfolk told his congregation that, “One leader of a local group to re-open schools immediately is a religious leader who rejects the final authority of the Scriptures, the absolute necessity for the New Birth through the shed blood, and bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and other vital doctrinal matters. Christian people need to know about those with whom they align themselves.” Despite the theological ruminations proposed by Norfolk’s ministers who both condemned and supported the closure of Norfolk’s public school system, city schools eventually reopened February 2, 1959 in the face of intense federal pressure. Brewer continued to vocally support integrated education and the necessity to accept an inclusive society writing in May of the year that “I believe in a strong public school system. I believe that a strong public school system is a necessity for a strong democracy. I am concerned about our public schools and their improvement... a concerned citizen will keep himself informed, and I am sure that all of

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79 Unitarian Church of Norfolk, Newsletter, January 21, 1959, Will C. Frank Collection, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
80 Dorothy Mulligan, “Minister Leads Fight for Public Schools,” The Unitarian Register, January 1959, Papers of Dr. Forrest P. White, MG5 Box 1 Folder 13, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
81 Littlejohn and Ford, Elusive Equality, 79.
us will again seek ways of letting our concern be felt as we have in the past." Later in September, Brewer continued to strengthen the role of religious liberalism in Norfolk by writing that "liberal religion is concerned about the welfare and freedom of the individual. It is based upon a democratic process in human relations and the use of the scientific method and reason in the search of truth...liberal religion is a method to help man honestly face reality."

In May of 1961, the governing bodies of American Unitarianism (American Unitarian Association) and Universalism (Universalist Church in America) formed the Unitarian Universalist Association and although Brewer had left the Unitarian Church of Norfolk to serve in South Africa, religious liberalism would continue to function in the city that was beginning to recognize the incendiary policies of its racially suppressive past. In 1964, Reverend James H. Curtis, Brewer’s successor in the Unitarian Church, and Reverend Carroll T. Dozier of Christ the King, a Catholic Church within the city, attended a conference held by the Norfolk Council of United Church Women and the Unitarian Women’s Alliance speaking on the subject or racial reconciliation, integration, and women’s equality. Also attending the conference was the Reverend O.E. Luttrell of Larchmont Baptist, a Southern Baptist institution, a symbolic gesture of the willingness of the Southern Baptist Convention within Norfolk to address concerns of social liberals in the escalating Civil Rights era.

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82 Unitarian Church of Norfolk, Newsletter, May 14, 1959, Will C. Frank Collection, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
83 Unitarian Church of Norfolk, Newsletter, September 20, 1959, Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
84 “Seventh Annual Norfolk Community Understanding Conference;” February 21, 1964, The Papers of Edith R. White (MG 109: Women United, Box 1, Folder 10), Old Dominion University Special Collections, Norfolk, Virginia.
Through the Civil Rights era, Catholicism, Unitarianism, and Universalism had formed an unlikely ecumenical alliance as prominent activists for social progressivism and religious liberalism. While the churches had vastly different theological interpretations and structural hierarchies, they shared remarkable similarities in their approach to denominational cultural awareness. The true value in the support of Civil Rights among Catholics, Unitarians, and Universalists must be understood within the limited congregational influence. Catholicism, Unitarianism, and Universalism, had small congregations in Norfolk and were responsible for the spiritual well-being of few parishioners. Catholic, Unitarian, and Universalist church officials and congregational leaders were therefore able to utilize their pulpits to speak freely and openly about pressing social conditions and the plight of the urban poor, global oppression, and the suffering of African Americans in Norfolk and throughout the South. Norfolk Catholicism based its religiously liberal policies on greater higher ecclesiastical authority while the Diocese of Richmond continued to preach religious obedience and spiritual devotion to an economically disadvantaged flock in the heart of the city. While the Diocese of Richmond found ecumenical support from the Vatican that served to promote socially reformist Roman Catholicism, Unitarians and Universalists promoted religious liberalism as a hallmark of their decentralized congregationalism and denominational devotion.

Overcoming early charges of racial paternalism and social elitism, Unitarians and Universalists promoted a sense of racial inclusiveness during a crisis that threatened to undermine the entire framework of the city's civic institutions. Catholic ecumenical progressivism and Unitarian-Universalist religious liberalism in Norfolk functioned and
flourished in the shadow of Protestant spiritual hegemony. Eschewing pressure from many mainline Protestant denominations throughout Norfolk, Roman Catholicism and Unitarian-Universalism were able to offer a powerful voice for religious liberalism within the city; a voice advocating social and religious change in a reluctant, hesitant, and often violently confrontational conservative Southern municipality. While Catholics and Unitarian Universalists supported the liberalization of religion and the implementation of progressive policies, their denominational sentiments were not echoed by mainline Protestants within Norfolk, Virginia, and the American South. In the midst of Cold War political agitation, religious conservatives criticized groups that advocated for the enfranchisement of African Americans and labeled them as reactionary, revolutionary, and inspired by Soviet communism. Russo-American relations during the Cold War provided ample opportunity for segregationist rhetoric to be camouflaged by declarations of America’s Christian heritage. To be communist was to be godless and to be godless was to be un-American. American Protestantism was determined to define its religious mission with a spiritual determination to win the Cold War and used its denominational rhetoric to denounce, condemn, and delay African American equality and the introduction of increasingly liberal politics.
In the summer of 1963, the Reverend Arthur E. Shelton addressed his congregation at Norview Methodist Church with a powerful sermon intended to provoke his audience to analyze critically their conception of liberal theology and the mission of the Methodist Church. Like its mainline Protestant counterparts, Methodism within Norfolk had devolved into regionally divisive factionalism driven by intense and heated religious rhetoric. The Southern Protestant church vilified Northern interference by arguing that Northern church bodies were trying to dominate the area with politically tinged ecumenical policies ignorant of the Southern idiosyncrasies of de jure segregation. Norview Methodist Church stood in the eastern portion of the city, an area that had rapidly expanded in the post-World War II era to accommodate for the exploding population eager to find adequate housing in the suburban outcropping of urban Norfolk.

By the 1950’s, the Norview section of Norfolk had witnessed intense racial violence as African Americans moved into traditionally white neighborhoods and encountered physical intimidation, block busting, and white flight. Norview High School had been one of the four high schools to shut its doors in the city’s school closing crisis of 1958-1959, and the tensions of the situation had not dissolved when Rev. Shelton’s sermon was delivered. A liberal-minded church intellectual, Shelton earned his Bachelor in Divinity degree at Emory University and his Doctor of Theology degree at

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Boston University by the age of 24. Shelton had been educated at distinguished regional Methodist institutions but had rejected the sectional religious polemics that defined ecumenical doctrine of the era. Intelligent and confrontational, he demanded that his parishioners understand their ambivalent position regarding the Civil Rights movement that signified a quiet approval of continued resistance on the part of the Protestant laity. To Shelton, his parishioners absence of a religiously liberal voice and amounted to little more than approval by their silent solitude. Other religious institutions made forceful stances regarding their support of the social gospel while his congregants steadfastly adhered to their collective spiritual isolation.

On a warm summer Sunday morning, Shelton accused his congregants of being afraid of confronting prejudice within themselves, their community, and their church. Shelton spoke, “Something tragic has happened, beloved, to sap the prophetic strength from the pulpit, and substitute the watered-down drivel we hear most of the time... We have to face the facts that ours is a strongly segregated, status-quo seeking, ‘don’t rock the boat’ sort of church organization in Virginia, from the hierarchy way on down to the average layman.” Shelton’s words were jarring and his voice grew increasingly agitated and fervent, “in spite of all the high-sounding pronouncements in the newspapers lately by some of our leading Methodist leaders in Virginia, we are a complacent, non-prophetic, and shamefully biased group of Christians.” Shelton’s sermon finished with an impassioned charge to his audience, “Unless the people called Methodists in the state

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3 Arthur E. Shelton, “What Do You Want”, Papers of Arthur E. Shelton, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.
4 Arthur E. Shelton, “What Do You Want”, Papers of Arthur E. Shelton, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.
of Virginia, from our bishop right on down to the average layman, take the matter of racial unrest upon their hearts...there will be bloodshed on the streets of Norfolk in less than six months!" Shelton's voice was an unwelcome one for the congregants of Norview Methodist Church. In less than three years Shelton left the ministry to teach sociology at several Christian colleges in North Carolina of various denominational affiliations. Shelton had hoped to push the resistant conservative laity of Southern Protestantism to accept and act as the true promoters of the liberal Christianity promised by their church hierarchy. Still, as powerful and persuasive as Shelton's words were, he encountered significant resistance amongst a laity who had begun to associate American racial bloodshed with the Communist tinged political rhetoric endemic to the Cold War.

Shelton's voice and his ministry had emerged from the politically conservative religious rhetoric of the pre-Civil Rights era. Religiously liberal congregational bodies operating within Norfolk and the South had offered their parishioners the opportunity to speak on behalf of social justice and African American enfranchisement. Resistance often came from conservative parishioners who refused to acknowledge the call for social equality as a spiritual necessity.

With Shelton's sermons, the church found itself locked into a new vitriolic battle for the soul of Southern religionists. The emergence of the Cold War created a new cause célèbre for conservative congregations, clerics, and ecumenical hierarchies. The Cold War provided a new opportunity to exercise continued social ostracism from an international and domestic perspective. The Cold War offered an opportunity for

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5 Arthur E. Shelton, "What Do You Want", Papers of Arthur E. Shelton, Pitts Theological Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.
6 Houck and Dixon, eds., Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights, 622.
conservative religious and political bodies to denounce the Civil Rights movement as an insidious infringement on Southern institutions brought by an unrelenting assault of global communism. Furthermore, the fraternalism that African Americans shared with indigenous Africans demanding political equality in the crumbling post-World War II European imperialist structure was dismissed by white conservatives as additional proof that the Soviet Union was seeking to undermine democratic institutions with the hollow promises of Marxist egalitarianism. The last stand of segregation in Norfolk pushed regional social exclusion and the Civil Rights movement out of its Southern home and into an international forum of Soviet-American diplomacy.

Despite the introduction of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, most Southern Protestant congregants remained determined to resist the realization of full political and spiritual equality for African Americans. While the political agitation of pre-Brown religious groups had been relinquished to the secular world of partisan organizations, a religiously backed resurgence had festered in the interim growing louder and more determined than ever before to offer a church sanctioned commitment to resisting Civil Rights legislation and the agonizing death of Jim Crow. A two-pronged attack signaled the last defiant stand of Protestant backed Southern socio-religious exclusion. Political and Christian groups attacked Civil Rights and African American empowerment organizations as atheistic communists, zealously destroying the church wherever they sought political influence. In addition, Southern Protestantism viewed the growing African independence movements as examples of popular unrest inspired by socialist ideology determined to overthrow the white state. The combination of Soviet inspired civil unrest in the United States and abroad created a potent opportunity to infuse the fear of white conservatives
with a global threat undermining the dominant political and religious power structure of Southern Protestantism, culture, and communal life. The Southern clergy, who had often supported measures of racial reconciliation and Civil Rights initiatives in the years following the Brown ruling, found themselves questioning the formal enactment of political liberation on two separate occasions, commiserating with their parishioners and then reaffirming their antiracial position for fear of their own hypocrisy. The Cold War era of the 1960s sparked fear in the hearts and minds of the Southern clergy. Communism was atheistic and sought to remove the established church from the lives of the people. Southern Protestant clergy reasoned that if communism was introduced and successful in the United States, institutionalized churches would dissolve. White Southern Protestant ecumenical assemblies had a checkered past in approving calls for African American enfranchisement. Originally the voice of the “Lost Cause” mythology, white churches originally opposed desegregation and cultural inclusion and used misinterpreted scripture and social customs to continue their exclusionary policies. In the years following Brown, white religious bodies reluctantly retreated from public pronouncements of segregation but had continued to harbor parishioners who were uneasy with the social liberation promised by major mainline Protestant ecumenical denominations. Clerical leaders were often keenly aware of the split between church and laity. The Cold War created resurgence in Southern religious conservatism. In the face of communism, African decolonization, and the Black Power movement, the ecclesiastical power structures that defined sectional religious life quietly reaffirmed their commitment to social isolation and spiritual marginalization.
The Southern laity routinely defended socially exclusive segregationist legislation as emblematic of the “Southern Way of Life,” a preservation of practices employed by previous generations that defined race relations in the region. *Brown I* and *Brown II* introduced federal mandates to destroy legalized segregation practiced in theory for centuries and formalized by 1896’s *Plessey v. Ferguson* case. Communist organizations attacked the exclusivity of the South’s perceived “otherness” prior to the introduction of the school desegregation cases. The Communist supported American Negro Labor Congress met in Chicago in 1922 and in 1928 the Comintern declared that “American Negroes constituted an oppressed people.” The ANLC was a weak organization and the American government dismissed announcement of the subjugation of Southern blacks as empty posturing by the Soviet Union. The Party’s American affiliate, CPUSA, supported the defense of Alabama’s Scottsboro Boys in 1931 through its International Labor Defense and was cause enough for a defiant Southern public to label communism as an internationally inspired subversive organization. The ANLC had further supported African American membership within communist organizations throughout the South. In Norfolk, African Americans joined forces with small communist organizations as a means of organizing labor unions for the promotion of equitable treatment. African Americans were ostracized within these meetings as Southern communist party members continued to focus on the radicalization of the white working class rather than the inclusionary rhetoric of post-racism extorted by international communist leaders.

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Norfolk had an active Communist Party and had worked to forge a bridge between laborers, poor whites, and African Americans in an effort to develop a larger coalition of the dispossessed. During the 1930s, the Communist Party introduced the concept of the “Popular Front” to support American members of the international political ideology. The Popular Front had been introduced in Western Europe for the purpose of adapting the philosophy of global communism to the jingoism of independent nations. The Popular Front, introduced by the Communist Party and leader Early Browder, incorporated American national emblems and patriotism to assuage the concerns of terrified citizens who declared communism inherently evil, destructive, and synonymous with Soviet domination. The Popular Front was effective in forging alliances with the children of immigrant laborers and African Americans replacing concerns of race struggle with class struggle. Despite its success in the 1930s, supporters of the revolutionary and controversial ethos of global communism faced dire consequences in the American South.

Communist-led organizations became involved in a variety of social causes throughout the American South and were roundly chastised by conservative whites for their support of integrated labor organizations. The NAACP, often accused of being a Soviet inspired organization, routinely denounced communism and labeled supporters of

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10 Lewis, Massive Resistance, 129.
the international polity as radicals intent on spreading incendiary rhetoric.¹⁴ Still, African Americans throughout the American South found an opportunity for social equality in communist supported or inspired organization. In 1933, Richmond witnessed a massive gathering at the Fifth Street Baptist Church where hundreds of African Americans pledged to support the International Labor Defense.¹⁵ In 1938, the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW) was created to address the needs of the region’s poor agrarians and African Americans. The organization was in existence for a decade but fell victim to allegations of communism and collapsed from the pervasive red fear of the Depression era.¹⁶ The dismantling of the SCHW was proof that conservatives were willing to condemn, attack, and destroy any organization or piece of legislation that threatened to infringe on the ability of Southern jurisprudence.¹⁷ The SCHW was considered an institution influenced or potentially sponsored by “outsiders” and was thus vulnerable to public challenges of its communist affiliation.¹⁸ Historian Earl Lewis uses the example of the SCHW’s brief existence as a “template” for the efficient dismissal of Civil Rights groups.¹⁹ Lewis suggests that Southern political demagogues could quickly destroy the legitimacy of social groups promoting racial egalitarianism and liberal theology by labeling such assemblies as communist inspired or claiming that such groups had been “infiltrated” by individuals who were non-native to the region.²⁰

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¹⁵ Harris, “Running with the Reds,” 31.
By the conclusion of World War II, African American involvement within the Communist Party had dissipated for fear of being marked with the permanent stain of sedition and treason, but the social concerns of African Americans living in Norfolk and throughout the South had not been satisfactorily addressed in the wake of the war despite the claim that the United States sought permanent social justice and had fought to rid the world of the totalitarian Nazi and Fascist regimes. African Americans wished to realign themselves with groups that appeared less radical than the communist regimes that had come into power within Eastern Europe.21 With the United States locked in a new battle for international political and military supremacy, the Southern Protestant polity felt itself menaced by the twin threats of Civil Rights and Communism and sought to enforce a strict national allegiance to American social and political ideals.

In the years following World War II, increasingly polarized Soviet-American relations galvanized the anti-communist rhetoric supported by Protestant denominations throughout the American South. In addition to the growing domestic Civil Rights movement, international political maneuvers placed mounting pressure on the racial exclusion practiced in Southern religious institutions. In 1946, South Africa announced at the first United Nations General Assembly that the nation had every intention of annexing its western neighbor, the former German South West Africa.22 The NAACP quickly and vociferously attacked South Africa’s plan for imperialism in the face of self-determination. South Africa had been dominated by the European Protestant mainline

traditionalism that held control of the spiritual life of the American South and the annexation of nearby German South West Africa signaled a continuation of colonialism in a post-World War II construct. Resentment among the indigenous African population of South Africa was reflected in the work of Reverend Michael Scott, a black South African Anglican Priest who defied Anglican racial exclusion and briefly aligned himself with the Communist Party in an attempt to promote racial egalitarianism in a white minority controlled African state.\textsuperscript{23} White South African exclusion became a powerful political force in 1948 when Daniel F. Malan, a clergyman from the Dutch Reformed Church, rose to power in the national government and helped to implement apartheid through the Nationalist sponsored parliament.\textsuperscript{24} Malan’s policies were reminiscent of American exclusionary religious rhetoric as he successfully circumvented Scott’s calls for racial inclusion by labeling the Anglican priest as a dangerous communist ally and Soviet sympathizer. Scott eventually found an audience at the United Nations with the assistance of the NAACP, but accusations of his empathy for communism hindered his overall international effectiveness. Barred from participation in the Anglican priesthood due to conflict with his superior bishop, Scott’s impassioned speeches allowed for greater South African Protestant denominations to collectively speak out against apartheid in 1948 with separate announcements published that censured legalized racial regulations.\textsuperscript{25} Apartheid policies mirrored American Jim Crow legislation and were enforced with results leading to a deep chasm between the church leadership and the laity. White American Protestantism viewed apartheid as an insult to the concept of

\textsuperscript{23} Anderson, “International Conscience, the Cold War, and Apartheid,” 307.
\textsuperscript{24} Anderson, “International Conscience, the Cold War, and Apartheid,” 313.
Western inspired democracy but the Southern denominations that had splintered from larger national entities refused to denounce apartheid actions that mirrored the regional exclusive policies in the Jim Crow South.

The international diplomatic realties of Cold War politics quickly became intertwined with the American desire to contain communism. American religious groups had condemned Soviet inspired communism in the immediate post-World War I era, but the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global superpower following World War II prompted impassioned rhetoric from Southern spiritual groups condemning its expansion. With the proclamation of a Communist mainland China in 1949, the American public had witnessed a powerful example of the growing threat of international communist expansion. American religious leaders grew increasingly alarmed at the spread of communism, voluntarily placing Christianity at the forefront of a larger international political debate. While most American ecumenical and secular groups grew anxious over communism’s growth and takeover in China as an apostate and atheistic state, Southern spiritual groups feared the introduction of egalitarian measures within China as reflective of the state’s determination to introduce institutionalized civic parity.

Southern Protestant denominations had been members of the Federal Council of Churches and, with the creation of the National Council of Churches (NCC) in 1950, had joined an organization that saw “the mainline, suburban, white middle class as their core constituency.” The NCC frequently created policies and consulted with church

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agencies to promote policies of racial inclusion, much to the chagrin of Southern Protestant denominations that viewed these initiatives as tainted by communist pressure aimed at influencing domestic faith-based organizations. Southern Protestant laypeople felt uncomfortable with the NCC’s policies of domestic egalitarianism and bristled at acknowledging the existence of a communist state. They routinely chided their religious leaders for keeping membership within a body that recognized the legality of non-Christian states.

At the dawn of the Cold War, African American groups that had promoted racial equality had been loudly dismissed as communist institutions hopelessly infiltrated by the insidious anarchism of Soviet communism. The NAACP had quickly decried any communist sympathies emitting from its national and regional offices. Still, the lingering threat of social collectivism was thrown at the organization regardless of its affiliation with the Kremlin. Modern historians allege that the NAACP distanced itself from global communism for fear of the ultimate demise of the organization. The NAACP may have sought public detachment from communism for fear of American jingoism, but politicians throughout Virginia and the South marked the organization as a sympathizer of Soviet governmental policies. As a result, Virginia passed legislation designed to hamper the effectiveness of the NAACP, accusing the organization of communist infiltration and radicalism. The government of Virginia had tried in vain to force local

branches of the NAACP to shutter their doors and end their involvement in equal rights initiatives. When this proved ineffectual, the government of the Commonwealth “demanded certified statements regarding donations and all records.”

The South’s fear of communist infiltration is representative of the greater American hysteria during the early Cold War. Russia exploited the simmering racial tensions in the post-war nation to the advantage of its international propaganda machine. Articles reporting American racial exclusion were frequently published in Soviet newspapers. Soviet attacks on racial exclusion placed the South in the crosshairs of the communist assault on regional hypocrisy. Still, Protestant bodies of the American South served as the armor-clad defenders of sectional faith and spirituality. Southern Protestantism represented the spiritual heritage of the region, the ecclesiastical culture of a people who had found solace in their church through war, economic devastation, and political uncertainty. The Southern Protestant Church hierarchy had attacked social isolation and cultural distinction but the lingering concern over communism forced the church to redefine its mission to a global audience. Southern Protestantism was often provincial and introverted, but in the face of unrelenting foreign accusations of religious insincerity, church leaders argued that the continued existence of institutionalized religion was reliant on the succinct dismissal of Soviet indictments as the nefarious work of a totalitarian regime.

The Soviet Union’s denunciation of the American global democratic mission continued to mount and became more provocative with the introduction of South Africa’s

Suppression of Communism Act in 1950. The act declared the Communist Party of South Africa to be an illegal political organization and made involvement with the party punishable by imprisonment. The Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 created an opportunity for the white-dominated South African government to openly confront and destroy organizations labeled communist or communist inspired, regardless of their true sympathies. South Africa had become critical to the maintenance of western power and the United States relied on the British territory as a bulwark of western democracy on the African continent. Although South Africa’s institutionalized segregation policies were firmly entrenched by the introduction of the Suppression of Communism Act, the United States had thrown its allegiance to the British and subsequently to South Africa in an attempt to undermine communist expansion across the African continent. The African continent had become a key battleground in the American fight to stop the growth of global Marxism.

The charges made by the Soviet Union in chastising American duplicity in the promotion of global democracy while promoting domestic racial exclusion caused significant unease amongst national policymakers. The introduction of McCarthyism, the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and public trials designed to uproot American communist sympathizers in the name of American political homogeny and democratic entrenchment were hallmarks of 1950s America. Southern Protestants understood the Communist arguments created in the name of racial reconciliation. The 1952 annual meeting of the Baptist General Association in Norfolk acutely addressed the

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tense global climate, “The church must be at its best to combat foes that would take away
our liberties and destroy the Christian way of life. There are...foes that loom menacingly
on the horizon today...ruthless, atheistic, totalitarian Communism.”

With the introduction of Brown I and Brown II in 1954 and 1955, Southern
Protestantism continued to defend its regionally defined racial polemics. The argument
that hypocritical American domestic racial policies represented a national policy to
continue the subjugation of African Americans was fueled by the eruption of violence in
the South following the Supreme Court’s rulings. Southern Protestant leaders initially
urged acceptance and tacit approval of the permanence and necessity of desegregation but
then relinquished their voices to defense of the Southern status-quo. Conservative white
clergymen allowed their politicized parishioners to debate the issue of federally mandated
desegregation. Traditionally suspicious of international and national policies, Southern
Protestants linked the civil rights activism to communism in an effort to “protect the
traditional social order.”36 Southerners, who defended racially biased legislation as
endemic to the regional culture, shielded the enforcement of Jim Crow social policies
from foreign criticism. While the secular South condemned desegregation as
representative of an overzealous federal government enforcing social liberalism upon the
conservatives of the region, provincial Protestant denominations confronted communist
indictments by appealing to the religious sentimentality of their parishioners.

International atheism put Southern faith on trial as the defense of Protestant

35 “Journal of the One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Annual Session of the Baptist General Association,”
(Richmond, VA: Richmond Press, Inc., 1952): 48-49., Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of
Richmond, Richmond, VA.
(Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press), 5.
denominationalism evolved from Southern clergymen and ecumenical entities implicit approval of post-Brown initiatives. The Civil Rights movements could be branded as Soviet encouraged and as the members of the Soviet leadership were considered unapologetic atheists, Southern Protestantism could openly spar with Russia over the protection and promotion of Christianity. In short, the Protestant Church left desegregation to the laity in the political arena, but it avowedly fought communism in the name of Christianity.

The development of African independence movements across the continent forced many conservative Southern Protestant congregational leaders to look beyond their traditional provincial perception and to analyze the fervent rage of oppressed groups that had become disenfranchised with the Protestant rhetoric of European African churches. The literature of racially biased organizations throughout the South discussed the Mau Mau Rebellion in the British Kenya Colony as a passionate and intense uprising of a group of indigenous Africans who would be unable to effectively and efficiently make a successful attempt at self-government. A Mississippi White Citizen’s Council publication depicted racist imagery imbued in a fictitious “Mississippi Headquarters of the Mau Mau Party” illustration placating fears of white Southerners concerned over African revolts against oppressive white dominated European governments.\(^{37}\) The rebellion, which had occurred in the British controlled territory, forced denominations to consider their political stances on African independence.

American and Western Europeans feared that the Mau Mau rebellion was the realization of African social and racial revolution. Southern Protestantism decried the

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\(^{37}\) James W. Loewen and Edward H Sebasta, eds., *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The “Great Truth” about the “Lost Cause”* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 360.
indigenous nationalism of the decolonization movement. In an effort to create a network of subservient Africans within Kenya, the British crown distributed profitable and arable land to white subjects and exerted rule over the colony by allowing African Christians to replace the imperial power of England with the seemingly independent leadership of an indigenous population.\textsuperscript{38} By the dawn of the Mau Mau revolt in 1952, the uprising targeted not only white colonialists and the British authority, but also indigenous collaborationists who had gained power, prestige, and privilege by bowing to the dominion of white hegemonic authority.\textsuperscript{39} In 1951 the British government introduced a state of emergency within the Kenya Colony and two years later imprisoned the indigenous movement’s most influential leader, Jomo Kenyatta.\textsuperscript{40} Contemporary historians debate Kenyatta’s imprisonment and his affiliation with the Mau Mau uprising, but his involvement with European communist organization was clearly evident in his education in Moscow and participation with British student publications aimed at promoting communism’s message of egalitarianism to indigenous Africans.\textsuperscript{41} Kenyatta’s leadership, coupled with the class based revolution of the Mau Mau uprising, evoked fear in American, European, and African white conservatives. The Kenyan independence movement was not only an indigenously led undertaking to remove colonialist oppression, but it had strong socialist leanings. Other African revolutionary movements had been effective in bucking the control of Northern and Western European nations and


\textsuperscript{39} Branch, “The Enemy Within,” 296.

\textsuperscript{40} Rita Kiki Edozie, \textit{Reconstructing the Third Wave of Democracy: Comparative African Politics} (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 43.

had fought armed conflicts for self-determination.\textsuperscript{42} African nations' independence gained throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s focused on the intense national diplomatic concentration on the allegiance of developing African nations.

Southern Protestantism found an unrelenting foe of the specter of international communism that would come to dominate denominational rhetoric for the remainder of the 1950s and the early 1960s. An editorial in the denominational press of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia defined six core principles of communism charging that communists propagated the concept that "there is no God [and] religion is a fraud."\textsuperscript{43} The editorial continued, "existing governments and economic systems must be overthrown--by force if necessary—to establish the communist way of life."\textsuperscript{44} The Annual Virginia Baptist Association Conference further spread denominational fears of communism by offering that "the spread of the atheistic philosophy of communism has set a record for expansion that is unparalleled in history...the only lasting answer to Marxist-Leninist Communism is a dynamic, militant application of the Christian faith in the lives of its adherents."\textsuperscript{45}

Despite Southern Protestantism's international mission to defend Christianity from atheistic communism, regional Protestant denominations had hoped to bring their spiritual message forth to indigenous groups throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Southern Protestants feared impoverished regions of the world were especially fertile

\textsuperscript{43} The Jamestown Churchman, Editorial, 22 (1959): 2, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.
\textsuperscript{44} The Jamestown Churchman, Editorial, 22 (1959): 2, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.
\textsuperscript{45} "Report of the Christian Life Committee," Journal of the One Hundred Thirty-First Annual Session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia (1961), Virginia Baptist Historical, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
areas for the formation of communist inspired governments. Southern Protestantism had anticipated creating foreign opportunities to spread the Biblical Gospel. But, for the indigenous populations, Protestantism represented the faith of the colonizer, the oppressor, and the exploiter. Forming an alliance with Christian ecumenical groups was often a means of procuring trade goods, raw materials, or military support rather than indication of the acceptance of the message of evangelism. In the early 1960s, the expansion of apartheid hindered the effectiveness of European sponsored Christianity within the segregated state. The Presbyterian Church, U.S. (PCUS) found that its Calvinist cousin, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, experienced a painful reminder of the ineffectiveness of its evangelistic message. A white dominated church in apartheid South Africa watched its mission become stunted and feeble as it preached its message of Christian salvation to a reticent public. The Dutch Reformed Church was disingenuous, preaching the brotherhood of Christ but promoting the exclusion of the temporal world. The PCUS and its Southern Protestant denominational counterparts took notice in recognizing the confusing message practiced by the laity of the American South.

Southern Protestant fears in the American South echoed in the words of Walker N. Stockburger, pastor at Trinity Baptist Church in Norfolk. Stockburger acknowledged the tenuous situation of African independence movements and addressed the concerns of his parishioners by discussing the work of African operations sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention. Stockburger had come to the conclusion that the work of the church

was dismissed as an “impotent, irrelevant, and hypocritical institution.” Fellow Southern Protestants throughout Virginia were fearful that African independence was a precursor to racial revolution within the American South. The African continent had become a major battleground for the Cold War, a battleground that pitted the Southern Protestant church as a carrier of white Anglo-Christian tradition against rising African nationalism. The United States promoted diplomatic aid and support to nations struggling to support themselves in their post-colonial existence. American military involvement within Africa, it was feared, might arouse new legions of anti-imperialist indigenous Africans to unite against the perception of neocolonialism.50

Southern Protestants had been placed in an admittedly uncomfortable position. Ecumenical boards and clergymen in strong episcopal hierarchical denominations had supported Civil Rights legislation emanating from Washington, D.C. Virginia denominational presses had admonished those advocating racism but they distanced themselves from denouncing the laity and congregational conservatives which had now come to haunt the international campaigns of Southern Protestantism. While Southern Protestants feared African independence, they eventually came to view it as a part of the greater policy of social inclusion to bring the domestic policies of American racial stratification in line with the greater promise of international democracy.51

Originally dismissive of African independence as communist sponsored social revolution, the church leadership of Norfolk and Southern Protestantism turned towards the support of African independence movements at the dawn of the 1960s. With

51 Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 187.
communism promising the elimination of class and a post-racial society, African nations yearning for freedom found it easy to form Moscow-backed alliances to the dismay of the United States and her western allies. For Southern Protestants, missions within Africa had been losing influence for years as indigenous groups began to reject the promulgation of a message spread by churches built by European colonial powers or sponsored by white congregations in the United States. Protestant churches represented violence, repression, and the pain of colonization. While originally reticent, Southern congregational leaders acknowledged the need for African independence to reintroduce Christianity within newly independent states. White Protestantism hoped to persuade practitioners to continue their faith and resist atheistic communism while rejecting racial revolution and Western support.

African nations pursuing independence played a pivotal role in the development and the continuity of social policies affiliated with Southern Protestantism. They transposed a strictly American construct to a global commitment to hinder the expansion of communism in the Cold War Era. Although Norfolk Churches and Virginia Protestantism gradually began to support African independence movements, the South continued to witness horrendous racial violence. Norfolk Protestantism began to address congregational concerns for increasing violence but were often rebuked by Virginia politicians who were unwilling to break from the Southern stalemate in addressing social liberation. In 1961, Rev. George P. Gunn of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia invited W. Roy Smith, a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, to serve as chairman of the Diocese Commission on Racial Relations. Smith responded to Gunn’s request by supporting the need for parishioners to accept the call for Civil Rights but
refused participation, writing "I feel very strongly that true progress is impossible except insofar as change can be the result of voluntary acceptance, by members of our Church, of the idea that change is necessary and right."\textsuperscript{52}

The relationship between the Southern congregations and church leaders became increasingly strained as the Civil Rights movement blossomed. Churches of Norfolk, Virginia, and the Upper South condemned the violence of their brethren in the Deep South as the rage of an impassioned and vulgar white mob. Parishioners of Norfolk Congregations felt a sense of shame as images of bloodied and beaten African American and white supporters appeared in local newspapers but remained complacent or ambivalent in addressing the concerns of Norfolk leadership. The independence movements of African nations had led to the institution of what scholars have referred to as the "imperialism of anti-imperialism."\textsuperscript{53} Many African nations had been granted their independence by Western European nations under the assumption that they would remained tied to their colonial rulers in a stunted post-colonial paternalism. While African nations had been placed in an early process of decolonization with a continued link to European states, African Americans had taken the promise of racial equality from the dominion of the predominantly black congregations to the greater public. As the movement expanded, young African Americans, who had grown increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress made in providing full social, political, and legal equality became radicalized.

\textsuperscript{52} W. Roy Smith, \textit{Personal Correspondence}, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia, Norfolk, VA.

The 1960s was a pivotal period in the development and the continuity of the defense of social policies affiliated with Southern Protestantism. The 1963 March on Washington forced the laity of Southern Protestantism to accept the changing tide of American race relations. Southern Protestant denominations that had allowed for the laity to be steadfast in its resistance to applying desegregation to its church membership had instituted policies forcing the laity to accept race relations. Denominational publications hounded congregants to accept the humanity of African Americans and to understand that mistreatment of them within the United States was used as fodder for the propagandist presses of communism.54

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 implemented sweeping change for the American South and pushed federal legislation to the front of national political debate. The act met with significant resistance, especially in the South, as a symbol of federal pressure to force national policies in a resistant region.55 The Voting Rights Act of 1965 further pressured defiant Protestant parishioners to accept civil rights legislation. In Virginia, Mills E. Godwin, Jr. endorsed Lyndon Baines Johnson for president in 1964, and in 1965, and won the gubernatorial election due to his support of Civil Rights.56 The entrenched Democratic Byrd Organization found its power slipping and the white dominated Virginia political structure began to crumble.

By 1965, Virginia Baptist leaders had opted to open colleges and universities as integrated facilities, refusing to remain silent as their congregations continued to defy secular and ecclesiastical calls for racial change. The Religious Herald announced the membership of an African American family in the congregation of a church in northern Virginia. The Diocese of Southern Virginia’s leadership denounced the racial violence of the Deep South by steadfastly proclaiming its commitment to ending racial segregation. The newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia Jamestown Churchman published an article early in 1965 that reiterated the earlier announcements of the 61st General Convention that “called upon the Church to ‘proclaim unfailingly in the worship, in the sacraments and rites, and in what it does in the world that racial discrimination, segregation, or exclusion of any person...because of race from the rites or activities of the Church...are contrary to the mind of Christ and His Church.’”

The leadership of mainline Protestant denominations, liberal theological groups, and the Roman Catholic Church had made clear their support for the institution of social policies that sought to dismantle the remaining obstacles to the realization of liberal democratic American state. In 1963, the PCUS had discouraged its representatives to the National Council of Churches from participation in the March on Washington, a clear indication that while the PCUS leadership had supported attempts at racial reconciliation, it did want not want to appear overtly radical in the eyes of its conservative laity for supporting the radicalized public assembly. In 1965, the PCUS invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to address the annual conference in western North Carolina. The PCUS had

been one of the most conservative regional Protestant bodies in an era when Southern denominations had made strides in promoting racial inclusivity. King’s arrival at Montreat, the center of Southern Presbyterianism, signaled a shift for the conservative denomination. Montreat’s location in the small, isolated Appalachian community of rural North Carolina was appropriate for an annual conference of a denomination that had appeared committed to its conservative congregations. King’s arrival was not met with unanimous approval but his presence signaled the shifting tide of Southern Protestant race relations.

As the racial confrontations of the Brown decision and African independence abated, the Protestant Church had confronted a new enemy within the Southern religious sectional diaspora, growing African American discontent and the increasing demand for social equality. Southern Protestant denominations began to actively support Civil Rights legislation and full religious and civic inclusion. Still, the veneer of social acceptance within provincial religion dissipated as the Church prepared to confront the palpable fury of a social group which Southern denominations tried to court while maintaining strict impermeable social boundaries. The late 1960s became a period of disorder for Southern Protestantism that had acknowledged the changing nature of its mission to accommodate the glaring inequities and the social, political, economic, and humanitarian needs of the African American population of the American South. Regardless of the concessions made by Southern Protestantism in making amends for the transgressions of its earlier policymakers, the introduction of a new wave of African American calls for liberal democracy and the creation of an egalitarian American state struck intense fear within the hearts of Southern denominational leadership. In the early 1960s, influential Southern
Protestant clergymen and ecumenical leaders had jarred the apathetic congregations of regional churches to move towards acceptance after a flirtation with communist denouncements of post-colonial independence movements. Secular supporters of segregation and Jim Crow policies had been allowed to practice their vitriolic racial antagonism outside of the church. Yet by the mid-1960s, the leeway granted to conservative parishioners resistant to social transformation had begun to fade. While white Southern Protestant denominational leaders advocated moderation to avoid the violent confrontations unfolding in the Deep South, they were unable to foresee the rising of African American and indigenous African groups clamoring for equality, rejecting token samples of transparent acceptance in favor of social revolution. As clergymen and church bodies encountered a harsher tone in addressing parishioners by 1965, the foreign media shed light on the ferocity of white resistance to Civil Rights legislation. Polls conducted showed the American public’s concern with race discrimination as both a moral and international diplomatic issue.60

While Virginian politicians had become acutely aware of the growing political power of African Americans and the damage of continued racial exclusion, painful reminders of the Commonwealth’s unwillingness to adopt true democratic liberalism were often evident. In 1968, the Supreme Court’s ruling in Charles C. Green v. County School Board of New Kent County destroyed the “freedom of choice” plan and demanded that New Kent County and other Southern school boards “affirmatively eliminate all

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60 Dudziak, Cold War Civil Rights, 187.
vestiges of state-imposed segregation." Despite the effects of Supreme Court action, the New Kent County decision came a full fourteen years after the original Brown ruling in 1954. The intervening fourteen years had witnessed an epidemic of violence and legislative defiance instigated by white political leaders, ecumenical groups, and community organizations aimed to extend African American disenfranchisement for the foreseeable future. African Americans had pleaded, begged, and marched for democracy and had been granted political opportunity by a resistant white power structure only when it became convenient and unavoidable amidst larger national and international pressure.

The growing Black Power movement in the late 1960s changed the dynamic of racial relations by transforming African Americans asking for equality to African Americans demanding it. The Black Power movement at once empowered disenfranchised African Americans and struck fear into the hearts of minds of conservative whites who had resisted desegregation and Civil Rights. Southern Protestant leaders feared the Black Power movement as the full realization of social egalitarianism in a total revolution and upheaval of the American social structure. As Southern Protestant leaders had come to increasingly support African American opportunity after the Brown ruling, the Black Power movement represented an entirely different mechanical apparatus that commanded social equality. Black Power supporters advocated a coup d’État and toppling of the economic system. It was this devotion to domestic insurgency that terrified the white conservative Protestant churches. As Southern Protestant denominational leadership and most of Norfolk and Virginia came to

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support institutionalized desegregation, the fear of Black Power caused Norfolk and Southern Protestantism to retreat to its pre-\textit{Brown} stance of social exclusion and isolation out of concern for protection of its position and allegiance to Southern white Christianity.

The Black Power movement represented the culmination of several years of successful NAACP and SNCC campaigning and action throughout Virginia and the American South. By the late 1960s, increased focus on the Vietnam War had taken many sympathetic white supporters of Civil Rights away from the movement to focus on protesting the escalating combat in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{62} African American’s sense of abandonment and disillusion increased with the assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis in 1968. White Protestant churches in Norfolk responded to the assassination with pained sermons and public announcements mourning the slain Civil Rights leader. The Episcopalian Diocese of Southern Virginia passed a resolution that announced that the church would “redouble our efforts, through faith, toward the elimination of the evil among us that gives rise to such tragedies and to the conditions for which he offered his life and ministry.”\textsuperscript{63} At the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Dr. King’s work was discussed in statements eulogizing King who “has caused countless numbers of persons to rethink their own commitment to the cause of brotherhood and racial goodwill.”\textsuperscript{64} The Richmond Baptist Association reaffirmed its commitment to racial justice by offering that “we affirm out undying belief in the unity of the human race…and call upon all Christians to assume responsibility for alleviating injustice

\textsuperscript{64} The Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, 1968, Archives of Virginia Wesleyan College, Norfolk, VA.
wherever it is found." King had appeared at white denominational conferences and had been devoted to the concept of peaceful demonstrations. African Americans who listened intently to the words of King now witnessed this bloody fall in Memphis. Black Power had been borne from the political agitations of earlier Civil Rights groups and had been animated by the delay of social justice. The Southern Protestant church viewed the movement as violent, communist inspired, and harmful to the mission of regional Christianity and, reminiscent of their earlier stance regarding African decolonization, retreated to a familiar isolationist position and dismissive stance. White churches through Norfolk and Virginia held public funeral services mourning the loss of the slain civil rights leader. King had been a voice for racial reconciliation, a peaceful orator who espoused Christian ideals of tolerance and love. With King’s death, Norfolk churches feared a response of radicalism and racial violence with the death of the most prominent religious representative of African American equality.

Black Power movements shocked Southern Protestantism due to their insistence on maintaining African American egalitarianism without the intervention or interference from white sources. Further fear amongst the clergy of Southern Protestant denominations emanated from the willingness of Black Power organizations to accept communism as an eliminator of social class and entrenched conceptions of race. As the Vietnam War became increasingly hostile and anti-war domestic fury mounted, Black Power groups empathized with the North Vietnamese as freedom fighters working to

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topple a western backed government. The issue implicit within this allegiance was that of Black identification with the struggle of the North Vietnamese. The communist-inspired military of the NVA had taken up arms to realize their political goals. To a Southern Protestant, African Americans affiliated with the Black Power movement and who sympathized with the opposition in the Vietnam War could be willing to initiate violent revolt against white institutions. The clergy had initially opposed Brown and African independence and certainly their parishioners who had long divided their spiritual and secular concerns were symbolic of white institutionalism in the mind of Black Power advocate. White Southern Protestant churches sought to provoke fear in the hearts of their congregations in an attempt to reunite clergy and laity to resist Black Power.

At the 1969 Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in Norfolk, the fear of Black Power was discussed in detail. The Methodist Church argued that “Black and white Americans do not belong to the same social body.” The statement represented the fears of a denominational organization unsure or unwilling to examine the cause or creed of the Black Power movement. Further fears of Southern Protestantism were discussed within the denominational press of Virginia Baptists who wrote in 1969 that “the Black Power movement confronts the predominantly white church with a new challenge. What is to be our reaction to black assertiveness, to black separatism, to black racism? We have not yet reacted decisively to black efforts to integrate white culture, including the white church, and suddenly integration seems

67 Bloom and Martin, Black Against Empire, 204.
68 The Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, 178, Archives of Virginia Wesleyan College, Norfolk, VA.
passe." While the fear of Black Power radicalism and the removal of white interference from the attainment of African American equality appeared to terrify the predominantly white church, the introduction of the “Black Manifesto” in 1969 further heightened white Southern Protestant fears of racial radicalism in the wake of the public announcement of James Forman. Forman’s introduction of the “Black Manifesto” at Riverside Church in New York City crystallized the thoughts of the Black Power movement into a powerful document attacking and condemning the racial ambiguity of predominantly white Christian denominations. The “Black Manifesto” demanded reparations from white Christianity and Judaism to the African American community with specific caveats and directives concerning expenditures. Southern Episcopal groups exploded with vicious attacks against the “Black Manifesto” calling it the “new MEIN KAMPF for the destruction of Free Government and People.” In 1969, the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia reacted to the “Black Manifesto” in The Jamestown Churchman by stating that

The demands are set within a ‘manifesto,’ the language and basic philosophy of which are calculatedly revolutionary, Marxist, inflammatory, anti-Semitic, and anti-Christian establishment, violent, and destructive of any democratic political process—so as to shock, challenge, frighten, and, if possible, overwhelm the institutions to whom it is directed.

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69 Journal of the One Hundred Forty-Sixth Annual Session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, 1969, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.


In the next edition of *The Jamestown Churchman*, an article appeared describing Old Blandford Church in Petersburg, Virginia as “a colonial church, a place of worship, a memorial to a war and to the valor of those who fought and died for their Southland.”

Often the introduction of a powerful anti-inclusionary message with an article, statement, or remark regarding the devotion of the white church to the fallen Confederacy and the “Lost Cause” mythology of the South served to incite retaliation or resistance within the white laity. Yet, in contrast to the slow and often painful movement of Southern Protestant denominations in opposing racial injustice, the predominantly white churches of the South moved quickly to disarm Black Power’s perceived attacks against the institutionalized church. In 1969, months after the issuance of the “Black Manifesto,” the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church rejected Forman’s words but offered to increase support “to combat poverty and injustice.” The Baptist General Association of Virginia offered that “the predominantly white church is to redouble its efforts to open its doors to all men at the same time withholding judgment on the black power movement...we offer neither judgment nor advice to black men, but rather speak to a Baptist association that is predominantly white.” Virginia Protestantism had acknowledged its role in institutionalizing social segregation. The reaction to the “Black Manifesto” was a theological mea culpa, replete with apologies, self-analysis, and most importantly, recognition of the goals of the Black Power movement to allow for black equality from a movement inspired by and led by African Americans. The Black Power

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75 *Journal of the One Hundred Forty-Sixth Annual Session of the Baptist General Association of Virginia*, 1969, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.
movement detached white paternalism from the African American call for social liberation. The white church quickly recognized its error, affirming the anger of the movement’s participants and offering a compassionate theology for a group historically disparaged by white Southern Protestant ecumenical bodies.

The change from a socially exclusive to a socially inclusive religious body represents the conclusion of centuries of Southern regional Christianity. The development of a uniquely Southern Christian experience is rooted in the earliest division of the colonial American and the Southern Protestant church has not entirely progressed into a post-racial religious institution. From its inception, predominantly white Southern Protestant denominations were created to represent their congregations with religious instruction reflective of their social strata and conception of moral and ethical behavior. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, the established Protestant Church witnessed a greatly changing domestic and international landscape and, understanding that its mission could be compromised or rejected in its entirety, sought to redefine its purpose for a changing American nation. While white Protestant denominations were often viewed as the embodiment of provincial conservatism, rifts between the laity and clergy existed as a result of the liberalism of church leadership in many Southern religious traditions. But with the support of the clergy and hierarchical power, white denominations openly attacked segregation and racial exclusion as hypocritical of acceptable Christian doctrine. The introduction of Cold War politics, African independence movements, and Black Power into the American conscience had severe effects on Southern Protestantism. African independence and Black Power represented the mobilization of African American radicalism. Indigenous Africans and African
Americans felt compelled to initiate social change through revolution if necessary, and the white Southern church was compelled to recognize the watershed crusade for the realization of permanent empowerment. White political leaders were often reluctant to share power with African Americans and with the growth of the Black Power movement, African Americans appeared determined to wrest authority from the hands of the establishment at all costs. The Southern Church was able to deflect the anger of the Black Power movement by examining its own core principles, its history, and its role in African American oppression. Initially fearful of African independence and Black Power, the Southern church approached Black Power by acknowledging its role in promoting racial exclusion, relinquishing its command on religious paternalism and creating a church that had turned from extreme conservatism to religiously progressivism for a new American era.
CONCLUSION

In May 2013, the Baptist History and Heritage Society held its annual conference at the University of Richmond. The theme of the conference was “Faith, Freedom, and Forgiveness: Religion and the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconciliation in Our Time.” Co-sponsored by the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, the conference took place on a formerly segregated institution of higher education affiliated with the conservative Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Convention has recently made headlines throughout the conservative Protestant denominations that have historically found strong support throughout the South. In 2012, the Southern Baptist Convention voted to rename the evangelical group the Great Commission Baptists, in a move to reflect the global ecumenical goals of the provincially based denomination. While the name change is entirely optional, the Great Commission represents the goal of Southern Baptism to distance itself from its isolationist and segregationist past to offer a fully inclusive Christian ecclesiastical body for the larger Protestant denominations in the United States. While this is certainly remarkable, it does not overshadow the inauguration of Rev. Fred Luter Jr., the first African American head of the Southern Baptist Church in the summer of 2012.

In the years before the outbreak of the Civil War, Southern Protestants often used their faith to define the distinctive social policies inherent within the continuation of Southern racial interaction. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the mission of white Southern Protestantism changed to reflect military defeat and occupation that haunted the socio-political and cultural landscape of the post-war South. The South had lost on the
battlefield, but in the Southern Church the deification and myth making of fallen
Confederates and the "Lost Cause" served as a constant reminder of the Biblical Job and
his unwavering faith in God through times of personal and emotional hardship. The post-
World War II Civil Rights movement created a new opportunity for the Protestant
Church to renounce its segregationist past and to open the church doors to a new wave of
African Americans eager to experience the full bounty of the American democracy they
were aware existed, in which they were not allowed to participate.

The Protestant Church's transition from the home of racial exclusion to a
Christian mission dedicated to the promotion of toleration, charity, and understanding has
not been fully concluded. The church's movement had been painfully slow and
hampered attempts at racial resolution as the lumbering beast of Southern conservatism.
Christianity in the United States remains extremely divided as the "most segregated hour
in America." Christian denominations are bound by tradition, culture, and religious
identity. The predominantly white churches of the American South remain
predominantly white. African American churches born from the pain of segregation and
slavery remain predominantly African American. The post-Civil Rights era witnessed a
growth in ecumenical interaction and Christian understanding. The 2013 Baptist History
and Heritage Society's annual conference provides an opportunity for self-examination
and repentance. By offering a public remonstrance of a traditionally conservative and
isolationist denomination, Southern Baptists are acknowledging the pain that their
forebears had caused. The Southern Protestant Church may never be able to fully shed its
past, but it can write the future of religiously inspired racial interaction in the twenty-first
century.
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