

Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee,
and the Nation

By

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the Civil Rights Movement through the experiences of primarily two African American families with roots in Brownsville, Tennessee. This study, based on archival research and oral histories, chronicles three generations of citizens affiliated with the NAACP whose translocal civil rights struggles include both the South and urban North. It highlights various tactics individuals used to secure their rights and identifies African American entrepreneurship as a form of non-violent protest, focusing on the African American funeral home as a gateway enterprise which contributed to the establishment of other businesses or “staple institutions” that helped to sustain the Black community during segregation.

Keywords: African American history, Civil Rights Movement, American studies, southern history, Black entrepreneurship, women’s studies, community studies

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, Charles Allen Rawls, with gratitude.

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Introduction

I had been a member of the Humanities faculty at Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin, Tennessee, for about ten years before I decided to take a leave and pursue a doctorate. I enjoyed my classes—world literature, English composition, business English, English as a Second Language—and I loved my students. Some of them were first-generation college students—tobacco farmers paying tuition with income from their tobacco crops, some refugees from Sudan, representing the Lost Boys of Sudan. Others were immigrants from Bangladesh, and at least one student told me he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. My students and their lives were fascinating, and I was delighted to be a part of them. Still, I recognized that if I wanted to continue in higher education, I should earn a Ph.D.

I knew graduate students were expected to have original research ideas, so I decided that I would examine the role of the African American funeral home in the Civil Rights Movement. The development of this research project began to take shape in my American Studies (AMS) 801 class. By the time I enrolled in AMS 804, I started to feel like a bona fide graduate student. I had been to the Library of Congress and perused the NAACP papers housed there, so I began to see two paths to freedom emerge in my research. Moreover, a sort of ‘hybridity’ existed within the pursuit of full citizenship. Black entrepreneurship and civil rights organizations were both approaches to civil rights.

This revelation led me to examine my own life and the pivotal moments that made my experiences unique. I was the product of a kind of hybridity. As a child, I often broke open my piggy banks and walked uptown to Ben Franklin Ten Cent store to buy books. I had mostly “invisible” students to teach unless I was able to find some actual students among the children

who lived in the public housing complex near my house. On my trek uptown, I passed “the funeral home,” Rawls Funeral Home, and “the office,” Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. I generally slowed my pace to see if the hearse was parked in front of the building—which meant there would be a funeral later that day. My grandfather, who had founded the funeral home, did not want me hanging around since the funeral parlor was typically filled with men— in khakis, overalls, or preachers and insurance agents in suits sitting around, smoking, and “chewin’ the fat” as they say—just talking things over. Sometimes I stopped by the funeral home. I made sure that I spoke to all of the men in the parlor. Then I headed to Miss Renfro’s office. She was my grandfather’s secretary and a masterful gatekeeper. She would whisper, “He’s with a family,” which meant he was busy selling a funeral and that I should probably resume my walk to Ben Franklin.

While growing up, my siblings and I had our fill of Rawls Funeral Home because every Friday after Thanksgiving, we were required to participate in Rawls Funeral Home’s annual burial drive at First Baptist Church on Jefferson Street. It was a combination raffle, customer appreciation dinner, memorial service. Burial association members paid their annual \$3 policies which made them eligible for prizes—usually money with a television set as the final gift of the night. The hybridity was present, even at the burial drive. It opened with music by the Gospel Pearlettes. All of the members of the group had “Pearl” in their names, including Miss Pearlie Mae, a school teacher, and Miss Sarah Pearl, the pianist and hairdresser for the funeral home. After lots of gospel singing, a riveting sermon, and the benediction, “the drawing,” or the secular part of the night, began. Rawls Funeral Home staff set up their tables, brought out the barrel welded to a wooden base that tickets would be stuffed into, and then the winning ticket would be selected from after a good roll. It was a rural west Tennessee version of a lottery machine. Staff

pulled tickets out of sealed envelopes that they were holding for members unable to attend, while burial insurance agents and members pulled out their tickets as well. Some folks went to the kitchen for stew and crackers. I pulled out the stack of money-order checks that would be issued to winners. The bank had already typed in the amount on each check, so I had to be alert and not confuse, for example, prize number three, a \$50 check, with prize number four a \$100 check. We were usually exhausted after each burial drive, but our ritual included gathering at my grandparents' house for a recap of the event. There was always too much stew, so we had to box it up and distribute it to folks the next day.

Then in December, Golden Circle had an annual Christmas dinner. It was a bit more sophisticated as it was at the Brownsville Bank's Gold Room. People wore their "church" clothes or even festive outfits with sequins to celebrate the season and this annual banquet, which recognized Golden Circle agents and their productivity for the year. Miss Ruby, the cashier clerk at Golden Circle, was always in charge of decorations. In addition to the beautiful Brownsville Bank Christmas tree, Miss Ruby filled the room with seasonal décor. Tables were dressed with tablecloths, candles, and poinsettias. The banquet was free to the public and always included a delicious turkey and dressing buffet with turnip greens, string beans, potato salad, cranberry sauce, corn bread, rolls, iced tea, pecan pie, and my favorite, red velvet cake. Unlike the burial drive, whites attended Golden Circle banquets—the mayor, bank presidents, legislators. I remember cringing once when my grandfather, at the end of the banquet, stood to thank everyone. He thanked his "colored and white friends" for attending. An integrated social gathering was rare, even during my adolescence in Brownsville, and he remembered Brownsville when "the mob," that included the local sheriff, had lynched Elbert Williams, a local NAACP member.

In addition to books and Golden Circle and Rawls Funeral Home functions in my life, there was also the NAACP. My mother was the life membership chair of our local branch for decades, and my father served a term as its president. There were oratorical contests and Freedom Fund banquets, and, of course, the national conventions held annually. Occasionally, we made family trips to the conventions, depending on the location. My grandmother Maude and great-aunt Matt flew together each year, regardless of whether my parents attended, as did my aunt Garnetta who traveled by bus with her friend Mrs. Dunn and the delegation from Brooklyn. The national conventions were so unlike the events we had in Brownsville. We were small town, and some members had saved all year to pay their membership dues and purchase tickets for local fundraisers, but the national conventions were so grand. I remember wearing my floor-length dresses to the closing banquets and seeing people I had read about in books walking the aisles or speaking before me. I knew that Aunt Mildred, who was actually a cousin to both of my parents, organized these really great “parties,” but I did not know until years later how important she was to the NAACP and the Civil Rights Movement. Nor did I realize that conventions in fact were meant to blend the social and the political. I did know that at the end of an incredible week of meetings, keynote addresses, and banquets, there was a gathering, a sort of recap like the ones we had at my grandparents’ house in Brownsville, but on a much grander scale. A large hotel suite was filled with dapper men who had law degrees and vacationed in France; as well as sophisticated women who drank champagne and discussed apartheid in South Africa. They laughed over caviar or stood seriously near the baby grand piano brainstorming strategies for a new NAACP campaign. And I, a teenager from Brownsville was there—in the midst of such beauty and brainpower. The elegance and opulence filling swank hotel suites were as much a

part of the NAACP as the Freedom Fund banquets in Haywood County held in our high school gymnasium.

Each year I was able to experience different elements of both Black business and the NAACP. I began making “first calls” with my father, which meant that I would leave the house with him, sometimes in the middle of the night, go to the funeral home for the Suburban and stretcher, then head to the house or hospital for “the removal” where we would pick up the deceased member of a now grieving family and take him or her to the funeral home. I remember entering the hospital room of harmonica player Hammie Nixon, who had won international fame as a musician, and arriving at the small frame house of a family in Gadsden, Tennessee, then closing the bedroom door of the elderly man we would take from his bed to the funeral home. After my apprenticeship, I sat for the state funeral director’s examination and passed it. After college, I enrolled in Gupton School of Mortuary Science. The curriculum included such courses as anatomy, pathology, applied mathematics, history of embalming, and sociology.

Once during a discussion of race in the sociology class, a young white man who sat directly behind me raised his hand to comment. I turned around so that I could see him as he spoke. Chris Neighbors, looking in my face, remarked in his southern drawl, “Yeah, Blacks are inferior. They’re from Africa. They’re from the jungle. They’re used to chasin’ rabbits for food.” How ironic. How miseducated. And how hurtful. He and many of the young white men at the school had not been to college, but would use the school to earn their associates degrees. When they returned to their hometowns, they would become trade embalmers and work for, but not own, a firm. The only Black male in my cohort came from a funeral home family and would return to his family business. I finished the class with an A+ and graduated from Gupton with

honors, following the tradition of my grandfather C.A. Rawls and great uncle O.S. Bond, both funeral home owners and Gupton honors graduates.

My interaction with the NAACP was varied and allowed me to experience different dimensions of the association. For example, after ninth grade, I left Brownsville to live with my father's sister Joyce and her family in Teaneck, New Jersey. Half of my father's large family had migrated to the East Coast. From Teaneck, a trip in to "the city" was just a thirty minute drive over the George Washington Bridge. During my three years at Teaneck High School, Mildred provided tickets for us to attend dinners hosted by the national office. Sometimes the Spingarn Award was presented, and other times we just enjoyed the meal, the guest speakers, and the camaraderie. For my senior project at Teaneck High School, Mildred arranged for me to work at the national office with her. I took the bus and subway train to Columbus Circle and walked to Broadway. I felt such independence as I road into the city. For awhile I was the switchboard operator, like Uhura on the USS Enterprise, so I was the first voice callers heard when they contacted the national office. I was able to shadow Mildred as I sat in on different meetings and listened to discussions about civil rights issues, prison outreach, and convention planning. One summer Mildred hired my cousin Thomas Bond, whose father was president of the NAACP's Tennessee State Conference, and me to run the national office's boutique at the convention. For me, the boutique seemed to be the center of the convention. Thomas and I served our customers— answered questions, recommended books—and when business was slow were able to people-watch.

As I fast forward to 2011, I see how my research has evolved since AMS 804. My study is an examination of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and is a part of the scholarship on the long civil rights movement. It chronicles the experiences of three generations

of NAACP workers who have contributed on national and local levels in both southern and northern cities. It is a story of women as workers, both in business and civil rights organizations. My study also examines economic justice as a component of the Civil Rights Movement, not so much in terms of Blacks as consumers able to buy from whites, but as entrepreneurs empowered to contribute to human rights through employment opportunities and the organization of staple institutions to sustain Black communities. For example, sit-ins at Woolworth counters allowed Blacks to sit at lunch counters so that they could be served. The “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns made white retail owners aware of the importance of the Black dollar, but employment, *not* entrepreneurship, was the general focus. Segregation laws eventually changed because of the brave actions of these protestors; however, Blacks still needed an economic empowerment plan.

Using Rawls Funeral Home as a case study, I identify the Black funeral home as a “gateway enterprise” that paved the way for other businesses in the Black community, businesses that not only helped to create a solid infrastructure to support civil rights activities but that also served as a nonviolent form of protest during the struggle for equality. My work chronicles a Black family’s eighty-year history in business. I represent a woman defining her place in what has been a historically male-dominated business. As a licensed funeral director and embalmer, a graduate of Gupton School of Mortuary Science, a fourth-generation insider with some knowledge of Black business as well as the NAACP, I offer a unique perspective as I combine prior knowledge with archival and oral history research skills.

This research is a case study which focuses primarily on the lives of members of the Bond and Rawls families, two families with ancestral roots in Brownsville, Tennessee. The work spans four decades and begins by establishing the important contributions African Americans made as they created staple institutions and vital communities which sustained and nurtured their families despite the limitations of segregation during the Jim Crow era. As institutions such as schools, churches, and civil rights organizations were formed, Blacks practiced their citizenship through civic engagement within their own communities as they were frequently excluded from opportunities to obtain their political, social, and economic freedoms within mainstream society.

For example, local Black residents organized a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1939. However, after receiving a charter from the NAACP's national office, a white backlash resulted in the lynching of NAACP member Elbert Williams in 1940. A mob of white citizens that included the town's sheriff kidnapped Williams from his home while he was in his pajamas, tortured him, and threw his remains in the Hatchie River. The mob terrorized NAACP members, and several families fled the state.

The period following the murder of this thirty-one-year-old African American husband and laundry worker prompted a shift from the pursuit of political justice by local African Americans, who had planned to secure voting rights for upcoming national elections, to the pursuit of economic justice. A local funeral home became a gateway enterprise from which other businesses and staple institutions grew. By the 1950s, these businesses provided more than services to the Black community; they also put Brownsville on the "map" of Black entrepreneurship. Employment opportunities for African Americans grew, professional networks developed, and marketable skills increased.

As another generation of Black Brownsvillians matured, many migrated to other parts of the country, making contributions to their new communities across the nation. The Brownsville diaspora thus became a significant part of this study. The exodus of Brownsville natives to northern cities resulted in diverse experiences and new sites of growth, including private boarding schools, college and university campuses, multinational corporations, and national civil rights organizations. Although members of the second generation of Brownsvillians made their marks outside the South, others remained in Tennessee, building, growing, struggling, and surviving. From both groups and several generations emerged “political actors” who used their positions to acquire political and economic freedoms denied African Americans.

As Brownsville natives who had migrated earlier returned to their hometown in the late 1950s, another wave of political activism arose, beginning with efforts to secure voting rights denied Blacks in Haywood County since 1888, and the founding of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, in neighboring Somerville, Tennessee, the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, and the Haywood County branch of the NAACP. Again, a white backlash emerged, and economic reprisals were used as leverage to coerce Black sharecroppers from demanding their voting rights. “Tent City,” a makeshift settlement of displaced Black sharecroppers, emerged. Conditions were deplorable, and families lived a tenuous existence as they faced homelessness and unemployment.

Local and national relief eventually came, but local Blacks and their white allies were subject to physical violence and economic hardship. A convergence of the political and the economic developed as Blacks confronted the realities of their existence. Black sharecroppers as well as established Black business owners were at risk of retaliation. As the decade of the 1960s came to a close and segregation gradually ended, much work was still to be done to ensure

equality for all citizens. Nevertheless, the hybridization of political and economic interests produced a stronger shield against racism and white supremacy.

The following pages represent the life experiences, struggles, and triumphs of African Americans living in rural west Tennessee who used their resources to insist that they be recognized not only as full citizens but as human beings entitled to the inherent respect owed to all men and women. These citizens educated their progeny and inspired them to resist oppression and seek freedom using multiple means, means dictated by their intellectual and physical proclivity as well as the opportunities available to them.

Chapter 1: 'Not For Ourselves Alone'¹: Creating Community, Staple Institutions, and the Brownsville Branch of the NAACP, 1930s

*Can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by that instrument to the citizen? . . . We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word "citizens" in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race*² -From the United State Supreme Court Decision in Dred Scott v. Sanford

“Well, he was a very, very black man, and he came from Africa in a boat. My mother told me this. And he was sold to a Frenchman who allowed him to work and pay. I never did know how much he paid, but he bought his freedom. And he married a white woman. He had worked and saved his money, and he had land . . . oxen and . . . everything on the farm that anybody else had. And, when he died, he left each child thirty acres of land. That was grandfather.

“I was born December 5, 1895 in Washington, Hempstead County, Arkansas. Washington at that time had one of the very best private schools. The curriculum embraced the eighth grade and courses in advanced English, Latin, Greek, algebra, geometry, science, civics, history, music, and religion-- an unusual thing at that time. I had Latin in high school--Latin I, Latin II, Latin III, Latin IV, and in college I studied Virgil, Horace, Livy, and Cicero. My parents saw that I attended school. I, in turn, felt duty bound to see that my daughters were given that same opportunity. I have over fifty years' experience as a teacher. I believe everyone should

¹ Manifesto of the Niagara Movement 1905, in Julian Bond et al., NAACP: Celebrating a Century: 100 Years in Pictures (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith Publishing- Inc. NAACP and the Crisis Publishing Company, 2009), 19.

² See Dred Scott v. Sanford <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2933t.html> (Reproduced by permission of St. Martin's Press).

master mathematics as the universe is based on it. How do you think the world could turn over and over and over and keep on doing it? Of course, God. I believe in science, and I believe in God. I lie in bed sometimes and think how I would find the distance from that corner to that corner, testing my mind. God intended that as we pass this way, we maintain the human touch in thought, word, and deed. . . . I do not feel that I have a single enemy of my own making. So, today, I am the recipient of bounteous blessings, not material blessings, but blessings in material that may originate only from the Creator.”³

.....

On display at the Dunbar-Carver Museum in Brownsville, Tennessee, is a map of Haywood County dated 1877. The map is comprised of landmarks and discrete communities which make up this rural west Tennessee town, including such communities as Allen Station, Beech Grove, Hopewell, and Willow Grove, each with its own “ethos” and history. Even now, local residents often identify themselves and others as members of their respective neighborhoods, which were oddly segregated in that Blacks and whites often lived in the same vicinity, but boundaries were both rigid and fluid. White children, for example, might visit the farm of a Black family and swim in their pond along with Black children, but these children would not attend the same school. Pre-pubescent Black and white children often played together in rural areas, but children who lived within the city limits played with children in their respective neighborhoods, which were typically segregated.⁴

³ Interview by Dr. Armond Tollette with Mrs. Mattye Tollette Bond, 1982. Transcript is in possession of author.

⁴ The local residents typically use the word “community” to describe what most readers would consider a “neighborhood.” These communities or neighborhoods typically sought to be autonomous, independent, and distinct from the others while, at the same time, supporting each other.

The African American neighborhoods generally maintained three important “staple institutions,” the family, the church, and the school, which provided a foundation upon which other staple institutions emerged. “Staple institutions,” as I have conceptualized them, are fixtures typically found in a given neighborhood or community.⁵ They have filled specific needs for the community and have been especially important to residents confined to segregated neighborhoods. Some staple institutions may be traced to communities of enslaved Africans. For example, historian Suzanne E. Smith links the “slave funeral” to Black staple institutions:

[T]he slave funeral served as the foundation of several key elements of African American life, including the early origins of an independent black church, the organization of mutual aid and burial societies, and ultimately—through the establishment of the funeral industry—a very successful form of black entrepreneurship.⁶

Staple institutions offer economic, social, and psychological support for residents while nurturing, sustaining, and often preparing community members for entrance into the larger society in which they were excluded. These institutions have benefitted not only the Black communities of which they have been a part, but they have become sites that provide socio-cultural context for the African American experience. When studied, they give voice to African American ways of life integral to understanding the broader American experience.

Within the African American home, children learned to respect their elders and authority figures. They were introduced, often implicitly, to the concept of “mother wit,” which acknowledges the humanity of others and guides how individuals should treat one another. Family members learned to share resources, even when resources were scarce. The women,

⁵ “Staple institutions” is a concept inspired by “staple foods” as both help to sustain racial and ethnic communities. Both staple institutions and staple foods also reflect the history, values, and struggles of the people they have helped to sustain and empower.

⁶ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 26.

including their daughters, sisters, mothers, mothers-in-law, and grandmothers, quilted, canned, and cooked meals to nourish the family. The kitchen table became a place of sustenance but also a sanctuary where families shared ideas, plans, and even their sorrows. Fathers and some mothers, together with their children, planted food, plowed the fields and picked cotton. Men cut wood, built houses and slaughtered hogs together, ensuring that each family and their neighbors would have meat on their tables to sustain them during the winter.⁷

The church reinforced much of the “home training” parents taught within the family. As members of a human family created by one Supreme Being, embracing an extended family was an understandable social construction. Scriptures from the Bible that instructed Christians to love their neighbors and do for “the least of these” instilled in the members a sense of responsibility to fellow sojourners and those less fortunate. They prayed, and when burdened with life’s grief, poured out their souls to a heavenly Father, who recognized the virtues of patience and faith. Church members memorized scriptures from the Bible, and many developed leadership, organizational, and oratorical skills. They were encouraged to listen and to study the Word. As studying helped to prepare believers for the afterlife, education helped to prepare students for their places in society.⁸

⁷ This paragraph is filled with images based on conversations I have had with my father, his nine brothers and sisters, my grandparents, and local residents. My great-grandmother used to quilt and can with my grandmother. This continued with my aunts and grandmother. My maternal grandmother (Jo Bond) told me that on her wedding day, she put the finishing touches on the lace dress she had sewn by hand and made a batch of lye soap before the ceremony. See the essay that explains the significance of the kitchen by Barbara Smith, “A Press of Our Own: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 10 (1989), 11-13. Smith notes: “We chose our name because the kitchen is the center of the home, the place where women in particular work and communicate with each other.” Also see an unpublished essay by Zanice Bond, “The Wit and Wisdom of a West Tennessee Witchdoctor,” written in 1980, which describes life with “Shot,” the family housekeeper who first taught her about “mother-wit.”

⁸ See Betty Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

At school, children continued to practice what they learned at home and church. Teachers taught students to appreciate learning, and students understood that education or “book sense” could help them contribute to the welfare not only of their families and communities, but also of the larger world. In an unpublished essay, “At Hopewell School in 1945,” teacher Willie Bell Leigh Rawls affirmed, “I am employed by society for the guidance and improvement of mankind. . . .I must stress the value of preparedness: preparedness for gainful employment, which is done by hard work. A good citizen is only useful when . . . prepared.” Her assertions reflect the importance of preparedness, the individual’s obligation to society, and the responsibility to improve humankind.⁹

As these communities grew, both the staple institutions and the early training reinforced within them helped to shape and empower African American communities. From these institutions grew other staple institutions such as volunteer and fraternal organizations; benevolent and secret societies; burial associations, funeral homes, insurance companies; women’s clubs, literary societies, and Greek letter organization; and civic and civil rights organizations. These staple institutions provided individuals with economic support as well as cultural and social capital despite exclusion from the mainstream society. According to Suzanne E. Smith, for example, benevolent societies and fraternal orders were “founded primarily to assist fellow blacks through economic cooperation and to offer social support in times of need.” In a study of Seattle’s “Central District” from 1870 through the civil rights era, the historian Quintard Taylor challenged the studies of Black communities which define them based on “denial and exclusion.” Drawing from urban historian Blaine A. Brownell, who defined the common ethos as a “guiding complex of beliefs,” Taylor examined the institutions present in the

⁹ Willie Bell Leigh Rawls, “At Hopewell Church in 1945,” unpublished essay (1990), 2. Essay is in the possession of author.

Central District which helped to empower this Black community. He concluded: “The “African American community development process . . . was also forged . . . through their churches, fraternal orders, clubs, and sports activities [and] sought to retain and transform their rural values and sense of shared culture.” Taylor showed that the nightlife, theatre groups, churches, fraternal orders, women’s and men’s clubs, and the emphasis placed on education all reflect the “social nexus” which developed from the emerging community ethos.¹⁰

Descendants of early Brownsville, Tennessee, residents grew up to establish, join, and support such staple institutions, which remain foundational parts of the community. They were able to teach at universities, join sororities or fraternities designed to provide public service, and to establish insurance companies that offered health and life insurance to policyholders often excluded from mainstream companies. Entrepreneurs established businesses that provided jobs for the community, and activists supported civil rights organizations that would ensure equality for African Americans who struggled against their marginalization and oppression within the nation.¹¹

¹⁰ Suzanne E. Smith, To Serve the Living, 40; Quintard Taylor, The Forging of a Black Community Seattle’s Central District 1870 through the Civil Rights Era (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 135.

¹¹ In addition to my personal knowledge as a licensed funeral director and embalmer, as well as a former licensed life and health insurance agent, I have relied on many sources that have offered important scholarly discussions about Black businesses. I have listed a few. See Abram L. Harris, The Negro as Capitalist: A Study of Banking and Business Among American Negroes (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939); M.S. Stuart, An Economic Detour: A History of Insurance in the Lives of American Negroes (College Park, Maryland: McGrath Publishing Company, 1969); James M. Hund, Black Entrepreneurship (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970); Walter B. Weare, Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); Alexa Benson Henderson, Atlanta Life Insurance Company: Guardian of Black Economic Dignity (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990); Joseph A. Pierce, Negro Business and Business Education: Their Present and Prospective Development (New York: Plenum Press, 1995); Michael A. Plater, African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The Story of R.C. Scott (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996); Juliet E.K. Walker, The History of Black Business in America (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998); John Sibley Butler, Entrepreneurship and Self-Help among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Also see dissertations by Christopher Leevy Johnson “Undertakings: The Politics of African-American Funeral Directing,” Proquest Dissertations And Theses 2004. Section 0202, Part 0337

In this chapter, I will argue that despite the marginalization and systematic exclusion of African Americans from American society, Americans of African descent have actively participated in civic engagement. Civic engagement, often linked to staple institutions, helped to establish a pattern that prompted future generations to continue their community involvement. The staple institutions have provided cultural and social capital and functioned in ways that helped African Americans to cope with oppression and discrimination while at the same time preparing them for full participation in a democratic society.

Robert Putnam, the political scientist, has argued that marginalized groups are less likely to be civically engaged because they lack social capital. Conversations within the study of civic engagement discuss the extent to which ethnicity, social class, and marginality impede the desire to volunteer participate or engage. Scholars do not agree on this issue. This study supports scholarship that acknowledges the proliferation of civic engagement within the Black community. It reinforces the findings of researcher Gunnar Myrdal, who in *An American Dilemma*, published in 1944, has stated that, “Negroes are more inclined to join associations than whites.”¹²

Joe William Trotter, the historian, has bemoaned the lack of scholarly attention paid to fraternal orders and voluntary associations within the Black community and the significant role they have played in community development. The lack of scholarly attention is also true of the history of African American entrepreneurship. Black businesses such as funeral homes and insurance companies have been uniquely linked to fraternal and self-help organizations. Trotter

356 pages, [PhD dissertation] United States—South Carolina .University of South Carolina; 2004. Publication Number: AAT 3130454; and Kim Cliett Long, “Servant Leadership and the History of Royal Funeral Home, 1918-2008,” Proquest Dissertations and Theses 2008. Section 1443, Part 0703 120 pages Publication Number: AAT 3337673.

¹² Theda Skocpol et al., “African American Fraternalism: A Missing Chapter in the Story of U.S. Civic Democracy,” in Theda Skocpol et al., What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 6-7.

has criticized scholars for paying “insufficient attention to the role of black fraternalism as a form of civic engagement in American and African American life.”¹³ In fact, in terms of importance, he has ranked Black fraternal organizations alongside the Black church, reminding the reader that even the AME church “emerged from the work of Philadelphia’s Free African Society, a voluntary organization under the leadership of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones.” As Trotter has recognized, “These organizations . . . guarded members against hard times through the development of unemployment, health, burial, and widows’ funds.”¹⁴

Some scholars have examined the important role of what Trotter calls “communal ideas, beliefs and social practices” in slave societies, and some have “analyzed fraternal orders and mutual societies among free blacks.” Trotter has stated that researchers in the 1980s and 1990s “highlighted the role of black fraternal orders, benefit societies, and secret societies not only in the transition of blacks from slavery to freedom, but also from farm to factory and from the South to the Urban North and West.” He has suggested that the “self-transformation” of African Americans is indeed grounded in the “communal networks” present even within slave communities.¹⁵

Self-help organizations, including secret societies and fraternal organizations, share a powerful legacy with Black business history, as these organizations often had interweaving objectives designed to develop a more self-sufficient and empowered community. As an early staple institution, fraternal organizations frequently evolved into insurance companies. Burial associations provided funeral directors or entrepreneurs the necessary members and capital that either supported an existing funeral home or helped a new one to grow. Therefore, a discussion

¹³ Joe W. Trotter, “African American Fraternal Associations in American History: An Introduction,” *Social Science History*, 28 (Fall 2004), 355-366.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 361-362.

of fraternal organizations may also become an introduction to the history of African American businesses. Explicit in these studies is the “lift as we climb” approach, common to both self-help organizations and early Black-owned businesses.¹⁶

What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality developed from a “side project” for scholars involved in the Civic Engagement Project at Harvard University who examined voluntary associations in the U.S. As Theda Skocpol and others involved in the project discovered, the study of African American fraternal organizations provides a unique lens through which to understand African American participation in democracy. Their study has examined the important social, cultural, and economic roles which fraternal organizations played in the Black community. These organizations provided insurance for their members, “fostered entrepreneurial talents,” and “gave ordinary African American men and women virtually the only chances they might have to get elected to offices, to run organizations and to learn and exercise organizational skills.”¹⁷

African Americans have been marginalized in the history of this country, but the study of fraternal organizations tells stories of focused and actively involved citizens across the nation who were fully committed to the democratic process. Collectively, in fact, the membership moved forward boldly and with flair determined to overcome the limitations of oppression, segregation, and racism that often permeated the nation. Recognizing studies by early scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Howard Odum and Arthur Raper, whose work confirms civic engagement among African Americans that Putnam and other scholars seem to have ignored, Skocpol and her colleagues have concluded that “the assumption that African

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

Americans . . . found it hard to organize . . . flies in the face of much scholarship to the contrary- indeed, contradicts the standard judgment of earlier generations of scholars.”¹⁸

My study focuses on the life experiences of members of the Bond and the Rawls families, whose roots span seven generations in Brownsville, Tennessee. It traces the struggles, varied approaches to full-citizenship, and contributions of citizens who, while traversing the demands of the every day, sought political, social and economic justice for their families and communities. These individuals also prepared themselves to participate in a democratic and free America. Their lives and experiences are microcosms that show the importance of both adaptability and collaboration to effect change, themes germane to understanding the broader study of African American life. It documents the trajectory of an African American family with a history of nearly 150 years of civic engagement and nearly 100 of entrepreneurship.

Socially constructed racial designations initially thrust these families together. “Race” bound them together as brothers and sisters with a shared history of both oppression and survival. Migration and immigration patterns of white landowners to fertile lands in Tennessee determined the families’ literal and figurative place in the world. Then these individuals established deeper kinship ties within the bonds of matrimony and communities that cultivated neighbors, friendships, and extended family. Education, landownership and other trapping of success linked and separated families as they began to stake their claims to the American dream.

Formerly Chickasaw and Cherokee lands, Tennessee became the 16th state in the union in 1796. It was a slave state and a Confederate state. And the issue of race dominated state politics,

¹⁸ Skocpol *et al.*, What a Mighty Power We Can Be, 7.

including the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865,¹⁹ the passing of Tennessee's first act to enforce school segregation in 1866, and the legal prohibition of racial integration under the Tennessee State constitution in 1869.²⁰ Finally, in 1881, Tennessee enacted the South's first Jim Crow law which mandated segregation on railroad cars.²¹

Brownsville, Tennessee, established in 1824, is the county seat of Haywood County. It is a rural west Tennessee town located about 120 miles from Pulaski, birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, and 50 miles from Memphis, the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968. Haywood is one of only two counties in Tennessee where African Americans comprise the majority.²²

Brownsville was part of Tennessee's rural frontier where cotton production and slavery thrived. After the Civil War, sharecropping and tenant farming replaced slavery as the labor system that undergirded the county's economy. This system kept landless African Americans beholden to landowning whites who opposed racial equality. In the midst of a relatively harmonious existence within each community loomed the storm of discrimination and intimidation. The so-called etiquette of race relations in the South, including the lack of legal redress and protection under the law, kept both landless and landowning Blacks at a disadvantage, always in a tenuous social, political and economic position. Still, African

¹⁹ David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism* (New York/London: New Viewpoints, 1981), 8-9. Also see PBS's "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: Jim Crow Stories, The Ku Klux Klan" which says the Klan was founded in the "winter of 1865-1866." www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories.org_kkk.html.

²⁰ Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, "School Desegregation in Tennessee 12 Districts Released from Desegregation Orders 17 Districts Remain Under Court Jurisdiction" (April 2008) <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/TNDESEGFULL.pdf> (accessed January 23, 2011).

²¹ See Tennessee State Library and Archives http://www.tn.gov/tsla/exhibits/blackhistory/timelines/timeline_1877-1882.htm. Also see Stanley J. Folmsbee, "The Origin of the First 'Jim Crow' Law," *The Journal of Southern History* 15 (May 1949), 235-247.

²² Fayette County, which borders Haywood to the west, is the other county where African Americans outnumber whites.

American leaders, committed to the promise of America, developed local communities and emerged from the shadow of Jim Crow.²³

The descendants of Mortimer (Maltimore) and Maryetta Farrington Bond have roots in the Beech Grove community. The Bond patriarch Maltimore Bond was born to his mother Bobbie Bond, who was enslaved on the plantation of his father, Thomas Bond. According to family history, Maltimore married Maryetta Farrington, the daughter of Anika and Green Farrington, and bought his freedom several years before the Civil War. Determined to earn a living and contribute to his community's development, Maltimore used his skills as a brick mason to assist in the construction of the Brownsville- Haywood County Courthouse, still the focal point of Brownsville's town square. In 1867, he was appointed chair of the trustee board selected to negotiate the purchase of land for the establishment of the Brownsville Colored School. The local committee, adamant about its plans for a school, informed the Freedmen's Bureau in a letter that it would establish a school with or without Bureau funding. The deed for the school was placed in Bond's name, with people in the community contributing \$900 of the \$1175 needed to build the school, a symbol of their commitment as well as their empowerment. Unlike most schools for African Americans at the time, this school was a two-story building with large windows that provided natural light for the students.²⁴

The Bond patriarch established a precedent for future generations who would help to build their respective communities, embrace education, and prepare themselves as well as their

²³ For more information on the "New South," see the following: C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) and Edward L. Ayers, The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁴ Dorothy Granberry, "Origins of an African-American School in Haywood County," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 56 (Spring 1997), 44-55. Also see Dr. Granberry's speech to the Brownsville Rotary Club that discusses the establishment of the school and the Freedmen's Bureau document, available online at <http://vimeo.com/18452365>.

progeny for life beyond exclusion. Maltimore and wife Maryetta raised five children. Their son Andrew James “Buck” Bond married Aurelia Anderson Bond, the daughter of her enslaved mother Jane Anderson and her father John Sevier, a white plantation owner.²⁵ Andrew served as deputy sheriff of Haywood County during the Reconstruction era. Bond, his wife Aurelia, Murph Currie, and other community members organized the Beech Grove Church of Christ in 1883. The church also maintained the Beech Grove Cemetery, a site of Black history and commemoration. Murph Currie became a Haywood County magistrate and the first minister for the congregation. The church became a focal point in the community where individuals strengthened friendships with their neighbors, studied religious teachings, and discussed social issues. Andrew and Aurelia Bond were the parents of five sons: Andrew James “Bud,” Ollie Seahorn, Johnnie, Maltimore “Sweet,” Garnett; and one daughter, Etta.²⁶

Etta Bond, “Sis Etta” as she was called by her family, provided a unique example of rural southern womanhood to her rural southern family. She left Tennessee to study in Kentucky then returned to Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee. Etta married three times and bore no children. She cut her hair while being admonished that a woman’s glory was in her hair, thus challenging restrictive gendered religious teachings. She also worked outside the home, earning a living as principal of Lester School for nearly twenty years.²⁷ Lester was one of three Rosenwald schools, funded by the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, in Brownsville. Its building plan was a “four-teacher type” on two acres of land donated by the Lesters, an African American family and

²⁵ Her father is not to be confused with her half-brother Dr. John Sevier who practiced medicine in Brownsville nor the well-known Tennessee politician Governor John Sevier. Oral family history and genealogy records do indicate kinship ties with the governor.

²⁶ Of Maltimore and Maryetta’s five children, only the descendants of Andrew James “Ole Man Buck” Bond will be the subject of this study. For a discussion on Bond family history, see Interview by Larry Crow of HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York City. Also, for more information on Murph Currie and Buck Bond as sheriff, see Marc Crawford, “Haywood, A 50-Year Voting Void,” *Jet*, 16 (October 1, 1959), 12-13.

²⁷ Telephone interview by author with Andrew B. Bond, March 24, 2010.

longtime residence of the area. The total cost of the school was \$7,500. Each year public funds provided \$4,600, Rosenwald Funds provided \$1,100, and African American residents, committed to the school's survival despite their limited income, provided \$1,800²⁸

Ollie Bond, the only other sibling to attend college, also studied at Lane College where he met fellow student, Mattye Tollette. She was from a pioneering family in Arkansas. Tollette's grandparents had asserted their citizenship rights against a hostile racial environment. According to family oral history, her paternal grandfather, Stephen Tollette, was born on the African continent and brought to the United States via the Middle Passage. He purchased his freedom from a Louisiana planter outside Shreveport. Then he and his wife Hannah, an Irish immigrant, moved to Arkansas. He purchased 300 acres of land, opened a blacksmith's shop, and made Arkansas home for his wife and their children.²⁹ Mattye's maternal grandparents were Washington Crofton, an enslaved Choctaw originally from Neshoba County, Mississippi, and Ellen Emmons Crofton, enslaved on the plantation of her father Daniel Emmons, a physician in Mississippi. Washington and Ellen met while enslaved in Alabama, but eventually made their way to Arkansas. In 1875, Washington filed his Final Affidavit Required of Homestead Claimants to secure forty acres of land for his family.³⁰ Ellen Crofton bought and sold horses and cultivated cotton alongside her husband, and she continued to manage the family farm after his death.³¹

²⁸ See Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Care File Database <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search>, last accessed August 20, 2011.

²⁹ Interview by Armond Tollette, Jr. with Mattye Tollette Bond, 1982, in the possession of author.

³⁰ Denise L. Johnson, a Crofton descendant and genealogist, has cross-referenced family stories, interviews (with descendants of both enslaved and slave-owners), and eleven years of archival research on the Crofton family of Tollette, Arkansas. Tollette, Arkansas Heritage-Family Tree <http://tollettear.tribalpages.com>.

³¹ Interview by Armond Tollette with Mattye Tollette Bond, May 12, 1999. Also see October 27, 1887, bill of sale in author's possession.

In the 1800s, Mattye Tollette's parents, Sanford Tollette and Caldonia Crofton Tollette, were responsible for the establishment of a post-Reconstruction, all-Black town, Tollette, the small Arkansas town which still bears the Tollette name. The family established staple institutions including a church, a store, and a public school. Mattye's father died while he was still in his forties, and her mother, with six children to rear, became postmistress of the United States Post Office that had been established in 1893. As a child, Matt went to work with her mother at the post office. She learned to read at an early age and enjoyed reading at the post office. It was also at the post office that she began her love affair with numbers and mathematics.

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At age fifteen, her mother insisted that she sit for the teacher's examination. Matt scored 87 percent and began teaching at an early age to help provide income for the family. So, when Mattye arrived in Jackson, Tennessee, to attend Lane College, she brought a legacy of empowerment, civic engagement, and community development.³³ She excelled in her classes, and she also admired Ollie Bond, her handsome classmate, who challenged her intellectual sensibilities. Mattye and Ollie married in 1918, just before Bond entered the military. As World War I dominated the minds of many young men, Ollie's white uncle, Dr. John Sevier, who maintained a relationship with his half-sister, Aurelia, and her family, guaranteed that only one of Aurelia and Andrew's sons would have to report to duty during World War I. Ollie agreed to

³² Julian Bond and Sondra Kathryn Wilson, eds. Lift Every Voice and Sing A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem (New York: Random House, 2000), 29. Discussion of the post office and the death of Sanford Tollette are included in "Brief Sketch of the Life of Mattye T. Bond" (unpublished) in possession of author.

³³ Mattye Tollette Bond, "Brief Sketch of the Life of Mattye T. Bond," unpublished in possession of author.

serve so that his brothers could remain in Tennessee to work the family farms and attend to their mother.³⁴

After serving in World War I, Ollie returned to his family and the segregated community he had left behind. John Bond, a relative and proprietor of the Colored Mercantile Association, had recently died and left Ollie the funeral business. John's brother, Hopson Bond, who was a likely heir to the business, had left Tennessee as a young man. Years earlier, Hopson decided to cross the color line and begin a new life as a white man in St. Louis, Missouri.³⁵

Ollie completed his studies at Lane College while operating the funeral business from his home. Patrons were friends and neighbors who frequented the home for both professional and personal reasons. In fact, funeral directors' responsibilities moved beyond solely caring for the dead. Grief counseling, money management advice for bereaved families suffering financial loss, reading government policies regarding flags, headstones or other entitlements for U.S. veterans all made up the duties of a funeral director.³⁶

Living in what was the apartheid South made African American funeral directors even more important to the survival of the community, and it was understood in their unwritten job

³⁴ Interview by Larry Crow of The HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York, NY. Also see Mattye Tollette Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life: AN NAACP Memoir" *The New Crisis*, 107 (March/April 2000), 20-21. It is interesting to note that Dr. Sevier was the draft board physician on site who administered the physical examinations to determine eligibility for the military. Also according to Aurelia's grandsons, her father sent Christmas gifts/care packages, even heads of cattle for her family. Telephone conversation with Andrew Bond October 12, 2011; telephone conversation with Geraldus Bond, October 12, 2011.

³⁵ Hopson Bond's "passing" and migration to St. Louis was common knowledge among family and local Black residents. During a recent conversation between Cynthia Rawls Bond and Katherine Rawls, related to Hopson Bond by marriage and blood respectively, they recalled the confusion at Hopson's funeral among his white friends when so many "newly-discovered" African Americans "friends" (relatives) appeared at his funeral to pay their last respect. Conversation on July 4, 2011.

³⁶ Interview by author with Cecil M. Giles of Rawls Funeral Home, April 10, 2011. As a licensed funeral director and embalmer, I have personal knowledge of these duties as well.

description that they would “serve the living and the dead.”³⁷ As Suzanne Smith, the historian, has argued “African American funeral directors’ relationship to the living was (and is) as important as their relationship to the dead.”³⁸ Limited access to medical treatment, attorneys,³⁹ and other professional consultants made the funeral director a vital resource. For these reasons, farmers with documents to decipher, couples with legal matters to solve, individuals with financial woes, or victims of social injustices often came to the local mortician for support. It was difficult work, and early funeral records indicated that payments for services rendered were not always in cash but often in the form of food grown in family gardens or meat killed on family farms.⁴⁰

As Matt Bond recalled, her husband still advocated for Black farmers who had been exploited economically. Some farmers encountered planters unwilling to provide wages for honest work, while others needed assistance completing insurance forms or claims.⁴¹ According to Marion Bond Jordon, “Tenant farmers, the poor whites, and blacks would come [to the Bond home] when . . . they were in trouble [because] if they received checks from the Government, the landowners would often take advantage of them because they could hardly read or write” Bond continued to serve his community but abhorred the laws that excluded African Americans from social and political justice.⁴²

³⁷ See Suzanne Smith, To Serve the Living: History of African American Funeral Home and the Civil Rights Movement (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

³⁸ Suzanne Smith, “To Serve the Living: The Public and Civic Identity of African American Funeral Directors” in Marguerite S. Shaffer, ed., Public Culture: Diversity, Democracy and Community in the United States, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 251.

³⁹ Bobby L. Lovett, Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee University (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 15. Note that Gunnar Myrdal is quoted about the scarcity of Black lawyers in the South and how often they were prohibited from appearing in court.

⁴⁰ Funeral record book in the possession of Mildred Bond Roxborough, NYC, NY.

⁴¹ Mattye T. Bond, “A Memoir,” June 1960, unpublished 3, in author’s possession.

⁴² See Marion B. Jordon “Commitment to Human Rights” in Marcy Babbitt, ed. Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1975), 120.

On February 13, 1920, Ollie and Matt welcomed to the world their first daughter, Vivian. The following year, Marion Ollie was born. Then in 1926, the couple's youngest daughter, Mildred, was born. Despite the legalized segregation and systemic racism that surrounded them, they never doubted that they were the equal of other human beings. Their family background, parents' strong convictions, and their independent spirits helped to shape their worldview. The children listened to stories about ancestors whose civic engagement challenged exclusion and inequality. In school and at home, they learned about leaders whose actions moved the nation closer to democracy and equal justice.⁴³

Since both Matt and O.S. valued education and family, each week they carved out family time for their children to read and discuss the works of writers like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.⁴⁴ The children learned the words to "Lift Every Voice and Sing," memorized scriptures, poems and famous speeches. Matt, the consummate educator, never tired of her role as teacher, whether at home or in her classroom at Haywood County Training School. In 1926, three of Matt's young relatives arrived from Tollette, Arkansas, including fourteen-year-old cousin Maude Ellis Crofton who came to live with the burgeoning Bond family after the death of her parents Caesar Crofton⁴⁵ (Matt's uncle) and Dutch Hill Crofton, who had died years earlier of tuberculosis. Maude was promptly enrolled in Haywood County Training School and quickly settled into her new home with "Uncle Ollie" and "Cousin Matt." Maude knew her family had high moral, civic, and academic expectations. She and her female cousins in Tollette used to imagine what the future had in store

⁴³ Interview by Maude Y. Bond with Mildred Bond Roxborough for StoryCorp. CD in author's possession. Also see Janus Adam, "Born and Bred for the NAACP," *The New Crisis* 107 (March/April, 2000), 18-22.

⁴⁴ Bond and Wilson, eds. *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, 29.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, his full name was Caesar Sampson Raleigh Jackson Crofton.

for them, knowing that “taking in washing” was often the only option for rural African American women without means or education.⁴⁶

Maude had worked at the post office in Tollette with her aunt Caldonia (Matt’s mother) and, like Matt, learned early the importance both of literacy, as she sorted letters, newspapers and magazines, and the value of money, as she learned to count at the post office. Maude was a welcome addition to the O.S. and Mattye T. Bond family in Tennessee, as she brought compassion for her family and a keen sense of diplomacy. In the early mornings, she often sat by her bedroom window conjugating verbs for Latin class. One frigid winter morning Maude observed a young man walking down the railroad tracks. His jacket was snug and tattered. He walked with urgency in his bones as his breath appeared whenever it hit the cold air. Maude watched him from her window for several days and soon decided he was the man she would marry.⁴⁷

As providence would have it, this same young man Charles Allen Rawls had captured the attention of Matt and Ollie, who had begun teaching and coaching football, at Haywood County Training School. “Al” was an intelligent and charismatic student whom they both admired. The couple became mentors to Rawls whose family also had history in the community. Rawls’s grandfather, Daniel Rawls, was born into slavery on the Dempsey Nowell farm located just east of Brownsville in 1836. Daniel’s mother Liz was identified as an enslaved “mulatta” and his father was “Ole man Jim White.” When Daniel was sixteen years old, he was listed among the property in Dempsey Nowell’s last will and testament dated November 4, 1852. Nowell’s daughter Emily Nowell Rawls, wife of Dr. Joseph Rawls, inherited Daniel in the will which read:

⁴⁶ Conversation with the author and her grandmother, Maude E. Rawls.

⁴⁷ Conversation with author and her grandmother Maude E. Rawls in 1980. This story is a part of the Crofton-Rawls family oral history and has been shared with several generations now.

“I give and bequeath unto Emily Rawls... land known by the name of the McKindree tract . . . and a Negro boy Daniel.” In his youth, Daniel was badly burned in a fire. Dr. Rawls provided such care during this crisis that, upon emancipation, Daniel decided to keep Rawls as his surname.⁴⁸

In 1860, one year before the Civil War erupted, Daniel Rawls married Harriet Stewart. She was the daughter of an enslaved mother, Mary Stewart, and a prominent landowning father from the Stewart plantation in Brownsville. Both Dan and Harriet experienced the indignities of enslavement and life as “property” with little control over their own lives. They lived to experience emancipation and acquire property, giving their heirs an opportunity to inherit land and distinguishing themselves from sharecropping families who were generally more vulnerable to the whims of white supremacists.⁴⁹

Dan was a carpenter by trade, but the couple owned a cast-iron corn-sheller and made their own sorghum. According to the couple’s granddaughter, they were both “peddlers,” progenitors of enterprising small business owners. The couple raised cattle and sold beef in the summer. Harriett, a “little bitty woman,” made lye soap in a large cauldron then packaged it for selling. She also marketed a pain reliever from an original recipe that included turpentine and other ingredients. In addition to her homemade blends, she sold garden seeds and Watkins liniment.⁵⁰ Unlike the iconic image in American culture of the “Watkins men,” donned in their suits driving horse drawn wagons, Harriett provided a different image of the Watkins

⁴⁸ Last Will and Testament of Daniel Rawls reprinted in Rawls Family Reunion Booklet in possession of author. The Dan and Harriet Stewart Rawls Story: From Slavery to Success Rawls Family Reunion “Coming Home and Re-Connecting, (July 2-4, 2004), 17-D. Historical Census Data Haywood County, Tennessee 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910 and oral history narratives also included.

⁴⁹ See Rawls Family Reunion booklet The Dan and Harriet Stewart Rawls Story: From Slavery to Success Rawls Family Reunion “Coming Home and Re-Connecting” (July 2-4, 2004), 6-10.

⁵⁰ Interview by Yvonne Mesler with Ada Margaret Neal, June 24, 1999, Brownsville, Tennessee.

salesperson. She, a 4'10" caramel-colored woman, put on her work dress, pinned her hair on top of her head, and drove her "hack" through Brownsville. She sold her products door-to-door while networking with her customers and local residents. Upon Dan Rawls's death, he left in his last will and testament 65 acres of land to her and the two youngest of their fifteen children.⁵¹

Al's father, Ned Rawls, was the eldest son of Dan and Harriett Rawls. Ned married Texanna Love, daughter of Margaret and Monroe Love, also natives of Brownsville. Ned and Texanna Rawls owned a farm in the Allen Station/Snipes Grove community which sustained their family. As a child, Al worked on the family's farm, picking and chopping cotton, but he found his niche in the shade, entertaining his siblings and the hired workers with his oratorical skills. He memorized sermons and speeches, then recited them to his fellow workers, not unlike the lecturers in cigar factories.⁵²

Al, the seventh child, was said to have been "born with a veil." According to African American folklore, the seventh child born with a veil is gifted with wisdom or insight that could lead to great accomplishments.⁵³ Al's parents, who adhered to this belief, occasionally indulged

⁵¹ Ada Margaret Neal explained that a hack was a buggy that would seat two or three people and two horses were often used. According to an Independent Watkins Associate, "The 'Watkins man' brought more than products to his customer base. In the early days he was one of the few forms of communication in rural America, relied upon for bringing the latest news. . . . See www.associatetrainer.com/index.php?option=com Watkins Associate Training. For pictures of "Watkins men" see, <http://donnaray56thewatkinsbuildings.blogspot.com>. Last Will and Testament of Daniel Rawls reprinted in Rawls Family Reunion Booklet in possession of author. The Dan and Harriet Stewart Rawls Story: From Slavery to Success Rawls Family Reunion "Coming Home and Re-Connecting, (July 2-4, 2004), 17-D. Historical Census Data Haywood County, Tennessee 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910 and oral history narratives also included. Information also from interview with Ada Margaret Rawls Neal, granddaughter. June 24, 1999. The two youngest children named in the will had remained on the farm to work the land.

⁵² Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 2011, Brownsville, Tennessee. This story is a part of Rawls-Bond family oral history; also for more on the lecturers in cigar factories, see Nilo Cruz, Anna in the Tropics (NY: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 2003).

⁵³ See Eula Youngblood, The Seventh Child of Nod (Quartz Hill, CA: Quartz Hill Publishing House, 2007), 102. The author noted that some children "arrived still in the placenta sack. . . cultures call this being born with a veil In African and German folklore, this was an omen of special powers." Also see Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition by Yvonne P. Chireau who wrote, "Being born with a caul, the amniotic veil covering the face of the newly discovered infant, was interpreted as evidence that one was gifted with enhanced

him, while instilling in him their values and work ethic. Al's father did put an end to his orations, but not before Al earned the name "Preach," which stuck with him into adulthood. Ned suffered from kidney disease and died prematurely, leaving Texanna to raise eleven children alone, and never witnessing his children's accomplishments.⁵⁴

Al's eldest brother, George Washington "Buddy" Rawls, immediately assumed the role of provider for the family. At an early age, the boys began working outside the family farm. They valued education because it satisfied human curiosity and challenged intellect as well as better positioning African Americans for leadership roles in the larger society. Still, work, a survival tool, which helped to satisfy the immediate needs of the family, was education's biggest competitor. They also understood the significance of landownership and financial independence as they were only two generations removed from slavery, and they had witnessed the injustices their landless neighbors, as sharecroppers and tenant farmers, encountered during the Jim Crow era. Al's early morning treks down the railroad tracks, which first attracted Maude's attention, were to his job on the Anderson farm. Al milked cows for Professor Anderson, a white landowner and educator, who also admired young Al's initiative.⁵⁵

Ollie and Matt introduced Maude to Al. After a brief courtship, they married in the home of O.S. and Matt Bond on October 27, 1927. Ollie's work as a funeral director and teacher was very demanding. He encouraged Al to enroll in Gupton Jones School of Embalming in Nashville, Tennessee. As historian Matthew Whitaker has stated, "Teachers, attorneys, and physicians did not monopolize the black professional class throughout the United States. . . . By virtue of their training, skill, service, and limited numbers, morticians were elevated to the status of

insight into the visible realm." Yvonne P. Chireau, Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 23.

⁵⁴ Interview by author with Cynthia Bond, April 10, 2011, Brownsville, Tennessee.

⁵⁵ Conversation between author and her maternal grandmother, Maude E. Rawls.

professionals in the minds of many. . . . Undertakers were among the few expert and accomplished individuals in black communities whose careers opened doors to substantial wealth, authority, and opportunities for representative leadership.”⁵⁶

Having a licensed funeral director and embalmer not only would add credibility and a professional edge to the business, but also it would ensure Al’s future should he pursue funeral service as a vocation. Gupton-Jones School of Mortuary Science was founded on June 8, 1920, by Lawrence A. Gupton. Rawls recalled that there were hundreds of white students at the school and only six or seven Black students. Upon completion of the program, he graduated with honors. Ollie made Al a business partner and changed the name of the funeral home to Bond and Rawls.⁵⁷ After Al graduated, Ollie left for Gupton- Jones and returned to Brownsville as an honors graduate as well.⁵⁸

The 1930s were difficult for most Haywood Countians, both Black and white. A longtime resident recalled waking up at 4 a.m., one hour earlier than her white competition who began scavenging the trash cans for meat from the butcher shop at 5a.m.⁵⁹ Not unlike landless Black sharecroppers who were dependent on white landowners for their livelihood and shelter, prospering Blacks who owned their own homes, farm land, or businesses were also vulnerable to white control and even violence. Moreover, the opportunity, or lack thereof, to earn a living was

⁵⁶ Matthew Whitaker, Race Works: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 32.

⁵⁷ Interview by James A. Baxter with Charles Allen Rawls, July 4, 1977, Brownsville, Tennessee. I have spoken with representatives of Gupton-Jones School of Mortuary Science in Atlanta, Georgia. Student records and school documents have not been archived and I was not allowed access to the records because of privacy issues involving student records. Suzanne Smith has noted that most embalming schools were not segregated. I am awaiting a response from Gupton-Jones officials to confirm or explain the type of segregation the school practiced.

⁵⁸ Interview by Larry Crow of History Makers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, NY, NY.

⁵⁹ Interview by author with Lurleen Trigg, March 20, 2005, Brownsville, Tennessee.

a tangible equalizer. Blacks were not to acquire too much or think too well of themselves. They were to know their place.⁶⁰

For example, African Americans traveling through west Tennessee were forewarned not to drive through Brownsville. As a result, many drove miles out of the way to bypass Haywood County's Sheriffs, Tip and Jack Hunter. Blacks driving new cars were often arrested on bogus charges; whites certainly resented Blacks who seemed to have more than they. Moreover, the competition for limited resources was fierce, and even the most poorly educated and economically impoverished whites believed they were entitled, by virtue of their whiteness, to more liberties, rights, and opportunities unavailable to Blacks. The feelings of invincibility and absolute power that accompanied whiteness gave officials like Tip or Jack Hunter unparalleled confidence, particularly as they interacted with Blacks, who remained defenseless against political and law enforcement officials.⁶¹

The daily lives of African Americans in Brownsville were filled with uncertainty, and they were suspicious when unexplained events occurred, especially events that were potentially harmful or life-threatening. Blacks labeled "troublemakers" because of their stance on civil rights were carefully watched, and Blacks who appeared to be "uppity" by local whites were

⁶⁰ American racism during the Jim Crow era shares similarities with the system of apartheid which existed in South Africa. Obvious examples include miscegenation laws, segregated public accommodations, curfews, and above all, white supremacy. The following books are very helpful in understanding these similarities: John W. Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South African and the American South (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); George M. Fredrickson, White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); George M. Fredrickson, Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); George M. Fredrickson, Racism: A Short History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Bertram Wilbur Doyle, The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study of Social Control (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937); Jessie Daniels, White Lies: Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse (NY: Routledge, 1997); Ian Haney López, White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

⁶¹ Tip Hunter led the mob that lynched Elbert Williams, and Jack Hunter was killed in the yard of a Black man known to be humble and quiet. Dissertation chapters two and three respectively include discussions about the infamous Hunter brothers in Brownsville. Conversations and oral histories among elders within the Black community are full of Jack and Tip Hunter stories.

subject to being “put in their place.” When Matt graduated from Lane College in the spring in 1933, the Bonds returned to their home to find that their house had been destroyed by fire. Only the chimney remained. The house had been custom built for the family. Matt’s brothers, contractors from Arkansas, had spent months in Brownsville building the house to meet Matt’s specifications. Rumors circulated as to whether the fire was a result of arson or faulty wiring. The Bonds suspected arson since the house had few, if any, electrical wires. They were put on alert that vigilantes were aware of their academic accomplishments, business dealings, and their efforts to enhance the status of Haywood County’s Black citizens.⁶²

Since returning from WWI, completing Lane College, operating the funeral home, and working at Haywood County Training School, Ollie had begun community organizing. First, he helped to organize a chapter of the American Legion in Brownsville. Then he organized a committee of concerned citizens who presented a petition to the city council demanding that Blacks’ federal right to vote be honored in Haywood County. Because Blacks had not been allowed to vote in Haywood County since 1888, this committee of concerned citizens posed a powerful threat to Brownsville’s white minority. Tennessee historian Dorothy Granberry has confirmed, “The loss of political power by blacks in Haywood County began in earnest during the election of 1888. . . [with]. . . a Democratic plan of election fraud that eliminated thousands of Republican votes throughout West and Middle Tennessee.” Thus, whites in Brownsville had governed the town for decades without any participation from African American residents, who had been systematically denied the right to vote.⁶³

⁶² Interview by Larry Crow of The HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York City.

⁶³ Dorothy Granberry, “When the Rabbit Foot was Worked and Republican Votes became Democratic Votes: Black Disfranchisement in Haywood County, Tennessee,” Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 56 (Spring 2004), 35.

The Bond family relocated to a home in the same neighborhood and their lives continued; but, if anything, the Bonds became more overt about their disdain for the oppression they faced. Still, they were keenly aware of the fact that their personal advancements as well as community mobilization had become extremely dangerous endeavors.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, Maude and Al Rawls had moved into their own home on Bradford Street. Maude attended Lane College, and after two years, began teaching at Willow Grove School. In 1933, Al established Rawls Funeral Home and operated it from their residence at 201 Bradford Street. His respect for his mentor O.S. Bond remained a constant throughout his life, but Al could perhaps see the proverbial “handwriting on the wall” as he continued to expand his business. In 1935, he began the Rawls Mutual Benevolent Burial Society. Al later purchased the pasture on which he used to milk cows from his former employer, Professor Anderson. This land became the site of Rosenwald Cemetery, a cemetery which Al named to honor the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, whose schools educated poor Blacks in Brownville and throughout the South.⁶⁵

Also in the 1937, Rawls Funeral Home, together with the Rawls Mutual Benevolent Society, began hosting an annual burial drive. Members or subscribers paid ten cents per week to maintain their burial insurance. Not only did this marketing tool encourage members to pay their burial insurance premiums, but also the burial drive provided African Americans an opportunity for fellowship and celebration. No other event, other than the Haywood County Colored Fair, which ended in the late 1950s, attracted as many participants. The burial drives were especially

⁶⁴ Mattye T. Bond, “A Memoir,” unpublished June, 1960, 1-4, in author’s possession.

⁶⁵ For more details on Julius Rosenwald see Peter M. Ascoli, Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

important because Blacks confronted such cruel and demeaning treatment while interacting with white merchants for foods, goods, and supplies as well as for burying their dead. On the Friday following Thanksgiving, during harvest season, Rawls Funeral Home staff hosted what locals referred to simply as “the drawing.”⁶⁶

However, preparation for “the drawing” began months in advance. Al’s brother Joe Zannie and other agents used debit (or door-to-door) collection methods, which conveniently allowed policyholders to pay their premiums. Over a glass of water, iced tea, or a piece of homemade peach cobbler, the sales visit often included conversations about family accomplishments, problems at work, the price of cotton, and social issues. The visits put a friend’s face to the otherwise unpleasant business of death and burial, and policyholders were reminded that they were a part of a collective whole that offered support and autonomy in the midst of harsh racial segregation and oppression. Talk of the burial drive also reinvigorated members who knew they had a chance to win prizes that were often necessities, such as cash (silver dollars), mattresses, rugs, bedroom suites, dining room tables, and other household furniture—without the fear of entering a store that denied credit or encountering a clerk who refused to be cordial, make eye contact or use a courtesy title.⁶⁷

The burial drive provided members with psychological relief from the stress of spending money with rude white merchants or having to compromise their integrity while purchasing household necessities. It also helped benevolent society members save money for burial

⁶⁶ Willie Bell Leigh Rawls, “At Hopewell Church in 1945” unpublished (1990), in the possession of author; Sleepy John Estes has stated in his song titled “Al Rawls” that burial policies cost \$3 per year. According to Cecil Giles of Rawls Funeral Home, premiums could vary depending on the size of the family being insured.

⁶⁷ Willie Bell Rawls, “Looking Back to the Beginning,” Rawls Funeral System Sixty-Seven Annual Celebration program booklet, Friday, November 26, 2004; Sleepy John Estes’s song “Al Rawls” states that the burial insurance is \$3 a year. According to Cecil Giles premiums did vary depending on family size and how many members were covered.

expenses so they would not suffer financially because of the death of a breadwinner or family member. Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee University, noted in The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery that benevolent societies “collected from the masses of coloured people large amounts of money that would not otherwise have been saved [and] created considerable capital, which has been at the disposal of Negro business men.” Washington continued to comment on the “mutual helpfulness” and “democratic” nature of these types of organizations. He further observed how business leaders, with group support, helped to develop the community: “It has enabled the Negroes to erect buildings, invest in lands and greatly increase property in the hands of members of the race. Indirectly, these organizations have stimulated thrift and industry among the masses of the people.” Mrs. Evelyn Jones has attended Rawls Burial Drives since the 1930s when her mother, a benevolent society member, used to take her to the event. After eighty years, she still attends. The evening included a dinner of Mr. Fate Murphy’s⁶⁸ homemade Brunswick stew with crackers and corn bread, a sermon by a local minister and vocal performances from a local choir. Members who could not attend sent empty Mason jars to be filled with stew and delivered to them after the festivities.⁶⁹

After feeding the soul and body, the raffle for prizes began. Members pulled out their tickets and waited to hear their numbers called. Policyholders from Humboldt, Milan, Paris, Bells, and other towns would come to Brownsville driving empty trucks in anticipation of going home with a truck filled with prizes. Cooperation filled the air as members who did not win generously hauled off prizes for their lucky neighbors. Mr. Jesse Giles, an employee of Rawls Funeral Home, often brought his children with him to the event. Their job was to keep the tickets

⁶⁸ After his death, Mrs. Inez Austin Taylor and Mrs. Waldine Austin Mickins began making the stew.

⁶⁹ Conversation with Cecil Giles, Rawls Funeral Home funeral director, April 15, 2011; Booker T. Washington, The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery, Volume 2 (NY: Doubleday, 1909), 168-169.

for individuals who were unable to attend. The following Saturday, his son Cecil would deliver furniture, mattresses and other items to winning policyholders. The burial drive not only brought families and neighbors together, it also highlighted local talent and provided some relief from the humiliation of the world outside.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, as Al's business endeavors prospered, Matt continued to teach at Haywood County Training School, and Ollie became the assistant principal there. As an administrator, he spearheaded several projects, including "building of hard surfaced walkways to the outdoor toilets and organizing an athletic program which included football, baseball, tennis and basketball." He also taught history, algebra, and woodwork. Because woodworking required extra funds that would not be allocated from the local school board, Bond collaborated with parents to form a parent/teacher partnership. Eventually, the treasury contained enough money to purchase woodworking tools and athletic equipment. The entire community was delighted when the woodworking students built a new stage and an automatic curtain for the school's community center. The cooperative spirit within the community and the school's successes increased the cohesiveness of the Black population.⁷¹

Ollie's nephew, Roy B. Bond, was the principal of the Haywood County Training School and Ollie's niece, Aurelia Bond Bachelor (Roy's sister), who had resided with Ollie and his family while attending high school, was a teacher. Though Etta and Ollie were the only two children of their generation to attend college, the next generation of Bonds produced numerous college graduates, making the pursuit of higher education a family staple. Ollie's oldest brother "Bud" and wife Florence had only two children, Roy and Aurelia. Their six-bedroom home,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See Matt Bond "Memoir," unpublished, in possession of author.

complete with indoor plumbing, was spotless, their manners and diction impeccable. Unlike many children in the area, Roy and Aurelia did not wear hand-me-downs. Roy owned a car when many young men his age did not have access to even a wagon. Manual labor from rural farm life became a distant memory at least for Roy's nuclear family.⁷²

Both Aurelia and Roy graduated from Lane College. While at Lane, Roy met his wife Clara Moore, a student from Illinois. Upon graduating from Lane, Roy left Tennessee for graduate school in Atlanta, Georgia, where he earned a master's degree in education from Atlanta University. Roy became principal of Haywood County Training School at age twenty six. No doubt, this position came with responsibilities that produced tremendous stress. Ollie, Roy and Aurelia were all direct descendants of Maltimore Bond, an advocate for the Black community, who was instrumental in establishing the precursor to this school in 1867. Yet, in his position as principal, Roy Bond's ability to advocate for African American students, faculty, and parents, while placating local white leaders, most of whom supported segregation and believed Blacks were ordained by God to be their moral and intellectual inferiors, was a challenge. At school, Roy also factored into his decision-making the success of his own immediate family, and although Matt and Ollie excelled as teachers, their community organizing and emerging "civil rights" activities kept them on the watch list of local segregationist leaders.⁷³ For example, Ollie Bond, in his capacity not only as funeral director but as a human being, removed the remains of a murdered African American male who had been dumped on the side of the road. A white man, presumed to be the murderer, sent word to Bond that he should not testify at the inquest

⁷² Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 10, 2011.

⁷³ Mattye Tollette Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life: AN NAACP Memoir," The New Crisis, 107 (March/April 2000), 20-21.

regarding the death or “he wouldn’t live to see another day.” Bond did testify, however, and he and his family anticipated retribution for ignoring a directive from a white man.⁷⁴

As Roy and his family prospered, Garnett and Jo (Ollie’s youngest brother and sister-in-law/Roy’s uncle and aunt) welcomed their fifth child, Maltimore, named to honor the family’s ancestor Maltimore. The following year, 1934, Maude Crofton Rawls and husband Al Rawls welcomed the birth of their daughter, Charles Cynthia. The growing Rawls family maintained close ties with their extended Bond family. They continued to “lift as they climbed,” as most people did in the community. Al’s mother Texanna and younger brother resided with his nuclear family, and at times, the house was full of relatives who needed lodging during school months or who wanted the conveniences of living “uptown” as opposed to out in the rural countryside.⁷⁵

By 1937, Ollie and Matt’s daughters Vivian and Marion were students at Lane College in Jackson, together with Ollie’s niece, Garnetta Bond, the oldest of ten children born to Ollie’s youngest brother Garnett and wife Jo. Garnett privately feuded with Bud, the eldest brother, (Roy and Aurelia’s father) over money generated from leasing family-owned farms and what Garnett believed to be unfair business dealings on Bud’s part. The family rift seemed to spill into school policies as Roy asserted the power of his position to his extended family’s detriment. As principal, Roy denied his Uncle Garnett’s children access to the local school bus that serviced the Beech Grove community so that the children, his first cousins, had to walk or ride their horses the six miles to town for school. During the period that Roy denied his Uncle Garnett’s children access to the public school bus, young Maltimore, the fifth of ten siblings, recalled that the public school bus designated for white children once stopped to pick him up. The driver mistook

⁷⁴ Marion B. Jordon, “Commitment to Human Rights,” in Marcy Babbitt, editor, Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 120.

⁷⁵ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 10, 2011, Brownsville, TN.

him for a “white” child walking to school. Maltimore, knowing his place in the Jim Crow South, did not board the school bus as it would be taking him to the school reserved for “whites” only.⁷⁶

Also in the mid-1930s, Ollie and Matt ventured the possibility of establishing a local branch of the NAACP. Milton Mitchell, an officer of the NAACP branch in Jackson, Tennessee, and along with Brownsville residents, such as Elijah Davis, supported the idea of a branch in Haywood County. The Bonds’ youngest daughter Mildred had already written a letter to Roy Wilkins of the NAACP’s National Office a letter requesting permission to sell the Crisis magazine in Brownsville, since the magazine had become an important link to both national and international news, art, and culture.⁷⁷

On February 18, 1939, Marion, the couple’s middle daughter, and four other young women at Lane College became charter members of the college’s Beta Chi Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.,⁷⁸ a public service sorority founded in 1913, at Howard University. Its first official activity in March of that year was to participate in a suffragist march down Pennsylvania Avenue.⁷⁹ Marion’s expanding knowledge of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. introduced her to the work of Memphis, Tennessee, native Mary Church Terrell, a prominent Delta and NAACP member who worked for gender equality, racial justice, and social change. Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune Cookman College and honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., was also active in sorority, politics, and the NAACP. Nannie Helen Burroughs, also a sorority member, worked for racial and gender equality through the National

⁷⁶ Interview with Maltimore Bond, April 10, 2011, Brownsville, TN.

⁷⁷ Adam, “Born and Bred for the NAACP,” 18; Patricia Sullivan, Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement (New York: The New Press, 2009), 237.

⁷⁸ Conversation with Mrs. Anna L. Cooke, Lane College public historian and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. See Beta Chi history pamphlet that is in the author’s possession.

⁷⁹ Paula Giddings, In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1988), 15.

Association of Colored Women (NACW). The lives of these women cultivate the belief that the intersection of civil rights work and sorority life was a normal progression.⁸⁰

Even more so than among white sororities, membership in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority became a “lifetime commitment,”⁸¹ with the “Five Point Program Thrust” that includes educational development, economic development, physical and mental health, political awareness and international awareness and involvement. Thus, Marion’s membership linked her to thousands of other college-educated women committed to public service. Her membership in this sorority introduced another staple institution for future generations of female relatives to embrace and engage civically. Soon after the chapter’s founding at Lane College, both Vivian (Marion’s sister) and Garnetta (Marion’s cousin) became members of the sorority as well.

Nine years earlier, Al’s older brother Ned Rawls, a student at what is now Tennessee State University, introduced fraternity life to his family. He became a charter member of the Rho Psi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, a fraternity founded in 1911 at Howard University by four men, including Dr. Ernest Everett Just, the renowned biologist. Earning college degrees and affiliating with respected Greek letter organization helped these young men and women to position themselves as members of the rising Black middle class. The accoutrements of the middle class often included college degrees and membership in the “right” fraternities and sororities. Status or networking opportunities might have been a motivating factor for Marion and for Ned as they entered college and established Greek letter organizations on their college campuses. Whether they sought to be among Du Bois’s “Talented Tenth,” or whether they

⁸⁰ For more on Mary Church Terrell, see Cherisse Jones-Branch, “Revisiting the Politics of Race, Class and Gender,” in *Tennessee Women: Their Lives and Times*, Volume I, eds. Sarah Wilkerson Freeman and Beverly Greene Bond (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009); For more on Nannie Helen Burroughs, see Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 288, 290, 307.

⁸¹ Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 21. One of the public oaths sworn by sorority members is that “Membership into Delta Sigma Theta is a lifetime commitment.”

simply respected the organizations' missions, their future contributions to their families and respective communities reflected their leadership potential.⁸²

As local residents either ventured to other parts of the state or migrated to the North to secure employment or pursue higher education, Al remained in Brownsville as an established business leader, maintaining the traditions of the African American funeral director, despite the demeaning conditions of life in the apartheid South. Each day he wore a suit and tie to his office. He was always well-groomed, but never flashy or ostentatious. Al's special blend of charisma, insight and patience served him well as he served his community. The funeral parlor remained much more than a site for bereaved family members to convene for making funeral arrangements. Preachers, insurance agents, farmers, hairdressers, business owners, local musicians—men and women from all walks of life-- entered the funeral parlor for conversation, advice, fellowship, encouragement, counsel, and even laughter. Like his mentor Ollie Bond and other community leaders before him, Al became a problem solver. He became “the fixer”—the “go-to guy” as Blacks tried to live with dignity and respect in a society that degraded and disregarded them.

Entering local white-owned establishments was taxing for African Americans, and visiting the local drug store was an especially humiliating experience. Roy Drugs was one of several white-owned drug stores in town. Black patrons standing in line for prescriptions or other items lost their place in line when white patrons entered the store. The drug store also had a soda shop that attracted lots of customers who enjoyed malts, milkshakes, sundaes and other sweets while waiting on prescriptions to be filled. It was also a gathering place for whites who wanted to

⁸² For more details, see Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) ; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Jarrett, editors, *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Lawrence Otis Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class* (NY: HarperCollins, 1999).

relax and socialize over ice cream. Black patrons did not have access to the soda shop. Racial separation and limited serve policy based on race were not unusual in Brownsville or other segregated towns in the South.⁸³

After listening to the complaints from relatives and local residents at home, church, and at the funeral parlor, Al decided to purchase a building adjacent to Rawls Funeral Home on the corner of Jefferson Street and Jackson Avenue. The building was christened as the Service Sundry Drug Store. Maude, Al's wife, became the manager of this Black-owned business which had its own soda shop complete with sandwiches, ice cream dishes, cakes, and pies. The Service Sundry made history in the Brownsville, much to the disapproval of local white pharmacists and despite threats to Al's life for the business venture that would reduce profits for white-owned drugstores.⁸⁴ Maude hired the town's first female and first African American pharmacist, Mrs. Gustava MaclinVance of Keeling, Tennessee. Mrs. Vance had studied at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. She was the wife of the Reverend W.S. Vance, a Baptist minister in Brownsville, and they had one daughter, Bobbie Mae Vance.⁸⁵ Local Black residents met for ice cream snacks while they listened to news, music, and sporting events on the radio. Service Sundry was especially crowded whenever Joe Louis was in the ring as residents gathered to cheer on the "Brown Bomber," their national hero.⁸⁶

In addition to a full-service pharmacy and soda shop, the Service Sundry also employed a jeweler, William Williamson, who repaired watches, sized rings and served his clients with

⁸³ Interview by author with Maltimore Bond and Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 11, 2011, Brownville, TN.

⁸⁴ Interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977, Brownsville, TN.

⁸⁵ Bobbie Mae Vance married Christopher Poussant. The Poussants' daughter is Renee Poussant. In May 2011, Mrs. Bobbie Poussant died, and in June 2011, her cremains were flown to Brownsville where Rawls Funeral Home was entrusted with her ashes. As per the family's wishes, the cremains were scattered over the graves of her parents, Gustava Maclin Vance in Keeling, Tennessee and Rev. W.S. Vance in Rosenwald Cemetery in Brownsville, TN.

⁸⁶ Interview by author with Cynthia Bond, April 8, 2011, Brownsville, TN.

respect. Maude had once taken her jewelry box in for repair to a white-owned jewelry store in Brownville. The white clerk was enamored of the jewelry box and offered to buy it from her. Maude politely refused, but the clerk persisted. Finally, she blurted out to “Maude” that a “nigger” simply should not have anything that lovely. The anger and frustration Mrs. Rawls felt after that incident stayed with her through the years, and most Blacks had similar experiences in dress shops, gas stations, grocery stores, or other businesses around town. Black customers often left establishments feeling berated, used, angry and sadly powerless. Both Al and Maude, susceptible to the same disrespect other Blacks encountered, were relieved and personally rewarded that they could contribute to the Black community with the establishment of a neighborhood drugstore.⁸⁷

There was no single strategy to remedy the social, political, economic ills that threatened the life and vitality of the Black community in Brownsville. Al continued in the tradition of his mentor and other funeral directors before him who served “the living and the dead.” While Al’s entrepreneurial spirit grew, Ollie decided to focus on the establishment of a local NAACP branch. According to Bobby Lovett, Tennessee historian, the Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee developed in phases which began “in earnest” in 1864. By 1881, the second phase began and continued until 1935. This phase included several goals: “1) to regain the right to vote and full political participation, 2) to eliminate discrimination in public accommodations, and 3) to remove all Jim Crow practices, and 4) to further promote equal protection of law through federal and state governments” and 5) to build a Negro political economy.”⁸⁸ A “new civil rights movement” emerged “during the mid-1930s, with the advent of President Franklin D.

⁸⁷ My grandmother, Maude E. Rawls, shared this story to me when I was a teenager.

⁸⁸ Bobby L. Lovett, The Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee, xx.

Roosevelt's New Deal," and organizations such as the NAACP "developed new strategies against racial discrimination."⁸⁹

Whether Ollie and the others consciously planned to become part of a growing social movement is unknown. He and other local residents decided that an NAACP branch in Brownsville would help support their efforts to vote in the next presidential election and secure the rights of citizenship that had been denied since Reconstruction. Local NAACP chapters existed in Jackson, Nashville, and Memphis, Tennessee. African Americans in adjoining counties were allowed to vote, but Blacks in Brownsville could not. Brownsville residents knew they needed federal assistance to combat the repressive system in which they lived. Perhaps support from federally-mandated New Deal programs and leadership from the NAACP, a nationally-known civil rights organization, would be ingredients necessary for social change in Brownsville.⁹⁰

The NAACP would help to provide national support for Blacks in this small town of 26,000. On March 12, 1939, the committee to establish the local NAACP branch held an official organizational meeting. The committee invited white leaders, including the mayor and other officials, to join the Association. Several attended the meeting out of curiosity, since they were unfamiliar with the work of the NAACP. Perhaps they were simply spying on this group of African Americans who, they feared, might well stir fellow citizens to action against the racial apartheid that subjugated them. Still, no whites joined.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁰ Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Nancy J. Weiss, Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) provide valuable information on the strengths and weaknesses of the New Deal relative to Black America.

⁹¹ Interview by Larry Crow of HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York City.

On June 12, 1939, the national office approved the charter for the Haywood County Branch of the NAACP, which included fifty-three African American members. Charter members elected Bond, a veteran of World War I, teacher and licensed funeral director, as the first president. William Williamson, a jeweler at the Service Sundry Drug Store, became the founding vice-president. Mattye T. Bond and Beulah Hill, both teachers, became the first secretary and treasurer respectively.⁹²

The chapter's goals for the year were to prepare members to participate in the 1940 national elections. Among the charter members were five day workers, seventeen teachers (six of whom were male), two decorators (both male and house painters), seven farmers, and seven who self-identified as wives. The chapter's treasurer was Beulah Hill, a stern elementary school teacher at the Haywood County Training School. Bond was the only mortician. Dr. L.D. Thomas, originally from the Virgin Islands, was the only medical doctor, and Reverend Buster Walker, who would become the second president of the chapter, was the only minister. The charter members also included a tailor and a mechanic, Elisha Davis, owner of Davis Filling Station; a presser, who worked at the Sunshine Laundry, a nurse, a beauty consultant, and Elbert Williams, identified as a cleaner at the Sunshine Laundry, who would lose his life within one year of the chapter's formation.⁹³

⁹² Application for Charter contained in Library of Congress NAACP Files Group II Manuscript Division, Box A406; See Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 119-121,133. Smith has included examples of funeral directors who had leadership positions in civil rights organizations: John C. Melchor, a funeral director in Clarksdale, Mississippi, was president of their local branch; Robert L. Drew also of Clarksdale was vice-president of the local NAACP branch; Claire Collins Harvey had been "a leader in the local NAACP since her youth" and her father Malachi C. Collins was a founding member of the NAACP branch in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1916; T.V. Johnson of Belzoni, Mississippi was "active with the NAACP." Charles C. Diggs, Sr., a prominent funeral director in Detroit, was a member of the local chapter of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded by Marcus Garvey.

⁹³ Ibid.

While the fifty-three charter members represented individuals from different classes with different social standing and family lineage, each member shared community respectability. They were considered upstanding citizens, and that was important to the NAACP nationally and locally, especially as the nation was bombarded with scientific racism and theories which purported to prove the sub-human, barbaric proclivities of the Black “race.” Together the members represented entrepreneurs, professionals, and laborers who had nerve enough to claim their rights as human beings and U.S. citizens. These Brownsville residents united as a community of local advocates. They chose to become a part of a larger network of civil rights defenders who had state and, more importantly, national standing, which made the combined voices of these members ring out when they were confronted either with state-sanctioned oppression or brutal lynchings. Walter White of the NAACP argued that when interacting with African Americans, whites relied on “the old standby” . . . terrorism and persuasion by brute force.”⁹⁴ Terrorism certainly came to Brownsville as the NAACP chapter grew.

The branch embarked upon an ambitious social and political venture: members sought to exercise their constitutional right to vote. This was their primary mission. They began organizing so that they would be registered to vote in the 1940 elections. Blacks had not been allowed to vote in Haywood County since 1888, but Blacks in Jackson, Tennessee, neighbors only twenty-six miles to the east, could vote. Rights were not based on constitutional law, but determined by the arbitrary desires and whims of a power hungry white minority. Blacks, as artisans and enslaved laborers, had been a part of west Tennessee since the 1700s. Later, their taxes and talents helped to sustain the area. Now, the imagination, creativity, and political consciousness of Black leaders would help to save it.

⁹⁴ Walter White, Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1929), 111.

But rejecting the status quo that dehumanized and subordinated Blacks brought repercussions. Mildred, the youngest daughter of Ollie and Matt Bond, recalled being at home when law enforcement officials dragged her father into the house after they had beaten him with brass knuckles. They ordered, “You better take care of ya pa, gal.” The sight of her father’s bloody body on the kitchen floor infuriated young Mildred. As she and her mother tended to his wounds, he never offered the details surrounding his arrest and subsequent beating. Brownsville law officers were among the most brutal in the region, and challenging white power in any form was sufficient reason for legalized assaults on Black citizens.⁹⁵ Given Ollie’s familial ties to Tennessee, he had a vested interest in his community and its people, but as a human being he sought to have the inherent dignity owed to all men and women recognized and respected. It was not surprising that Mattye would not only support her husband as he fought for equal rights, but also take an active leadership role in the NAACP. As a mother, no doubt, she wanted to set an example for her daughters as her foremothers, independent thinkers who transgressed gendered and racialized boundaries, had done for her. Her students, nieces, and other female relatives would encounter discrimination based on both ethnicity and gender. Perhaps they would come to a crossroads that required them to choose between the past and the possible. Surely, she hoped they would take steps to make the impossible possible as she had tried to do in Brownsville.

Soon after the NAACP was chartered, Roy fired Matt from her teaching position at Haywood County Training School, even though she was a highly trained teacher who tutored teachers preparing for the licensing examination. Mattye T. discussed her termination in “The Turning Point of My Life: An NAACP Memoir”: “My school principal finally informed me that

⁹⁵ Janus Adams, “Mildred Bond Roxborough: Born and Bred for the NAACP,” *The New Crisis*, 107 (March/April 2000), 18-20, 22.

although I was an excellent teacher, he was not going to recommend to the Board and Supervisor that they renew my contract because of my ‘outside’ activities.”⁹⁶

Matt Bond, a staunch supporter of education, instilled in her students a belief in their intrinsic value as human beings, even though the iron hand of Roy Bond, the principal, elicited fear in many students. Her years of training in Latin also qualified Haywood County Training School for Latin instruction certification. She had personally tutored over thirty teachers so that they could pass the required licensing examination (including two white teachers), and she had allowed Roy’s sister Aurelia to live in their home while she attended high school. Vivian and Marion, Matt and Ollie’s two oldest daughters were in college, and both parents’ income contributed to tuition payments. During the depression, the funeral business had suffered, and Bond became a personal target, having gained the reputation of not knowing his place. The tremendous demands placed on him, the emotional strain of living as a second-class citizen under the watchful eye of a white minority determined to maintain power, and the intimidation which brazen white citizens used to discourage patrons from using the funeral home’s services took its toll on the family. Now, Matt, who lived in walking distance from the school, would be forced to take a teaching job in Trenton, Tennessee, nearly 30 miles from home, and because she could not drive, she had to secure transportation to and from the school. Vivian, the oldest daughter, withdrew from school to work fulltime. She helped Marion with tuition expenses and eventually completed her own studies at Lane.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Mattye T. Bond, “The Turning Point of my Life: An NAACP Memoir,” *The New Crisis*, 107 (March/April 2000), 20-21.

⁹⁷ Telephone interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, April 2010; interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005.

Roy sacrificed a competent teacher to secure his status among white community leaders and alienated Matt, his aunt by marriage, and her family. Perhaps the incentives or pressure he received from school board officials were more compelling than the backlash he might encounter from firing his uncle's wife, whom he would see at church and family gatherings. By some, Roy was labeled an "Uncle Tom," the pejorative reference to a member of the African American community who so lacked integrity that he compromised and "sold out" fellow Blacks to satisfy whites. Still, Roy and his wife, Clara, also a Lane College graduate and a teacher at Haywood County Training School, fared well within the town. Roy became a central figure in the collective memory of Dunbar-Carver-Haywood County Training School, despite reports of his cruelty, fiscal impropriety and abuse of power which fostered resentment among students and faculty alike.⁹⁸

Teachers who joined the NAACP were especially vulnerable to white retribution, and of the fifty-three names listed on the application for charter, seventeen were teachers. Each person whose name appeared on the list was subject to white backlash including pecuniary sanctions, but teachers posed a specific threat. Whites feared both educated Blacks and black education. During slavery, educating Blacks was illegal, and afterwards white officials in Brownsville tended to believe that educating Blacks was futile at best and dangerous at worst. School policies reflected the county's unwillingness to use county funds, which included taxes paid by Blacks, to educate the town's African Americans. Lurleen Trigg, an 81-year-old Brownsville native who earned her living as a domestic, recalled vividly the Haywood County School system. She explained in southern vernacular, "Cullard churin' didn't go ta school long enuff to mount ta

⁹⁸ Mattye T. Bond, "A Memoir," unpublished (June, 1960), 3. Also note that alumni chapters are located on the East and West coasts, including Washington, D.C., Midwestern cities, and in the South. Annual events include the "All Carver Reunions." (Haywood County Training School became Carver High School).

nuthin.’” She spoke of times when schools for Blacks were closed for cotton picking or even strawberry picking season. Then she remarked that she hardly made it out of “the primer.”⁹⁹ In fact, it was more than fifteen years after Brown v. Board of Education before Haywood High School was desegregated. In 1968 Haywood County schools were still experimenting with “Freedom of Choice.” While equal education was not a privilege extended to Blacks, many local segregated schools produced well-educated graduates who pursued higher education and earned advanced degrees.¹⁰⁰

Teachers involved in the Civil Rights Movement were targets for several reasons. Illiteracy was prevalent among poor whites, especially among white law enforcement agents. So, Blacks who sought to change their station or forget the place a segregated society prescribed for them were bordering on being “uppity.” The economic component of racism is evident in the strategies which whites used to punish activist Blacks. Blacks who asserted themselves were threatened in various ways. For example, banks and lending institutions threatened to foreclose mortgages.¹⁰¹ Individuals lost their jobs. Stores refused to offer credit to Blacks whose radical political agendas included full citizenship for all.

The Haywood County branch of the NAACP attempted to organize an Armistice Day event, but school authorities would not permit the NAACP to hold a meeting on school property. In a letter to O.S. Bond, Walter White of the NAACP’s national office noted that while it might

⁹⁹ Interview by author with Lurleen Trigg, March 20, 2005, Brownsville, Tennessee.

¹⁰⁰ Part of the integration controversy in the 1950s stemmed from the segregated schools that had better teachers than some white schools. While the Black schools were thought to be inferior given the outdated books and crowded one- room schools, evidence suggests that some educational advantages existed within Black schools, which clearly provided foundational and advanced intellectual development plus race pride and uplift depending on the students, teachers, and classroom conditions. See Richard Kluger, Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1977). Chapter four provides more information on the desegregation of schools.

¹⁰¹ Mattye T. Bond, “Memoir,” unpublished, 3, in possession of author.

be understandable if NAACP meetings on school property were prohibited, but the Armistice Day event was a part of the nation's celebration.¹⁰²

Race relations had reached the boiling point in Brownsville, and on Christmas Eve, 1939, vigilantes set fire to Ollie and Mattye's family house. Mattye Bond was in Kansas City, Kansas, caring for her brother who was recovering from surgery, and Mildred, the only daughter still living at home, was staying with relatives in Brownsville. The Bond family knew O.S. was in imminent danger. His mother, who typically did not interfere with her adult son's decisions, urged him to flee. Ollie's white uncle, Dr. John Sevier, had provided his family insider information from the white community about plans to retaliate against Ollie. Should Ollie decide to remain in Brownsville, Dr. Sevier said, he would most certainly be killed.¹⁰³

When young Mildred and her extended family heard the blaring sounds of the fire whistle and received word that her home was ablaze that Christmas eve, they did not know whether her father had escaped before the fire or been killed in it.¹⁰⁴ A call from Kansas City on Christmas day allayed their fears: Ollie Bond had boarded a bus in Memphis and was in Kansas with his wife. Although the details of Bond's escape were never openly discussed, even within the family, relatives suspect that Bond's former student and business partner Charles Allen Rawls arranged the escape.¹⁰⁵ Mildred's two older sisters had already left home for Lane College, but she remained in Brownsville to complete the school year.

¹⁰² NAACP Manuscript Group II, box C183: White makes reference to a letter O.S. Bond wrote to J. L. Le Flore of Mobile, Alabama. LeFlore forwarded Bond's letter to White. This letter was not in the files, but might be in others as I continue to look.

¹⁰³ Interview by Maude Y. Bond at Story Corps with Mildred Bond Roxborough, March 4, 2004, New York City.

¹⁰⁴ See Langston Hughes, Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1962), 172.

¹⁰⁵ Rawls Funeral Home included rolling stock, so it is possible that Bond left Brownsville in a hearse.

The rights to earn a living, live peacefully in their home, exercise their humanity without fear or intimidation, and participate in the democratic process—all of these were inevitably denied to African Americans in Brownsville. Members were so preoccupied with trying to protect themselves and their families that they had not achieved their goal to register voters for the upcoming election. Records indicate that after nine months, the chapter reported to the national office that most of its time was spent organizing. According to the December 1939 financial statement, there were 90 members. The statement of activities for the year ending in December 31, 1939, stated that the branch had conducted four executive meetings, twenty branch meetings, and five mass meetings.¹⁰⁶ In a letter to the national office on chapter activities, the branch submitted the following: “We regret that our activities have been so limited. . . . We have functioned only 9 months. Most of the time has been spent in the establishment of our branch through Haywood County and the vicinity. We wish to reassure you that the entire branch is in accord.”¹⁰⁷

Members of the Brownsville Branch of the NAACP believed they had made only limited progress during the first year of operation, despite the sacrifices they had made to organize and advocate for change in Haywood County. They had invited white officials to their organizational meeting, which suggested a sincere desire to collaborate with local whites committed to social justice. The fact that they had received a charter from the NAACP, had four executive board meetings, twenty branch meetings, and five mass meetings was actually quite impressive. The fierce white opposition to the mission of the organization elicited fear and discouraged participation from local Blacks. Still, the tone in the correspondence from this newly-chartered branch to the national office suggested a spirit of hope for a productive future. As Ollie Bond

¹⁰⁶ NAACP Manuscript box G-198.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

and his family fled to Kansas for safety, their fate was tenuous and their future unsure. Events that would transpire over the next few months would change the course of many lives and transform the ethos of the entire community. Though the branch members were of one “accord,” neither they nor fellow townspeople could have been prepared for what awaited them in the year to come.

Chapter 2: The Lynching of Elbert Williams and the Shift Toward Economic Justice, 1940s

No torture of helpless victims by heathen savages . . . ever exceeded the cold-blooded savagery of white devils under lynch law. . . . This was done by white men who controlled all the forces of law and order in their communities and who could have legally punished rapists and murderers, especially black men who had neither political power nor financial strength with which to evade any justly deserved fate. The more I studied the situation, the more I was convinced that the Southerner had never gotten over his resentment that the Negro was no longer his plaything, his servant, and his source of income. --Ida B. Wells-Barnett¹⁰⁸

Six-year-old Charles Cynthia, the local mortician's daughter, had endured yet another night of Grandma Texanna's litany of prayers--on her knees no less--praying as if she were Sister Mary Lange herself.¹⁰⁹ Lying in bed, Cynthia had to remain completely still to avoid disturbing the family matriarch, but she kept her ears on the front door. Last year ended with a bang—literally—Cousin Matt and Uncle Ollie's house had been firebombed, which forced them to leave Tennessee for a new home in Kansas. Tonight Cynthia just wanted to hear Uncle Buddy's key at the door. He was her father Al's oldest brother, and she knew he would be by soon with bags of money from the pool room. She couldn't wait to spread those shiny coins out on the floor and have her way with them—counting silver dollars, stacking quarters, rolling around in buffalo nickels.

When she finally heard the front door open, she crept out of bed to greet her uncle -- an Edward G. Robinson look-a-like, only Uncle Buddy, born George Washington Rawls, was “colored” and a bit more handsome. He ran Rawls Pool Room and kept a fat roll of cash in his pocket in case any of the Black teachers in the area needed loans. Uncle Buddy had not gone to college, but his wife, more than twenty years his junior, had graduated from Lane College, made Delta, earned a master's from the University of Michigan, and spent summers at Fisk studying

¹⁰⁸ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “To Tell the Truth Freely,” in Alfreda M. Duster, ed., Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1970), 70.

¹⁰⁹ Sister Mary Lange was the founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first Black order of nuns in the United States.

music with John Work, all thanks to her intelligence, of course, and Uncle Buddy's financial backing. The teachers who borrowed money from him were a bit embarrassed on payday when he would meet them at the bank to get the money they owed him, but he kept a tight rein on his cash. It was after 10:00 p.m. on a muggy June night in 1940, and Uncle Buddy had had a full day. So he did not mind handing over the cloth bags to Cynthia who quickly spread the coins out on the living room floor. She was so enraptured with counting coins that she hardly heard the staccato knocks at the door. She froze as Uncle Buddy opened the door and the voice from the darkness whispered: "They got Elbert."¹¹⁰

.....

On Thursday, June 20, 1940, thirty-one year old Elbert Williams and Annie Williams, his wife of eleven years, both charter members of the Brownsville NAACP, were safely tucked away in their home at 210 Bradford Street. Joe Louis, the "Brown Bomber" had just knocked out his heavyweight opponent Arturo Godoy in the eighth round of their championship fight, and the couple was about to retire for the night. It was after 10:00 pm. Elbert, a "fireman" at the Sunshine Laundry, was already dressed for bed. He was wearing his pajamas and a vest when Tip Hunter, Haywood County sheriff-elect, knocked on the door. Annie Williams, who was still wearing street clothes, opened the door and answered affirmatively when Hunter asked if Elbert Williams lived there. Sheriff Hunter instructed Williams to come outside to the car, even though Williams was barefoot and dressed for bed. Elbert stood in the dark, answering questions from

¹¹⁰ This vignette has been adapted from conversations with Cynthia Rawls Bond and her unpublished essay titled "Remembering Uncle Buddy," written during the Lenten season 2009, in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond.

the voices inside the car, then rode off with the sheriff and an unidentified group of men. That was the last time Mrs. Annie Williams would see her husband alive.¹¹¹

This chapter examines the lynching of Elbert Williams which exemplified the intersection of political and economic oppression in Haywood County. The lynching highlighted both the community's vulnerability as well as its range of local-national networks. Its aftermath resulted in the Black community's shift from the pursuit of political justice through protest to the pursuit of economic justice through education and entrepreneurship.

In 1939, a year before the lynching of Elbert Williams, African American residents of Brownsville had organized the Brownsville branch of the NAACP. The group's mission was political. Members planned to secure the right to vote so that they, disenfranchised since the 1888, could register and vote in the next presidential election.¹¹² White leaders in Brownsville opposed Blacks' efforts to assert their citizenship so much so that they assaulted Black activists with property damage and physical violence. They imposed economic reprisals to dissuade Black business owners and other residents from joining the NAACP and ultimately participating in the political process.¹¹³ After the death threats and the bombing of their home, O.S. and Matt Bond, the founding president and secretary of the local NAACP, fled to Kansas.

Before the lynching, Elbert Williams and Elisha Davis, both charter members of the NAACP branch, were negotiating the sale of Davis's gas station to Williams. This purchase

¹¹¹ NAACP Papers, Group II, Manuscript Division, Box A406, Annie Williams Affidavit; Patricia Sullivan, Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement (NY: The New Press, 2009), 237-245.

¹¹² NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406: Folder Lynching Brownsville, Tennessee Elbert Williams, 1940, Statement of Facts re: Brownsville, Tennessee Case; For more information regarding the disenfranchisement of Blacks in Haywood County after Reconstruction, see Dorothy Granberry, "When the Rabbit Foot Was Worked and Republican Votes Became Democratic Votes: Black Disfranchisement in Haywood County, Tennessee" Tennessee Historical Quarterly, 56 (Spring 2004), 35-47.

¹¹³ Mattye Tollette Bond, "The Turning Point of My Life: An NAACP Memoir" The New Crisis, 107(March/April 2000), 20-21.

would elevate Williams to the ranks of business owner in Brownsville. Undoubtedly, to white segregationists, Williams's leadership role in the local NAACP, a nationally known civil rights organization, and his plans to become a business owner confirmed that he, a Black laborer with limited education, did not know his place in Southern society.¹¹⁴

Cheryl I. Harris, a critical race theorist and legal scholar, has offered an explanation as to why whites responded so viscerally to Blacks' efforts to acquire property in her seminal work "Whiteness as Property":

The origin of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. . . . [I]t was not . . . race alone that . . . oppressed blacks and Indians; rather, it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property which played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination.¹¹⁵

The threat of lynching was often a deterrent for Blacks who wanted to acquire property or assert themselves as human beings and American citizens. Lynching was a violent act of domination and oppression. Mobs, usurping local laws and jurisdiction, sometimes took prisoners who were awaiting trial from their jail cells. At other times, individuals were taken from their homes, as was the case with Elbert Williams, who was forced to leave home barefoot and still in his pajamas. Walter White, author of Rope and Faggot: Biography of Judge Lynch, has stated that in instances of lynchings, "[r]acial superiority . . . justified cruelty and inhumanity

¹¹⁴ Richard Couto, Lifting the Veil (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 148-149.

¹¹⁵ Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," in Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al., editors, Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement. (NY: The New York Press, 1995), 277.

...”¹¹⁶ The history of Blacks as “property” and therefore subhuman contributed to the high incidents of Blacks being lynched, and in rare cases might have also been used as a defense for those accused of participating in lynch mobs. The infamous Moore’s Ford lynching in 1946 is a case in point where four African Americans were murdered. Loy Harrison, a white landowner for whom two of the victims worked, had posted a \$600 bail for one of these employees, who was accused of stabbing a white man. The accused and three other Blacks were taken from Harrison’s car while Harrison drove them home, shot sixty times, and lynched. Harrison, who reportedly had ties to the Klan, responded to FBI accusations of conspiring with the murderers by claiming, “Why, I’m as mad as anybody the way they killed my niggers. I need all the nigger hands I can get.”¹¹⁷

Lynchings elicited fear, which kept many African Americans “in their place,” afraid to assert themselves and their citizenship rights. Yet some Blacks resisted oppression alone and suffered the consequences. Mississippi native Mozeal Crofton recalled seeing her father “stripped of his clothes, tied to a nut tree, and beaten” until he was nearly dead. A mob was terrorizing local Blacks as they looked for her uncle who had shot and killed the white man he had accused of stealing his land.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Walter White, Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 107; Also see Christopher Waldrep’s African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009).

¹¹⁷ Roger Malcolm and his wife Dorothy Dorsey Malcolm were lynched as were Dorothy’s brother and sister-in-law George and Mae Murray Dorsey. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1174520> For more details see Laura Wexler, Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America (NY: Scribner, 2003).

or the NPR website <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5579862>

¹¹⁸ Her uncle had reported the incident to the Dekalb County (Mississippi) Sheriff’s Department, but law officers ignored his complaint. Her uncle’s son intervened, which resulted in the son’s murder. He reported his son’s murder to the police who responded, “Ain’t nuthin’ we can do ‘bout a dead niggah.”¹¹⁸ Once Crofton’s uncle realized the law would not protect him or his family, he devised a plan of retaliation. First, he moved his family Meridian, Mississippi, to ensure their safety. Then he returned to Dekalb County and killed the white man who had stolen his land and murdered his son. With a ticket to Meridian already in his pocket, he, now a fugitive, left for the

Rather than resisting oppression alone, members of the Brownsville NAACP branch took a proactive approach to their marginalization. They organized. In May 1940, the Reverend Buster Walker, president-elect of the Brownsville NAACP branch, together with other Black residents entered the local courthouse attempting to register to vote. This otherwise innocuous act of civic responsibility became an affront to white privilege and to those whites determined to deny Blacks, who were the majority in Brownsville, their rights as citizens.¹¹⁹

In early June 1940, Elisha Davis, owner of Davis Filling Station in Brownsville, was taken from his home at about 1:00 a.m. The mob took him to the Hatchie River bottom and interrogated him about the NAACP's function. He explained that its goal was to help Blacks secure the right to vote and "become better citizens." The mob wanted names of NAACP members as well, and Davis complied by giving the few names that were already public knowledge. He was then warned to 'be gone before dawn.'¹²⁰ Being coerced to leave town meant uprooting his pregnant wife and their seven children. It also meant aborting his business transaction with Williams or having to abandon his business altogether. Davis and his family relocated to Jackson, about thirty miles from Brownsville, but the mob continued to harass him. He and his family soon fled to Niles, Michigan, searching for safety, community, and employment opportunities.¹²¹

After the white community's hostile response to local NAACP efforts to register to vote, the harassment of the Davis family, and now the abduction of Elbert Williams, the Black community was put on high alert. The word traveled down Bradford Street and throughout the

train station, hoping to rejoin his family and rebuild his life in Meridian. Mozeal Crofton interview with author October 2003.

¹¹⁹ Couto, *Lifting the Veil*, 131.

¹²⁰ NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406, Lynching Folder, Letter from Walter White to McClanahan, July 1, 1940; Roy Wilkins, editorial "Brownsville, Tenn., U.S.A. 1940" *The Crisis*, 47 (August 1940), 232.

¹²¹ NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406. Letter from Elijah Davis to Walter White, September 21, 1940.

town. Blacks were on guard because Williams's disappearance led them to fear the worst. Because Elbert was taken from his home in the middle of the night while in his pajamas, Mrs. Williams searched unsuccessfully for her husband at City Hall. She then went to the local jail to make sure he had arrived safely and that he had appropriate street clothes when he was released from jail. Mr. Williams was not at City Hall or at the jail. The officer in charge assured Mrs. Williams that her husband would not be harmed since Sheriff Hunter and the others would simply ask questions then "let him loose." Before Mrs. Williams left the jail, the officer added, "If he doesn't come home in a day or two, come back and let me know."¹²²

Dissatisfied with the answers from law enforcement and in, perhaps, a moment of desperation, she sought help from Spence Dupree, a white resident and owner of the Sunshine Laundry where both she and her husband worked. When none of these sources provided any help, she traveled to Jackson to see Milmon Mitchell, an insurance agent for Atlanta Life.¹²³ Mitchell had policyholders in Brownsville and had offered his full support to Brownsville residents as they organized their NAACP branch a year earlier. He was an officer of the Jackson branch and had corresponded with representatives of the NAACP's Southern Regional offices to offer assistance to the charter members in Brownsville.¹²⁴

In the meantime, the Reverend Buster Walker, the newly-elected president of the Brownsville branch, had already left town to attend the 31st annual NAACP Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Walker was unaware of Williams's abduction as he prepared to meet fellow NAACP delegates at the convention. He and other NAACP members in Brownsville were

¹²² NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406, Annie Williams undated affidavit

¹²³ *Ibid.*; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 238- 240,

Atlanta Life Insurance Company is a Black-owned company founded in 1905 by Alonzo Herndon. Herndon was born into slavery, but became a prominent business man.

¹²⁴ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 237-278.

prepared to implement the local branch's plans that had begun in 1939 to register and vote, despite vituperative resistance from local whites.¹²⁵

After Elbert Williams had been missing for three days, Mrs. Williams received the news she feared most. On Sunday, June 23, 1940, C.A. Rawls, local funeral director and neighbor of the Williamses, requested that she meet him at the Hatchie River. The coroner had contacted Rawls and instructed him to bring a casket with him to the river. Upon Mrs. Williams's arrival, she learned that fishermen had discovered her husband's body in the river. The coroner advised her not to view her husband's remains, but she did, observing that his body had been "beaten and bruised [and there were] holes in his chest." He had been pounded in his head so much so that it was "twice its normal size." His hands and feet had been bound with rope; and attached to the rope around his neck was a log to ensure that his body stayed under water.¹²⁶ Elbert Williams's bludgeoned remains, sacrificial in the struggle for civil rights, were put into a pine box then taken to Taylor's Chapel (CME Church) Cemetery for an immediate burial.¹²⁷ This local community's loss became the state's last recorded lynching; and according to the most recent history of the organization, "Elbert Williams was the first known NAACP official killed for his civil rights activities."¹²⁸

According to funeral records, Williams died on June 20, 1940, the night the mob kidnapped him from his home. The Hatchie River was listed as the place of death and drowning

¹²⁵ Ibid., 238; Sondra Kathryn Wilson, ed., In Search of Democracy: The NAACP Writings of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins 1920-1977, (NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 175.

¹²⁶ NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406, Affidavit Annie Williams and letter from Walter White to William McClanahan, U.S. District Attorney dated July 1, 1940 ; Raye Springfield, Legacy of Tamar: Courage and Faith in an African American Family, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 80.

¹²⁷ Rawls Funeral Home Record Book June 20, 1940 indicates that the complete funeral cost \$25. The service was identified as a pauper's service, which reflected the language of the day. The bill was paid in full in August.

¹²⁸ TN4Me website http://www.tn4me.org/article.cfm/era_id/6/major_id/20/minor_id/57/a_id/149; Sullivan Lift Every Voice, 238.

as the cause of death. No contributory causes were listed on the document: only “D.K.,” (“don’t know”). No mention of a lynching or the brutality of the crime was revealed in these records. The nuanced silence, even in the official funeral records, confirmed the caution with which Black citizens moved about in Brownsville, the collective vulnerability of the community, and the fear lynching elicited.¹²⁹

Among the many tactics domestic terrorists have used to intimidate and deter African Americans from pursuing human rights in this country, lynching has been among the most horrifying. As Philip Dray, author of At the Hands of Those Unknown: The Lynching of Black America has written, “Lynching . . . has referred to nonlethal summary punishment as a flogging or tar and feathering. Later it meant the summary execution by a mob.”¹³⁰ Although often propagandized as an act to punish Black males for raping white females, lynchings were also potent weapons used to deprive Blacks of political and economic equality.¹³¹

Lynchings became so pervasive in American culture that many Southerners knew “the bridge,”¹³² “the river,” “the tree”¹³³-- their community’s code word for what personified torture and death. For example, for residents of Dekalb County, Mississippi, “the scaffold” was their community’s code word. Built especially for the lynchings, the scaffold became a permanent part

¹²⁹ Rawls Funeral Home Record Book June 20, 1940.

¹³⁰ Phillip Dray, At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America, (NY: Modern Library, 2002), iii.

¹³¹ White, Rope and Faggot, xix, 82, 105, 111; Wells-Barnett, “To Tell the Truth Freely,” 70.

¹³² In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the Walnut Street Bridge (the “county bridge”) was the site of two noted lynchings. Alfred Blount was hanged on February 14, 1893. See Chattanooga Times February 15, 1893; Cleveland (OH) Gazette July 8, 1893.. And Ed Johnson was hanged on March 19, 1906. For information on the Johnson lynching, see the Supreme Court case surrounding the incident at United States v. Shipp and the book by Leroy Phillips and Mark Curriden, Contempt of Court: The Turn of the Century Lynching that Launched a Hundred Years of Federalism, (NY: Faber & Faber, Inc., 1999).

¹³³ On May 30, 1929, nineteen- year-old Joe Boxley was hanged from a tree in Alamo, Tennessee. Interestingly, an “injunction” written on a “placard” next to the tree where he was lynched stated that the body should “hang there until Thursday at 4:00 p.m.” The local coroner, however, ignored the directive and returned the deceased body to the family. See “Youth Accused of Attacking Woman is Taken from Jail at Alamo and Hanged,” New York Times, May 20, 1929.

of the courthouse and a constant reminder to Black residents of their powerlessness. Lynchings in Dekalb County, Mississippi, typically occurred at 4 a.m. on the courthouse lawn. A group mostly of Black women left home in the dark, walking somberly down dusty roads. They attended these public executions to support the victims' family members, who were usually their neighbors, church members, and friends, thus adding another layer to the death rituals in the Black community.¹³⁴ Once Black residents arrived at the town's square, they gathered on the edge of the lawn, forbidden by local officials to get too close to the lynching. When the lynching ended, the remains were tied to a truck and dragged through the Black neighborhood. Black residents who did not see the lynching firsthand could still bear witness to its horror. After parading the body through the neighborhood, it was dumped on the front lawn of the local Black funeral home. These events were etched in the community's collective memory, and, no doubt, carried with residents until they died.¹³⁵

In juxtaposition are the white spectators who attended lynchings across the South as if they were family outings, making the events festive social functions. White onlookers bought postcards showing graphic photographs displaying lynched bodies. They mailed copyrighted images of mutilated bodies to friends and family with notes that documented and often celebrated the deaths.¹³⁶ Phillip Dray, has written:

Lynching celebrate[d] killing and [made] of it a ritual, turning grisly and inhumane acts of cruelty. It is this ritualization, and the knowledge that victims were chosen for their race in . . . defiance of reasonable values of fairness or

¹³⁴ See Karla F. Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹³⁵ Interview by author with Mozeal Crofton, October 2003. Mozeal Crofton attended her first lynching in Dekalb County when she was nine years old. A young African American male, employed in the kitchen at a Mississippi State in Columbia, Mississippi, was accused of raping a white female student who left her home in the North to attend college in Mississippi. The above details of a Dekalb County, Mississippi, lynching come from her memories of the lynching she witnessed at nine years old. By age twelve, she had witnessed her second lynching.

¹³⁶ See James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2003).

decency, that makes the story of lynching so burdensome an American legacy to confront.¹³⁷

One Black Mississippian offered a similar analysis. “. . . To kill a Negro wasn’t nothing.” He said, “It was like killing a chicken or . . . a snake. Kill a mule, buy another one. Kill a nigger, hire another one. They had to have a license to kill anything but a nigger. We was always in season.”¹³⁸

Unlike the lynchings in Dekalb County, Mississippi, or many documented in James Allen’s book Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America, the lynching of Elbert Williams in Brownsville, Tennessee, was clandestine and covert, but equally cruel and devastating to the community. The Reverend Buster Walker, president-elect of the Brownsville NAACP branch, received the news of Elbert Williams’s lynching while attending the NAACP conference in Philadelphia. He provided details about one of the country’s most recent hate crimes to the national delegation of NAACP members and supporters, and his report sparked national attention.¹³⁹

The NAACP’s national office, which had advocated for the passage of an anti-lynching law since 1919, alerted the national media to Elbert Williams’s lynching. Walter White, the NAACP’s executive secretary, appealed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt for a federal

¹³⁷ Dray, At the Hands of People Unknown, xii.

¹³⁸ Allen, Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America, 12.

¹³⁹ In 1941, the 32nd annual NAACP Convention in Houston, Texas, began by evoking the Williams lynching. “Just as the 31st annual conference of the NAACP was fired by the lynching of Elbert Williams in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the wholesale terror against that little NAACP branch, so has the 32nd annual NAACP conference in Houston, Texas. . . .” The Crisis, 48 (July 1941), 227.

investigation. Despite the introduction of nearly 200 anti-lynching bills, the U.S. Congress never passed any of them.¹⁴⁰

Both Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Walter White displayed personal courage in the fight against lynching. Wells began her “anti-lynching crusade” in the late nineteenth century. The author of Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws in All Its Phases, she used her position as a journalist and public speaker to condemn, expose, and document lynchings, traveling across the United States and to Europe with her message.¹⁴¹ Walter White uncovered the story of the 1926 lynching in Aiken, South Carolina, in which three African Americans were murdered while more than one thousand spectators watched. Because he was mistaken for “white” with his light skin tone, blonde hair, and blue eyes, White, an African American, was able to investigate firsthand more than forty lynchings and eight race riots. White’s research confirmed that the shared goal of these outrages was to keep Blacks “in their place” and intimidate the Black workers. Lynching and other forms of intimidation proved to be forceful deterrents to those who aspired to full citizenship.¹⁴²

In 1937, three years before the lynching of Elbert Williams, the Reverend John Maclin of Ripley, Tennessee, a town approximately twenty miles from Brownsville, sent a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt and Congress pleading “in the name of god that made heaven,” for the passage of the Gavagan Anti-Lynching Bill and an end to the vicious murders of Black citizens. Maclin began his heartfelt letter with “Dear sirs I voice the sediments of the entire Negro race by beggin you an Congress to sign the Gavagan anti-Lynching bill.” His letter continued:

¹⁴⁰See Robert L. Zangrando’s NAACP Crusade Against Lynchings, 1909-1950 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); <http://www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history-anti-lynching-bill>.

¹⁴¹ See Paula J. Giddings, Ida: A Sword among Lions (NY: Amistad, 2008).

¹⁴² See Kenneth Robert Janke’s Introduction in White, Rope and Faggot, vii-xi.

A mule have more protection in the south than Negroes. Any man will be punished by law for killing a mule but A White man will not be punish for killing A Negro. . . . We don't wont equal sociality with with [sic] white folks. But we dose wont equal protection of the law and equal in any of the Government business that we have the ability to fill. . . There is not a struggle in history that the Negro have not played An empotum part for democracy. In time of war we put our lives at stake for the good old U.S.A. so why would our lives be more in danger in time of peace. . . . [You] have power to declair wars [and] bine states in laws and [make] anyone that take part in lynching. . . murderers [who] violate the laws of the USA. . . [and] spit on the Constitution with crimes.

The writer has acknowledged the powers of the president as well as the Congress, while highlighting the powerlessness, danger, and fear with which Blacks in the South were forced to live. His words evoked images of Blacks as soldiers fighting for their county's freedoms but suggested that a Black man's safety during peace time was as dubious as in times of war. Reverend Maclin addressed not only the need for equal protection but for economic justice as well.¹⁴³

On May 3, 1939, almost a year before Elbert Williams was murdered, the Reverend E.C. Bonds, a resident of Memphis, Tennessee, sent a letter to President Roosevelt, appealing for help after the murder of his nineteen-year-old nephew. On April 28, 1939, Bonds's nephew, a husband and father of a three-month-old baby, was "mobbed and thrown in a dredge ditch of water." Bonds and fifteen relatives who signed the letter lamented, "We don't know anybody to go to, but the Lord and you. . . . As poor Negroes, we come to you . . . for justice." The family insisted that they were "powerless" and requested an investigation of the young man's death.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Letter from Reverend John Maclin to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 16, 1937, Justice Department Criminal Division.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Reverend E.C. Bonds et al to President Franklin Roosevelt, may 3, 1939, Justice Department Criminal Division.

After the Williams lynching, social and political networking increased on both the local and national level. Through the years, local white leaders in Brownsville had been complicit in human rights abuses and provided little protection for African Americans who challenged segregation and disfranchisement. For example, a few days after Williams's burial, Haywood County police officer Hawkins approached Mrs. Williams. He assured her that he and Judge Bond would address the lynching and "have something done about it." He told her to maintain contact with them and advised her not to stay at home at night, but no arrests were ever made.¹⁴⁵

John Bomer, president of the Brownsville Bank, wrote to a Reverend McDowell that he had tried to persuade the county court to offer a \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of the culprits. Although his efforts were futile, he asserted that he knew that "our people condemn a thing of this kind, no good citizen could feel otherwise."¹⁴⁶ However, by the end of June, Annie Williams had left Brownsville for Farmingdale, New York. She continued to correspond with Thurgood Marshall, who wrote letters to President Roosevelt and the U.S. Justice Department, as the NAACP continued to seek justice for her husband.¹⁴⁷

The outward appearance of calm masked the deep anxiety that existed in the Black community. Whispers, glances, nods, private vigils, and silent prayers were clues to the brewing chaos in Brownsville as was the quiet gathering of weapons such as fishing and hunting knives, gardening tools, and shot guns for protection. Children stayed closer to home, and car owners stashed their pistols in glove boxes or under car seats to defend themselves should they be

¹⁴⁵ Annie Williams affidavit.

¹⁴⁶ NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406, Lynching Brownsville, TN Elbert Williams folder, letter from John O. Bomer to Rev. S.C. McDowell dated July 6, 1940.

¹⁴⁷ NAACP Papers, Group II, Box A406, Lynching Brownsville, TN Elbert Williams folder

accosted while driving. Meanwhile, local law enforcement instituted a curfew for Blacks. A horn sounded reminding Black residents to be in doors or bear the consequences.¹⁴⁸

Less than one month after the Williams lynching, Irma Newbern, serving her first term as secretary of the Brownsville NAACP, wrote a letter to Walter White of the NAACP's national office which provided a glimpse into the Black community's collective response to Williams's lynching and the hostile climate in which people lived. Newbern first requested that no correspondence from the NAACP be sent to her for fear of repercussions. Although federal law prohibited tampering with U.S. mail, she had been informed that mail was being opened, and she explained that ". . . all the officers of this Branch have gone. Some were forced to leave and others fled due to fear of bodily harm." The devastating news of Elbert Williams's lynching convinced Ollie and Matt Bond, exiled in Kansas City, Kansas, after the firebombing of their home, that they should not attempt to return to Brownsville.¹⁴⁹

Mrs. Newbern thought she had been spared physical harm because she was a woman,¹⁵⁰ but she remained "afraid to stay at home at night." She, a school teacher, and her husband, a local tailor, had been productive members of the community, and both were charter members of the NAACP. They debated whether they too should leave Brownsville. Mrs. Newbern lamented that ". . . these white people here are trying to run all the NAACP members out of Brownsville."

¹⁴⁸I am not sure what time the curfew began. In Richard Congress, Blues Mandolin Man: The Life and Music of Yank Rachell (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 56. Rachell makes reference to the curfew in Brownsville, "[at] Seven o'clock they blow you off the streets." See Raye Springfield, The Legacy of Tamar: Courage and Faith in an African American Family (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 131. "This Saturday, it was getting late, and any black person caught on the streets after 10:30 would spend the rest of the weekend in jail." See page. Both of these references referred to the time Elbert Williams was lynched. Blacks might have had a later curfew on the weekends, which could explain the time discrepancies.

¹⁴⁹ Mattye T. Bond "Brief Sketch of the Life of Mattye T. Bond" (unpublished/undated essay in possession of author).

¹⁵⁰ A Black woman who was eight months old was lynched and her fetus cut out of her and stomped by a member of the lynch mob. See James Allen's Without Sanctuary, 14.

She, like other local residents, was “. . . scared to death” and confirmed that “[b]eing threatened and watched is a terrible predicament to be in.”¹⁵¹

The NAACP, headquartered in New York, and other organizations helped to make the lynching of Elbert William and the forced exodus of Brownsville citizens seeking their civil liberties part of the country’s national discourse. Human rights violations in Brownsville were also likened to global ones that were more prominently debated in the media among American politicians. In July 1940, Walter White discussed the Williams lynching at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.¹⁵² In the August 1940 edition of The Crisis magazine, Roy Wilkins evoked the language of Nazi Germany to illustrate how egregious the events in Brownsville had been. He challenged the “democratic way of life” rhetoric U.S. citizens were spewing to condemn the Nazis by comparing the events in the American South to “Hitler’s occupation of Prague or Vienna.” He argued that these southern events read “like a passage from ‘Mein Kampf,’” or sounded like something from a “Nazi chamber of horrors.” He also emphasized that these victims of state-sanctioned violence were respectable citizens and had become “criminals” because they wanted to register and vote in the next presidential election. According to Wilkins, the perpetrators drove at least twelve residents out of town at gun point, including “a minister of the gospel, and the father of seven children who owned and operated a gasoline filling station-- a solid law abiding citizen.” Wilkins concluded that “they [were] all peaceful, hard-working citizens, and, if you will, well-behaved.”¹⁵³

A Pittsburgh Courier editorial condemned President Franklin Roosevelt and Tennessee native U.S Secretary of State Cordell Hull for concentrating on international human rights

¹⁵¹ NAACP Papers: Group II, Box A406, Letter from Irma Newbern to Walter White July 9, 1940.

¹⁵²“Democratic Convention Told of Brownsville, Tennessee Lynching.” CA Eagle, July 18, 1941.

¹⁵³ Roy Wilkins, Editorial in The Crisis, 47 (August 1940), 232.

violations while ignoring racially motivated violence at home. According to the editorial, Roosevelt had shown “indignation” over “aggression in Europe and Asia.” And Hull had been “endeavoring to organize hemisphere resistance against . . . totalitarianism,” while dismissing the fact that “democracy has been taking a severe beating in the little town of Brownsville.” The Courier insisted that the Brownsville “refugees” needed as much “help and protection as . . . refugees in Holland, Belgium, France, China, Poland or Ethiopia.” The newspaper also conjured up images of Nazi Germany by using a striking parallel: “There are a thousand Brownsvilles in this country where Negrophobia enslaves democracy as effectively as the Nazi enslaved liberty in Europe.”¹⁵⁴

Delegates at the United Automobile Workers’ (UAW) 1940 convention in Detroit, Michigan, added a discussion of lynching to their agenda. Attendees drafted a resolution that documented their support of anti-lynching legislation. In addition to President Roosevelt, Congress, and the national office of the NAACP, the group sent a copy of their resolution to Prentice Cooper, the governor of Tennessee, acknowledging the recent lynching of Elbert Williams in West Tennessee.¹⁵⁵

Despite public outcries and political efforts to pass anti-lynching legislation, the federal government provided no relief for the dispossessed Brownsvillians. Elisha Davis, for example, with his pregnant wife and their seven had fled to Niles, Michigan. Davis was prepared to sue Haywood County and testify against the men in the mob whom he was able to identify, but the Davises’ abrupt flight from their home and business in Brownsville had put them in serious financial difficulty. Davis, who had owned his own business, resorted to asking Walter White

¹⁵⁴ From “The Press of the Nation: Editorial of the Month,” The Crisis, 47(September 1940), 289.

¹⁵⁵ “Editorial of the Month,” The Crisis, (November 1940), 360.

and the NAACP for financial assistance. The NAACP was responsive, raising funds for the Davis family, running advertisements to connect Davis with a willing employer, and sending him money. At one point, Davis had to rely on public assistance. And, in the midst of exile and economic uncertainty, Davis remained loyal to the NAACP. In letters to White, Davis asked for NAACP membership applications as he wanted to support the NAACP's agenda in Niles, Michigan, just as he had done in Brownsville, Tennessee. In fact, he attempted to vote in the 1940 election in Michigan, but he was denied because he had not yet established residency.¹⁵⁶

Davis's dire circumstances were exacerbated when he learned that whites had taken over his business and refused to pay him for the equipment he had recently purchased.¹⁵⁷ He also received disturbing updates from NAACP members in Haywood County. In a letter, Beulah Hill, treasurer of the local NAACP branch, wrote, "I don't think I'll ever recover from the shock. . . . It's best for them [the Davises] not to come back this way." She also warned, "Tell Elisha don't send more open messages, such as telegrams or telegraphs as they create a lot of excitement."¹⁵⁸

News of the threats from Brownsville made their way to former residents living in exile. Elisha Davis received correspondence from several friends including Robert Bond. A letter dated September 13, 1940, from "your friend R.B." stated, "You don't have no idea how dangerous it is to go up there [to register]. A white man told my cousin before this thing was settled the river would be full of Negroes." In another letter dated August 31, 1940, Bond said "I also had a man to stop me with a long gun in his belt and told me he had me on his list. . . ." According to Bond, Dr. Lanier was confident that "Negroes would never vote in Brownsville." And a white gas

¹⁵⁶ NAACP Papers: Group II, Box A406.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 241; Couto, *Lifting the Veil*, 149.

¹⁵⁸ NAACP Papers Group II, Box A406: Long distance calls were being monitored and mail was being opened before it reached the person to whom the correspondence was sent.

station owner reportedly told Bond's brother, "I'm your friend, but if you join that dam [sic] organization I would be the first man to put a rope around your neck."¹⁵⁹

Although the lynching received national attention, including an official federal investigation, African Americans in Haywood County were convinced that neither the NAACP nor the federal government could guarantee their protection against local whites who violently opposed equal rights. The lynching of Elbert Williams highlighted the political and economic oppression prevalent in Haywood County and the lengths to which local whites would go to quash Blacks' pursuit of civil rights. Black citizens in Brownsville wanted to participate in the political process and have their voices heard. However, they was so vulnerable and the institutional racism so entrenched that even with a formal FBI investigation and an eyewitness willing to identify at least thirteen members of the mob, no one was arrested for the lynching or any of the brutal crimes against Black citizens during the early years of the Brownsville NAACP's formation.¹⁶⁰

The federal investigation itself was a mockery since the FBI agents who came to Brownsville to interview Black residents allowed Sheriff Tip Hunter, a well-known racist and a leader of the mob, to accompany them to the interviews. While only a small number of Blacks in Brownsville had joined the NAACP and pursued the right to vote, the white leaders, who had a stronghold on the town's social, political, and economic life, fought to maintain their apartheid-like control of Blacks in the town. African Americans feared mentioning the NAACP because of the physical, emotional, and financial backlash its presence in Brownsville had ignited. The

¹⁵⁹ NAACP Papers: Group II, Box A406 Re: Elbert Williams lynching: Letter to Elisha Davis from R.B., Walker School, Ripley, Tennessee, dated September 13, 1940; Letter from Robert Bond, Route 3, Box 12, Brownsville, August 31, 1940. I surmise that R.B. is Robert Bond, who was a teacher in west Tennessee for decades.

¹⁶⁰ Williams's murders never came to justice, but ironically, almost twenty years later Jack Hunter, brother of Sherriff Tip Hunter, died at the hands of Willie Jones, a meek Black man and father of 4 daughters. More details will be in Chapter 4.

lynching of Elbert Williams was a pivotal moment in the consciousness of the African American community. It forced residents to reconsider how they could pursue rights as Haywood County residents and as citizens of the United States without provoking the wrath of local whites and more bloodshed.¹⁶¹

How did this hate crime and terrorist threats change the lives of African Americans in Brownsville, and how did it influence their pursuit for equality? Would this incident motivate Blacks in Brownsville to fight even harder for their civil rights as the Emmett Till lynching had done in the 1950s? Christopher Benson, attorney and Associate Professor of African American Studies and Journalism at the University of Illinois, at Urbana-Champaign, has argued that the 1955 lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi, spurred the Civil Rights Movement and helped to link the NAACP's legal strategy used in the Brown case with grassroots efforts of Mrs. Mamie Till, who decided to have an open casket funeral for her son. His body revealed the gruesome way in which he had been tormented and murdered. The unsettling picture of Till's remains in Jet magazine stirred the hearts and minds of many who, some for the first time, felt the call to action. The smiling face of the handsome teenager was contrasted with an unrecognizable and grotesque image of what lynching, hate, and white supremacy look like. According to Benson, Rosa Parks, whose act of defiance helped to spark the Montgomery Bus Boycott later that year, carried Till's image with her during her act of civil disobedience.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Sullivan, Lift Every Voice, 24; Couto, Lifting the Veil, 170-171.

¹⁶² Listen to NPR <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1969702>; Visit NPR <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1969702> "Emmett Till and the Impact of Images" Christopher Benson, "Turning Point: Emmett Till's Killers Thought No One was Watching. . . They were Wrong," The Crisis 111 (Winter 2009), 7-8.

The aftermath of the Williams lynching in Brownsville caused local residents to turn their attention to building staple institutions that were less obviously threatening to white supremacy. The nationally-known NAACP represented overt resistance to white privilege and oppression in Brownsville. On the other hand, staple institutions in the Black community, such as schools and funeral homes, raised no immediate red flags and appeared harmless on the surface. As Black businesses emerged, much more than the façades of new buildings materialized in the town: capital, marketable skills, personal contacts, professional and socio-political networks, ideas, models, and strategic plans also emerged—all of which could translate into power, leverage, and upward mobility for Blacks seeking equality. The formation of the Brownsville branch of the NAACP and the lynching of Elbert Williams not only reconfirmed the need for civil rights, but also inspired local leaders to shift their embrace of full citizenship from the political realm to the economic realm. Growing Black businesses and quality education for Blacks would be strategies to achieve economic equality and eventually first-class citizenship.

After Elbert Williams's lynching, it was clear that local white leaders were opposed to sharing their power or citizenship rights with Blacks. Brownsville whites would not permit the growth of the new NAACP branch without causing more deaths and property losses. Black Brownsvillians had already exhibited an entrepreneurial spirit with the small businesses established in the town. Even before Emancipation, enslaved Africans had used economic empowerment to resist racism and subjugation. They understood the importance of economic leverage as they saved money to buy freedom for themselves and their families. Thus, like their

enslaved forbearers, Blacks in Brownsville used economic empowerment as a path to human rights and full citizenship.¹⁶³

In 1899, W.E. B Du Bois addressed the relationship between Black entrepreneurship and social justice when he published a report that focused on African American businesses and identified their “functions” within the African American community, which were “(economic, social and psychological)”. He observed that “Physical emancipation came in 1863, but economic emancipation is still far off.” And according to historian Suzanne Smith, Du Bois “articulate[d] a clear vision of black economic independence as a central platform in the fight against racial inequality.” So, the interwoven threads of economic independence and the Black freedom struggle are grounded in centuries of practical and intellectual thought.¹⁶⁴

Charles Allen Rawls’s personal affirmation, “The Negro will never be free until he is economically free,” made him an important figure in the community’s shift from political to economic justice. Rawls, together with the Black community, was able to use entrepreneurship as a nonviolent form of protest against exclusion and oppression which furthered the cause of civil rights while pursuing economic justice for the community, and enhanced self-esteem for the people living there. More specifically, Rawls used the funeral business as a “gateway” enterprise that allowed him to establish other staple institutions. Christopher Leevy Johnson, a funeral director and author of “Undertakings: The Politics of African American Funeral Directing,” has stated that African American funeral directors were “committed to the needs of the community and often broadened their service beyond providing decent burials. . . . [In fact], during the

¹⁶³ For the “slaves’ economy,” see Roderick A. McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁴ Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines, *Black Titan: A.G. Gaston and the Making of a Black American Millionaire*, (NY: Ballantine Books), 86 ; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro in Business* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1899), 5; Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 49.

twentieth century, African American undertakers in America used their success as businessmen to facilitate social change by their involvement in various civil rights organizations and movements.”¹⁶⁵

In Brownsville, Black businesses helped to create social change. The entrepreneurial spirit of business leader and funeral director C.A. Rawls indeed extended beyond providing a decent burial. No doubt after witnessing the resistance, violence, and economic reprisals his mentor O.S. Bond had encountered while fighting for equality, Rawls concluded that direct action would not be effective. Subversive economic action, but in plain sight, became a viable approach to securing economic leverage and citizenship.

In the classic Harlem Renaissance poem, “I, Too, Sing America,” Langston Hughes observes: “I am the darker brother./ They send me to eat in the kitchen/ When company comes,/But I laugh,/And eat well,/And grow strong.” He is aware of what white America might perceive as his subordinate position, being sent to the kitchen and excluded “when company comes.” Still, Hughes, perhaps embracing the Washingtonian notion of growing where we are planted or casting down our buckets where we are, asserts that “Tomorrow, / I’ll be at the table/ When company comes.” More than simply coming to the table or being allowed to sit at the table, the poet prepares to contribute to the conversation at the table and expresses contempt for the inhumanity he has experienced while being excluded. He continues, “Nobody’ll dare/Say to me,“Eat in the kitchen, /Then.” As the poem ends, the writer shifts his focus to the more fundamental and universal message that condemns inhumanity and honors his inherent beauty as not only as an American but as a member of the human family. He concludes, “Besides,/ They’ll

¹⁶⁵ Christopher Leevy Johnson, “Undertakings: The Politics of African-American Funeral Directing,” Proquest Dissertations and Theses, 2004. Section 0202, Part 0337 356 pages, [PhD dissertation] United States—South Carolina .University of South Carolina; 2004. Publication Number: AAT 3130454, 10-11.

see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed--/I, too, am America.” Much like the approach to citizenship Hughes uses in his poem, Rawls and the citizens who remained in Brownsville in the 1940s began building their own “table” as they attempted to “eat well and grow strong.”¹⁶⁶

On a personal level, Rawls understood the importance of economic empowerment as he became part of an emerging middle class that provided him with access to information, resources, and ideas, as well as to social, political, and professional contacts that he used to elevate his family and his community. Rawls practiced thrift. He saved money and was able to move his business from his residence into a new building on Jackson Avenue, which became a central location for many Black-owned businesses. At home, Rawls hired Lurleen “Shot” Hart, a young woman from the neighborhood, to keep house, cook, and clean. Shot became an integral part of the family as she freed Mrs. Rawls from traditional household chores and gave her more time to devote to community work. Shot provided support when the family entertained guests or when business associates were unable to secure lodging in “whites only” hotels. She, similar to local ministers, leaders, and business associates, was an unofficial advisor who provided Rawls with a perspective from struggling and working-class neighbors that increased his awareness of community needs. As the family grew in stature, they maintained an open-door policy which kept them connected to their community. The family owned several household firsts: neighborhood children, for example, who were fascinated with an electrical appliance that made ice, dropped by just to see the refrigerator make ice. A neighbor, living with domestic violence, retreated to Mrs. Rawls for safety when her husband’s abuse escalated. Extended family from the “country” lived with the Rawlses for months to attend school or secure employment in the city. Mrs. Rawls was a Sunday school teacher and member of the Missionary Society at Farmer’s

¹⁶⁶ Langston Hughes, “I, Too,” in Arnold Rampersad, ed., *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 46.

Chapel C.M.E. Church. Rawls maintained a professional persona and purchased tangible symbols of prosperity. Still, he remained a prudent consumer whose purchases were investments that would ultimately help his family, his business, and his community.¹⁶⁷

C.A. Rawls and his wife Maude had annual physical examinations at Riverside Hospital, the first Seventh-day Adventists-run hospital for Blacks in Nashville. Riverside, established in 1927, attracted prominent Blacks from across the state. Patients ate vegetarian meals, received medical treatment, including alternative treatments such as hydrotherapy, and met a staff of African American doctors and nurses.¹⁶⁸ Rawls understood the importance of quality health and medical care. Although he maintained relationships with local white physicians, particularly Dr. David Stewart with whom his grandmother Harriett Stewart Rawls shared common ancestors, Rawls sought out African American medical doctors and dentists willing to practice in Brownsville, and he often leased housing and office space to them. For example, Dr. L.D. Thomas, a medical doctor born in the Virgin Islands and a charter member of the local NAACP, leased office space from Rawls. In later years, Dr. Ernest Carter, a graduate of Meharry's School of Dentistry, and native of Jackson, Tennessee, practiced in Brownsville and rented a home from Rawls.¹⁶⁹ Rawls Funeral Home provided ambulance services for its burial association members and local residents before an ambulance authority was established in Brownsville. Funeral home hearses became ambulances which transported burial association members and Brownsville

¹⁶⁷ Cynthia Rawls Bond interview with author, 2008.

¹⁶⁸ See Nashville Adventist Heritage Tour www.blacksdahistory.org/files/40749920.pdf (accessed August 13, 2011) <http://historicnashville.wordpress.com/2009/04/14/riverside-sanitarium/> and http://www.blacksdahistory.org/Important_Whites_in_Black_Seventh-day_Adventism.html

¹⁶⁹ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, June 4, 2008.

residents to local-area hospitals for emergency care and medical appointments. Rawls Mutual Benevolent Society, at its peak, insured over 30,000 African Americans.¹⁷⁰

The Rawls family also took what were advertised as “health vacations”¹⁷¹ to the Pythian Bathhouse and Hotel in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The Pythian, established in 1914, was owned by the Knights of Pythias of North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia (KoP), a well-known fraternal organization and benevolent society. The resort became a popular getaway for prosperous African Americans who were able to bathe in the healing hot springs of Arkansas, which helped to rejuvenate both the mind and body.¹⁷² Benevolent society members received a discount when visiting the bathhouse, but Black sports figures, congressmen, bankers, journalists and entrepreneurs also vacationed at this upscale facility. Rawls and his wife had daily bathes and massages. They met other Black leaders from their respective communities who discussed issues of the day. Dinner often included conversations about the philosophies and achievements of Booker T. Washington and less well-known leaders of “the race” such as A.G. Gaston, an Alabama native and funeral director whom Rawls admired. Gaston’s success in the funeral business helped him to expand into other enterprises so that he eventually opened a bank, a hotel, and an insurance company. Rawls was aware of Gaston’s success in business and admired his accomplishments as well as his service to his community.¹⁷³

Self-help groups and fraternal organizations, though less frequently researched, for example, than Black churches, have provided foundational support to communities forced to

¹⁷⁰ See Golden Circle Life Insurance pamphlet, “From Zero to Six Million,” in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond; See funeral program of Charles Allen Rawls, February 10, 1988, in possession of author.

¹⁷¹ See advertisement in *The Crisis* 47(September 1940), 303.

¹⁷² See website “Pythian Bathhouse, Hotel, and Sanitarium” [http:// mosaicemplarscenter.com/collections/files.aspx](http://mosaicemplarscenter.com/collections/files.aspx); also see “African Americans and the Hot Springs Baths” Department of the Interior, National Park Service: Hot Springs., [n.d.], on accessed August 4, 2009.

¹⁷³ See Jenkins and Gardner Hines, *Black Titan*.

exist and survive along the periphery. These institutions, which have helped communities not only to survive, but even to grow in the midst of racial segregation, knitted together the social and cultural fabric of rural towns and cities and towns across the country. Moreover, these institutions have often been sites of political activism representing sociopolitical markers of resistance. The Black community has long embraced the collaborative spirit of these associations. Burial associations have been an integral part of Black communities where poverty and disenfranchisement abound. Pooling together resources, though small, helped communities on multiple levels. A strengthened sense of community emerged as members were assured relief or assistance when death or loss of family income occurred.¹⁷⁴

Like local NAACP members who had made connections among civil rights activists across the country, Rawls built networks within staple institutions that benefitted him as well as his community through the local chapter of the National Negro Business League, founded by Booker T. Washington, and the West Tennessee Funeral Directors' Association. Rawls brought ideas from meetings of these organizations back to his community, and with community support, he was able to lay the groundwork for businesses that would benefit the Black community. For Rawls, a consummate business man, lines between work and play or business and pleasure were often blurred. The bottom line was business, and business meant, as Suzanne Smith noted, "serving the living and the dead."¹⁷⁵

Rawls often advised his daughter, "Make yourself necessary to the world and the world will give you bread." He was establishing himself as a central part of the community. For example, Rawls Funeral Home continued to expand as Rawls opened other locations in West

¹⁷⁴ Skocpol, et al., What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 13, 76; personal observations by author.

¹⁷⁵ See Suzanne E. Smith, To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the American Way of Death (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Tennessee. The Rawls Burial Drive continued each year without interruption and provided material support that included furniture, money, insurance coverage, and ambulance service as well as psychological support that included membership in the burial society with friends and the promise of a dignified burial. Whites appeared to tolerate Black-owned businesses which they typically saw as non-threatening and insignificant to the larger white community.¹⁷⁶

In the mid-1940s, after Blacks protested to Rawls about the treatment they received at the local white-owned movie theater, Rawls purchased a building on Main Street, just south of the Courthouse square, and opened the Gem Theater. Blacks were no longer relegated to the balcony, and they were able to enjoy western or other movie genres without compromising their dignity in the process. This business created additional employment for African Americans, generated income that could be recycled into the Black community, and became part of an important infrastructure in Brownsville. The auditorium in the Gem Theater building became a site where artists such as B.B. King performed, thus providing Blacks in the area with another social and cultural outlet.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the basement of the Gem became the site of the Kozy Barber School, established to cater to Black World War II veterans returning to West Tennessee.

In June 1944, President Roosevelt signed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act into law. The GI Bill, as it became known, provided financial support to World War II veterans as they re-entered civilian life. In addition to money for tuition and books, veterans could receive monthly living allowances as well.¹⁷⁸ A total of 7.6 million veterans used the GI Bill for educational purposes, and according to the military historian John Butler, approximately 95 percent of the

¹⁷⁶ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011, Brownsville, Tennessee; Interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977, Brownsville, Tennessee.

¹⁷⁷ Sharon Norris, Nutbush of Cotton Fields, Butterflies, and Wild Onion Ridge (Nutbush: Nutbush Heritage Productions, Inc., 1999), 27-28.

¹⁷⁸ Ronald Roach, "From Combat to Campus: GI Bill Gave a Generation of African Americans an Opportunity to Pursue the American Dream," Black Issues in Higher Education, 14 (August 21, 1997), 26.

African American veterans using the Bill were “educated in the South.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, given its large African American population, Brownsville was an ideal location for a vocational center for African American veterans.

Additionally, poverty in Brownsville was rampant, especially for disenfranchised African Americans, many of whom were landless and lacked sufficient training for college admission. Veterans who took advantage of the educational component of the Bill earned substantially more than those who did not.¹⁸⁰ However, Veteran Administration statistics revealed in 1947 that “only 5 percent of all black veterans enrolled in courses and programs under the education benefit.”¹⁸¹ Hilary Herbold, author of “Never a Level Playing Field: Black Veterans and the GI Bill,” observes that the GI Bill became a financially sound investment for the U.S. government as well since it “generated tax revenues eight to ten times greater than the total cost of the program.”¹⁸² Rawls was a business man and community developer who negotiated with state authorities to open a barber school in Brownsville so that veterans and the community at-large could reap the benefits of the GI Bill.¹⁸³

Rawls entered into a joint venture with local beautician, Mrs. Alma Sloan Taylor, a Brownsville native who had married, moved to Nashville, and returned to Brownsville with a cosmetology license. “Madam Taylor,” as she was called by locals, had established herself as an ambitious and progressive business woman. She had leased a two-story building behind Rawls

¹⁷⁹ Hilary Herbold (as quoted in), “Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill,” The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 6(Winter 1994/1995), 108.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁸¹ David H. Onkst, “First a Negro. . . Incidentally a Veteran”: Black World War Two Veterans and the G.I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948,” Journal of Social History, 31 (Spring 1998), 532.

¹⁸² Hilary Herbold, “Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill” The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 6 (Winter 1994/1995), 104.

¹⁸³ James Baxter interview with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977; James Baxter, A Portrait: C. A. Rawls, Tennessee State University Thesis, 19; copy of thesis in the possession of the author.

Funeral Home where she maintained her residence, a studio apartment, and three small businesses that reflected her sophistication and style. The Kozy Tea Room was located on the first floor of the building, adjacent to a garage with rolling stock from the Rawls Funeral Home. Walking past hearses and funeral cars did not diminish the posh feel of the tearoom. Unlike most local “cafes,” the waiters at the tearoom wore crisp white jackets. The tables and chairs were upscale and the décor oozed refinement. Rather than what rural West Tennesseans might call a “sammich,” guests came to the Kozy Tearoom for sandwiches, t-bone steaks, pastries and, of course, afternoon tea.¹⁸⁴

“Madam” also operated the Kozy Beauty Parlor where her patrons, rural Black women, could read Vogue magazine and sip tea while they waited for their salon services. She also contracted with Rawls Funeral Home to wash and style hair of the deceased entrusted to the funeral home’s care. She later opened the Kozy Beauty School, complete with manicure stations and manikins on which students could style, color, and cut hair.¹⁸⁵ The Kozy Barber School, a practical complement to the Kozy Beauty School, provided training for Black barbers in the Brownsville and adjoining counties. Madam Taylor was the ideal person to teach classes and see that the school ran efficiently. Completing the requirements and receiving a barber’s license meant that those who migrated to the North possessed a marketable skill that could translate into income for the family. Those who remained in West Tennessee could open their own businesses or join existing shops in the area.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Cynthia Rawls Bond interview with author, April 15, 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Cynthia Rawls Bond, “Remembering Madam,” unpublished /undated essay.

¹⁸⁶ The 10th annual beauticians’ conference was held in Brownsville in 1951, and Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune was guest speaker. For more information on the role beauty shops played in the Civil Rights Movement, see Tiffany M. Gill, Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2010) and Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

Like Brownsville, the nation, too, inched toward freedom, but it was constantly reminded of discrimination, violence, and institutional racism. According to Edward Humes, author of Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream, less than a month after President Roosevelt signed the GI Bill into law, an African American lieutenant, serving in what was still a segregated military, “faced court-martial and a long wartime prison sentence for simply refusing to give up his seat on a military bus to a white soldier.”¹⁸⁷ Then an African American veteran was lynched with three civilians in Georgia in 1946, and one veteran was lynched in Louisiana in 1947.¹⁸⁸ The NAACP had demonstrated its commitment to ending lynching in this country, and Black veterans who charged the Veterans Administration with discrimination also sought assistance from the NAACP. The Association advocated for Black American veterans when Veterans Administration representatives refused to grant them educational benefits from the GI Bill.¹⁸⁹ Both local and national efforts helped veterans to adjust to civilian life. Despite the dearth of employment opportunities in Brownsville, the barber college and beauty school were hopeful signs for veterans and the community-at-large. Local business leaders knew that both the development of businesses and the promotion of education were paths to economic growth.

For Matt and O.S. Bond, the fruits of their political labor in Brownsville appeared barren. Still, the aftermath of the Williams lynching and the destruction of the Brownsville branch of the NAACP allowed the Bonds to shift their sights to their children, beneficiaries of the educational

¹⁸⁷ Edward Humes, “How the GI Bill Shunted Blacks into Vocational Training,” The Journal of Higher Education, No. 53 (Autumn 2006), 93.

¹⁸⁸ Herbold, “Never a Level Playing Field,” 105; for more details on the lynching in Monroe, Georgia, see Laura Wexler, Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America (NY: Scribner, 2003).

¹⁸⁹ Herbold, “Never a Level Playing Field,” 105.

opportunities that led to economic empowerment, political justice, and full citizenship. The Bonds knew membership in civil rights organization was only one method to gain equality. Schools have been well-established staple institutions in the Black community that have facilitated the entry of Blacks into mainstream society, thus gaining access to American democracy and its material resources. African Americans have used a variety of approaches to secure civil rights and their futures as American citizens.

In 1941, Marion Ollie Bond, daughter of O.S. and Matt Bond, was a graduating senior at Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, when she became a part of civil rights history in corporate America. Recruiters from Pepsi-Cola introduced a unique employment opportunity to students on campus. The “rivalry” between Coca-Cola and Pepsi that began in the 1940s motivated Pepsi to launch the Job Awards for American Youth program that would make the company more competitive, increase its sales in the African American community, and offer African Americans a chance to “[break] the corporate color line.”¹⁹⁰

Walter S. Mack, Jr., president of Pepsi from 1938 until 1950, initiated the Job Awards for American Youth, which provided thirteen college graduates one-year internships at Pepsi-Cola. Interns earned \$1,300 for the year. At the end of the year, Pepsi would hire the interns or assist them as they sought other employment. Opening the Job Awards for American Youth to African Americans was a step toward dismantling exclusionary practices that fostered an all-white network while increasing diversity in the workplace.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Stephanie Capparell, author of *The Real Pepsi Challenge: The Inspiring Story of Breaking the Color Barrier in American Business* has argued that “Pepsi’s first special-markets sales staff” should be included among “the unsung civil rights pioneers.” (ix-x).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Marion's parents, who had fled from Tennessee to Kansas because of violence directed against them for establishing Brownsville's NAACP branch, encouraged her to apply for the internship. Applicants took tests and wrote an essay on "Why American Democracy Should Be Preserved." Marion was selected as one of fifteen finalists, who received an all-expenses paid trip to New York where they met with Walter Mack. A distinguished interview team that included Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, former Ambassador to Norway, and H.V. Kaltenborn, a noted radio commentator, interviewed the finalists. After the screening process, Walter Mack hired twenty-one-year-old Marion Bond and twenty-one-year-old Philip Kane, a graduate of Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland.¹⁹² These two interns filled the vacancies which Allen McKellar and Jeanette Maund, both African Americans, had created when they moved from interns to full-time Pepsi sales representatives for the "special [all-Black] market."¹⁹³

In the spring of 1941, Marion graduated summa cum laude from Lane College with a major in sociology and a minor in English. She then moved to New York City to begin her employment with Pepsi-Cola as a national sales representative in special marketing (that is, the "Negro" market). For Marion, this position meant that she was being recognized for her academic record, oral and written skills, and impressive extracurricular activities.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Marion B. Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights," in Marcy Babbitt, ed., Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hal, Inc.), 121; see newspaper clip on Pepsi Challenge website <http://www.realpepsichallenge.com/gallery.html> (accessed March 20, 2011)

¹⁹³See The Real Pepsi Challenge website that includes a newspaper clip of Marion Bond, Walter Mack, and Philip Kane. In 1940, the original thirteen interns included two African American, Allen McKellar and Jeanette Maund. <http://www.realpepsichallenge.com/gallery.html>

¹⁹⁴Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights, 119-127; NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See Jan 27, 1947 letter by Marion Bond.

However, Marion, a Black female from the rural South, was becoming a part of civil rights history in corporate America.¹⁹⁵ According to Stephanie Capparell, author of The Real Pepsi Challenge, “Integrating business [unlike integrating sports], . . . was a far more sweeping—and for some, threatening—proposition in a white society: an invitation to the rank and file of an entire race to vie for the same jobs as everyone else in the corporate hierarchy.”¹⁹⁶ Marion was among the new Pepsi white-collar employees who traveled across the country to sell Pepsi products to the newly-expanding African American market. And as Capparell notes, the young Black Pepsi representatives spoke in “black churches, women’s clubs, civic centers, fraternities, campuses, and convention halls.” And when these new members of corporate America encountered segregation in hotels and restaurants across the country, they relied on a “network of families willing to give them food and lodging . . . while on the road.”¹⁹⁷

After completing her one-year internship, Marion started working for Pepsi as a full-time employee New York City. Her acceptance both as an African American and a woman in corporate America helped to distance her from memories of the discrimination her family had confronted in Brownsville. She was a college-educated professional, and she was breaking gendered and racialized barriers at a national corporation where her ideas were respected and her contributions acknowledged.

Then, on Thanksgiving morning, November 26, 1942, three years after Marion’s parents had fled Haywood County, Aurelia Bond, Marion’s grandmother, the family matriarch, died in Brownsville. Friends and relatives warned Marion’s father Ollie, a Brownsville native, that it

¹⁹⁵ Nancy MacLean has noted that, “In 1940, only 14 percent of black women and 11 percent of black men nationally had completed high school, compared to 40 percent of whites. See Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19-20.

¹⁹⁶ Stephanie Capparell’s The Real Pepsi Challenge focuses on the team African American Pepsi executive Ed Boyd led after he arrived in 1947, x.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., xii-xiii.

was still not safe to return to Tennessee, not even for his mother's funeral. Like millions of African Americans who had abandoned the South for lives in other parts of the nation, Ollie Bond's move severed a century and a half of ancestral roots. But, far more important to the family, they would never see Aurelia Bond again.

While Marion was making her mark at Pepsi Cola, younger sister Mildred was a student at Sumner High School in Kansas City, Kansas. In 1943, Mildred graduated from Sumner with honors and began her freshman year at Howard University in Washington, D.C., in the fall. Howard was a mecca for African American social, political and intellectual thought. The university was a community where students and faculty lived on the pulse of a changing nation. University professors such as Alain Locke, Rayford Logan, Sterling Brown, and E. Franklin Frazier provided a rich academic and intellectual environment.¹⁹⁸ During her freshman year, Mildred pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a public service sorority, and was inducted into the Alpha Chapter at Howard the following year. Her cousin Garnetta and both of her sisters had made Delta, and she, like they, respected the public service component of the sorority.¹⁹⁹

After two years at Howard, Mildred transferred to New York University (NYU). Howard had provided social networks and a strong academic base, yet she preferred the "anonymity" NYU provided. While at NYU, she participated in the American Friends Service (AFS) study abroad program to Mexico, adding a new dimension to the academic experience for her family. She was also able to assist communities in Mexico with housing, educational, and economic

¹⁹⁸ See Kenneth Janken, Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African American Intellectual (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁹ Mildred Bond Roxborough telephone conversation with author, April 10, 2010; Mildred Bond Roxborough interviewed by Larry Crow, June 8, 2005.

needs, quite like the support her parents and affiliates of staple institutions provided local residents in Brownsville.²⁰⁰

In 1946, while Mildred was at NYU, C.A. and Maude Rawls decided to send their daughter Cynthia to Kansas City to live with Matt and Ollie. For Cynthia, family and school life in Kansas City differed from life in Brownsville. The Rawls home was always busy, full of relatives and business associates coming in and out of the house. Cynthia's parents worked long hours, and her primary chore was to practice her piano lessons. In Kansas, however, Cynthia was taught how to wash and iron. Her weekly chore was to wash Uncle Ollie's socks, which she did proudly. Ollie had passed the civil service exam and was employed at the post office. Matt worked as a substitute teacher and as a seamstress at a local lingerie factory. Their evenings at home were similar to those the Bonds had had in Brownsville, filled with books and lively debates about issues of the day. Without fear of retribution by local whites, both Ollie and Matt were members of the Kansas City branch of the NAACP. They also voted and worked at the polls during election time. Cynthia attended political rallies with Uncle Ollie and helped Cousin Matt dress up for her Intelligencia Club meetings at the YWCA.²⁰¹

Cynthia entered Northeast Junior High School after taking an assessment test. Her aptitude and potential were high, but the test revealed that she had not been exposed to or had not learned many academic lessons which an 8th grader in Kansas was expected to know. Still, she was excited to begin life in a new school and was ready for the challenge. Students whom she

²⁰⁰ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005.

²⁰¹ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011.

met were already playing chess and doing complicated math problems. She attended school with children who accepted her as just another student.²⁰²

Although both Northeast Junior High School and Haywood County Training School were racially segregated, the overall climate was entirely different for young Cynthia. Most of the seven years she had spent at Haywood County Training School had been difficult. She had had a few compassionate teachers and friends. However, for her, the classroom environment was hostile and rarely conducive to learning. She felt at times as if both the students and teachers were “angry,” burdened, perhaps, by the daily oppression they experienced in their lives. Cynthia’s mother tried to help her daughter blend in with the other children, thinking simple clothes and shoes would help. Cynthia was never “flamboyant” or outspoken. She was quiet and saved her jewelry, new dresses, and shoes for out-of-town events. Even with her efforts to become invisible, she was bullied by students and teachers alike. Many of the very adults who supposedly respected her parents and held them in high esteem because of their contributions to the community were the same teachers who disparaged her during class.²⁰³

Aurelia Bachelor (formerly Aurelia Bond, principal Roy Bond’s sister and Ollie Bond’s niece), was Cynthia’s 7th- grade teacher. Bachelor, a heavy-set woman who snarled and carried a paddle around with her, was notorious for being a strict disciplinarian. Bachelor had announced to the class at the beginning of the year that while she knew Cynthia’s parents, Cynthia Rawls would not have any special privileges and that she would be treated like any other student. For

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Telephone interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, October 4, 2011. Interestingly Dr. C.P. Boyd, a Haywood County native who will appear in chapter four, wrote that he experienced discrimination when he, a student from the county schools, began attending the city schools. Both school districts were racially segregated, but students apparently made distinctions between Blacks from county and city schools. Boyd noted, “[T]he city kids had the same prejudice against us country kids that you would find between blacks and whites.” See Couto, Lifting the Veil, 195.

Cynthia, this meant she could be berated or physically punished with impunity, just as the other students were in Miss Bachelor's class. When Bachelor heard that Cynthia was leaving town to attend another school, she announced to the class, "Well, at least if she gets pregnant, no one from Brownsville will know about it." Twelve-year-old Cynthia, mortified by Bachelor's comment, had endured her last humiliation at Haywood County Training School. She had survived Miss Bachelor's class, and she welcomed the move to Kansas to live with Cousin Matt and Uncle Ollie.²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Marion continued her work at Pepsi, which was "impressive," but after working in sales for five years, Marion decided she wanted to work in personnel. The personnel director, however, told her that the personnel department did not have positions available for Blacks. Marion met with Walter Mack, the president, to express her outrage at what she thought was an "unfair" policy, but he too encouraged her to continue in sales.²⁰⁵ Marion was already established in New York City and began looking for career opportunities there. Apparently, she decided to leave Pepsi because of what appeared to be a layer of hypocrisy that made her valuable only if she generated income, expanded the territory, and increased good-will for Pepsi within African American communities. Marion's experiences with Pepsi-Cola reinforced the importance of African American agency and entrepreneurship as a path toward economic justice. Although the internship provided a select group of young college-educated Blacks with an opportunity to enter mainstream corporate America, there were limitations governed, no doubt, by the racial politics of the day.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Cynthia Rawls Bond interview with author, October 4, 2011.

²⁰⁵ Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights," 121.

²⁰⁶ According to Capparell in *The Real Pepsi Challenge*, "Some critics saw this experiment [jobs program] as "a limited task rather than the seeds of a permanent transformation of a modern corporation. . . [ending] without any meaningful plan for the continued hiring and promoting of minority applicants." (xvii).

Marion had begun building her professional resume as a sales representative for Pepsi Cola in 1941, but in January 1947, she decided to leave the company. That same year, her younger sister Mildred graduated from NYU with a degree in psychology and began working for the Department of Human Services in New York City. Marion applied for a field secretary position at the NAACP's National Office in New York. Norma Jenson,²⁰⁷ field secretary since 1943, was leaving the position to marry and to begin graduate studies at the University of Chicago.²⁰⁸ In a letter of application to Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP, Marion drew from her professional history at Pepsi, emphasizing her "extensive travel" experience and "first-hand knowledge of (Negro) communities." She also drew from her family's history with the NAACP in Brownsville. Marion wrote that she hoped to "contribute to . . . the fight . . . against prejudice and discrimination all over the country."²⁰⁹

Later that month, Gloster B. Current, Director of Branches, interviewed Marion. Current thought she was an excellent candidate for the job and described her as "dynamic, personable and apparently a very capable young lady," adding that he expected she would conduct membership campaigns in a manner reminiscent of Mrs. [Daisy] Lampkin."²¹⁰ Comparing Marion to Mrs. Lampkin was quite a compliment, since Lampkin was an NAACP legend. As Steve Levin of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette wrote of Lampkin: "A fund-raiser extraordinaire—be it for Liberty Bonds or memberships in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—she could fly into a city, give several speeches with her oratorical flair and get

²⁰⁷ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Jensen had specialized in Intercultural Education and had visited forty school systems and fourteen states. See February 21, 1947 memo to the Publicity Department from Mr. Current.

²⁰⁸ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: February 21, 1947 memo to the Publicity Department from Mr. Current.

²⁰⁹ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See Jan. 7, 1947 letter from Marion O. Bond.

²¹⁰ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See Jan. 29, 1947 letter to Walter White from Gloster Current.

even the most parsimonious to donate.”²¹¹ Thus, it was not a surprise when Current recommended Marion over the other applicant for the position. Walter White approved Current’s recommendation but stressed to Current the importance of new field workers knowing that their continued employment was contingent upon their ability “to produce.” After all, more members meant more supporters, more foot soldiers, more Americans committed to the cause of justice. It also meant more capital to finance campaigns and support *causes célèbres*.²¹²

Current offered Marion the position with a starting date of March 1, 1947. Since her salary at Pepsi was \$3,100 per year, she expected a comparable salary.²¹³ Current suggested to Roy Wilkins, Assistant Executive secretary, that Bond start with “a figure not less than \$3,000 per year.”²¹⁴ They settled on a salary of \$2, 8000 with a stipulation that on July 1, 1947, Marion would be eligible for a raise if her work warranted a salary increase.²¹⁵ Confident in her abilities, she accepted the salary and began her work. After completing her first assignment in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Marion was commended for an “excellent job, one of the best field work jobs ever done by any member of the Branch Department staff.”²¹⁶ The Philadelphia campaign she had led totaled 8,000 members. According to reports from the Philadelphia branch, Marion had conducted NAACP business “tactfully and aggressively.”²¹⁷ Current used this opportunity to advocate for Marion’s raise which the Association and promised to consider on

²¹¹ See <http://www.post-gazette.com/blackhistorymonth/19980202lampkin.asp>

²¹² NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See January 29, 1947 memo from Walter White to Gloster Current.

²¹³ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: At Pepsi, Marion was also to receive a cost of living raise. See Letter from Marion Bond, January 1947.

²¹⁴ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See January. 31, 1947 memo to Roy Wilkins from Gloster B. Current.

²¹⁵ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Correspondence dated February. 4, 1947 to Marion Bond from Gloster Current.

²¹⁶ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Gloster B. Current letter.

²¹⁷ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Memo to Wilkins from Mr. Current June 19, 1947.

July 1, 1947. According to the NAACP's Board of Directors, her outstanding work merited a salary increase to \$3,000.²¹⁸

Field secretaries were troubleshooters who were expected to enter economically and socially diverse communities across the country. Understanding southern culture as well as northern urban life was important and helped the field workers as they developed relationships with community leaders and fellow NAACP workers. Marion's southern roots and experiences in the South, coupled with her professional experiences as a sales representative with Pepsi had prepared her for the challenges she would face in the field.

Marion's work required organizational and interpersonal skills. She also prepared speeches, met with NAACP executive board members and chapter members, interacted with various organizations, led fundraisers and membership drives, and listened to problems encountered by local chapters. The field secretary was expected to motivate members and non-members alike to action. As the eyes and ears of the National Office in the field, the field secretary was also required to provide detailed reports on each chapter's progress and problems and inform the National Office of injustices, discrimination, and oppression occurring across the nation.²¹⁹

Marion's work often took her to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During a membership campaign trip in 1948, Daisy Lampkin introduced Marion to James A. Jordon, a Pittsburgh native who was corresponding secretary of the Pittsburgh NAACP branch and organizer of the YMCA's Breakfast Club. Jordon asked Marion to speak at the Breakfast Club, which provided a

²¹⁸ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: July 9, 1947, Memo to Mrs. Waring from Mr. Wilkins.

²¹⁹ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: I drew these conclusions after analyzing the documents in the NAACP files.

forum for students to discuss religious and political issues. Afterwards, Jim and Marion had dinner together. They discussed shared interests and a friendship grew.²²⁰

Jim had attended integrated primary and secondary schools and had not experienced segregation as Marion had in the South. His father was a business owner, and even as a young boy, Jim planned to expand his father's business legacy. While an undergraduate, Jim was drafted into the U.S. Army and became part of an Airborne Infantry Battalion, the first of its kind for African Americans. He became a paratrooper, in part, to disprove the Army's contention that "Negroes" lacked "the nerve to jump out of airplanes." After completing his military service, he returned to his undergraduate studies and began volunteering with the Urban League.²²¹

Like Marion, Jim was involved in Greek life on his college campus, and he was elected president of the chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. at the University of Pittsburgh. He attended a conference in Oslo, Norway, where he first became aware of revolution in Indonesia and apartheid in South Africa, which piqued his interest in human rights. His roommates from South Africa and Nigeria informed and inspired him during his trip to Norway. Upon his return to Pittsburgh, he initiated drives to send relief to South Africa. Marion was impressed with Jim's and their friendship grew while she continued her work with the Association.²²²

On July 8, 1948, Marion's mother, Mrs. O.S. Bond, send a telegram to Gloster Current expressing her concern about the long hours Marion was required to work, suggesting that Marion might "need a rest."²²³ Current spoke with Marion and promptly responded to Mrs. Bond, reassuring her that while he thought that her "assignments . . . are somewhat taxing for a

²²⁰ James Jordon, "Black Man, White Man, God's Man," Marcy Babbitt, ed., Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 105.

²²¹ Ibid., 101-104.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: July 8, 1948 Mrs. O.S. Bond to Gloster Current.

woman,” employees did have, in addition to four weeks of vacation each year, “adequate rest periods in between.”²²⁴

Women like Ella Baker had paved the way for younger women who aspired to grow professionally and contribute to the civil rights struggle through work at the NAACP’s national office. According to the historian Barbara Ransby, “[b]y the 1940s, a cadre of educated young, predominantly black professionals was increasingly influencing the association’s programs and policies.” Ella Baker, for example, had become an assistant field secretary in 1941. Then, by 1943, she was director of branches and the following year had initiated leadership training programs. Daisy Lampkin, a “legendary” civil rights advocate who worked tirelessly with the NAACP in several capacities, as well as with the National Association for Colored Women (NACW), Negro Voters League of Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Company had mentored Baker.²²⁵

Lampkin was still an important figure with the Association when Marion arrived in 1947 and was a supportive mentor to Marion who confronted a number of different civil rights issues. For example, during Marion’s tenure as an assistant field secretary, she addressed issues of racial discrimination in local and college swimming pools, movie theaters, restaurants, and pharmacies. She collaborated with individuals fighting against school segregation, as well as violence against Black children by white teachers, police brutality, and employment discrimination. Addressing these issues involved not only consulting with NAACP representatives, but often interacting with whites who resisted racial equality. The work was no doubt stressful and required considerable

²²⁴ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: July 12, 1948 to Mrs. O.S. Bond from Gloster Current.

²²⁵ Sullivan, Lift Every Voice, 262, 286,289; See Daisy Lampkin entry in Blackpast.org.

fortitude. Still, Marion, surrounded by supportive mentors and colleagues, received consistent praise for the work she did.²²⁶

Four months after Mrs. Bond contacted Gloster Current about Marion's workload, Marion submitted a letter of resignation effective January 1, 1949. She, like her predecessor, had decided to begin graduate studies, and Marion enrolled in the New School for Social Research in New York City.²²⁷ Records do not indicate whether Marion felt pressure from her mother to resign the position and begin graduate school or whether the growing friendship with Jim Jordon, had influenced her decision to quit. Marion resigned the position, much to the disappointment of her colleagues, after giving what Gloster Current deemed, "superior service to the NAACP."²²⁸ Marion left the Association after nearly two years of service, still committed to the work of the NAACP, but eager to begin graduate studies at the New School.²²⁹

In the meantime, Mrs. Lillie M. Jackson, president of the Baltimore NAACP branch, was preparing for the branch's September membership drive, and expected Marion, who had worked with the branch as a field secretary the previous year, to return to Baltimore. Marion had worked well with Mrs. Jackson, a veteran activist who was notorious for her tenacity.²³⁰ Theodore R. McKeldin, former Baltimore mayor and governor of Maryland, proclaimed, "I'd rather the devil get after me than Mrs. Jackson. Give her what she wants."²³¹ In true Lillie M. Jackson style, Jackson contacted Marion and convinced her to work on the upcoming Baltimore campaign for

²²⁶ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: See correspondence from Gloster Current, including memo dated December 31, 1948.

²²⁷ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Memo from Marion Bond to Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Gloster Current November 15, 1948.

²²⁸ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: December 31, 1948 letter from Gloster Current to Marion Bond.

²²⁹ NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Letter to Walter White from Marion Bond, November 15, 1948; See Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights," 121.

²³⁰ Paul McCardell, "Dr. Lillie May Carroll Jackson," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 10, 2007, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bal-blackhistory-jackson,0,485558.story>, (accessed August 2, 2010).

²³¹ McCardell, "Dr. Lillie May Carroll Jackson."

two months. Jackson learned that Marion and Jim Jordon planned to marry on September 10, 1949, but she still persuaded the bride-to-be to accept the assignment, which began Saturday, September 24. The women then negotiated a salary, part of which the National Office would pay.²³²

For Marion and Mildred Bond and for Cynthia Rawls, representing the next generations of Brownsvillians, memories and childhood experiences in Tennessee strongly influenced their intellectual, civic and social sensibilities. Their ideas on civil, legal, and economic equality were deeply rooted in their early life lessons, which included the lynching of Elbert Williams as well as their family's personal triumphs and struggles. These young women maintained close ties with relatives who remained in Tennessee as well as those who migrated to New York and other parts of the country. For Brownsville residents, as well as members of the Brownsville diaspora, the work toward equality had only just begun.

²³² NAACP Papers, Reels 2&3 of Part 17 National Files 1940-1955: Memo from Gloster B. Current to Roy Wilkins September 1949; Lillie M Jackson letter to Gloster Current August 31, 1949.

Chapter 3: The Brownsville Diaspora:
Our Hands on American Democracy as it Bends Toward Justice , 1950s²³³

Mobilization! Legislation! Litigation! Education! The Ballot! Each was recognized by Juanita Jackson Mitchell as a key ingredient to empowerment for Americans of color. For a black woman in those days of the pre-Sixties to be in the vanguard of the struggle for the liberation of black people—male and female—required a rare brand of courage. Bear in mind, the feminist movement, as we know it, had not yet sprouted wings. In carrying forward her crusade, Mrs. Mitchell not only linked arms with her courageous mother, but also with the great women freedom fighters of the abolitionist period of history. . . . Her battles also paved the way for other women leaders. . . .and offer further refutation of the nonsense that the Civil Rights Movement was born with the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, or the famous 1963 March on Washington. . . . We know that the struggle for human dignity goes far back in our history. . . .
-From *In Memoriam: Juanita Jackson Mitchell* by Nathaniel R. Jones²³⁴

Sixteen-year-old Cynthia Rawls arrived in Baltimore in 1950, the same year Juanita Jackson Mitchell made history by becoming the first Black woman to practice law in the state of Maryland.²³⁵ Cynthia, unacquainted with race relations in the city, was eager to begin her senior year of high school at St. Frances Academy, a boarding school for girls run by the Oblate Sisters of Providence, an order of Black nuns founded in 1828 by Mother Mary Lange, who emigrated from Cuba to the United States. Among Cynthia's classmates were young women from Cuba. Oddly for her, looking into their faces, she saw her own reflection. The budding relationships were both familiar and new. Cynthia first heard of Antonio Maceo Grajales, an Afro-Cuban leader of the Cuban Revolution from her friend Maria Cruz Elena. And pleading with Luz to sing

²³³ This title comes from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "How Long? Not Long!" speech delivered in Montgomery, Alabama on March 25, 1965. The original quote is included in a sermon "On Justice and Conscience" written by 19th century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker and published in 1853. "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. My eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice." King's quote: "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Thanks to Maude Y. Bond for introducing me to the quote. See the following for more details: <http://blog.chron.com/keepthefait/2008/04/the-arc-of-the-moral-universe/> and <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461>; [http://open.salon.com/blog/arthur_howe/2009/01/18/the arc of the universe is long but it bends towards justice](http://open.salon.com/blog/arthur_howe/2009/01/18/the_arc_of_the_universe_is_long_but_it_bends_towards_justice)

²³⁴ Quoted in the *Maryland Law Review* honoring the life of Mrs. Juanita Mitchell. The journal edition includes reflections from several associates and friends. Nathaniel R. Jones, "In Memoriam: Juanita Jackson Mitchell," *Maryland Law Review*, 52 (1993).

²³⁵ Dr. Elaine C. Davis also graduated from law school with Mrs. Mitchell. Dr. Davis earned a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University and became an educator. See *Jet*, 44 (April 26, 1973), 36.

Bésame Mucho-- over and over and over--the only song Cynthia knew in Spanish-- became almost a ritual.²³⁶

St. Frances was a refuge despite the pervasive racial discrimination in Baltimore. Segregation prevented Black Americans from trying on clothes in local stores, so Cynthia was surprised when Luz and Maria Cruz Elena returned to school after an afternoon of shopping. They had not bought much, but they had tried on clothes, shoes, and hats—items Cynthia loved and was able to buy. She felt the puzzling sting of exclusion which prompted discussions about discrimination with her friends. Soon after their conversations, Cynthia began joining them for what became their transgressive shopping sprees. As long as she did not speak “American” English, she was able to shop with her “Black,” albeit, Spanish-speaking Cuban friends. She usually kept her mouth shut, but when feeling particularly womanish, she would smile at the clerk as she left the shop recalling lines from her favorite song in Spanish, “Quiero tenerte muy cerca mirarme en tus ojos,” which was a plea for the clerk to see her own reflection, a shared humanity, in Cynthia’s eyes.²³⁷

The 1950s began what some have called, the “classic” period of the Civil Rights Movement. However, for others, it was yet another decade in the “long Civil Rights Movement” which represented another opportunity for white American to look into the eyes of Black American and see fellow citizens and human beings. It was also a time when global human rights issues became a more prominent part of the discourse within the freedom struggle. Advocates for

²³⁶ According to Bettye Collier-Thomas, St. Francis Academy was “established by the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first order of black nuns [and] [a]mong the most noted educational institutions in Baltimore.” See Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Justice, Jobs: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 49. For more on Mother Mary Lange, a Catholic nun of Haitian ancestry who lived in Cuba before immigrating to the United States and founded the Order, see <http://www.motherlange.org/>.

²³⁷ This vignette has been adapted from stories Cynthia Rawls Bond has told regarding her experiences at St. Frances Academy. The students’ names have been changed. Translation: I want to have you very close so that you may see me, your own reflection, in your eyes.

justice ushered in another decade of work which permeated not only southern towns but northern cities as well.²³⁸

This chapter discusses not only the pertinent civil rights issues of the decade, but, also how young women, coming of age in the workplace, contributed to much needed social change in the nation. In this chapter, I draw from arguments that historian Catherine Allgor has raised in Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government. Allgor has argued that Washington women contributed to nation building during the period after the American Revolution as they became “political actors” who “use[d] social events and the ‘private sphere’ to build the extraofficial structures . . . needed in the infant federal government.” Like the Washington women observed in Parlor Politics, the women discussed in this chapter are not “femmes fatales,” but they too represent “mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.”²³⁹

Allgor has also noted that “politics,” for these Washington families, became “a family business,” no different from women who worked on family “farms” or in family “shops.” I argue that for many civil rights families, NAACP business, and ultimately the business of freedom, became family business. Certainly, the families of this study had an unquestionable stake in the success of American democracy and the nation’s growth as a republic “by the people, for the people” so that their posterity and future generations of Americans, especially African Americans historically excluded from the political process, could live as full American citizens, realizing the American dream.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ See Jacqueline Dowd, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” The Journal of American History, 91(March 2005), 1233-1263.

²³⁹ Catherine Allgor, Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Section one of this chapter examines NAACP work on a national level through the experiences of Mildred Bond, NAACP field secretary-at large, who advised and supported local chapters across the country as fundamental changes in American democracy emerged. Mildred, a young single woman of color, the daughter of NAACP organizers, used her education, intelligence, and agency to navigate her role as a woman in the workplace, despite the presence of both racism and sexism, while simultaneously working for equality and justice.

Section two highlights the experiences of Marion Bond Jordon as she defined her roles as a new wife, new resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the newly-hired executive secretary of the city's NAACP branch. The section focuses on the Civil Rights Movement using Pittsburgh as an example of an urban center in the "northern" Civil Rights Movement where the narratives are unique to Pittsburgh, but also reflect common themes across the nation.²⁴¹

The final section investigates the social changes in Brownsville, Tennessee, an example of a southern town that had functioned without the presence of a national civil rights organization, like the NAACP, for over a decade and where Blacks had not voted since the 1888. Black residents relied on leaders and established staple institutions in the Black community to effect steady change that would empower them and move the town closer to racial equality. Cynthia Rawls, who came of age in New York, returned to Brownsville in 1957, the same year Currie Porter (C.P.) Boyd, a graduate of Iowa State, also returned to the city expecting to register to vote. These Brownsville natives began developing strategies with local leaders who had remained in the South.

²⁴¹ Among the books which discuss the Civil Rights Movement in the North is Thomas Sugrue, Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North (NY: Random House, 2008).

Path to Justice: Mildred Bond, Secretary-at-Large, NAACP, National Office

Mildred Bond, who was living in New York City and making plans to begin a doctoral program at Columbia University, decided to join the NAACP's national staff for a temporary assignment. Gloster B. Current, director of branches, had urged Mildred to defer her doctoral studies for a three-month project with the Association. Marion, Mildred's older sister, had worked closely with Mr. Current at the national office for nearly two years before getting married and leaving for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mildred had met several members of the NAACP's national staff through her sister and deeply respected the Association's mission. Affiliation with the NAACP was quickly becoming a family tradition.²⁴²

Mildred was nine when she began selling Crisis magazines to her neighbors in Brownville and requesting that her subscribers learn the words to "Lift Every Voice," as she had. And she was only thirteen years old when her family was forced to leave Tennessee after their association with the local NAACP branch. Indeed her parents and sister had set the groundwork for her, a woman "born and bred" for the NAACP. Moreover, blurring the boundaries between NAACP business and family business was not unusual. For example, in 1939, both her father and mother were officers of the Brownsville NAACP branch, president and secretary respectively. The branch's membership roster included the names of at least six married couples, and members often represented the same extended family or neighborhoods. The Bonds often held chapter meetings in their home, and the chapter's official photograph was taken in their

²⁴² Janus Adams, "Mildred Bond Roxborough: Born and Bred for the NAACP," The New Crisis 107 (March/April 2000), 18; Marion Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights" in Marcy Babbitt editor, Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 119-127.

front yard with their antebellum home, which vigilantes eventually firebombed, in the background. The fight for freedom was indeed a family affair.²⁴³

By the 1950s, Mildred had become quite an independent woman with plans for her future. She had graduated from college, studied in Mexico and France, and completed a master's at Columbia University. She had also spent nearly two years working at the New York City Department of Health and Human Services, witnessing firsthand the needs of many poor and marginalized families. After discussing Current's offer with her parents, she decided to accept the short-term assignment with the Association, believing it would give her firsthand experience to complement her academic work in social psychology. Ironically, Mildred's first assignment took her to Baltimore, Maryland, where her sister Marion had completed her final assignment as field secretary. For the next three months, Mildred worked closely with Mrs. Lillie M. Jackson, a veteran activist who was serving her eighteenth year as Baltimore City branch president, who had also made NAACP business family business.²⁴⁴

Mrs. Jackson and her husband had four children, and she was often referred to as the "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement," a title that was both literal and figurative.²⁴⁵ In her role as an activist, she had decades of pioneering work to her credit. She led "Don't Buy Where You

²⁴³ Interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2008, New York, New York. See NAACP Papers, Charter NAACP Files Group II Manuscript Division, Brownville, Tennessee, Box A406Library of Congress.

²⁴⁴ Mildred Roxborough, telephone conversation with author, April 10, 2010; Interview by Maude Y. Bond with Mildred Bond Roxborough, September 16, 2004, StoryCorp Grand Central Terminal, New York, NY; Paul McCardell, "Dr. Lillie May Carroll Jackson," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 10, 2007, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bal-blackhistory-jackson,0,485558.story>, (accessed August 2, 2010); Interview by Larry Crow of The HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York, NY.

²⁴⁵ Others identified as "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement" include Rosa Parks. See book by Dennis Brindell and Judith Bloom Fradin, *Ida B. Wells, Mother of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000). William Chafe discusses Ella Baker: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1I6n9EGM5Y>). Dorothy I. Height has been referred to as the "queen mother" of the movement. See Jocelyn Y. Stewart, "Dorothy Height dies at 98; Key Figure in the Civil Rights Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/20/local/la-me-dorothy-height21-2010apr21>.

Can't Work" campaigns in Baltimore,²⁴⁶ founded the Maryland State Conference of the NAACP, was elected to the NAACP's National Board of Directors, and was at the helm of the Baltimore branch when its membership reached a peak of nearly 18,000 members. Moreover, in her role as mother, she nurtured and encouraged her daughter, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, so that she made significant contributions to the Civil Rights Movement as well. Juanita Jackson Mitchell began her work with the NAACP as a youth. She helped her mother organize a citywide forum for the youth, and then continued to work with NAACP as a Youth Director. She also became a special assistant to Walter White. In 1951, Juanita became the first African American woman to pass the Maryland bar. Clarence Mitchell, her husband whom she married in the 1930s, spent thirty years as chief lobbyist for the NAACP, distinguishing himself as a civil rights advocate of the highest caliber. Mrs. Jackson was a proud mother and mother-in-law of civil rights icons. She also became a grandmother to two Maryland state senators and the great-grandmother of a third.²⁴⁷

After months of working with Mrs. Jackson, organizing membership campaigns, fundraising, negotiating with branch officials, and interacting with the public, Mildred returned to New York, relieved to have "conquered her crucible," Mrs. Lillie May Jackson. But more than conquering her crucible, Mildred, still in her twenties, had formally entered a powerful network of leaders in the Baltimore movement, including influential members of the Jackson-Mitchell family. Mildred formed important relationships, earned the respect of her new associates, and

²⁴⁶ See Andor Skotnes, "Buy Where You Can Work": Boycotting for Jobs in African American Baltimore, 1933-1934, *Journal of Social History* (Summer 1994), 735-761; NAACP Baltimore City Branch timeline www.naacpbaltimore.org for details on this campaign. It was much like the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns of Chicago and other parts of the county and has been discussed in Eric Arnesen, editor, *Encyclopedia of United States Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

²⁴⁷ Prudence Cumberbatch, "What 'the Cause' Needs Is a Brainy and Energetic Woman" in Dayo F. Gore, *et al* editors, *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); McCardell, "Dr. Lillie May Carroll Jackson."; See also Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/970324/mitchell.html>. Mrs. Jackson was president of the branch from 1935-1970.

received invaluable practical experience. Despite the differences in persona, Mildred remained objective as she observed Mrs. Jackson's fundraising techniques and authoritarian style of leadership. She stood her ground with Jackson and contributed her ideas as a competent representative of the national office.²⁴⁸

Mildred's return to New York meant resuming her graduate studies at Columbia, but Current, impressed with her interpersonal and organizational skills, appealed to her once again, this time asking if she would postpone her doctoral studies for a semester so that she could continue her work at the NAACP's national office. Mildred decided to stay with the Association for a few more months, but her temporary assignment began to compete with her academic aspirations, as new assignments quickly spiraled into other challenging projects. In fact, Mildred soon learned that Mrs. Jackson had requested that she return to Baltimore the following year. In 1954, NAACP executive director Walter White offered Mildred a permanent position as the organization's field secretary-at-large. She accepted the position and was soon thrust into the national movement to eradicate racial segregation, thus being officially written into United States civil rights history. The Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision, handed down in May of that year, overturned the 58-year-old "separate but equal" precedent established in Plessy v. Ferguson. School boards and community leaders across the nation grappled with how and when to implement this and the subsequent Brown II ruling.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Interview by Larry Crow of The HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York, NY; See Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democracy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 122-124, for an interesting discussion about Ella Baker's encounter with Lillie Jackson. After Baker visited the Baltimore branch, Jackson sent a letter to Walter White complaining that Baker had a 'bad attitude.' Baker's impressions of Jackson's leadership style and interpersonal communication skills were not very positive, either.

²⁴⁹ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough.

In 1955, representatives of the NAACP's national office traveled to Nashville, Tennessee, to join other activists from across the country for the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University. During that summer, news spread of the voluntary integration of schools in Hoxie, a community in northeastern Arkansas. After the Brown decision a year earlier, the Hoxie School Board, under the direction of Howard Vance, decided that desegregation was both moral and practical for the district given the financial burden of maintaining separate educational facilities. A Life magazine article brought national attention to the otherwise peaceful transition, which soon made Hoxie, with a population of 1,284, a site for racial tension as outside agitators, including the White Citizens' Council, which used its resources and rhetoric to fight integration. One parent offered \$100 to the person who would physically attack Howard Vance, the superintendent of schools. Vance received threats and was called "a nigger loving son of a bitch" from an anonymous caller. A local minister even told an audience that God would support violence in Hoxie if it ensured the "purity of the white race."²⁵⁰

Disturbed by the news from Hoxie, Thurgood Marshall urged Roy Wilkins, now executive director of the NAACP, to send Mildred there to support the African American families caught in the crossfire. Like other individuals who held field secretary positions, Mildred was the obvious person for this assignment. Fifteen years earlier, Ella Baker, as assistant field secretary, had been "fighting in the trenches of southern battlefields. . . travel[ing] to the bowels of the American South, suffering the insults of Jim Crow. . . putting her own life in danger. . . ."²⁵¹ Mildred followed in the footsteps of other brave men and women who weighed

²⁵⁰ David Appleby, director, Hoxie: The First Stand, DVD (California Newsreel, 2003). According to Hoxie The First Stand, Fayetteville and Charleston, Arkansas both integrated "some" of their schools before Hoxie. However, local school board officials refused to allow any media coverage; See Memo to Mr. Roy Wilkins From Mildred L. Bond August 6, 1955 <http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/view.player?coid=&pid=rds:632&isUserOwned=>

²⁵¹ Ransby, Ella Baker, 105-106.

the options and decided that the fight for human rights was worth the risk to personal safety. She reported that, while black high school students were bused to a school in Jonesboro, the school facility designated for elementary school children was a dilapidated building very close to the sewage line. The African American children in Hoxie doubled as custodians for their school building since the school board provided none. The response to what many thought would be a peaceful desegregation of the town's school facilities became virulent. In August 1955, an estimated 350 segregationists descended on Hoxie's City Hall. Don Jean Bright, an African American seventh grader, was spat on, and a bullet was fired into her home while she and her sister sat together in their bedroom. One family received a picture of the disfigured remains of Emmett Till torn from a September 1955 issue of Jet magazine with a note suggesting that their son could have a similar fate.²⁵²

The Hoxie assignment was a turning point in Mildred's life as an activist in the struggle for equality. It positioned her as a frontline advocate for families terrorized by racial strife. Mildred Bond's presence served as a direct link between the African American community and a storehouse of political power—the NAACP—should the community need it. Mildred walked with the children and their families to and from school, reassuring them, in essence, that “the NAACP was with them.” She held meetings with community members in the evenings, met with FBI agents, and submitted written updates to the NAACP national office. Mildred listened to

²⁵² Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York, NY.; David Appleby, Hoxie: The First Stand, DVD; <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry/-details.as> Desegregation of Hoxie Schools-Encyclopedia of Arkansas; Memo to Mr. Roy Wilkins From Mildred L. Bond, August 6, 1955 <http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/view.player?coid=&pid=rds:632&isUserOwned=>

local residents so that she could understand the community's history and the residents' needs. They discussed contemporary issues and shared their stories.²⁵³

Generations earlier, Mildred's own ancestors in Tollette, Arkansas, had asserted their citizenship rights against a similarly hostile racial environment. According to family oral history, Mildred's maternal great-grandfather, Stephen Tollette, was born on the African continent and brought to the United States via the Middle Passage. He eventually purchased his freedom from a Louisiana planter outside Shreveport. Then he and his wife, Hannah, an Irish immigrant, moved to Arkansas. He purchased 300 acres of land and made Arkansas home for his wife and their children. Years later Mildred's grandparents, Sanford Tollette and Caldonia Crofton Tollette, founded Tollette, Arkansas, a small post-Reconstruction town where the family established a church, a store, and a public school, which was located, in part, on that land. When Mildred's grandfather died prematurely, her grandmother, described as an "enterprising woman," became head of the household and served as the town's postmistress.²⁵⁴

When Mildred's assignment in Hoxie ended, she boarded a bus to Little Rock to meet with Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas State Conference of the NAACP. When a white couple entered the bus, the driver instructed Mildred to move to the back row, even though she was already seated near the last row on the bus. Mildred refused and the driver put her off the bus. Filled with contempt, she grabbed her bag, left the bus and began walking as cars sped past

²⁵³ Appleby, Hoxie; Memo to Roy Wilkins states that only fourteen African American families resided in Hoxie. Of those, only nine had children enrolled in Hoxie Elementary Schools.

<http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/view.player?coid=&pid=rds:632&isUserOwned=>

²⁵⁴ Interview by Armond Tollette, Jr., with Mattye Tollette Bond, 1982; interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough; Adams, "Mildred Bond Roxborough, 18. This article notes that Joycelyn Elders, former U.S. Surgeon General, attended school in Tollette; See Howard County Heritage (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1988), 437. Under the entry for Stephen Tollette, Sr., the text stated "By the mid 1800's the community of Tollette was well established. . . . [Sanford Tollette] applied to the U.S Postmaster for a post office. . . . [On] January 21, 1891, Sanford J.W. Tollette was appointment postmaster. . . . Sanford died May 9, 1898, but the post office operated until 1926. . . ."

her. A white motorist offered her a ride and safely delivered her to Bates's front door. At the time, Mildred chuckled inside wondering if the driver knew he had supported a subversive who was stepping outside of traditional societal norms for women. She was not only an unmarried woman traveling along across the country, but she was traveling on business which required that she lead anti-oppression rallies, converse with FBI agents, and "agitate, agitate, agitate," as Frederick Douglass had advised.²⁵⁵

Just as Hoxie had become an important site of social conflict surrounding the issue of school desegregation, Little Rock was on its way to entering the national stage as well. While in Little Rock, Mildred began to establish a friendship with L.C and Daisy Bates that continued through the years. She admired how the couple collaborated. Mrs. Bates, who was about twelve years older than Mildred, was quickly emerging as a leader among NAACP constituents in Little Rock. L.C. Bates, a newspaper owner, covered civil rights reports across the country and was a "proud husband" as his wife began to emerge as a central figure in the struggle. Mildred and the Bates discussed events in Hoxie and the plans for Little Rock as residents prepared to implement the nation's new school integration laws. Mildred prepared updates for the national office and began a letter writing campaign to secure funds for the court case local residents and the NAACP anticipated that they would have to file against the Little Rock School District for opposing school desegregation. In the months ahead, Thurgood Marshall, Constance Baker Motley, and the NAACP's legal team worked closely with Bates and the Little Rock families who would serve as plaintiffs for what would become the Aaron v. Cooper case.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005, New York, NY.

²⁵⁶ Grif Stockley, Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 76-77, 80.

After completing her business in Arkansas, Mildred traveled to the North for an assignment in Detroit, Michigan. Inspired by Channing Tobias's "Fight for Freedom Fund" speech, members of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP had decided to organize their first "Fight for Freedom Fund" dinner. The National Office sent Mildred to Detroit to assist the local branch with plans for this fundraiser. Mildred collaborated with Dr. Alf Thomas, Jr., a member of the Detroit Medical Society, who chaired the Freedom Fund committee. He garnered support from fellow Detroit Medical Society members, who became regular supporters. But planning for this event was marred by the tragic death of Dr. Thomas H. Brewer, Sr., a charter member of the NAACP branch in Columbus, Georgia, in 1939 and brother of James A. Brewer, a Detroit resident and active member of its medical community.²⁵⁷

Thomas H. Brewer was an Alabama native. He had graduated from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, and then moved to Columbus, Georgia, where he practiced medicine for nearly 40 years. He remained an outspoken civil rights advocate throughout his life. His uncompromising pursuit for equality in the segregated South made him a target for those who sought to maintain inequality. He received death threats, and he customarily carried a gun for protection. In February 1956, Brewer and Luico Flowers, a local businessman, both witnessed the arrest of an African American charged with public drunkenness, but they disagreed as to whether officers had used excessive force during the arrest. In a meeting to discuss the incident, Brewer was said to have entered Flowers's establishment, put his medical bag down and "reached into 'a pocket,'" thus prompting Flowers to reach for his gun and begin shooting. Brewer died after sustaining seven bullet wounds from Flowers's gun. Police officers, who were at Flowers's establishment when Brewer arrived, found a 32 caliber pistol in Brewer's left front

²⁵⁷ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough.

pants pocket but did not determine into which pocket Brewer was reaching or which hand he typically used. Flowers were never charged for the shooting, but committed suicide approximately one year after the incident.²⁵⁸

Dr. Brewer was shot in what many believed to be a racially motivated killing. The incident strengthened the resolve of many Freedom Fund organizers in Detroit and reminded them of the work yet to be done not only in southern but in northern states as well. After careful planning, the committee decided that Thurgood Marshall, head of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund who had recently argued the Brown case before the U.S. Supreme Court, would be the ideal inaugural keynote speaker. The local committee asked Mildred to contact Marshall, as his visit to Detroit would provide firsthand information about the case. It would also reassure NAACP members and supporters that, despite the virulent reactions to Brown by the White Citizens' Council and other segregationist groups, the nation's doctrine of "separate but equal" would surely crumble. Marshall accepted the invitation, and after the very successful fundraiser, Mildred returned to New York.²⁵⁹

Mildred's responsibilities at the NAACP national office grew as both the nation's civil rights struggles and the NAACP's role in these struggles grew. She was rarely home for two consecutive weekends as she was constantly traveling and documenting what she had seen and heard across the nation. On rare occasions home, she discussed issues from the field with her family and read newspapers or books that would be useful to her at the Association. Her age, petite frame, and wholesome girl-next-door appearance might have suggested to an imperceptive

²⁵⁸ For more information on Dr. Brewer's death, see W. Montague Cobb, M.D., "Thomas Hency Brewer, Sr., M.D., 1894-1956," *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 48 (May 1956), 190-193. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-3410>.

²⁵⁹ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough; Chester A. Higgins, Sr., "A Salute to Detroit. . . Dynamic Detroit NAACP Branch Sets Most Lavish Life Membership Table in the U.S." *The Crisis*, 90 (April 4, 1983), 8-11.

observer that she was naïve or could be easily dismissed. Yet Mildred was a model of self-assurance and perceptiveness. She was always astute, well-informed, and focused on the task at hand. Sheer “determination” was the “militancy” she inherited from her father. These traits helped as she moved up through the organization’s ranks.²⁶⁰

As secretary-at-large she traveled extensively, and often alone. She was especially vulnerable in the South as she was susceptible to dangers not only because of her gender and small frame, but because of her color as well. She moved from segregated buses and trains into “coloreds only” hotels or into the homes of allies in the struggle who were sometimes virtual strangers. Couples from local chapters welcomed field workers from the national office into their homes. The time together built camaraderie and established a bond between local members and national staff members. Accommodations and experiences varied depending on the home. For example, once while taking a bath in an outdoor facility in her host family’s backyard, Mildred got stuck in their small tin tub while freshening up before a town meeting later that night. She actually required help getting out of the tub. That evening after being introduced and approaching the podium, a man who had seen her predicament jokingly remarked to the crowd that she looked as good now, in her clothes, as she did when he had seen her earlier struggling to get out of the tiny tub. They enjoyed a good laugh despite the sexual undertones as Mildred immediately returned to the business at hand.²⁶¹

Gender-based politics in the field were not always so lighthearted. One night while staying with a local chapter president and his wife, Mildred was awakened by the presence of her

²⁶⁰ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough; interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2008.

²⁶¹ *NPR*, “Stuck in a Tub and Getting to Know the Locals” Produced for Morning Edition by Vanara Taing. The senior producer for StoryCorps is Michael Garofalo. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112075660>.

male host entering her bedroom. As a representative of the national office, she felt she must give the host the benefit of the doubt and not to jump to the wrong conclusions. However, as a woman she was startled. She became frightened and quite angry when she saw the figure approaching her bed. The man left the room without incident. The next morning, though uncomfortable, she remained professional, which for her at that moment meant remaining silent about the event. She soon completed her assignment, but did not return to that home again.²⁶²

Her early assignments ranged from socializing with wealthy patrons in chic New York City restaurants to traveling dusty back roads in the Mississippi Delta. For example, Mildred was assigned to meet with Mrs. Grace Nails Johnson, widow of James Weldon Johnson, and the daughter of a wealthy New York realtor. Both Mrs. Johnson and her father, John B. Nails, generously supported civil rights activities. Mr. Nails was the first NAACP member to become a life member of the Association. Mrs. Johnson had no children, and on occasion, Mildred had high tea with her in her suite at the Gotham Hotel or dined with her at La Caravel, where Mildred would often meet prominent politicians. Developing relationships with NAACP members and supporters across the country and from all walks of life helped to promote national campaigns designed to end racial oppression and sustain goodwill for the organization. Planning and attending events such as the annual board of directors' meetings, national week-long conventions, and Spingarn Medal ceremonies also became a part of Mildred's routine. She understood the importance of social gatherings and the political foundation upon which the annual convention and other galas were built. Mildred continued her career at the Association as her responsibilities and expertise grew, carrying on a legacy of service.²⁶³

²⁶² Interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2008, New York, NY.

²⁶³ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough.

Path to Justice: Marion B. Jordon, Executive Secretary, NAACP Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Chapter

At first glance it would appear that when Marion B. Jordon arrived in Pittsburgh in 1950, she was doing little more than socializing and enjoying her new role as Mrs. James A. Jordon. A Pittsburgh Courier article on the Pittsburghers' annual tea referred to her as "Mrs. Marion Jordon, wife of Jimmie Jordon, a diligent NAACP worker." In a later article covering a Palm Sunday Symposium, Marion was described as the "charming mistress of ceremonies" and "the wife of the outstanding businessman. . . James Jordon." Although engaged in what might appear to be purely social activities, Marion never lost her desire to confront human rights violations, especially those grounded in racial bigotry and hatred that distanced America's reality from its ideals. The teas and symposia she attended were, actually, very political. As guest speaker of a tea hosted by the Daisy E. Lampkin Chapter of the Harriet Tubman Guild, Inc., which bore the names of two icons in the struggle for freedom, Marion was surely discussing more than just tea. She was, no doubt entering a sacred political space and becoming a part of Black Pittsburgh's leadership elite.²⁶⁴

Marion had resigned her field secretary position with the NAACP's national office in 1949, and by October of that year she had completed her final campaign with Mrs. Lillie M. Jackson of the Baltimore branch of the NAACP. Marion then migrated to Pittsburgh where she and her husband Jim made their first home. Jim was a Pittsburgh native and had established himself in the community as a man of principle and integrity. Both as a business owner and civil rights advocate, he was concerned with the city's social, political, and economic growth. His

²⁶⁴“Photo Standalone 8—No Title,” Pittsburgh Courier, May 20, 1950; “Pittsburghers’ Annual Tea Set for May 21,” Pittsburgh Courier, May 13, 1950; “Palm Sunday Symposium Features Journalist,” Pittsburgh Courier, April 5, 1952.

work with the NAACP and the Urban League reflected these concerns, which made Marion respect her new husband even more. The couple shared a sense of responsibility to their community, which caused the confluence of their personal, civic, and professional work. For example, both Jim and Marion were members of the Metoka Club that hosted an annual scholarship garden party in which funds were raised for deserving students. In July 1951, Jim and Marion's lawn, together with the adjacent lawn of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Carter, was the setting for over six-hundred guests who gathered for the event. On February 1, 1952, Marion joined others across the nation to commemorate "Freedom Day," initiated by President Harry Truman in 1949. She was among the guests on a local radio program that discussed the theme, "Freedom is Everybody's Business." Later that year she became a charter member of the Alpha Alpha chapter of Gamma Chi, a national multiethnic non-academic sorority, the first of its kind in the United States, whose aim was to "kindle and forever maintain the principles and ideals of true democracy."²⁶⁵

Despite their already busy calendar, Jim wanted to study law, and for awhile, Marion and Jim attended law school together. Like Marion's parents, she and Jim enjoyed intellectual exchanges, and they spent time together debating arguments and questioning rules of law which appeared unfair or discriminatory. Despite the satisfaction law school provided, the couple decided it was fiscally impractical for them both to be in law school. Jim's business was successful, but not as lucrative as he had hoped, so after finishing their first year, they quit, postponing Jim's law school graduation for several years.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ "Metoka Club Gives Scholarships to Nine Students," Pittsburgh Courier, July 28, 1951; "To Celebrate Freedom Day Here February 1," Pittsburgh Courier, January, 26, 1952; "Interracial Sorority Installs Chapter in Pittsburgh," Pittsburgh Courier, April 12, 1951.

²⁶⁶ James Jordon, "Black Man, White Man, God's Man," in Marcy Babbitt editor, Living Christian Science: Fourteen Lives (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1975), 101-104.

Fortunately, Marion's credentials and experience, together with Jim's standing in the community, provided Marion a quick entree into the town's social, cultural, and political centers. Marion was a Christian Scientist who was mindful of the mind, body, spirit connection. She was poised, well-dressed, and soft-spoken, a woman who was articulate, deliberate, and sophisticated. She maintained her appearance with silky-soft skin, well-manicured nails, smart suits and dresses, a touch of makeup, and neatly styled hair. She read and meditated daily, practiced positive thinking, and generously gave to those less fortunate. Creating a wholesome and peaceful home environment with nutritious meals each day was also a priority for her. She was quite comfortable in "polite" society as she had graduated from college, attended the New School for Social Research, pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and become a Girl Friend while living in Pittsburgh. She had also worked as a sales representative for Pepsi Cola Company and as a field secretary at the NAACP's national office in New York City. These attributes contributed to her ability to move about in diverse social circles and made her a viable candidate for employment in the city.²⁶⁷

In 1952, Marion applied for the newly-created executive secretary position for the Pittsburgh NAACP branch. Because its membership had increased significantly from a small twenty-five member unit, the organization decided that a full-time administration should be hired. After interviews with the screening committee among a "large field of applicants," Marion was offered the position and officially began her duties in April 1952, thus becoming the first executive secretary of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Mattye T. Bond, "Brief Sketch of My Life," unpublished, in possession of the author; Marion Jordon, "Commitment to Human Rights" in Marcy Babbitt editor, Living Christian Science (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 119-127.

²⁶⁸ "Paid Secretary Begins Duties as NAACP Office Opened to Public," Pittsburgh Courier, April 26, 1952.

While historians have not given the same scholarly attention to the Civil Rights Movement in the North that they have to the movement in the South, individuals who lived “Up South,” as the North was often called, understood that racism did indeed extend beyond the Mason-Dixon Line, and organizations like the NAACP were vital parts of northern communities. According to historian Laurence Glasco, racial discrimination in the North was “endemic,” but it was “informal and customary rather than explicit and codified.” As stated in a booklet entitled “The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh: To Make This City Some Place Special”:

In restaurants, blacks found salt in their coffee, pepper in their milk, and overcharges of their bills; in department stores, they couldn't try on clothes and encountered impolite service; in downtown theaters, they either were refused admission or were sent to the balcony. Forbes Field, where the Pirates played baseball, confined them to certain sections of the stands. . . . Downtown hotels regularly turned away black guests. Equally troubling, by the 1920s the region's Ku Klux Klan boasted seventeen thousand members.²⁶⁹

Despite its similarities to southern cities, record numbers of African American had migrated from the South between 1910 and 1930. These new Pittsburghers, together with their neighbors, established staple institutions such as “the Pittsburgh Crawfords, the Homestead Grays, the Pittsburgh Courier, the YM/WCA, the NAACP, [and] the Urban League . . . ,” which helped to shape the community's ethos and strengthen its political base. Pittsburgh was also home to the Loendi Club and the Aurora Reading Club, which Glasco has identified as “two of the nation's oldest and most distinguished women's and men's social clubs.” These staple institutions made Pittsburgh, a city not without its racial problems, an appealing urban site for

²⁶⁹ Laurence Glasco, “The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh: To Make This City Some Place Special,” June 2001, 2, In Commemorative Booklet for dedication of Freedom Corner Monument, June 2001. Essay serialized by Pittsburgh Courier in 6 parts; available on-line at www.freedomcorner.org

African Americans and provided a firm infrastructure to those Pittsburghers committed to the cause of human rights.²⁷⁰

To serve the needs of the people in Pittsburgh during the 1950s, local NAACP committee members listened to a variety of complaints waged by residents; then they evaluated and investigated these complaints. The branch also pursued issues and initiatives associated with the national office's agenda. Fair housing and access to equal employment opportunities were central to the branch's mission. The integration of public accommodations, particularly skating rinks and municipal swimming pools, and obtaining quality education also dominated the branch's work. Thus, the branch was busy with both local and national civil rights concerns. Despite the challenges ahead, Marion's husband Jim and her NAACP mentor Daisy Lampkin, both members of the branch's board of directors, provided a robust support system. As a result Marion transitioned into her new position with relative ease.²⁷¹

Less than one month after she began her new position, the mass arrest of sixty-six Black youth and young adults at a dairy bar in Latrobe, a predominantly white city about forty miles southeast of Pittsburgh, became headline news. After taking advantage of the one night reserved for Black patrons at a local roller skating rink, patrons usually went to the nearby dairy bar. After some complaints, the police arrived and transported the Black patrons from the establishment to Latrobe City Hall for questioning. Police officers arrested Furman Hale, the dairy bar owner and fined him \$500 for operating without a city amusement permit, but the

²⁷⁰ Glasco, "The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh"; For books on the Civil Rights Movement outside the South, see Randal Maurice Jelks, African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Sugrue, Sweet Land of Liberty; Martha Biondi, To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Matthew J. Countryman, Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

²⁷¹ NAACP Papers Part 27: Selected Branch File, 1956-1965, Ser. B: Northeast Reel 11, Pittsburgh, PA.

officers presented conflicting reasons as to why the patrons were arrested. Marion, in her new role as executive secretary, became spokesperson for the branch after a concerned parent from Latrobe whose son had been arrested contacted the branch. In an interview, Marion assured the community that the NAACP's legal redress committee would evaluate the incident and determine what, if any, steps should be taken. While this incident ended with law enforcement officers only issuing warnings to the Black patrons, it made the NAACP branch aware of the Jim Crow policies at the skating rink in Latrobe.²⁷²

As executive secretary, Marion quickly realized she had several levels of responsibility. She attended branch meetings; reviewed and prepared financial records for the chapter; and requested literature, membership applications, and other items from the national office necessary to promote the Association and run a local NAACP office. She also focused on creative ways to attract new members. For example, in June 1952, the branch began its summer membership drive. On behalf of the Association, Marion publicly acknowledged the commitment of Patricia McCoy, a ten-year-old girl who saved her allowance for weeks so that she could join the Association. An article and photograph of Marion, Patricia, and her parents in the local paper offered both a visual and written reminder for parents to join the NAACP as well as their children to join to the NAACP Youth Council, thus making NAACP membership a family endeavor. Marion had also begun running cartoon-character advertisements in the local paper designed to solicit new members to the Association. The caption under the cartoon asked, "Are you riding to freedom on the backs of the few who support the Advancement of Colored People?"

²⁷² "Youngsters Arrested in Latrobe Raid," Pittsburgh Courier, May 3, 1952.

. . . Write Mrs. Marion Jordan. . . if you want to lighten the load of the above pilgrim on the road to freedom.”²⁷³

Marion assisted the branch president and committees with the planning and implementation of regular programs as well as special events. For example, the branch organized the first statewide NAACP Youth Conference, which was held in early 1953. In true Pittsburgh fashion, representatives of different groups and organizations within the community participated. Music from the district’s Intercultural Choir and Local 471 of the American Federation of Musicians entertained the conference attendees. Marion, ministers, and other area leaders, including Richard F. Jones, president of the local NAACP, Judge Homer S. Brown, and Alexander J. Allen, executive director of the local Urban League, offered workshops and presentations for participants. Because Marion and Jim were supportive of the arts and mindful of the Association’s need for funding, they joined the committee which organized the 100-Voices Chorale benefit for the NAACP.²⁷⁴

Her duties also included outreach to other communities interested in forming NAACP branches. For example, in May 1953 Marion spoke at an organizational meeting in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, a town nearly twenty miles from Pittsburgh, to a group of residents motivated to establish an NAACP chapter after they had filed three anti-discrimination laws in Washington County. Plaintiffs argued that local establishments refused to serve them because they were Black. Marion reassured the group that equality was possible in Washington County, yet she added, “The fight for equal rights is one which requires the stoutest of hearts.” Marion agreed to

²⁷³ “Even Children are in the Act in Pgh. NAACP Effort,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 14, 1952; “Display Ad 61—No Title,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 20, 1953.

²⁷⁴ “Pa. NAACP Youth Confab Meets Here Next Saturday,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 24, 1953; “100 Voice Chorale to Give Benefit Concert for NAACP,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 27, 1954.

work with the organizers as they contacted the national office and recruited charter members, eighteen of which had committed and almost sixty had promised to join in the future.²⁷⁵

Marion's community outreach also included speaking engagements for a variety of community organizations. She was an avid reader, analytical thinker, and an engaging speaker. Her knowledge of history and current issues affecting racial and ethnic minorities kept her in great demand as a speaker. Serving as an officer on the Allegheny County Council on Civil Rights, she also was aware of local and state dialogues on race. She used her platform to inform and to inspire. She also championed the work of the NAACP and its efforts to secure human rights. For example, Marion was one of two keynote speakers at the Greater Pittsburgh Improvement League's annual tea February 1953. The League, founded to "promote democratic and integrated job employment in Pittsburgh," hosted an event conducted in "George and Martha Washington style" complete with a table reserved for the guests of honor represented by impersonators in full costumes. Guests enjoyed solos and theatrical performances on the theme of citizenship and national pride. The Boy Scouts of America took part as well. Invoking the name of George Washington, who signed the Judiciary Act of 1789 establishing the United States Supreme Court, was appropriate during the 1950s, since the Supreme Court's decisions were playing a major role in the lives of Blacks and other Americans.²⁷⁶

Marion also spoke at the Angell-Bolen Post 4040 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) during its fall-winter series of vespers services, which was personally gratified since both her father and husband were veterans. She also served as moderator for a political debate in which representatives from the Democratic and Republican parties discussed "The Negro and His Place

²⁷⁵ "Wash. County Folks Meet to Form NAACP; Café Owner Promises Services," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 30, 1953.

²⁷⁶ "Washington's Birthday to Be Theme of Improvement League Installation," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 14, 1953.

in Politics.” In October 1954, she joined Gaines Bradford and Alexander Allen, both of the Urban League, and Wilson Borland, a research analyst at the Pittsburgh Housing Authority, at the Kay Club as panelists on a “Housing Forum,” which allowed audience members to voice their opinions, ask questions, and relay fears related to fair housing in the area. In 1955, Marion opened the Pittsburgh Ethical Society’s “Race Relations and Justice” four-part series with a discussion of “The Supreme Court’s Decision on Segregation in Education: Is it Being Accepted?” Marion, aware of the national uproar surrounding the desegregation of public schools, functioned as a “political actor” who supported the law of the land and extolled the benefits of equal education for all Americans. Being a part of the lecture circuit in the area was an important aspect of her work as an executive secretary, a citizen, and a human being determined to generate change in a racially repressive nation. It allowed her to meet the public, network with others, and build coalitions with local agencies and organizations that shared her hope for a better America.²⁷⁷

Unfortunately, unfair housing policies throughout the nation thwarted the hope of many Americans for a “better America.” According to the Pittsburgh Courier, in 1955, the Pittsburgh NAACP “condemned” the actions in Homewood-Brushton area where white families, some of whom had lived in their homes for decades but had not purchased them, were “being replaced. . .with Negroes as emphasis [was] on the ‘quick’ sale, thus exploiting the desperate needs of Negroes for housing.” To the NAACP’s credit, its concern was not simply for Black homeowners but for white homeowners as well who were being treated unfairly. Unlike many NAACP branches in the South, the Pittsburgh branch consisted of an integrated group of

²⁷⁷“NAACP Official to Address VFW,” Pittsburgh Courier, November 21, 1953; “Young, Wolken to Debate Value of Their Parties,” Pittsburgh Courier, June 14, 1952; “Photo Standalone 2—No Title,” Pittsburgh Courier, October 23, 1954; “NAACP’s Mrs. Jordon to Address Ethical Society in Bias Series,” Pittsburgh Courier, February 5, 1955.

residents who shared the same vision for an America without discrimination. Some of these same individuals were members of the National Urban League and other civil rights organizations they established to confront racism.²⁷⁸

Also in the 1950s, Levittown, Pennsylvania, became a national symbol for the debate over fair housing for Americans. Once the William Meyers family arrived in all-white Levittown, some among the 15,000 residents violently resisted the Black family's presence in their quaint middle-class neighborhood. A mob representing hundreds of residents made their objections clear to Meyers, his wife, and their small children. Responding to the situation in Levittown, Marion Jordon argued that the federal government was "a party to the perpetuating [of] discrimination in housing" because homeowners were being "subsidized with FHA or VA funds." In December 1957, Marion spoke before the Senate Sub-Committee on Housing, charging that "housing segregation poses the greatest single threat to gains made in the field of human rights." Citing Shelley v. Kraemer, a landmark case making restrictive covenants legally unenforceable, she argued that "[today] the degree of racial segregation and concentration is greater even than in 1915 or 1948. . . . [A]nd this pattern is repeated in every section of the United States." Marion condemned the "pernicious nature of this pattern" which fostered racial segregation in community centers, places of worship, schools, recreational facilities, and in all of the "staple institutions" that ultimately unite a neighborhood and potentially strengthen an entire nation.²⁷⁹ She also addressed the "economic burden" on minorities who were unable to invest in homes on the open market. Homeownership as a path to the American dream was blocked for

²⁷⁸ "NAACP Condemns Housing Situation in Homewood," Pittsburgh Courier, July 30, 1955. Also note that chapter four will show an example of collaboration between Marion Jordon and Louis J. Reizenstein, a Jewish colleague from both the NAACP and Urban League.

²⁷⁹ "Marion Jordon Writes Comments about Levittown, Gentlemen," Pittsburgh Courier, August 31, 1957; NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Branch.

many Blacks and other ethnic minorities who were unable to accumulate capital for a down payment. According to the Pittsburgh Housing Association, "overcrowded, disease and crime-breeding ghetto homes" described many African American communities. As the historians Joe W. Trotter and Jared N. Day have observed:

African Americans continued to pay larger portions of their total incomes for housing than their white counterparts. Some 50 percent of blacks paid more than a quarter of their annual earnings for housing, whereas only about 30 percent of white families paid that much. Partly because the demand for housing among African Americans greatly exceeded the supply, landlords and realtors regularly charged blacks, renters and homebuyers alike higher prices for lower quality housing. Geographer Harold Rose has called this phenomenon "the color tax."²⁸⁰

While Americans continued to debate the racial disparities in housing and land ownership, global human rights issues became a prominent part of the discourse within the freedom struggle in the 1950s. Consequently, members of the Pittsburgh NAACP branch decided to include among their fundraisers an annual Human Rights Dinner. The world had witnessed Ralph Bunche become the first African American to win the Nobel Peace Prize for contributing to Israeli/Arab negotiations, and James W. Ivy, an editor of the Crisis magazine, who had translated works into English from Portuguese, Spanish, and French, which built "international solidarity" among Crisis readers and other members of the African Diaspora.²⁸¹

After meticulous planning in 1953, the branch held its first annual Human Rights Dinner in April 1954. This was only one month before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the Brown decision, and it was the same month in which Paul Robeson had harshly criticized the United States' attempts to malign the struggle for independence in Kenya. An audience of over 400

²⁸⁰ Joe W. Trotter and Jared N. Day, Race and Renaissance: African Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 65.

²⁸¹See "The Nobel Peace Prize 1950," Nobelprize.org. Accessed 10 October, 10, 2011. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1950; NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Branch; Julian Bond et al., NAACP: Celebrating a Century, 100 Years in Pictures (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publishers, 2009), 157.

welcomed Chicago native Archibald Carey as the speaker for their inaugural dinner. Carey was an attorney and United States diplomat who served as an alternate delegate to the United Nations. The following year Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel for the NAACP, was the “honored guest” and keynote speaker for the evening. The audience was eager to hear his position on “effective method[s] of implementing the Supreme Court decision that banned segregation . . .,” as well as on the NAACP’s plan to eliminate housing discrimination through legal channels. The event was well publicized. Renowned jazz vocalist Sarah Vaughn was the first person to purchase a ticket for the event, and Mayor David Lawrence declared the day of the dinner, April 2, 1955, “Human Rights Day.”²⁸²

In May 1956, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr, the charismatic, albeit “militant and outspoken,” congressman from Harlem was speaker for the event. The nation was still mourning the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi, and celebrating the Montgomery bus boycott as the branch planned its Human Rights Dinner. Proceeds from the event went to the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, which desperately needed money to finance important cases that were shaping the course of American history. The dinner committee created an “Honor Roll on Human Rights” and encouraged guests to reserve tables early. Diverse organizations such as the Elks Civil Liberties Committee; the Refuse-Salvage Drivers and Helpers, Local 609; the Business and Professional Women’s Association; Civil Liberties Committee; United Steelworkers, AFL-CIO; Wesley Center AME Zion Church; and the prestigious Frogs Club, the first organization to reserve a table, made the “honor roll.”²⁸³

²⁸² Martin Bauml Duberman, Paul Robeson (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 424; NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Branch; “Photo Standalone 4-No Title,” Pittsburgh Courier, March 19, 1955; “Att’y Marshall to Talk Here Tonight on Court Decision Implementation at Rights Dinner,” Pittsburgh Courier, April 2, 1955.

²⁸³ “Interest Mounting for ‘Rights Dinner,’” Pittsburgh Courier, March 17, 1956.

The 4th Annual Human Rights Dinner, held at the Hotel Penn Sheraton on October 28, 1957, was a stellar event that doubled in size as almost 800 people attended the event. David L. Lawrence, Mayor of Pittsburgh brought greetings and Pittsburgh native Daisy Lampkin, co-chair for the dinner and NAACP stalwart, introduced the keynote speaker, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary for the NAACP. The event was especially significant because of the nation's preoccupation over the school desegregation controversy in Little Rock. Staunch segregationists fiercely resisted the integration of Central High School, and children's lives were stake in the wake of this defining moment in United States history. Wilkins emphasized that "Little Rock has ripped away the magnolia blossoms, and shown what the South would do if left alone. It has revealed clearly what the Negro has had to undergo under the so called Doctrine of 'states' rights.'" Wilkins also reassured the audience that human rights advocates in the United States had allies in both Asia and Africa. The world, he reminded the audience, was watching.²⁸⁴

Perhaps the "highlight" of the night came from the frontline when Daisy Bates of Little Rock, made remarks via a long distance telephone interview. Bates was introduced as "a wife, mother . . . co-founder of the Arkansas State Press . . . and president of the (NAACP) Arkansas State Conference of Branches." The audience heard her "fervent pleas for prayers . . . on behalf of the children . . . attending Central High and their parents." Although not afraid for herself, she did express concern for the safety of her eleven-year-old son Clyde. Bates's message confirmed that the country stood on the precipice of a new day: "If we win here, we believe that it will be easier for other Negro children everywhere to break the color line." The Pittsburgh branch recorded the interview and replayed the message at different venues so that others in the city could hear the message. Alexander J. Allen, executive director of the Urban League of

²⁸⁴ Papers of the NAACP, Part 27; Selected Branch File 1956-1965, Series B: Northeast, Reel 11(Pittsburgh Branch).

Pittsburgh, congratulated Marion and the Reverend Charles Foggie, the NAACP chapter president, stating that the event was “one of the most impressive and inspiring” he had ever attended. Events like this were crucial to the survival of the NAACP, as the national office was operating at a \$100,000 deficit because of the decrease in membership.²⁸⁵

Later that year, Marion’s husband Jim received the Jaycees’ “Outstanding Man of the Year” award. In his acceptance speech, Jim began by recognizing the organization’s “stand on human relations.” He advised, “Time is running out and the United States must show the people in other parts of the world that they know how to treat the Negro [who] is needed in industry to increase production and manpower [and] to eliminate much wasted resources. It is the responsibility of Jaycees, as future leaders in the business world, to see that industry is awakened to this big fact and that all workers be hired based on qualifications.”²⁸⁶

The final years of the decade were just as busy for the Jordons as the first. On December 16, 1958, approximately 300 people attended a testimonial dinner honoring Marion who had tenured her resignation as executive secretary of the Pittsburgh branch of the NAACP. According to Pittsburgh historian Laurence Glasco, Marion and Jim “invigorate[d] both the NAACP and the local civil rights movement. . . . [Marion] oversaw a massive growth in membership from 500 to 25,000.” Clarence Mitchell, the illustrious director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP, husband of Juanita Jackson Mitchell, and son-in-law of Keefer and Lillie M. Jackson, was the keynote speaker for the evening. All of the proceeds were donated to the local chapter as the “preparations and services [were] furnished free.” Bobby Jones, a Paris, Tennessee, native, and his nationally-known gospel group performed at the event, donating their

²⁸⁵ NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Branch.

²⁸⁶ “James Jordon Praises Jaycees and Koppers Co.,” Pittsburgh Courier, February 9, 1957.

fee to the local branch. Although officially retired from the executive secretary position, Marion became a member of the Pittsburgh NAACP board of directors, continued to lead membership campaigns, and to participate in local activities. She even handpicked her successor, a talented young attorney whom she knew from her neighborhood. His name was Derrick Bell.²⁸⁷

On September 24, 1959 Marion and Jim were invited to a luncheon welcoming Premier Nikita Khrushchev to Pittsburgh. United States Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and other dignitaries were among those who witnessed this milestone in world history. In the Russian leader's address, he remarked, "We love our children just as much as you love yours," which consoled some Americans who feared Soviet power and possible nuclear aggression. Perhaps Premier Khrushchev, like many in the audience who worked for peace, thought of his progeny too as he set out to do his work. And perhaps Khrushchev, the Russian statesman, like Marion, the Pittsburgh citizen, took his responsibly to the nation as seriously as she had taken hers.²⁸⁸

Paths to Justice in Brownsville, Tennessee

Many Black members of the Brownsville Diaspora moved about the country and other parts of the world quite content to be away from cotton fields, country blues, and hot summer nights. For countless Blacks, the familiar stench of segregation in that subaltern world kept them away from Brownsville, the site of painful memories and a sadistic past. For some, the emasculation of young Black men, the disrespect of Black women, and the systemic dehumanization of African-descended people stained the streets of Brownsville so that no road or river could take them away far enough or fast enough. Blacks were relieved to reach Chicago, St. Louis, New York City, and lesser known destinations such as Mansfield, Ohio, or Decatur,

²⁸⁷ "Dinner to Honor Marion B. Jordon," Pittsburgh Courier, December 6, 1958; Laurence Glasco, "The Civil Rights Movement in Pittsburgh: To Make This City "Some Place Special," 4, NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Branch.

²⁸⁸ Mrs. Helen M. Prattis, "Luncheon for Khrushchev Impresses Distaff Side," Pittsburgh Courier, October 3, 1959.

Illinois, which became popular locations for Brownsville natives. Although the North was not quite the “promised land” migrants had hoped it would be, for many, it became home.²⁸⁹

Still, there were some individuals who made their peace with the South and chose to return--not as victims of an oppressive past, but as a new generation of educated and invigorated Brownsvillians prepared to collaborate with family and friends who remained behind—keeping watch over the town, the metaphoric family farm, that would eventually feel like home. Cynthia Rawls left Brownsville when she was twelve years old, and her return migration at age twenty-three was supposed to be an interim stop before she resumed her life in New York City. However, when she received notice of job opportunities in New York, she had already begun to consider her role in her family’s businesses and in the local community.²⁹⁰

In the 1946, Cynthia’s parents had sent her to Kansas, where she lived with relatives Ollie and Matt Bond, and attended junior high school. They sent remittances from Brownville each month and kept the family abreast of happenings in Tennessee. In 1948, Cynthia graduated from Northeast Junior High School in Kansas City, and then convinced her parents that at fourteen, like her cousin Marion Love, she was mature enough for boarding school. So, Cynthia enrolled in St. Louis’s Saint Rita Academy, which Marion detested, and Cynthia was sure she would love. By 1950, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, who ran the school, decided to close it in efforts to promote school integration in St. Louis. Ideally, day students would attend local public schools, and borders would attend other schools run by the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Cynthia

²⁸⁹ For more information on Black migration, see Nicholas Lemann, The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How It Changed America (NY: Vintage Books, 1992); For an example of non-fiction migration narrative, see Isabel Wilkerson’s The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (NY: Random House, 2010).

²⁹⁰ See letter from New York State Education Department, Office of Business Management and Personnel, dated June 7, 1957, regarding Rehabilitation Interviewer/Vocational Rehabilitation, salary range \$3,670-\$4,580, permanent position and letter from Theresa G. Martin, Placement Director, Urban League of Greater New York, dated November 15, 1957, regarding position “seeking a young Negro . . . personable person with professional skills. . . .both in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond, Brownsville, TN.

selected Saint Frances Academy in Baltimore. She made friends easily and was an active part of the student body. She was vice president of the senior class, a member of the yearbook staff, and as much as she loathed Miss Kate, her piano teacher in Brownsville, she was thrilled to have been selected to play piano for the Saint Frances orchestra and Glee Club. Her classmates described her as a “true asset to the class,” a girl with a “glamour wardrobe,” one who was “welcome in any crowd.” The yearbook’s list of benefactors revealed Cynthia’s fundraising ability that she would demonstrate throughout her life. On her patron list were nearly forty names, including her former principal Roy B. Bond; her seventh grade teacher Aurelia Bachelor; Dr. John W. Washington, a medical doctor from Boston who migrated to Brownsville; and two full-page ads, one from her parents and brother and one from Rawls Funeral Home.²⁹¹

In 1951, Cynthia left Baltimore for Washington, D.C., and began her freshman year at Howard University, enjoying both the academic and social life the university provided. She left campus for concerts at the Howard Theater and heard performers such as Dinah Washington and Nat “King” Cole. While at the university, she received the only letter from her father that she recalls ever receiving from him. It warned her of the dangers of drugs. Apparently drugs were as damaging to society as racism and poverty, all of which her father prayed she would avoid. After completing two years at Howard, Cynthia transferred to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. She was inspired by the work of Dr. Vivian Henderson, nationally-known economist and head of the Economics Department at Fisk, whose research examined the importance of economic development in the Black community. Cynthia pledged Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., at Fisk,

²⁹¹ Saint Frances Academy, Class of 1951 Yearbook, Baltimore, Maryland, in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond.

and after graduation, she moved to New York City and began graduate studies at New York University.²⁹²

Twenty-one-year old Cynthia's official coming of age occurred while living in New York where she was exposed to unique networks of social and political stimuli. She lived on Strivers Row with relatives Ollie and Matt Bond, with whom she had lived in Kansas, then made treks to Greenwich Village where she often remained after class to study and soak in the East Village culture. On the weekends, Fiskites who lived in or near the city visited the family apartment, which became the spot for lively discussions. For example, Jocelyn and Carlton Hodges recently returned from Switzerland where Carlton was a medical student at Basel University. Carlton, a native New Yorker, returned to Albert Einstein Hospital in the Bronx to complete his residency, while Jocelyn pursued a master's degree at NYU. Adah Edwards Pierce, a fellow southerner and daughter of a medical doctor in Tyler, Texas, was a graduate student at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, and she often spent weekends in New York. The gang enjoyed Broadway plays and evenings at the Apollo Theater. Cynthia experienced a political and social awakening while living in New York. She registered to vote, joined the NAACP, and attended her first national convention of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. in Washington, D.C., where she was motivated by Dorothy I. Height, the sorority's national president who worked to empower Blacks as well as women.²⁹³

As much as Cynthia was surrounded by intelligent and progressive African Americans who lived among whites and other ethnicities in a world of hope and possibilities, her work at

²⁹² Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond; Fisk University Yearbook Class of 1955, in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond; For information on Dr. Henderson, see "Black Economists: An Overview," *Black Enterprise*, 6 (June 1976), 88.

²⁹³ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011; Conversations with Adah Edwards Pierce and Dr. Carlton Hodges.

Riverside Hospital also awakened her to a new world from which she had been sheltered.

Opened in 1952, Riverside Hospital was an adolescent drug treatment center, which became the first of its kind. The 140-bed hospital served mostly heroin addicts. As Cynthia made her way to the island on which Riverside sat, first as a volunteer, then as an employee, her route included a bus, subway, and ferry ride. The commute from Harlem provided her with much time to think. She remembered her father's letter about the horrors of drugs, his accomplishments in a segregated city, and Dr. Henderson's research on economic growth and its role in strengthening the nation.²⁹⁴

Heroin, typically her patients' drug of choice, offered an inescapable and ugly equality the nation could do without. Cynthia's patients were not much younger than she, and residents were African American as well as Puerto Rican and white, all battling the same social problem that could potentially destroy a generation of Americans. One of Cynthia's responsibilities was to secure employment for residents before they left the facility. One young woman laughed out loud when Cynthia told her about the dishwashing job and modest weekly salary available for her when she went home because it could not compare to the money she made as a prostitute. Issues of public health, including poverty and addictions, became concerns for Cynthia. When Cynthia graduated from NYU in 1957, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 had been signed, which symbolized hope for oppressed Americans. Cynthia took with her images of how the world could operate outside of Brownsville, outside of the South, outside of the pristine walls of Catholic schools. She thought more about the economic empowerment of women and her role in the larger society. Cynthia planned to continue her work in New York, so she took the New York

²⁹⁴ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011; see Stephen R. Kandall, *Substance and Shadow: Women and Addiction in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 129; William L. White, "Riverside Hospital: The Birth of Adolescent Treatment," *Counselor: The Magazine for Addiction Professionals*, 5 (February 2004), 18-21.

state civil service examination, submitted her resume to a few agencies, and returned to Brownville to visit her parents as she awaited her future.²⁹⁵

In 1957, Currie Porter (C.P.) Boyd also returned to Brownsville. Boyd's reverse migration to Brownsville created quite a stir when he entered the Haywood County Courthouse to transfer his voter registration card from Decaturville, Tennessee, to Brownville. His act of political assertiveness became a pivotal moment in the civil rights history of Brownville which was no surprise to those who knew him. In a funeral tribute to him, Garnetta Bond Lovett recalled

Even in Miss Geneva Miller's 8th grade civics class, we could tell that he was no ordinary teenager. He was a brilliant scholar, a walking history book, and already interested in politics. . . . Once when Miss Miller asked what we wanted to be when we grew up, he responded . . . , 'I'm going to be a Black senator from Tennessee'. . . . He was 'Black and proud' long before the phrase became popular.²⁹⁶

Boyd was born in 1924 to a family deeply committed to the community. His grandfather Murph Currie was a magistrate during Reconstruction and the first minister at the Beech Grove Church of Christ. Boyd's father Porter Boyd, a World War I veteran, was a farmer, and his mother Mrs. Hester Currie Boyd, who attended Lane College, was a school principal for forty-four years. In 1957, Boyd had just completed a master's in plant pathology and vocational education from Iowa State University and had spent eight years teaching in Decatur County Training School in Decaturville, Tennessee, when he returned to Brownsville. He had provided creative instruction for both male and female students to develop car repair and maintenance skills. He had also organized a band, "Barrel House Boyd and His Little Keg Heads," which

²⁹⁵ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011; William L. White, "Riverside Hospital: The Birth of Adolescent Treatment," also discusses the use of heroin among residents.

²⁹⁶ Garnetta Bond Lovett, "In Celebration of the Life of Dr. Currie Porter Boyd: 'Our Gleam Across the Wave,'" in possession of author, funeral tribute written October 1, 1997, Brooklyn, New York.

included his students; coached basketball; and worked with the New Farmers of American (NFA), the Black equivalent of the Future Farmers of America (FFA), which exposed young Blacks to organizations and parliamentary procedure as well as to “livestock, crop, and poultry judging . . . quartet singing, and public speaking.” Boyd valued the time he spent in Decaturville. The new experiences this community provided were political as well as social. He voted for the first time when he lived there, and he experienced “political pressure” for the first time in Decaturville. He also observed Blacks and whites peacefully coexisting there and was “amazed” because of the stark contrast between Decatur and Haywood counties. This period in Decaturville marked “the beginning” of Bond’s desire to “develop political power in Haywood County.”²⁹⁷

In 1957, however, when Boyd, a new resident, appeared at the Haywood County Courthouse to update his voter registration card, he was told that he must talk to the sheriff and then the county court clerk. Eventually, he was informed that Blacks were unable to vote in Haywood County. After he wrote a complaint letter to the federal government, a representative from the President’s Commission on Civil Rights came to Brownville, only to be assaulted by the local sheriff. According to Boyd, this dispute made the local papers and piqued the interest of the Ku Klux Klan, which wanted to reward the sheriff for attacking the federal representative by purchasing him a new suit.²⁹⁸

Soon after Cynthia arrived in Brownsville, she received offers for positions in New York at Montefiore Hospital and the Urban League, but by then she had begun to consider her role in

²⁹⁷ Obituary of Dr. C.P. Boyd, in possession of author; interview by Margaret Mallard Beach with Currie Porter Boyd, January 19, 1992, essay from transcribed interview “My Years Teaching at Decatur County Training School.” See www.tnyesterday.com/yesterday_decatur/c-boyd.html.

²⁹⁸ Richard A. Couto, *Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round: The Pursuit of Racial Justice in the Rural South* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 32-33.

her family's businesses and in the local community. She began attending the Jackson, Tennessee, Alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and as a part of the sorority's community service, visited patients at Western State, a nearby mental hospital. She taught Sunday school, gave speeches in the area, and even received a \$15 honorarium for one speech, which her father insisted she could not accept in the future. She was back and so was Currie Porter Boyd, but what had they come back to?

In the 1950s, Brownsville continued to be a segregated town in which Blacks negotiated the limitations placed on their social, political, and economic development. Blacks had no political voice, and political exclusion prompted various groups to demand access to rights they were promised as citizens. Social exclusion prompted less vocal responses, but Black cultural expressions continued to grow. Business leaders in the Black community continued to use their entrepreneurial spirit to promote opportunities for economic development and long-term security within the community, despite the environmental and psychological chaos caused by segregation and discrimination.

The 1950s was a decade of motion, mobility, and movement in social, political and economic spheres. An important community venture emerged in 1950. C.A. Rawls had founded the Rawls Funeral Home in the 1930s. Together with the funeral home, he, his brother Joe Zannie, and other burial insurance agents expanded the Rawls Mutual Benevolent Burial Association. Members of the Association became part of a network of subscribers who were guaranteed a decent burial without having to "pass the hat" or financially burden family members with burial expenses. For Rawls, the funeral business/burial association was a gateway enterprise that provided Rawls with a firm foundation into the world of business.

Alabama native A. G. Gaston, whom Rawls admired and emulated, entered into the business of burial insurance fearing a financial disaster. After deciding to begin a burial society and soliciting members door-to-door, one of Gaston's members, Mrs. Sara Emmons, died shortly after he had collected her twenty-five cents. She was due a standard \$100 burial, but Gaston's business had not accumulated enough money to actually cover the expenses. Gaston was determined not to tap into his own savings, so he negotiated with a local funeral director to handle the services for \$75 with the promise of reimbursement as the burial insurance monies accumulated. During the time set aside at the funeral for donations to help the deceased's family, the minister announced that no more donations would be solicited at future funerals since "Brother Gaston" had opened his burial association. The funeral was profitable for Gaston on several levels. Mrs. Sara Emmons, the deceased, and the minister had given him the publicity he needed. Several people in the audience joined the burial society that day, and the funeral director agreed to provide Gaston's subscribers with discounted funerals in the future.²⁹⁹

After nearly twenty years in business, Rawls appealed to his community to support another business venture. Records indicate that the inception of the Sons and Daughters of the Golden Circle, the fraternal organization Rawls planned to form, occurred in 1950 during the 11:00 am service at First Baptist Church, where he was a trustee. At that moment, the secular and the sacred were one. Supporting the Sons and Daughters would provide cash benefits to Blacks in west Tennessee who were often ineligible for mainstream insurance coverage.

As Gunnar Myrdal noted in An American Dilemma:

²⁹⁹ Carol Jenkins and Elizabeth Gardner Hines, Black Titan: A.G. Gaston and the Making of a Black Millionaire, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 77-81; also see C.A. Spencer, "Black Benevolent Societies and the Development of Black Insurance Companies in Nineteenth Century Alabama," Phylon, 46 (3rd Quarter, 1985), 251-261.

. . . [S]ince the 1880s, Negroes have been subjected to differential treatment by white insurance companies in that some of them, at that time, started to apply higher premium schedules for Negro than for white customers, whereas others decided not to take on any Negro business at all. The underlying reason, of course, is the fact that mortality rates are much higher for Negroes than for whites.³⁰⁰

Moreover, as Mary L. Heen, professor of law and author of “Ending Jim Crow Life Insurance Rates,” has written, “During the Jim Crow era, life insurance companies doing business in newly emerging markets began categorizing blacks as ‘substandard’ mortality risks.” She attributed “the rise of scientific racism” and the “eugenics movement” to the “race-based practices” in the life insurance industry.”³⁰¹

Rawls was aware of some of the challenges he would face. He had already met with representatives from the Tennessee Department of Insurance and Banking in Nashville as well as the Businessmen’s Association of Washington, DC. He also consulted with Thomas Jefferson Huddleston of the Afro-American Sons and Daughters Fraternal Organization and Dr. Lloyd T. Miller, director of the Afro-American Sons and Daughters Hospital in Yazoo City, Mississippi, which was organized under the leadership of the Afro-American Fraternal Organization fraternal organization which contributed to the African American community another staple institution.³⁰²

Cluster L. Johnson, attorney for the Afro-American Fraternal Organization, served as legal advisor for the new fraternal organization which began with thirty-three units. These units were comprised of individuals who were usually from the same community or who attended the same church within a given community. This secret society observed strict rituals, maintained

³⁰⁰ Gunner Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 316.

³⁰¹ Mary L. Heen, “Ending Jim Crow Life Insurance Rates,” *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 4(2009), 363-364.

³⁰² Sharon Norris, “Golden Circle Life Insurance Company,” Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/imagegallery.php?EntryID=G023>, accessed September 9, 2010; The History of the Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, unpublished essay, in possession of author.

minutes from bi-monthly meetings, and cared for its fellow Sons and Daughters with the fervor of any brother or sisterhood. C.A. Rawls served as the grand president and J.Z. Rawls served as the general secretary, but each unit had its own president and secretary. For example, a ledger from the Farmer's Chapel unit of the Sons and Daughters showed that Quintard Taylor was president and Millie Tyus was secretary. Minutes indicated that not all members paid the same dues. Whether larger payments included past due amounts or were for a family plan is unclear. Both Quintard Taylor and his wife Grace, for example, paid forty cents each, but others paid as much as \$4.80. The minute book showed that the organization paid a \$3.50 sick claim and \$3 to the janitor. The organization owned rental property from which it received income. The body discussed one renter's failure to pay for the month, but she was given special consideration because she had been ill.³⁰³

The front cover of the ritual book reflected the organization's ambitions: "We Insure the South." At the close of each meeting, members recited their secret motto, indicated in the ritual by a capital O in parentheses (O). The United States flag, taking center stage, was placed between the president and the church altar. Then the president concluded the meeting by reading, ". . . As we part let us carry in our hearts and show forth in our lives the golden rule, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do you also unto them.' Let us live in peace and harmony as near as we can to all mankind." The meeting ended with the Lord's Prayer and the official closing hymn "My Country Tis of Thee." Despite the abhorrent conditions in a society that exploited and exclude them, they performed their own version of Americanness. They remembered this "land where their fathers died" as a mantra for deceased ancestors,

³⁰³ Ibid.; Sons and Daughters of the Golden Circle Ritual Book, Ledger and Minute books, and bank account booklet from First State Bank are all in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond.

neighbors, and slain civil rights workers whose deaths, often occurring prematurely, connected them to the nation's past as well as to its future.³⁰⁴

Brownsville grew in the 1950s. In 1951, Brownsville hosted the 10th Annual Tennessee State Beauticians Conference. The Kozy Barber College, established in the 1940s and catering to returning World War II veterans, and the Kozy Beauty School graduated a large number of barbers and beauticians. Brownsville had businesses in place, community support, and a large number of graduates, so it was an ideal venue for the convention. It was also a quite a coup for the convention committee when Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, president and founder of Bethune-Cookman College, and member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," accepted the invitation to serve as keynote speaker for the event. Carver High School students and faculty together with local Black businesses supported the event. Dr. Bethune stayed in the home of C.A. and Maude Rawls, owners of the local funeral home, and spoke at the Carver High School auditorium. Her visit invigorated the entire African American community.³⁰⁵

Still, as the country moved toward equality in education, segregationists responded ferociously. For example, in the 1954, the Black community joined the nation in celebrating the Brown decision. However, like white segregationists across the county, whites in Tennessee reacted to the landmark decision with contempt. State Senator Charles Stainback, who represented Haywood and Fayette Counties, introduced the Stainback Bill that would "perpetuate segregation in Tennessee schools." According to the Chicago Defender, Stainback and his supporters "denounced Negroes as ignorant, diseased, unclean, dangerous and both unfit and

³⁰⁴ Ibid.; Sons and Daughters of the Golden Circle Ritual Book, Ledger and Minute books, and bank account booklet from First State Bank are all in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond.

³⁰⁵ Dunbar Carver Museum has photographs of the event. Program for the event is in the possession of author.

unable to compete with whites.” Supporters of the bill tended to be “bankers, chamber of commerce representatives, lawyers and other ‘leading citizens’ . . . who depend[ed] on the availability of Negroes as cheap, unprotected and terrorized labor.” Nonetheless, an interracial group of opponents to the bill, which included Z. Alexander Looby of Nashville, urged the Senate Commission on Education to kill the bill. While Governor Frank Clements did veto the bill, some African Americans believed pending anti-Communist legislation which required teachers to sign a “loyalty oath” was also an attempt to “eliminate” Black teachers.³⁰⁶

Sensitive to the ebb and of flow of race relations in the country, Rawls decided to build a new home for his family on land he had purchased in the 1930s. The house would be adjacent to Rosenwald Cemetery, the cemetery Rawls had established in 1935 and which he had named in honor of the white philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. He knew the importance of both land and home ownership, especially for African Americans who struggled to achieve economic equality. The 120 foot ranch-style house on Cynthia Drive became a tangible symbol of progress in the Black community; however, for local whites who preferred that Blacks stay in their “place,” the long red brick house threatened the stability of white domination. Although homeownership was a fundamental part of the American dream, Blacks had been lynched for being “uppity” and not knowing their place. Rawls had to tread carefully as he made decisions about his home. A consummate businessman, he also thought of out-of-town families who would need accommodations while in Brownsville for funerals. Rawls eventually decided to continue the plans for the house and added a modest second floor, still trying to balance the tight rope he walked daily.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ “Bill Seeks to Thwart Integration in Tenn.,” Chicago Defender, March 5, 1955; Arnold DeMills, “Once Over Lightly,” Chicago Defender, April 2, 1955.

³⁰⁷ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond and Maltimore Bond, April 15, 2011, Brownsville, TN.

In addition to his home, he planned to develop a subdivision adjacent to his house in which African Americans could live, purchase homes, and build equity that would translate into future opportunities for their families. Architects in Nashville had completed blueprints for the subdivision, and Rawls had already decided on names for the model houses and the neighborhood streets. Before the plans could be finalized, however, the government, through eminent domain, took the property and built Jefferson Courts, a low-income housing project on the land. While Rawls opposed the acquisition as well as the price offered for the land, the city used this decision to send Rawls a message. Using eminent domain allowed government officials to flex their muscles and showed their ability to usurp Rawls's ownership of this land. Deciding to build low-income housing filled with Black residents was a daily reminder to Rawls, both literally and figuratively, of the economic status of Blacks in Brownsville, a reminder that the city made sure Rawls would not be able to forget. The forty-eight units filled up quickly, and Rawls's vision for a subdivision never materialized. Both Rawls and his wife Maude were people of faith and were not deterred. Rawls, who focused on the big picture, publicly responded to the loss graciously as he realized some of his new neighbors had come from rural areas without indoor plumbing.³⁰⁸

Maude Rawls used this opportunity to reach out to her new neighbors. In her role as wife, Christian neighbor, and fellow citizen, she became a political actor building bridges which ultimately fostered goodwill for the business and the Rawls family. The door leading into the kitchen of the house was always open. Children from Jefferson Courts and their families developed relationships with "Miss Maude." They came to the house to use dictionaries or encyclopedias to complete homework assignments or to use the telephone. Some asked to do odd

³⁰⁸ Blueprints for subdivision in possession of author; For details about the complex, see "Demolition of Jefferson Courts Taking Place, [States Graphic](#), October 23, 2011.

jobs around the house to raise money for school trips their parents could not afford. Children began bringing report cards to the house so that Miss Maude could see their good grades. They often left with oranges, apples, pecans, or ham sandwiches. Sometimes they received dimes or quarters. Occasionally, Mrs. Rawls had etiquette classes for the young girls who enjoyed sitting at the dining room table, practicing their table manners with real china. She gave the children penny and dime holders and encouraged them to save their money for the future. Some of the children attended Miss Maude's Sunday school class at Farmer Chapel C.M. E. Church. They rode with her to Easter practice, recited their speeches for her, and looked forward to the treats she always found to share. Even older residents of Jefferson Courts visited the house, such as Vance Campbell, an elderly blind man, whose grandson would walk with him to the house and return in an hour or so to walk with him back home.³⁰⁹

The activities at the Rawls house on Cynthia Drive were really no different from those on Bradford Street. Only this time, the city had provided the Rawlses with hundreds of neighbors who were actually a stone's throw from their front door, neighbors, many of whom became loyal supporters and productive members of the community. Rawls continued to expand his network both in Brownville and in other parts of the state. In 1955, he was president of the Tennessee State Negro Funeral Directors Association, which held its annual convention in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Governor Frank Clement sent greetings to the organization as members attended workshops, business meetings, and a memorial service for three deceased members of the association. The convention was both a professional and social outlet which represented funeral homes from such cities as Columbia, Covington, Salem, Memphis, Chattanooga, and Nashville.

³⁰⁹ Conversation with Ruth Jeffries who frequented the Rawls home; conversation with Alma Carney who attended etiquette class; conversation with Lurleen Trigg who frequented the Rawls house as a child and who became the housekeeper for the family. Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011, Brownville, Tennessee.

Not only were ties among funeral directors strengthened, but relationship with the clergy and local residents were also deepened. The activities ended with a picnic for fifty funeral directors and their associates.³¹⁰

In 1958, the Department of Insurance and Banking advised Rawls that the fraternal organization, which was not required to pay premium tax, should convert to a stock company. Rawls presented this information to Sons and Daughter members who trusted Rawls's integrity as a business man and community leader. The members divided all of the organization's assets among themselves, as instructed by the Department of Insurance. Then Sons and Daughters subscribers would become the newest policyholders of the Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. The state, however, would not allow insurance to be written on some of the elderly members with chronic health conditions. Thus, Rawls and former Sons and Daughters members organized the Tribes of Judea which continued to offer insurance coverage for the ill and elderly among them. The transition from fraternal to stock company moved smoothly although Rawls was required to remit \$300,000 to the state for the formation of this insurance company. Rawls brainstormed with confidants, including his brothers. One jokingly remarked that if an individual had \$300,000 he would not need an insurance company.

As the state's deadline approached, Rawls, who had maintained a good relationship with the Brownsville Bank, approached bank president Frank Chapman about his plans.

Undoubtedly, the men discussed how the presence of an insurance company in Brownsville would benefit the town and the surrounding areas. The company would mean more jobs for African Americans who would have money to spend and deposit in local banks, especially the

³¹⁰ Johnella Hutchins and L.J. Glanton, "Negro Funeral Directors Convention Held July 10-12" scrapbook posting date and newspaper unknown in author's possession.

bank responsible for financially supporting the venture. Undoubtedly, this business would be an asset to Brownsville. Frank Chapman contacted A.B. Benedict, president of the First American National Bank of Nashville who authorized the transfer of capital into the appropriate Department of Insurance and Banking account on May 28, 1958. Rawls had met the state's deadline.³¹¹

This feat was a testament to the confidence which residents, both Black and white, had in Rawls's sagacity. Rawls appreciated those early policyholders who had insurance with the company even before the company could actually pay a claim. Golden Circle became a member of the National Insurance Association (NIA) and was counted among Black-owned insurance companies featured in Black Enterprise magazine, making Brownsville a part of a network of Black business owners and trade organization members across the country. According to Black Enterprise magazine, "[T]he number of black life insurance companies had remained virtually unchanged until 1958 when Golden Circle Life Insurance Company of Brownsville, Tenn. was formed." Less than a month after Golden Circle had been established, Tennessee State University hosted the NIA's School for Agency Management Institute, which provided approximately fifty hours of training for insurance professionals. Business and academic circles provided support for both fledgling and well-established companies. Rawls was charged with organizing a board of directors and hiring a staff. For the 1958-1959 year, the first board of directors included C.A Rawls, his wife Maude E. Rawls; two of his brothers J.Z. Rawls and G.W. Rawls; and his son W.D. Rawls.³¹²

³¹¹ Sharon Norris, "Golden Circle Life Insurance Company."

³¹² "Report on Black Financial Institutions," Black Enterprise, 3(June 1973), 51; See Golden Circle Life Insurance Company's stockholders bulletin for periods ending in December 1958 and 1959, in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond; "Management School Held at Tennessee State University," Chicago Defender (June 21, 1958).

Rawls hired employees from across west Tennessee, including Black men and women who had been unemployed, but who believed they could have a successful career in sales. Individuals who worked on farms, in factories, and laundry mats had alternative employment opportunities should they desire. Teachers who needed supplemental income were able to gain additional marketable skills and work as insurance agents. Some employees spent only a few years with the company, while others made careers in insurance. Golden Circle provided opportunities that helped individuals in non-professional jobs elevate their employment status. Few women began with the company at its inception, but Golden Circle eventually provided employment for women, many of whom made careers in insurance. For example, Mrs. Mary Freeman, the company's first typist, commuted by bus from Memphis to work at Golden Circle. Her husband was a minister in Memphis who did missionary work in Africa. Mrs. Freeman was obviously pleased to have her own occupation and contribute to the new company, if only for a few years. Mrs. Ruby Johnson, the company's first cashier clerk, remained with the company until her retirement. As cashier clerk she was responsible for handling premium payments that insurance agents had remitted to the company. Golden Circle provided a professional business environment which helped her as a young high school graduate to develop skills with spreadsheets, audits, and financial transactions more so than her previous jobs as a cook at local restaurants. As the company grew, she, too, grew in business knowledge and professional development. Similarly, Mrs. Laura Young was a young woman married to a high school math teacher. She was employed at the Sunshine Laundry, where Elbert and Annie Williams had worked in the 1930s. After the opening of Golden Circle, Miss Laura quit her job at the laundry and began selling burial insurance as well as life and health insurance. For policyholders, she became the friendly face who entered their homes with claim checks after a loss or with advice

to families as their circumstances changed. She became a manager who advised agents and attended NIA conferences. She was respected and very successful in her profession.³¹³

Rawls's daughter Cynthia, now twenty-four years old, lived in the midst of all these positive changes. On the one hand, she witnessed the birth of a Black-owned insurance company that would cater to the life and health insurance needs of African Americans in her rural hometown as well as the collaboration of Blacks and whites working together behind the scenes to ensure that the company became a reality. As much as she saw positive change, she also realized she would be forced to battle patriarchy in the workplace. She experienced overt sexism as she began working not only from her father, but also from her uncle and her brother who was nine years her senior. Together the Rawls men represented an interesting blend of chivalry and chauvinism, which made office politics and the professional development initiatives she wanted to implement difficult. At times, she, too, like the protagonist in Hughes's "I, Too" was relegated to the "kitchen." The typewriter became her "kitchen," where she was expected to type rather than contribute her ideas. Eventually, she used her typewriter and steno pad to give herself voice in the company. Cynthia began documenting the company's growth beyond the fiscal records actuaries and financial advisors had been hired to do. She wrote speeches and presented them at various events throughout west Tennessee, promoting the funeral home and the insurance company. She clipped newspaper articles, prepared the text for stockholders' reports, set the groundwork for an annual scholarship for high school seniors, and helped to brand the company as one committed to its extended west Tennessee family. While adjusting to life as the new personnel director of Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, a title she gave herself that was

³¹³ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011; Rawls Funeral Home dedicated the 2009 Rawls Funeral Home Burial Drive to Mrs. Laura Young as a memorial salute.

confirmed on the company stationery, she still felt the clash between Blacks and whites as they vied for political power, each side struggling to define what it meant to be a citizen.³¹⁴

Statewide initiatives to promote voting among Blacks were planned. In 1958, the Veterans Benefit of America, which was headquartered in Memphis and aware of the disfranchisement of Blacks in Haywood and Fayette Counties, organized a statewide Vote-O-Rama. The purpose of the event was to “develop county-wide political leadership in every county where Negroes . . . resid[ed].” The theme “Get Out the Votes for the Right Folks” appropriately reflected the organizers’ goals to educate Black voters so that they were aware of candidates’ positions and commitment to issues facing Black citizens. Questionnaires were used as tools to prepare attendees to be more informed voters as they cast their votes for both the governor and U.S. Senator. Still, Blacks in Brownsville were not allowed to perform this civic duty.³¹⁵

In 1959, Haywood County residents took their own bold stand. With the legal guidance of Memphis attorney James Estes, C.P. Boyd, Odell Sanders, Betty Douglas, and other residents organized the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, which was modeled after the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League in neighboring Somerville. Its mission was to “obtain voting rights” and “factory jobs for African Americans in Haywood County.” Estes reported to the state elections commission that, in August, Blacks seeking to register to vote had been informed that two of the county election commissioners had “resigned” and one had “died.” Commission records did not substantiate these claims, and a new Haywood County election commission was requested. The League immediately began to confront voting rights issues by contacting the

³¹⁴ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011.

³¹⁵ “Plan Grass Roots Vote Drive In Tennessee: Candidates To Be Queried On Race,” Chicago Defender, July 26, 1958.

U.S. Civil Rights Commission. The Commission suggested that “federal registrars be appointed to protect Negro citizens’ voting rights.”³¹⁶

However, League members knew they had a daunting task ahead. A Chicago Defender article simply titled “Notorious County” reaffirmed what they already knew firsthand:

Haywood County is notorious throughout the state of Tennessee as being fanatically anti-Negro, even though the population . . . is over 70 percent colored. Brownsville . . . is known as a community in which Negroes ‘walk lightly.’ . . . Sheriff [Jack] Hunter was cited as boasting that he would ‘shoot the head off the first Negro who came in to register to vote.’”³¹⁷

On July 24, 1959, the situation in Brownsville intensified with the fatal shooting of Sheriff John S. “Jack” Hunter, who was attempting to serve a non-support warrant to a Willie T. Jones.

Hunter arrived on the premises in civilian clothes and did not announce himself as a law enforcement officer to the family sitting on their porch cutting okra. When Hunter approached the house, Willie Melvin Jones, a 49-year-old African American father of four daughters, told Hunter he did not know Willie T. Jones. According to Jones, his wife, and children, Hunter cursed him, pulled a gun, and warned that he would kill Jones. Jones and his family were able to make it safely into the house, but Hunter approached the door as if he were going to enter as well. Through the screened-door, Jones warned Hunter not to come into his home. Hunter proceeded, and Willie Jones shot him. Jack Hunter and his brother Tip, leader of the mob that lynched Elbert Williams in 1940, were notorious racists in Brownsville. (After the shooting, Jones sent his daughter to the sheriff’s department without knowing that the man he had just shot was the sheriff.) Prior to Jones’s trial, a mob of about 1,000 descended on the jail to kidnap and

³¹⁶ See Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, Inc. Annual Founder’s Day Program, June 15, 1996, which includes League’s charter of incorporation, in possession of author; “West Tenn. Group Launches National Appeal for Vote,” Chicago Defender, October 24, 1959; “Reports Haywood County Denies Negro Vote Rights,” Chicago Defender, August 8, 1959.

³¹⁷ “Notorious County,” Chicago Defender, August 8, 1959.

lynch him. Fortunately, police officers had clandestinely transported him to Memphis before the mob could carry out their vigilante justice. Willie Jones became a folk hero among Black residents, but an all-white jury found him guilty and sentenced him to twenty years and one day.³¹⁸

Then, on September 28, 1959, Omar G. Carney was assaulted when he attempted to file the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League's charter at the Haywood County Courthouse. Carney did not want to exacerbate the situation, so he did not file any charges or identify the assailant. Still, the League remained diligent. In October 1959, Haywood and Fayette County Civic and Welfare League members, together with their attorney James Estes, appealed to Henry Putzel, chief of the Voting Election Section in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, to remove the FBI agents who had been sent to west Tennessee to investigate voting rights violations. The correspondence cited two FBI agents including Franklin L. Johnson, for allegedly having divided loyalties between his duties as a federal agent and his home community. Johnson, a Fayette County native whose father was still a resident there, was accused of employing methods of interrogation that had "given aid and comfort to the wrong doers of his native county." This was not an uncommon occurrence as the FBI agent sent to investigate the lynching of Elbert Williams in the 1940s allowed the local sheriff, leader of the mob, to attend interviews with local residents about the incident. According to a news report, after FBI agent Johnson's visit to Somerville, "no Negroes were permitted to register on the first Wednesday in October, 1959." In fact, according to Estes's not one of the 500 registered voters eligible to vote in the August primaries in Fayette County was permitted to do so. Data from the

³¹⁸ "Lawyer Foils Second Plot to Lynch Tennessee Farmer," *Jet*, 16 (August 27, 1959), 6-8; "Negro Deacon Guilty of Tennessee Sheriff's Murder," *Jet*, 17 (October 29, 1959), 45; "Deacon Kills Tennessee Sheriff," *Jet*, 16 (August 13, 1959), 6-8; Couto, *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round*, 34-36. I do not know the details, but Jones did not have to serve the full term. He had seven white character witnesses during his trial. In exchange for his freedom, he was required to leave the state and not return. He does have a daughter who still resides in Brownville.

federal Commission on Civil Rights also indicated that 61 percent of Haywood County was African American, but of the 7,921 citizens of voting age, not one was registered to vote.³¹⁹

The League was making some progress, but money was essential to its survival. Later that month, the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League began a national fundraising campaign for \$5,000 in donations. C.P. Boyd, who had been fired from his teaching position in Haywood County, traveled to Chicago to solicit funds for the organization, which was operating with a \$500 deficit. The League had already sent representatives to Nashville so that an election commission could function in Haywood County to ensure fair voter registration practices. Despite the establishment of the commission, no Blacks had yet been allowed to register. According to reports from the Chicago Defender, individuals in Brownsville who had attempted to register lost their jobs and were denied credit, evidence that history was repeating itself from efforts NAACP members made in the 1930s. Before the decade ended, Cynthia Rawls had joined the League. The meetings were empowering and reminded her that Haywood County could be a better place for its African American residents. Talent and convictions spilled from the small room over the laundry mat that her heroes, C.P. Boyd and Odell Sanders, owned.³²⁰

The nation and many of its white citizens vacillated on whether to share political power, social capital, economic development, and educational equality with African Americans. As in the game of hopscotch, policies affecting non-white Americans appeared to move them forward and backward, almost in a surreal and illusive game of citizenship and belonging. All the while Blacks were not only claiming their citizenship in a variety of ways, they were expanding (or contesting) notions of citizenship as well. As political actors Black women and their male

³¹⁹ “Ask Ouster of FBI Agents in Probe,” Chicago Defender, October 3, 1959.

³²⁰ West Tenn. Group Launches National Appeal For Vote, Chicago Defender, October 24, 1959; Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2011.

counterparts took advantage of opportunities, whether as NAACP workers, entrepreneurs, or guests at an afternoon tea. The passing of the 1957 Civil Rights Act offered hope for African Americans across the nation. The presence of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League gave Brownsvillians courage, and the town's Black businesses provided an economic base as well as employment and career opportunities. Members of the Brownsville Diaspora had their hands on American Democracy, and because of their collective efforts the bend, however slight, was indeed toward justice.

Chapter 4: 'Will the Circle Be Unbroken?': The Legacy of O.S. and Matt Bond and the Convergence of Political and Economic Justice in Haywood County, 1960s

[T]he biggest mistake of the past is that the Negro has not been taught economics and the value of a dollar. . . . [A]t one time we had a teacher . . . he . . . left the county because he was teachin the Negroes to buy land, and own land, and work it for hisself, and the county Board of Education didn't want that taught. . . . Durin this ten year period I reached the opinion that the Negroes, while they are fightin for their rights, must enter into businesses of their own and study economics, because you cannot be free when you're beggin the man for bread. But when you've got the dollar in your pocket and then got the vote in your pocket, that's the only way to be free. –John McFerren, President, Original Fayette County Civic and Welfare League³²¹

There was a thunderstorm the night before the funeral. Garnett and Jo Bond's rural west Tennessee farm house reverberated with the clamor of rain and wind. The violent claps of thunder did not disturb the livestock: horses pranced in the pasture, pigs squealed in their pens, and cattle walked calmly in the rain. Those inside the wooden-frame house were somber as they had been taught to respect the thunder, to be still while God did His work. A few days earlier, on June 12, 1960, Garnett had gotten the news of his brother Ollie's death in New York, God again doing His work. Struggling for life as he battled a fatal heart attack, he had pulled the towel rack off the bathroom wall. Now, after years of exile, he would finally be returning home. Garnett and Jo's children had returned to Brownsville to pay their respects as much to their father as to their uncle. Joyce, a chemist at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, and Countess, a social worker, had flown in from New York. Garnetta, a stay-at-home- mom and her husband Arvil had driven from Brooklyn with their two children. Twenty-year-old Garnett, Jr., a student at Tennessee State, had arrived from Nashville. Ollie Joe, an operator at Michigan Bell, and his wife Costella had driven

³²¹ Robert Hamburger, Our Portion of Hell: Fayette County, Tennessee: An Oral History of the Struggle for Civil Rights (NY: Links Books, 1973), 250-251.

in from Flint, and Malt, a civil engineer in Lansing, was already home on vacation—a week in Brownsville and then a week in New York.³²²

The house was full of kinfolk and memories. Lights flickered as the storm subsided. The family spoke in whispers as they grappled with their loss on that muggy June night. Uncle Sweet, the itinerate poet of the family, took a swig from his stash of white lightning, remembering how Ollie had not been allowed to return to Brownsville for their mother Aurelia's funeral nearly twenty years ago. Buck, Garnett and Jo's eldest son, would miss the funeral, but finishing his PhD took precedence, even over a funeral. Uncle Ollie, intellectual that he was, would have insisted on it. Moot, the youngest son, was still in high school. He was sure he had seen Uncle Ollie's ghost pass through the house that night, perhaps a good omen on a rainy night before a funeral. Garnett, the protective father of ten, was pensive. He filled his pipe with tobacco and lit it. As puffs of smoke came from his mouth, he, making peace with death, resolved that there was one thing he could say about his brother Ollie: "He sho' wudden no Uncle Tom."³²³

The next morning black Lincolns from Rawls Funeral Home arrived at Maude and Charles's house ahead of schedule. The sun shone through the windows like a welcome friend as Maude noticed the cars and dashed about the kitchen in her red apron making breakfast--homemade biscuits, country ham, sausage, smothered squirrel and gravy, eggs, fresh fruit, oatmeal, coffee, and tea. The house was full of her Tollette, Arkansas, cousins, and Maude wanted to make sure the day ran as smoothly as possible for Cousin Matt and "the girls," as she still called them, though both Marion and Vivian were married, and Mildred was already an official with the NAACP in New York.

³²² Information gathered by author from text messages by Chee Chee Lovett, October 29, 2011; telephone interviews by author with Countess Bond Metcalf, Andrew Bond, Maltimore Bond, Garnett Bond, Jr., October 29, 2011.

³²³ Ibid.

Cynthia was up early, too. Uncle Ollie had taught her the importance of having “chrysanthemums for the soul.” For Cynthia, Matt and “the girls” were among her chrysanthemums. She had been a woman-child in Matt and Ollie’s home—first at age twelve and later at age twenty-two. She thought attending Uncle Ollie’s funeral would be her last gesture of admiration for him, but the months ahead would prove her wrong. Charles, now an established business leader in the community, took telephone calls from his bedroom as he dressed for the funeral of his mentor, former coach, and business partner. Without Ollie’s encouragement and influence, he would not have entered the funeral business, and Rawls Funeral Home would have never become the gateway enterprise for other staple institutions in Haywood County. Shot, also anticipating the busy day, arrived early in her uniform, which she wore on special occasions, and began helping Miss Maude with breakfast. She set the tables with the good china and cloth napkins. This would be a busy day indeed, for after the funeral, family and friends would come back to the house for the repast, which meant more food to prepare, more dishes to wash, more people to serve, and more conversations—conversations that would, no doubt, include the tense political climate in Brownsville.³²⁴

In June 1960, Ollie Seahorn Bond, a man whose bravery and commitment to social justice had helped to ignite a movement in the lives of his daughters which was continuing in his rural West Tennessee community, was buried. When Ollie was a boy playing in the churchyard, he had carved his initials in a Beech tree under which he wanted to be buried. His family honored his wishes and brought his remains to the home he had loved. His funeral services were at Beech Grove Church of Christ, the church his parents had helped to organize and the one in which he had been baptized.

³²⁴ Telephone interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, October 29, 2011.

While being eulogized in the church that summer, he was also being eulogized in the streets of Haywood County as African Americans once again took up the mantle in protest for full-citizenship. In 1939, the stage had been set for this historic time in Haywood County. Twenty-one years ago NAACP leaders had officially begun the fight for political justice but had been viciously attacked physically and economically so that several members were forced to leave their extended families as well as their homes. The most shocking atrocity occurred in 1940 when Elbert Williams, whom Ollie Bond had recruited to join the NAACP, was lynched. Since that time, the shift from political to economic justice dominated the Black community's agenda, believing, as Booker T. Washington had, that economic empowerment was an essential first step to freedom.³²⁵

In the summer of 1960, Haywood County residents continued to fight against inequality, and change was visible as local civil rights activists refused to compromise or buckle under the threats of aggression and bigotry. As local Black residents asserted themselves politically, whites used economic reprisals to coerce them from voting and exercising their political freedoms. A number of local events precipitated the harsh backlash which sparked national attention for this local movement. In 1959, C.P. Boyd returned to Haywood County to continue his teaching career. When he attempted to register to vote in Haywood County local officials, were rattled since Blacks had not voted since 1888.

In nearby Fayette County, African American attorney and Jackson, Tennessee, native, James Estes, defended Burton Dotson, a Black man who had fled the state after murdering a white man nearly twenty years earlier. The fact that the jury was all-white, in a predominantly

³²⁵ Interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2009; Telephone interview with Countess Bond Metcalf, October 29, 2011; telephone interview with Geraldus Bond, November 5, 2011; NAACP Papers Elbert Williams Lynching; NAACP Papers Brownsville, Tennessee Branch.

African American town, intrigued Estes, who examined the voter registration rolls to find that no Blacks were registered in Fayette County. People in Fayette County responded quickly to Estes's urging that they test registration and voting policies. Blacks met with resistance, but they were determined to obtain their voting rights.³²⁶

Events continued to highlight the civil rights progress Blacks were making across the country, and Blacks in west Tennessee became a part of the momentum. Voting rights had far-reaching effects and were important to Blacks in Brownsville and Somerville who represented a majority of the population. To vote meant to be able to serve on juries; jurors helped to decide the fate and ultimately the freedom of fellow citizens. Moreover, voters put leaders into office to represent and advocate for their needs. Groups unable to vote became insignificant. Estes provided legal assistance for both Haywood and Fayette County Blacks as they established civic and welfare leagues in their respective towns. Each organization became central to the civil rights struggle.³²⁷

The summer of 1960 was a volatile one in Haywood County. In May, eight African Americans were added to the voter registration rolls in Brownsville. Officials in Brownsville began using "slowed-down" tactics so that hundreds of Blacks had to stand in line all day while only four or five would actually be allowed to register. As the numbers of Black registered voters increased, a blacklist was circulated among whites identifying Blacks who should be denied store credits, loans, and jobs. In some cases, too, their insurance was canceled.

³²⁶ Robert Hamburger, Our Portion of Hell: Fayette County, Tennessee, An Oral History of the Struggle for Civil Rights (New York: Links Books, 1973), 3-6; "Fayette County, TN, African Americans form Tent City for U.S. Voting Rights, 1960-1962," Global Nonviolent Action Database, [nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/Fayette-county-tn-african-a. . .](http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/Fayette-county-tn-african-a...), accessed October 31, 2011. Also note Estes is the attorney who assisted Fayette County and Haywood County civil league founders prepare their charters.

³²⁷ Claude Sitton, "Tennessee Area Curbing Negroes, New York Times (June 19, 1960).

Sharecroppers were among the most vulnerable in the population as they relied on landowners for shelter and sustained employment with contracts renewed annually. They also needed gas for their tractors and typically requested loans before they “made their crop.”³²⁸ Herman Holmes, a fifty-three-year-old sharecropper in Haywood County and his family were driven out of their home of ten years after the farm foreman, Shelby Dixon, observed Mrs. Holmes in a voter registration line. The foreman warned Holmes that his wife had been in the ‘wrong place’ and that they were ‘through.’ Holmes had the option of staying on the property so that he could make his crop, but he would have to sign over the proceeds from the crop to Dixon, the farm foreman. Dixon also told Holmes he owed \$600. The “script” or credit system was convenient for farmers whose ready cash increased after harvesting or “making” their crop. It was detrimental, however, to many sharecroppers who were unable to read well or calculate their indebtedness. Holmes, his wife, and their two children left the property before being exploited, but they were allowed only to take what they could put in a suitcase, leaving behind furniture, beds, and other personal items. Holmes had two brothers living in Haywood County, so he and his fourteen-year-old son remained in Tennessee while Mrs. Holmes and their daughter relocated to Chicago, away from the summer chaos that would change their lives forever.³²⁹

According to Aubrey Williams, president of the Southern Conference Educational Fund, “Negro farmers are unable to buy gasoline for their tractors, merchants are refusing to sell food and clothing while Negro children and their mothers face literal starvation because their fathers’ efforts to vote.” Although Williams inaccurately reported that men were the only ones attempting

³²⁸ “Eight Negroes Register In a Tennessee County,” New York Times, May 18, 1960; Tennessee Area Curbing Negroes, New York Times, June 19, 1960; “Fayette, Haywood Counties: SCEF Asks End of Oil Boycott,” Tri-State Defender, June 25, 1960.

³²⁹ “Kicked Off Land for Registering,” Tri-State Defender, June 25, 1960. For an extensive history of Tent City, see Gloster B. Current, “Which Way Out . . . ?” The Crisis, 68 (March 1961), 133-148.

to vote, he highlighted how crucial it was to support the farmers and their families.³³⁰ As more families were displaced, oil companies joined the local efforts to punish Blacks who registered to vote. During its national convention in June 1960, the NAACP initiated a boycott of oil companies that were participating in the west Tennessee reprisals. In solidarity, some NAACP members destroyed their gas credit cards. Within a month, representatives of major oil companies met with NAACP leaders in New York, and assured them that they were not party to the boycotts.

The voter registration drives in 1960 and Brownsville's struggles became part of other local struggles which together created the decade's national movement. In 1959, the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League had been founded. Its mission was to secure the vote and jobs, particularly factory jobs for African Americans in the area. This league became a critical part of Haywood County civil rights history that linked the NAACP of the 1930s to the 1960s. In December 1960, Gloster B. Current, Director of Branches for the NAACP, had come to west Tennessee to install officers of the newly-formed NAACP branch in Fayette County, a predominantly African American county that bordered Haywood County. While in the area, he spoke with individuals interested in establishing a branch in Brownsville. Given the NAACP's tragic history there, rechartering a branch was a potentially dangerous undertaking. On January 6, 1961, Cynthia Rawls wrote Gloster Current, thanking him for his interest in Haywood County and apologizing for not responding earlier. She and other residents definitely supported the formation of a new NAACP in Haywood County. However, she wanted to maintain a behind-the-scenes role in the chapter's evolution. In the letter, she explained:

³³⁰ "Fayette, Haywood Counties: SCEF Asks End of Oil Boycott," Tri-State Defender, June 25, 1960.

My role in the Branch will be one of “pusher” and “follower” (smile). I am sure you encounter many situations similar to mine in your work. It is difficult for people here to view my actions as independent from that of my family; therefore, I usually place myself in situations that are not in the spotlight. I am already a member of your organization and you may count on me to help in any way possible.³³¹

Cynthia became a principal, yet behind-the-scenes, organizer of the budding Haywood County branch. The role she framed in her letter to Current reflected the patriarchal climate of the rural South in which she lived. It also alluded to the perceived separation between political justice and economic justice within the Civil Rights Movement. Would the community likely suspect a successful Black business owner of having ulterior motives when leading a civil rights organization? Would NAACP members expect business leaders to choose an economic approach to freedom over a political one? Would Cynthia and her family be considered “too involved” or possess a kind of “monopoly” in Brownsville if they were both business and civil rights leaders in the community?³³²

Despite the quandary, Cynthia proved to be an effective “pusher” and “follower.” On February 8, 1961, Jesse H. Turner, president of the Memphis NAACP branch, submitted a “report of memberships from Haywood County” to the national office on Haywood County’s behalf. Cynthia recalled being at a Haywood County Civic and Welfare League meeting, in a room over Mr. Odell Sanders’s laundry, when she wrote the names of the individuals who would eventually become charter members of the Haywood County branch. Historian Richard Couto, whose book Lifting the Veil is a study of Brownsville’s struggle for freedom, positioned Cynthia

³³¹ Cynthia Rawls letter dated January 6, 1961 to Gloster B. Current, NAACP Papers Haywood County Branch files, Library of Congress, Film 305.896073 N21, Part 27A, Reel 14.

³³² Gloster B. Current letter dated January 11, 1961 to Attorney H.T. Lockart, NAACP Papers Haywood County Branch files, Library of Congress, Film 305.896073 N21, Part 27A, Reel 14; Haywood County Civic and Welfare League printed program that includes organization’s goals, in possession of author.

in the “spotlight” she had hoped to avoid and acknowledged the blending of the political and the entrepreneurial:

In Haywood County, efforts to reestablish the NAACP chapter centered on Cynthia Rawls, daughter of Al Rawls and member of the most prominent African-American family in the county. Charles Allen (“Al”) Rawls, the family patriarch, was a mortician who established several funeral homes in West Tennessee and an insurance company, Golden Circle, in Brownsville. In December 1960, as [John] Doar was in court seeking injunctions, members of the NAACP national office decided that ‘time was ripe for another branch’ in West Tennessee and that Miss Rawls was the best person to organize it.³³³

In a letter from Gloster B. Current dated March 14, 1961, Eddie L. Currie, who became the Haywood County branch’s first president, was given “Executive Authorization” for the Haywood County branch “chartered by the National Board of Directors on March 13, 1961.” The seventy-nine charter members were ecstatic, especially since there was a time, according to Wilbert Bond, former Haywood County resident and president of the Tennessee State NAACP, that Blacks in Haywood County were “afraid to say NAACP [even] in their sleep.” And certainly no one was more pleased than Cynthia, membership chairperson for the branch, who, together with her fellow charter members, had become heirs of O.S and Mattye T. Bond’s NAACP legacy in Brownsville. Ollie’s sister, Etta Bond Reed, principal of Lester School, one of the Rosenwald schools in Brownville, was also among the charter members, and before the summer’s end, Garnett, Ollie’s brother, had registered to vote and paid his \$2 NAACP membership. Several

³³³ Richard Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A Political History of Struggles for Emancipation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 207; see Cynthia Rawls Bond, “History of the NAACP in Brownsville, Tennessee” in 50th Year Charter Celebration Freedom Fund Banquet Haywood County Branch booklet, October 1, 2011; Jesse Turner to Gloster B. Current, February 8, 1961, NAACP Papers Haywood County Branch.

members of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League, in addition to Cynthia, were also charter members of the NAACP, including League founders C.P. Boyd and Betty R. Douglas.³³⁴

The NAACP branch decided to have its first membership program that would officially announce its presence in the community on May 7, 1961. Cynthia suggested that Ollie and Matt Bond's daughter, Mildred, who had begun her tenure as life membership director at the national office, serve as keynote speaker for the event. Mildred had assumed her position in 1958 and was running a program known as the "lifeblood" of the organization and "credited with sustaining the organization financially."³³⁵

Mildred, Matt, Marion, Vivian, and Tommy, Jr., Vivian's young son, returned to Tennessee, less than a year after Ollie's funeral, this time to celebrate the rebirth of a civil rights initiative that had been trampled in the 1940s. Before driving to Brownsville, the Bond women and young Tommy had lunch in Memphis with their official welcoming committee: attorney H.T. Lockart, president of the Tennessee State Conference of the NAACP; L.C. Bates, NAACP staff member and husband of Daisy Bates; Cynthia Rawls; and Eddie L. Currie, the Haywood County branch president. After lunch Mildred and her family traveled to Brownsville where they relaxed with Maude and Charles then prepared for the festivities. May 7 began with a parade that started on Jackson Avenue, an historic site of African-American entrepreneurship in Brownsville, and ended at the First Baptist Church on Jefferson Street. The church was filled with over 1,000 NAACP supporters. The Haywood County branch established an "In Memoriam

³³⁴ Application for Charter of Haywood County, Tennessee Branch, dated March 13, 1961 in Haywood County NAACP Branch files also in NAACP Records VI, Box C7, Library of Congress.

³³⁵ Ironically, as late as 1969, Roy Wilkins, executive director of the NAACP, discussing women's "place," stated, "Biologically they ought to have children and stay home. I can't help it if God made them that way, and not to run General Motors." He added that women were "key people in our organization" and "There are a lot of areas where they could be used a lot more." See Marilyn Bender, "Black Woman in Civil Rights: Is She a Second-Class Citizen?" *New York Times*, September 2, 1969. Cynthia Yeldell, "NAACP Lifetime Membership Program Celebrates 100th Anniversary," *The Crisis*, 117 (Spring 2010), 58-59.

Life Membership” for O.S. Bond, and welcomed new members. Later that week, Mildred advised newly-installed officers of the branch as they prepared for their duties. She also met with NAACP branch leaders from neighboring Fayette County, who were already in the midst of their own civil rights struggles that had begun to receive national support.³³⁶

In the 1960s, local white segregationists, including White Citizens Councils members, were inundated with disturbing national news that showed powerful and widespread Black resistance to oppression. Tent City, the makeshift settlement of Haywood and Fayette County sharecroppers who had been evicted from their homes because they had registered to vote had gained national attention. Blacks in West Tennessee were a part of court cases, voting rights campaigns, and other local issues of political protest that made the new NAACP in Brownsville only one of many targets to eliminate. The presence of the Brownsville branch in the 1930s elicited a white backlash that was intense but contained. However, the white backlash in the 1960s was broad and pervasive, negatively affecting not only Black sharecroppers in Brownsville and Somerville, but also landowning Blacks who attempted to register and the few white allies in the area as well. NAACP members in Brownsville were aware of the hostile political climate, the risks of associating with the NAACP, and the violence that membership could incite. Thus, NAACP correspondence was initially mailed to Cynthia in “plain wrappers” at 1101 Cynthia Drive, the home she shared with her parents and older brother, Bill. By July, the branch had rented a post office box, but the local branch secretary advised national membership secretary, Lucille Black, “not [to] use any person’s name on the mail.”³³⁷

³³⁶ Mildred Bond to Gloster B. Current, May 1961, NAACP Papers Haywood County Branch files, Library of Congress, Film 305.896073 N21, Part 27A, Reel 14; See “Bonds Return to Brownsville,” *The Crisis*, 68 (August/September 1961), 448.

³³⁷ See Cynthia Rawls to Lucille Black, June 5, 1962; Lucille Black to C. Cynthia Rawls, June 8, 1961; Mildred Hay to Lucille Black, undated, received at national office, July 31, 1961, Haywood County NAACP Files.

The Haywood County branch began its work with a letter-writing campaign to local merchants. In a letter dated July 19, 1961, NAACP members spoke both as citizens and consumers, representing “the largest consumers in the county.” They appealed to business owners’ interest in the “commercial and industrial growth” of the city, and argued, “The consumer, the producer, and the distributors are interdependent in the commercial and industrial growth of a city.” The letter highlighted the fact that Blacks had been denied “privileges,” both “economically and politically.” As citizens attempting to register to vote, they were being “abused” and “denied access to the registrar’s office.” They were also being “intimidated” by local law enforcement officers and “humiliated” by the “For Whites Only” signs around the city, “especially in the courthouse.” The letter continued, “You have seen us arrested and fined unreasonably, and often times beaten. We are constantly humiliated by the abusive language used by those you have placed in office.”

The economic component affected Blacks both as workers and consumers. As workers, Blacks were “afraid to register because they [fear being] fired.” As consumers, Black customers were waited on after white customers, even when whites had arrived in the store after Blacks. Store owners also refused to give courtesy titles to Black patrons, regardless of age and station, but used them when speaking to whites. After identifying a list of concerns, NAACP members concluded their letter by soliciting the help of the merchants. They stated, “Please use your influence to see that these injustices are eliminated. . . . As consumers, we need you. As distributors and producers, you need the consumer.” A copy of the letter was sent to Mayor T.C. Chapman and Sheriff Hunter, along with personal letters appealing to them as community leaders. The mayor was reminded that African Americans were tax-paying citizens who were denied their right to vote and refused access, to public accommodations, even to the public

library, which were sustained by tax payer dollars. The branch members wanted to be able to enter the courthouse and receive assistance from the registrar, whose salary came from tax-payer monies. They wanted to register without the “slowed-down” tactics that resulted in only a few Blacks from a line of a hundred actually being able to register. They also wanted to use their public library. As these letters clearly showed, the 1960s struggle in west Tennessee recognized the significance of both the political and the economic.³³⁸

Another more subtle example of the convergence of the political and economic as well as the familial component of the movement is seen in a letter sent to Mildred Bond at the national office from Cynthia Rawls on Golden Circle Life Insurance Company stationery. The company became a silent partner in the movement. Cynthia had access to paper, a typewriter, a copy machine, stencils, envelopes, and stamps should she need supplies to conduct NAACP business. She also had a flexible work schedule. So, when fellow NAACP charter member Hadester Gregory, for example, came to the office to tell her when the registration lines at the courthouse were short, Cynthia was able to walk the two blocks to the courthouse to register. The “slowed-down” process, however, meant that Blacks would wait in line, sometimes all day, and still not be able to enter the courthouse to register. Golden Circle also provided space for meetings that could occur during or after business hours which would not be subject to white bosses’ threats of termination for engaging in civil rights activities on the job. L.C. Bates, NAACP field representative for the area, frequently met with Cynthia at Golden Circle. When C.P. Boyd was fired from his teaching position, the Golden Circle president hired Boyd, well aware of his political activism, as an insurance agent for the Nashville district. Boyd was able to draw a salary

³³⁸ Haywood County Branch, NAACP letter dated July 19, 1961 to Merchants; Haywood County Branch, NAACP; letter dated August 4, 1961 to Mayor T.C. Chapman, Haywood County Files, NAACP.

and sustain his civil rights work in the state capital with more direct access to legislators and policymakers.³³⁹

Cynthia addressed the letter to “Bo,” a shortened version of Mildred’s nickname that only family and a few childhood friends knew. After discussing NAACP business, that included membership forms, pamphlets, and the in memoriam membership established by the local branch “for Uncle Ollie,” Cynthia closed the letter with “Give me some suggestions about a place for the honeymoon.” Then in her postscript, she added, “What size shoe do you wear?” In addition to negotiating her place in the family business among her chauvinistic male relatives, being among those organizing the local branch and planning its chartering ceremony, Cynthia was also planning her wedding and getting the shoe size for her bridesmaid. Cynthia and Maltimore Bond had announced their engagement in April 1961, after Maltimore had sent a letter to her parents and received their approval. Invitations were sent to friends and family across the country and to all area churches. On August 27, 1961, Cynthia and Maltimore exchanged wedding vows on the front lawn of her family’s home before hundreds of guests, representing all walks of life. Before leaving for the Loraine Motel in Memphis and then flying to New York for their honeymoon, Cynthia passed her NAACP files over to her friend Mildred Hay, secretary of the local branch. Cynthia would be leaving Brownsville to live with her new husband in Lansing, Michigan.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, October 2, 2011.

³⁴⁰ Cynthia Rawls undated letter to “Bo” (Mildred Bond) in Haywood County Files, NAACP. Cynthia’s family had a very intimate relationship with the Bond family. Cynthia’s cousin Mattye Tollette from Tollette, Arkansas, married Ollie Bond, Maltimore’s uncle. Cynthia’s mother Maude Crofton came from Tollette, Arkansas, as a teenager to live with her cousin, Matt Bond, after her parents died. (Matt’s mother Caldonia Crofton Tollette was Maude’s aunt and raised Maude after her parents died. When Caldonia Crofton Tollette died, Maude came to Brownsville.) While living with Cousin Matt and Uncle Ollie, Maude met C.A. Rawls, who was a mentee, former student, and business partner of Ollie Bond. Matt had also taught and mentored C.A. Maude and C.A. Rawls married while Maude was living with Matt and Ollie. In fact, the wedding ceremony was in the house. Then C.A. and Maude sent their daughter Cynthia, when she was twelve years old, to live with Matt and Ollie in Kansas. She later lived with them while a graduate student at NYU. Mildred and her sisters were related to Cynthia on the Crofton /Tollette side and to Malt on the Bond side. As long-time residents of a closely-knit town, the Bonds and

Meanwhile, in September 1961, the Haywood County chapter experienced its first violent assault against one of its members. Dick Sarabian, an Armenian immigrant who owned an electrical repair shop in Brownsville, was harassed because of his “pro-integration attitudes.” Sarabian, a financial member of the local NAACP, attended meetings and supported the organization’s goals. Local whites who abhorred “race mixing” undoubtedly saw Sarabian as a traitor to the white “race.” A white business owner allegedly lodged a complaint against Sarabian. Then Sarabian was beaten and arrested in his shop for resisting arrest though he was “no more than five feet” and weighed approximately 125 pounds. The national office sent \$200 for assistance with Sarabian’s defense, and Memphis attorney H. T. Lockart agreed to represent him. While the records do not include more details about the case or possible appeals, branch secretary Mildred Hay indicated in a letter to Mildred Bond that “[Serabian] is going to sue the city and county [and] if he wins the suit he plans to donate a part of it to the NAACP.”³⁴¹

In 1962, the local NAACP addressed several issues. For example, Roy Bond, principal of the local Black high school, had reportedly warned students that they would be expelled if they joined the NAACP’s Youth Council, and a committee planned to meet with him about the allegations. Dunlap Cannon, chair of the Haywood County Court Board, arranged a meeting with local Black leaders. Odell Sanders of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League was the point person who insisted that C.P. Boyd, League co-founder, and NAACP officers Eddie L. Currie and Fred Hay be invited to the meeting. Under protest from other whites in the city,

Rawlses knew each other well. Both families were landowners with prominent white relatives in the town. Maltimore’s father Garnett and Garnett’s brothers were friends with C.A. Rawls. Rawls Funeral Home buried their dead, and Garnett spent time in the funeral parlor among the local men who gathered there to talk. Cynthia and Malt knew each other and would run into each other at different family functions, such as funerals. Maltimore escorted Cynthia to Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity dance in Flint, Michigan, which sparked their interest in each other. After the dance, they began corresponding by letter until Malt visited his family in Brownsville.

³⁴¹ See letter from Mildred Hay dated September 26, 1961; Memo to Gloster B. Current from Mildred Bond September 7, 1961; Correspondence includes two ways of spelling Sarabian/Serabian.

Cannon, C.T. Hooper, of the First State Bank, and Kirby Matherne, attorney for the local Housing Authority, met with these civil rights leaders to discuss the pressing issues Black citizens faced, which included “integration of public schools and libraries, representation on the Mayor’s Commission and general improvement of the status of Negro citizens.”³⁴²

Black political advancements in west Tennessee were made despite the existence of Tent City, which symbolized white resistance to such progress. The settlement, grounded in racial and class oppression, left poor Blacks homeless, jobless, and vulnerable to whims of white landowners and a local judicial system that had often ignored the interests of poor and marginalized Americans. White landowners using economic reprisals to punish African American sharecroppers who had asserted their right to vote was tantamount to slashing the community’s collective jugular vein. Sharecroppers, who were typically landless workers struggling to survive, were forced to endure the harsh economic realities of their lives which left them at the mercy of those with land, jobs, employment opportunities, capital, lines of credit, and quality education. How these Black families coped with their dire circumstances could have potentially shifted the balance of white political power in Haywood and Fayette Counties. For of Tennessee’s ninety-six counties, Haywood and Fayette were the only two with predominantly African American populations. If Blacks remained in these counties and secured voting rights, they could dominate political office. However, if they migrated to other cities or states, they would never occupy positions of power in these cities or dismantle the white segregationist’s “way of life” that trampled on notions of equal rights and social justice.³⁴³

³⁴² Haywood County Files two memos to Gloster B. Current from Mildred Bond and letter from Mildred Hay dated September 25, 1961.

³⁴³ Claude Sitton, “Tennessee Area Curbing Negroes,” New York Times, June 19, 1960.

Three major sources working together helped to strengthen the fight for voting rights in Haywood and Fayette Counties. First, the federal government, which had vacillated in its commitment to protect the non-white, poor, disfranchised, and the oppressed of its citizenry, had begun to enact laws attorneys used to secure civil liberties. The 1957 Civil Rights Act that President Eisenhower signed into law proved to be a critical piece of legislation for local residents. In addition to federal laws, outsiders, both Black and white, became a formidable presence in west Tennessee as African Americans emerged from the quagmire of their lives in Tent City. These “outside agitators” helped to bring national attention to the torture southern law officials inflicted on human rights defenders. And finally, within the counties, local leaders were proactive as they organized and collaborated with allies committed to the work of peace. Local advocates remained firmly committed to the social, political, and economic survival of their communities despite the sacrifices. Their hands-on approach and determination provided the momentum to cause change in rural west Tennessee. Local Black businesses also provided an anchor with both an important economic base and useful social networks to help maintain community stability.

The history of American jurisprudence has shown the gradual move toward enacting laws and setting precedents which reflected the ideas that all citizens are equal under the law. In 1896, Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Early immigration laws supported this idea, for to qualify for citizenship, one needed to be “white.” Yet, the unanimous decision in the Brown case and subsequent cases involving fair housing all contributed to the body of law that gave Americans who had fought for equality hope for the nation’s future. Under Civil Rights Act of 1957 (Part IV, Section 13):

No person, whether acting under color of law or otherwise, shall intimidate, threaten, coerce, or attempt to intimidate, threaten, or coerce any other person for the purpose of interfering with the right of such other person to vote or to vote as he may choose, or of causing such other person to vote for, or not to vote for, any candidate for the office of president, vice-president, presidential elector, member of the Senate, member of the House of Representatives. . .at any general, special, or primary election held solely or in part for the purpose of selecting or electing any such candidate.

This civil rights act provided for the creation of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department. John Doar, who served in the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division from 1960-1967, explained that the Division “[a]s late as February 1960. . . had not yet begun to act effectively to bar racial discrimination in voting.” Controversy arose as to whether the federal government actually had authority over individual states to set the guidelines and parameters for voting in a given state. According to Doar, “distinguished constitutional lawyers” believed the Constitution did not provide the federal government with the “power to regulate voter qualifications.” Three cases, two from Haywood County and one from Fayette County, were among the first to test the new Civil Rights Act of 1957. Doar stated that “. . . the Division had achieved some success in checking economic intimidation against sharecroppers who had tried to register to vote in Haywood and Fayette counties. . . .”³⁴⁴ For Haywood County residents, “some success” was quite substantial as they participated in and witnessed firsthand political changes of their rural west Tennessee town.

The crisis in west Tennessee also demanded that lawyers examine the Civil Rights Act of 1960, and as Claude Sitton of the New York Times noted, some believed the crisis “illustrate[d].

³⁴⁴ John Doar, “The Work of the Civil Rights Division in Enforcing Voting Rights under the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960,” Florida State University Law Review, 25 (1997), 1, 5.

. .a basic weakness” in the act. Although Black Americans could legally vote, the Civil Rights Act of 1960 had not factored in a method of protecting them from the inevitable backlash as they asserted their political privileges. Regardless of the legal complications or shortcomings, the acts reassured African Americans that civil rights issues were a part of federal discourse. West Tennessee was on the radar, and the experiences of Blacks in the rural South had become a part of a national movement.³⁴⁵

Allies outside of Brownsville and Somerville expressed their support of Tent City inhabitants in different ways. For example, during the NAACP’s national convention in June 1960, Roy Wilkins, the association’s executive director, encouraged attendees from across the nation to boycott any national oil companies participating in economic reprisals against residents in Haywood and Fayette Counties. To show support for those struggling in west Tennessee, a number of NAACP members canceled their gas cards. In November 1960, nearly 200 students from Lane College, a historically Black college in neighboring Jackson, Tennessee, organized a march to the Madison County Courthouse to show their solidarity with African Americans in Haywood and Fayette Counties. The message on their picket signs was clear: ‘We want to see Negroes free to vote in Haywood and Fayette Counties.’ Blacks in Madison County were able to vote and participate in the political process, but Blacks who lived less than an hour away in Haywood County and Fayette Counties could not. Before the protestors reached the courthouse, however, they were arrested for “disorderly conduct, threatening breach of peace and violating a city ordinance requiring a permit to stage a parade.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Claude Sitton, “Tennessee Area Curbing Negroes,” *New York Times* (June 19, 1960); See transcript of Civil Rights Act of 1960 <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=97&page=transcript>

³⁴⁶ “Arrest 170 in Tennessee Protest against Bias,” *Chicago Defender* (November 19, 1960).

On February 4, 1961, five University of Michigan students arrived in Brownsville to donate food and clothing to Blacks in the struggle. Before being able to transport the supplies, two of the students, David Giltrow and Andrew Hawley, were arrested. Giltrow was charged with resisting arrest, and Hawley was charged with failure to stop at a stop sign. The judge decided to dismiss the charges provided the students leave Haywood County. They were allowed to take the items they had brought with them to Tent City residents, but only with a police escort.³⁴⁷

NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins had proposed an initiative to NAACP branches across the country to support ‘Tent City’ refugees. So, in February 1961, the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, NAACP branch led a Freedom Rally which began a month-long campaign of support. Allen Yancy, Jr., twenty-six-year-old president of the Fayette County NAACP, spoke at the opening to a group of Pittsburghers who paid with can goods or articles of clothing for admission to the rally. The president of Minutemen of the United Steel workers, AFL-CIO, volunteered to maintain and box the items for shipment, and members of the Civil Rights Division of the United Steel Workers pledged to pay for transporting the items to Tennessee. Yancy shared his own story to the audience. Both he and his wife were teachers. His wife was a librarian and tenure protected her position, but he, a mathematics and chemistry teacher without tenure, had been fired from his job. Unlike many of those affected by the harsh retaliations, his educational background provided him with options. He was awarded a scholarship for graduate studies at Tuskegee University. While he was fortunate to have the scholarship and the opportunity to further his education, he had to travel 400 miles to Tuskegee, Alabama, preoccupied with the social and economic pressures he and his family faced at home. Like

³⁴⁷ “Student Arrest Cited Michigan Youths were Aiding Negroes in Tennessee,” New York Times (February 6, 1961).

residents in Brownsville who had been blacklisted, he could not “buy a suit of clothes or get [his] wife’s dresses cleaned” in his hometown. He could not purchase food for his family or gas for his car without having to travel miles away to make these purchases.³⁴⁸ Less than two months after Yancy’s visit to Pittsburgh, AFL-CIO Laundry Works Local 141 raised \$543 in donations for Tent City. The patriotism from these union workers was reflected in their previous campaigns: Local 141 had already led “To Help Build a Better America” campaign, and Local 284 of the Laundry Works, Cleaners and Dryers Union had led a “Dollar for Decency In Democracy” campaign.³⁴⁹

In Boston, Massachusetts, twenty-one women hosted a tea party to support Tent City occupants. They raised \$650, earmarked for Tent City, and deposited into CORE’s Seed, Equipment, and Loan Fund. The tea included a panel on “The Struggle for Equality” at which Alan Gartner, a member of CORE, and James Loue, a graduate student of Social Relations at Harvard University, spoke. The moderator Dr. Martin Kilson, also of Harvard University, ended the affair by highlighting the similarities between contemporary African and African American struggles.³⁵⁰

As much as the Tent City incident elicited compassion and generosity from Americans across the nation, it also exposed the inhumanity and brutality of law enforcement departments across the South, including Brownsville. In May 1962, CORE organized the Committee of Inquiry into the Administration of Justice in the Freedom Struggle in Washington, D.C. Over the course of two days, twenty civil rights advocates, both Black and white, testified to the torturous treatment they had received at the hands of southern police officers. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt

³⁴⁸ “NAACP Plans Huge Rally To Aid ‘Tent City’ Victims,” Pittsburgh Courier, February 11, 1961; “NAACP’s Anniversary Aids ‘Tent City’ Dwellers,” Pittsburgh Courier (February 25, 1961).

³⁴⁹ “Pittsburgh Laundry Workers Donate \$543 to ‘Tent City,’” Pittsburgh Courier, April 1, 1961.

³⁵⁰ “Bostonians Give Benefit Tea for ‘Tent City,’” Pittsburgh Courier, March 18, 1961.

chaired the august panel which included such individuals as Dr. Kenneth Clark, psychologist; Joseph L. Rauh, Jr. of Americans for Democratic Action; Boris Shishkin of the AFL-CIO; and Telford Taylor, lawyer and prosecutor at Nuremberg. These hearings confirmed a pattern of behavior among law enforcement officials as well as the judiciary:

Police intimidation by acquiescence or complicity in white mob violence, by mass arrest of peaceful demonstrators on dubious charges, by brutality on streets and in jails. Judicial intimidation with the purpose of blocking civil rights by mass convictions; by placement of the highest charges . . . by the attempt to bankrupt organizations with astronomical bail and bond; by the attempt to stop civil rights action by injunction, and by isolating leaders in jail.

The personal accounts also revealed that “police viciousness and judicial intransigence . . . increased with the new strength of the civil rights movement.”³⁵¹

The punishments which these protestors and supporters received varied in severity. For example, in January 1961, Phillip H. Savage, an NAACP field secretary from Baltimore was arrested in Brownsville for “threatening a breach of peace,” and fined \$50 because he interviewed Blacks while they stood in registration lines at the courthouse. Deputy George Sullivan, better known by locals as “Buddy” Sullivan, a well-known bigot, claimed Savage was ‘causing confusion.’ While the General Sessions Judge “dismissed the charge of illegally attempting to vote,” H.T. Lockhart, NAACP attorney from Memphis, said he would appeal.³⁵²

On October 29, 1961, the Reverend Maurice McCrackin, a white minister from Cincinnati, Ohio, was fined \$72 and sentenced to thirty-six days in the Haywood County

³⁵¹ Charlotte Devree, editor, “Justice,” Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) <http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt80005x7&&doc.view=entire>(from Calisphere, a world of primary sources and more, the Regents of the University of California)

³⁵² “NAACP Official Fined In Vote Clash,” New York Times, January 28, 1961; The Crisis, 68 (March 1961), 168.

workhouse. McCrackin recalled waiting for Mr. Odell Sanders before going to Tent City to deliver supplies. Sanders was an African American from Brownsville who had co-founded the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League in 1959 and was a local liaison for Tent City occupants. Buddy Sullivan and another police officer approached McCrackin and inquired as to what he was doing. He told officers he was waiting for Mr. Odell Sanders, to which Buddy Sullivan replied, "Around here we don't call niggers 'mister.'" Then he added, "The nigger is lazy and dumb and undependable. You got to keep them in their place or they get into all kinds of scrapes. Niggers just aren't the equals of white folks in any way." McCrackin, a minister who had pastored an integrated congregation in Cincinnati and had refused to pay income taxes because monies were used for war and munitions, told Sullivan that he believed Blacks and whites were "children of the same Father. . .brothers and all equal." Sullivan turned his attention from McCrackin and asked the police officer with him about the woman who claimed McCrackin had been looking in her windows. Sullivan then arrested McCrackin for "loitering and peeping." In protest against these unsubstantiated charges, McCrackin began a hunger strike and refused to pick cotton or perform duties assigned to him at the workhouse. During the course of his incarceration, a group of ministers came to Brownsville to investigate, but they dismissed any notions of impropriety on the part of the police. McCrackin, they concluded, was "not cooperating with authorities." Nonetheless, McCrackin sympathizers, who believed the infraction was a serious threat to peace and democracy, wrote Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington and President John F. Kennedy requesting an investigation. Members of the Cincinnati NAACP solicited assistance from Attorney General Robert Kennedy as well. Seventy-two Cincinnati ministers also signed a petition for publication acknowledging the injustices the evicted sharecroppers in west Tennessee were experiencing and the wrongful imprisonment of

McCrackin, who remained in the Brownsville workhouse. The States Graphic, the local newspaper in Brownsville, in which the ministers wanted the petition printed, refused to publish the document, just as it had decided not to print any stories about Tent City. McCrackin was released on December 9, 1961, and sent to Memphis so as not to allow his supporters to publically celebrate his release. He returned to Owen Junior College, now Lemoyne Owen College, a historically Black college, in Memphis, which served as a base for him. McCrackin returned to Brownsville the day after his release to attend a Haywood County Civic and Welfare meeting, still committed to the cause.³⁵³

Eric Weinberger, who spent his life engaged in projects that promoted peace and egalitarianism, went to Brownsville several times and was among the twenty civil rights activists who testified at the Committee of Inquiry into the Administration of Justice in the Freedom Struggle in Washington, D.C. which exposed the torture southern police department were inflicting on civil rights workers. His testimony focused on his experiences in Brownsville. In December 1961, Weinberger went to Haywood County with a micro-economics project, the “Haywood Handcrafters’ League,” to assist local Blacks affected by the economic reprisals that left them jobless. He returned to Haywood County the following February with Jeffrey Gordon, and after being in Brownsville a few days, he was arrested and incarcerated for burglary. Police officers detained him because of the “burglary of a fruit stand.” Weinberger’s “tote bags for integration” had become profitable for the displaced west Tennesseans. For example, the Commission on Social Action of the Union of Hebrew Congregations, which included over six-hundred reform temples, supported these efforts and encouraged their temples to advertise and

³⁵³ Judith A. Blackburn and Robert M. Coughlin, “‘Share a Bit of the Danger’ Operation Freedom,” in Building the Beloved Community: Maurice McCrackin’s Life for Peace and Civil Right (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 136-155; “Minister Suspended,” New York Times, May 17, 1961; “Hunger Strike Ended,” New York Times November 25, 1961.

help to sell these items. Seventy-five families produced income by crafting the tote bags and mailing them to customers across the country.³⁵⁴

Although the Black families valued Weinberger's contributions, local white law enforcement resented his interference. During Weinberger's interview with the Committee of Inquiry into the Administration of Justice in the Freedom Struggle, he testified that he had been imprisoned without being told exactly why he was being arrested and that he had been "dragged out of the courthouse by his feet with his head bouncing on cement steps." He said the police used metal clamps to bind his hands. He charged that his pants had been ripped off of him, and he had been beaten until he "passed out several times." Further testimony revealed that police officers cursed him and used an "electric shock probe" (cattle prod) "around the private parts." He also maintained, "I was picked up and held in the air by the private parts." In November 1962, Weinberger received the Congress of Racial Equality's (CORE) third annual Gandhi Award for his non-violent social justice efforts in Brownsville. Weinberger returned to Brownsville in August 1963 and was arrested again. Although Blacks in Brownsville, no doubt, respected Weinberger's recognition, they were more grateful for his personal testimony which documented the sadistic nature of local law enforcement to which they were constantly subjected.³⁵⁵

Other projects to support the community included summer workcamps that Mrs. Virgie Hortenstine of Cincinnati organized in Haywood and Fayette Counties. Students from

³⁵⁴ "Jewish Group Backs Sales to Aid Negroes," New York Times, January 21, 1962.

³⁵⁵ Charlotte Devree, editor for CORE, "Justice,"

<http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt80005x7&&doc.view=entire>(from Calisphere, a world of primary sources and more, the Regents of the University of California) ;"Jewish Group Backs Sales to Aid Negroes," New York Times, January 21, 1962; "Tennessee Expects to Free Two Whites," New York Times, March 5, 1962; "Gets Award for Aiding Tenn. Sharecroppers," Chicago Defender, November 10, 1962; "Brutality Charged in Tennessee Town," New York Times, August 6, 1963.

institutions such as Swarthmore, Sarah Lawrence, and Ohio State lived on farms with local Black families and worked alongside them in the fields. They picked cotton and developed an appreciation for rural life, and also participated in voter registration drives. While Sarah Lawrence and Swarthmore students lived in Tennessee, students from Haywood and Fayette Counties participated in a downtown Philadelphia workcamp in which students helped to remodel houses. When students were not working, they toured the “City of Brotherly Love.” These enrichment opportunities were sponsored by several Quaker organizations and groups such as the Cincinnati Chapter of Operation Freedom. Despite both the civic engagement and the cultural exchange components, some whites opposed this program. For example, whites who apparently rejected “race mixing” on all levels disparaged Blacks families because white workcampers lived with and worked alongside them. Once workcampers in Fayette County were warned by travelers in a passing car, “You better get out of Fayette County or you’re going to be killed.” Students provided local and federal authorities with the license number from the car, but no arrests were made. Workcampers in Fayette County also faced intimidation from “six carloads of whites . . . armed with ropes and weapons. . . .”³⁵⁶

Local Black business owners also served as allies to Tent City dwellers. As both Blacks and whites from outside the region showed their solidarity, only a few local whites came forward as allies. They too were subject to economic hardship and potential physical violence as well. Oren and Sarah Lemmon, for example, lived in Stanton (Haywood County) and owned both a grocery store and a dry cleaner. The dry cleaner provided home delivery service for customers, including African Americans.³⁵⁷ The Lemmons were aware of a blacklist circulating among

³⁵⁶ “White and Colored Workcampers Being Harassed In Tennessee,” *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1963.

³⁵⁷ During a conversation with Cecil M. Giles on October 31, 2011, Cecil noted that he knew Mr. Lemmons personally as he had come to the Giles’s home to deliver dry cleaning.

merchants that identified African Americans who were not to receive service because of their attempts to vote, and the couple acknowledged the existence of this blacklist in open court, which put them and their businesses in jeopardy. Leo T. and Frances Redfern, Fayette County residents, suffered economic consequences as they were “forced out of business because they refused to honor the blacklist.”³⁵⁸

In 1960, Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, a stock company which developed from a fraternal organization, celebrated its second year in operation. The company had already begun to expand as its officers planned to “cover Tennessee.” District offices in Memphis, Nashville, and as far east as Knoxville were established, thus providing employment opportunities for African Americans in west, middle, and east Tennessee. The company offered life and health insurance policies to African Americans who might not otherwise have purchased insurance, although Atlanta Life, also a member of the National Insurance Association (NIA), did have a district in nearby Jackson. Brownsville, however, had the distinction of being the site of Golden Circle’s home office. This Black-owned insurance company was counted among the nationally recognized insurance companies in Black Enterprise magazine and helped to put Brownsville on the “map” of Black entrepreneurship. Golden Circle’s policy known as the “education” policy became a popular plan for families with children who wanted to attend college. The policy matured when the insured reached eighteen years old, providing seed money for college or technical school. The debit or industrial insurance market allowed for smaller, weekly premium payments. It also facilitated a more personal and direct relationship with the agent, who came to policyholders’ homes regularly. Policyholders developed intimate relationships with their agents

³⁵⁸Judith A. Blackburn and Robert M. Coughlin, “‘Share a Bit of the Danger’ Operation Freedom,” in Building the Beloved Community: Maurice McCrackin’s Life for Peace and Civil Right (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 136-155 .

and by extension their insurance company. Because of their affiliation Golden Circle and Rawls businesses, many policyholders allowed Rawls Funeral Home to handle with the funeral services for their loved ones. Members of the Rawls burial association, which was established in the 1930s, often became Golden Circle policyholders. The company was local and policyholders had full access to company officials, including the president, C.A. Rawls. Rawls's open door policy promoted camaraderie and built good-will for his businesses throughout the county. Having the freedom to enter Rawls's office simply to say hello, get advice, ask for a loan, or to lodge a complaint about services was an important feature for customers, especially given the deplorable treatment Blacks typically received from white business owners. Golden Circle policyholders were often neighbors, church members, extended family, fellow lodge members, fraternity brothers, Rawls Funeral Home supporters, or individuals in the struggle who believed investing in the Black community was an investment in Black America's future.³⁵⁹

During the nearly three-year Tent City embargo that left Blacks, especially the most vulnerable among them, without food, shelter, gasoline, medical care, income, credit, and employment, Rawls was approached to help the farmers financially. He did not have the ready cash needed to assist the hundreds of sharecroppers and other farm families who lacked funds for basic necessities as well as farm equipment and tractor rentals, gasoline for the machines, seeds, fertilizer, and other supplies. Over the course of nearly three years, financial support from outside sources aided the farmers. Still, many farmers were already living in poverty, and the embargo exacerbated their financial woes.

³⁵⁹ Jim Crow Insurance article; Interview with Cynthia and Malt Bond, April 15, 2010; Golden Circle was featured in Black Enterprise when the top 100 Black-owned insurance companies were recognized.

After analyzing his options and feeling, no doubt, a sense of helplessness, Rawls went to the Brownsville Bank to make a loan on the farmer's behalf. T.C. Chapman, the bank president, told Rawls the he would not authorize a loan for the farmers. Emotions were high, and the political climate was rife with racial hatred, mistrust, and a jealous possessiveness of resources, including American citizenship rights. Whites were generally determined not to lose power in counties where the majority of citizens were African American. These extreme measures reflected the extent to which they wanted to maintain their social, political, and economic status. After an entire day of waiting, Chapman finally agreed to loan Rawls the money, but not on behalf of the farmers. Rawls who had assets to cover the loan could borrow the money as a private citizen and do with it what he wanted, but when the loan was due only he, not the farmers, would be responsible for the indebtedness.

Rawls borrowed \$240, 000 to aid the farmers. The less publicity about the money the better as anonymity provided safety and protection from Ku Klux Klan or White Citizens Council retribution. Available records to date do not indicate if Rawls had a selection process that screened good risks, but Rawls lent the money to area farmers. Mr. Earl Maclin, an officer at Golden Circle who lived in Somerville, often left the Golden Circle office in the evenings with bags of money and the requisite promissory notes for individuals who had been approved for loans from the Rawls funds. Tent City continued to be a hotbed of racial animosity and economic reprisals, but borrowers repaid all of the money, enabling Rawls to repay the Brownsville Bank when the note was due.³⁶⁰

³⁶⁰ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond and Maltimore Bond, April 15, 2010; Interview by James A. Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977; James Arnold Baxter, "C.A. Rawls, A Portrait," Master's Thesis.

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Also in 1960, Rawls was contacted to join a racially integrated group of men in Nashville who were planning to organize a savings and loan that would benefit both Blacks and whites, but especially Blacks who were usually “insulted” and often unable to “get a fair shake” when conducting business. Blacks also had limited access to financial support in the Jim Crow South. Hobert Martin, a member of Golden Circle’s Board of Directors and the Tennessee State Negro Funeral Directors Association, and Victor Barr, a white attorney from Nashville, met with Rawls to discuss this business venture. According to Rawls, among the goals were to “build homes, tear down slums, and renovate homes.” These were worthwhile goals which he supported.

Establishing a savings and loan with these goals in mind was critical, especially since hundreds of sharecroppers in west Tennessee were, at that very moment, living in Tents because they had been evicted from their homes for attempting to register to vote. Tent City was a visual reminder that economic empowerment and fiscal autonomy were indeed important components of full citizenship. Rawls remained focused on his efforts to open a savings and loan in Nashville, as well as balancing his work at Rawls Funeral Home and Golden Circle with efforts to empower Tent City residents.

By April 1962, the Community Federal Savings and Loan Association was open for business at 2430 Jefferson Street. However, acquiring the reserve to launch the association had been no small feat. According to federal laws, the association had to be federally insured before it could receive a charter. This meant having deposits and enough capital in reserve to open for

business. The goal was almost \$450,000 to meet the legal standard. Rawls and other organizers met with legislators, solicited investors, and moved forward with their plan. Rawls used his contacts within the state and across the country to solicit investors and those willing to make deposits. Rawls pledged \$10,000 from Golden Circle and contacted a number of Black business owners requesting \$10,000 from each. In less than two hours on the telephone, he had received over \$100,000 in pledges. In a bold move, the team met with the directors of Tennessee's National Life and Accident Insurance Company, a Nashville-based firm established in 1901, which collected approximately \$300,000 a week in premiums, with about 70 percent of those premiums coming from Black industrial workers. Initially, company representatives declined to contribute to the association. Rawls, aware of the firm's history, reminded the men that the company's success was in large part because of the support of Black workers. He also knew the story of Elijah Whitelaw, a Black insurance agent for National Life in Brownsville during the 1920s who grew a large debit for the company, insuring hundreds of African Americans, and once the debit was solid, generating premiums regularly, the company replaced him with a white agent. Depositing \$10,000 into the association would be a small gesture of goodwill to the Black community. The meeting ended without any commitment from National Life, but Rawls left his business card on the table. The next day Community Federal received a check for \$10,000 from National Life and Accident Insurance Company. White-owned banks and financial institutions were not typically in favor of this new savings and loan; however, several companies made deposits.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ For more information on National Life and Accident Insurance Company, see John Egerton, Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries, 1790-1980 (Northbrook: Plus Media, Inc., 1979) ; interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977; interview by author with Cynthia and Malt Bond, April 15, 2010; James Arnold Baxter, "Charles Allen Rawls, 'A Portrait,' 1907-1977"(unpublished master of science thesis, Tennessee State University, 1982.

The association attracted different types of depositors. For example, Malt and Cynthia sent money from Lansing as did their friends Cullen and Helena Dubose, representing small deposits from couples who were just starting out.³⁶² James Maclin represented another type of investor. Maclin was a middle-aged African American landowner from Haywood County. He drove a school bus, and his wife was teacher. The couple owned rental property and saved their money through the years. Maclin was known for saying that he wasn't "rich" but that he was a "wealthy son-of-a-gun." Despite confusing the meanings of the words, he knew that he wanted to deposit his money in the new savings and loan. Locals with checking accounts, who wanted to make deposits, left checks at the funeral home, but depositors often left cash in envelopes or paper sacks with Rawls, trusting him to take the money to Nashville, make the deposits, and return the receipt or bank book. Some depositors did not even expect a receipt; Rawls's word was enough.³⁶³

On one trip to Nashville, James Maclin decided to ride with Rawls so that he could see the new building. Rawls, a Black man in the South, was transporting a trunk of money—thousands of dollars-- from west Tennessee depositors to a Black-run savings and loan association in Nashville. He had kept a pistol in his locked glove box since the 1930s, but the trip to Nashville with all of that money could have been dangerous given race relations in the South and the insignificance of a Black life during those days. Rawls welcomed the company on the 150-mile trek, but let Maclin know about the large sum of cash he had in the trunk. Before reaching Community Federal, Rawls pulled into a gas station, where he purchased some gas. He then requested the key to the restroom to which the clerk responded "no" because the restrooms

³⁶² Interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977; Interview by author with Cynthia and Malt Bond, April 15, 2010; Baxter, "Charles Allen Rawls, 'A Portrait,' 1907-1977."

³⁶³ Interview by author with Cynthia and Malt Bond, April 15, 2011.

were reserved for whites only. Maclin was livid, insisting that Rawls should have told the insolent clerk to take a look in the trunk and then say no. Rawls took the insult in stride as he drove his car filled with money, and now gas, to Nashville's brand new savings and loan association, of which he was president.³⁶⁴

The original nine-member board of trustees for the association consisted of a dynamic group of men that included two white attorneys, despite the racial discord within the segregated South at the time. In addition to Rawls, other members of the board included Alfred C. Galloway, a Nashville native who had earned a master's in organic chemistry from Fisk University. Galloway owned a contracting business and became the second president of Community Federal. Dr. Harold D. West was a New Jersey native who held a PhD in biochemistry from the University of Illinois. He had served as president of Meharry Medical College since 1952. Dr. Walter S. Davis, a Mississippi native, held a doctorate from Cornell University and was president of Tennessee State A & I from 1948-1968 (now Tennessee State University). Hobert Martin, a founder of the association, was co-owner of McGavock and Martin Brothers Funeral Home with his brother J.D. Martin, a veteran and Tennessee State University graduate. Both men were vice-presidents of the association. Austin Swett was from an entrepreneurial family in Nashville.³⁶⁵

In August 1962, C.A. Rawls received a letter from John London, special agent from the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service, Intelligence Division. London

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Incidentally, Maclin had made a profitable deal involving rental houses when a new road was coming through Haywood County that would destroy a row of houses. He had agreed to take some of the houses and repair them, which he did. Maclin also had standing in the community. For example, He had a disagreement with the minister at his church, Fredonia Baptist Church in Stanton, and decided to build another church across the street from the old one, naming it Greater Fredonia Baptist Church. Telephone interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, November 10, 2011.

³⁶⁵ Baxter , "C.A. Rawls, 'A Portrait,' 1907-1977, 51-57; interview by Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977.

advising Rawls that he would be arriving at the Rawls Funeral Home on August 6 to investigate his “Federal income tax affairs” from 1957-1961. London and his associate Internal Revenue Agent J.W. McMurray arrived and began their review. Over the next five years Rawls would be the subject of this investigation. While Rawls had an accountant, Leroy Williams, who kept his books, he decided to hire Lucian Minor, owner of an accounting firm in Memphis, to do a special audit of his transactions from the burial society to prove that he was reporting income accurately. After almost a year later, Rawls discovered that the agents were reviewing his tax history, not to determine whether he owed back taxes and fines for possible late payments, but that they were gathering information for a criminal case against him for alleged income tax evasion, based on unreported income from funerals and burial insurance premiums.³⁶⁶

Rawls had often said tongue-in-cheek that a man needed excellent doctors and lawyers; otherwise, he would end up in the cemetery or in jail. On July 1, 1963, he heeded his own advice, and contacted Memphis attorney Lucius Burch of Burch, Porter and Johnson for legal representation. Burch, Porter, and Johnson was a prestigious law firm established in Memphis in 1904 by Charles N. Burch, a founder of the Memphis Bar Association; Clinton H. McKay, former member of the Tennessee Legislature; and H.D. Minor, a former president of the Lawyers Club of Memphis. Lucius Burch and his firm were staples in west Tennessee. Shortly before Burch took the case, he had hired B.C. Clifton, an attorney employed with the IRS who left the government to join the firm. Given Clifton’s expertise with the IRS, Burch asked Clifton to review the Rawls case. Clifton visited Brownsville and observed the approach Minor and the accounting firm was taking to show that Rawls had not failed to report income from the burial

³⁶⁶ *United States of America v. Charles A. Rawls*, No. CR-66-80, NRC-10-1778, National Archives of Atlanta, May 22, 1967; Interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977; Telephone interview by author with B.C. Clifton, July 22, 2011.

association. According to Clifton, Minor had been using an actuarial table to compute Rawls's liability to burial insurance members, which was more appropriate for an insurance company like New York Life rather than the Rawls burial association operating solely in west Tennessee. Clifton stopped the Minor audit and began to plan a strategy for Rawls's defense. Lucius Burch remained the attorney of record. His name and presence in the courtroom would commandeer social capital for Rawls, a Black man from rural west Tennessee was defending himself against the federal government. Still, Clifton became the lead attorney and soon began building his case.³⁶⁷

In addition to drafting motions and legal documents that charged agents London and McMurray with failure to inform Rawls that he was being investigated for possible criminal violations of the Internal Revenue Code; that he had the right to retain counsel; and that he was not required to make his records available to them, Clinton also decided to interview burial insurance members. As a white stranger, he could not enter the homes of the burial members, all African Americans, with a barrage of questions without a community liaison. Clifton and Al's son Bill drove through the rural "back roads" of Brownsville and adjoining counties to interview burial association members. The two men often left Brownsville in the morning and worked all day. Clifton had created a form that he used to record relevant information regarding claims and premium payments. By lunchtime, Bill and B.C. were usually famished. They wanted simply to eat, review statements and issues raised in the conversations, and resume their work so they could finish without interrupting supertime for the families. Finding a café to have lunch was a chore since not all establishments were integrated. Bill typically entered the restaurant first, if he could enter and be seated, they would stay; otherwise, they had to find another restaurant. During

³⁶⁷ B.C. Clifton telephone interview; Burch, Porter & Johnson History www.bpjlaw.com/history.php.

their travels, they came across the tents of Tent City. Clifton, who had only heard about the settlement, almost “lost his breath” when he saw it. He remarked, “It felt like somebody had hit me in the chest.” After months of gathering information, Clifton had interviewed about one hundred people. The stories he heard from the burial association members he interviewed convinced him of Rawls’s integrity and the “unbounded good-will” Rawls had “throughout the county.” Thus, he continued vigorously preparing for his first court case, should the investigation go that far.³⁶⁸

Then on June 7, 1966, U.S. Marshalls appeared at Rawls Funeral Home with an arrest warrant for C.A. Rawls. C.A. sent word for his brother Zannie, who was across the street at Golden Circle, to come to the funeral home. Garnett Bond, Ollie Bond’s brother and Cynthia’s father-in-law, happened to be among the men sitting in the funeral parlor that day. Garnett traveled to Memphis with C.A. and Zannie. He and Zannie then made an appearance bond for C.A; otherwise C.A. would have been jailed. Zannie used his house valued at \$8,000 as surety, and Garnett used his farm valued at \$30,000, both free from encumbrances, to make the \$2,500 bond. On May 15, 1967, almost a year later, the trial finally began.³⁶⁹

While William A. McTighe, Jr, assistant U.S. Attorney for the Western District and B.C. Clifton were preparing their cases, Rawls prepared for his uncertain future. He was unsure how long the trial would last, so he packed his bags and checked into a hotel in Memphis. He knew the government had subpoenaed over 140 witnesses from across the country, including such cities as St. Louis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Rochester, New York, Mansfield, Ohio, and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and had spent nearly \$10,000 just on travel, food, and lodging for them. He also knew

³⁶⁸ Telephone interview by author with B.C. Clifton, July 22, 2011.

³⁶⁹ National Archives.

had been charged with five counts of false statements which carried not more than \$5,000 and three years in the federal penitentiary; as well as five counts of income tax evasion which carried a penalty of not more than \$10,000 and a five years prison sentence. Should he lose, he could spend forty years in a federal penitentiary and owe the government \$75,000. When the trial began, Clifton recalled the many witnesses subpoenaed by the government lined up outside the court room with no designated place to wait until they were called to testify. Some witnesses perhaps recognized Clifton from his visit to their homes complained to him about the waiting and the standing-room-only accommodations. Several asked him if they could leave. Although he thought it was “pitiful” to see the witnesses waiting for hours or lined up in random stairwells, he explained to them that they were witnesses for the government, and he had no control over the matter.³⁷⁰

During the trial, the government raised issues intended to “smear” Rawls and to brand him as a successful businessman who had exploited the community for personal gain. Clifton’s “insider knowledge” helped him as he cross-examined witnesses and analyzed events in the courtroom. According to Clifton, for example, the government “made a big deal” about the large house Rawls had built on Cynthia Drive. Since there was no hotel that accommodated Blacks in Brownsville, Clifton knew families who arrived in the city for funerals often stayed at Rawls’s house while they “grieved the loss of loved ones.” So, the house reflected the vision of a prudent business man who could, in the Jim Crow South, accommodate his “families,” both his nuclear and business-extended. The government also pointed out that Rawls was president of Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. Clifton, who had spent months in Brownsville, knew that the Rawlses were conservative spenders. He had been to Golden Circle’s home office and knew it

³⁷⁰ Ibid.; C.A. Rawls interview.

was directly across the street from Rawls Funeral Home. Once while visiting, he had asked Zannie, C.A.'s brother and secretary/treasurer of Golden Circle, if he could use the telephone. Zannie told him that Golden Circle did not have a telephone. Insurance agents were out in the field, and office employees made and received calls from the funeral home, only about a fifty-foot sprint away. Clifton asked Zannie on the stand if Golden Circle owned a computer. Zannie responded, "no." He then asked, "Well, do you own a phone?" To which Zannie also replied "no." The courtroom burst into laughter as Clifton proved that Golden Circle's daily operations were managed using a "simplistic" and "rudimentary" approach, which reflected the philosophy both C.A. and J.Z. shared. Their plans were for long-term growth, and they sacrificed to make the business financially solvent first.³⁷¹

Almost a week into the trial, the parties met in Judge Bailey Brown's chambers. Judge Brown was a well-respected jurist, born in Memphis and educated at the University of Michigan and Harvard Law School. He had been an officer in the United States Navy during World War II and a partner in Burch, Porter & Johnson before being appointed by John F. Kennedy to the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee in 1961. By 1966, he had become chief judge of the district, and his chambers covered an entire floor of the federal building, which overlooked the Mississippi River. Judge Brown was an avid fisherman and as the men gathered in his chambers, he stood behind his desk and picked up a rod and reel he kept near his desk. Attorneys for the government began the meeting by saying that after considering Mr. Rawls's age and health they would be willing to settle for a plea of nolo contendere and a "short jail time." Judge Brown fiddled with his rod and reel, appearing to concentrate only on the swishing sound that filled the room as he cast the line. He responded, "You have not considered

³⁷¹ United States of America v. Charles Allen Rawls, National Archives; Interview by author with B.C. Clifton; Interview with Cynthia and Maltimore Bond, April 15, 2011; interview by James A. Baxter, July 4, 1977.

Mr. Rawls's age (then casting his line and listening for the sound as the line returned) *swish* nor have you considered his health *swish*." "But you do know," putting his rod and reel down, as he leaned onto his desk, "this Young Turk is kicking your ass all over the twelfth floor of the federal building." Judge Brown had indeed been listening and evaluating the government's case against Rawls. Clearly, he, the government, and the Rawls defense team knew the nearly one hundred witnesses the government had already called to testify had done so as if they were witnesses for the defense, making the government's case quite weak. Lucius Burch replied to the government's offer regarding jail time with an unequivocal no.³⁷²

Meantime, Rawls had developed a following at the hotel. Blacks working as bellmen and maids in the hotel were eager each day to hear what had happened at the trial. Some actually attended the trial. On May 22, 1967, a week after the trial began, B.C. Clifton, Lucius Burch, and C.A. Rawls walked into an almost empty courtroom. According to a partial transcript of the proceedings for that day, William McTighe, assistant U.S. attorney, stated before Judge Brown

We feel that what we are about to say to the Court is right, and without going any further into detail. . . the Government will recommend in this case, if Your Honor please, a total aggregate fine of \$2,500.00, and the costs adjudged against this Defendant, Mr. Rawls. . . . [T]his is in the best interest of society and fair to the defendant. . . . [T]he United States Attorney's office in this district. . . and several of us have talked to the Nashville office of the Internal Revenue and to the Tax Division of the Department of Justice in Washington, and the higher echelons share fully our view and concept of this recommendation.

Rawls was then asked if he had anything to add. He simply replied, ". . . I certainly haven't intentionally done anything wrong. . . ." While McTighe preferred not to go into further

³⁷²Ibid.; B. C. Clifton interview; Bailey Brown biography, History of the Sixth Circuit, www.ca6.uscourts.gov/lib_hist/courts/circuit/judges/brown/bb.

detail, Judge Brown decided to do so, by playing a verbal game of chess which anticipated the moves of the plaintiff, defendant, and even the jury. By his calculations, he agreed with McTighe that the government probably lacked sufficient evidence for a conviction. For Clifton, the trial and testimony presented had proven Rawls had “tentacles of good-will which ran everywhere west of the Tennessee River.” The court entered on the record a nolo contendere plea, and Rawls was fined \$500 for five counts of false statements, which totaled \$2, 500 plus court costs.³⁷³

Rawls was no doubt relieved and completely satisfied with the verdict. He returned to his hotel room and shared the news with his new comrades there. When Rawls arrived at the front desk to settle his bill, the manager refused to take any money telling him, “You owe me nothing.”³⁷⁴ Rawls, perhaps the people’s David, had struck a powerful blow to the mighty Goliath, in this case, the United States of America, which after five years of investigations and threats to make “an example” of Rawls, walked away with fines of only \$2,500, about three times less than the court costs that had been incurred. Clifton, on a high after devouring the government in his first case, asked Rawls for permission to file a motion that would reduce the amount of the court costs due. Rawls was willing to pay the entire \$8,893.98 in court costs that included the travel expenses, food, and lodging for the government’s more than 140 witnesses, ninety-nine of whom testified. Clifton was persistent, so Rawls agreed, not interested in the outcome which seemed inconsequential after the five-year investigation hanging over his head. Clifton filed a motion charging that the subpoenas were “not recommended by the Internal Revenue Service in good faith.” His motion also stated that because Rawls was charged with five of the ten counts, he should be responsible for only \$4,446.99, half of the court costs. Rawls’s

³⁷³ National Archives; The \$8,893.98 in court costs were more than the fine.

³⁷⁴ In the interview between James Baxter and C.A. Rawls in July 1977, Rawls stated that a woman wanted him to pay for two phone calls he had made, so he did leave forty cents. I do not know if he was so generous because witnesses stayed at the hotel or not. From the interview, it appears they might have.

federal tax returns were also amended. Three years later, Rawls received a check in the mail from the Internal Revenue Service for \$86,000, Clifton's gift to Rawls, who he believed, had "a heart so big it could hardly fit in his body."³⁷⁵

The Rawls family and legal defense team considered the verdict in the United States of America v. Charles Allen Rawls a victory. For example, Rawls was not imprisoned or found guilty of tax evasion, and although his reputation as a business man had been called into question during the trial, community members came to his defense. Even white supporters surprised the plaintiffs who assumed whites would take the opportunity to discredit Rawls, a Black man moving outside the subordinate place ascribed to him by virtue of his color in the segregated South.³⁷⁶

However, the trial and the long investigation must have created undue stress and tension for Rawls and his family. While Rawls told his daughter Cynthia, who had returned to Brownsville with her husband and their growing family in 1963, that he never doubted a favorable outcome, surely, he was preoccupied with the ongoing scrutiny of his financial records and vexed by the insinuation of impropriety in his business dealings. Four months after the opening of the Community Federal Savings and Loan Association, a business venture he had spent two years organizing, he was hit with a federal investigation. Rather than compromise the integrity of the association, Rawls soon resigned his position as president and board member, a decision that must have been a difficult one to make. Two of the white board members also resigned, though it is not clear as to why they cut ties to the association. Thus, the investigation

³⁷⁵ Ibid.; B.C. Clifton interview; interviews by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond and Maltimore Bond, April 15, 2011, Brownsville, Tennessee.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Cynthia Bond and Maltimore Bond, November 11, 2011.

did, to an extent, damage Rawls financially and professionally.³⁷⁷ Both race and class were factors in the investigation as well as the courtroom. Clifton, however, believed race was not a factor; if anything it helped Rawls in the courtroom. Yet if Rawls had been a white business man, would the \$240,000 he borrowed from the Brownsville Bank have raised a red flag or would his affiliation with the Community Federal Savings and Loan Association and the size of his six-bed room house, far from a stately mansion, have been relevant? How motivated were plaintiffs to investigate Rawls given the political and economic mayhem in west Tennessee that resulted in the eviction of sharecroppers who had defied their white landowning bosses and had begun to dismantle the status quo white had enjoyed for nearly one hundred years? Rawls did not dwell on the what-ifs. He resumed his work at Rawls Funeral Home, and he expanded Golden Circle's mortgage loan department, all the while contributing to the fiscal health of African Americans in west Tennessee.

By 1964, the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League had become an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headed by Martin Luther King, Jr. The SCLC hosted Citizenship Schools throughout the South and provided training for instructors as well as materials and classroom supplies. In 1964, individuals from Haywood County went to the Dorchester Center in Georgia to attend the SCLC Citizen School. The SCLC sent a check for \$44.55 to cover roundtrip bus fare and meals. Among the Haywood Countians attending the school in Georgia was Mrs. Ethel Britton who served as an instructor at a Citizenship School in Brownsville in 1964. From January until April and then from October until December 1965, Mrs. Larcenia Taylor led Freedom Schools at New Hope Baptist Church. According to the monthly attendance and record sheet for April, eight Ohio State students identified as "freedom

³⁷⁷ National Archives; Baxter, "Charles Allen Rawls, 'A Portrait,' 1907-1977."

workers” visited the class during the session. Students, ranging from ages fifteen to seventy-five, met on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they were encouraged to register and vote so that could be a part of the political process. After completing the school, they received certificates that documented their participation and reminded them of their obligations as citizens.³⁷⁸

O.S. and Matt Bond Legacies: Marion Bond Jordon and Mildred Bond Roxborough

Meanwhile, Mildred continued her work at the NAACP national office, weathering the storms and celebrating the victories of life with the NAACP. In the 1961, Thurgood Marshall, “Mr. Civil Rights,” left the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund after being appointed a Federal judge, which, according to Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, disproved the notion that “a man who is upstanding cannot reach high places.” Mildred’s work with the NAACP continued to keep her quite busy. For example, she traveled to Detroit many times where she met Detroit native John W. Roxborough, II, an attorney who shared her passion for social justice. Roxborough, a graduate of the University of Detroit Law School, served as chairman of the legal redress committee of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP. He was also Special Assistant Attorney General in Detroit, and he later served as the United States State Department’s first race relations consultant.³⁷⁹ John and Mildred’s friendship grew. In August 1961, John accompanied her to her cousins’ wedding in Brownville, where he was officially introduced to her large extended-family. The following year

³⁷⁸ Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Part 4, Records of the Program Department 1954-1970, Lucinia Taylor Brownsville 1965-1966; Ethel Britton, 1964 in ProQuest History Vault. Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century, organizational records and personal papers.

³⁷⁹ Roxborough was also a former Big Ten track star and the nephew of John Roxborough, trainer for former heavyweight champion Joe Louis.

they visited the newlyweds in Lansing, squeezing in leisure time despite their demanding work schedules.³⁸⁰

Mildred traveled across the state of Mississippi with Medgar Evers, gathering testimony from farmers evicted from their land after they tried to exercise their right to vote. Meetings were often held at night, and Evers and Roxborough slept in hotels rather than jeopardizing the safety of the farmers and their families who hosted them. On one occasion, after an especially exhausting day, Mildred decided to take her shoes off and stretch her legs as Evers drove down the highway. To her surprise, her feet touched what she soon learned to be Evers's shotgun.³⁸¹

The threat of danger and the need for protection proved to be very real. On June 12, 1963, exactly three years after the death of Mildred's father, thirty-seven-year old Medgar Evers was gunned down by a military rifle with a telescopic lens outside his home in front of his wife and children. Evers's assassination was another impetus for the struggle across the country to continue. According to the New York Times, "Mr. Evers' martyrdom has advanced the prospects for strong civil rights legislation. . . [and] for this recourse to bestiality must come a firmer legal foundation for the human rights Mr. Evers dedicated his life to make." Before the NAACP actually established a fund for Evers's children, mourners began sending money to the NAACP. Mildred recalled coming to the office the day after Evers's assassination to find people waiting to show their financial support to the slain civil rights worker's wife and small children. Mildred managed what became the educational fund for the Evers children. By September, over 1,000

³⁸⁰ Benjamin E. Mays, "My View: Thurgood Marshall," Pittsburgh Courier, October 14, 1961; more on John Roxborough, see Michael L. Krenn, Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969 (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999) 140; Ethel L. Payne, "U.S. Diplomacy is not Diplomatic Where Race is Concerned," Chicago Defender, May 4, 1957; "Detroit's 'Bright Young Men' in Washington," Black World/Negro Digest, 14 (May 1965), 33; "Top-Level Blacks in the Federal Government," Black Enterprise, 14 (January 1974), 23.

³⁸¹ Interview by Larry Crow with Mildred Bond Roxborough.

people had donated nearly \$45,000. Even children were touched by the death of Evers. A nine-year-old girl, for example, submitted sixty-three cents and promised to send more each week. An eleven-year-old girl donated one dollar, her allowance for the week. Mrs. Evers received a letter from a man who identified himself as a white man with two grandsons and a granddaughter. He told Mrs. Evers that a piece of him had died that day.³⁸²

Also in 1963, eight African American children died in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, and then in November, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, as was his assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. Dean Francis Sayre, grandson of President Woodrow Wilson declared, “We have been present at a new crucifixion,” referring to Evers, the children in Birmingham and Kennedy. He further stated, “All of us have had a part in the slaying of our President.” The violence which many African Americans had experienced in their own lives now had extended to the national stage with the brutal deaths of not only of African American girls in Alabama and a Black insurance agent turned civil rights leader in Mississippi but also the president of the United States. What a dismal commentary for human rights in America.³⁸³

In April 1964, John and Mildred exchanged wedding vows in a private ceremony in Alexandria, Virginia, creating a union of civil rights advocates who remained accountable to the cause of justice. John would always be Mildred’s husband, but she would always be married to the NAACP. As Legal Advisor for the State Department, John was in and out of the Washington, D.C., area. His posts took him all over the world. Mildred continued to work at the NAACP, ever mindful of human rights issues at home and abroad. She managed to balance the

³⁸² “Racial Assassination,” New York Times, June 13, 1963; “Medgar Evers,” New York Times, June 15, 1963.

³⁸³ “A Portion of Guilt for All,” New York Times, November 25, 1963.

transnational relationship she and her husband shared with the demands of her work at the Association.³⁸⁴

Shortly after their marriage, John was assigned to Nigeria, and Mildred took a leave of absence from the NAACP to join her husband in Lagos, the nation's capital city. Nigeria had declared independence from British rule on October 1, 1960, less than six years before Mildred's arrival. Given her personal history in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, she was engrossed in witnessing the growth of a sovereign African nation under the leadership of its first Prime Minister, Sir Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Balewa, a teacher born in Northern Nigeria, was respected among world leaders and recognized as a "turtledove among falcons." For nearly a year, Mildred lived the life of a diplomat's wife in the burgeoning West African nation but was never quite comfortable with the attention lavished upon her or the constant presence of a household staff that catered to the couple's every need.³⁸⁵

While the Roxboroughs were living in Nigeria, the Prime Minister hosted a two-day Commonwealth Leaders Conference in Lagos. The conference convened on Tuesday, January 11, 1966, and leaders from the commonwealth nations gathered to discuss racial oppression in what was then Rhodesia. Following the conference, Mildred and John were among the dignitaries invited to a reception at the Federal Palace Hotel honoring the Prime Minister. She later recalled the sweltering heat of the city, and she must have longed for a quiet evening at home rather than the pageantry of another formal reception. As the night ended and conversations waned, she and John returned safely to their home. After leaving the reception, the Prime Minister and several other government officials, however, were ambushed. The following

³⁸⁴ Interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2009.

³⁸⁵ "Nigeria: The Black Rock" *Time*, December 5, 1960, <http://www.time.com/printout/0,8816,895071,00.html>.

day the nation was shocked with the news of a military coup d'état. Approximately thirty government officials had been assassinated, and Prime Minister Balewa had been kidnapped. On January 21, 1966, six days after the coup, Balewa's body was found on the side of the road about 25 miles outside Lagos. This marked the beginning of military rule and the foreshadowing of the Biafran war. With danger escalating, the U. S. State Department ordered diplomats' families in Nigeria to evacuate their homes, thus forcing Mildred to return to the U.S. "to do battle" on the home front once again. Leaving Nigeria alone, Mildred was, for a second time, ripped away from her home, a situation reminiscent of her family's abrupt departure from Brownsville nearly thirty years earlier.³⁸⁶

She returned to the states, back to the life she knew. Active on the frontlines and behind the scenes of civil rights work, Mildred continued to stay the course. "My concern," she affirmed, "[has been] to make sure the organization could run properly and effectively . . . that its leaders were well-informed and had the kind of foundation they needed to interpret and delineate the mission of the association." Mildred has put her words into practice daily, seizing opportunities previous generations have helped to build and clearing paths for other generations to consider. Although she has not self-identified as a civil rights activist, but as one who "works for a civil rights organization," she continued to serve.³⁸⁷

The 1960s were times of change for Marion and Jim as well. They remained active in both the local and national movement, using their resources and skills to contribute to a more just society. Their lives reflected the blending of the economic and the political. After resigning from the executive secretary position at the Pittsburgh NAACP branch in 1958, Marion recruited

³⁸⁶ Telephone interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, April 15, 2009; Lloyd Garrison, "Nigeria Discloses Death of Balewa, *New York Times*, January 23, 1966.

³⁸⁷ Telephone interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, April 15, 2009.

twenty-eight-year-old attorney Derrick Bell to serve as her replacement. Bell, a Pittsburgh native, had been hired to work in the Justice Department's new Civil Rights Division but when a controversy arose as to whether he would revoke his NAACP membership because of a possible conflict of interest should a case come before him involving the NAACP, he left the job. Bell was only in the executive secretary position for a few months as the NAACP quickly recognized his skills as an attorney. Bell joined the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and began an illustrious career as one of the great legal minds of the century. He later became a law professor at Harvard University and was among the legal scholars responsible for developing critical race theory.³⁸⁸

Marion joined the Pittsburgh branch's executive board and continued to help the branch grow by heading membership campaigns. She wrote an eight-week series of articles titled "Our Schools . . . Good or Bad" for the Pittsburgh Courier, and in 1960 became the first recipient of the Golden Quill Award, which was co-sponsored by the Pittsburgh Press Club and the Pittsburgh Chapter of Sigma Delta Chi Journalism Fraternity. Also in 1960, Jim was appointed to the Pittsburgh City Council after the unexpected death of a council member. Jim completed the term, earned his law degree from Duquesne University Law School, and was later elected to the city council position, serving several terms. In the mid-1960s, a controversial election of officers occurred at the Pittsburgh NAACP branch. By 1962, Marion decided to resign her position as board member of the local branch. Marion, and many other members, believed the election that ousted former president Reverend Charles Foggie and moved attorney Byrd R. Brown into the

³⁸⁸ NAACP Papers, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Branch; See Critical Race Theory; "Derrick Bell, Pioneering Law Professor and Civil Rights Advocate, Dies at 80," New York Times, October 7, 2011.

position was based on unscrupulous voting tactics. Her dissatisfaction with the local chapter's politics did not deter her commitment to the NAACP nor her efforts to promote social justice.³⁸⁹

In August 1963, Marion, her husband Jim, and Marion's mother Matt, who came in from New York, all joined the integrated group of Pittsburghers who traveled to Washington, D.C., for the historic "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." In addition to those who traveled from Pittsburgh by bus, an estimated 600 people traveled to the March by train. Bessie Lynch was among those traveling by train, who seventeen years earlier, had marched "on the White House" with the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, protesting the 1946 mass lynchings of Roger Malcom, Dorothy Dorsey Malcom, George Dorsey and Mae Murray Dorsey in Georgia. Hazel Garland of the Pittsburgh Courier stated that the March was ". . . an enormous success because . . . it made Negroes more aware of their combined strength [and]. . . showed that we are not alone in our fight for freedom . . . [as] thousands of whites 'stood up to be counted.'" Garland also acknowledged the presence of labor groups at the march, which linked civil rights to job opportunities and further reinforced the event's theme of "jobs and freedom"

The March . . . broke down the so-called caste system which exists in this country. Doctors, lawyers and people of all professional fields marched together with little folk and the unemployed men and women of all races, creeds and colors. Perhaps the largest delegation was composed of labor groups. Certainly one of the most impressive was the Ladies Garment Workers from New York.³⁹⁰

That same year Marion collaborated with Florence Reizentein to establish Project NEED, the Negro Emergency Educational Drive. Marion and Florence had worked together for many

³⁸⁹ Pittsburgh NAACP Papers; "Jordon Joins Westinghouse, To Direct Education System, Pittsburgh Courier, June 11, 1966.

³⁹⁰ Hazel Garland, "Things to Talk About: Washington in Retrospect," Pittsburgh Courier, September 7, 1963.

years both as members of the National Urban League's Education Committee and as members of the NAACP, with Reizenstein serving on the board of the Pittsburgh NAACP branch while Marion was its executive secretary. NEED grew from a "temporary program" at the Urban League that provided money for seventy-six African American high school seniors unable to pay their college tuition. Marion and Florence's letter-writing campaign secured funds from donors for these 'last dollar' grants and laid the foundation for what became the "oldest community-based, nonprofit, minority, higher education assistance program in Pennsylvania." According to historical data on the organization, the initial seventy-six students turned into nearly 20,000 students with a distribution of almost \$20 million in grants.³⁹¹

On February 2, 1965, Marion and Jim were among the 180 guests to attend a White House gala hosted by President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson honoring Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Chief Justice Earl Warren, and Speaker of the House John W. McCormack. Marion was seated between Vice President Humphrey and Chief Justice Warren. The gala included a performance by Jessica Tandy and Hume Croyn, whose theatrical piece included "excerpts from Mr. Johnson's State of the Union message on his Great Society." Judge and Mrs. Loren Miller of California and Mr. and Mrs. Jackie Robinson of Connecticut were among the dozen or so African Americans in attendance at what Hazel Garland of the Pittsburgh Courier deemed a "truly all-American party. . . [where] guests from the North and South ate, chatted and danced together like one big happy family." Mrs. Robinson, wife of the famed athlete recognized for integrating major league baseball, shared a dance with the president, and Marion shared a danced

³⁹¹ See "History of NEED," NEED Unlocking the Power of Education, www.needld.org/about/history; The Pittsburgh Courier has many articles that include information on project NEED. For example, Treshea N. Wade, "Need Continues to Give Youths a Chance," New Pittsburgh Courier, July 3, 1999; Charles N. Brown, "NEED Awards 32 Scholarships," New Pittsburgh Courier, April 2, 2002; Ben Johnson, "NEED Mission to raise \$1.5M," New Pittsburgh Courier, January 18, 2003; Debbie Norrell, "NEED Celebrates 45 Years," New Pittsburgh Courier, April 9-April 15, 2008 .

with the vice president. Marion and Jim made their visit to the nation's capital a combination business-pleasure trip. Jim talked with executives of a small business agency, and the couple visited friends including former Pennsylvania governor David L. Lawrence, whom they had known since he served as mayor of Pittsburgh.³⁹²

On March 10, 1965, a month after their visit to D.C., Mrs. Daisy Lampkin, NAACP stalwart and women's rights advocate, died after suffering a stroke a year earlier. Mrs. Lampkin had been a mentor and friend to Marion. Not only had she advised Marion when Marion began working as a field secretary at the national office in the 1940s, but Mrs. Lampkin also introduced Marion to her husband Jim. Not only Pittsburgh but the entire nation lost a dedicated fighter of human rights. Mrs. Lampkin had recently been awarded the National Council of Negro Women's Eleanor Roosevelt-Mary McLeod Bethune World Citizenship Award for her "dedication to racial and gender equality." Roy Wilkins, longtime friend and colleague of Mrs. Lampkin, reminded mourners at her funeral that 'She was more than a moving force within the narrow confines of the national association. She was a force in everything she turned her attention to. . . [and] [h]er life calls on us all to be 'doers.''³⁹³

As the 1960s came to a close, the "doers" among the west Tennesseans of Brownsville and members of that diaspora continued to work for political and economic justice. The legacy of O.S. and Matt Bond continued to thrive in the accomplishments of their daughters and extended family in both entrepreneurial and political endeavors. The world was quite different as the 1960s came to a close. Martin Luther King, Jr., involved in the Poor People's Campaign, embarking on the Memphis Sanitation Workers' strike had hopes for America's future. In 1968

³⁹² Hazel Garland, "Things to Talk About," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 13, 1965.

³⁹³ Casey Nichols, "Daisy Lampkin (1888-1965)," Blackpast.org; Toki Schalk Johnson, "Dignitaries from Many Cities at Lampkin Funeral," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27, 1965.

in Memphis, Tennessee, at the Lorraine Motel, King was assassinated. The tremendous loss for the movement touched activists across the globe, but the work did not end.

Chapter 5: 'Not for Ourselves Alone': Transforming Communities and their Landscapes in Post-1960's America³⁹⁴

*I come here this evening because of my deep interest and affection for a land settled by the Dutch in the mid-seventeenth century, then taken over by the British, and at last independent; a land in which the native inhabitants were at first subdued, but relations with whom remain a problem to this day; a land which defined itself on a hostile frontier; a land which has tamed rich natural resources through the energetic application of modern technology; a land which was once the importer of slaves, and now must struggle to wipe out the last traces of that former bondage. I refer, of course, to the United States of America. -Robert F. Kennedy, June 6, 1966
University of Cape Town, South Africa*

On Sunday, January 25, 1987, C.A. Rawls left home, making the half-mile commute to Rawls Funeral Home, as he had done for the past fifty years. His wife Maude had discouraged him from leaving home that morning because a winter storm was approaching; even local churches had cancelled morning worship services anticipating the snow. He drove to the funeral home, passing First Baptist Church where he would ordinarily be at this time, then parked his car in front of his building without incident. As he was getting out of the car, however, he slipped on a patch of ice and fell. He was rushed to the hospital where emergency room doctors confirmed that he had broken his hip, a potentially dangerous accident for a man in his eighties. He would need surgery and physical therapy before he could go home and return to work.³⁹⁵

Rawls had surgery and began physical therapy in the hospital. He had instructed his son Bill to bring him the Rawls Funeral Home checkbook since he was the only one authorized to sign checks. His daughter Cynthia brought his mail to him from Golden Circle along with his calculator, legal pads, and pens. Maude visited him each day at 11:00 am so that they could see the "Young and the Restless" together as they had begun to do for the past few years. They had

³⁹⁴ "Not for ourselves alone" comes from the manifesto of the Niagara Movement.

³⁹⁵ Telephone interview by author with Alan Rawls Bond, November 14, 2011; telephone interview with Maltimore Bond, November 14, 2011; telephone interview with Cynthia Rawls Bond, November 14, 2011.

lunch together in the hospital, which sometimes included meals that Shot had prepared and delivered to him. Al conducted business from his bed, writing checks, ordering caskets, and answering his mail. He even called Cynthia in a few times so that he could dictate some letters. Rawls remained at the helm of his businesses, always fiscally conservative and mindful of the greater good.³⁹⁶

On February 7, about two weeks after Al's fall, the family learned that he had had a seizure the night before. Dr. Stewart, Rawls's family physician, was concerned. So, Alan, the Rawlses' grandson, drove his grandmother to the hospital early that day. After she saw her husband and the rest of the family arrived, she walked to the small hospital chapel to pray. Reading scriptures and having morning, afternoon, and evenings devotionals were daily rituals for her. Before Al left home for work, they had usually discussed at least one Bible verse and commentary from The Upper Room, The Daily Word, or some other publication. Shot sometimes chimed in as she served lunch, citing her favorite verse, "Only the pure in heart shall see God."³⁹⁷

The family gathered at the hospital, and Rawls died that day with his grandson Alan, daughter Cynthia, and son-in-law Malt surrounding his bed. Maude received word of his death while she was in the chapel, perhaps not wanting to see her husband, whom she had always shared with their community, leave this world, even for a better one. She and Alan stood crying with the stained-glass behind them as they watched Billy Jackson, a longtime employee of the funeral home, roll Rawls away. Rawls had accomplished much in his eighty-two years despite the obstacles he had encountered as a man of color in the Jim Crow South. He had founded

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

businesses, served on the Board of Trustees at Meharry Medical College, and been selected president of a savings and loan association even before he could vote in his hometown. In his lifetime, he had witnessed many changes in west Tennessee, some of which he helped to make possible through his entrepreneurship.³⁹⁸

Al's business philosophy, like that of Booker T. Washington, was a "hybrid," which historian Michael B. Boston had argued was "neither purely capitalistic nor purely socialistic, but contained elements of both ideologies." Boston has observed:

Washington advocated capitalist ideas such as private enterprise Simultaneously, he advocated a group uplift program. He espoused such ideas as supporting worthy African American ventures, creating captains of industry, contributing toward community development, developing high character--which he considered more important than material wealth—and helping those least fortunate. Washington, as a shrewd technician, operated as best he could in the political, economic, and social setting in which he found himself and his people, privileging the group over the individual.³⁹⁹

The hybridity about which Boston has written that characterized both Washington and Rawls's business philosophy, may, by extension, also characterize the approach most individuals took as they chose their paths toward freedom and justice. Many freedom fighters chose the path to political freedom with voter registration drives, sit-ins, marches, public protests. Even within that group of activists, some individuals privileged work through legislation and the legal system. Some activists believed education was the most important equalizer. They were instructors at citizenship schools or served on education-related committees within civil rights organizations.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.; see "Eulogistic Services for Charles Allen Rawls," February 10, 1987, in possession of author; National Archives, *United States of America v. C.A. Rawls*, CR-66-80.

³⁹⁹ Michael B. Boston, *The Business Strategy of Booker T. Washington: Its Development and Implementation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 143, 145-146.

Others embraced economic empowerment as the most direct way to achieve freedom while providing behind-the-scenes financial support for those “frontline” civil rights advocates.

Boston also noted that Washington, for example, “understood and advocated that African Americans find a niche, start small, build a foundation, expand and help others.” Washington also believed that if African Americans became “of such indispensable value to their surrounding communities, both to African American and whites, the race problem would eventually be solved in a natural and unforced manner.” Similarly, Rawls had subscribed to the following philosophy: “Make yourself necessary to the world and it will give you bread.” The metaphor of bread included food essential to sustaining the human body, but it could also suggest the vernacular reference to bread meaning “money,” a necessary resource for survival as well. For example, during “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns, bus boycotts, and sit-ins across the country, Rawls, focusing on a different paradigm, asked what African Americans had established that whites wanted to patronize, and rather than riding a bus, owned and operated by whites, he questioned why African Americans should not aspire to own their own buses. If this logic sounds more like Marcus Garvey than Washington, the “hybridity” has been reinforced by the fact that Garvey, known for his militant and separatist philosophy, admired Booker T. Washington, corresponded with him, and intended to organize a school in Jamaica using Tuskegee as a model. Garvey had also planned to travel to the United States to meet Washington. In fact, Garvey came to the United States in 1916, but Washington had died. According to Michael Boston, “to pay homage to Washington, Garvey visited Tuskegee Institute and was very impressed with the school. . . .”⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ Boston, The Business Strategy of Booker T. Washington, 138-139, 145,148; David Levering Lewis, W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963 (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 50;

Even W.E. B. Du Bois, Harvard educated scholar and a founder of the NAACP, who in 1903, avowed that the “Negro race . . . is going to be saved by its exceptional men. . . the Talented Tenth; . . . the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass . . .,” shifted his theoretical approach to the liberation of Black people. In 1948, during a Boulé conference at Wilberforce University, Du Bois first presented his concept of the “Guiding One-Hundredth,” the “re-examined and restated theory of the “Talented Tenth.” A “new” Talented Tenth would include “group leadership.” According to independent scholar Christopher George Buck, “This doctrine democratizes and internationalizes Du Bois’s strategy for racial advancement by placing it in a global context. Numerically narrower yet strategically broader, the “guiding hundredth” represents the evolution of Du Bois’s original theory of the “talented tenth.”⁴⁰¹

The life choices and career decisions, as well as the political and social affiliations of the Brownsville natives discussed throughout this dissertation, show both hybrid and singular methods African Americans used to pursue freedom and change the trajectory of American social and political history. Mildred Bond Roxborough, for example, maintained her advocacy primarily through her work at the NAACP. Cynthia Rawls Bond, on the other hand, maintained a more hybrid approach through her work as an entrepreneur and local NAACP member. Her role as a Black woman in business and her work within the NAACP and other organizations positioned her among Tennessee residents selected to tackle issues of importance not only to African Americans in west Tennessee but to Tennesseans across the state. Rawls’s hybridity was

telephone interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, November 14, 2011; telephone interview by author with Maltimore Bond, November 14, 2011; telephone interview by author with Alan Rawls Bond, November 14, 2011.
⁴⁰¹ Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois*, 538; Christopher George Beck, “Talented Tenth,” Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker, eds. in *Encyclopedia of African American History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2000), 1047-1048; “The Talented Tenth Memorial Address,” *The Boulé Journal*, 15(October 1948), online www.sigmaphiphi.org/home/the-talented-tenth.php; W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=174>.

reflected not only in his entrepreneurship and professional affiliations but also at his funeral and within the legacy he left his descendants.

Rawls's funeral was held on Tuesday, February 10, 1987, three days after his death, at First Baptist Church, the site of the Sons and Daughters of the Golden Circle inception in 1950; the site of the Haywood County branch of the NAACP's chartering ceremony in 1961; and the site of Rawls Funeral Home's burial drives, including the seventy-fourth drive planned for November 25, 2011. The church was filled to capacity as the community said good-bye to their native son. After the processional, the Reverend Thomas Averyheart, a political activist even from his pulpit, gave the invocation. Reverend Averyheart had run two unsuccessful campaigns for mayor of Brownsville before being elected to the city council. Reverend J. W. Shaw, minister and owner of a radio station in Bolivar, Tennessee, who later became a State Representative, offered the scripture taken from II Timothy 4:1-8. Verses six and seven read, ". . . [T]he time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. . . ." This "comfort" scripture acknowledged the finite number of days individuals have to accomplish their work, the effort required to complete it, and the importance of faith as inevitable difficulties arise along the way. Rawls had "fought a good fight" and "finished his course" as both a citizen and business leader. Reverend Eddie L. Currie, founding president of the local NAACP branch read the obituary, and Dr. Virgil Caldwell of the New Monumental Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, eulogized Rawls. Dr. Caldwell, a Haywood County native, had become a staple at Rawls Funeral Home's burial drives. Known for his gifts of oratory and his talents as a saxophonist, Dr. Caldwell had been the keynote speaker for the drives for over twenty years. His text for the

funeral was taken from the scripture which asked can any good thing come from Nineveh. Rawls, he eulogized, was indeed something good that had come from Haywood County.⁴⁰²

Among the tributes to Rawls were those from his longtime friend, Mrs. Nola Walker Bond, who, in the 1960s, quit her job as a teacher in the Haywood County school system to manage the Haywood County Supermarket, a business that operated under the umbrella of the Haywood County Thrift Cooperative which Rawls helped to establish. Bishop William Graves, a Brownsville native and vice-president of the NAACP's National Board of Directors offered a tribute based on his boyhood admiration for Rawls. As a child, he had emulated Rawls and announced that he wanted to grow up and be like Rawls. He liked a particular suit Rawls used to wear, and when he was able, he bought one like it.⁴⁰³

The musical selections at the funeral also reflected Rawls's life and business philosophy. For example, "Work for the Night is Coming" had both earthly and spiritual relevance that embraced the importance of a strong work ethic. The solo, "If I Can Help Somebody," was a reminder that sojourners on earth must live a life in service to others so that their lives would "not be in vain." The hymn "Draw Me Nearer," began with "I am Thine oh Lord, I have heard Thy voice," and invoked the importance of accountability as well as humility. The refrain of the song continues with "Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord/ To the cross where Thou has died/ Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord to Thy precious bleeding side." These words express deference and respect for the sacrifice of a loving deity. The final song of the funeral service was "The Unclouded Day," which began with the lyrics "They tell me of a home far beyond the sky/They tell me of a home far away/They tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise/O, they

⁴⁰² Funeral program titled "Eulogistic Services for Charles Allen Rawls," in possession of author; video of the funeral in possession of Cynthia Rawls Bond.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

tell me of an unclouded day.” Characteristic of many musical selections at “homegoings,” there is a reference to the afterlife, a “home far beyond the sky,” that expressed the ephemeral nature of earthly existence as well as the hope for a future filled with mental, spiritual, emotional clarity absent the allegorical cloudy days.⁴⁰⁴

Educational, entrepreneurial, and political intersections, all grounded in service, were elements of Rawls’s legacy. Although he had graduated from Gupton-Jones School of Mortuary Science with honors in 1929 and had attended business school in St. Louis for a few semesters, Rawls never earned a college degree. Yet he valued education. He supported academic endeavors and encouraged those around him to pursue higher education. Both Rawls Funeral Home and Golden Circle Life Insurance Company awarded college scholarships to local high school graduates. Golden Circle carried an endowment policy, known as an “educational” policy that matured on the insured’s eighteenth birthday. Many policyholders used the benefits toward college tuition. Rawls made personal loans to individuals who lacked the funds to pay for their children’s tuition, and he donated money to Meharry Medical College, Lane College, and the United Negro Scholarship Fund. He paid for his wife’s college tuition while she studied at Lane College, and assisted his niece with boarding school tuition after her father died.

Among his seven grandchildren, all of them earned college degrees. Rawls paid four years’ tuition for his eldest grandchild and provided her with modest stipends each semester. His youngest granddaughter spent her junior year of college studying in Madrid, Spain. One grandson earned a law degree from Tulane University, and all four of Rawls’s granddaughters earned master’s degrees. Andrea Bond Johnson, the only granddaughter to make a career in insurance, earned an executive MBA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her graduate

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

curriculum included a two-week international residency period in Moscow, Russia, and Warsaw, Poland, where she studied the global economy with an emphasis on the financial services sector. The year following her graduation, she traveled to Hong Kong as a consultant for the new MBA cohort in Knoxville. Of the four grandchildren who became licensed funeral directors, two of them completed mortuary science school, one of whom graduated from his alma mater also with honors.

At his death, Rawls was a 32 degree Mason of the Prince Hall Masons, Winfield Lodge, and an honorary member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., a fraternity founded at Cornell University in 1906 by seven African American students who pledged to “stimulate the ambition of its members; to prepare them for the greatest usefulness in the causes of humanity, freedom, and dignity of the individual;. . . and to aid down-trodden humanity in its efforts to achieve higher social, economic and intellectual status.” He accomplished many firsts in Haywood County: he was the first fully-paid life member of the NAACP; the first African American to serve on the Brownsville Bank Board of Directors; and the first African American to become a member of the Brownsville Rotary Club and the chapter’s first African American Paul Harris Fellow.⁴⁰⁵

Country blues legend Sleepy John Estes, who lived in Brownsville much of his life, commemorated Rawls with a song titled “Al Rawls.” In the song, Estes highlighted the presence and pivotal role of this African American funeral director in the Black community. “Al Rawls,” a tome about life in a rural southern community and sung in rich southern vernacular, narrated the life experiences of many Blacks in Brownsville. Estes began with a holler, a wail, almost a cry:

⁴⁰⁵ See Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. vision statement on fraternity website at <http://www.alpha-phi-alpha.com/Page.php?id=53>.

“Al Rawls first started the burial association in Brownsville town.” This opening established the link between the burial association and the community. Sleepy John continued, “Yah know I think ever’body ought-ta pay they polices ‘cause some day you sho’ goin’ down.” He urged people to pay their burial insurance policy premiums. This was the socially conscious thing to do to avoid “passing the hat” when death, the inevitable, occurred. This reality was particularly stark during the height of lynchings, legally sanctioned white violence against Blacks, and frightening mortality rates in Black communities. But he followed with “So many people they don’t try to save nairee dime. You know they lay down and die-- people toting a beggin’ ca’d all over town.”⁴⁰⁶

Estes’s words praise the idea of saving, not a new concept to the African American community since many enslaved African Americans saved money to buy their freedom and later to amass the resources to buy land. In Black communities, people carried “begging cards” as they solicited money to bury their dead. With the proliferation of poverty and racial discrimination which limited employment opportunities, life for Black Americans was even more tenuous. And saving for life’s uncertainties was almost as difficult as saving for death’s certainty. Still, our narrator admonished the community because he believed the burial association should replace the begging cards as they suggest dependency, a loss of dignity, and poor financial planning.⁴⁰⁷

Estes’s lyrics continued with “It’s very easy--don’t cost but three bucks year. You know you could easy keep it up if you lay off so much whiskey and beer.” The direct and practical

⁴⁰⁶ Sleepy John Estes, “Al Rawls,” Brownsville Blues

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

message in these lines focused on community members who wasted money on the excessive use of alcohol. The “three bucks” stood between a dignified burial/respectability and a begging card.

Estes moved to another valuable social function of the funeral home: “You know George would go and get cha at his own expenses anywhere inside 50 miles. Pay for your policy ‘cause you sho’ goin’ down.” He stopped preaching and reminded listeners of two significant points. First, the funeral home provided free ambulance services within a fifty-mile radius, an important service, as there was no local ambulance service. Whenever Blacks needed to be rushed to the hospital or when immobile patients needed to be transported to hospitals or doctors’ appointments, the funeral home’s ambulance driver (George Lowery) responded to the call. Secondly, he again reinforces death’s certainties and the need for medical help made possible in part by the African American funeral home.⁴⁰⁸

The final words to the song were quite matter-of-fact. “When he bring you in on them stretcher and draw that blood thru yo veins, you know the next ride you get’ll be down to shady lane.” He graphically explains the embalming procedure with blood being drawn from the deceased’s body. He reminded listeners that the cemetery is ultimately the end for all.⁴⁰⁹

After Rawls’s death, his family established the C.A. and Maude E. Rawls Scholarship Fund at Lane College. The city honored Rawls along with Alex Gray, a white attorney from Brownsville, by naming the town’s two and a half mile bypass the Alex Gray/C.A. Rawls Memorial By-pass. To celebrate Rawls’s centenary, his daughter Cynthia, together with Dr. Cynthia Bond Hobson, organized the Charles Allen Rawls Legacy Awards, which was a salute to

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

the black businesses of Haywood County. Business owners received awards and recognitions for the services they provided to the community.⁴¹⁰

Cynthia, Malt, and Bill continued and expanded on the work Rawls had begun at Rawls Funeral Home and Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. Cynthia became the first woman to serve on the Brownsville Bank Board of Directors, filling the vacancy her father had left. She also became president of Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. For nearly twenty-five years, she had worked with her father, uncle, brother, and husband, struggling at times to make her voice heard and her suggestions respected among her male relatives and business colleagues. She continued to strengthen Golden Circle's ties to insurance organizations, such as the National Insurance Association (NIA) and served as its secretary for many years. Malt became vice-president and managed the mortgage loan department that assisted local residents with the purchase of homes and churches in the area. Bill had graduated from Gupton-Jones School of Mortuary Science and did much of the funeral home's embalming. He became chairman of the board at Golden Circle. Bill, Cynthia, and Malt, representing the second generation, worked together well, still dashing across the street when duty called. Both Cynthia and Malt became licensed life and health insurance agents and licensed funeral directors. During income tax season, Golden Circle became an unofficial income tax service center. After completing Golden Circle work at 5:00 pm, Malt, Bill, and Zannie completed income tax returns for local residents. Some individuals paid for cash for these services, while others paid later with vegetables from their gardens, homemade cha-cha pickle or preserves, country ham or sausage they had made on their farms, homemade pies, and other southern staples. More than a money-making venture, it

⁴¹⁰ Charles Allen Rawls Legacy Awards; Salute to Black Businesses of Haywood County program, in possession of author.

was an opportunity to provide an important service to the community and keep abreast of federal income tax laws.⁴¹¹

Malt served as president of the Haywood County Chamber of Commerce and the Haywood County branch of the NAACP. During his tenure as president, his cousin Roy Bond, who had a contentious relationship with certain family members, decided to become a life member of the NAACP. However, he paid his membership through the national office rather than affiliating with the local branch his first cousin headed. Malt, undaunted by the snub, continued his work in the community. He maintained local affiliations by serving on such committees as the Election Commission and the Haywood County Equalization Board. He and friend Dr. Jesse Cannon, Jr. became business partners and opened Brownsville's first dialysis clinic, hiring Haitian-born, Dr. Jerry Charles to run the clinic. Dr. Charles's research had identified high instances of kidney disease in Brownsville, and most residents on dialysis had to travel to Jackson for treatment.⁴¹²

As Malt continued to work on local projects, Cynthia became part of a broader Tennessee network with several key appointments. In 1984, Republican Governor Lamar Alexander had appointed her to the Tennessee State Board of Education, a new board consisting of only business leaders in the state. She was then reappointed by Democratic Governor Ned McWherter. Her work with the state board became an asset to her after being appointed to the Appalachian Educational Laboratory (AEL) which addressed educational issues in Tennessee as well as Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. The Honorable Lyle Reid, Chief Justice of the Tennessee State Supreme Court, appointed Cynthia to the 34-board Commission on the Future of

⁴¹¹ Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond, April 15, 2010; interview by author with Malt Bond, April 15, 2010; I have personal knowledge of these events as well.

⁴¹² Interview by author with Cynthia Rawls Bond April 15, 2010; interview with Maltimore Bond, April 15, 2010.

the Tennessee Judicial System, which John Seigenthaler served as chairman. In 1994, Cynthia became the first recipient of the Avon N. Williams Living Legend Award. The award, presented by the Tennessee Black Caucus, was named for a beloved civil rights lawyer and former Tennessee State Senator who was among the first African American legislators since the Civil War. Williams, a Knoxville native, moved to Nashville in the 1950s and became a formidable opponent to segregationists. He argued cases before the United States Supreme Court, and in 1991, the Black Caucus designated him legislator of the year.⁴¹³

As the second generation of Rawls and Bond family members continued to contribute to their community, considerable changes in the funeral industry occurred. For example, Service Corporation International (SCI) firms began purchasing Black family-owned funeral homes so that the businesses were no longer Black-owned, only managed for a designated time by the original owners, causing a shift in the entrepreneurial landscape within the Black community. Despite the rigid segregation that has existed in Brownville concerning burying the dead, Brownsville now has a new white-owned funeral home that has informed the Black community of its desire to provide professional services to them as well as to whites in the area. In fact, in November 2011, First Baptist Church was the site of the first African American funeral with the white-owned funeral home handling the services. Other changes in the industry include Green Burials, designed to be more eco-friendly, and Conservation Burials, which create a nature

⁴¹³ “Avon Williams, 72, Lawyer Who Fought To End Segregation,” New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/08/31/obituaries/avaon-williams-72-1>.

preserve of the gravesites. These options, in addition to cremation, continue to reframe the funeral business and require owners to keep informed of changing trends in the industry.⁴¹⁴

In 2001, Cynthia, Malt and their daughter Andrea and husband Dwight established the Golden Circle Insurance Agency. The following year, Cynthia and Malt, majority stockholders, presented a plan to sell Golden Circle Life Insurance Company during their annual stockholders' meeting. After the proposal passed, Golden Circle Life Insurance Company was sold to Booker T. Washington Insurance Company. The family continued its work in the insurance business, although Malt and Cynthia eventually began phased retirement, and Andrea became the chief operating officer of the agency. Unlike Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, which served the Black community for fifty –two years, Golden Circle Insurance Agency serves the entire community, including Blacks and whites as well as Latino, Caribbean, and Arab Americans and immigrants. The agency represents such insurance companies as Travelers, All-State, and Chubb and has established a Hispanic Outreach. Advertisements are printed both in English and Spanish, and the company has hired native-Spanish speakers to better serve their Spanish-speaking customers. Andrea Bond Johnson, who worked at the Golden Circle Life Insurance Company on Saturdays when she was a child, has expanded the scope of the business by not only earning an MBA, but also by becoming licensed as a financial planner. Unlike Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, which was licensed to do business only in the state of Tennessee, the

⁴¹⁴ Telephone interview by author with Cecil M. Giles, November 16, 2011; telephone interview with Alan Rawls Bond, November 16, 2011; see conservation burial website (www.conservationburialinc.org): Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, "Who's Buying Up all the Black Funeral Homes?," <http://libcom.org/library/black-funeral-homes-lorenzo-ervin>; Mitch Lipka, "Minorities Hold Out Against Chains' Bid," [Sun Sentinel.com](http://www.sun-sentinel.com), March 21, 1999 http://www.allcounty.com/sun_doc4a.htm; Robin Fields and Mitch Lipka, "Death, Inc.: In Surprising Numbers Chains Are Buying Up Funeral Homes But Keeping the Names Making It Difficult to Tell the Chains from the Independents," [Sun Sentinel.com](http://www.sun-sentinel.com), March 21, 1999; see Service Corporation International (SCI) website <http://www.sci-corp.com/SCICORP/home.aspx>.

agency is also licensed in Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Alabama, and Mississippi. The third-generation descendants of the Sons and Daughters of the Golden Circle, the fraternal organization that was the precursor to Golden Circle Life Insurance Company, continue to participate in the transformation of the landscape of the business community and community-at-large in west Tennessee and across the state.⁴¹⁵

Dr. C.P. Boyd

After igniting the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville with his efforts to register to vote and his role in organizing the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League in the 1950s, Boyd testified before the Civil Rights Commission on behalf of Haywood and Fayette County sharecroppers in Tent City. Boyd later left Brownsville for Knoxville where he earned a doctorate in Educational Administration and Supervision. Upon his return to west Tennessee, Dr. Boyd resumed his teaching career. He spent forty years as an educator with nearly twenty years of college-level teaching. He taught at both Lane College and Jackson State Community College (JSCC). During his fifteen years as a sociology professor at JSCC, he organized the first Black History Month program on campus and often discussed in his classes the local Civil Rights Movement of which he was a part.⁴¹⁶

Boyd emerged as both a “race” and Renaissance man. He donated property valued at \$50,000 to the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League and \$10,000 to Lane College for the Hester Currie Boyd scholarship to honor his mother, a Lanite. His contribution was matched with funds from the U. S. Department of Education. Boyd also provided financial assistance to struggling college students. He negotiated with Brownville’s local government to lease the

⁴¹⁵ Interview by author with Andrea Bond Johnson, April 15, 2010.

⁴¹⁶ Jacque Hillman, ““He Was My Hero,”” Jackson Sun, November 18, 1997; “Dr. Boyd, Community Activist, Dies in Car Crash,” Brownsville States Graphic, October 30, 1997.

Carver High School building to the Carver Alumni Association, and he secured a \$24,500 grant from state legislators to remodel Carver High School. Dr. Boyd traveled to each of the seven continents and all fifty states. He wrote poetry, enjoyed jazz, and played several instruments, including the saxophone. He hosted the HLC Talk Show “where he discussed . . . subjects from agriculture to religion.” Boyd made several unsuccessful campaigns for political office, but he became a member of the Haywood County Commission.⁴¹⁷

On October 25, 1997, seventy-three-year-old, Currie Porter Boyd was killed in a fatal car crash. According to the obituary included in his funeral program, Dr. Boyd was writing two books: The Sociological Implications of Louie Jordan’s Music and a History of the Haywood County Civil Rights Movement of the Sixties. In his last will and testament, Boyd left land to the city of Brownsville for the establishment of the C.P. Boyd Memorial Park. The small park, located on the corner of Jackson Avenue and Jefferson Street, consists of a gazebo and benches for citizens who wish to soak in the local culture. His other philanthropic gifts included \$2,000 to the Carver-Dunbar-Haywood County Training School Alumni Association and \$1,000 to Tennessee State University, where he earned his undergraduate degree.⁴¹⁸

Mattye T. Bond

As the Rawls and Bonds who remained in Tennessee continued their work, Mattye T. Bond and her daughters continued their work. After her husband Ollie’s death, Matt began dividing her time among her daughters in New York, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, and in Brownsville with Maude and Charles Rawls. Most summers she and Maude traveled to national NAACP

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.; letter to Dr. Currie P. Boyd from Herman Stone, president Lane College dated January 15, 1985, in possession of author; unpublished and undated essay on Dr. C.P. Boyd, in possession of author; “Dr. C.P. Boyd Notes,” curriculum vita, in possession of author; “Homegoing Celebration of Dr. Currie Porter Boyd ” funeral program, November 1, 1997, in possession of author who attended the funeral.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.; “Boyd Makes Gift to League,” The Brownsville States-Graphic, August 29, 1996.

conventions, attended “homecomings” in Tollette, Arkansas, every two years, and visited relatives across the country until Maude’s passing in 1992.

For Matt’s 100th birthday, she flew alone from New York City to Memphis without incident. Brownsville relatives Cynthia and Maltimore Bond, who were hosting the event, met her at the airport. However, after settling into her room, she fell and broke her hip. Hundreds of relatives, friends and former students from across the country were scheduled to descend upon Brownsville to honor the Grand Dame, Mother Mattye T., but after performing emergency surgery on the soon-to-be-centenarian, the doctor told the family she would not be able to attend the birthday party. After frequent updates on Mrs. Bond’s progress, late night strategy sessions for acceptable alternatives, and still not counting Mother Mattye T. out, nephew Maltimore arranged to have the local ambulance service bring the guest of honor to the birthday party. Mildred, the attentive daughter, spent the day of the party helping her mother dress for the occasion, applying rouge and lipstick as instructed. With red lights flashing and the crowd awaiting her arrival, Mrs. Bond entered the community center in a fuchsia bed jacket and beaded hat, blowing kisses from her hospital stretcher.⁴¹⁹

Six years later, Mrs. Mattye T. Bond died at her home in New York City on February 10, 2002. Her exceptional mind was still very active. She was tutoring a Columbia University student, playing weekly games of Scrabble, and reading the New York Times. Her funeral services were held in Brownsville, Tennessee, among family and friends who celebrated her contributions as both a teacher and trailblazer for the local civil rights movement. In lieu of flowers, individuals were encouraged to make donations to the NAACP or to the Ollie and Mattye T. Bond Scholarship at Lane College established in 1987. As per her written

⁴¹⁹ Author attended the celebration.

instructions, Mrs. Bond's remains were interred at the Beech Grove Church of Christ Cemetery next to her husband. Mildred gave a portion of her mother's remains to Cynthia, who keeps them in a cobalt blue urn in her living room among pictures and reminders of a rich family history.⁴²⁰

The following month, on Saturday, March 30, 2002, Mildred and her sister Marion hosted a "luncheon of celebration" in their mother's memory at The Riverside Church in New York City. Mrs. Bond's nine-year-old great-grandnephew from Brownsville, Dwight Johnson, II, memorialized her alongside Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, NAACP Executive Director, Emeritus, and New York Post columnist Michael Meyers. Guests enjoyed an original oboe solo by Miriam Kapner and musical selections by Bobby Short. T. Ray Lawrence, baritone for The Metropolitan Opera Company, offered his rendition of "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and led the guests in "Lift Every Voice" as the celebration came to a close. This celebration was a fitting testimony to Matt Bond's hybridity as well, a teacher, above all, who supported the growth young people, and a civil rights pioneer who inspired her daughters and won the respect of accomplished members of her community.⁴²¹

Mildred Bond Roxborough

Mildred continued her work at the NAACP, rarely deviating from her schedule which remained exciting and varied. In 1993 the Haywood County Branch of the NAACP hosted the 47th NAACP Tennessee State Conference, a first for the local chapter. To commemorate this milestone, Mildred's cousin, Wilbert Bond, a Haywood County native and Tennessee State president of the NAACP, insisted that she be keynote speaker for the event's Freedom Fund

⁴²⁰ Author attended the service, funeral program in possession of author.

⁴²¹ Memorial program, in possession of author.

banquet. At the banquet, the mayor of Brownsville welcomed Mildred home by presenting her with a Key to the City. The county court clerk read a proclamation from the citizens of Haywood County in which Mildred was honored for her “lifetime of work eradicating from the soul and heart of people this nuisance labeled racism.” The proclamation acknowledged her four decades of service to the NAACP and its branches all over the United States. It also paid homage to Mildred’s father, acknowledging that she was “following in [his] footsteps . . . in seeing that all people are dealt with fairly, honestly and equally.” These gestures from public officials were especially meaningful since many of the local residents seated in the audience knew firsthand how dangerous Haywood County had been for African Americans. Bond praised the charter members of 1939, who had established the Haywood County branch seven years before the Tennessee State branch. They had done so during a time when residents, according to Wilbert Bond, “couldn’t even say NAACP in [their] sleep.”⁴²²

Mildred addressed a packed crowd of NAACP members and supporters, including her 98- year-old- mother, assembled in the Haywood High School cafeteria, with words that reminded and empowered: “This nation was built on the backs of our ancestors, and with all of the inequities, inequalities and indignities, we were there—even when they were counting us three-fifths a person.” She chronicled legislation since 1865 that African Americans helped to generate, then highlighted the 1963 March on Washington and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights as laying the foundation for the 1964 Civil Rights Act. From this important piece of legislation came other acts which have helped to transform society, including the 1965 Voting Rights, which Mildred Bond Roxborough identified as “probably the most important civil rights

⁴²² “The 47th Annual NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet” DVD, Haywood High School, Brownsville, Tennessee, in possession of author.

legislation since Reconstruction,” the Rehabilitation Act, the Older American Act, and the Fair Housing Act. Looking toward the 21st Century, she stated that the “cutting edge of the Civil Rights Movement should be sharpened by the inclusion of groups and individuals not yet equally represented by their numbers.” Women, she insisted, are critical to the 21st -Century struggle. Plus, to ensure social and economic justice for all, the contributions of every member of society should be valued, and organizations must be willing to cross ethnic and cultural lines to collaborate for the “greater good.” The audience rose in applause as she concluded and returned to her seat.⁴²³

After the funeral, Mildred returned to New York and resumed her work. The niche she had secured within the NAACP prepared her to become an informal “keeper of institutional memory,” holding in her mind and heart accounts of the Civil Rights Movement through the historical, intellectual, and socio-cultural lenses of the organization. In 1997, Mildred officially retired from the NAACP; however, she agreed to accept a six-month consultant position with the organization to ensure smooth transitions for new staff within the organization. Fourteen years later, she is still at this temporary post. In a situation similar to Gloster Current’s request that she take a three-month leave from doctoral studies to work on some special projects for the organization, Roxborough’s brief six-month post-retirement consulting position stretched to a fourteen-year tenure. In addition to the mentoring and training responsibilities of a senior consultant and historian at the NAACP, her schedule is still full of projects and an active social life. To enter Mildred Bond Roxborough’s New York City apartment is to step into the mosaic of an American life. Packed with pictures, personal stories, social history, politics, and culture, this home reflects both her west Tennessee roots and the transnational world that has enriched

⁴²³ Ibid.

her life and given shape to her commitment to social justice. Amid the now canonical writings of W.E.B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes are murder mysteries, bound volumes of the Crisis, and gourmet cook books. Her cd collection includes recordings from Yo-Yo Ma, Leontyne Price, and Brownsville Blues guitarist Sleepy John Estes, which share space with classical composers and early jazz innovators. Original pieces of art which she and her husband purchased on their trip around the world reveal her aesthetic sensibilities and sustained respect for local talent. The hand- sculpted bookends she retrieved from their home in Lagos and a bas relief painting on black rice paper, a gift to her husband from a family in Phenom Phen, Cambodia, all share in the story of Mildred Bond Roxborough.⁴²⁴

During the 100th anniversary of “Lift Every Voice,” Mildred wrote a commemorative essay for the book Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem 100 Years, 100 Voices. She recalled being three or four years old when she first heard this “poem-prayer,” and being so captivated by it that she had memorized it by age six. While selling the Crisis to subscribers in Brownsville at age nine, she also insisted that they learn the words, too. In 2008, she was featured in American Express’s Extraordinary Lives, a book designed to commemorate American Express’s 50th anniversary and the “extraordinary lives” of twenty-two of its charter members. During the 100th Annual NAACP National Convention in New York City, a life-sized wax figure of Mildred was officially unveiled. Her statue joined those of national icons like Sojourner Truth, Colin Powell, Thurgood Marshall, and Rosa Parks at the National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. She accepted the recognition, not for the work she has done, but on behalf of all women of the NAACP who have labored for equality and human dignity. In July 2010, during the 101st Annual NAACP convention in Kansas

⁴²⁴ Interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2009; visit to NY apartment.

City, Kansas, Mildred was recognized as a “living NAACP legend. . .still active in the organization’s planning.” In an address to the organization’s youth, Mildred encouraged them to ‘know and understand their history’ and ‘develop a sense of value for themselves.’ In conclusion, she reminded the audience that “We have essentially built on to what each generation has given and sacrificed in order for us to be where we are today.”⁴²⁵

Mildred has put her words into practice daily, seizing opportunities previous generations have helped to build and clearing paths for other generations to consider. Although she does not self-identify as a civil rights activist, but as one who “works for a civil rights organization,” she continues to serve. Reflecting on her lengthy service to the Association, she recalled:

I joined the NAACP staff in 1954 and have been privileged to share the pathos, passion and hopes of our constituents for more than a half century, campaigning for workers’ jobs in Key West, Florida, [and] picketing for equal opportunity in the deep snow of Benton Harbor, Michigan. . . . In times of victory and tragedy the NAACP family has gathered in countless cities, towns and rural communities in this nation and I have never doubted that it would prevail. . . .⁴²⁶

Active on the frontlines and behind the scenes of civil rights work for over fifty years, Mildred Bond Roxborough continues to stay the course. “My concern,” she affirms, “[has been] to make sure the organization could run properly and effectively . . . that its leaders were well-informed and had the kind of foundation they needed to interpret and delineate the mission of the association.” Mildred remains disciplined, accountable, and about the business of the NAACP.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*; Susan Choi, “Take My Hand,” in *Extraordinary Lives Members Since 1958*, ed. Peg Tyre (NY: American Express Company, 2008) ; Mildred Bond Roxborough, “Mildred Bond Roxborough,” Julian Bond and Sondra Kathryn Wilson, eds., *Lift Every Voice and Sing, A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem, 100 Years, 100 Voices*, (NY: Random House), 208. 46-57.

⁴²⁶ Women In the NAACP (WIN) Pamphlet, 11, in possession of author; interview by author with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 4, 2009.

Daily exercises on her stationary bike, a heart-healthy breakfast and a cup of Darjeeling tea, complete her morning routine. Then she sprints out of the door, headed to the subway just blocks from her home. Each work day is different, presenting new challenges and moments of reflection. Mildred, now 85 years old and the longest running staff member at the NAACP, is a respected elder. Like the griot who preserves and protects the beloved community's historical memory, Mildred's presence reminds us of our beginnings, of the roads we have traveled, and of the work yet to be done.

Epilogue: Reflections from the Haywood NAACP's Freedom Fund Banquet, Celebrating Fifty Years

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Brownsville, Tennessee, is marketed as “A Good Place to Live,” but that has not always been true for the thousands of African Americans who lived in Brownsville for decades under apartheid-like conditions. The folk wisdom in the area teaches that “It’s a mighty strong wind that don’t never change.” White supremacy and racism have been “mighty strong” winds, not just in Brownsville, but in our nation and in our world. This year the city of Brownsville reached a milestone. The Haywood County branch of the NAACP celebrated its 50th year. The “parent” branch, founded in 1939 to secure voting rights for African Americans who had been disfranchised since 1888s, disbanded after “the mob,” which included the local sheriff, lynched Elbert Williams, a thirty-one-year-old NAACP member and fellow Haywood County citizen.⁴²⁷

Although O.S. and Mattye T. Bond and the other charter members of the NAACP parent branch were not alive to witness this milestone, their legacy and their blood continue to flow through the Haywood County chapter. On Saturday, October 1, 2011, over 250 NAACP members and supporters gathered at Carver High School gymnasium to commemorate the

⁴²⁷ See Fiftieth Year Charter Celebration: Freedom Fund Banquet Program, October 1, 2011.

chapter's half-century of work toward social justice at the annual Freedom Fund banquet. The guest speaker for the evening, Dr. Cozette Rogers Garrett, a Brownsville native whose father owned Rogers Funeral Home before his passing in 1988, was especially pleased to address the banquet theme, "Affirming America's Promise," on the Carver High School stage as it was there she had won her first oratorical contest. Carver, the segregated high school which African Americans attended until it closed in 1970, is now the site of the Brownsville Boys and Girls Club and the Dunbar-Carver Museum, a space dedicated to chronicling the history and achievements of African Americans in Haywood County. On Saturday evening, Carver's gymnasium was transformed into a place of reconciliation that paid homage to the chapters' collective forbearers in the struggle. O.S. and Mattye T. Bond, the first president and secretary of the parent branch, were well represented with three generations of family members contributing to the Association. Andrea Bond Johnson, grand-niece of O.S. and Mattye T. Bond, served as Freedom Fund banquet chair. She has served as assistant treasurer of the branch for six years and has worked closely with her aunt, Joyce Bond Fannin, the immediate past treasurer of the branch. Andrea's fourteen-year-old son, David Alan Johnson, is a junior life member and served as an usher for the evening.⁴²⁸

In 1961, seventy-nine members had chartered the Haywood County branch of the NAACP. Mrs. Etta Bond Reed, a former school principal and the only sister of O.S. Bond, was among the now deceased members who continued her family's legacy with the branch.⁴²⁹ Eight

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.* This information is from notes and observations from Freedom Fund Banquet. Also note that Dr. Andrew Bond was a Gold Sponsor of the event. Mildred Bond Roxborough (O.S. and Matt's only surviving daughter) was a Silver Sponsor, and Lia N. Bond was a distinguished patron. Garnett Bond, Jr. (Lia's father) and Countess Bond Metcalf were recognized among this year's fully-paid life members. All of these individuals are descendants of Garnett and Jo Bond, O.S.'s youngest brother and sister-in-law. Garnett and Jo, who are now deceased, were also members of the branch.

of the charter members are alive and still reside in Brownsville.⁴³⁰ Four of the remaining charter members attended and received recognition at the banquet. Miss Evelyn Jones, now eighty- eight years old, and her mother Mrs. Beatrice Dotson, now deceased, were both charter members. Miss Jones is a life member, as is her sister, who has served on the branch's membership committee. For years, Miss Jones was the face Avon customers envisioned when they thought of "Avon calling." She kept house for several families in Brownsville, including Judge Dixon Hood, and even after his death, his son, who no longer lives in Brownsville, has employed her to maintain the family home. She drives her own car, wears high heels, and participates in community activities. She attends church regularly, and after nearly eighty years, she still attends Rawls Funeral Home Burial Drives each November.⁴³¹

Mrs. Rubye Jonson is a life member who served on several committees with the branch over the years. She was the first cashier clerk for the Golden Circle Life Insurance Company and retired from her position after nearly fifty years with the company. She is the former Worthy Matron of the Fair Lilly Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star and maintains her thirty-four year membership in the Fair Lilly Chapter.⁴³²

⁴³¹Other deceased members memorialized were Mr. E.N. Henning, Mr. James (Tom) Bond, and Mrs. Crettie Mae Springfield, who was an active NAACP member until her death. Notes from Freedom Fund banquet; Four charter members were unable to attend the banquet: Mr. Calvin Douglas, a retired farmer and his wife Mrs. Betty R. Douglas, who was also a charter member of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League; Mr. Joe S. Moore, a life member, past president of the branch, and the first African American elected to serve as Circuit Court Clerk; and Mrs. Hadester Gregory, a seamstress, who voted during the 1960 drive and whose daughter was among the first students to integrate Haywood County schools. Miss Jones and I sat next to each other at the banquet.

⁴³² Although this is "common knowledge," Cynthia Rawls Bond telephoned Miss Ruby on October 4, 2011 to confirm.

Mrs. Inez Farrington, now eighty-five, is a widow and retired homemaker who devoted her life to raising her five children. She is active in her church and became a subscribing life member this year.⁴³³

Mrs. Cynthia Rawls Bond, twenty-seven-years old when she became a charter member of the branch, had returned to Brownsville a few years earlier to work at Golden Circle Life Insurance Company. She was the chapter's first life membership chairperson and has continued in that role for over forty years. She solicited her father C.A. Rawls, who became the chapter's first fully-paid life member, her mother, other relatives, business associates, and friends. Now at age seventy-seven, she proudly notes that she, her husband Maltimore Bond, a former branch president, their children, and their grandchildren are all life members. For seventeen years, she served as the Jubilee Day chairperson, and she has been among the most active of the charter members.

Cynthia's passion for the NAACP was ignited when she left Brownsville at age twelve to live in Kansas City, Kansas, with relatives O.S. and Mattye T. Bond. Although they were exiled from their home because of their work with the NAACP, they continued to seek justice for the oppressed and remained loyal to the organization. Their affiliation with the Association extended to their daughters, Marion and Mildred, who both worked at the national office; to Cynthia, who worked behind the scenes to organize the Haywood County branch; and to their large extended family, who often made NAACP conventions family trips and NAACP banquets regular social and cultural events. NAACP business became family business which soon became extended family business. Perhaps NAACP business will become "human family" business in Brownsville and in our nation as well. In the 1930s, when O.S. Bond and the future members of the local

⁴³³ My notes from Freedom Fund Banquet.

branch planned their first organizational meeting, they invited all Haywood County residents, including the mayor and other elected officials. At that time, most, if not all of the elected officials, were white. Many of these local officials had never heard of the NAACP, and some of them actually attended that first organizational meeting out of curiosity. After learning about the NAACP and its mission, none of the officials supported the organization. In fact, it became an unwelcomed presence. However, this year several elected officials were among the guests for the evening. Brownsville City Mayor Mrs. Jo Matherne, the first woman to hold this office, and County Mayor Franklin Smith, are both European Americans and subscribing life members of the NAACP. Sheriff Melvin Bond and superintendent of schools Marlon King, both African Americans representing Brownsville firsts, are also subscribing life members.⁴³⁴

Brownsville's Vice Mayor Mrs. Carolyn Bond Flagg, the first African American woman in this position; Web Banks, retired lieutenant colonel and former mayor of Brownsville; Lyle Reid, former Chief Justice of the Tennessee State Supreme Court and his wife, daughters, granddaughters, and nephew Judge Roland Reid are all members of the local NAACP branch. Members represent a diverse group of occupations, socio-economic groups, religious affiliations, and ethnicities. And this chapter's demographics suggest that more progress is likely to be made as more policy makers and local leaders will think of justice and fairness when deciding the future of their constituents and fellow Americans. Factory workers and farmers, domestics and bank executives, police officers and teachers, funeral directors and school superintendents, retirees and high school students, journalists and ministers are all a part of this mosaic.

⁴³⁴ Conversation with Cynthia Rawls Bond after Freedom Fund banquet, October 1, 2011; Mattye T. Bond, unpublished essay; Larry Crow interview with Mildred Bond Roxborough; notes from Freedom Fund Banquet.

Perhaps, among the youth in our audience, is another Mary White Ovington, a founding member of the NAACP and descendant of abolitionists whose parents supported women's rights and anti-slavery campaigns. Ovington, a young white woman, was inspired to join civil rights efforts in 1890 after hearing Frederick Douglass speak. Or perhaps another W.E.B. Du Bois sits among us. Du Bois, another NAACP founder, was an African American activist, educator, writer, and scholar who earned a B.A. degree from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and his master's and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard University. No doubt, Brownsville's early civil rights workers would be gratified to know that their lives and sacrifices were not in vain.

Today the advocacy and issues of the NAACP have broadened to meet the needs of the nation and its citizens. Anti-lynching campaigns, for example, are no longer necessary, but the national office provides initiatives for branches that complement local projects. And while the Association does not operate as if this is a post-racial society, branches are encouraged to participate in a variety of projects like joining local school districts to fight childhood obesity, participating in civic engagement, promoting health and educational awareness, or supporting climate justice campaigns. The Association also sponsors Federal advocacy plans that promote the passage of the Jobs Act and economic opportunities for all.⁴³⁵

Brownsvillians have weathered many storms and have lived to tell their stories, some of them horrifying reminders of our inhumanity and others quite beautiful. They have acknowledged their Confederate past and survived the city's controversial purchase of Tennessee Academy, one of the many "private" schools established in the South to circumvent integration. Residents have witnessed the county's full compliance of a school desegregation case that began

⁴³⁵ My notes from Freedom Fund banquet; also see "Advocacy and Issues" on the NAACP website: <http://www.naacp.org/programs>.

forty-four years ago and have begun “Conversations at High Noon,” which brings readers and history buffs together for lunch and learning at the Dunbar-Carver Museum. Residents of all shades have gathered at the local synagogue for evening hors d’oeuvres and a series of lectures from Holocaust survivors, community historians, and scholars in the area. “Time,” as the saying goes, “brings about a change,” and after fifty years, we indeed see change, even commemorating the Civil Rights Movement as it shifts and expands. For example, among the events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Rides this year, civil rights leaders partnered with leaders of the food movement to discuss current food injustices across the nation, allowing participants to talk about food, agriculture, and federal policy.⁴³⁶

How will we as Haywood County residents, Tennessee inhabitants, American people, or world citizens respond to each other and our planet over the next fifty years? Tennessee has made national news recently because of controversial issues within its borders. Soledad O’Brien’s CNN special titled, “Unwelcome: The Muslim, Next Door,” examines the Muslim American community’s struggle for human rights and religious freedom in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Another shocking headline stems from Tennessee Republican Senator Stacey Campfield’s Bill 49. This proposed legislation, referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, would prohibit the use of the word “gay” in public elementary and middle schools. Certainly both issues fall under the purview of “civil rights,” or more broadly human rights issues. Who in the post-9/11 South will support Muslim Americans seeking religious freedom and first-class citizenship?

⁴³⁶ Food & Freedom Riders presentation was held at the Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas on Friday, August 12, 2011 at noon. For more details, see <http://liverealnow.weebly.com/>; <http://wellcommons.com/groups/locavores/2011/aug/10/youth-food-bill-of-rights-on-board-the-f/>.

Who in the Bible belt will challenge heteronormativity and reach out to children bullied and oppressed because of their sexual orientation?⁴³⁷

The Civil Rights Movement which I have discussed in my dissertation appears never to have been just a “civil rights” movement. Fundamentally, the Civil Rights Movement was (is) a rejection of what George Lipsitz has identified as the ‘possessive investment of whiteness,’ produced by “public policy and private prejudice” which, is “responsible for the racialized hierarchies of our society.”⁴³⁸ The movement was—the movement is--our “moment of truth”—the moment when each of us—the oppressor and the oppressed, even the bystander-- must choose whether to embrace the humanity of the human being by our side or deny it. We must decide whether to respect “the least of these” among us or ignore their realities.

Unfortunately, “the struggle continues” is no relic from a distant past. While writing the lynching section of this dissertation, I received disturbing news from relatives in Italy. My cousin Josh, Ann-Lee’s fifteen-year-old son, who lost his eye to cancer at age two was being called, what is translated into, a “one-eyed nigger” by his Italian classmates. This was Ann-Lee’s moment of truth—the moment to empower her son, to protect her son, to show him her humanity. “Rednecks” in the backwoods or skinheads in Georgia do not own the market on hatred, bigotry, or cruelty. “The fight for freedom,” as the familiar NAACP slogan reminds, really does “begin every day.”

Even today the NAACP and other human rights organizations have myriad social problems to address. Today Brownsville confronts gang violence, a disproportion number of

⁴³⁷ See CNN report on the Muslim struggle <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA>; See CNN report of ban on use of the word “gay” TN schools. [articlehttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGQz1S6DMGc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGQz1S6DMGc).

⁴³⁸ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii. The quote is that “. . . both public policy and private prejudice have created a ‘possessive investment in whiteness’ that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies of our society.”

AIDS cases, and high instances of cancer thought to be caused by toxic pesticides used to treat cotton. Brownsville's history like world history is blemished with shameful events, and the twenty-first century is not without its problems. Yet I remain hopeful. In the midst of our chaos and at the core of our uncertainty, I believe we will find as Paul Robeson has asserted that "the human stem is one."⁴³⁹ I anticipate that, we, as human beings, will extend our reach so that we will practice reverence for our land, our food, our planet, and our-collective-selves. Until then, we fight-- every day if we are able—writing our nation's biography as we go. We write dissertations, poems, and letters to editor. We listen to our children and love our elders. We "drive like Buddha," read, walk that proverbial mile in another's shoes, grow gardens, volunteer, and eat more beans. Sometimes we just stand there--by a stranger's side letting her know she is not alone in her struggle. We sleep, awaken, offer salutations to the morning sun, and try again another day. Yes, we try again another day. *Namaste*

⁴³⁹ Martin Bauml Duberman, Paul Robeson (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1988), 202.

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Historical Census Data Haywood County, Tennessee 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910

Interviews Conducted by Author

Alan Rawls Bond

Andrea Bond Johnson

Andrew Bond

Cynthia Rawls Bond

Geraldus Bond

Maltimore Bond

Maude Y. Bond

B.C. Clifton

Anna L. Cooke

Mozeal Crofton

Cecil M. Giles

Countess Metcalf

Ada Margaret Rawls Neal

Mildred Bond Roxborough

Lurleen Trigg

Interviews Conducted By Others

- Interview by James Baxter with C.A. Rawls, July 4, 1977.
Interview by Larry Crow of HistoryMakers with Mildred Bond Roxborough, June 8, 2005.
Interview by Dr. Armond Tollette with Mrs. Mattye Tollette Bond, 1982.
Interview by Yvonne Mesler with Ada Margaret Neal, June 24, 1999.
Interview by Maude Y. Bond with Mildred Bond Roxborough for StoryCorp, 2008.

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