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Unfamiliar Streets

The Chattanooga Sit-ins, the Local Press, and the Concern for Civilities

By Jessie Harris

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at Virginia Commonwealth University

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INTRODUCTION

Hardly a history of the Civil Rights movement has been written without mention of the four young men from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical School who walked into a Woolworth's in downtown Greensboro on February 1, 1960, ordered coffee, and were refused. There had been other sit-ins before, but none that had produced such an overwhelming response. Within two months, students were conducting sympathetic sit-ins in some fifty-four cities in nine states. The demonstrations, which prompted leaders in a number of cities to begin the process of desegregation, helped to establish the viability of direct-action style protests in challenging mandated segregation. They significantly departed from the piece-meal strategy, hitherto pursued by the NAACP, of seeking freedom through filing individual lawsuits. As the decade unfolded, blacks more and more felt inspired to protest, taking the struggle for equality to theatres, restaurants, and other public places once reserved for whites. The mass protests of the 1960s came to define the decade and would eventually pave the way for swift legislative changes, including the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965).¹

Though much scholarly attention has been focused on the sit-in movement, few works have assessed the role the press played in publicizing the demonstrations and how the press itself changed through its coverage of the movement. The first protests in Greensboro, planned and carried out by a group of dedicated and charismatic college students, surely would have produced a degree of momentum on their own. But in part because of the added presence of news reporters, whose accounts of the Greensboro sit-ins were read by students throughout the Southeast and the country at large, what might have remained a local occurrence snowballed into a regional movement that captured the attention of an entire nation. In addition, the sit-in

movement helped secure in the minds of editors and reporters the importance of covering race relations in the South.

Until the 1950s and 1960s, Southern newspapers largely turned a blind eye to African Americans, excluding them from the news and society sections of the newspapers and maintaining near silence on the issue of racial discrimination. African Americans, therefore, relied on their own publications for news, entertainment, and increasingly during the Jim Crow era, for a sense of identity and for guidance. Gunnar Myrdal in his classic *An American Dilemma* (1944) argued that black newspapers surpassed even black churches and schools in terms of influence on popular black opinion. In the South “where concerted action on the part of Negroes is usually so severely checked, and where Negro leadership in all practical matters has to be accommodating,” he wrote, “the Negro press serves as a safety-valve for the boiling Negro protest.” Black newspapers were at the center of this protest. They were a “fighting press.”²

But whites did not read black newspapers, Myrdal observed. As a result, potentially sympathetic Northerners stood on the sidelines when they could have been helping to solve the racial problems that plagued the South, such as the pervasive poverty among black communities and the cycle of substandard black education and lack of career opportunities that perpetuated it, he contended. White newspapers, then, held the key to sparking the transformation that needed to take place in the South, Myrdal concluded. If white newspapers were to begin consistently publicizing racial problems, sympathetic whites would begin solving them. “To get publicity is of the highest strategic importance to the Negro people,” he wrote.³

More than fifty years after *An American Dilemma* was published, journalists Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff considered Myrdal’s observation prophetic. In *The Race Beat*, one of the few works that examine the role of the press during the civil rights movement, Roberts and

Klibanoff exposed how the white press, led by a core group of Southern liberal editors and sympathetic reporters from the North, eventually did open their pages to reports of racial discrimination and black protest. They argue that news coverage of such events as the Montgomery bus boycott (1955-1956), school integration in Little Rock (1957), and the sit-in movement that swept the Southeast, encouraged blacks to conduct larger and bolder protests. The coverage would eventually inform the nation's move to outlaw discrimination on the basis of skin color. Reporting during this era also fundamentally changed the way reporters did their jobs. Roberts and Klibanoff contended:

At no other time in U.S. history were the news media—another phrase that did not exist at the time—more influential than they were in the 1950s and 1960s, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. From the news coverage came significant and enduring changes not only in the civil rights movement but also in the way print and television media did their jobs.⁴

Historians credit the 1960 sit-in movement, more than other instances of black protest, with sparking the civil rights movement. The few historians who have examined the press have also noted the movement's particular importance for journalists: Roberts and Klibanoff observed that, for those covering race relations in the South, "the intensity and pace of the game would never be the same" after the sit-in movement.⁵ Journalism professor Doug Cumming noted the "new spiritual dimension" that the sit-ins brought to the story of black protest.⁶ The demonstrations featured a younger generation of African Americans than had traditionally contested Jim Crow. Through a simple and even elegant act—asking for a cup of coffee—they powerfully exposed the hypocrisy of Southern culture. Committed to a policy of nonviolence, the protestors filed into the downtown lunch counters, ordered, and once refused, stayed seated, quietly reading a work of literature or a textbook. They remained calm even as defenders of segregation, who were also mostly students, jeered at them.⁷ Historian David Goldfield, who

was not writing on the press but with regard to Southern race relations at large, argued that the sit-ins forced Southerners who carried Bibles, attended church, and prided themselves in displays of hospitality to either reconcile their faith “to a new social order or live with and explain away the increasingly glaring contradiction between faith and reality.”⁸ Significantly, newspapers brought the issue to the front stoops and dinner tables of Southern homes.

Nevertheless, newspaper coverage of the sit-in movement fell short of advocacy. The news stories and editorials written about the demonstrations reveal a group of journalists, save for a few, who struggled at this early juncture in the Civil Rights movement to process the novelty of the demonstrations. They were also fearful of the violence the protests might incite. Their coverage, therefore, largely avoided the issues of civil rights. Most news articles excluded the perspective of the young men and women who were risking their futures to conduct the demonstrations. Most editorials avoided discussing the longstanding Jim Crow laws the students were contesting. Yet the reporting was still significant because it existed. Southern newspapers, which had for decades ignored the black community, were now dedicating front-page space for weeks at a time to the black students, the sit-ins, and the varied responses from both black and white communities.

The local coverage of the Chattanooga sit-ins clearly exemplifies this trend in reporting. The morning *Chattanooga Times* and its afternoon conservative rival, the *News-Free Press*, gave the sit-in movement, which hit the East Tennessee town eighteen days after it began in Greensboro, extensive coverage with several news stories each day and editorials on most days. An examination of their coverage provides a case study of the sit-ins and newspapers and, in so far as it reveals the dominant Southern attitudes at this time, helps explain why change in the South, though long in coming, took place rapidly once it began. As Roberts and Klibanoff

described the correlation between increased media coverage and an ultimately successful national civil rights movement, so, too, in Chattanooga the regular coverage of black protests, beginning with the sit-in demonstrations, seemed to play a role in overturning mandated segregation. By August of 1960, Chattanooga's lunch counters were serving blacks, and by 1963 all public facilities were desegregated.

Nevertheless, the Chattanooga reporters and editors in 1960 were perhaps as wary of the sit-ins as most Chattanoogaans. They were also biased. Rarely did a news reporter interview a student protestor in search of his or her perspective. Rarely did an editorial discuss the prospect of reform. This was true not only of coverage in the *News-Free Press*, a segregationist newspaper, but also in the *Times*, owned and operated by the Ochs-Sulzberger family, who also controlled *The New York Times*.

News stories instead focused on the commotion: they gave blow-by-blow accounts of the demonstrations as the students filed into the dime stores, took seats, requested service, and were refused; they assiduously detailed the fights, if there were any; they assiduously detailed the normalcy of the afternoon, if there were not any fights. This was perhaps understandable since Chattanooga witnessed one of the stormiest sit-in weeks in the nation; the chaos that erupted downtown prompted the police to become the first in the country to make use of fire hoses in crowd control. Nevertheless, the near obsession with disorder in the newspapers, coupled with the silence on the issue of civil rights, betrayed the reporters' commitment to "civilities," the term historian William Chafe used to describe the convictions of white progressives in Greensboro dealing with the nation's first sit-ins. "Civilities," as Chafe defined the term, encompassed a "series of implicit assumptions, nuances, and modes of relating" that ultimately prevented well-meaning whites from being able to deal fairly with the sit-in movement. They

viewed conflict over any issue as inherently bad, whether it regarded labor unions, race relations, or political ideology. Indeed, the preservation of amicable relationships was more important than substantive reforms. Thus, Chattanooga editors confronted with the sit-ins, without ever mentioning civil rights, bemoaned the loss of “decency.” *Times* editor Martin Ochs declared amid the sit-ins, “For the very spirit and conscience of a city has been outraged, and a community is no greater than its people and their determination to uphold its dignity and *decency*.” Once the demonstrations subsided, Lee Anderson of the *News-Free Press* wrote, “The basic *decency* of Chattanooga regained firm control in our community yesterday” (italics mine).⁹

Beginning in the 1990s, historians influenced by literary and feminist theories of interpretation have described race relations in the Jim Crow South as conforming to a carefully prescribed “racial etiquette,” which historian Jennifer Ritterhouse defined as a “set of rules, a script, and a part of process” through which blacks and whites interacted on a daily basis, thereby participating in the act of creating culture and “race itself.” This etiquette, manifested through a variety of physical and verbal cues, reinforced the notions of superior whites and inferior blacks, Ritterhouse argued. The journalists’ concern for civilities reveals the extent to which they, too, as Southerners, took part in this etiquette. Despite the reputation of journalists as objective eyewitnesses of historical events, those who covered the sit-in movement could not lay aside their culture prejudices to write their stories. Therefore, their reports almost always led with whether or not there had been any violence or commotion. For the journalists, this information was the most important because, as they were well aware, blacks who flagrantly challenged the status quo risked eliciting a violent response from whites. In addition, their stories implicitly reinforced the dominant-subordinate relationship between whites and blacks in that they favored interviews with white male leaders and only rarely interviewed the sit-in participants.¹⁰

Roberts and Klibanoff noticed similar tendencies among reporters whose coverage of the sit-ins throughout the nation failed to do justice to the young men and women who bravely contested Jim Crow. The coverage also avoided asking hard questions of white leaders. Wire reports, Roberts and Klibanoff argued, were “for the most part bare-bones, tentative, and unquestioning. They seemed painstakingly shallow and uninformative and absorbed in a sportswriter’s obsession with developing a box score and declaring winners and losers.” A second-day Associated Press (A.P.) story of the Greensboro sit-ins set a pattern that would characterize the next few months of civil rights reporting:

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP)—A group of negro students—at one time numbering up to 27 men and four women—sat down at a 5- and 10-cent store lunch counter Tuesday in an attempt to obtain services and break racial barriers.

They failed.

But one of the students said the group “is prepared to keep coming for two years if we have to.”¹¹

Roberts and Klibanoff, however, are too harsh in their assessment of this story. In a few short sentences, the A.P. managed to communicate much more than news stories several times longer in the Chattanooga papers. The story described the sit-ins as an attempt to “break racial barriers.” It also provided a student quote. The Chattanooga reporting only occasionally described the demonstrations as “anti-segregation,” but when this information appeared, it was buried beneath paragraphs detailing the commotion, or lack thereof, and how public figures were responding. Also, they usually did not provide student voices.

Even Southern liberal editors who supported the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Roberts and Klibanoff observed, reacted cautiously to the sit-in movement. Although they had more easily defended *Brown* with the rationale that federal law must be obeyed, they were wary of the sit-in movement, which entailed students breaking state and local laws and violating police

orders. “It gave the editors pause,” Roberts and Klibanoff wrote.¹² More troubling for Martin Ochs and the *Times*, the sit-ins led to mobs and fights on the usually quiet streets of downtown Chattanooga.

David Halberstam is the only other author who has focused much attention on the sit-in movement and newspapers. His depiction of two Nashville papers, the *Tennessean* and the *Banner*, however, seems to offer exceptions to the patterns of Southern conservative and liberal reporting at the time. Reporters at the *Tennessean* who covered the Nashville sit-ins, of whom Halberstam was the principal, published in-depth pieces that reported “exactly what had happened” and revealed to the community “the price of segregation,” as one of the Nashville sit-in participants later recalled. Halberstam, who was only a few years older than the sit-in participants at the time, recalled feeling sympathetic toward their cause:

I think I knew in some instinctive way from the first time I watched the young people walk from Kelly Miller Smith’s church to the Woolworth’s counter that I was watching the beginning of something historic, that these young people were not going to be turned around, nor were they likely to stop once they won their first localized victory at the lunch counters.¹³

Halberstam described the *Tennessean* as an “unusual paper” at the time. When other Southern newspapers “were surprisingly passive and soft in their news coverage, often content to use wire service stories to report on events which had taken place locally the *Tennessean* not only supported editorially the right of black children to go to white schools, but it covered the ongoing story with a fearlessness that made it nothing less than a beacon to young journalists in the South.”

The Nashville paper was a refreshing change for Halberstam, a Harvard graduate who joined the *Tennessean* after a brief stint with the *Daily Times Leader* in West Point, Mississippi. Halberstam, like other young Northern journalists at the time, had looked south for work,

anticipating “powerful social forces that would now be set into play” in the wake of the *Brown* decision, he recalled years later. His interest in the story of black protest, however, troubled his editor at the *Daily Times Leader*, who asked Halberstam to leave after he published a story in *The Reporter*, a nationally reputed magazine, covering blacks in Yazoo City, Mississippi, who lost their jobs after demanding the integration of the local school system. The editor of the Nashville *Tennessean*, Coleman Harwell, however, was committed to covering the story of school integration and the subsequent years of protest, even if it meant lost advertisers and personal discomfort for himself and his family, according to Halberstam. Such dedication on the part of a Southern editor was invaluable, he argued. “A liberal paper could make a great deal of difference in a city trying to move from an older, segregated order to a new, more liberal one.”¹⁴

Nashville’s segregationist paper, the *Banner*, also had clout. Editor Jimmy Stahlman, in perhaps the most extreme response to the sit-in movement from any Southern editor, forbade his reporters from covering the demonstrations and instead had several of them purchase ten reconditioned World War II Army surplus rifles, an ample supply of ammunition, metal army helmets, bulletproof vests, and mace. Despite the sit-in participants’ commitment to non-violence, Stahlman feared they would come after his newspaper. Stahlman later targeted Jim Lawson, leader of the city’s sit-ins, demonizing him in a news article that covered a meeting between seventy-five black ministers and Mayor Ben West regarding the recent arrests of Nashville sit-in participants. Though Lawson had not been the most outspoken at the meeting, the *Banner* article portrayed him as the chief mastermind behind a plan that encouraged students to break the law. Despite more accurate accounts of the meeting in other publications that had quoted Lawson more carefully, the *Banner* article troubled Vanderbilt Chancellor Harvie Branscomb, who demanded that Lawson take back what he had said at the meeting regarding the

law and civil disobedience or face expulsion from the Divinity School. Lawson did not. With the added pressure from Stahlman, not only as an editor of an influential local newspaper, but also as a lifetime board member at Vanderbilt, Branscomb expelled Lawson, an act that would deeply embarrass the school for years to come.¹⁵

Unlike their editor Lee Anderson, news reporters at the Chattanooga *News-Free Press* offered sympathetic portrayals of the students from Howard High School, who started the protests. Mirroring a trend in the coverage nation-wide, reporters highlighted the distinction between the dignified Howard students, who sat quietly at the lunch counters often reading Bibles, and the disheveled white high-school students, who crammed into the dime stores to watch the protests and make fun of the participants.

As for the city's liberal newspaper, the *Times*, it did not equal the *Tennessean* in terms of courageous reporting and advocacy editorials. *Times* reporters were just as reluctant to interview the Howard students as were *News-Free Press* reporters. The *Times* had supported the *Brown* decision and—on recommendation from Arthur Sulzberger, president and publisher of *The New York Times*—had done away with segregated obituaries in 1956. Nevertheless, Martin Ochs in 1960 criticized the sit-in participants for impatiently demanding equality and worsening Chattanooga race relations.¹⁶

But perhaps in the case of the sit-in movement, the facts spoke for themselves, and the news sections counted for more than negative editorial pages. Desegregation, which occurred relatively promptly in Chattanooga, could have only been initiated by an occurrence as drastic as the sit-ins, which upset the city's equilibrium, commanding the attention of citizens and city leaders alike. With continued news coverage that detailed the commotion and the high school sit-in participants' continued dignity throughout, the demonstrations forced Chattanooga, as they

did in other Southeastern cities, to deal immediately with the issue of the city's longstanding segregation laws. Even though the news articles were on the whole shallow, with only a few interviews with participants and downtown merchants, and far too few questions asked of city leaders, the coverage managed to convey the fear among whites and the resolve among the black high-school students, and it contributed to the tipping-point situation that made change possible.

CHAPTER ONE

The streets of our town were not the same familiar, dingy but well-loved streets Wednesday that they were just three short days ago. Wednesday afternoon they were alien. They were frightening and saddening.

- Marion Peck, *The Chattanooga Times*, February 26, 1960

Thus *Times* reporter Marion Peck described the atmosphere downtown on the third day after the first sit-in demonstration in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in February 1960. Students from Howard High School, who were younger than the college-aged students holding sit-ins in other Southern cities, had conducted peaceful protests for two days at segregated lunch counters. They requested service and, after being denied, sat quietly. The third day brought larger crowds. Black and white students from other public and private schools joined in. Near riots ensued. Chattanoogaans were frightened. Mayor Rudy Olgiati demanded increased surveillance, and the police and fire departments joined ranks on day four to prevent further violence. Firemen turned on their hoses, tipping them upward, to prevent mobs from forming. “‘God help us’ said a graying white woman, shaking her head from side to side. A negro woman nodded her head up and down in agreement,” Peck wrote.

The morning *Times* and its politically conservative afternoon counterpart, the *News-Free Press*, provided daily coverage of the sit-in movement, giving the news A-1 placement each day and editorial comment on most days. Though the two newspapers reputedly presented differing political standpoints, their coverage paralleled as they denounced the sit-ins for having caused violence, and as they pleaded for the restoration of peace and order. Significantly, news reporters at both papers were especially harsh in their depictions of white participants, though editors were

not necessarily so in their columns. Overall, the newspapers emphasized the need for maintaining civic order, a concern that seemed to overshadow the city's deeper problem of racial inequality. They printed numerous stories on the stepped-up efforts of the police and fire departments and praised them for preventing further violence. However, few reporters asked why participants had held the sit-ins. The reports incorporated several student quotes, but they were not as authoritative as they could have because the reporters largely avoided interviewing the students and instead gathered comments overheard in conversation. Several reports in the *Times* are noteworthy for the images of downtown they provided. But on the whole, coverage skimmed the surface of the matter. Historian William Chafe argued that white residents during the nation's first sit-ins held in Greensboro cared more for civilities than civil rights. So too did Chattanooga and the newspapers they read.

The city's African American newspaper, the *Observer* published infrequently and offered only limited coverage. Two editorials, published a week later, are revealing in the differing black perspectives they represented. One struck a denunciatory tone similar to the white newspapers. The other gave a positive take, the only report that had been supportive without qualification. The articles highlighted the generational divide among blacks responding to the sit-ins. Fully aware that the Howard students were risking their personal safety to contest segregated lunch counters, a number of older blacks also exalted maintaining civilities amid the sit-ins.

Reports that Howard students had brought the sit-in movement to Chattanooga hit local newsstands on February 20, 1960, the day after the first demonstration. The two major dailies published front-page, yet measured stories with an emphasis on what could have, but did not, happen: "Negroes 'Sit Down' Here; No Incident, No Service," the *Times* declared, while the *News-Free Press* stated, "Negroes Try No Follow-Up on Sitdowns: Lunch Counters Resume

Service to White Customers.”¹ Aware of the commotion caused by recent sit-ins in North Carolina, Virginia, and closer to home in Nashville, writers and editors were relieved to report a lack of chaos and violence in Chattanooga. Indeed, that civilities had been maintained as blacks protested segregation at lunch counters was the angle from which they reported, not that the students were for the first time conducting sit-ins or that they were participating in a regional uprising among young blacks.

The front-page article in the *News-Free Press* described in detail what seemed like a non-situation. “Counters at all variety stores downtown were operating this morning, serving only white customers,” according to the story, which was without byline. Several squad cars had arrived on the scene, but there was little for police to do. “There was no incident or disorder,” and “there was no physical contact reported.”

Though anti-climactic in its description of the event, the *News-Free Press* was far from blasé. The reporter(s) provided responses from prominent blacks in the city, which gave weight to the story and added a revealing twist: the students had acted on their own initiative, and furthermore, older blacks were distancing themselves from the students’ style of protest, which disrupted businesses, disregarded civilities, and could potentially anger whites. C. C. Bond, the principal of Howard, said he was “as surprised as anyone” to learn that his students had participated in lunch counter demonstrations. He was sure they had not received encouragement from teachers and speculated that they instead got the idea from reading recent news reports of other sit-ins held regionally. In response to a question about how he felt personally about the demonstration, he said, “I think there is a better way.” James R. Mapp, president of the local chapter of the NAACP, also held the protest at arm’s length. He said that though he favored any movement attempting to confront segregation, his organization was not behind the sit-ins.²

The *News-Free Press* did not provide responses from student participants. Instead, on this first day of reporting, the newspaper quoted a leaflet handed out by Yale University students conducting sympathetic sit-ins in New Haven, Connecticut: “We are attempting to communicate to others that Woolworth’s branches in Greensboro, Raleigh, Fayetteville, and Durham, N.C., like many other Southern stores, treat their negro customers undemocratically and deny them the same seated meal service provided to white people,” the leaflet read, according to the Associated Press. Although the leaflet helpfully provided a student voice, it also took the spotlight off Chattanooga. Sit-ins were not only happening in “Dixie,” the story pointed out, but also in the North. In other words, Chattanooga could be excused for what the city felt was an embarrassing breach in etiquette—blacks who were supposedly satisfied with the status quo were crying out against segregation.³

Times reporter Springer Gibson, however, did keep the focus on Chattanooga. Indeed, in one of the most revealing news stories from the entire week, Gibson in his account of the first day of protests, captured an exchange between several white and black students that, piercing to the heart of the matter, expressed the injustice of segregation, as the Howard students saw it, and brought a degree of clarity to bear that would not be reached again. Gibson, overhearing the students talking, quoted this exchange:

“Negroes can go into the white person’s home,” one of the Negro boys said, “and can prepare his food, nurse his children, but that’s as far as they can go.”

“Yes, that’s right,” the white boy agreed.

“Another thing,” another Negro said, “We defend our country together, so why shouldn’t we have togetherness in other things?”

“I know,” the white boy said. “You are a Negro and we are white, and we find that difference.”

“The most important thing,” another Negro student stated, “is unity. What we want is unity, togetherness, equal rights, all under God because we are all of God.”

Another student told Gibson that the idea for a demonstrations occurred to him that morning during third period trigonometry class. Two others said they were inspired by reading reports of other sit-ins. “We read the papers. We got our ideas from other people. We want civil rights. We want mixed classes like others,” one of them said. The other added, “It is our intention not to have any violence.”⁴ In a deluge of reporting focused on civilities, Gibson’s story was salient. By interviewing the students, Gibson exposed the crux of the matter. The Howard students were painfully aware of the inequality of segregated living. Inspired by the protests in other cities, they were willing to force the issue of civil rights in Chattanooga, a step their parents had not been willing to take.

However peaceful and well handled the situation had appeared in the news sections of both papers, the editorials sounded the alarm. *Times* editor Martin Ochs started with the obvious: blacks in more than twenty cities were resentful of segregation, and especially, segregation as practiced by dime stores that allowed blacks to make purchases at any counters except at the lunch counters. Chattanooga, he continued, had so far escaped any major desegregation lawsuits. Nevertheless, citizens should be wary. “Friday’s events demonstrate that anti-segregation sentiment, especially by younger Negroes here, is not to be underestimated,” he wrote. The Chattanooga sit-ins might potentially generate “heavy tensions,” as did recent attempts to desegregate schools in a number of Southern cities. Therefore, sit-in participants and their leaders should “necessarily weigh the long-term consequences of the lunch counter actions and their effect, which we think will undoubtedly be harmful upon the whole race relations climate in this area.” The editor called for “continued reason and understanding” among all those

concerned. Fortunately, citizens on Friday had exercised common sense, patience, and calmness. He argued that they must continue to do so in the case of future of demonstrations.

Perhaps understandably, Martin Ochs feared a violent situation similar to that of recent attempts to integrate schools in the South. When he wrote his editorial, he may have been recalling the images of the nine black students who, in 1957, were blocked from entering Little Rock Central High School by state troops, but eventually attended, protected by members of the National Guard on orders from President Eisenhower. The editor's fear of violence perhaps also stemmed from the often-deadly confrontations between labor unions and businesses of the early twentieth century. Chattanooga, known as the "Dynamo of Dixie," was an industrial city, home to iron foundries, machine works, textile mills, and two active labor unions, the Central Labor Union and the Chattanooga Manufacturers Association. Indeed, on the same day Ochs cautioned against violent lunch counter sit-ins, the editor also condemned potentially violent labor strikes, including recent strikes held at Special Products Company and Royal Company, two Chattanooga manufacturers that were considering relocating in part as a result. The city could not afford to lose "a single one of its fine industries," Ochs contended:

Violence of any kind, however, is intolerable in this or any other civilized place. These two industries, such an important part of Chattanooga, should be assured of renewed vigilance against criminality. Violence and harassment do untold harm not only to those affected but to the community and industrial relations in general.⁵

Ochs's continued emphasis on protecting the civilized community of Chattanooga throughout the lunch counter demonstrations aligned the *Times* editorial pages closely to those of the *Greensboro Daily News* amid the nation's first sit-ins.

Historian William Chafe contended that the Greensboro newspaper's editors, as well as white Greensboro residents at large, saw themselves as open to new ideas, but only within the

context of gradual implementation and if good manners could be maintained all the while. They believed they were compassionate people who could be trusted to deal “honorably and justly” with the concerns of local blacks, Chafe argued. The sit-in movement, however, proved these self-perceptions fundamentally faulty. Whites committed to this mode of relating, however well-meaning, were unprepared and unwilling to make the sorts of reforms that blacks were demanding. Furthermore, they could not get past the disruption that downtown businesses suffered as a result of the sit-ins. A *Greensboro Daily News* editorial declared that the issue facing American was no longer “civil rights” but “civilities” and the right of businesses to serve whomever they please.⁶

The *News-Free Press* also expressed a concern for maintaining civilities and business rights, but the potential for violence was just one of many concerns the segregationist newspaper expressed over the sit-ins, which were fundamentally challenging the Southern way of life. “Let there be no reaction by anyone that would be unworthy of decent, law-abiding people,” Lee Anderson wrote on Saturday. The paper flatly denounced the demonstrations: “It is deeply disappointing that a few Negro students here have resorted to a destructive sort of exhibitionism, copying the ill-advised ‘sit-down’ mob tactics by which similar groups have sought to take over lunch counters on the private property of downtown stores in a number of communities.” Taking up an argument that would echo again and again in the paper’s continued coverage of the sit-ins, Anderson contended that participants had disregarded the rights of private business owners. “The owners and operators of private property have an absolute right to serve or not to serve on whatever seems to them desirable,” he wrote. Furthermore, the demonstrations were regressing the harmonious race relations that had for so long characterized the city, although it was fortunate on Friday that “the trouble-making white elements did not react to the trouble-making

Negro movement to create an untoward incident.” As would become clear in the weeks of coverage, the newspaper feared “trouble-making” whites perhaps as much as the blacks who were protesting segregation.⁷

The *Observer*, the city’s African American newspaper, would not respond to the sit-ins until its next issue was published a week later.

Apparently all was quiet over the weekend after the first day of sit-ins. Anticipating another eventful afternoon of lunch-counter protests, reporters staked out downtown establishments the following Monday. They were not disappointed. More Howard students turned out, as well as students from several white high schools: Kirkman Technical, Chattanooga, and Central. There had been jeering and taunting students, but there were no instances of violence, both papers again announced. The day was “tension-packed” but “violence-free,” according to the *News-Free Press*. “There was no violence,” the *Times* observed. Correlatively, both credited the police department for keeping the episode low-key: The “local police detail kept a weather eye” on the situation, according to the *News-Free Press*. “It was apparent the Chattanooga police department had anticipated the development,” according to the *Times*. The newspapers would continue this emphasis in the coming days, exalting policemen, firemen, city leaders, as well as citizens who helped uphold law and order.⁸

Times reporter Fred Hixson was less reflective than his colleague Springer Gibson. Hixson’s account of Monday’s events, unlike Gibson’s Friday story, provided no student voices. Nor were there reactions from citizens or city officials, or mention of how Chattanooga’s situation might tie into the larger, regional civil rights movement sweeping the Southeast. Thus, the story was more typical of the reporting at the time. Hixson, nevertheless, was dutiful. His story was replete with details: nearly two hundred students were now involved; they represented

at least five white and black high schools; and their demonstrations occurred at four dime stores, including McClellan's, Woolworth's, Grant's, and Kress. Also typical of the reporting at the time, the story gave a detailed account of the action. The students filed into McClellan's, but white patrons occupied most of the seats there. The students then left for Grant's, and upon finding open seats at the counter, took up most of them. After some time, a portion of the group left for Woolworth's and, once again, tried McClellan's, which was by now vacant. A group of whites gathered at Woolworth's, but there appeared to be no communication between the whites and blacks. The students at the lunch counters munched on snacks brought from home, including oyster crackers, potato chips, and sandwiches. Other studied.⁹

Although Hixson did not interview the students, which would have been helpful, his story was nevertheless sympathetic. Hixson's attention to details—his mentioning that they brought snacks from home, read at the counters, and did not communicate with whites— contributed to an overall dignified portrayal of the students that was emerging in the newspaper coverage. Such a portrayal was ultimately important to the students' successful case against Jim Crow.

A *News-Free Press* article was similar. Reporter Julius Parker, while he also did not interview the students during the demonstrations, must have taken copious notes on what he had seen. He had paid particular attention to the white students. His description of them was not flattering. They let out "derisive calls," "hoots," and "catcalls" at the black students at the lunch counter, with the most noise coming from the girls. A group of "leather-jacketed white boys" joined in, one of whom threatened the group would return the next day with increased numbers. A "heavy-set white girl" laughed as the black students walked by. "Aren't you getting hungry?" she asked them several times. "Why don't you get something to eat?" Others wandered through

the store. Some yelled at the cameramen who had gathered inside the dime stores, “Take our pictures!”

The black students were unfazed. They read, talked to each other, and snacked at the counter, but they did not react as the white students laughed at them, Parker noted. Even his verbs implied discipline: they “appeared” at the dime stores; they “filed” through the doors; and later, they “left as a procession” of students.

The situation, however, made one black woman nervous, Parker observed. She was shopping with her son, who, inspired by the sit-in demonstrations, moved to join the black students at the lunch counter. “Let me go over there,” he said to his mother. “No you don’t,” she replied. “[She] grabbed him by the arm as they hurriedly left the store.”¹⁰

On Tuesday, day three of the sit-in demonstrations, matters took a turn for the worse as whites and blacks en masse flooded the downtown area, threw food at each other inside the Kress store, and wrangled on the streets outside the store, leading to several arrests. For the first time, a sense of panic pervaded the coverage. The city was experiencing “the most massive racial clash” in its history, according to the *Times*. What had been a relatively quiet scenario in which sit-ins took place with only a few tense exchanges between the students had now become a “near-riot” situation. The newspapers assiduously detailed the fights and commotion, but still did not mention civil rights.¹¹

A series of photographs with ominous captions in the *Times* chronicled the afternoon. Whites and blacks filled the sidewalks in one photo. They seemed to be having a good time, smiling and waving at the camera, but the caption warned they were “young and vociferous.” Another photo showed a policeman directing a group of blacks away from the dime stores. They “moved grudgingly under persuasion by the police,” according to the caption.

With a host of adjectives and adverbs, *Times* reporter Fred Hixson detailed the action. A “furious fight swirled” at the Kress store, as students threw potted plants, bowls, cups and saucers, ice cream, and other items inside the store. A black student “walked briskly and warily behind the lunch counter toward the front of the store. He was holding aloft and waving menacingly a container of sugar from the counter.” But the white students were more troublesome. They outnumbered blacks “by not less than three to one.” Scores of “highly excited white boys” gathered behind the students seated at the barstools and jeered at them. Struggling to maintain control, the police began to shove “howling” whites and blacks out the door. But while blacks heeded police orders, whites “began throwing everything they could lay their hands on in the general direction of the fighting.” While the blacks appeared to be “well organized” and “well disciplined,” the whites seemed to heed the impromptu directions of Jimmie Henderson, one of eleven whites arrested that day on charges of disorderly conduct (only one black was arrested). He directed his fellow whites to fill the seats at Kress and to block the black students from passing through the store. Although Henderson at one point called on whites to cooperate with the police, “when rioting broke out, he was in the thick of it.” At one point in the afternoon, he told Hixson, he bullwhipped a black student who had attacked him with a shovel.

Even bystanders were exasperated with the white students, according to Hixson. A white woman who was shopping in Kress at the time and had got splattered with ice cream exclaimed, “They’re worse than Negroes!” A saleswoman nodded in agreement.¹²

The clashes intensified on the streets. After being ordered out of Kress, a group of blacks headed toward Ninth Street with a group of whites hot on their heels. They threw rocks, bottles, and other debris from the streets at each other, nearly injuring a bystander on the lawn of the post office, according to Hixson. Allegedly, some of the blacks were carrying knives.

The police department was scrambling to react to the turmoil, according to another *Times* article, which was without byline. Police chief Ed Brown called in off-duty patrolmen, detectives, and forty auxiliary officers. “We had an unfortunate situation here Tuesday,” Brown said, according to a press release. “We don’t intend to let this sort of thing happen again . . . We will patrol this diligently; we will protect its schools, public institutions and other property, and we will maintain law and order, showing neither fear nor favor. These are all objectives to which every law-abiding Chattanooga can lend his support. I sincerely hope that each and every citizen will do just that.”¹³

A portion of the statement also appeared in the *News-Free Press*. While the two newspapers usually did not present student voices—even on calmer days when interview with the students might have been easier to come by—they nevertheless published official responses.

Schools and businesses were also taking measures to help end the chaos, the *News-Free Press* reported. John W. Letson, School Superintendent, met with the principals of Howard, Chattanooga High and Kirkman Technical and exhorted them to take whatever steps necessary to prevent their students from congregating downtown. Three of the dime stores announced they would be closing their lunch counters early at 3:30 p.m. before students would have time to arrive at the stores after school.

For all their preoccupation with law and order, Jimmie Henderson was as close to a true rabble rouser that the newspapers could find. Committed to a state training school at age thirteen, Henderson, now seventeen, was accused of popping a whip in the aisle of the Kress Store and talking back to police officers. The *News-Free Press* covered the Wednesday hearing, and with a lengthy portion from Henderson’s testimony, the newspaper provided readers with a powerful image and stereotype of the sort of white boy responsible for the chaos downtown. Henderson’s

speech was rough. During the testimony, he hemmed and hawed, telling City Judge Riley Graham,

I come into Kress; I meant to get me a Coke. I had about three boys with me. One of the boys picked up a bullwhip. The man told us to leave. When I got back the riot started. When the fight started I went out. They had Baker. Everybody was hollering 'Don't hit him. He's a juvenile.' I hollered too. That's all I said. I didn't call Davis (Patrolman W.T.) a dirty copper. I didn't go for trouble. I went because everybody did.

Assistant Manager of the Kress store B. F. Crocker and a police officer contradicted Henderson's testimony. Crocker claimed Henderson and a group of whites entered the store on Monday afternoon, took bullwhips off one of the shelves, and popped them in the aisle. He had asked Henderson, whom he considered to be the leader of the whites, to leave. "You ain't seen nothing yet," Henderson had replied. "Wait till the boxing match starts." The police officer agreed that Henderson had been a source of trouble of trouble. "The Henderson boy agitated white youths into action against city policemen by yelling, 'Go ahead,'" the officer said. The hearing concluded as Judge Graham fined Henderson the maximum amount of fifty dollars.¹⁴

The *Times* and the *News-Free Press* were initially quite similar in their coverage of the sit-ins. They detailed the demonstrations and the commotion. They reported the stepped-up measures of the police and fire department. On Wednesday, they both published Police Chief Ed Brown's firm statement denouncing violence. These were perhaps the obvious stories to report. But the overall tone of the reporting betrayed the journalists' fear of disorder. The long history of white-black violence in the South may have been an influence. The Little Rock school integration conflict and the brutal lynching of Emmett Till were only five years in the past. Closer to home, though further back in history, a mob of white Chattanoogaans in 1906 stormed the city jailhouse and stole the likely innocent Ed Johnson, suspected of raping a white woman, paraded him halfway across town, and hanged him at the Walnut Street Bridge shortly before

Johnson's case was to be heard before the Supreme Court. Civic order had gone by the wayside as Sheriff Joseph Shipp stood by helplessly as the lynch mob broke into the jail using an ax and a sledgehammer. (In the only criminal case ever to be heard by the United States Supreme Court, Shipp would be found guilty of contempt of court.)¹⁵

The *Times* shuddered to consider that Chattanooga on Tuesday had been ruled by a mob. Perhaps Ochs was considering the Johnson lynching when he wrote this line: "Not in the memory of most Chattanoogaans had there been a more extensive and violent racial outburst here." The most disturbing element of the scene on Tuesday was the "clear spoiling for a fight, the disrespect for and even defiance of law. This shames any community." If ever the word "explosive" could be used to describe an event, the word could be used to describe Tuesday, Ochs argued. There was hatred and hysteria in the eyes of white members of a mob that pushed through the downtown streets, jeering at blacks and policemen and throwing any object that could be found. The youthfulness of those involved was obvious. Inside the dime stores, they jumped on top of the lunch counters and threw ice cream. Every measure should be taken against a repeat scenario. Tendencies toward emotion, fanaticism, and violence should be squelched, while peaceful and reasonable avenues should be kept open.¹⁶

Lee Anderson of the *News-Free Press* was also incensed. Appalled at the "bitter interracial clash" that occurred Tuesday, the editor blasted the protestors for two contradictory reasons. First, blacks had "invaded" the lunch counters designated as white-only in what clearly constituted an "improper aggression against private property." On the other hand, he appealed to a state law, which limited the uses of private property, forbidding private restaurants from serving blacks and whites at the same table.: "Moreover, a state official has pointed out that eating establishments are prohibited by law from serving whites and Negroes on an integrated

basis.” Private property owners had the freedom to allow onto their property whomever they pleased, and yet they did not have the freedom to offer services to whomever they pleased, Anderson argued.¹⁷

A second editorial increased the rhetoric. Appealing to Jesus Christ and the Bible, Anderson contended that the sit-in demonstrations were inherently wrong, and ultimately, so was racial integration. Under the title, “Goal for Human Relationships,” the paper argued that the “organized agitations, usurpatious court orders and mob demonstrations” were “unfortunate expression of human relationships today” and evidence that people had turned away from the “basic moral principles” as taught by Jesus Christ. People were ignoring the intercessory role of Jesus and serving another Father, two things that Jesus himself had warned against in John 8. “If God were your Father, you would love me,” Jesus had said. But, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” The editorial claimed that there had always been “hecklers seeking to create discord,” and one of the best examples was the young lawyer who had once approached Jesus, asking how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan in which a Samaritan man cared for a stranger who had been beaten and robbed. “Go and do thou likewise” had been Jesus’s response to the lawyer. The editorial concluded that here was a “pattern for human relationships,” and it was one that “does not require racial integration, social assimilation or conformity. It militates for individual good will by each for all others. ‘Love thy neighbor’ should be the goal for all.”¹⁸

There was no sign the students were letting up. Again on Wednesday, white and black students flocked downtown, and the Howard students’ lunch counter demonstrations ended with fistfights and shouting matches on the downtown streets, prompting the police to become the first in the nation to make use of fire hoses in crowd control—an act that would be repeated in other

cities that weathered civil rights protests in the 1960s. Eight stories between the two newspapers detailed the scene, following the pattern hitherto established in the coverage. Reporters gave blow-by-blow accounts of the demonstrations and the violence, as well as a host of stern reactions from city officials. Chattanooga was embroiled in a series of events, the coverage screamed. Yet, any notes the reporters might have taken on the Howard students and their perspectives on the tumultuous demonstrations was now buried beneath a mound of disapproving press releases.

A news reporter with poetic sensibilities, Marion Peck of the *Times*, offered a series of images and descriptions that encapsulated, perhaps better than any news story yet, how frightening events had been for a normally sleepy city. “The streets of our town were not the same familiar, dingy but well-loved streets Wednesday that they were just three short days ago,” Peck wrote. “Wednesday afternoon they were alien. They were frightening and saddening.” “Clots” of young whites and blacks covered the streets and sidewalks, including a number of curious adults who had flocked downtown to watch. Muttered profanity could be heard, and occasionally, sticks and bottles were thrown. Eventually, whites and blacks began fighting in the streets. Firemen raced to the scene. They parked their trucks and unwound hoses, which looked like “white lines” stretched down the streets. The firemen shot “their warning streams” into the downtown sky that “until last month [was] still arched with tinsel and lights of a gaudy downtown Christmas.” The “guilty and innocent alike were doused,” including an elderly black woman. “What’d they want to wet me for?” she asked no one in particular. “I ain’t done nothing.” Then, “feet pounded and a beefy, flame-haired man sprinted” down a side street with a “policemen hard on his heels.” A “mass of humanity, white and negro alike [swarmed] up like

locusts,” and the fire hoses were again turned on. Bystanders laughed or grinned nervously. Finally, “It was quiet and the street was wet and the water draining off into the gutters.”¹⁹

The colorful departure from traditional reporting methods of straight giving-of-the-facts, as well as the emotional tone throughout, perhaps better suited Peck’s piece for a memoir. He apparently did not include any interviews with bystanders or students, although he seemed to intensely observe them. His descriptions were painstaking. Perhaps because of its unusual style, the story was all the more revealing of how shaken the community was. Peck managed to capture the sense of shock and puzzlement among Chattanoogaans, their fear of a troublemaking younger generation, and the strangeness of a city engulfed in racial turmoil when, only weeks ago during the Christmas season, all seemed well. Peck’s story could not have won any prizes for objectivity. But the story nevertheless uncovered the fear and annoyance Chattanoogaans felt as they were confronted by the lunch counter demonstrations and the beginning of a social revolution that was affecting the entire region.

Fred Hixson and Springer Gibson of the *Times* penned more traditional news stories than Peck. But their stories, too, flourished with vivid detail. “Milling crowds, boisterous and truculent in the face of law enforcement officials, swarmed [the streets with] racial tensions on edge,” Hixson wrote. “Chattanooga rode through an explosive situation Wednesday,” according to Gibson. As bad as the situation was, however, both writers pointed out it could have been worse if not for the cooperation among city officials and sensible citizens. “The concentrated action of Police Commissioner Dunlap, Police Chief Ed Brown and a large complement of well-disciplined patrolmen managed to avert a serious clash [that] conceivably could have reached disastrous proportions,” Hixson wrote. In the words of Gibson, “the effective conduct of city

officials and the police department and the great majority of responsible people on the sidelines” helped the city survive a tumultuous day.

The Chattanooga police were on top of the situation, another *Times* article assured readers. Extra policemen and deputized firemen would now be working extended shifts of twelve hours each, increasing surveillance downtown by as much as “seventy percent.”²⁰

Throughout the sit-ins, Gibson, Hixson, as well as their colleagues depicted the demonstrations and their aftermath under a simplistic scheme of heroes and villains. Easily discernible were “groupings of hard-core malcontents” (Hixson) or “a hoodlum element to be isolated from the main stream of people” (Gibson). Policemen and city officials, however, were the courageous protectors of law and order, adopting a “get-tough” attitude on Wednesday and preempting disaster (Hixson). In addition, “responsible actions” came early in the day from the School Superintendent John Letson, who met with several principals to brainstorm on how schools could prevent their students from gathering downtown after school, and Mayor Rudy Olgiati and Police Commissioner H. P. Dunlap, who met with a group of pastors to discuss the sit-in crisis (Gibson). Responsible action, as was becoming clear in the coverage, entailed group discussion among the city’s prominent adults, although not necessarily that they consider integrating lunch counters.

Both newspapers lauded Mayor Rudy Olgiati for his responsible handling of the sit-ins. He was among the heroes of the day. While reporters generally did not question him, they readily took down his press releases, including one from Wednesday:

What happened here Wednesday afternoon was not typical of the conduct of the great majority of Chattanooga, but, nevertheless, we will all share in its responsibility. I saw firsthand the much of what occurred. It was not pleasant to watch. I would appeal to the goodness and the reason of all Chattanooga to help us in preventing a recurrence of the happenings of Tuesday and Wednesday ... The people of Chattanooga will not tolerate violence and the city can do no less than see that it is not forced upon them.”²¹

The role of blacks during the sit-in week, however, defied such simple categorization into either heroes or villains. The reporters more or less blamed the black students for holding sit-in demonstrations, which led to violence on the streets of downtown Chattanooga. However, blacks seemed less guilty than whites, who, as it was noted, more often started fights and defied police orders. Further complicating the picture, older blacks, in what was emerging as a critical subplot during the sit-in week, appeared to be distancing themselves from the younger generation of protestors, fearful that the high school students were undoing the social progress older blacks had worked their lives to achieve. The NAACP's Mapp had said, standing on a street corner downtown:

This has been terrible. This is something that we don't want and must not have ... We do not want violence. That destroys everything. I saw a Negro boy arrested today with a gun. I have nothing but contempt for anyone who carries a gun or a knife in a situation like this.²²

Rev. Robert Richards, pastor of Olive Baptist Church, speaking on a local radio station, said, "This is no way to settle our problems;" only the Holy Spirit could. "Some of the things I have seen today have broken my heart." According to Springer Gibson, "Negro leaders [were expressing] deep concern." So, too, were black bystanders who observed the protests. They shook their heads and whispered their disapproval to one another as police broke up a group of young blacks who were throwing rocks and bottle at whites and police officers. "This is no way to do it," one bystander had said. "Why are they doing it? We've got to stop acting this way."²³

The *News-Free Press* included reactions from school officials, who were also appalled at the chaos downtown and eager to help end the mayhem. Students who participated in further demonstrations could expect to receive "drastic disciplinary action," including expulsion from school, according to Superintendent John Letson. He also suggested that principals enact

staggered dismissal times to prevent students from several schools converging downtown at the same time. Principals were eagerly on board. “We will do everything in our power” to stop the violent demonstrations downtown, declared Hobart Millsaps, of Central. Any students of McCallie School “caught or seen” participating in downtown demonstrations would be expelled, Headmaster Spence J. McCallie said. Father J.J. Driscoll, of Notre Dame High School, was perhaps the most incensed. “There is a Latin saying that extreme situations call for extreme measures. I think this not only an extreme situation, it is a disgrace to our city, our state and our whole nation,” Driscoll said. “You can’t expect police to handle a couple of thousand school children whom they cannot strike or shoot to keep in line,” he continued. “The schools are going to have to do the job.” Accordingly, Notre Dame High would dismiss twenty minutes early for as long as need be, and students would be instructed to go home immediately after school. A basketball game scheduled for later in the week was canceled so that students could abide by the new rule.²⁴

The Chamber of Commerce also spoke out, urging Chattanooga employees who worked downtown to heed police orders as they traveled between work and home and to “exercise greater control over their children,” according to another *News-Free Press* article. In addition, those in positions of authority, including city officials, ministers, and heads of local organizations, must speak out against the violence and work together with citizens to reestablish law and order and to solve the difficult problems facing the city. The Chattanooga sit-ins had garnered national attention, and the health of Chattanooga’s business climate—including the city’s ability to attract new industries and the fate of numerous local jobs—were now in a state of jeopardy, according to the article. Chattanooga, therefore, “will not tolerate the complete disregard of law as exhibited these past few days,” the Chamber of Commerce declared at its

monthly meeting. “Law enforcement agencies of the state, county and city [are] encouraged to use their total resources to maintain law and order.” The Chamber of Commerce announced it would send thank-you notes to the police and fire departments for their hard work so far.²⁵

A third *News-Free Press* report lauded the police: “Heavy police patrols, cold water and good luck prevented a bad situation from becoming a headless mob tearing through the heart of the city,” declared reporter Grady T. Gallant. Assistant Police Chief E. E. Williams told Gallant that for the first time in twenty-three years of service he felt it was necessary to carry a blackjack on patrol. He said the sit-ins and their aftermath were by far the worst incident he had ever seen, but that the police, with improved organization and extended shifts, were finally regaining control downtown.²⁶

The responses from the police, the Chamber of Commerce, and the high school principals—not to mention the newspapers’ prolific coverage of them—revealed a shaken, yet determined community. From all corners of the city, citizens were volunteering to do whatever they could to help end the chaos. The concern for civilities continued to trump the issue of civil rights. Perhaps sensing this loss of focus, the original group of Howard student who had started the Chattanooga sit-ins—committed to such rules as dressing well, behaving, and not using profanity—had stopped participating. They were also encouraging their classmates to stop. No one at the time, however, made the distinction between the sit-ins and the chaos unfolding on the streets. They were reported as the same event.

The editorial pages after the fourth day of demonstrations continued to express exasperation. “What happened again yesterday was totally alien to this city’s history. There have been very few such downtown incidents like it over the whole of the South,” Martin Ochs of the *Times* wrote. The “fantastic scene” on Wednesday, with firemen at one point spraying water in

all directions at the yelling mobs, made it difficult to believe that this was still Chattanooga, Tennessee. “But it was.” The city’s youth seemed primarily responsible. Indeed:

the spectacle had the aspects rather more of mass juvenile delinquency, of young boys and girls on a joy-riding lark, than a race disturbance. From Central, City, Kirkman, Howard and elsewhere they came: some in ROTC uniforms; peroxided, ducktailed, blue-jeaned, combs in pockets; small clumps of Negroes incongruously tagging along in the fast-moving crowds. Most of these young people were completely oblivious of the full implications in what they were doing. Can’t the parents control these offspring?

All responsible organizations and law-abiding citizens must commit to returning Chattanooga to a state of “decency” and “dignity”. If not, outside agitators and “diseased minds from near and far” were likely to descend upon Chattanooga.²⁷

Lee Anderson of the *News-Free Press* called on police to throw “such massive law enforcement power into the downtown area that the congregation of marching mobs might be avoided.” Parents and teachers needed to give “strict” instructions to their children and students, so that “sanity might be restored in our community and the restraint which has long been exercised by the great majority of our Negro and white citizens can reassert itself as the pattern for resumption of orderly activities,” the editor declared. If need be, “governmental authorities” should step in and mandate that school dismiss an hour or more later than normal. “This would be disagreeable,” he conceded. “But not nearly so disagreeable as the dangerous demonstrations that high school students have created as regular daily events.” Anderson reiterated his belief that the sit-ins were an “invasion of downtown lunch counters in private establishments.” They had precipitated the “crowding around of curious and trouble-making young whites” and the “disturbances” downtown.²⁸

On Thursday, Chattanooga let out a collective sigh of relief. There had been no demonstrations, mobs, or minor riots downtown. A few “bullies and troublemakers” ventured downtown, but police quickly subdued them, arresting nine persons, six blacks and three whites.

The issues of civil rights and segregation never were addressed, but the newspapers felt the city had solved the problem by restoring law, order, and a tranquil atmosphere to Chattanooga. News stories gloried in the inactivity downtown and lauded community-wide efforts that made a turn-around possible. “Chattanoogans rallied under the banner of harmony Thursday and put the community back on even keel,” declared Springer Gibson of the *Times*. “There were no mobs, no assemblies, no parades and no racial demonstrations in Chattanooga Thursday,” exclaimed Fred Hixson of the *Times*.²⁹

Policemen and firemen deserved a large share of credit, but “precious assistance” came from school officials, parents, and other responsible citizens, Hixson’s story continued. They had helped convert downtown into a veritable ghost town Thursday: the sidewalks were “thinly occupied,” when only the day before they had “seethed with humanity.”

The community expressed understanding. The commotion had significantly curtailed business downtown, but Alfred Smith, of Hardie and Caudel, a clothing store that advertised suits for the “university man,” did not mind. The business community respected the mayor and other leaders who had encouraged citizens to avoid the downtown area, he said.

Mayor Rudy Olgiati said he considered the city “over the hump,” though police would continue on an emergency basis with police working extended shifts downtown, according to Hixson. “The good people of Chattanooga showed Thursday that they have no sympathy for those who would substitute mob rule for law and order,” the mayor said. Police Chief Ed Brown said the community-wide efforts showed “that a community, when its forces work together, can meet its responsibilities in a crisis.”³⁰

Springer Gibson of the *Times* added his congratulations. Policemen, city leaders, ministers, and “just plain citizens” helped restore the city to peace and order. “Without masses of

students in which to mingle, the hoodlum elements, both white and Negro, were left exposed to alert police officers,” Gibson wrote.

Gibson’s article continued with a report of Mayor Rudy Olgiati’s speech at a Rotary Club meeting, and the issue of civil rights briefly surfaced. Olgiati had conceded that the problems facing the city were numerous. Blacks and whites, he had argued, needed to work together to solve them. The mayor had said:

It is going to take the leadership of both races to work it out. I can’t solve it, Dr. Letson can’t solve it and city officials can’t solve it. Let me plead with you to get in and solve this situation. We have made a lot of progress in Chattanooga physically. We are being broken down morally.

The mayor’s comments and Gibson’s interpretation of it as “going to the heart of the problem” constituted a rare instance in the entire week of coverage in which a leader, and perhaps a journalist too, conceded that a problem existed that lay behind the mobs, fights, and disruption to downtown businesses. Nevertheless, Gibson and Olgiati remained committed to civilities. “The widespread response to the cause of law and order was a heartening sign,” Gibson’s story continued. The mayor later in the speech had said, “We want law and order and we are going to maintain law and order if we possible can. Innocent people already have been pushed around and more will be pushed around.” Therefore, “The citizens of Chattanooga must take the pressure off” by ending the demonstrations and the commotion downtown, the mayor said.

The mayor’s stance was similar to that of Greensboro leaders, including local attorney and city council member, Edward Zane, who had stepped to the forefront of that city’s sit-in situation, proposing the formation of a committee that would seek to find a peaceful solution. He persuaded the students to hold off on further demonstrations in the meantime until a decision was made. The students realized, according to a statement influenced by Zane, that “an atmosphere of ultimatum has been created [which] is not the best position under which favorable progress can

be made.” Therefore, the students would trust a “reasonable local bar of public opinion” to solve the matter.³¹ In a similar spirit, Olgiati would soon appoint a biracial committee to solve the Chattanooga sit-in, and the students would agree to cease demonstrating.

The *News-Free Press* was also thankful for a quieter day downtown. “Unlike events of the day before, there was no reoccurrence of violence, and the three companies of firemen who manned engines at strategic spots were not needed for crowd-dispersal duty,” Tom Gilliland wrote. The police would continue working extended shifts and relying on help from the fire department and auxiliary forces for as long as need be, Gilliland added. The reporter also mentioned the mayor’s speech and his comment about the need for blacks and whites to work together to solve the difficult problems facing the city. Although Gilliland did not interpret the speech as “going to the heart of the matter,” as Springer Gibson did, the reference to the speech nevertheless helped balance the reporting that day, which had largely congratulated, praised, and moralized about the return of the peaceful status quo. Reference to the speech revealed that the mayor, for one, did not consider the city past the race problem.³²

Ministers and the NAACP expressed gratitude for a day downtown without trouble, but they talked also of how they could help make sure that peace would be lasting, according to a second *News-Free Press* article. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders met Thursday afternoon to brainstorm on how to reduce racial friction in the city. Mention of groups discussing the race problem at least implied there was a deeper problem yet to be solved in Chattanooga. Also, the NAACP had had a change of heart. The *News-Free Press* broke the report that the organization voted unanimously to “endorse the efforts by Negro students to protest against segregated lunch counters in the downtown dime stores.”

But the article betrayed its segregationist leaning, reiterating that the Howard students' "sitdown strikes" were "preludes to the mob demonstrations that resulted Tuesday when hundreds of white youths crowded into town to contend for counter seats." The students were not served, the article continued. Their request violated a state law that prohibits black and whites from being served together in public places. Not mentioned in the article, the point of the students' demonstrations was challenging this law.³³

Police Commissioner Dean Patterson also had good news for Chattanooga as he urged them to ignore the "rumors" that "radical outsiders" were involved with the local sit-in movement, according to the *News-Free Press*. It was an allegation mentioned in both newspapers, that, though it remained unproven, distracted attention from the localness of the story and the issue of civil rights and affirmed the notion that black Chattanoogaans were satisfied with the status quo.³⁴

Perhaps the most colorful article published that day was another by Marion Peck of the *Times*: "At 3 p.m. on Thursday an icy wind whipped up Market Street. The air crackled with cold and tension," Peck wrote. There were only a few shoppers downtown, including a woman who held the hand of a young child and hurried to leave behind the downtown area. "Come on," she said. "Let's go. Let's get out of here." Stores, however, were mostly empty, save for the sales clerks who peered anxiously through store windows, braced as if "for a hurricane." Policemen, teachers and principals were stationed at nearly every downtown corner, turning back students who had ventured downtown. Nevertheless, a group of whites managed to sneak downtown. "Dingy-necked, leather-jacketed youths slouched and ran their runover loafers across an intersection, their lavishly oiled ducktailed heads bobbing like laboring sea turtles." A few bystanders feared the whites meant trouble. "Look, they're coming back today. It's them that's

stirring this thing up.” Another replied, “Yes, them. Both colors. I hope to God the school kids stay home today.” As the clock at the Hamilton National Bank announced the five-o-clock-hour, playing “The Church’s One Foundation,” policemen began to relax. They headed into the Kress store not to break up fights, but to purchase a cup of hot chocolate. They were smiling. “The expected trouble had failed to materialize.”³⁵

Editors at both papers again expressed relief. They also began to moralize about the importance of maintaining law and order now that they had been regained. “After a stumble, a community came firmly to its feet yesterday. There is no reason whatever why it should not stay that way, not only in the immediate, vitally important days to come but permanently,” Martin Ochs of the *Times* wrote. Policemen, principals, teachers, and parents contributed to restoring the city to a state of peace and order. Indeed, they accomplished “one of the most magnificent race recoveries in the whole spectrum of Southern race relations.” Nevertheless, a “residue of danger” still existed, and adults should continue advising the students, white and black, to avoid downtown.³⁶

“The basic decency of Chattanooga regained firm control in our community yesterday,” similarly exclaimed Lee Anderson of the *News-Free Press*. “The agitators were gone from the downtown area. The trouble-makers that had been attracted by the demonstrations were gone. And so were curious bystanders.” The segregationist newspaper continued to describe the sit-ins as an affront to private property and as an act that disrupted the harmonious relationships between black and whites:

We do not believe it accurate to describe Chattanooga as a community in which there is widespread racial tension. Our Negro citizens and our white citizens hours before the demonstrations and hours after them passed each other on our streets with courtesy and friendliness, just as long has been traditional.

Chattanooga should also realize that the sit-in participants were a troublesome minority. They should rest assured that the community is largely of “good will and harmony” and, therefore, has much to offer “decent citizens.”³⁷

On Friday, the *Observer*, the city’s African American newspaper, published its first issue since the start of the sit-in demonstrations, offering opposing viewpoints on the week of lunch counter protests. The featured column by Editor Walter C. Robinson, who was also head of the Republican Voters League of Greater Chattanooga, criticized the sit-ins as a show of impatience among black youth. Aligning himself with Booker T. Washington and other blacks who had promoted self-help and economic independence as the best methods through which to combat racial inequality in the South, Robinson argued that young blacks should emulate an older generation who fought for freedom not by protesting, but through hard work owning farms or starting their own businesses. “It appears to me that if Negroes would build for themselves economic security or freedom, that would go further to help them out of this fog than anything else,” the editor wrote. “The great majority of young negroes apparently haven’t the patience to wait or the will to work.” They were instead looking for a “get-rich quick system.” What is more, the sit-in participants had violated the rights of private business owners, Robinson contended.³⁸

The *News-Free Press* noticed Robinson’s column. Editor Lee Anderson approved so highly of it that he printed the column in its entirety on March 3, encouraging Chattanooga interested in “peace, harmony, and progress for all races” to read the editorial written from the perspective of a prudent black Chattanooga. Robinson in his next issue on March 11 noted that he had been published in the *News-Free Press*. He had also received hundreds letters and telephone calls praising his stance on the sit-ins, according to the *Observer*.³⁹

Peter D. Simmons, also of the *Observer*, in the only published voice supportive of the sit-ins, argued that the Howard students had set in motion “a new movement” through their lunch counter protests. (The *News-Free Press* did not recognize Simmons’s article.) A number of prominent older blacks were grateful for the refreshingly direct way in which the students were contesting Jim Crow, according to Simmons. C. C. Bond, principal of Howard, who had earlier distanced from the sit-ins said, “You may quote me on this: I admire the courage of the students and especially the intelligent manner in which they conducted themselves.” The principal did not plan to discipline the students. “You can see, this is a new day, and this is simply a new way the students and young people have to cry out against what they see is wrong and to let those who practice these injustices know how they feel.” Other blacks interviewed by Simmons felt that the black community had grown complacent in the fight for civil rights. The students, however, had enlivened the age-old struggle. They had found a solution, according to N. B. Callier, a black physician. Simmons agreed. The sit-ins were an outgrowth of the times, and once begun, “you just can’t stop progress.”⁴⁰

All was quiet downtown on Friday, February 26, exactly one week after the first sit-in had been held in Chattanooga. The police arrested seven persons, including one black and six whites, who were lingering near Market and Ninth Streets—the center of action on the previous two days. (The total number of arrests for the week was fifty-nine persons, including twenty-seven blacks and thirty-two whites.) But otherwise, there was little action to report. The news coverage began petering out. Fred Hixson penned the only *Times* article on the protests, giving ample space to statements from Police Chief Ed Brown and Mayor Rudy Olgiati, both of whom expressed gratitude for another quiet afternoon, and warned that increased surveillance of the downtown area would continue. “Friday was a good day for shopping and meeting friendly folks

on the streets of downtown Chattanooga,” the mayor said. “We expect the same encouraging atmosphere to continue throughout the weekend.” Brown encouraged any who might consider “breaking the peace” to think twice. “We intend to use every force at our command to stop it,” he said.

The *News-Free Press* added a report from Notre Dame High School. There, Father Driscoll, the principal, had made good on his promise, expelling thirteen students who headed downtown after school against his warning announced on Wednesday, eight of whom had only passed through in a vehicle and none of whom had participated in the demonstrations. Driscoll conceded that some might consider such disciplinary action “too drastic.” Nevertheless, “I issued an order. They violated it and there was nothing else I could do.”

In hindsight, it is tempting, but would be mistaken, to accuse the Chattanooga reporters of not producing the in-depth reporting that could have brought greater clarity to the week of sit-in demonstrations. We can only speculate whether or not such reporting would have sped up the process of desegregation because the reporting we have often appears hollow, oddly obsessed with seemingly trivial details, and even amateurish. Most reporters did not include interviews, instead preferring to rely on sight observation and bits of overheard conversation to formulate their stories. This was so in part because the profession of journalism had yet to see the wave of New Journalism writers, who would emphasize greater humanization and improved narratives in non-fiction writing. Also, at the time, covering the lunch counter demonstrations was business as usual, and the scale of the emerging civil rights movement was as yet unknown.

In addition, reporters generally trusted public officials. They took public statements from the mayor, the police chief, the school superintendent, among other authorities who commented on the demonstrations and their aftermath, while only rarely questioning them.

Journalism professors Edwin Emery and Michael Emery contended that before Watergate and the investigative reporting that exposed the scale and scope of illegal activities and deceptions carried out by the Richard Nixon administration, Americans more readily took politicians at their word. Indeed, upon hearing the initial reports of the Watergate scandal, Republicans and Democrats alike “were loath to believe that men who had entered the White House on a strict ‘law and order’ platform had misused their power, money, and public trust.”⁴¹ Chattanooga reporters in 1960 would have been just as reluctant to mistrust local officials who stood for law and order amid the sit-ins.

News of the sit-ins all but disappeared in the following weeks. The *News-Free Press* noted on March 1 that police were back on schedule. The *Times* followed up on several hearings from those arrested during the sit-in week. Several teenagers were committed to a state vocational training school; others received fines, were placed on probation, or were made wards of the court. Coverage of other matters came to the fore, including news of three black parents, among them James Mapp of the NAACP, who threatened to sue the local Board of Education for lack of compliance with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the controversial 1960 civil rights bill, which stipulated greater federal oversight of voting and voter registration, that made its way through Congress in late February and produced a filibuster that lasted more than forty-three hours. The sit-in week was behind the city, but clearly, the race problem was not.

The *News-Free Press* feared this might be case. Rolling the issues of sit-ins, school integration, and the civil rights bill into one editorial, the *News-Free Press* cried out for “Simple, Moral Answers” in the February 29 edition. “Basic principles of the Constitution, of constitutional law, and of morality” pointed to clear answers to each of the three issues: sit-in participants had violated the rights of private property owners; federal law already granted

sufficient legal protection to those deprived of voting rights, and therefore, the civil rights bill was unnecessary; and every student should have free choice in deciding which school to attend instead of being forced to integrate. As history would show, however, the *News-Free Press* was on the losing side of all three arguments.

CHAPTER TWO

The primary principal on which this democracy of ours was founded is equality, yet we never yet have achieve total equality and may never achieved it, but in trying to attain it we need to be orderly. If it gets out of hand, the real purpose is lost sight of.

- Judge Burrell Barker, May 19, 1960

In the coming weeks, city officials, downtown businesses executives, and black ministers regularly met and attempted to find a consensus solution to the lunch counter protests. Like their counterparts in Greensboro, the Howard students agreed to cease protesting while prominent adults promised to find a solution. In Greensboro the students resumed their protests, when, in just a few weeks, these efforts failed. During the interim period, however, Chattanooga newspapers were largely quiet. There was no coverage of the biracial meetings, no speculation as to what the outcome might be, nor were there suggestions as to what it should be. Only two editorials, both published in the *Times*, ever referenced the sit-in demonstrations. They effectively downplayed the demonstrations' importance. After all, Chattanooga was not a Montgomery, Alabama, argued Martin Ochs in one of the editorials. In contrast to the violence in Montgomery, law and order had been quickly regained after only a temporary spell of chaos. Ochs spoke as if the sit-in demonstrations were fully in the past, and therefore their implications, irrelevant.

Nevertheless, Howard students resumed demonstrations on April 16, again forcing the issue of Chattanooga's unjust Jim Crow laws.* The efforts of the biracial committee had stalled,

* On April 15, the day before the Chattanooga students resumed demonstrations, nearly 150 students representing nine states traveled to North Carolina for a conference on non-violence with keynote speakers Jim Lawson and Martin Luther King, Jr. As a result of the meeting, the students

and the students feared they would not resume. This time, however, the protests did not create the same level of commotion downtown as seen in February. Although police arrested a total of about one hundred protestors over the following weeks, they were able to do so quickly and quietly. And although there were a few skirmishes between blacks and whites, they did not equal the minor riots of February. The newspapers, therefore, gave less attention to this round of demonstrations. One or two news articles documented the action each day, with a rare editorial on some days. The papers' emphases were the same: They continued to detail the commotion, or lack thereof. They continued to leave out the students' perspective. And, they continued to avoid the issue of civil rights. April's demonstrations, however, were characterized by several differences, which helped get civil rights and segregation on the front pages of the newspapers. There were more varied protesting tactics. The NAACP and black ministers, previously uninvolved, were now staking out downtown alongside the students and protesting segregation. And, the issues of mass demonstrations and civic disobedience landed in the city courts.¹

The resumed demonstrations climaxed as Robert Thacker, general manager of the Kress store, called in the police to have the sit-in participants arrested, resulting in court hearings in which the students were found guilty of loitering and ordered to limit their numbers to six at a time in future demonstrations. The newspapers interviewed Thacker on several occasions, providing the perspective of a businessman for the first time. The *Times*, which covered the hearings extensively, provided the additional viewpoints of a liberal Chattanooga judge and a lawyer who attempted to defend the students, as well as their lively debate over civic disobedience.

founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It is not clear if any Chattanooga students attended, or if the first day of resumed demonstrations was intentionally planned for the day following the conference on non-violence.

As the dust was settling in downtown Chattanooga nearly two weeks after the February sit-ins, Martin Ochs seemed to breathe a deep sigh of relief. In an editorial published on March 11, the *Times* editor expressed gratitude for “this city’s superior, strict, impartial maintenance of law and order during our own recent trouble.” Effective policing had kept the city from becoming a Montgomery, Alabama, where police officers had taken no action as they watched white men strike a black woman with a miniature baseball bat; police had said they could do nothing unless a complaint was filed. Perhaps more worrisome to Ochs, angry whites had also targeted members of the press. A group of whites had seized a photographer from the *Montgomery Advertiser-Journal*, preventing him from covering a race story unfolding on the campus of the Alabama State College. The photographer had been left nearly choking with his camera strap tightly pressed against his neck and his film stolen. The *Advertiser-Journal* was a segregationist paper and generally critical of the civil rights movement, but even its staff members had not been safe from the attacks of white supremacists. “What kind of law enforcement exists down in Montgomery anyway?” Ochs rhetorically wrote.²

Several days later, Ochs again defended Chattanooga, this time in response to a recent Associated Press story that detailed a string of crimes, including lynching, floggings, cross burnings, and bombings, which the A.P. claimed, “began developing in the blue hills around Chattanooga.” Ochs conceded that “in truth” there had been 21 floggings in the past few months that had evaded the local police. But Ochs argued that the A.P. story, which appeared in the *Times*, was at fault for having singled out Chattanooga when other crimes in the story had been mentioned only in reference to states. Furthermore, the trend of Southeastern crimes was not ongoing. The Alabama state legislature in “one of the most effective blows ever struck in the South against masked terrorism” had passed an anti-mask law that had put an end to the recent

spate of violence. Civilities, Ochs seemed to reassure readers, were being maintained despite reports that suggested the contrary. Ochs also blamed the national press—“radio and other means of communication”—for having exaggerated the Chattanooga sit-ins. As “deplorable and astonishing” as the “mob scenes” were, the press in their reports had succeeded in producing “grotesque exaggerations” of them that were “inflammatory and often absurd.”³ The sit-ins had put at stake not only the status of law and order in Chattanooga, but also the city’s national reputation. Ochs found both troubling.

Och’s editorials were the only newspaper references to the sit-in movement in over a month, and they did not discuss civil rights. Instead, they discussed the demonstrations within the context of the region’s escalating violence—which in Chattanooga, he claimed, had been exaggerated—and the ability of a city to crack down on the violence. The editorials reinforced the reporting during the February sit-ins, which had focused heavily on the commotion and the reaction of the police and fire departments. Understandably, Ochs and the *Times* were concerned about the issue of safety amid a swirl of regional civil rights protests and the resistance from white supremacists. But this concern, coupled with silence on the issue of civil rights, prevented the newspaper from being able to contemplate the substantial reforms the demonstrators had demanded, and from being able to lead the city in a meaningful discussion of them.

The *Greensboro Daily News* exhibited a similar mindset. Civil rights was a back-burner concern. In at least one editorial, the paper argued that if civil rights were to be addressed, they needed to be addressed within the context of group discussion and without placing pressure on businesses. Besides, the issue of civil rights was no longer preeminent:

[the issue] no longer concerns civil rights (such as school attendance or use of public facilities); it concerns civilities – the rights of businesses to invite their own customers and the fairness of business practices ... Somewhere a Southern community must find a way to deal with civilities as well as civil rights ... [A solution] will be found only where

both sides are able to sit down and work out an answer unimpeded by the threat of force or the worry of economic reprisal. Greensboro, we think, can come closest to the ideal. It has a fine committee ... dominated by a feeling of the need for moderation and give and take rather than inflexibility and closed minds.”⁴

Three weeks after this editorial was published, as William Chafe noted, the city’s biracial committee commissioned with solving the sit-ins matter announced its failure. Around the same time, the Chattanooga committee was also faltering. Martin Ochs, for one, did not ponder what that might mean about the city or its approach to dealing with racial problems. Nearly a month into the April demonstrations and in response to some seventy-four student arrests, Ochs expressed faith in the committee as the only possible means to a solution. “It is true that the [committee] discussions had become stalemated,” he conceded in a May 14 editorial. “But there was definite hope among the participants that the impasse might be temporary.” More demonstrations had only complicated the matter, a point of fact that “responsible adults” ought to communicate to the students. “The group plainly is not in a patient mood. But it should know that only patience, reason, and steady effort can resolve a most difficult matter.”⁵

Chafe argued that ultimately the sit-ins provided the only language through which blacks could express dissatisfaction with the long-established system of white supremacy. Efforts to proceed through legal means were costly, time-consuming, and painfully slow. Five years after the *Brown* decision, perhaps the biggest legal victory at the time, few schools had actually integrated. The sit-ins, however, were a refreshingly simple and direct means through which to attack the legitimacy of the Jim Crow system. They were hard to ignore. What is more, the effects seemed immediate. Cities like Chattanooga and Greensboro appointed biracial committees to discuss the fate of mandated segregation. But once students gave up the initiative, progress slowed. At least in Greensboro and Chattanooga, students were forced to take to the streets once again, increasing the pressure on city leaders to follow through with meaningful

reforms.⁶ The Howard students, therefore, on Saturday, April 16, this time joined by James Mapp of the NAACP, picketed outside three downtown dime stores in the first show of demonstrations since February. This time their voices were at least partially heard. Reporters at both newspapers quoted their signs: “You are all One in Jesus Christ,” “Don’t Support Discrimination,” “Don’t Buy; Pray,” “Think Before You Buy.” In the following weeks, carrying signs, as well as singing and chanting during the arrests, proved an effective means by which the students made their voices heard in the newspapers. Reporters who in February only rarely interviewed the students, in April and May did quote their signs and chants, and did name the songs.

Nevertheless, the two newspapers largely downplayed the news. Indeed, both headlines mentioned misfortunes that did not occur: “20 March on Market Street – No Violence and No Arrests,” according to the *Times*; “No Disorder” and “No Arrests Made,” according to the *News-Free Press*.

The news articles proceeded in similar fashion, detailing the normalcy of the afternoon despite the resumption of protests and the added support of Mapp. Thousands of last-minute Easter shoppers continued about their business as if nothing unusual were happening, according to the *Times*. They paid no attention to the demonstrators, who marched in front of three downtown dime stores with signs encouraging a boycott and with a new leader in James Mapp, president of the local chapter of the NAACP. There were “no outbreaks of violence and no arrests made.” Indeed, only a few extra policemen were needed to maintain order. Most policemen “went about their regular duty.”

The students seemed hardly threatening as they staked out in front of the dime stores holding “crudely drawn cardboard signs” and urging would-be customers to think twice before

shopping at stores that maintained segregated services, according to Tom Gilliland of the *News-Free Press*. The hundreds of shoppers paid no attention to the students, resisting the urge to “hamper” them as the shoppers “wended their way through traffic.” The episode was only “brief.” A report of a heart attack suffered by a white person downtown was, as far as the paper could tell, unrelated to the demonstrations.

Either the reporters did not take the resumed demonstration seriously, or they did their best to downplay the news, which might upset a community still reeling from the February outbursts. Whichever the case, the reporters seemed intent on portraying the pickets and Mapp’s involvement as a virtual non-situation, an odd angle for a journalist to take on any story, however trivial. They also were biased, or at least shortsighted, as they continued to exclude the perspectives of the demonstrators, including why they felt compelled to resume their demonstrations, and why they had now joined forces with Mapp. Conspicuously, the reporters also left out any news of the committee deliberations. Precisely because the newspapers, and perhaps the community too, shrugged at the students’ renewed determination, the Howard students had more to say.

The students once again took their seats at three downtown lunch counters on Monday, April 18, conducting the first sit-ins since February. They quietly read and studied at the bar stools, but received no service. The students this time were not the only demonstrators. For the first time in Chattanooga history an older generation of blacks showed solidarity with the students in contesting mandated segregation. Seven black ministers stood with heads bowed on a traffic island, lifting signs that encouraged an endless stream of traffic to show love and to end segregation. They prayed intermittently. The NAACP led a third set of demonstrations by

forming picket lines outside the Kress store, urging the shoppers to think carefully before they spent money in a store that supported segregation.

It is difficult to determine why the NAACP emerged at this time. Local members could have been taking their cue from their intrepid president, who, in addition to leading pickets in April, had earlier filed a lawsuit against the local School Board, demanding immediate integration or else a spelled-out plan for integration under a reasonable timetable. Mapp, along with two other parents, Josephine Maxey, and H. H. Kirnon, first made their case for school integration, coincidentally on the second day of the student-led demonstrations in February, when they presented four of their children for enrollment at the all-white Glenwood Elementary School. The city's substandard black schools for years had frustrated Mapp, and an attempt in 1959 to persuade the NAACP to sue the School Board failed. Mapp, Maxey, and Kirnon decided to pursue the matter on their own. Glenwood turned away the four black students on a chilly February morning, prompting the three parents to file the lawsuit on April 6. "We were naïve because we knew of the 1954 Supreme Court decision and that this superseded all local laws," Mapp recalled years later in an oral history interview. "We did not go to break the system down, we merely went for relief for our children."⁷

Though Mapp had reacted cautiously at the time to the February sit-ins, at one point saying that the NAACP was not behind the demonstrations, he reflected years later that he believed the sit-ins and the lawsuit had been providentially timed so that the two acts occurred simultaneously, thereby dividing the attention of a "hostile community." The wintry weather of early March 1960 seemed to further confirm that "a hand mightier than ours" was at work in the city. An ice storm that hit Chattanooga the week after the sit-ins made "Lookout Mountain look like a ghost" looming large and white over the distressed city.⁸ When lunch counters were

finally desegregated in August of 1960, Mapp provided one of the few fully supportive voices captured in the local newspapers.

Times reporter Springer Gibson continued to be among the most insightful of any journalists who covered the Chattanooga sit-ins. More direct than other reporters, Gibson identified in the lead paragraph that the protests were “anti-segregation” protests and that the pickets were a new form of resistance among black Chattanoogaans. Gibson connected this round of protests to those that occurred in February, though he conceded the usual journalistic line regarding the sit-in: “There were no arrests and no disturbances.” The students sat quietly at the lunch counter, studying, working math problems, or reading Bibles. One student told Gibson that more sit-ins were planned, but did not say when. The article’s greatest contribution was its interview with Rev. M. J. Jones, the black pastor of the Stanley Methodist Church, one of the participants in the traffic island demonstrations, and a member of the biracial committee. The interview provided a rare perspective from a black, and in particular, a black who saw the local protests as part of a national and global fight for black civil rights. “We are praying first of all for success of sit-ins all over the country. We are praying for the aspirations of Negroes all over the world, especially the Negroes here in the South and, secondly, those in South Africa,” Jones told Gibson. “We abhor segregation and discrimination in any form wherever it exists.”⁹ The ministers, all of whom were members of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, said they had been considering protesting segregation for a long time. “We were hopeful that discriminations here would be ended and that this would not be necessary,” Jones continued. Dogan Williams of Wiley Memorial Baptist Church said that silent prayer conducted in a public place was not original with the Chattanooga pastors; activists in Washington, D.C. had done it before.

Black ministers were also now likely advising the Howard students, at least some of whom attended prayer meetings at downtown churches before conducting demonstrations each afternoon. The meetings coincided with improved organization among the demonstrators, and perhaps strengthened the students' resolve to acquiesce peacefully as they were put under arrest. The church's support also seems evident in the more explicitly Christian message the students expressed during this round of sit-ins. They now carried Bibles and silently read them at the lunch counters. They wrote Christian messages on picketing signs: "You are all one in Jesus Christ" and "Don't Buy; Pray." Perhaps the students intentionally followed the model proved successful by the Nashville sit-in participants, who conducted the country's largest and best-organized sit-in demonstrations under the guidance of Vanderbilt Divinity School student, Jim Lawson. As historian Taylor Branch put it, the Nashville participants were "recruited from the campuses, quartered in the churches, and advised by preachers."¹⁰

The *News-Free Press* that day focused on an investigation school officials were conducting to determine if Monday's sit-in participants had violated School Superintendent J. W. Letson's February directive that had stipulated all students should avoid the downtown area, again framing the sit-in matter in terms of law and order. Letson was out of town and apparently could not be reached by either the school officials debating the issue or the newspaper covering the debate. Reporter J. B. Collins instead contacted Letson's assistant, Joe Goss, who argued that the Letson directive was indeed still in effect and that the emergency bus routes of February, which prevented students from being let off downtown, should be reinstated. The students might also be subject to a portion of state law that called for the expulsion of students who were "a detriment to the good order, discipline, and instruction of other pupils." Collins also interviewed C. C. Bond, the Howard principal, who offered an opposing viewpoint to Goss's. The February

directive was, in fact, no longer in effect because it had been issued within the context of a temporary emergency situation which had now passed.

Collins summarized another afternoon of protests with the usual emphasis on the commotion that did not occur. Collins also included the revelation that the three types of protest were “apparently aimed at segregated lunch counters,” but there were no reports of disorder.¹¹

There was even better news on Tuesday. There were no sit-ins. Picketing was the only form of protest carried out by blacks that afternoon, according to the *Times*. A group of blacks gathered at the 800 block of Market Street near the Kress store holding signs, which read: “Segregation is immoral: Support the NAACP” and “Money spent in the store supports Jim Crow policy in the South. NAACP,” reporter Fred Hixson noted. But, the picketing “was the extent of racial demonstrations here Tuesday,” and it occurred “without incident.” Fortunately, no white or black students lingered downtown either. The Howard school bus passed by the Ninth Street stop, the troubled location near the Kress store of a few weeks ago. The driver designated the stop as “Special” on the sign that flashed to surrounding traffic the bus’s next stop and proceeded to pass it by. A few students were dropped down the road, but did not visit the dime stores. Perhaps Chattanooga would not endure another boisterous week of demonstrations like that of February, Hixson seemed to breathe.

Beneath the surface of a tranquil afternoon, however, Chattanooga were on edge. Police officers, some on motorcycles, circulated the area near the dime stores, according to Hixson. Several high school principals toured the aisles of the dime stores, keeping an eye on the door for any students who might enter and repeat the scenes of February. The scenes inside Kress during February in which students had thrown ice cream at each other and popped whips in the aisles of the store were surely difficult memories to shake. Robert Thacker, manager of

Kress, was also anxious. Talking with a group of journalists gathered outside his store, the manager forbade them from entering with cameras. He threatened trespassing charges against any reporters who disregarded the warning, claiming that “photographers were more damaging to the business of the store than the Negro demonstrators.” Later that afternoon, an unknowing cameraman from the local television station entered Kress and was promptly asked to leave, though Thacker did not press charges.¹² The story provided the first perspective yet of a downtown vendor, revealing that at least one businessman was wary of the resumed demonstrations, and in particular, of the continued newspaper coverage of them. Profits surely suffered in February as photos of young blacks and whites fighting inside his store emblazoned the pages of the newspapers and as reporters detailed the anti-segregation protests taking place at his business. Ultimately, the economic toll taken on downtown businesses in Southern towns amid the wave of sit-ins would prove a key aspect of the movement that made it successful. Store owners who were not impressed with the participants’ call for social justice eventually made reforms compelled by declining profits.

Though C. C. Bond, principal of Howard, distanced the school from the new round of anti-segregation protests, he was not without sympathy for the students. He told Hixson that the Letson directive, which forbade students in February from frequenting the downtown area, was no longer in effect. Even if it were, Bond argued, the students did not violate the order because they had gone home immediately after school, as the directive stipulated, and only later in the afternoon, after attending a prayer meeting did they head downtown. Bond insisted that the students were not receiving encouragement from the Howard faculty or himself. “The students did not tell me, and they did not tell any member of the faculty, what they were going to do. The first I knew about the demonstrations was when I read the *Times* this morning,” Bond said. “The

students are receiving advice from both their parents and their ministers, but not from teachers here at Howard.”¹³

The *News-Free Press* followed up on the story reported the previous day concerning the debate whether or not the Letson directive was still in effect. The newspaper reiterated Bond’s stance that it was not. Also, Joe Goss, Letson’s assistant, seemed to back away from the hard line he had taken the previous day, saying that the students’ actions would be examined on a case-by-case basis to determine if any “conduct violations” applied. The efforts to revive the February directive seemed to be fizzling.

The *News-Free Press* summarized Tuesday’s events: There were no sit-ins, but the NAACP conducted pickets outside a Market Street dime store. Also noteworthy, the Kress manager forbade reporters from entering his store. The lone violator, Cecil Pierce, Jr., of Channel 12, was ordered out. A policeman, however, said he would not arrest any photographers unless ordered to do so.

Things were quiet in Chattanooga over the following week. The only demonstration was held at Thacker’s Kress, and only the *News-Free Press* covered it. Seven persons staged a “quiet sit-in at a luncheon counter for white people,” and there was no commotion to report. A crowd of white and black shoppers “practically ignored” the students, who were carrying Bibles and who still did not receive service. The Chattanooga newspapers hardly considered the sit-in newsworthy.¹⁴

Lee Anderson, segregationist editor of the *News-Free Press*, had not written a word regarding the sit-ins since February. But with the resumption of demonstrations in April, the editor broke his silence in characteristic fashion. He accused the black protestors of promoting the harmful mixing of the races and of hypocritically using the word “non-violent” to describe

their protests. He argued that the demonstrators intended to stir up trouble, and claimed to be non-violent in an attempt to garner public sympathy. Anderson's rhetoric was alarmist:

What these race-mixing promoters don't tell the public [that] their "non-violent" tactics are designed to try to incite violence on the part of those opposing such pressures. For in the cases where boycotts, picket lines, lunch counter invasions and other such activities have stirred irresponsible elements of both races into actual physical clashes, the promoters of these demonstrations have been able to chalk up substantial propaganda victories by assuming a false cloak of "non-violent" martyrdom.

Anderson also cited an application for a CORE (Congress on Racial Equality) training program to be held that summer in Miami that required participants to waive their rights to sue against damages or injuries that might result from anti-segregation protests. It was "strange indeed" that a group promoting nonviolent tactics would require such a waiver to be signed, Anderson concluded.¹⁵

Another series of relatively low-key sit-ins began on Thursday, April 28. They were only mentioned in the *Times*, which repeated the all-too-familiar lunch counter refrain, announcing that there were neither disturbances nor service. The students, who attended a prayer meeting beforehand, "were quiet, were not served and there were no disturbance [sic]." Again on Friday during sit-ins held at Kress, Woolworth's, and W.T. Grant's, "There were no incidents. The demonstrators received no service." The students silently read textbooks and Bibles at the counters. They appeared organized. At Kress, one of the female participants directed her fellow students to take seats at the counter as white patrons vacated.

A third day of demonstrations, however, drew up to fifty participants and a crowd of white students who flooded into the Woolworth, Millers, Loveman, and Kress stores downtown. Kress held the majority of students. There, blacks filled more than half of the bar stools, and whites gathered behind them, prompting the police officers, who had flocked to the scene, to yell

at the students who were blocking the aisles, "Move on!" A group of whites and blacks vacated the store, only to engage in a shouting match on the street, leading to two white arrests.

Robert Thacker was losing patience, but managed to keep his cool. According to the *Times*, the only newspaper to cover the episode, the manager talked "calmly and earnestly for over ten minutes" with several of the sit-in leaders, eventually persuading them to leave his store. "This is the first time I've had a chance to talk to the demonstrators. They complained they were treated rudely by some of my help. I assured them we would show them every courtesy possible at every counter in the store where we could," Thacker confided to the newspaper. The manager felt he was drawing a firm line.¹⁶

Despite a two-week pause in demonstrations, some fifty Howard students, the largest number of sit-in participants since February, crammed into the Kress store on Thursday, May 12, taking up nearly all of the bar stools. Thacker had had enough. He ordered the police to arrest the participants, charging disorderly conduct and violation of a city loitering ordinance. Thacker was the first Chattanooga manager to take such a step. The students' enthusiasm was hardly dampened, however, as police escorted them to the police vans. They sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," reporters noted, and others clapped and cheered. A group of young blacks observing the scene were emboldened by the students' courage and moved to fill the now vacant seats at the lunch counter, but the police blocked their path.

Springer Gibson of the *Times* covered the eventful afternoon, penning a story that once again showed a quality of journalism superior to that typical of the time. In a rare article that captured the perspective of not only a store manager, but also of a student participant, Gibson revealed the breakdown of communication between the members of the biracial committee,

downtown businesses owners, and students. In Gibson's story, Thacker and the student offered differing accounts of an agreement that the committee had supposedly reached. Without any coverage of the meetings themselves or available records of committee minutes, it is not clear precisely to what the committee members had agreed, or if they had even reached an agreement before the resumption of demonstrations in April. According to Thacker, the students agreed to come in small numbers and not create any commotion, and he had agreed to "go along" with the demonstrations. "But yesterday, there must have been 40 of them, and today they took up almost all, if not all, of the stools. You can't just let them take over your stores," Thacker said. He asked the students to leave. Most did, but of the two that remained, he noted, "We had them hosed down real good." The other students then returned, and in the presence of police officers, Thacker again asked them to leave. This time they refused, and Thacker requested their arrest.¹⁷

According to one of the students, however, some of the ministers who were on the committee told the students before Easter they would be served eventually if they continued visiting the lunch counters in small numbers and made no noise. The students followed the ministers' advice, but to no avail. "We tried that for three or four weeks, but we didn't seem to be getting anywhere," said the student, who, according to Gibson, held a leadership position at Howard. The store managers seemed to pass up plenty of opportunities to serve them. Thus the students increased their numbers. "Because we didn't seem to be making any progress, we stepped up the numbers" in the last week and have continued to increase them. "I still don't see where we are wrong," the student said.¹⁸

Gibson described the emotional scene at Kress as Sergeant William O. Welch told each student, "You're under arrest," before he and three other officers escorted them in two groups to the police vans awaiting them outside the store. The students sang, cheered, and clapped as the

arrests took place. A group of black bystanders, moved by the scene, attempted to continue the sit-ins at the now vacant lunch counter, but were stopped short by the police. The students were technically charged with violating a city ordinance that made it illegal “to loaf, loiter, wander, or idle in, upon, or about specified types of places without any legitimate business or purpose.” R. H. Craig, the students’ lawyer, in the coming weeks would hang his defense on the point that the students were indeed pursuing a legitimate purpose at the time of arrest.

Despite an eventful afternoon, “there was no violence or disturbances other than the hosing,” Gibson noted.¹⁹

The police officers’ efficiency in the arrests effectively prevented the large-scale chaos seen in February, but it also ensured the issue of civil disobedience, and therefore civil rights, would begin to find increasing coverage in the newspapers. The *News-Free Press* described the first exchanges between a lawyer and a judge concerning the sit-arrests, giving a foretaste of the lively debate that would ensue in the Chattanooga courts over the sit-ins. Craig, the students’ lawyer, opened a test case, selecting Andrew Smith as the defendant, to determine the constitutionality of the loitering ordinance invoked against the students. Enacted in 1958, the law was a response to a group of white juveniles who were disturbing the peace at several restaurants in the Brainerd neighborhood. “If this law is not constitutional we might as well forget about it,” City Judge Riley Graham said to Craig, agreeing to the test case for the sit-in participants. If Smith were found guilty, he and the others arrested at Kress would be fined fifty dollars. Graham also requested that Craig ensure that the students refrain from further demonstrations until the case was decided—to which Craig countered that he could not control the actions of the students.²⁰

In the same article, the *News-Free Press* recapped the eventful day of arrests as the students, seemingly joyously, were put under arrest. “Although there was much confusion,” reporter Tom Gilliland wrote, “there were no reports of violence.” Apparently borrowing Springer Gibson’s interviews with Thacker and the Howard student, Gilliland reiterated the conflicting viewpoints on the biracial committee’s agreement. There were no direct quotes from Thacker or the student in Gilliland’s version. Nor were there additional interviews with committee members or the mayor, which might have shed light on the confusion. Perhaps the committee was unwilling to be interviewed, or perhaps the reporters simply did not think to question its members.

Despite the unanswered questions, the reporting throughout the resumed demonstrations in the spring continued to show implicit sympathy for the students. Reporters described them as quiet, dignified, and studious during the demonstrations, and almost mysteriously joyful and unified as the protests ended with arrests. The image was powerful. Taken for granted and even ridiculed by some at the time, Chattanooga nearly fifty years after the sit-ins would consider the image transformative.

Lee Anderson was again moved to write an editorial. This time he felt Chattanooga had reason to be thankful. Chattanooga law enforcers, in a triumphant moment for private property owners, arrested fifty sit-in participants who violated a city loitering ordinance that had first been applied to whites. “We frequently hear the cry of ‘equality.’ Well, here was equality—a law passed to apply to whites being applied equally and justly to Negroes,” the *News-Free Press* editor wrote. In 1958, “crowds of troublesome white teenagers virtually [confiscated] Brainerd drive-ins from their owners,” prompting the city to pass an ordinance protecting the rights of private property owners to “use their property as they wish and to control its occupancy.”

Chattanoogans approved of the law, and even though it was only applied to whites, no one accused the law enforcers of being discriminatory at the time, Anderson continued. They were not. Neither were police and the store manager yesterday when they punished the sit-in participants for violating the city ordinance, he argued. What was more, the arrests effectively brought “order out of chaos,” Anderson concluded²¹

The students were undeterred. The day following the arrests, some sixty-two gathered on Friday and led a protest march around city hall and the jailhouse before conducting sit-ins at four dime stores, including at Kress. Thacker had the twenty-four participants arrested. Despite another day of excitement, “there were no instances of violence reported on Friday,” according to the *Times*. A female protestor had wrangled briefly with a white student and a white woman over a bar stool, but a male protestors intervened, leading the female protestor to another seat.²²

Springer Gibson detailed the protest march, as the students circled the jailhouse chanting, “Two, four, six, eight, we want to integrate!” Craig, the students’ lawyer, however, urged them to march silently. They obeyed, falling into a single-file line, their hands clasped behind their backs. They continued to march around the jailhouse for some time before moving on to another downtown block. Craig, Mapp, black ministers, and other black leaders watched. After nearly half an hour, the students and the black bystanders filed into the First Congregational Church for a meeting.²³ No additional reporting could be located to reveal what transpired at the meeting.

In the same story, Springer Gibson described the scene of arrests and captured another exchange between Thacker and students as the store manager once again refused to serve them and said that he would not do so until the state segregation laws were overturned and other Chattanooga stores were serving blacks. “I would be violating a state law if I served you,” he said to each of the black students who requested service. “I cannot serve you. If and when it

develops that it is not against the law, and the other stores here agree to serve you, then we will start serving you here. Until then, we cannot.” Shortly after five p.m., he closed the lunch counter and ordered all patrons to leave. The whites did, but the blacks remained. Thacker called in a police officer and, in his presence, again asked the blacks to leave. When they refused, the police escorted them to the police vans that waited outside the store. Upon hearing the news of their friends’ arrests, some thirteen students conducting sit-ins nearby at the Grant, Woolworth, and McClellan stores left for the now vacant seats at Kress. They too were arrested. Gibson noted that, of the twenty-four students arrested that day, eight were over the age of eighteen – six boys and two girls. The boys chose to spend the night in jail, while the girls posted bond for one hundred dollars each. The others were given trial dates at the juvenile court.²⁴

Craig’s personal health briefly became the topic of news when the lawyer became “noticeably ill” during a court hearing for eight students arrested on Friday, postponing the hearing, according to the *News-Free Press*. He left the courtroom and took a seat in the lobby as a group of black leaders, including Mapp, surrounded him. Asked if the students would get a Nashville lawyer to fill in for Craig, Mapp said any such decision would be made by Craig. The “slender, white-haired lawyer,” who was battling cancer at the time, almost died during surgery nearly two years previous, but physicians rushed to massage his heart, which had stopped beating during the operation, saving his life, reporter Tom Gilliland noted. Craig was the city’s “only active Negro lawyer” and, therefore, if no Nashville lawyer took over for him, Craig, who was also the chief lawyer at work on the school integration lawsuit, would continue the students’ case despite his precarious health.²⁵

In the same story, the issue of segregation once again figured prominently in the reporting as Gilliland recapped the arrests at the Kress store. Thacker refused to serve the

students until the “law is settled,” he had told the students in reference to state segregation laws, Gilliland noted. Prior to the demonstrations, the students had “paraded informally on sidewalks near the police station in apparent protest” of their peers arrested the day before, Gilliland added.²⁶

Another twenty-four students were arrested at Kress again on Monday, May 16, bringing the total number of arrested to ninety-eight, the *Times* reported Tuesday morning. The newspaper again observed that the students sang, chanted, and cheered in a show of solidarity and celebration as the arrests took place. “One, two, three, four—we want to freedom! Five, six, seven, eight—we want to integrate!” they shouted as they were escorted to the police vans. En route to police headquarters, they sang “Onward Christian Soldiers.”²⁷ Because of the songs and chants, the reporters could not ignore the issues protested.

At a hearing for twelve sit-in participants on Tuesday held at the juvenile court, Judge Burrell Barker ultimately rejected the sit-in method as disruptive to businesses and harmful to Southern communities thus aligning himself with editor Martin Ochs and other white Southern liberals at the start of the Civil Rights movement. While paying lip service to the students’ right to protest, the judge upheld the loitering charges and forbade the students from conducting sit-in demonstrations in groups of more than six “so as not to create a disturbance or interfere in the orderly pursuit of business,” according to the *Times*. The students were made wards of the court. The judge argued:

The court recognizes the rights of these individuals to pursue what they think to be their rights, but the court questions the methods being used as being not proper, not well-regulated and not under proper control. If the situation continues as it is, it will not be good for these individuals or for the community – no good can come of it all.²⁸

With less flourish than had marked his February articles, but no less gusto, Marion Peck declared that “the Hamilton County juvenile court in effect went on record Tuesday as ‘recognizing the rights’ of Negro juveniles to engage in ‘sit-in’ demonstrations in limited numbers and orderly fashion.”²⁹ Although the judge had indeed recognized the students’ rights to protest, he had rejected Craig’s main contention that the students were innocent of violating the loitering order, as the cross examinations of a police officer and Robert Thacker revealed. It was at best a partial victory for the students. Through pointed questioning, Craig attempted, but ultimately failed to convince the judge that the students had not been “loafing, loitering, wandering, or idling” inside the Kress store, as the city ordinance stipulated. What is more, Craig’s defense had not been sufficient to show that the students were pursuing the “legitimate business” of receiving service at a downtown lunch counter. Peck’s news article quoted the cross examinations at length, as well as the court’s response, providing readers not only with the perspectives of a dime store manager, a police officer, and a Southern progressive judge, but also with that of a seasoned civil rights lawyer. Preoccupied with the commotion of the mass sit-ins and the resulting arrests, the newspaper now offered Craig’s perspective, which returned the sit-ins to the issue of civil rights.

“Was there anything to indicate they were loitering, loafing, or idling, except what the manager told you?” Craig asked Lieutenant O.W. Downey.

“All we know is they were sitting at the counter as the white persons were,” Downey said.

Thacker testified next: “They [the students] came in increased numbers so service to the whites was disrupted,” he said. “They completely filled the counter, 60 seats, and I ordered them to leave and they refused, so I had them arrested.” In response to a question from Craig, Thacker admitted he had squirted some of the students with water, the news of which “might” have

caused even more students to pile into the dime store. Regardless, the “large numbers constituted the problem.”

“They just interfered with service to people you wanted to serve?” Craig responded asked.

“Yes,” Thacker said.

One of the sit-in participants testified, claiming she visited Kress in the pursuit of legitimate business—“to be served.” She denied wandering, loafing, idling, or disturbing business at the store. Craig argued this was so:

“They believed, whether it were true or not, they were within the law in pursuing an objective they felt to be their right.” Craig said. “This was a lunch stand and they went there to be served, that was their purpose and that alone. They went there to establish a rights they thought they had, or to create an atmosphere where they could negotiate for that right.”

The judge asked Craig if he were raising the “constitutional question at this point [in the hearing]” regarding state segregation laws. Craig replied, “Not necessarily, since whether it is raised here or not, that question will be settled somewhere else.”³⁰

Although Craig had deferred the issue of the state’s unjust Jim Crow laws, the issue kept cropping up in the newspapers. The following morning, James Lee, the attorney representing the Kress store, announced the store had dropped the loitering charges against the twelve convicted students because the court-issued restraining order had solved the problem of too many students flooding the Kress store, taking up most of the bar stools, and thus blocking business with white patrons. In an interview with the *Times*, Robert Thacker agreed that the scale of the demonstrations had been the main problem and what had prompted him to have the students arrested, not necessarily the students’ challenging segregation laws. Therefore, if the students continued to hold sit-ins at Kress, but heeded the restraining order, limiting their numbers to six or less, the store would tolerate such “orderly” protests and would not prosecute them. With

regard to granting the students service, Thacker felt the store eventually would, but not “unless and until the other variety stores agree to serve [blacks].”³¹

Both newspapers observed that Judge Barker, while upholding the loitering charges, also conceded the legitimacy of the students’ protests. The court had recognized “the right of Negro youths to stage sit-in demonstrations in pursuit of ‘an objective they feel to be right,’” declared the *News-Free Press*.³² The Hamilton County juvenile court had gone “on record” recognizing the students’ right to hold sit-in demonstrations, *Times* reporter Marion Peck trumpeted in the opening paragraph of his story.³³ Barker had indeed acknowledged the issue of civil rights, as both newspapers rightly pointed out. But the judge, the newspapers, and the community at large would continue to focus on civilities—including the rights of business owners and their customers to conduct transactions free of disruption and disorder—to the neglect of civil rights.

Judge Burrell Barker, therefore, continued to issue guilty verdicts and restraining orders as some seventy-one juvenile sit-in participants passed through the court room in late May. At the quieter hearings, the judge also began to lecture the students on the virtues of a society governed by law and order. The *Times*, perhaps sympathetic to Barker’s views, published the judge’s remarks at length, providing a perspective that epitomized Southern white progressivism at the start of the Civil Rights movement with Barker’s telling emphases on human progress, law, and order. At a hearing for eleven male protestors on May 19, Barker declared:

The court has the dual obligation and function not only to look after the welfare of the individual child but that of the community and other citizens as well ... It is not my purpose to give you a lecture, but I would like to drop this thought in passing. Do not become obsessed with this one idea. In most area of life you will find many inequalities and discriminations, not only in terms of race. You are endowed with good minds and good intellects. The court is interested in seeing you develop those qualities, to think for yourself, not let someone else do your thinking for you. The primary principal on which this democracy of ours was founded is equality, yet we never yet have achieve total equality and may never achieve it, but in trying to attain it we need to be orderly. If it gets out of hand, the real purpose is lost sight of ... the whole universe is controlled by laws.

Let's keep that in mind. There is a redress for every wrong for every individual in this country. Let's look to the law to right those wrongs.³⁴

At another hearing for twenty-two students on May 24, Barker urged the protestors to respect the rights of business owners and any other citizens who might be affected by their demonstrations or protest marches, lest the country give way to "anarchy":

In the first place, the court stated that we recognize the right of you people, or any individual for that matter, any citizen, to pursue a course of action to attain some alleged right he might have under law. But in pursuing that right, whatever it might be, he must so it in a lawful and orderly manner ... We haven't yet reached the point where we want to live in an anarchy ... In making this order, and the others, it is not to be construed that the court is trying to confer on you people any additional rights to the exclusion of the rights of other people ... People who operate businesses also have rights. I think you young people, all high school students, are familiar with the rights of citizens in a democracy such as we have. We only have rights to the extent that they don't infringe on the rights of other citizens.³⁵

The students' lawyer, R. H. Craig, assured the judge that, of all people, the students understood the judge's advice. "I think they, more than other people, should be able to see the unreasonableness of infringing on others' rights," Craig said, perhaps with irony. "These are all good children. They are trying to better themselves, but a whole lot of the time we don't see the other fellow's side because we are wrapped up in our own."³⁶

On Thursday, May 19, the students resumed sit-ins, but, this time, heeding the court-issued restraining order, they conducted the protests in groups of six that spread out to seven downtown dime stores. Both newspapers reported a lack of commotion and no arrests, which seemed to affirm the wisdom of Judge Barker's court order. "Police reported that there were no disturbances at any of the places and no arrests were made," according to the *Times*.³⁷ "There were no complaints from store operators" and "no reports of disorder," according to the *News-Free Press*.³⁸ However, the students were still not served.

As the Howard students, many of whom were seniors, neared the end of their semester, and after the ordeal of getting arrested and having the restraining order issued against them, the demonstrations eventually came to an end. News of the sit-in situation evaporated from the two newspapers. There was no coverage of the biracial committee meetings held over the summer as the group, with new impetus after the April demonstrations finally came to a decision to open services to blacks at lunch counters on August 5. Perhaps the group met secretly and refused to answer questions from the press. Or, perhaps the newspapers did not consider the meetings newsworthy.

Reporters did show on August 5, as twenty blacks sat down at Kress, Grant's, Liggett-Rexall, McLellan's, Miller's, and Woolworth's in downtown Chattanooga and for the first time received service. The news stories they wrote, however, continued to follow the pattern of reporting established during the sit-ins with emphasis on the disturbances that did not happen, and in this case, remarkably little written to indicate that a significant racial barrier had been felled. Blacks were served at seven downtown lunch counters, both newspapers announced. But "There was no disorder" and "no complaints made" (*News-Free Press*). The afternoon passed without "untoward incident" (*Times*). There were no interviews with the twenty blacks who enjoyed service for the first time at integrated lunch counters in Chattanooga.

Several white and black pastors of the biracial committee that brokered the agreement with downtown merchants to integrate lunch counters, when interviewed by the *News-Free Press*, responded cautiously. Carl Allen, a white man and president of the Chattanooga Pastor Association, said the pastors had played only a neutral role throughout the deliberations, helping keep the lines of communication open between whites and blacks so that order might be quickly

restored. He added that as white man, personally, he would have preferred that segregation laws be maintained:

As for my position on integration, I am a Southern white man. And because I am a member of the favored group, I would prefer things to continue as I have known them. However I recognize the responsibility of every citizen throughout the world to find answers to the troubled times rather than being an abiding part of the problems.

John H. Bonner, a black pastor, described his role and that of all pastors dealing with worldly situations as spiritual. “The role of every Christian minister and rabbi in any community is that of reconciling God to man and man to man. Many ministers, including myself have tried faithfully to play the role in Chattanooga in recent months,” he said. Major J. Jones, a black pastor who participated in anti-segregation protests in April, would only comment that the first day of integration was apparently “successful in that there were no incidents.” Mayor Rudy Olgiati said he had no comment because he was not a member of the committee.

Robert Thacker of Kress said his decision to integrate his lunch counters was a reflection of community-wide support for such a move. National Kress executives had left the decision to integrate up to local managers, who were dealing with similar sit-in demonstrations across the Southeast. At least in Chattanooga, “considerable local support” among whites, blacks, and city leaders made the decision to integrate sensible, Thacker said.

The only forthrightly positive response came from Mapp. The NAACP president felt “gratified to see the community take such a forward step. I feel this is the American way of life.”³⁹

Lee Anderson of the *News-Free Press* seemed to despair, condemning the integration of Chattanooga lunch counters as the “first fruits” of Senator Estes Kefauver’s recent landslide reelection and also blaming Judge Burrell Barker for affirming the rights of the students to conduct sit-ins in the first published attack of the judge since the May hearings. Senator

Kefauver had voted against the Southern Manifesto (1956) that protested school integration, and he had supported the 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Acts.* Anderson contended that his victory was proof that the “vast majority of Tennesseans” accepted “race-mixing,” and soon there would be pressure to integrate hotels, restaurants, and private companies in the wake of the integration of lunch counters. The majority opinion in Tennessee was in effect steamrolling the rights of private business owners. The *News-Free Press*, Anderson continued, stood up for the rights of business owners, whether they preferred operating on a segregated or an integrated basis. Anderson saw himself as the only voice of support and argued that business owners had been forced to integrate “as a result of coercion which began with the illegal confiscation of private property through sit-down demonstrations, with juvenile court shockingly endorsing confiscation so long as confiscators acted in groups of six or less.”⁴⁰

Lee Anderson could not have been more accurate when he argued that the tide had turned in the battle for civil rights. Soon, indeed, there would be pressure for other businesses to follow suit with the dime stores by integrating their services. Blacks, encouraged by the success of the sit-ins, would protest for greater reforms, and the white community, its fears allayed that integration was a dangerous policy, would have fewer and fewer rebuttals against protests. Anderson’s fears, however, that such a development would precipitate the downfall of private businesses and his concern for the mixing of the races were groundless.⁴¹

Despite the overt opposition to integration from the *News-Free Press*, and despite the overall negligence of reporting by both newspapers, the cause of civil rights was moving ahead in Chattanooga, Tennessee. David Halberstam argued that the *Nashville Tennessean*, through

* The drafters of the Southern Manifesto, which was written amid Senator Estes Kefauver’s campaign for the 1956 presidential nomination, did not ask the senator to sign it. They assumed he would decline because Kefauver was seeking a national office at the time. [Tony Badger, “Southerners who Refused to sign the Southern Manifesto,” *The Historical Journal* 142, no. 2 (1999): 525.]

courageous news reporting and supportive editorials, played a key role in bringing about desegregation in Nashville. That might have been the case in the capital city. But down the road in Chattanooga, citizens were swiftly moving toward a policy of desegregation despite the lackluster newspaper coverage of the 1960 sit-ins. The Howard students made such progress possible. Their courage and persistence shined through in even the murkiest news articles. Although reporters only rarely referenced the issues of civil rights, they dutifully recorded the scenes at downtown dime stores. Again and again, they described the students' quiet, dignified manner and their persistent act of requesting service at the white-only lunch counters.

EPILOGUE

The desegregation of lunch counters in August 1960 marked a significant turning point in the history of race relations in Chattanooga, but the struggle for civil rights was far from over. A string of dynamite bombings targeting black homes later that month kept the race issue on the front pages. The outburst of violence, worse than anything that had occurred during the sit-in week, kept the issue of law and order on the minds of Chattanooga editors and citizens. Martin Ochs and Lee Anderson again condemned the violence and again exhorted law-abiding citizens to exert their influence on the few who were threatening civic peace and stability. “Another bombing, another attack on decency, another sickening exhibit of diseased and tyrannical mind,” Anderson wrote in the *News-Free Press* after a bomb shattered the windows and blasted the siding off a vacant house on the market for black renters. The Avondale neighborhood, like other predominately white Chattanooga neighborhoods, had recently witnessed an influx of blacks that had been displaced by the city’s urban renewal plan and the construction of highways, some of which had cut through black neighborhoods. The *Times* speculated that disgruntled whites detonated the bombs to intimidate would-be black neighbors. The most severe bombing narrowly missed killing a family of six who resided in a St. Elmo duplex, prompting Ochs to demand the criminals to be stopped. “We cannot exist much longer as a peaceful community unless they are,” he wrote, “for then we will have given way to rule by violence under a reign of hate.”¹

The bombings subsided as the community continued to express outrage. In addition to the stern editorials from Anderson and Ochs, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the same group involved in anti-segregation demonstrations in the spring, issued a public statement condemning the bombers:

So nervous is our community that we are afraid that any slight provocation might plunge us into widespread disorder and chaos. We find it hard to sleep at night for fear that our lives might be endangered by a bomb or fire. Such is not good for our community, such breaks the tranquility of harmony, such appeals to emotion rather than to reason.²

The Chamber of Commerce declared that the Chattanooga business community “deplores these dastardly acts of cowardice and criminality and urges upon our entire citizenry thoughtful, prayerful and diligent efforts to resolve these conflicts which are reflecting discredit upon Chattanooga.”³ The city’s two newspapers, the city government, prominent citizens, as well as Governor Buford Elliott on behalf of the state of Tennessee, raised more than five thousand dollars as a reward for anyone who provided tips that would help solve the case. There were as of yet no suspects.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation became involved a few weeks later on August 24. The agency suspected that the dynamite used for the bombings had been smuggled across the state line, a federal offence according to the recently passed 1960 Civil Rights Act.⁴ Ochs and Anderson urged citizens to cooperate with local and federal investigators. Even seemingly vague tips should be reported. They could help bring justice to the “mad dogs of society who have declared themselves enemies of decency,” Anderson wrote.⁵

The bombings coincided with a string of highly publicized racial crimes in Chattanooga, further distressing the newspapers and their readers. The morning after a bomb was detonated between two black homes, shattering several windows and damaging portions of the siding on both homes, six blacks stood before the grand jury in Chattanooga. They were charged with rape of a seventeen-year-old white girl. Other recent crime reports alleged a black man had robbed and raped a white woman at a dry cleaners and a group of white men had shot and wounded a group of black men. Along with the recent spate of bombings targeting black homes, these crimes “are the result of a troubled atmosphere,” Anderson observed. Only “stiff prosecution of

the guilty” could end this trend in crimes, whose “frequency and pattern” and “racial overtones” merited decisive action from Chattanooga law enforcers, he argued.⁶

Within this atmosphere, it is perhaps understandable that the community continued to exalt civilities. As a consequence, however, Chattanooga continued to defer dealing with civil rights. By the end of 1960, the school desegregation lawsuit was stuck in the courts, and other downtown businesses had not followed dime stores in doing away with segregation. Therefore, young blacks once again took to the streets to protest the injustice of Jim Crow. Black ministers and the NAACP continued to support the students, buoyed perhaps by a controversial visit from Martin Luther King, Jr., on December 30, 1960. The Board of Education had refused to allow King to speak at the Howard High School auditorium, so he spoke instead at the Memorial Auditorium downtown—perhaps a better venue in the end—and exhorted the crowd of about 2,500 to continue the fight against “gradualism” and “token integration.” Blacks must remind the recently elected president, John F. Kennedy, that they helped him win the election, and that he must now “use the full weight of his office to remove the burden of segregation from our shoulders.” King said they must also continue to practice non-violence. “It is marvelous to have a way in which you can hate segregation and yet love the segregationist,” he said.⁷

Nearing the first anniversary of the sit-ins in, Howard students conducted stand-ins at the Rogers, the Tivoli, and the State Theatres. The demonstrations lasted for weeks as the students repeatedly walked up to the ticket windows at the segregated movie theatres, requested a ticket, and were refused. They also occasionally conducted sit-ins at Krystal’s, prompting the manager on one occasion to close the store. “We are closed for business to do some repair work, and I’m going to ask everyone leave,” the manager told the students.⁸

The reporting continued to follow the patterns established during the sit-ins. Reporters focused on the action, leading their news reports with an announcement of whether or not there had been violence and whether or not the students had succeeded in purchasing tickets. Reporters continued to forego interviews with the participants, but picketing signs continued to be a useful tool through which the student made their voices heard. Outside a movie theatre advertising playtimes for "The Misfits," a student carried a sign that read: "We are misfits in a segregated society." Others read, "Our color will not rub off on you," "All men are created equally," "Friendliness for newcomers," and "We want equality."

The anniversary demonstrations led to several clashes between whites and blacks, the students throwing bricks and stones at each other on one occasion. On another occasion, a white man punched Rev. Robert Hunter, who was serving as a leader to the student participants. Arrests of whites and blacks were made, though not as many as during the sit-ins of 1960. Bruce Carver Boynton, a recently inducted black member of the Tennessee Bar, was now representing the students in place of R. H. Craig, who died of cancer in December of 1960.*

History was on the side of the Howard students. Their continued demonstrations eventually eroded the lingering support for segregation laws. In July 1963, the Chamber of Commerce encouraged Chattanooga businesses to treat all customers equally. A week later, seventy restaurants and several movie theatres desegregated. The Chattanooga Manufacturer's Association also spoke out, encouraging companies to hire employees on the basis of merit and ability, not race. In September, the City Commission voted unanimously to desegregate all public

* James Mapp recalled years later that a few months before Craig's death, the lawyer called Mapp into his office. "Look, I want you to know one thing," Craig said to Mapp. "The record of everyone of those children have been cleared," he said, referring to the sit-in participants he had represented. "There's something else; you don't owe me a dime, the NAACP doesn't owe me anything. This is a gift from me to these young people."

facilities. In addition, plans to gradually desegregate city schools were in full swing with the first four grades to be integrated by the start of the new school year.⁹

All went peacefully, which mattered much to the city. The *Times* and a new mayor elected in 1963, Ralph Kelley, continued to emphasize civilities throughout the process of desegregation, lauding the city's harmonious race relations at a time when many cities were aflame with racial tensions and riots. Chattanooga had managed to deal with the "towering domestic issues" of 1963 with "efficiency, dignity, [and] sincerity," Ochs wrote in August of 1963. Kelley said in a speech to the Engineers Club in June that the city was "very blessed" by the "good will and cordiality" that characterized the city's race relations. Springer Gibson of the *Times* agreed, reflecting in 1964 that the city had avoided the fate of many racially embroiled cities because "white and Negro leaders have worked quietly but persistently [here] to settle problems in a spirit of good will." Fortunately, "substantial progress for the Negro" had been made, but "without fanfare."¹⁰

Indeed, negotiation played a key role in keeping tensions down and, ultimately, ending segregation during the 1960s. Clarence B. Robinson, a black educator and civil rights activist in Chattanooga, years later credited Mayor Rudy Olgiati for always being willing to sit down with blacks and discuss the city's racial problems, including during the sit-ins. Through Olgiati's "efforts and concern," a biracial committee was appointed and the lunch counter crisis was resolved. Kelley continued this practice, and with Robinson's guidance, commissioned another biracial committee to negotiate the desegregation of all Chattanooga businesses in the spring of 1962, according to Robinson.¹¹

The role of direction-action style protest, however, had been imperative. The issue of segregation would not have come to the fore in 1960 if not for the Howard students and the sit-

ins they conducted. Furthermore, when negotiations stalled, renewed protests applied the necessary pressure on city leaders and business owners to follow through with reforms. Continued protests throughout the next few years kept the issue in the spotlight.

The Chattanooga newspapers at the time failed to see the necessity of the sit-in demonstrations and could not forgive the commotion they caused. Ochs and Anderson repeatedly denounced the demonstrations, and warned that if they did not soon end, the city would descend into chaos. News reporters modeled this viewpoint with stories that detailed the fights and shouting matches at the expense of presenting the views of the participants. Thus, Chattanooga reporters revealed their commitment to civilities, which blinded them to the bigger issue of civil rights. The journalists almost always led their stories with whether there were any “disturbances,” “disorder,” or arrests. By framing the sit-ins in this way, the reporters spoke to the Southern fear of violence and downplayed the intent of the Howard students who were pushing to overhaul Jim Crow laws. Their preoccupation with civilities demonstrated the extent to which the journalists, despite their reputation as objective witnesses of history, participated in the prescribed racial etiquette of the day: they exalted white male leaders, whom the journalists saw as responsibly handling the sit-ins; and they ignored the perspective of the Howard students, who endured jeers from white students and the hardship of getting arrested.

Nevertheless, the reporting was significant because the newspapers were dedicating front-page space for weeks at a time to the Howard students and their demonstrations. For decades white newspapers had ignored the black community. But with the sit-ins and the resulting crisis situation downtown, the journalists were forced to consider the protests newsworthy. With extended coverage of them, the newspapers helped transfer pressure on city officials to follow through with reforms. In a day in age when most families subscribed to a local

newspaper, such extensive coverage of a civil-rights protest, however shallow, would have been hard to ignore. Although the reporters rarely interviewed the students, they noticed their dress and comportment. Compared to the “duck-tailed” and boisterous white students, the Howard students seemed well-groomed and dignified, a powerful image that made the case for segregation increasingly difficult to support. As the racial barrier was felled at the dime stores—and without any significant violence—the progressive argument for gradualism was also beginning to diminish.

A few weeks after Barack Obama won election as the country’s first African American president, Chattanoogaans gathered in the Read House Hotel forty-eight years after the sit-ins to honor the Howard High class of 1960 and the role the students played in igniting the Civil Rights Movement. An editorial in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, a merged publication as of 1999, counted the evening as yet another sign of progress in an ongoing battle for civil rights. “That it took so long to celebrate these history makers is regrettable. But that we now do so with empathy and honor is very welcome progress.”¹²

NOTES:

 Abbreviations:

The *Chattanooga Times*: T

The *Chattanooga News-Free Press*: NFP

Introduction:

1. William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights, Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 99; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 272-274.
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5. *Ibid.*, 228.
6. Doug Cumming, *The Southern Press: Literary Legacies and the Challenge of Modernity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 155.
7. David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 118-121.
8. *Ibid.*, 121.
10. Martin Ochs, "Challenge to a City," T, February 25, 1960; Lee Anderson, "Decency in Control Once More," NFP, February 26, 1960
11. Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 1, 5, 6; 25, 26.
12. Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 223.
13. *Ibid.*, 226.
14. David Halbertsam, *The Children* (New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 724.
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16. *Ibid.*, 121, 198, 199, 200, 202,
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2. NFP, "Negroes Try No Follow-up on Sitdowns," NFP, February 20, 1960.
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 6. Lee Anderson, "A Mistake," NFP, February 20, 1960.
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 10. Fred Hixson, "Racial Fights Break Out in Market Street Store; 1 Negro, 11 Whites Arrested," T, February 24, 1960; NFP, "Supt. Letson Asks Students of Both Races to Avoid Downtown Area, Not Congregate," NFP, February 24, 1960.
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 17. Lee Anderson, "Goal for Human Relationships" NFP, February 24, 1960.
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 19. Fred Hixson, "20 Are Arrested," T, February 25, 1960; Springer Gibson, "Restraint Noted" T, February 25, 1960; T, "Foremen to Switch to Police Duty," T, February 25, 1960.
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 35. T, "22 Negro Youths Warned by Judge," T, May 25, 1960.
 36. Ibid.
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