

“TROUBLE UP THE ROAD:” DESEGREGATION, BUSING, AND THE NATIONAL
POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN FORT WORTH, TEXAS, 1954 – 1971

by

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“White Americans congratulate themselves on the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the schools; they suppose, in spite of the mountain of evidence that has since accumulated to the contrary, that this was proof of a change of heart - or, as they like to say, progress. Perhaps. It all depends on how one reads the word ‘progress.’”

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963)

I. PROLOGUE

In July 1971, a 78-year-old retired African American school teacher “scoured” the Fort Worth Board of Education for maintaining a segregated school district. Mrs. G.L. Nelson, who moved to Fort Worth from Mineral Wells upon retiring in 1945, relayed to the Board members her experience with the injustice and inequality of school segregation. “In 1913, I started teaching for \$25 a month ... and the white teachers were maybe getting \$50, \$75, and \$100,” she began.¹ Paid a fraction of what their white counterparts earned, black teachers also had to work in severely overcrowded classrooms and in schools suffering chronic staff shortages. “The principals themselves,” she continued, “would maybe have to teach from the first through the tenth grades. . . And we didn’t even have a library.” “You go over to the white school,” Nelson went on, “they had a teacher for nearly every one of the grades,” and they had libraries and many other amenities unheard of in segregated black schools. The black schools in which she taught had been separate, but they hardly had the chance to provide an equal education. Nelson pressed the Board to accept responsibility for these injustices, and to correct them.

According to the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Nelson left the Board members “abashed” as she confronted them with their complicity in the history of school segregation. Fort Worth’s school board, like school boards throughout the United States, had overtly and covertly created and maintained segregated schools. The Fort Worth School Board had gathered that July day after a federal court mandated that they had to address the reality that their district’s schools remained segregated 17 years after the original *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. With the backing of a new

¹ “Ex Schoolmarm Scours Board,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

federal judicial implementation order, Nelson demanded that the Board break down the walls of segregation and warned them that, if they didn't, they would reap what they sowed. "If all this big talk today just means you're not going to do it when you've got a chance to," she cautioned, "you're just going to meet more trouble up the road."²

Nelson appeared before the Fort Worth Board of Education at what seemed to be a particularly propitious moment. The courts had finally ordered school districts to take direct action toward desegregation. Her challenge to the Board, though, also highlights the city's long history of resistance to desegregation. The Board was not alone in delaying desegregation, as city officials and many white Texans created a multifaceted movement to resist challenges to white supremacy at all levels of social relations in the Civil Rights Era. Comprehending this history is necessary in order to fully understand Nelson's righteous anger at injustice, the Board's embarrassment, and, more importantly, why Nelson was skeptical about the "abashed" Board's rhetorical commitment to fairness in Fort Worth's schools. Nelson's appeal that day ultimately points to the central contention of this thesis: Responding to *Brown*, Fort Worth School Board members and many white residents actively resisted desegregation and contributed to the evolution of segregation and the broader system of racial inequality it supported. Resistance in Fort Worth was marked by grassroots activism in the form of the Tarrant County Citizens' Council in the 1950s and, later, an "antibusing" movement organized into Citizens' for Neighborhood Schools in 1971. While the School Board sought to curb the explicit racism of the Citizens' Council, they crafted new, often subtle forms of racial segregation

² "Ex Schoolmarm Scours Board," *Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

that gave life to the “antibusing” movement, which carried forth the torch of resistance while obscuring the city’s history of denying black Constitutional rights.

II. “A TRAGIC GULF:” NATIONAL RESISTANCE TO DESEGREGATION

“There is a tragic gulf between civil rights laws passed and civil rights laws implemented,” Martin Luther King, Jr. declared in his final book, published in 1967, *Where Do We Go from Here?*³ After significant legal and legislative victories for civil rights, including *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the United States remained largely segregated by race and class as the 1960s drew to a close. Riots in cities across the nation further underscored the persistence of devastating economic inequality and prompted King to move his focus from civil rights for African Americans to a Poor People’s Campaign against poverty and the systems of capitalism and imperialism that created and sustained it.⁴ As King became more openly critical of deeper structures of systemic inequality, the Civil Rights Movement that he once represented had fractured into multitudinous approaches that aimed not primarily to win over the hearts and minds of white Americans and politicians, but to empower black communities to overcome economic exploitation and discrimination.⁵ While the emerging Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party adopted new approaches to the struggle for freedom, they joined King in pointing out, as historians Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer put it, “the ways in which racial inequality was embedded in the political, social, and cultural structures of American life.”⁶ Yet, by the late 1960s, a new conservative movement had begun to see agitation for equality and

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Beacon Press, 1994), 86.

⁴ Michael K. Honey, *To the Promised Land: Martin Luther King and the Fight for Economic Justice* (Norton & Company, 2018).

⁵ Thomas Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor, *From Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

⁶ Kevin Kruse, Julian Zelizer, *Fault Lines: A History of the United States since 1974* (Norton & Company, 2019), 47.

justice as forces of disorder. Calling for what they saw as a return to “law and order,” by which they meant crackdowns on protest as much as on urban crime, conservatives rose in power in the 1970s by both promoting and benefiting from a backlash against calls for Black Power, racial equity, and the long-denied push for desegregation. As the Civil Rights Movement waned, “a tragic gulf” continued to separate the end of the constitutionality of legal segregation from the reality that segregation and other forms of institutional inequality continued to plague the United States.

This thesis delineates the causes of that gulf in the persistently divided city of Fort Worth, Texas. Initially founded as a military outpost in 1859, Fort Worth saw the segregation of black students from the inception of its public education system in the 1880s, a practice city officials continued for decades after *Brown* established it as unconstitutional. Even in 1972, after a year of court-mandated “busing,” 56 schools remained segregated by race with 11,717 black students attending all-black schools.⁷ To understand why segregation persisted for 17 years after *Brown*, and beyond, it is necessary to examine the evolution of resistance to desegregation at the local level from 1954 to 1971.

Segregation is a contested term. President Richard Nixon drew a sharp distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* segregation.⁸ *De jure* segregation, the logic goes, resulted from explicit and intentional policies like Southern Jim Crow laws. Alternately, *de facto* segregation creates school segregation as an extension of segregated neighborhoods, which purportedly result from private free-market decisions regarding where people choose to live. Summarizing this viewpoint, novelist and essayist James Baldwin stated,

⁷ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

⁸ “A 2-Year Plan,” *The New York Times*, March 25, 1970.

“de facto means that Negroes are segregated but nobody did it.”⁹ The distinction between segregation by law and as a natural phenomenon, which did not originate with Nixon and, in fact, reverberated throughout the United States, had a geographic component as well: de jure typically applied to Southern Jim Crow and de facto to residential segregation usually associated with the North. To be sure, legal segregation was pervasive throughout the United States;¹⁰ however, the push for geographic distinctions had a lasting impact after Northern politicians lobbied to add section 401(b) to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which reads: “desegregation” shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance.”¹¹ Essentially, de facto arguments hold that unless city policies can be explicitly proven to have created segregation (a standard that places an enormous burden of proof on civil rights attorneys), school districts are not obligated to pursue desegregation.

In 1954 however, Earl Warren, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from 1953 to 1969, made no such distinction in his majority opinion of the *Brown* decision. Focusing on the psychological effects of segregation, he stated, “To separate [African American children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”¹² Segregation, Warren reasoned, regardless of its causes, was “inherently unequal,” because the effects of

⁹ Mathew Delmont, “The Lasting Legacy of the Busing Crisis,” *The Atlantic*, March 29, 2016.

¹⁰ Astead W. Herndon and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “How Biden Became Democrats’ Anti-Busing Crusader,” *New York Times*, July 15, 2019.

¹¹ Mathew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland: University of California Press), 2016, 56.

¹² “*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*” In *Eyes on the Prize: Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990*, eds. Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Darlene Clark Hine, Vincent Harding, Gerald Gill (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books), 71.

segregation are so damaging to children’s social and psychological development. Despite Warren’s emphatic legal and even moral repudiation of segregation, de facto arguments provided a means of obscuring the causes of segregation and distracting from the harmful effects. The foregoing thesis assesses *how* and *why* Fort Worth maintained segregation for decades after *Brown* and places emphasis on city and school policies in creating enduring separation between white and black students and communities as well as on the role of grassroots resistance from the local community in justifying its continuation.

In the 1950s and 60s, the United States saw civil rights protests, federal legislation, and landmark court decisions in favor of defeating segregation; however, these social, political, and legal reforms also engendered dynamic strategies of resistance. In 1954, the Supreme Court in *Brown I* famously declared that “separate, but equal” is “inherently unequal” and in 1971, in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, the Court permitted student transfers or, as its critics called it, “busing,” as a reasonable means of overcoming residential segregation to achieve school desegregation. In between these two landmark decisions, white Americans—elected officials and ordinary citizens alike—resisted desegregation in ever-evolving ways. Historians have cemented the history of “massive resistance” to desegregation as one of the most important factors in postwar U.S. history, contributing nationally to the exacerbation of everything from racial inequality and white flight as a central aspect of metropolitan growth to the rise of a new conservative movement that has redefined the postwar political landscape.¹³

¹³ See: Carol Anderson: *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Jeanne Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Fort Worth has a long history of racism and segregation that helps contextualize its resistance to *Brown*. In 1882, the city opened seven public schools, two of which were for the African Americans.¹⁴ By 1886 there were 1,068 white students and 294 black students in the public school system.¹⁵ Although a white high school opened in 1891, the Board of Education did not open one for black students until the establishment of Fort Worth Colored High School in 1910, which was reconstructed and renamed I.M. Terrell High School in 1921. Isaiah Milligan Terrell was one of the initial four African American teachers hired in Fort Worth and later became the Principal and Superintendent of Colored Schools. Until the 1950s, I.M. Terrell remained the only African American high school in Tarrant County, and its students came from as far as Weatherford, 30 miles west. For much of its existence, the school was severely underfunded and lacked basic resources, revealing the city's disinterest in providing equal education. The district compounded the problems of its unequal allocation of resources by not "furnish[ing] any funds to transport [black] students," and leaving them to get "to school the best way they could."¹⁶ One neighborhood in Grapevine sent students to school in the bed of a pickup truck.

The city's failure to provide equal education became more glaring over time. By the 1930s, Fort Worth provided one high school, nine elementary schools, and no kindergarten for black students.¹⁷ In 1932, at the district's request, Columbia University faculty member George Strayer investigated the overall conditions of the city's education

¹⁴ Tina Nicole Cannon, "Cowtown and the Color Line: Desegregating Fort Worth's Public Schools," (PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2009), 30.

¹⁵ Harold Rich, *Fort Worth: Outpost, Cowtown, Boomtown* (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 26.

¹⁶ "Terrell is a Close Friend," *Star-Telegram*, July 22, 1982.

¹⁷ George Strayer, "Report of the Survey of the Schools of Fort Worth, Texas," Institute of Educational Research Division of Field Studies (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1931), 153.

system and concluded, “The teaching in the Negro schools in Fort Worth is far below the standard which could and ought to be maintained.”¹⁸ He even recommended that the district abandon all school buildings for African Americans, stating, “There is no building for colored children which is adequate to meet the needs of the location in which it is to be found.”¹⁹ The report also stressed pay disparities between white and black teachers, with median annual salaries of \$1,600 and \$1,111, respectively. The inequality endemic to Fort Worth’s education system is indicative of the injustice inherent to segregation itself.

Educational disparities occurred alongside the city’s history of grassroots white supremacy. Local chapter 101 of the Ku Klux Klan was established in 1918 and, as historian Kenneth Jackson has noted, Fort Worth quickly grew into one of the strongest chapters in the United States.²⁰ The most popular local newspaper, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, corroborated this in 1921, stating, “The Fort Worth Klan represent[s] several thousand members and one of the strongest in the country.”²¹ Into the 1930s, the *Star-Telegram* helped disseminate white supremacy to its readers by providing advertising space for Klan meetings that read: “Watch for Fiery Cross, KKK Outdoor Meeting.”²² The local newspaper even allowed the Klan’s leadership to publicly articulate their goals to target “‘those who law cannot touch’– alleged violators of the law who go without punishment [and] to ‘treat the criminal element as criminals’ and ‘make Fort Worth and Tarrant County a better place in which to live,’” one local Klansman stated.²³ Because

¹⁸ Strayer, “Report,” 396.

¹⁹ Strayer, “Report,” 115.

²⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1992), 84.

²¹ “Victim Requests Others’ Be Taken,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 6, 1921.

²² “Watch for Fiery Cross, KKK Outdoor Meeting,” *Star-Telegram*, July 3, 1931.

²³ “Victim Requests Others’ Be Taken,” *Star-Telegram*, July 6, 1921.

black subjugation formed the backbone of Klan ideology, the terrorist group's appeal to "law and order" underscores the interconnectedness of white supremacy and segregation, a connection that would resurface in the city's resistance to desegregation after *Brown*.

Fort Worth's resistance to *Brown*, which has remained largely unexamined, reveals inconsistencies between the city's history of racism and its self-image. In addition to delaying desegregation for as long as possible, city leaders and the local press downplayed the racism of their city's commitment to segregation. Responding to the first *Brown* decision in 1954, the editors of the *Star-Telegram* claimed that "the Southerner of long standing and tradition has a high respect for the worthy, honorable Negro, and will see that justice is done him as in the past" and "desegregation will not be extensive in most places" in Fort Worth.²⁴ Similarly, in 1959, School Board President Atwood McDonald both acknowledged that his district remained segregated five years after *Brown* and claimed, "We do not discriminate in Fort Worth."²⁵ Beyond reflecting the paternalism characteristic of white supremacy, statements that simultaneously acknowledge Fort Worth's long history of racism and segregation while casting that history as somehow nondiscriminatory or exceptional compared to more explicit displays of racism, fail to honestly account for the regional and national politics of resistance and white supremacy at play. Even more recent renderings of Fort Worth in the desegregation era widen the gulf between historical reality and self-image. After acknowledging the city's bureaucratic intransigence to court-ordered desegregation, local historian Richard Selcer has written that "one can also see the glass as half full because the city was able to

²⁴ Editorial, "Supreme Court Orders Radical Change," *Star-Telegram*, May 19, 1954.

²⁵ "Tracing Fort Worth's Desegregation," *Star-Telegram*, September 5, 1982.

avoid the violence and bitter divisions that marked... other cities.”²⁶ While the avoidance of violence should not be downplayed, it is not an objective standard of successful desegregation. More importantly, this framework, which posits Fort Worth as exceptional to other cities, overlooks how the city forged a creative and subtle maintenance of segregation and joined in massive resistance to *Brown*.

A more honest assessment of the historical record is necessary to see Fort Worth not as exceptional to other communities, but as part of the history of massive resistance at the state, regional, and national levels. Thus, the foregoing details the strategies and ideologies of resistance employed by Fort Worth school officials, city planners, and grassroots organizations. Chapter 1, “‘The Fort Worth Way’: White Supremacy and Bureaucratic Resistance to Desegregation” dispels notions of Fort Worth exceptionalism and argues that the “Fort Worth Way,” which local leadership have defined as their city’s commitment to peace and progress, included overt and covert protections of racial and economic hierarchies through segregation. From 1954 to 1970, the Board maintained segregation through gradualism, moderation, and tokenism. While delaying compliance with the Supreme Court’s decision in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Board members actively maintained segregation by manipulating school zoning. In South Fort Worth, as black schools faced severe overcrowding and nearby white school populations dwindled, the Board closed white schools altogether and reopened them as segregated black schools rather than alleviating overcrowding through a desegregation plan. Further, as white families abandoned the city for the suburbs, the Board reassigned and transported white

²⁶ Richard Selcer, *Fort Worth in Black and White: 165 Years of African American Life* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014), 419.

students away from increasingly black neighborhoods.²⁷ Preceding court-ordered desegregation, the Board helped accelerate white flight and create lasting patterns of residential segregation. This bureaucratic intransigence persisted with the implementation of legally-mandated desegregation in 1963, when the Board included small numbers of black students in white schools in what was merely a token gesture of legal compliance.

The Board rationalized its evasion of desegregation by adopting legal arguments that justified de facto residential segregation as beyond the scope of legally mandated school desegregation. In the 1960s, after the Board had facilitated white flight out of neighborhoods undergoing racial transition, they then argued that the existence of segregated neighborhoods justified a severely limited school desegregation policy. They needed the justification as they began token school desegregation in 1963, assigning just 20 Black students to white schools as they announced a plan to desegregate all of its schools by 1974, one grade per year.²⁸ In 1965, the Board indicated that they would “speed up” the desegregation process to complete it by 1967. While the Board claimed it would abandon race as the determining factor for school attendance zones and fulfill its legal obligation to desegregate 13 years after *Brown*, Court records reveal that, “because of marked residential separation of races in Fort Worth, little integration was accomplished by this revision in student assignment.”²⁹ After maintaining a separate and unequal school system for decades, the Board now viewed racially segregated neighborhoods as legally justifying a still-segregated school district. The “moderate” Fort Worth School Board thus violated both the letter and the spirit of *Brown*.³⁰ While the

²⁷ “TCU has Brains but the Money goes to Ridglea,” *Star-Telegram*, July 28, 1957.

²⁸ “Integration of Schools Without Incident Here,” *Star-Telegram*, September 4, 1963.

²⁹ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

³⁰ “School Segregation City Due to End by 1967,” *Star-Telegram*, May 4, 1965.

Board and city officials rejected overt appeals to white supremacy, their actions contributed to the evolution of segregation and reflected a conservative maintenance of racial and economic hierarchies.

The Board's bureaucratic resistance both fostered and drew support from grassroots movements to preserve segregation. Fort Worth residents, like white Americans in other locations across the United States, engaged in explicitly racist, overt calls for segregation. In the aftermath of *Brown*, some in the Fort Worth community formed a White Citizens' Council that articulated a white supremacist defense of segregation. Inspired by similar councils in the South, the Tarrant County Citizens' Council lobbied the School Board to affirm the legal doctrine of Jim Crow. At one point in 1956, they organized a rally in Downtown Fort Worth featuring public officials, including a former state senator from Fort Worth as well as Congressmen from other Southern states. While the Citizens' Council movement died out nationally, and in Fort Worth, following the confrontation between state and federal officials at Little Rock High School in 1957, resistance to desegregation remained prominent throughout the United States for decades. The Board continued resisting desegregation throughout the 1960s and grassroots resistance would eventually resurface in response to the Board's limited "busing" plan in 1971. Taken together, local bureaucratic obstructionism and grassroots resistance allowed Fort Worth to defend segregation for years to come, while the city simultaneously, and somewhat bewilderingly, built a reputation as a city "moderate" in its racial politics. Beneath appeals to gradualism and moderation were bureaucratic tools of resistance that continued to deny students their Constitutional rights.

The School Board's resistance to desegregation also took shape in concert with other local officials who pursued bureaucratic means to maintain residential segregation and economic inequality. The black neighborhood of Como, sitting Southwest of Downtown Fort Worth, exemplified the ways city and school policies worked together to maintain school and residential segregation. In 1960, 99% of Como's population was black and the neighborhood had one of the city's lowest per-household income rates. Sitting only a block away, across Guilford Road (now Bryant Irvin), the Ridglea Country Club community had maintained a 100% white population and boasted one of the highest per-household incomes in the city.³¹ City policies facilitated the stark contrast between the two areas. During the construction of apartments in the Ridglea area, for instance, city ordinance 2401 blocked the creation of streets that would connect the two communities and a construction company erected a barbed wire fence that served as a real and symbolic barrier between black Como and white Ridglea. Even after the Federal Housing Authority took ownership of the new apartments, it did not remove the fence. In the late 1960s, city management pushed back against the Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union's efforts to remove the fence and connect the two communities. The fence eventually did come down in the early 1970s, but once removed, segregation persisted in such a way that stark disparities continue to exist between Como and surrounding areas.³² The stark patterns of residential segregation exemplified in the Como-Ridglea dynamic ultimately signifies the evolution of Jim Crow from a legal to a geographic reality. Segregation that

³¹ Informal Report to City Council, Improved Access Between Como and Ridglea Neighborhoods, April 4, 1969, Fort Worth Public Library Digital Archive, City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3.

³² "Fort Worth Housing Solutions," North Texas Regional Housing Assessment, the University of Texas at Arlington, 2018.

had once been city policy was now a feature of the spatial landscape of Fort Worth and one that many white citizens and public officials actively maintained.

The Supreme Court's 1971 *Swann* decision challenged Fort Worth's reliance on segregated housing to preempt school desegregation. The local NAACP, which initially challenged the Board over segregation in 1959, persisted in its efforts to desegregate the district, resulting in a 1971 Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision requiring the Board to comply with *Swann* and implement a student transfer policy that continued the practice of transporting students based on race. Whereas before 1971 student transfers propped up segregation, student transfers, soon to be called "busing," would now undo it. The Board's 1971 desegregation plan, which its critics denounced with the national rhetoric of "busing" that was legitimized by President Nixon, remained minimal and left 16 African American schools completely segregated, along with 40 white schools for a total of 56, making it a majority segregated district.³³ Nearly two decades after *Brown*, and after nearly a decade of desegregation policies, the Board had failed to desegregate Fort Worth schools. Its changing treatment of school assignment policies, and its evolving justifications for those policies, turned race and space into one in the city of Fort Worth.

While city policies facilitated the transition in the underlying causes of school segregation--from de jure Jim Crow segregation to de facto segregation based on neighborhood composition--two grassroots movements highlighted how the local community also evolved in its defense of segregation. Chapter 2, "Guard and Keep:" "Antibusing" and the National Politics of Resistance," evaluates local reactions to "busing" and argues that the 1971 "antibusing" movement in Fort Worth served as an

³³ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

extension of massive resistance, as white “moderates” adopted the national language of “color-blind” conservatism that consciously avoided explicit racism but resisted desegregation nonetheless. Although the Citizens’ Council movement resisted segregation as a matter of explicit white supremacy, by 1971, grassroots resistance to school desegregation had evolved and “antibusers” framed their resistance to school desegregation in the “color-blind” language “neighborhood schools,” “freedom of choice,” and “forced busing.” In doing so, the “antibusing” movement, and the media that reported on it, tended to obscure the reality of persistent racial segregation, and the city’s history of creating and maintaining that segregation.

Abandoning the open racism of the past and stating their resistance to one policy, “busing,” rather than desegregation in general, the “antibusing” movement legitimized resistance to desegregation by popularizing resistance to the means of achieving it. Like the Citizens’ Council movement before it, the “antibusing” movement sought support for continued school segregation through public rallies and by lobbying the School Board, members of which were forthright in their support of the “color-blind” movement. “Antibusers” were able to legitimize resistance by claiming to support what massive resistors before them did not: desegregation; and they showed this by adopting phrases like, “I am for integration but...” Through these appeals to color-blindness, the movement granted the Civil Rights Movement legitimacy and even posited themselves as its rightful heirs. “If the civil rights demonstrations have taught us anything, it is that if enough people disobey an unjust law, they cannot put us all in jail,” stated a leader of the local “antibusing” group, Citizens’ for Neighborhood Schools (CNS).³⁴ However, in light

³⁴ “Silent Majority’ takes a stand against busing,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 21, 1971.

of the stark contrast between black and white neighborhoods exemplified in Como and Ridglea, resistance to school desegregation was inherently connected to issues of neighborhood segregation and economic inequality. Through popularizing the protection of more deeply rooted structures of segregation, the grassroots “antibusing” movement in Fort Worth, along with the School Board’s evolving policies, reflected dynamic strategies of resistance as well as the ways that national politics were reflected in a Texas city.

Local histories that have focused on school desegregation have mischaracterized local resistance to *Brown*. Tina Nicole Cannon’s dissertation, “Cowtown and the Color Line: Desegregating Fort Worth Schools,” traces a broad history of Fort Worth ISD from the establishment of public education in the 1880s to the end of court-mandated desegregation in the 1990s. Cannon frames her argument around Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” “I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate,” King declared. “I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice.”³⁵ Cannon argues that Fort Worth was one such moderate city that neither defended segregation nor embraced the legal mandate of *Brown*.³⁶ While “Cowtown” helpfully places Fort Worth’s history of school segregation in state and regional contexts and uncovers the long history of local black activism, she misreads Fort Worth’s resistance to *Brown* as a passive misunderstanding of the decision’s legal implications. Thus, when a school official stated, “I don’t think the Supreme Court decisions call for

³⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *Atlantic Monthly*, April 16, 1963.

³⁶ Tina Nicole Cannon, “Cowtown and the Color Line: Desegregating Fort Worth Schools,” PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2009, 1.

mingling. I think it calls for no discrimination, and we do not discriminate in Fort Worth,”³⁷ Cannon regards them as existing in a state of “willful oblivion.”³⁸ However, the Board’s rhetoric operated as an extension of white supremacy and its actions reveal not ignorance, but a steadfast commitment to segregation. Ultimately, this reading of the history misses how Fort Worth’s local bureaucracy and white community crafted dynamic strategies of resistance that evolved within the context of national movements to stall progress and thwart the promise of equal rights mandated by *Brown*.

While Fort Worth proclaims itself as the town “where the West begins,” and is often regarded as a moderate city and exception to the Southern racism, in the era of massive resistance, moderate was often a relative term. As historian C. Vann Woodward explained in his landmark study, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, during the desegregationist era in the South “a ‘moderate’ became a man who dared open his mouth, an ‘extremist’ one who favored eventual compliance with the law, and ‘compliance’ took on the connotations of treason.”³⁹ To properly assess resistance in Fort Worth, it is necessary to evaluate the ways the city fits into regional and national narratives, rather than how it was exceptional to them. As was the case elsewhere in the South, white supremacist ideology shaped grassroots resistance to desegregation in Fort Worth, and the School Board exemplified how relatively “moderate” officials could engage in prolonged resistance to desegregation without state politicians taking a stand at the schoolhouse door. By highlighting the similarities between the history of massive resistance in Fort Worth and elsewhere, one can see the city in light of the wonderfully

³⁷ “Tracing Fort Worth’s Desegregation,” *Star-Telegram*, September 5, 1982.

³⁸ Cannon, “Cowtown,” 118.

³⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

varied, sophisticated, and insightful work historians have done on the broader history of segregationist politics and their relation to national politics that emerged in the postwar United States.⁴⁰ If we can see past such Fort Worth exceptionalism, we can also call into question the ideas of Southern exceptionalism and see how the white supremacist South appears inextricably related with other parts of the nation. Throughout the United States, white supremacist reactionary politics were at the center of “reform” efforts after *Brown* as well as the broader struggle for racial justice dating back to Reconstruction.⁴¹

Breaking down Fort Worth exceptionalism requires engaging with the scholars who have explained the histories of subtle, yet powerful forms of racism after the fall of Jim Crow laws. In a recent retelling of the Civil Rights Movement, Jeanne Theoharris’ *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* compellingly argues that a system of “racial injustice was propelled not only by people who were yelling but by people who were silent.”⁴² Placing the Black Freedom Struggle in its national context, Theoharris argues that Americans today need to reckon with the movement’s history and legacy in order to see how the fight for racial and economic justice led by Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and local grassroots movements throughout the nation, remains unfinished. Theoharris overturns popular narratives that the Civil Rights Movement was inevitable and thus exemplary of American exceptionalism by showing how resistance to the movement took on subtle, yet complex and enduring forms.

⁴⁰ See: Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking Press, 2016); Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Anderson, *White Rage*, 12.

⁴² Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, 84.

Rejecting what she calls the “redneckification of racism,” Theoharris explores “polite” racism as a stumbling block to comprehensive social justice policies like desegregation. While popular accounts of the Civil Rights Movement often depict racism as the personal shortcomings of Southern rednecks, such renderings overlook how subtle forms of systemic racism were crucial to limiting the movement’s assault on racial and economic hierarchies. For example, in New York, Theoharris describes how officials created segregated schools by manipulating zoning patterns but then sidestepped culpability by reframing segregation in the harmless language of “separation,” which, they claimed, resulted naturally from de facto housing segregation.⁴³ This “polite” racism, she argues, ultimately used three tools: language, government bureaucracy, and sociological justifications of racial inequality. Because the quiet machinations of local governance were subtle, Theoharris explains, cities did not “need a governor at a school house door [because] you had BOE [Board of Education] officials constantly adjusting school zoning lines to maintain segregated schools.”⁴⁴ Local officials employed these bureaucratic measures quietly, often behind closed doors, and generally to protect the needs and interests of white citizens.

While not the first account of bureaucratic obstructionism or “color-blind” racism, Theoharris’ framework of “polite” racism provides a helpful lens through which one can view the national context for the adoption of “color-blind” conservatism as an extension of massive resistance in Fort Worth. Widespread use of “color-blind” discourse, Theoharris explains, obscured the pervasiveness of the related realities of residential and school segregation. Speaking of segregation in terms of “taxpayer rights,” “neighborhood

⁴³ Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, 38.

⁴⁴ Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*, 91.

schools,” and “forced busing,” officials at all levels of government portrayed urban segregation in Northern cities (if they acknowledged it at all) as a product of market forces beyond judicial oversight and state-enforced remedies. Historian Mathew Lassiter has also argued that “color blind” rhetoric obscured systemic racism and allowed “antibusers” to resist desegregation while presenting themselves as being free from racism and in support of equality, even as they blocked the very mechanisms through which equality could be realized.⁴⁵ By the time of the “antibusing” movements of the 1960s and 1970s, “polite” racism became the dominant political discourse standing in the way of desegregation. While Fort Worth may have been relatively “moderate,” then, Fort Worth officials and white citizens engaged in this “polite” racism to preserve segregation. Rather than seeing Fort Worth as moderate, we should see it as yet another crucible of creative, yet racist conservatism.

Conservatism aims to preserve hierarchies through creative reactions against the potential loss of privilege or power. As political theorist Corey Robin argues in his 2018 book, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*, conservatism does not just favor the status quo or tradition. Instead, the history of conservatism is the history of a dynamic movement that has evolved in reaction to emancipatory movements on the left, such as the French Revolution, the abolition of slavery, the women’s suffrage movement, and the struggle for civil rights. At the heart of the history of conservatism, Robin argues, is a drive to preserve a hierarchical order in which power is both rooted in, and has as its ultimate purpose the protection of, privilege and power in the private sphere. Describing the private life of power, Robin states,

⁴⁵ Mathew Lassiter, “The Suburban Origins of Color-Blind Conservatism: Middle Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis,” *Journal of Urban History* 30, no. 4 (May 2004), 553.

“Every great political blast - the storming of the Bastille, the taking of the Winter Palace, the March on Washington - is set off by a private fuse: the contest for rights and standing in the family, the factory, and the field.”⁴⁶ Thus, desegregation represented a threat to every level of the conservative’s hierarchical worldview: miscegenation threatened their conception of marriage and family life, desegregation of schools and other public places threatened social life, and the false association of desegregation with communism threatened political life. By adopting this framework of conservatism, one is better able to understand what motivated a seemingly moderate community and city officials to actively forge dynamic strategies to maintain segregation and resist threats to the broader system of American white supremacy.

Massive resistance to desegregation was a fundamentally conservative movement that aimed to preserve a worldview upheld by segregation. Robin’s description of the reactionary struggle to protect the private life of power can be seen in the Tarrant County Citizens’ Council’s framing of school desegregation as a threat to an entire way of life. “Our days as a national race are numbered... Once mixed they can never be unmixed, and this [is] the surest and most certain way to destroy us,” stated Howard Beard, the leader of the Tarrant Citizens’ Council.⁴⁷ Beard’s rhetoric speaks to the reality that segregation propped up an ideology of white supremacy that permeated every aspect of the conservative’s life. School desegregation thus represented an assault that extended beyond school policies to an entire worldview, even including segregationists’ religious conceptions. Dallas pastor Carey Daniel of the Associated Citizens’ Councils of Texas

⁴⁶ Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

⁴⁷ Robyn Duff Ladino, *Desegregating Texas schools: Eisenhower, Shivers, and the Crisis at Mansfield High* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), 80-1.

articulated a theological view that the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted from the transgression of divine laws of segregation. “Anyone familiar with the Biblical history of those cities during that period can readily understand why we here in the South are determined to maintain segregation,” he stated.⁴⁸ Viewing desegregation as a violation of religious ideology and an affront to an entire way of life, segregationists were motivated to act to protect their private lives of power.

In 1971, the “antibusing” movement represented another manifestation of the conservative drive to resist reform and preserve existing social, political, and economic hierarchies rooted in the private life of power. The conservatism of “antibusing” can be seen in School Board member Jim Harris’ appeal to his colleagues to reject “busing” in Fort Worth. Harris issued a long list of grievances that reflected his dismay at the state of the America by 1971. “I am concerned about my country not winning a war that it can win” he began. He then articulated an array of concerns including the expansion of the “...welfare state..., too many people seeking government aid..., the lack of law and order... And yes I am concerned about court rulings that *force* busing on children.”⁴⁹ “Busing” had come at the end of decades of civil rights protests, anti-war activism, and urban unrest which had shattered Harris’ image of American life and were now extending their reach into the private sphere by including white children in desegregation policies that had been shuttling black students around for a decade. Representing more than a desegregation strategy, the prospect of “busing” tapped into the fears of the Silent

⁴⁸ Jane Daily, “The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 156.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 6, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 5-6.

Majority, a group of middle class suburban whites who articulated a political ideology of “color-blind” individualism and meritocratic freedom. Contrasting the citizens’ council movement’s explicitly white supremacist worldview, “antibusers” issued a rallying cry of freedom and a defense of choice that emphasized privileges earned over rights protected.

The seemingly benign appeal to a philosophy of freedom and choice among “antibusers” served as an implicit protection of white material advantage in terms of wealth and power that was contingent upon black material disadvantage. This was most overtly on display in white reactions against the politics of Black Power, a social and political movement that cut to the core of what freedom for African Americans must entail: financial investment into the material conditions of black communities. Reacting against Black Power, the Fort Worth School Board and local press joined the national political consensus that disregarded black activists as militant and unrealistic radicals who should not be taken seriously. The creativity of “antibusing” was to shift the conversation away from black material conditions completely to notions of freedom that appeared universal, but were in reality expressions of white racial and class privilege that they sought to protect. In this light, the employment of “color-blind” discourse served less as a protection of “freedom of choice” and “neighborhood schools” and more as a protracted defense of white supremacy.

This thesis joins an ongoing historical debate over the causes, evolution, and implications of resistance to school desegregation after the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* decision. Massive resistance to *Brown* was not a monolithic movement. Instead, resistance to desegregation comprised multiple strategies, some coordinated and others emerging in isolation, that sought to maintain segregation in public schools. *Brown*

marked a turning point in both the Civil Rights Movement and the white supremacist reactionary movements that sought to resist racial progress. While threats to white supremacy existed long before *Brown*, the school desegregation decision brought into sharp focus how desegregated education threatened segregationist's private lives of power by targeting public schools, where their children were educated.

The period historians refer to as massive resistance occurred in the mid-twentieth century and represented a multifaceted movement to resist threats to segregation at the level of the grassroots as well as municipal, state and national politics. Further, resistance was rooted in a long history of reactionary white supremacist politics. In his 2006 study, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement*, George Lewis characterizes massive resistance as “an amorphous beast” that varied in scope and influence depending on the place and circumstances.⁵⁰ The movement's long-term causes, Lewis shows, were rooted in defenses of American white supremacy most explicit in the South and most visible where the emergence of President Harry Truman's modest civil rights policies initiated the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt and the splintering of the Democratic Party. The Dixiecrats, Lewis argues, provided a model for resisting federal desegregation policies based on states' rights and “a return to small town ‘*laissez faire*’ economics.”⁵¹ The politics of white supremacy proved crucial to shaping this early revolt against desegregation and laid the political groundwork for later reactions against desegregation after *Brown*.

⁵⁰ George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (Hodder Education Press, 2006), 24

⁵¹ Lewis, *Massive Resistance*, 20.

Lewis divides massive resistance into three periods. From 1954 to 1956, grassroots resistance appeared with the formation of White Citizens' Councils. Southern politicians failed to adopt a unified strategy, but many did sign the *Southern Manifesto*, pledging "to use 'all lawful means' to bring about the reversal of *Brown*."⁵² From 1956 to 1960, resistance remained varied, but its proponents sought to repress the activism of local African Americans throughout the South who organized against segregation. Steeped in the ideology of the Cold War, segregationists denounced the Civil Rights Movement as part of a larger communist conspiracy to impose "collectivist" ideals and practices on the United States. They argued that any true American would defend individual freedom and that, in this case, individual freedom equaled the freedom of parents to choose to send their children to segregated schools as opposed to the right of black children to have equal access to education.

Such Cold War racism inspired reactions in some of the landmark events of the era. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama in 1954 and 1955, for instance, a black boycott of city buses prompted the Ku Klux Klan and local law enforcement to seek to break the boycott with violent intimidation. And in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, a white supremacist mob denouncing the communism of integrationist politics, sought to prevent black students from attending a white school, prompting the Eisenhower Administration to intervene and uphold federal law. Finally, Lewis argues that from 1960 to 1965, massive resistors persisted but lost the initiative and increasingly could only react desperately in the face of spectacularly effective Civil Rights protests like the Freedom Rides and the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery. This third period, Lewis argues,

⁵² Lewis, *Massive Resistance*, 66.

ended with the 1965 Voting Rights Act, when the terrain of struggle shifted away from maintaining segregation as a legal reality to minimizing the extent to which Civil Rights legislation was implemented.

While Lewis's periodization is helpful for understanding the uniqueness of resistance in the immediate post-*Brown* environment, it is necessary to broaden that time frame to extend beyond 1965 and include "antibusing" as a continuation of massive resistance. Although the explicitly white supremacist characteristics of resistance after *Brown* began to fade from acceptable public discourse in the 1960s, new manifestations of that resistance persisted and operated as implicit protections of segregation and white supremacy. In Elizabeth Gillespie McRae's book, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Mothers and White Supremacy*, she describes white supremacists' complex world views and ways of life. Massive resistance to desegregation did not fall neatly into the period between 1954 and 1965, McRae argues, but was continuously negotiated and evolved over the twentieth century. Focusing on a fifty-year period, from the 1920s to the 1970s, McRae contends that "Jim Crow segregation remade itself decade after decade" as its defenders responded to threats to white supremacy.⁵³ Although *Brown* represented perhaps the most substantial threat to that system, it was not the first or last. *Mothers of Massive Resistance* ends with an account of "antibusing" movements in Boston and Charlotte, which McRae argues operated as extensions of massive resistance and represented the national scope of threats to white supremacy. As McRae reveals, racism in segregated cities was more than the views or actions of individuals, but was a "way of

⁵³ McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance*, 10.

life” that determined every facet of segregationists’ worldviews, including politics, schools, and the home.

McRae substantiates how segregationists were motivated to defend what Robin would call their “private lives of power.” McRae argues that mothers were the “constant gardeners” of segregation and white supremacy as they played active roles in passing white supremacist worldviews onto their children, shaping segregated education, and engaging in grassroots activism through canvassing, writing newspaper columns, and even running for office. According to McRae, white segregationist women were not only protecting a white supremacist worldview, but actively shaping one. In Mississippi, Florence Sillers Ogden was a politically active mother who argued that women must exercise their political responsibility in the home. Gillespie states that “white segregationist women made the family the center of political life and political ideology.”⁵⁴ After *Brown*, school desegregation posed a fundamental threat to white supremacist order in the home because “schools functioned as extensions of that domestic space.”⁵⁵ Desegregation, this line of argument went, threatened the entire precipice of segregation, foreboding interracial relationships and conceptions of history and civics education that threatened the American exceptionalist narrative of white supremacy. McRae ultimately challenges us to see racism and white supremacy beyond individual prejudice, and instead as a complex way of life that is reflected through private and public institutions and actively forged over time.

In Texas, the initial conservative struggle to maintain white supremacy played out in the 1956 Mansfield Crisis, which revealed the existence of a formidable movement of

⁵⁴ McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance*, 167

⁵⁵ McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance*, 168.

devoted segregationists throughout North Texas. Robyn Duff Ladino's book, *Desegregating Texas Schools: Eisenhower, Shivers and the Mansfield Crisis* (1999), argues that the Mansfield Crisis became as a microcosm of the United States after *Brown*. "The many facets of the racial problems facing the United States became apparent," Ladino asserts, "as African Americans, struggling for school integration, collided with officials at all levels who clung to the established traditions of the southern caste system."⁵⁶ Mansfield's segregated school system provided no educational opportunities for black students after the 8th grade, and in 1955, a federal court ordered black students to be admitted to the town's all-white high school. On August 30, registration day, a mob of approximately 500 segregationists from Mansfield and throughout North Texas surrounded the school, physically blocking black students from registering. Texas Governor Allen Shivers sent in the Texas Rangers to support the mob and President Eisenhower "remained as far away from the Mansfield situation as he could," warning that there were "extremists on both sides."⁵⁷ The showdown at Mansfield successfully delayed the desegregation of the high school until 1967, and revealed the extent to which the groundwork of white supremacy was already embedded in the daily lives of North Texans.

While mob showdowns at schools revealed the determination of many Southern whites to resist desegregation, less openly confrontational events, like the bureaucracy of local school board meetings, proved critical in determining the pace, scope, and outcome of desegregation and even the context of white resistance. John Kirk's essay, "Massive Resistance and Minimum Compliance: The Origins of the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis

⁵⁶ Ladino, *Desegregating Texas schools*, xiii.

⁵⁷ Ladino, *Desegregating Texas Schools*, 115-6.

and the Failure of School Desegregation in the South,” argues that the local School Board circumvented *Brown* through negligible desegregation policies. In 1956, to limit desegregation, the School Board opened two new high schools, Horace Mann as a segregated black school in a predominantly black neighborhood and Hall as a desegregated school on paper, but a school located in an all-white, suburban neighborhood.⁵⁸ The Board then scheduled three high schools, including Central, to desegregate the following year. By directly reinforcing segregated residential patterns, the Board limited desegregation to such an extent that the Superintendent deemed only 9 black students to meet the geographic and intellectual qualification to attend one white high school. The Superintendent of Schools in Little Rock, Kirk argues, deliberately sought to limit the impact of *Brown* through gradualism and tokenism, which served as a “diluted form of massive resistance.” However, that strategy eventually “wreaked chaos” as minimum compliance bolstered the segregationist response to Central High School desegregation in 1957.⁵⁹ In effect, desegregation was so minimal that segregationists were able to effectively concentrate their resistance at Central High, prompting a showdown with the federal government. Kirk’s essay highlights how local school boards had enormous power in determining the pace and scope of desegregation after the Supreme Court decentralized the task to local districts and federal district courts with judges who were often friendly to the local status quo.

State representatives also implemented bureaucratic methods of resistance not only to delay desegregation, but also to restructure the broader system of white

⁵⁸ John A. Kirk, “Massive Resistance and Minimum Compliance: The Origins of the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis and the Failure of School Desegregation in the South,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76.

⁵⁹ Kirk, “Massive Resistance,” in *Massive Resistance*, ed. Webb, 78.

supremacy and oligarchic minority control of democracy. Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in Chains: The Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* argues that desegregation served as a catalyst for libertarian thinker James Buchanan to formulate ways of limiting what he viewed as federal overreach stemming back to the New Deal. Left unchecked, he reasoned, the swelling power of the federal government would allow majority rule to infringe upon the rights of a minority of wealthy elites who would unjustly pay for costly federal programs. Motivated to maintain minority rule at the state level in Virginia, U.S. Senator Harry Byrd used legal processes rooted in massive resistance to govern his state as a white supremacist oligarchy. Byrd's political machine rested on the malapportionment of voting rights that allowed Virginia's rural population, a minority of the popular vote, to control a majority of the state legislature. To maintain this power, MacLean shows that Virginia elites used "clever legal rules [to] keep the state's voter participation among the lowest in the nation relative to population, and its taxes among the lowest in the nation relative to wealth."⁶⁰ Virginia was not alone. Other Southern states similarly relied on the machinations of state politics to uphold white supremacy.

After *Brown*, Virginia served as the breeding ground for the ideology and implementation of resistance to desegregation. To Senator Byrd, the *Brown* decision represented not only an assault on segregated education, but it was also the extension of a New Deal order that threatened the Southern politics of white supremacy through elite minority rule. From Virginia came the constitutional argument for resisting *Brown* based on "interposition," a philosophy which held that state officials had the right to interpose themselves between their citizens and the federal government to protect the former from

⁶⁰ MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, 50.

the latter. Prior to the Civil War, South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun formulated interposition as a defense of Southern control of slavery. In the aftermath of *Brown*, James Jackson Kilpatrick, an editor of the *Richmond News Letter* and author whose ideas were influential throughout the South, revived the doctrine and argued for a no compromise approach to *Brown*. Enacting interposition, the Virginia General Assembly convened a special legislative session to abolish local control of education, cut off funds to schools that attempted to desegregate, and establish tax-funded vouchers for white students to attend private segregation academies.⁶¹ While federal courts eventually struck down such measures, they wreaked havoc on public education in places like Prince Edward County, where public schools closed for five years, depriving black students of a basic education that would affect their lives for years to come.⁶² The politics of massive resistance in Virginia reflected the creative and dynamic ways that state level bureaucracy could be employed to resist desegregation and reinvent white supremacy itself.

The backdrop of the Cold War also played a role in limiting the scope of the national political commitment to comprehensive desegregation policies. In *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Mary Dudziak argues that the Cold War environment helped shape the domestic civil rights agenda. As World War II had highlighted similarities between the racism of Nazi Germany and American segregation, during the Cold War, the United States sought to reconcile its determination to shape global democracy even as it remained limited at home. While segregation provided easy fodder for international criticism of the United States, in the 1950s,

⁶¹ MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, 25.

⁶² Anderson, *White Rage*, 85.

Supreme Court decisions such as *Brown* and *Cooper v. Aaron* (a 1959 case that reaffirmed *Brown*) projected a positive image of the Constitution's affirmation of racial equity and the ability of American democracy to reform itself. Despite the projection of progress toward defeating racism, policy makers achieved little real desegregation after *Brown*, and the Little Rock desegregation crisis further tarnished the U.S. international image.

While President Eisenhower reluctantly decided to uphold federal power (rather than racial equity) and send federal troops to Central High School, the end of the Little Rock crisis did herald the arrival of a national commitment desegregation. Eisenhower's strong response again projected a powerful image of American democracy and Constitutional order as it also defeated the outright intransigence of state and local forces concerning Little Rock. However, by 1960, only eight African Americans were enrolled at Central High because the School Board's pupil assignment plan put bureaucratic obstacles in the way of black students seeking to attend white schools. As Dudziak explains, "Bureaucratization could accomplish most of what overt resistance had not."⁶³ Ultimately, the heightened international scrutiny of the Cold War, Dudziak argues, limited the United States' (particularly the Executive Branch's) commitment to racial equality beyond what projected a positive image of American democracy, even as school desegregation remained limited for years after *Brown*.

The subtle bureaucratic maintenance of segregation contributed to the evolution of racism from massive resistance to "antibusing," a shift in the ideology of white supremacy that occurred within the context of suburbanization and the rise of the Sunbelt

⁶³ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 150.

in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. After World War II, the South underwent a period of industrialization and suburbanization that transformed the politics and economics of the region.⁶⁴ As military industrial investment, federal highway construction, and urban renewal transformed urban landscapes and economies, the suburbanizing metropolitan regions of the South maintained segregation; however, the emerging political ideology was one of meritocracy and “color-blind” individualism, rather than explicit white supremacy. The widespread acceptance of “color-blind” political discourse and bureaucratic maneuverings to maintain segregation represented the national, rather than distinctly Southern, politics of resistance, and provided the impetus for the New Conservative movement. The emerging politics of class privilege and ahistorical racial innocence were reflected in Fort Worth’s own maintenance of housing segregation to preclude serious challenges to racial and economic hierarchies.

White flight to the suburbs was a crucial point in the political reframing of segregation in nonracist terms like freedom and choice. Focusing on the local politics of neighborhood segregation, Kevin Kruse’s *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* argues that white flight to the suburbs was “the most successful segregationist response to the moral demands of the civil rights movement.”⁶⁵

Contrasting top-down approaches to segregationist ideology, Kruse explores resistance to the civil rights movement from the ground up, establishing how the Old South transformed into New Conservatism through white resistance to desegregation of neighborhoods, public spaces, and schools. Importantly, Kruse shows that segregationist

⁶⁴ Joseph Crespino, “Mississippi as Metaphor,” in Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 107.

⁶⁵ Kruse, Kevin M. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 8.

ideology was dynamic, and segregationists actively reformulated the politics of white supremacy in the contexts of suburbanization and desegregation.

White flight not only defeated desegregation, Kruse contends, but represented a “political revolution” in which white Americans crafted a conservative ideology rooted in the language of individual rights, privatization of public institutions, and freedom of association.⁶⁶ As in Virginia, rural political leaders dominated Georgia’s state legislature in the mid-twentieth century. At the local level, ward politics dominated Atlanta, until African Americans gained more voting rights in the 1940s, a reality that prompted the mayor and business leaders to forge a new coalition with black voters to maintain power. Yet trouble lurked beneath Atlanta’s “politics of progress.” White Atlantans soon mounted a resistance to African Americans who sought to buy homes in white neighborhoods, that resistance evolved out of the blatant racism of neo-Nazis and the KKK into practices with a patina of respectability as homeowners resisted racial transition in the language of property values and rights, not explicit racism. The legitimization of white resistance as a defense of rights saw the transition from the politics of community to the politics of individualism. As white neighborhoods attempted to forge a top-down sense of community centered around whiteness, that fragile coalition crumbled when families abandoned neighborhoods as they felt their own self-interest threatened. With the beginning of token integration that “was often just another form of segregation,”⁶⁷ whites in Atlanta began resisting desegregation as a defense of their individual right to “freedom of association,” which proved a unifying ideology in an

⁶⁶ Kruse, *White Flight*, 6.

⁶⁷ Kruse, *White Flight*, 160.

otherwise divided segregationist movement. As desegregation expanded, whites more readily embraced the suburbs as well as private schools in the form of segregation academies and religious schools as alternatives to a public education system that they increasingly perceived as violating their rights. Atlanta provides insight into a political revolution that was happening throughout the suburbanizing nation.

In Houston, Texas, while violent confrontations were avoided, procedural resistance and white flight to the suburbs also nullified potentially successful desegregation remedies. In *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston*, William Keller addresses the desegregation of one of Texas' most populous and prosperous cities. Keller argues that peaceful desegregation in Houston, the nation's largest segregated school district, resulted from token integration policies and the limited gains were further reduced as white "Houstonians shifted from a strategy of 'massive resistance' to one of 'massive retreat.'"⁶⁸ Keller credits the business community for acting to ensure desegregation was peaceful, but shows that they did so not out of a desire to do justice to black Houstonians, but to avoid confrontations with the federal government like the one in Little Rock. As in Fort Worth, the lack of commitment from Houston's white community, the limited scope of desegregation, and the safe haven of white flight rendered peaceful desegregation hollow as it did little to adequately confront the fundamental issue of enduring segregation.

In addition to reformulating the political ideology of white supremacy, the growth of suburban political power that fueled the New Conservative movement in the mid-20th century was central to defeating both massive resistance and good-faith desegregation.

⁶⁸ William Keller, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 4.

Matthew Lassiter's *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* argues that the New Conservative movement of the 1960s and 1970s was not the result of a southernization of American politics but a "suburbanization of American politics" rooted in the suburban response to massive resistance in the 1950s. In Georgia, Lassiter argues, massive resistance resulted from political malapportionment that allowed the rural Black Belt to dominate state politics even as urban and suburban populations grew in Savannah and Atlanta. As in Virginia, the rural politics of white supremacy resisted *Brown* through a campaign to close public schools and open private segregation academies funded by tax vouchers and that excluded black children. In response, suburbanites around Atlanta, who would be unaffected by desegregation because of their segregated suburban living spaces, organized Help Our Public Education (HOPE) to save public education for white children. The moderate movement, Lassiter argues, "chart[ed] a middle path that discredited the politics of segregationist defiance by evading the ethical mandate of good-faith integration."⁶⁹ HOPE succeeded in keeping public schools open and represented a powerful new suburban voting bloc that rejected the politics of massive resistance. However, desegregation in Atlanta failed, Lassiter argues, because the suburbs remained insulated from Atlanta's urban population of poor whites and blacks, leaving "the City Too Busy to Hate" largely segregated by race and class.

Desegregation took a different course in Charlotte, North Carolina, with the advent of a metropolitan desegregation strategy. Controversy surrounding desegregation in Charlotte was rooted in the 1969 court case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, in which District Judge James McMillan found that "government policies had shaped the stark

⁶⁹ Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 137.

patterns of residential segregation that produced school segregation.”⁷⁰ McMillan’s decision abandoned traditional one-way “busing” policies that only transferred black students to white schools and created the two-way “busing” of white and black students. The District Judge also created a “metropolitan desegregation formula [that] could neutralize white flight” to suburban areas surrounding Charlotte by including them in the desegregation policy.⁷¹ Despite the effectiveness of metropolitan “busing” at achieving desegregation, resistance emerged as citizens formed the Concerned Parents Association (CPA), a suburban “antibusing” group. The CPA, Lassiter argues, articulated “a color-blind defense of middle-class respectability and insisted that opposition to busing had nothing to do with racial prejudice.”⁷² While the CPA claimed to support desegregation, they argued that “busing” violated the principle of “neighborhood schools.” In response, the CPA, like massive resisters before them, advocated boycotting public education altogether. The politics of “antibusing” that rocked Charlotte for five years were eventually tempered by the formation of another grassroots organization that intervened to bring the School Board and community around to support not just desegregation in theory, but the means of achieving it. Ultimately, Charlotte showed that desegregation plans involving race as well as economic mixing would be successful if the community and city leaders supported the premise that all children deserve an equal education and understood “busing” as a necessary means to that end. A lack of public support and failure to include all aspects of a school district would ensure “busing” was dead on arrival.

⁷⁰ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 142.

⁷¹ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 210.

⁷² Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 139.

Suburbanization and the emergence of “color-blind” conservatism in the late 1960s signaled the emerging national politics of race. While the Citizens’ Council represented explicit Southern white supremacy, historians remind us how the NAACP’s efforts against injustice were always part of a national project aimed at dismantling racial inequality everywhere. As a result, moderate local and national politics resisted those efforts in ways that often obscured the scope of injustice while also laying the groundwork for enduring segregation and inequality. Rejecting Southern exceptionalism that exempts the rest of the U.S. from the same level of scrutiny given to the South on issues of racial justice, the essay collection, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* argues that the regional preoccupation with the South “reinforce[s] a selective historical consciousness about the civil rights era, which is typically portrayed as an epic showdown between the retrograde South and a progressive nation.”⁷³ Only by discarding Southern exceptionalism, the authors’ argue, can we overcome the “mythology of American exceptionalism,” which juxtaposes a progressive nation held back by a regressive South. The North-South dichotomy fixates on the South as the bastion of American racism and economic segregation and overlooks how economic and racial segregation pervaded northern cities in the realms of housing and schools. Challenging its readers to abandon notions of American innocence, the essays in the collection explore trends in American social and political history that implicate the entire United States’ record on race and class inequality and injustice.

Southern Exceptionalism roots the Fort Worth School Board’s resistance to desegregation in its national context by showing how the legal strategy of using housing

⁷³ Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, 5.

segregation to avoid good faith desegregation was imported from non-Southern urban areas like Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and Chicago. Mathew Lassiter's essay, "De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth," argues that the distinction between de jure (legal) and de facto (resulting from free market choices) segregation created a false geographic dichotomy between northern (de facto) and southern (de jure) segregation.⁷⁴ While both forms created segregation in effect, this binary viewpoint distinguished between northern housing and school segregation, which purportedly resulted from individuals' private market choices, and Southern Jim Crow laws. Lassiter argues that this distinction is false because segregation in the North and West also resulted from legal discrimination in public policies such as "exclusionary zoning, pervasive discrimination in mortgage lending programs... redlining neighborhoods, [and] open Jim Crow practices in public housing projects."⁷⁵ Although the *Brown* decisions declared segregation "inherently unequal," long standing legal defenses of de facto segregation in cities like New York, Chicago, and Boston proved to be a formidable obstacle to the landmark decision's implementation nationally. In Fort Worth, the School Board adopted the de facto-de jure framework for discussing housing and school segregation. By arguing in court that neighborhood segregation was legal, the Board sought to exonerate its segregated school district, which remained separate and unequal for decades after *Brown*. Lassiter states that "The de facto framework, originally devised by civil rights leaders as a strategy to extend the *Brown* mandate beyond the South, turned out to be a road map for southern cities seeking to escape meaningful

⁷⁴ Mathew Lassiter, "De jure/ De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth," in *Southern Exceptionalism*, 27.

⁷⁵ Lassiter, "De jure/De Facto Segregation," in *Southern Exceptionalism*, 29.

integration through ‘northern-style’ approaches.”⁷⁶ Local officials in Fort Worth adopted this framework and distracted from the role of city and school policies in creating segregated neighborhoods and schools in the first place.

Understanding how the de facto-de jure distinction exonerated housing segregation as the result of free-market choices also contextualizes the evolution of grassroots defenses of segregation from massive resistance to “antibusing.” Massive resistance in Fort Worth was rooted in Southern-style white supremacist ideology that viewed desegregation as an existential threat to racial hierarchies. However, as the School Board shifted from maintaining school segregation as official policy to maintaining it as an effect of housing segregation, grassroots resistance evolved as well. Instead of the legal Jim Crow of white supremacy, the “antibusing” movement in Fort Worth, as elsewhere, defended housing segregation that resulted from supposed “freedom of choice.” Defending de facto segregation, “antibusers” included “moderates” who claimed to support desegregation, but oppose busing. In this way, “antibusers” throughout the nation protected an ideal of what Lassiter terms “color-blind individualism,” an ideology steeped in class consciousness and rooted in the protection of private property rights. However, as throughout the nation, in Fort Worth, the “freedom of choice” and “neighborhood schools” arguments obscured the governmental policies that created and maintained housing segregation and served as resistance to desegregation rather than a protection of rights.

Nationally, “antibusing” movements made resisting desegregation more acceptable in popular discourse as they abandoned the racist language of segregationists

⁷⁶ Lassiter; Crespino, eds. *Southern Exceptionalism*, 39.

for the New Conservatism, with its “color-blind” rhetoric of freedom and rights. In *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*, Mathew Delmont challenges the notion that “busing” was a failed desegregation strategy and argues that it failed because “school officials, politicians, courts, and the news media valued the desires of white parents more than the rights of black students.”⁷⁷ Focusing on the national development and progression of antibusing politics, Delmont looks at how, in the New York Parents and Taxpayers protest in 1964, “busing” became a “common sense” way to talk about school desegregation that distracted from the Constitutional rights of black students that were at the heart of segregation. The backlash against “busing,” which became more controversial following the 1971 *Swann* decision, also overlooked how school buses were historically used to maintain segregated school zones. Protestors, politicians, school officials, and news media all adopted the “busing” rhetorical framework such as “forced busing” and “neighborhood schools” and were thus able to “support white schools and neighborhoods without using explicitly racist language.”⁷⁸

The media helped shape the American public’s understanding of “busing” as a central problem rather than a judicial remedy to historic injustice. Instead of reading nuanced policy analyses, Delmont argues, many Americans learned about “busing” through news organizations, particularly on television, which presented simplified stories of “busing” crises in cities like Boston that ignored the complexity of segregation and school desegregation policy. Challenging assumptions that the news media was inherently supportive of the Civil Rights Movement, Delmont argues that television

⁷⁷ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 2.

⁷⁸ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 3.

news, which focused on day-by-day developments in unfolding crises, proved incapable of providing the necessary historical and legal context for its viewers to understand the intricacies of school desegregation. As a result, “The battle over ‘busing,’” he argues, “was never primarily a debate over which policy would lead to the best educational outcomes but rather a debate about how school desegregation would be defined in public discourse, and about how much actual desegregation would take place in the nation’s schools, especially in schools outside the South.”⁷⁹ Ultimately, the media provided a platform for white people to define the issue of how black rights would be protected. “Busing” thus presented an issue for all political parties and geographic regions of the United States to oppose the educational rights of black students, contributing to a situation in which popular opinion outweighed Constitutional rights.

Studies of resistance to desegregation that focus on Northern cities reinforce the national politics of resistance represented by “antibusing.” Ronald P. Formisano’s *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 70s* argues that Boston’s “busing crisis” resulted from a limited plan that inflamed ethnic and class tensions by focusing solely on race and confining desegregation to working class neighborhoods in the city and letting the suburbs off the hook. Local bureaucrats exploited class, race, and ethnic tensions in Boston to maintain segregation. Formisano describes local leaders Louise Day Hicks and John Kerrigan, both members of the Boston School Committee, as “entrepreneurs of white backlash.”⁸⁰ Both Hicks and Kerrigan were popularly elected to the Boston School Committee in the 1960s and actively resisted desegregation, unwittingly creating an airtight case that de jure segregation existed in Boston as a result

⁷⁹ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 212.

⁸⁰ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 227.

of BSC policies. In the mid-1960s, while they blocked the efforts of black activists like Ruth Batson and the NAACP who called on the BSC to acknowledge and address segregation, the BSC leadership bused black students past white schools, constructed new schools in locations that increased segregation, and manipulated school zones to maintain segregation.⁸¹ The bureaucratic mechanisms employed by the BSC, and the “antibusing” movement they generated, were reflected in cities throughout the United States, including Fort Worth.

The Boston School Committee’s efforts to maintain segregation, including the manipulation of school zones, “busing” of black students away from white schools, and strategic construction projects underscored the falsity of “color-blind” conservative talking points such as “neighborhood schools.” The intransigence of the BSC to actively reinforce neighborhood segregation, while ignoring local black leaders who pushed for desegregation, ultimately prompted what became known as the Kiernan Commission. Led by Owen Kiernan, the state commissioner of education, the commission investigated school inequality in Massachusetts. The commission’s findings included the assertion that the “neighborhood school was a myth” in a highly mobile society like the United States.⁸² The commission’s final report, *Because it is Right - Educationally*, contributed to statewide support for the passage of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act (RIA), which directly challenged segregation in Boston’s public schools. While it applied to Massachusetts specifically, Formisano writes that the report was “not written with a local audience in mind” but “was addressed to a national readership, perhaps even to the

⁸¹ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 68.

⁸² Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 35.

national conscience.”⁸³ The Act “defined a racially imbalanced school as one with over 50 percent nonwhite pupils,” and required local school committees to remedy imbalance or risk school losing school funds. Similar to Fort Worth after *Brown*, the BSC evaded the RIA for nine years. As the BSC manipulated Boston’s schools to delay desegregation, Hicks and other school leaders “catered to and fed the fears of its white constituency by raising the specter of busing.” In fact, in 1964, nearly a decade before the federal court ordered busing, the BSC, “not the NAACP or its allies, made busing a household word in the city” and cast white children as “innocent victims.” The Boston “busing” crisis revealed how local leaders could both create the conditions that necessitated desegregation and stoke community fears that “busing” represented a form of reverse discrimination that violated their rights. By the 1970s, as local officials and even the President rejected collective responsibility for creating segregation while simultaneously legitimizing “color-blind” resistance to school desegregation, the hope that the United States would remedy the racism embedded in its history and reflected in its institutions faded from likelihood. “A tragic gulf” remained between the death of Jim Crow and the realization of goals and hopes of the Black Freedom Struggle.

The history of resistance to *Brown* reveals the evolving politics of a broader resistance to reform in the United States. While the NAACP and other civil rights activists achieved significant gains with landmark Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation, white Americans nationwide undercut those successes by controlling and limiting their implementation and enforcement. That history both includes and extends beyond the common historical depiction of racist Southern “rednecks” and also consisted

⁸³ Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 34.

of the politics of gradualism and moderation, through which local bureaucracy and “color-blind” conservatism abetted and protected what amounted to a restructuring of American white supremacy. By focusing on a local Texas community such as Fort Worth, which claims a cultural heritage that is at once both Southern and Western, one can better look beyond regional distinctions, such as North and South, and see how a national politics of resistance to the Black Freedom Struggle deferred and denied justice in the twentieth century. Although the most egregious examples of segregationism largely faded from popular discourse in the late 1950s (though, to be sure, continued to threaten black life well into the 1960s), the politics of moderation and the context of suburban growth laid the groundwork for a subtler structure of white supremacy. Once established by local bureaucrats, a new conservative politics would adapt and defend racial and class hierarchies less through overt appeals to racism and more through a protection of white privilege masquerading as “freedom” and “choice.”

III. THE FORT WORTH WAY: WHITE SUPREMACY AND BUREAUCRATIC RESISTANCE TO DESEGREGATION

The phrase “The Fort Worth Way” has varying meanings. Bob Ray Sanders, a former reporter for the *Star-Telegram* and member of the 2016 Race and Culture Task Force, used the phrase to describe how the city’s business elites of the 1950s and 1960s tended to pressure local businesses behind closed doors to desegregate and preemptively avoid racial conflict. “A lot of talking was done behind closed doors,” he recalled. “Then you come out and announce what you’re gonna do. That’s the Fort Worth Way,” Sanders asserted in a 2017 interview. Former Fort Worth NAACP president Nehemiah Davis invoked the phrase to describe the way top-down leadership prevented an outbreak of violence after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Touting the non-confrontational model of local civil rights figures, he declared, “We were able to achieve some breakthroughs thanks for [our] leadership.”⁸⁴ By the 2000s, local political leaders had adopted the phrase to the era of public-private collaborations. Upon becoming mayor in 2003, Mike Moncrief hung a sign with the phrase in his office, defining it as “partnering for the common good.” Consistent across these definitions is the sense that, in Fort Worth, business and civic leadership have the best of intentions for all citizens and that has allowed them to control the outcomes of potentially explosive events. Recently, this celebration of the good intentions and achievements of collaborative leadership has been questioned. Local journalist Bud Kennedy, writing in the *Star-Telegram* in 2019, argued that the phrase has been redefined by a younger, nonwhite community. In 2012, Dallas Congressional candidate, Domingo Garcia, suggested the

⁸⁴ “Have you ever heard the term ‘the Fort Worth Way’? Here’s what it really means,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 22, 2019.

more critical perspective of a new generation of leadership. Scoffing at the older characterization of the city's politics, Garcia said "The Fort Worth Way" really "appears to be that everyone knows their place."⁸⁵

Regarding desegregation, the "Fort Worth Way" has been held up as an example of the city leadership's commitment to peaceful, yet gradual desegregation. Leonard's department store was one of the first downtown businesses to voluntarily desegregate by taking down "colored" signs over its restrooms in February 1960. A recent museum exhibition about the successful retailer goes so far as to claim that, "Because of Marvin [Leonard's] quiet leadership, Fort Worth moved toward desegregation more quickly than any other city in the South."⁸⁶

In addition to current representations of Fort Worth as an exception compared to the rest of the South, the city congratulated itself early on in the desegregation process. In 1963, under court mandate, Fort Worth ISD began desegregation and implemented a "stair step" integration plan, through which one grade would be desegregated per year starting with the first grade that Fall.⁸⁷ Under this plan, all grades were scheduled to be desegregated on paper by 1974, twenty years after *Brown I*. The city prided itself on the lack of conflict on the first day of integration. News headlines read, "Integration of Schools without Incident Here" and "Schools Open Doors to Negroes." However, the lack of overt racial violence or public disruption did not signal the end of segregation in Fort Worth. As desegregation began in 1963, only 20 of the 13,000-plus black students in the district attended desegregated schools. Nor did it signify the School Board's good-

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ "'Let's go ahead:' How One Fort Worth store owner Led the Way to End 1950s Segregation," *Star-Telegram*, December 15, 2018.

⁸⁷ "Integration of Schools Without Incident Here," *Star-Telegram*, September 4, 1963.

faith implementation of desegregation in an attempt to do justice to the city's black students, most of whom remained in segregated and unequal schools for decades after *Brown*. Discrediting claims of Fort Worth exceptionalism, the city's "Fort Worth Way" approach to desegregation consisted of active resistance through massive resistance rooted in white supremacy and local bureaucracy.

Rather than seeking positive solutions to systemic racism, the Board used the power of local bureaucracy to resist desegregation for 17 years after *Brown*. Through gradualism, tokenism, and by arguing that neighborhood segregation legally exonerated school segregation, the Board effectively maintained a segregated school system. The Board also paternalistically rejected black participation in the desegregation planning process. At a 1955 meeting, the black community offered clear support to the Board in crafting a positive desegregation policy. "In what ways can we best help the School Board as it undertakes the necessary steps in this reconstruction of our school system?"⁸⁸ However, from 1954 to 1963, the Board actively delayed desegregation by continuously voting against taking steps to align their district with the constitutional mandate of *Brown*. Further, the Board manipulated school attendance zones to maintain segregation, a policy that facilitated white flight out of black neighborhoods in South Fort Worth, contributing to enduring neighborhood segregation. As a result of the NAACP's persistent efforts, the Board began desegregation in 1963. Yet the Board's plan amounted to token desegregation. Even after voting to "speed up" desegregation in 1967, the Board limited desegregation by relying on residential segregation. Both school and city policies actively contributed to such stark patterns of neighborhood segregation and are most

⁸⁸ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education," July 13, 1955, Fort Worth Independent School District, Vol. 34, 1956-57, 2.

visibly seen in black neighborhoods like Como where limited education and low household income rates sharply contrasted the prosperous, white Ridglea community only one block away.

The Board's resistance to desegregation was accompanied by grassroots resistance that reflected the white supremacist ideology inherent to the segregationist position. Compared to defenses of segregation in other parts of the United States after World War II, massive resistance in Fort Worth proved to differ in degree, not kind. Fort Worth's leading newspaper, and many in the white community, mounted defenses of segregation by paternalistically defending Jim Crow and rejecting black Americans' input into conversations about their own rights. Early resistance occurred in white neighborhood of Riverside, where white citizens and business leaders organized to maintain residential segregation. Then, in 1955, local people took their resistance to the county level with the formation of the Tarrant County Citizens' Council, which organized to resist civil rights by casting desegregation as communist, promoting the states' rights ideology of interposition, and stoking fears of miscegenation. Ultimately, the Citizens' Council viewed desegregation as an existential threat to white supremacy and acted to defend their "private life of power,"⁸⁹ which cast desegregation as a threat to every aspect of life from American democracy and national security to the home, work, and school. The Board's minimal desegregation policies combined with residential segregation to help lay the bedrock for the "antibusing" movement that would articulate a "color-blind" defense of neighborhood segregation in the summer of 1971.

⁸⁹ Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

By taking into account Fort Worth's history of bureaucratic and white supremacist resistance to desegregation, this chapter places Fort Worth in the context of massive resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* nationally. As scholars have shown in cities like Little Rock, New York, Boston, and others throughout the United States, local bureaucracies proved critical in shaping local resistance to *Brown* and limiting desegregation. These conservative struggles to preserve racial hierarchies helped to maintain segregation as they occurred within the context of suburbanization that allowed Jim Crow to become a geographic, rather than strictly legal, reality.⁹⁰ Fort Worth joined such intransigent resistance to equal rights by emphasizing gradual and minimal procedures, which effectively limited desegregation for decades.

In the immediate aftermath of *Brown*, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* explicitly rejected the Supreme Court's declaration that "separate but equal is inherently unequal," a position that echoed throughout the South. Rather than making Fort Worth an exception to Southern Jim Crow and white supremacy, aspects of the city defended segregation rhetorically and through grassroots resistance. Speaking of the post-*Brown* South, Historian C. Vann Woodward has stated, "A fever of rebellion and malaise of fear spread over the region."⁹¹ While Fort Worth may be relatively moderate, its citizens' and officials actively rebelled against the notion that separate but equal was "inherently unequal" as they acted to defend segregation.

⁹⁰ See: Carol Anderson: *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Jeanne Theoharris, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Kevin Kruse *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Mathew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

⁹¹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 165.

At the state level, Texas leadership announced that they would take advantage of the Supreme Court's vague timeline to desegregate in the *Brown II* ruling, which held that school districts should desegregate "with all deliberate speed." Texas Governor Allen Shivers and State Attorney General Ben Sheppard responded by aligning themselves with massive resistance to desegregation, questioning the legitimacy of the Supreme Court and interpreting the phrase "with all deliberate speed" as license to continue segregation until the Court required immediate compliance. "Until the Supreme Court specifically states otherwise," Sheppard told reporters in August 1955, "segregation remains the law in Texas."⁹² Local officials in Fort Worth, like their counterparts across Texas, echoed these views, arguing that *Brown* did not apply to the state or the city.

At the local level, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* inaugurated resistance to *Brown* and, like Southerners elsewhere, questioned the viability of the Supreme Court and propagated the myth that "separate but equal" was nondiscriminatory, an argument that upheld legal white supremacy since *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. On May 19, 1954, two days after the first *Brown* decision, the editors stated, "We confess bafflement over the novel doctrine enunciated by Justice [Earl] Warren that 'separate but equal' facilities are 'inherently unequal.'"⁹³ As in other Southern cities, the editors viewed the *Brown* decision as a "radical approach to the Negro problem in the South." *Brown* was unwarranted, the editors contended, because "the Southerner of long standing and tradition has a high respect for the worthy, honorable Negro, and will see that justice is done him as in the past."⁹⁴ The *Star-Telegram* echoed the paternalistic ethos of white

⁹² "Segregation Remains Law for Present, Says Sheppard," *Star-Telegram*, August 20, 1955.

⁹³ Editorial, "Supreme Court Orders Radical Change," *Star-Telegram*, May 19, 1954.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

supremacy which held that segregation was best for all, including the “worthy, honorable Negro.” Indeed, throughout the South, white Americans defended white supremacy by framing segregation as “not merely a social necessity but a positive good.”⁹⁵ As Woodward put it, “Southern resistance had been able to persuade itself that ... Southern Negroes were contented and happy with the ‘Southern way of life,’” even though that “life” was premised on racial hierarchy through the subjugation of African Americans.⁹⁶

After defending segregation with the rhetoric of white supremacy, the *Star-Telegram* reinforced a doctrine of Fort Worth exceptionalism to Southern Jim Crow. Desegregation, the editors argued, “may not be extensive in many places” because in Fort Worth “Negro districts have been provided educational facilities, including competent colored staffs that are on a parity with those for white children.” A local man named J.O. Bean agreed. “There is no discrimination between whites and blacks in this part of the country,” he wrote to the editors.⁹⁷ However, at the time of the *Brown* decisions, Fort Worth ISD was segregated by race and denied African Americans of basic educational opportunities afforded to white students. Although “separate but equal” no longer held any legal standing, whites in Fort Worth began defending segregation in ways that confounded claims of Fort Worth exceptionalism.

Resistance to desegregation was not merely a rhetorical exercise. From 1954 to 1956, grassroots resistance to desegregation took shape amongst white citizens in the Riverside neighborhood east of downtown Fort Worth. As in other transitioning and suburbanizing communities in the United States, the threat of housing desegregation

⁹⁵ Neil R. McMillan, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954 – 64* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), 176.

⁹⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

⁹⁷ J.O. Bean, “Letter from the People: Crux of the Problem,” *Star-Telegram*, September 11, 1955.

provided the impetus for massive resistance in Fort Worth.⁹⁸ The white Riverside community's intimidation tactics contradicted the *Star-Telegram's* contention that Fort Worth had a tradition of "high respect for the worthy, honorable Negro," and revealed that respect to be contingent upon African Americans submitting to white supremacy. The *Como Weekly*, a local black newspaper, reported early acts of intimidation aimed at preventing African Americans from moving to Riverside. "For the second time in less than a month a bomb has been set off in the Lake Como area," the newspaper reported. The bombs were thrown at the property of Como residents who looked at for sale houses in Riverside, east of downtown. A man named C.M. Johnson described "looking at the house in Riverside for a friend who did not have a car and his license plate was taken down while he did so."⁹⁹ While the bomb caused no damage to Johnson's property, the first bomb destroyed the car and damaged the house of a teacher at a black high school who had also looked at houses in Riverside.

The white Riverside community's resistance to desegregation was rooted in the conservative struggle to protect the private life of power as housing segregation helped preserve a complex way of life predicated on white supremacy. In addition to corroding strict boundaries of racial proximity, housing desegregation represented an initial crack in the edifice of segregation that could expand to challenge social codes prohibiting interracial relationships or even class structures reflected in the often-glaring disparities between black and white neighborhoods. In 1956, after an African American man, Lloyd G. Austin, moved into the area, a white mob of about 200 people surrounded his home.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ For Atlanta, see Kruse, *White Flight*; for New York, see Mathew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*.

⁹⁹ "Bomb Blast Does No Damage to Home," *Como Weekly*, Fort Worth Library Digital Archive, October 8, 1954.

¹⁰⁰ "Negro Home is Picketed by Whites," *Star-Telegram*, September 3, 1956.

“The street was just piled with white people,” Austin remembered in a 2013 interview.¹⁰¹ The mob brandished signs reading “Better stay out Nig and stay alive” and a man waved a cross with the words “KKK” written down it.¹⁰² The Fort Worth police declined Austin’s request for protection after teenagers hung him in effigy from a tree in his yard and drove a wooden stake through the effigy’s chest as it dripped with fake blood. The police finally set up a blockade of his house after white kids hurled rocks at it.

Responding to the Riverside controversy, downtown business leaders employed what became known as the “Fort Worth Way” approach to desegregation that ignored issues of segregation and racial justice and opted for the quiet maintenance of Jim Crow. The businessmen invited Austin to a meeting and attempted to resolve the conflict behind the scenes by asking him to simply move to placate the white community. Austin refused, and, as he later remembered, one of the businessmen acknowledged that the negotiations had reached an impasse. “Well, you heard what this n----- said. This meeting is adjourned,” he stated.¹⁰³ In the Riverside conflict, the “Fort Worth Way” proved ineffective at working toward racial justice as well as appeasing the intransigent white community. White residents of Riverside ultimately considered resorting to outright violence to defend their segregated neighborhood. After rumors circulated that people were planning to burn down their house, Austin’s family decided to move.¹⁰⁴ The *Star-*

¹⁰¹ Lloyd G. Austin, interview by Madison Scott, April 2, 2013, Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://crbb.tcu.edu/interviews/1/interview-of-lloyd-austin>

¹⁰² “The Color of Hate,” *Star-Telegram*, October 6, 2002.

¹⁰³ Lloyd G. Austin, interview by Madison Scott, April 2, 2013, Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://crbb.tcu.edu/interviews/1/interview-of-lloyd-austin>

¹⁰⁴ Lloyd G. Austin, interview by Madison Scott, April 2, 2013, Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://crbb.tcu.edu/interviews/1/interview-of-lloyd-austin>

Telegram editorial and the white community's defense of Riverside marked the arrival of the rhetoric and tactics of massive resistance in Fort Worth, which soon organized to resist the threat of desegregation to white supremacy.

Following the Supreme Court decision in *Brown II* that school districts should desegregate with "all deliberate speed," the Fort Worth School Board and white community engaged in more far reaching resistance to desegregation. At a Board meeting in July 1955, the School Board initiated a bureaucratic resistance by voting to continue segregation, an action that they would repeat until the NAACP brought litigation against the district in 1959. While the NAACP's drive for justice and equality would ultimately initiate a mandatory desegregation process beginning in 1963, in 1955, the School Board refused to even open the issue for discussion, engaging in what would become an established a pattern: they would maintain a system of segregation that they would also refuse to discuss in official meetings. The Board's method of quiet segregation complemented the larger white community's response, especially those who formed the Tarrant County Citizens' Council at the downtown Fort Worth Hilton Hotel on Thursday night, August 11, 1955. The group engaged in zero-sum segregationist politics that viewed any threat to segregation as a threat to the entire edifice of white supremacy.

The Board coupled its action to maintain segregation in 1955 with its rejection of black community input on the desegregation process. At the meeting, a desegregation committee led by prominent black Fort Worth citizens, Dr. George Flemmings, Dr. Riley Ransom and Dr. Marion Brooks pressed the board to "reorganize the public schools of Fort Worth on a non-segregated basis."¹⁰⁵ The three black activists had championed civil

¹⁰⁵ "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education," July 13, 1955, Fort Worth Independent School District, Vol. 34, 1956-57, 2.

rights for decades. Flemmings led the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People since the 1930s, Brooks worked to improve access to medical care in black communities, and Ransom was the first African American to run for city council. Citing *Brown II*, the committee stressed that the Constitutional rights of black students were at stake. “Whatever the difficulties are in according children their constitutional rights,” Flemmings stated on behalf of the committee, “it is clear that the Board of Education will seek a resolution to the question in accordance with the law of the land.” Flemmings’ statement reinforced to the Board that the challenge facing them was not whether to protect the Constitutional rights of all Fort Worth students, but how they would do so.

Black activists also emphasized how *Brown II* gave local school boards enormous power in determining whether schools would remain segregated. “You are directly responsible,” Flemmings challenged the Board, “to take immediate steps leading to the elimination of segregation in the public schools.” The Board followed this appeal for justice by voting to maintain segregation. Citing the “administrative problems involved in ending segregation,” Board member Atwood McDonald cautioned his colleagues against making decisions in “an emotional, hurried, and careless manner” and urged a more gradual approach.¹⁰⁶ The other Board members apparently agreed, as they closed discussions and voted unanimously to delay *Brown’s* implementation.

The Tarrant County Citizens’ Council worked in tandem with the Board to resist desegregation in Fort Worth. At their first meeting, they elected local salesman and Fort Worth resident Howard Beard to serve as the Council’s temporary chair. In explaining his

¹⁰⁶ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 13, 1955, Fort Worth Independent School District, Vol. 34, 1956-57, 2.

group's determination to preserve segregation, Beard told the *Star-Telegram*, "We are prepared to enjoin in court any Tarrant County school which attempts desegregation on the ground that desegregation violates state laws which have not been rescinded."¹⁰⁷ Beyond rejecting the legal and moral obligation of school desegregation, Beard's statement implies that segregationists would resist even a school's voluntary attempt to desegregate. Less concerned with philosophical defenses of states' rights, Beard's position reflected how the Citizens' Council movement was determined to use state laws as tools to maintain white supremacy.

Refusing to give an inch, the Tarrant Citizens' Council appealed to Fort Worth using fear-mongering tactics typical of segregationists in other parts of the South. On August 19, the *Star-Telegram* published a Council advertisement in which the local group tapped into white fears of miscegenation and cast the NAACP as a militant and radical enemy. In bold letters the ad declared: "**Segregation!**" and appealed to Fort Worth citizens who "[do] not believe in doing away with segregation immediately in every way, including schools, parks, swimming pools, and golf courses thru lawsuits of a highly organized NAACP."¹⁰⁸ By casting the NAACP as highly organized, the Council's ad echoed common propaganda that the "civil rights movement was wholly the result of 'outside agitators,'" rather than a local movement.¹⁰⁹ The ad also tapped into Southern fears that desegregation would soon affect segregationists' private lives through miscegenation.

¹⁰⁷ "Tarrant Group Formed to Uphold Segregation," *Star-Telegram*, August 13, 1955.

¹⁰⁸ "Segregation!" *Star-Telegram*, August 19, 1955.

¹⁰⁹ Woodward, *Strange Career*, 168.

To segregationists, miscegenation did not merely connote interracial sex, but also the potential expansion of the Civil Rights Movement's push for equal rights into the segregationist's own family. As historian Jane Daily has argued, to the segregationist, "miscegenation ... was the root of all corruption in humankind."¹¹⁰ A "Letter to the Editor" in the *Star-Telegram* revealed the logic underlying common defenses of social segregation. J.O. Bean, who also claimed "we do not discriminate here in Fort Worth," wrote, "Everyone knows that when the white children and the Negro children are mixed in the public schools that they will sooner or later play together, eat together, swim together and later they will become so well acquainted from close association that they will learn to like each other, and finally intermarry, and then what will be the result?"¹¹¹ Bean's line of logic reflected the zero-sum thinking of segregationists. Even the smallest threat to segregation threatened the entire system and worldview of white supremacy.

Far from seeking to make Fort Worth an exception to Southern white supremacy, the Citizens' Council specifically modelled itself on councils in Mississippi and other Southern states. In Texas, Citizens' Councils articulated a white paternalism, which held that African Americans did not have a right to a voice in political debates over what amounted to their rights as American citizens. In July 1955, B.E. Masters, President Emeritus of the Kilgore Community College, emerged as an informal leader of citizens' councils throughout the state and explicitly articulated how he modelled Texas councils on those in the Deep South. Speaking to the *Dallas Morning News* on July 24, Masters claimed he spent "considerable time in Mississippi studying Citizens' Councils that have

¹¹⁰ Jane Daily, "The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 155.

¹¹¹ J.O. Bean, "Letter from the People: Crux of the Problem," *Star-Telegram*, September 11, 1955.

been formed there,” and that his council sought to “work in harmony” with affiliate councils in other southern states. In July, he formed the state’s first council in Kilgore. Over subsequent weeks, Masters helped organize councils in Dallas, Fort Worth, and the small town of Gilmer, where he drew a crowd of 1,325 to hear him speak.¹¹²

The formation of citizens’ councils also revealed that segregationists had no unified strategy for maintaining segregation. Guided by nothing but segregationist ideology, Masters admitted that his group had “not formulated any definite plan for carrying out our aims.”¹¹³ He did, however, reinforce his group’s desire that issues of desegregation and civil rights for all Americans should be defined and defended by white Americans. “If Negroes refuse to co-operate with us, then the whites will refuse to co-operate with them,” he stated. Given that civil rights groups like the NAACP would likely not cooperate with a group that strived to preserve racial hierarchies, Masters precluded African American involvement in conversations about equality and justice. Despite his lack of strategy, Masters proved compelling to many Texans as the state’s citizens’ councils eventually boasted 20,000 members, the equivalent of Arkansas and 10,000 less than Mississippi.¹¹⁴

As the Citizens’ Council movement spread throughout Texas, they continued to view state laws as tools to prevent any threat to white supremacy, rather than articulating broader conversations about constitutional rights and federalism. The Associated Citizens’ Council of Texas, a Dallas-based organization also established August 1955,

¹¹² “Upshur County Meeting Forms State’s Second Citizen Council,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 5, 1955.

¹¹³ “Citizens’ Council Head Calls for Co-operation,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 24, 1955.

¹¹⁴ Ladino, *Desegregating Texas Schools*, 41; Kirk, “Massive Resistance and Minimum Compliance,” in *Massive Resistance*, 84.

claimed that the *Brown* decision left state laws “confused, uncertain, and wholly inadequate” and that desegregation will “cause violence, hatred and possibly disease,” all of which are “contrary to the best interest.”¹¹⁵ Thus, it was segregation, not states’ rights that needed protecting. On August 11, 105 members met at the Hotel Dallas and adopted a resolution requesting Governor Allan Shivers to call a special legislative session. The group hoped for strong legal resistance at the state level based on the doctrine of interposition. First articulated by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions, John C. Calhoun famously revived the states’ rights doctrine in a defense of states’ right to maintain slavery. In the era of massive resistance, James Jackson Kilpatrick, editor of the *Virginia News Letter*, again revived the doctrine as a legal argument to preserve a state’s right to maintain segregation and resist *Brown*.¹¹⁶ To many Southerners, state governments had a Constitutional duty to interpose themselves between their citizens and the federal government to resist federal tyranny and segregation reinforced such arguments by stoking general distrust of the federal government. As Woodward stated, “Thousands were persuaded by Citizens’ Council propaganda to believe that whole branches of the federal government had been taken over by conspiratorial and mainly foreign subversives.”¹¹⁷

Distrust of the government influenced the climate of massive resistance in Texas. In the Cold War environment, segregationists in Texas argued that communists had infiltrated all levels of government, which could have drastic and far reaching effects on

¹¹⁵ “Segregation Session Requested of Shivers,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 12, 1955.

¹¹⁶ Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking Press, 2016), 20.

¹¹⁷ Woodward, *Strange Career*, 168.

every aspect of segregationists' way of life, including religious worldviews.¹¹⁸ On August 13, Carey Daniel, the vice-chairman of the Associated Citizens' Council and pastor of First Baptist Church in West Dallas, wrote an editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* warning readers that "the Communists would love a mongrelized America that they could easily enslave."¹¹⁹ Daniel based his claim on the segregationist theological view that the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted from the transgression of divine laws of segregation. "Anyone familiar with the Biblical history of those cities during that period can readily understand why we here in the South are determined to maintain segregation," Daniel stated.¹²⁰ Again reflecting a zero-sum approach to white supremacy, Daniel articulated a worldview that considered any level of desegregation a fundamental threat to every aspect of life. To segregationists, this threat could begin with something seemingly contained like school desegregation, but could expand to cosmic proportions. Maintaining segregation thus became necessary to stave off foreign influence and divine wrath. Fort Worth resident Elizabeth Dyson shared this view in her "Letters from the People" article, stating, "Only God will know the outcome if both races don't realize the appalling necessity of segregation. It is for all that this great state is taking this important stand." In Fort Worth, as elsewhere, desegregation truly threatened every facet of segregationists' way of life and worldview.

¹¹⁸ George Lewis, "White South, Red Nation: Massive Resistance and the Cold War," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 119.

¹¹⁹ "Biblical Basis for Segregation," *Dallas Morning News*, August 13, 1955.

¹²⁰ Jane Daily, "The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after *Brown*," in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 156.

Although segregationists continued to believe state Jim Crow laws would help preserve white supremacy, *Brown* had established a crucial legal precedent that overruled “separate but equal.” In August 1955, even the Texas Supreme Court ruled that *Brown* superseded state segregation laws. However, as the fall of 1955 approached, only 64 of Texas’s 2,000 school districts had adopted gradual desegregation plans, largely in private or parochial schools. Despite the uncertainty surrounding state segregation laws post-*Brown*, citizens’ councils remained determined to resist desegregation. In Big Spring, after the school district adopted a gradual plan, the Big Spring Citizens’ Council stalled by filing a lawsuit against the district claiming any attempt to desegregate violated the state’s 1948 Gilmer-Aikin laws. The *Fort Worth Press* stated that the laws required black and white schools to be funded separately.¹²¹ Ernest Sanders, a Fort Worth lawyer and chairman of the legal committee of Governor Shivers’ Subcommittee on Segregation, warned school districts that there is a “distinct possibility of jeopardizing the funds they are eligible to receive under the Gilmer-Aikin program.” Nevertheless, the citizens’ council lawsuit served as a short-term delay tactic, causing districts such as San Antonio and Amarillo to postpone desegregation because of the “confusion caused by the Big Spring suit.”¹²² In the longer run, however, state laws would provide no refuge for segregation.

More effective efforts to protect segregation drew on local school and city politics. At the September 14, 1955, Fort Worth School Board meeting, the Tarrant Citizen’s Council rejected the Board’s quiet approach to desegregation, advocating for an

¹²¹ “Segregation Councils’ Battle May Boomerang,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 25, 1955.

¹²² “San Antonio Plans Integration Delay,” *Star-Telegram*, August 28, 1955; “Big Spring Schools Answer Race Critics,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 24, 1955.

explicit affirmation of Jim Crow. Speaking for the group, Howard Beard asked bluntly, “Are you for us or against us?” Board President Armstrong welcomed the group and said they were “glad to have the citizenship show an interest in the schools.” However, he avoided taking a firm stance on segregation. “I don’t think it is my duty to determine whether we should have segregation,” Armstrong stated.¹²³ Despite Armstrong’s equivocal statement, under his leadership and recommendation, the Board had already made the unanimous determination to maintain segregation. Board member J. A. Gooch added that the July resolution to keep segregation “is our collective opinion. We passed it unanimously.”¹²⁴

The Board’s quiet maintenance of segregation reflected the bureaucratic resistance of the “Fort Worth Way,” which proved more committed to gradualism and avoiding conflict than to justice. Although the Board aligned itself with segregation by pointing to the July resolution, its members avoided agreeing on record with the Citizens’ Council’s racist demagoguery. Armstrong stated that, while he appreciated public interest in schools, if the citizenry “leave the school people alone (when integration comes), it will be accomplished with the least friction.”¹²⁵ As Armstrong seemingly acknowledged the inevitability of desegregation, he was well aware that because of the Supreme Court’s vague phrasing of “with all deliberate speed,” the Board would control the pace and scope of the desegregation process. In Fort Worth, this meant delaying for nearly another decade then accepting token desegregation without grappling with deeper structures of

¹²³ “School Board Awaiting Study on Integration: Schoolmen Say It Isn’t Their Duty to Decide if it is Right or Wrong,” *Fort Worth Press*, September 15, 1955.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” September 14, 1955, Fort Worth Independent School District, Vol. 34, 1956-57.

inequality supported by segregation. Further, Armstrong's Board would soon begin manipulating school zones to align with housing segregation, a practice that would eventually allow the Board to articulate a legal argument that only de facto segregation existed in Fort Worth, nullifying their legal obligation for meaningful desegregation remedies.

Rejecting Armstrong's more pragmatic approach to resisting desegregation, Beard stated, "Two generations of children will pay the price for our cowardice." "It is up to us to do something legally." Otherwise, he predicted the outbreak of violence. "Shotguns will come out if we don't give the people some legal means of fighting. We don't want to see violence break out. [It] would make the Klan look like grammar school kids."¹²⁶ Beard's drastic rhetoric reveals just how big of a threat desegregation posed to the white supremacist worldview and their sense of their "private life of power."

To segregationists like Beard, the moment demanded violent resistance to a civil rights movement that threatened the survival of white supremacy. In October 1955, Beard helped form the Mansfield Citizens' Council, a group that would soon act to resist desegregation at Mansfield High School. Speaking at the first Mansfield Citizens' Council meeting on October 25, Beard repeated the segregationist refrain that the Supreme Court justices were communists. However, he added a stark warning. "Our days as a national race are numbered... Once mixed they can never be unmixed, and this [is] the surest and most certain way to destroy us. If we don't organize, it will be our children who will pay the price in the next two generations for our cowardice."¹²⁷ In July 1956, J.

¹²⁶ "School Board Awaiting Study on Integration: Schoolmen Say It Isn't Their Duty to Decide if it is Right or Wrong," *Fort Worth Press*, September 15, 1955.

¹²⁷ Ladino, *Desegregating Texas Schools*, 80-1.

Evetts Haley, a segregationist candidate for governor similarly told a citizens' council audience in Fort Worth that "integration means the eventual down-breeding of our race."¹²⁸ Segregationists had come to view racial justice and equity as a threat to white supremacy and even white existence. Yet, while they sought to neutralize the threat of violence by seeking "legal means to fight integration," citizens' councils provided an organizational channel that legitimized and gave an aura of respectability to racism and white supremacy.¹²⁹

A Citizens' Council rally on March 16, 1956, at Will Rogers Colosseum underscored the popularity of the white supremacist ideological take on maintaining segregation in Fort Worth. The rally drew a crowd of 1,400 to hear segregationists promote freedom of choice, interposition, and white supremacy. Of those in attendance were Haley, B. E. Masters of the Kilgore Citizens' Council, Congressmen John J. Flynt of Georgia, and John Bell Williams of Mississippi. The outspoken segregationist Senator James O. Eastland was scheduled to speak, but he was delayed in Washington D.C. The morning of the rally, Ross Carlton, president of the Associated Texas Citizens' Council and candidate for Texas Attorney General, referred to the Supreme Court Justices as "a bunch of monkeys" as he spoke to a group of 35 people at Hotel Texas.¹³⁰ Carlton argued that white people needed to maintain power in order to keep order and to avoid being governed by African Americans, who he referred to as "semi-civilized" people. "[We] are not fighting the Negro," but fighting the usurpation of state and judicial power, Carlton said. "In 200 years, he [African Americans] has come from a sharp-toothed savage who

¹²⁸ "Voluntary Mixing of Races Scored," *Star-Telegram*, July 27, 1956.

¹²⁹ McMillan, *The Citizens' Council*, 114.

¹³⁰ "Integrated Union Here Tells Eastland, 'Go Home,'" *Star-Telegram*, March 16, 1956.

would eat his neighbor to a semi-civilized individual.”¹³¹ Carlton’s comments not only revealed the influence of white supremacists in Fort Worth, but they also reinforced how many segregationist arguments for states’ rights and anticommunism in the era of massive resistance were simply tools to maintain a racist power structure.

The rally further underscored the fact that outspoken segregationists lacked a unified strategy to preserve white supremacy. Speaking to the large crowd, segregationists employed arguments for interposition, states’ rights, anticommunism, freedom of choice, and even secession as potential tactics of resistance. Former State Senator Robert A. Stuart argued that Texas had a right to secede because the Supreme Court’s actions “voided the treaty under which Texas entered the union.” Stuart’s argument for secession apparently fell on deaf ears and he pivoted to an argument for school choice. Born in 1887, Stuart had served in the 38th, 39th, and 40th state legislatures from 1923 to 1928. Regarding school desegregation, he proposed dividing schools into “all-white, all-negro, and mixed,” then letting people choose. Yet, parents who choose to send their children to mixed schools are “Communist thinkers, left-wingers and fellow-travelers.” Standing in front of a Confederate Flag, he ended by encouraging the impeachment of all of the Supreme Court Justices.¹³² Following Stuart, John Gano of the Tarrant Citizens’ Council steered the rally back to the familiar territory of interposition.¹³³ Justifying the states’ rights doctrine, Congressman Flynt of Georgia later told the crowd that the Supreme Court Justices have “committed an act of treason against the Constitution of the United States.”¹³⁴ Beyond the importance of segregation in

¹³¹ “Highest Court Criticized for Racial Ruling,” *Fort Worth Press*, March 16, 1956.

¹³² “San Antonio Plans Integration Delay,” *Star-Telegram*, August 28, 1955.

¹³³ “Secession? Never, Says Lawyer Bob,” *Fort Worth Press*, March 18, 1956.

¹³⁴ “Secession Hint Causes Segregationist Trouble,” *Star-Telegram*, March 18, 1956.

maintaining white supremacy and ignoring the Constitutionality of *Brown*, the outspoken segregationists of the citizens' council movement lacked a coherent strategy to enact their views. Following the rally, the Citizens' Council hosted a private dinner for their guests at Ridglea Country Club.¹³⁵

Segregationists in Texas also had to confront the reality that federal appeals courts increasingly reaffirmed *Brown* in desegregation cases. In August 1956, a mob of segregationists from throughout North Texas converged on Mansfield High School to prevent a federal court order permitting black students to register. In the case that led to the desegregation ruling in Mansfield, *Jackson v. Rawdon*, a district court judge permitted the Mansfield School Board to delay desegregation for a year, revealing how local judges often helped districts resist *Brown*. However, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the decision and characterized the Mansfield School Board as deliberately prolonging segregation. "The board had not given serious consideration to its paramount duty not to delay but to proceed with integration in respect to the sole high school in Mansfield, but quite to the contrary, had taken definite action to continue segregation there throughout the coming school year," the Appeals Court stated.¹³⁶ *Jackson* revealed that once litigation was brought against a district, gradualism, which a federal district court judge may approve, could be overruled on appeal. Following the reversal, three black students were scheduled to register at Mansfield High in a matter of days. Formerly, black students in Mansfield who wanted to attend high school had to travel 20 miles to I.M. Terrell, Fort Worth's only high school for African Americans in the Tarrant County area.

¹³⁵ "Integrated Union Here Tells Eastland, 'Go Home,'" *Star-Telegram*, March 16, 1956.

¹³⁶ Ladino, *Desegregating Texas Schools*, 89.

Following the exhaustion of legal challenges, the white Mansfield and broader North Texas community resorted to mob tactics to resist desegregation. In the days leading up to registration day, whites hung three effigies around town, including one that replaced the American flag on the high school flagpole.¹³⁷ Then, on August 30, 1956, registration day, a mob of about 500 white Texans surrounded Mansfield High School to block the black students from registering. Governor Shivers ordered the Texas Rangers to arrest anyone who may incite the mob to violence, ensuring the African American students would be detained if they appeared on campus. “It just wasn’t safe, so we couldn’t get them in ’56,” L. Clifford Davis, the Fort Worth NAACP lawyer representing the plaintiffs later recalled.¹³⁸

President Eisenhower did not intervene on behalf of the black students as he would a year later in Little Rock, and Mansfield thus served as a model of success for the forces of massive resistance. Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland praised Shivers for his actions. “The hope for the South is in following the example of Gov. Allen Shivers of Texas who used the police power to preserve segregation in education in order to prevent riots and disorders.”¹³⁹ The federal government’s refusal to intervene in desegregation cases and enforce federal law emboldened resistance. As Woodward stated in the *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, “Given the temper of the times in the country at large and the mood of the Eisenhower Administration, the prospects for the success of resistance in the South were not at all bad.”¹⁴⁰ This changed however with federal intervention in Little Rock a year later, which diminished the hopes that massive resistance could succeed through

¹³⁷ L. Clifford Davis, interview with author, March 13, 2018.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ “Sen. Eastland Says Shivers Showed Way,” *Austin American Statesman*, September 18, 1956.

¹⁴⁰ Woodward, *Strange Career*, 162.

showdowns at schools. While massive resistance to desegregation would persist well into the 1960s and 1970s, after 1957, in school districts throughout the South, segregation was largely reinforced not through outright defiance of federal law, but through local officials narrowing the limits of desegregation. The citizens' council movement largely faded following federal intervention at Little Rock. In Fort Worth, segregation would be maintained more by local bureaucracy than outspoken segregationists articulating explicit white supremacist worldviews.

Beyond delaying desegregation, another tool the Fort Worth School Board used to maintain segregation was school attendance zones. Until 1967, the Board maintained dual attendance zones that allowed white students to attend their neighborhood school, but assigned black students to the nearest black school, regardless of distance.¹⁴¹ However, the Board proved willing to abandon the neighborhood assignment plan for white students when necessary to reinforce school segregation.

The Board took advantage of demographic shifts and encouraged white flight out of increasingly black neighborhoods in ways that contributed to broader patterns of residential segregation. Between 1950 and 1960, the city's population grew by nearly 80,000 and the school district faced overcrowding with 11,000 students attending classes in temporary facilities in 1956.¹⁴² Overcrowding particularly affected the black community. The all-black James E. Guinn Elementary and Junior High School in South Fort Worth projected enrollment in 1956 at 1,739, despite only having capacity for 1,200 students.¹⁴³ The nearby and all-white East Van Zandt Elementary School projected

¹⁴¹ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

¹⁴² Texas Almanac: City Population History, 1850 – 2000, <https://texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf>

¹⁴³ "Van Zandt to Admit Negroes," *Star-Telegram*, July 7, 1956.

enrollment at 67. Similarly, the nearby, all-white school, Carroll Peak Elementary projected 150 students for the 1957 school year.¹⁴⁴ Noting the “exodus of white families” and influx of black families in the area, new Superintendent Joe P. Moore decided to close the two white schools and reopen them as segregated black schools, rather than desegregating the schools and allowing white and black students be educated near their houses. The Board’s actions encouraged white flight by transferring Carroll Peak’s remaining students to all-white schools further away. In the summer of 1956, the Board also voted to continue segregation again. Defending its position, the Board claimed that a desire to prevent “the transfer of large number of students which would ... aggravate ... problems” related to overcrowding. By transferring white students, the Board coupled its attempt to alleviate overcrowding with policies that maintained segregation. James E. Guinn remained overcrowded in 1957 with a projected enrollment of 1,391 students.¹⁴⁵

As the Board manipulated school boundaries to reinforce segregation, school officials concluded a five-year study that exposed the lasting effects of separate and unequal schools on black students. The report determined that African American 6th-graders were at least two years behind their white counterparts and discrepancies between white and black learning increased as children got older.¹⁴⁶ The results of the study amounted to the most direct evidence of the consequences of Fort Worth’s segregated school system, which denied African Americans their Constitutional right to an equal, non-segregated education. Nevertheless, the Board continued its delay tactics after the NAACP challenged Fort Worth’s segregated school system in 1959. School officials

¹⁴⁴ “Carroll Peak May Be Negro School,” *Star-Telegram*, June 8, 1957.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ “Negro Pupils Here Are Grades Behind Whites,” *Star-Telegram*, September 13, 1956.

defended the segregated district by stating, “We sincerely believe this system best serves the needs of every child who attends our schools.”¹⁴⁷ With knowledge of the district’s own study revealing the disparities in learning outcomes for white and black education, the Board’s defense rings hollow. Responding to the lawsuit, the district’s attorney echoed segregationist rhetoric and accused the “NAACP of having ‘inspired’ the lawsuit in order to admit en masse all the colored children of Fort Worth into the white schools.”¹⁴⁸ Desegregation would not begin for four years as the Board engaged in delaying desegregation as long as legally possible.

The Board’s bureaucratic resistance successfully delayed any level of desegregation until 1963, nine years after the first *Brown* ruling. In December 1960, the federal district court permitted the Board’s request to delay proceedings until the next year because a Board member was sick. The same District judge also presided over the Mansfield case and issued the initial *Jackson* ruling that permitted continued segregation and was later overruled by the Appellate Court. However, in 1961, the new District Judge Leo Brewster warned that “Fort Worth Independent School District cannot avoid the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and that such a decision makes unconstitutional the dual system based on racial segregation under which the schools in such District are now being operated.”¹⁴⁹ In response, Superintendent William S. Potts testified, “I don’t think the Supreme Court decisions call for mingling. I think it calls for no discrimination, and we do not discriminate in Fort Worth.”¹⁵⁰ Potts reiterated false notions of Fort Worth innocence and white supremacist arguments for “separate but equal” that overlooked the

¹⁴⁷ “Fort Worth Going to Court on Integration,” *Austin American Statesman*, October 8, 1959.

¹⁴⁸ “Tracing Fort Worth’s Desegregation,” *Star-Telegram*, September 5, 1982.

¹⁴⁹ “Integrate in ’62, City Told,” *Star-Telegram*, November, 10 1961.

¹⁵⁰ “Tracing Fort Worth’s Desegregation,” *Star-Telegram*, September 5, 1982.

glaring evidence of achievement gaps between white and black students and the reality that the district remained completely segregated. Further, Potts' statement falsely asserts the underlying implications of *Brown* to be ending discrimination, rather than dismantling a fundamentally racist system of white supremacy upheld by segregation. As long as segregation continued, so would white supremacy and discrimination. Following the new District judge's requirement that desegregation begin soon, the Board appealed the case to the Fifth Circuit.¹⁵¹

While facing legal challenges to the district, the Board continued enacting policies that reinforced residential and school segregation. In June 1961, the board voted to close both Morningside Elementary and Middle School in South Fort Worth and reopen them as segregated black schools at the start of the school year. As before, white students who remained in the residential boundaries of the now-segregated black schools would be transferred to white schools in other neighborhoods, a reality that drew no protests from white parents. School administrators considered this the best mode of action as "an increasing number of white families sold their homes to Negroes and moved to other sections of the city."¹⁵² As white families moved to the suburbs, areas like Morningside in South Fort Worth grew in population by 176%, as many black families moved closer to the city.¹⁵³ Board policies had reinforced segregated school zones so much that by November 1961, the *Star-Telegram* reported that "only a few Negro children and a few white children live closer to one school than the one they attend."¹⁵⁴ More than outspoken

¹⁵¹ Tina Nicole Cannon, "Cowtown and the Color Line: Desegregating Fort Worth Schools," PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2009, 120.

¹⁵² "Two Schools Changed from White to Negro," *Star-Telegram*, June 29, 1961.

¹⁵³ "TCU has Brains but the Money goes to Ridglea," *Star-Telegram*, July 28, 1957.

¹⁵⁴ "Integration Wouldn't Require Shuffling Many Fort Worth Students," *Fort Worth Press*, November 12, 1961.

arguments for white supremacy, the Board's actions contributed to a gradual shift in segregation from a legal doctrine to a geographic reality in Fort Worth.

As in Mansfield, local intransigence on the part of the school board was ultimately rebuffed by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Despite federal litigation against the district, the Board reiterated claims that Fort Worth stood out as more moderate than other Southern locales and held that the district was nondiscriminatory and would willingly desegregate when the Board deemed it necessary. Nonetheless, in February 1963, Fort Worth was one of 53 school districts in Texas that received a letter of warning from the U.S. commission of education stating that they could lose federal funds if they did not desegregate. The Appellate Court handed down the decision requiring desegregation in 1963 and stated, "In effect, the board was urging that a court order is not needed (for a Negro to enroll in a white school here in Fort Worth) because the board, when an action demands, might alter its policy." However, the Board has "shown no disposition to change even though the principal purpose of this lawsuit to achieve that end."¹⁵⁵ The Board even assumed that the NAACP was mistaken in assuming that its case represented a class action lawsuit, stating "the spirit of good will, understanding, and harmony among the citizens of Fort Worth and the justified pride that is unanimous among all its citizens in the school system."¹⁵⁶

The Board's bureaucratic resistance created a situation in which its eventual compliance with the federal courts resulted in only token desegregation. Fort Worth's adoption of a "stair step" desegregation plan in 1963 meant that schools would not be completely desegregated on paper for 21 years after the initial *Brown* ruling. Although

¹⁵⁵ "U.S. Court Says Schools Here Must Integrate," *Star-Telegram*, February 7, 1963.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the Star-Telegram seemingly took pride in the lack of conflict with headlines reading, “Integration of Schools Without Incident Here,” such proclamations reinforced notions of Fort Worth exceptionalism that obscured bureaucratic and community resistance.¹⁵⁷ Further, with only 20 African Americans entering white schools in 1963, premature proclamations of successful desegregation overlooked how the district remained almost completely segregated.

The beginning of desegregation was limited in scope in 1963 because the board did not revise its segregated school zoning policies until 1967. Dual attendance zones formed the basis of the segregated school system with one zone for white and a separate zone for black students. “The larger zones for the Negro schools overlapped the smaller zones for the white schools and sometimes covered several of them,” the District Court later stated.¹⁵⁸ In fact, S.T. Willis, the district’s Child Accounting Director in 1963, reported that the only changes in school zoning since 1954 were designed to transfer white students from schools in neighborhoods with growing black populations such as Carroll Peak, East Van Zandt, and Morningside.¹⁵⁹ By 1963, Willis noted that only 89 African American students lived in white attendance zones. L. Clifford Davis, the NAACP attorney representing the plaintiffs in the desegregation suit, criticized the first desegregation plan precisely because it “maintains racially drawn district lines so that Negro students will forever be initially assigned to so-called Negro schools.”¹⁶⁰ Despite Board President Atwood McDonald’s recognition that “token integration [is not] the

¹⁵⁷ “Integration of Schools Without Incident Here,” *Star-Telegram*, September 4, 1963.

¹⁵⁸ *Flax v. Potts*, 1970.

¹⁵⁹ “50 ‘Eligibles’ in One District,” *Star-Telegram*, 1963, Fort Worth Central Library, Folder “Desegregation.”

¹⁶⁰ “Negro Attorney Asks Judge to Reject Grade-a-Year Plan, Order Mixing,” *Star-Telegram*, 1963?

spirit of *Brown v. Board of Education*,” the School Board’s failure to alter segregated zoning until 1967 amounted to just that.¹⁶¹ After the first phase of desegregation in 1963, 79 schools remained segregated.¹⁶²

The Board’s reliance on housing patterns to maintain school segregation represented their adoption of de facto legal arguments that viewed residential segregation as beyond the obligation of school desegregation remedies. The de facto segregation argument has been largely debunked by historians. As Mathew Delmont argues in *Why Busing Failed*, “in every region of the country, neighborhood and school segregation flowed from intentional public policies, not from innocent private actions or free-market choices.”¹⁶³ Additionally, the Board’s reliance on de facto legal arguments represented the arrival of national politics of resistance to desegregation. From Los Angeles to New York, school boards used de facto arguments to exonerate themselves from desegregation. In Fort Worth, the Board similarly began employing the de facto argument in 1965 when they decided to ‘speed up’ desegregation so that all schools from first through twelfth grade would be desegregated on paper by 1967. Announcing the accelerated desegregation plan, Superintendent Eldon Busby emphasized the “neighborhood school” will now form the basis of student assignment. Regardless of race, Busby stated, students will attend the school closest to their homes, which would “mean that schools in predominately white neighborhoods will remain predominately white and schools in Negro neighborhoods will have mostly Negro students.”¹⁶⁴ Reporting Busby’s statement, the *Star-Telegram* stressed that “By no means will all of

¹⁶¹ “‘Token Mixing’ Not in School Planning,” *Star-Telegram*, February 3, 1963.

¹⁶² “Enrollment at Schools Growing,” *Fort Worth Press*, September 5, 1963.

¹⁶³ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 6.

¹⁶⁴ “School Segregation City Due to End by 1967,” *Star-Telegram*, May 4, 1965.

the Negro students be affected by today's announcement, however, because many or most of them live in Negro neighborhoods served by predominately Negro schools." The Superintendent's statement distracted from the endurance of segregation as well as from the ways in which School Board policies manipulated school zones to accelerate white flight out of neighborhoods with growing black populations.

After touting the decision as an "act of good faith," Busby added that it "was not reached with the aid of, or on request of, any Negro leader." Rather than reflecting an honest attempt to address segregation, the Superintendent's comments reflected a desire to legally insulate the district from the *Brown* mandate and to keep white students out of black schools, while at the same time rejecting black citizens' input on an issue that inherently involved their Constitutional rights. In 1972, recalling the Board's abandonment of segregated school zones in 1967, the Court of Appeals stated, "Because of marked residential separation of races in Fort Worth, little integration was accomplished by this [1967] revision in student assignment."¹⁶⁵ However, the Board continued through 1971 to argue in court that residential segregation "gives justification for [racial] imbalance" in schools.¹⁶⁶

While the Board's adoption of de facto legal defenses of segregation evaded their Constitutional obligation to desegregate Fort Worth's schools, it also obscured the role of local government in maintaining segregation. In Como, an all-black neighborhood sitting Southwest of downtown, bureaucratic resistance to desegregation was not limited to the School Board, but included city officials working to maintain a barbed wire fence,

¹⁶⁵ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

¹⁶⁶ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

dubbed the “Ridglea Wall,” that separated the black community from neighboring Ridglea, an all-white country club area located only a block away.

The “Ridglea Wall” served as a real and symbolic barrier between black Como and white Ridglea. According to the 1960 census, Como’s population was 98% black, had a median education of 8.6 years, and a median household income of \$3,144. Citing the census, City Manager H.D. McMahan noted that much of the housing in Como was “classified as deteriorating,” and the area largely lacked paved roads.¹⁶⁷ With a gridiron street system, Como resembles a square on a map and was blocked in by natural and manmade barriers. Guilford Road (now Bryant Irvin) with the “Ridglea Wall” served as its western border, Camp Bowie its northern, Lake Como its eastern, and railroad tracks its southern. Standing in stark contrast to Como, Ridglea was established as a country club community in 1928, and in 1960, its population was 100% white, had a median education of 13 years, and earned a median household income of \$9,000. None of Ridglea was classified as deteriorating.¹⁶⁸ In 1957 the Chamber of Commerce and TCU’s Sociology Department conducted a survey that found people living in Ridglea to have the city’s highest median income and noted how the “exodus from downtown to the suburbs” allowed communities like Ridglea to grow.¹⁶⁹ The Como-Ridglea dynamic highlighted how issues of educational and income inequality were inherently tied to school and residential segregation.

¹⁶⁷ Informal Report to City Council, Improved Access Between Como and Ridglea Neighborhoods, April 4, 1969, City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3.

¹⁶⁸ Informal Report to City Council, Improved Access Between Como and Ridglea Neighborhoods, April 4, 1969, Fort Worth Public Library Digital Archive, City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3.

¹⁶⁹ “TCU has Brains but the Money goes to Ridglea,” *Star-Telegram*, July 28, 1957.

City officials' active maintenance of the "Ridglea Wall" contributed to the stark contrast between the two neighborhoods. In 1947, city ordinance 2401 required all streets in Como and the developing Ridglea area to stop at Guilford Road, with no through streets connecting the two areas.¹⁷⁰ During the construction of apartments in the Ridglea area, a private company erected the "Ridglea Wall" along Guilford Road. While the Federal Housing Authority eventually took ownership of the apartments, it did not remove the fence. Beyond separating the two communities, the fence obstructed access of Como residents to public amenities such as the library, which was on the Ridglea side. Additionally, many in the Como community were employed as domestic workers in the Ridglea neighborhood and others worked at Ridglea Country Club. While the club was only 1,700 feet away, having to walk around the fence increased their commute to about 6,500 feet.¹⁷¹ Beyond serving as a physical barrier, the fence had a lasting psychological effect on Como's residents that is reminiscent of Chief Justice Earl Warren's description in *Brown* of the consequences of segregation. Describing growing up in Como, one resident relayed how the fence impressed upon him a sense of criminality. Walking around the fence, he stated, "There would always be a mindset like... I'm stealing something."¹⁷²

The city management fought to keep the fence and maintain the separation of the two communities to protect what they thought of as white public interests. In the late 1960s, the American Civil Liberties Union pressed the City Council and city planners to

¹⁷⁰ Ordinance 2401 City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 38.

¹⁷¹ Informal Report to City Council, Improved Access Between Como and Ridglea Neighborhoods, April 4, 1969, Fort Worth Public Library Digital Archive, City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3.

¹⁷² *One Square Mile: Fort Worth*, Brazos Film & Video, 2010. <http://www.brazosfilms.com/osm>

remove what they referred to as the “Berlin Wall” separating the two communities. City leaders responded that to do so would not be in the interest of the people of Fort Worth. Public Works Director Jack M. Graham and Traffic Engineering Director T.R. Buckman wrote to City Manager McMahan and Planning Director V.L. Mike Mahoney that “to have a well-planned, attractive city requires that some time each of us be inconvenienced, however most citizens feel the overall advantages are worth far more than the small inconveniences.”¹⁷³ Their comments disregarded how Fort Worth’s black Como community disproportionately experienced what city planners wrote off as a necessary inconvenience of urban development. Internal correspondence of city officials further revealed the city’s indifference to the plight of Como’s black community. On January 29, 1969, in a letter to H. Grady Helm, the Chairman Community Relations Commission, McMahan stated, “The departments which have analyzed this request, including the Planning, Public Works and Traffic Departments, are unanimous in their opinion that such an opening [between Guilford and Westridge Roads] would not be of public benefit.”¹⁷⁴ In light of the contrasts between Ridglea and Como, McMahan’s rhetoric suggests that he was primarily concerned with the white public’s interest. Disregarding how Como’s segregation contributed to lasting economic and educational inequality, city officials “Fort Worth Way” approach reflected the continued bureaucratic resistance to desegregation.

¹⁷³ Jack M. Graham and T.R. Buckman to McMahan and V.L. Mike Mahoney, December 12, 1968, Fort Worth Public Library Digital Archive, Ridglea Wall. City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3.

¹⁷⁴ H.D. McMahan to H. Grady Helm, January 21, 1969, Fort Worth Public Library Digital Archive, Ridglea Wall. City of Fort Worth Records, Record Group 2, Series I, Box 3

Although city officials spearheaded the drive to maintain the fence, the School Board was also implicated by the maintenance of segregated Como schools. Working with the Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union and Como's black community, a local doctor named Eck Prud'homme appeared before the City Council on March 17, 1969, and made clear to city leaders how segregated Como violated the *Brown* mandate for school desegregation. "It is a clear violation to maintain a 99% black school within two blocks of a virtually all white area," Prud'homme stated. "Thus, the city's failure to use its unquestioned power to complete streets through the 'wall' makes the city a material contributor to the school district's violations," he continued.

Prud'homme reminded city leaders of their legal and moral obligation to Como:

The physical evidence of a concerted attempt by the city of Fort Worth to physically isolate the Como area from the rest of the city is overwhelming. The fact that the area so isolated coincides exactly with the area occupied by a minority race makes this travesty the more reprehensible and will, if not corrected, make its effects all the more explosive. It takes little imagination to predict what such totally uncalled for treatment is leaving upon the minds and outlooks of the people of Como, and especially upon the minds of the young who know that common decency costs nothing.¹⁷⁵

Prud'homme's comments challenged the de facto argument that held residential segregation as exoneration for school segregation. As he reminded school officials, *Brown* mandated desegregation unconstitutional, regardless of causes. Writing to new Superintendent Julius Truelson in 1969, Prud'homme stated, "To say that those of the race which is discriminated against choose to go to the inferior schools in no way relieves the school board of the moral and legal responsibility to provide equal education opportunities for all children."¹⁷⁶ Frustrated by the inaction of both city and school

¹⁷⁵ Prud'homme to City Council, March 23, 1969. Desegregation Correspondence, 1969 – 1970, Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union Fort Worth, Texas, Box 14. University of Texas at Arlington.

¹⁷⁶ Prud'homme to Truelson, May 22, 1969, Como; Desegregation Correspondence, 1969 – 1970, Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union Fort Worth, Texas, Box 14. University of Texas at Arlington.

leaders, Prud'homme also wrote to national politicians, including Attorney General John Mitchell and Senator Ralph Yarbrough.¹⁷⁷ To Senator Mike Mondale, Prud'homme made it clear that the School Board's segregated attendance zones had created a situation in which "a larger number of Negro children [are] enrolled in schools with 95% Negro enrollment today than were enrolled in such schools when the order [to desegregate] became effective in 1963-1964."¹⁷⁸

Although the City Council ultimately resolved to remove the "Ridglea Wall" in the early 1970s, segregation continued to isolate Como and stark disparities continue to exist between the largely black neighborhood and its surrounding areas. Commenting on Como's continued isolation in 1974, sociologist Joyce Williams stated, "The black community [of Como] now sits in the middle of a 'land squeeze,' which threatens its existence."¹⁷⁹ Today, the neighborhood remains physically isolated and easy to overlook unless one intentionally drives there. While Como sits less than a mile from popular upscale shopping areas like Central Market and James Avery, many who live within two miles of Como are familiar with the neighborhood's name but have little geographic understanding of where it is. "I've heard of it, but I honestly don't know where it is," one woman told the author. Como's isolation from the rest of Fort Worth is not lost on Como's residents. "They're putting walls all around us. We can't be seen. They're

¹⁷⁷ Eck Prud'homme to Ralph Yarbrough, April 8, 1970, Como; Desegregation Correspondence, 1969 – 1970, Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union Fort Worth, Texas, Box 14. University of Texas at Arlington.

¹⁷⁸ Eck Prud'homme to Mike Mondale, August 20, 1970, Como; Desegregation Correspondence, 1969 – 1970, Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union Fort Worth, Texas, Box 14. University of Texas at Arlington.

¹⁷⁹ Joyce E. Williams, *Black Community Control: A Study of Transition in a Texas Ghetto* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 51.

literally boxing us in,” one stated.¹⁸⁰ Segregation that had once been city policy is now a feature of the landscape of Fort Worth.

Rather than “partnering for the common good,” the “Fort Worth Way” approach to school desegregation was one of resistance. Rejecting compliance with *Brown*, the Fort Worth School Board actively resisted desegregation through gradualism and by using the power of its local bureaucracy to reinforce neighborhood segregation as a protection of segregated schools. The local white community similarly acted to resist threats to white supremacy while city officials confined the city’s black community to relatively impoverished living spaces to protect white public interests. The myth of Fort Worth exceptionalism masked what amounted to wide ranging conservative defenses of white supremacy and a restructuring of segregation into the city’s spatial landscape. However, in 1971, the Supreme Court’s *Swann* decision challenged the notion that segregated neighborhoods could provide a legal refuge for the quiet maintenance of segregation. By enshrining school segregation into the spatial landscape of Fort Worth, the School Board ensured further desegregation measures would be necessary, making the crisis over “busing” in 1971 inevitable.

¹⁸⁰ *One Square Mile: Fort Worth*, Brazos Film & Video, 2010. <http://www.brazosfilms.com/osm>

IV. “GUARD AND KEEP:” “ANTIBUSING” AND THE NATIONAL POLITICS OF RESISTANCE

“Most people guard and keep,” James Baldwin stated in *The Fire Next Time*.¹⁸¹ Describing systemic racism in America, Baldwin highlighted how resistance to reform was often rooted in notions of American exceptionalism and white identity that are incompatible with the nation’s history of oppression and injustice. “They suppose it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping,” he continued, “whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be.” In describing the disconnect between white conceptions of self and political and historical reality, Baldwin helps bring to light the obstructionism of “color-blind” conservatism. In the 1960s and 1970s, the national “antibusing” movement employed seemingly “color-blind” language that legitimized resistance to desegregation and even achieved national political influence that limited the scope of the Civil Rights Act to exclude desegregation remedies in Northern cities.¹⁸² While “antibusers” claimed to be only acting to resist “forced busing” and protect “choice” and “neighborhood schools,” their adoption of “color-blind” language obscured how their actions maintained segregation. Picking up the torch of massive resistance to the *Brown* decisions, the politics of “antibusing” actively limited the national commitment to desegregation remedies and racial justice, obscured the persistent injustice of segregation, and thwarted many of the positive gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

¹⁸¹ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International Press, 1993), 86.

¹⁸² Mathew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (University of California Press, 2016), 49.

“Antibusers” in Fort Worth adopted the national “color-blind” discourse and legitimized local resistance to desegregation. While, in the 1950s, resistance to desegregation was explicitly rooted in white supremacist ideology, “antibusers” claimed to support desegregation and only oppose “busing.” Instead of speaking in the racist terms of white nationalism, they used phrases such as “forced busing,” “neighborhood schools,” and “freedom of choice” which functioned as an implicit resistance to school desegregation. With resistance now clouded in the language of “choice” and “rights,” even public officials openly supported “antibusing” views. School Board member Jim Harris argued, “I am not speaking against integration in public schools... it is the principle of *forced* busing of school children that I am against.”¹⁸³ Based on the perception that “busing” was forced, Harris voted against the “busing” provision of the Board’s desegregation plan that created “clusters,” or groupings of elementary schools, within which students would be transferred to comply with the mandate of the Supreme Court case *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* (1971). *Swann* established “busing” as a legitimate means to eliminate school segregation “root and branch.”¹⁸⁴ However, the adoption of “busing” rhetoric legitimized the Board’s piecemeal desegregation strategy and cemented the conversational shift away from justice and inequality by focusing on “busing” as the principal issue, rather than a means of achieving the necessary end of desegregation.

In addition to applying the civil rights rhetoric of rights and justice to “busing,” the grassroots “antibusing” movement obscured the forces that contributed to persistent

¹⁸³ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 6, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 1.

¹⁸⁴ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

segregation in Fort Worth. They echoed those “antibusers” in Charlotte, North Carolina, who “defended neighborhood schools through a color-blind discourse that evaded the historical roots of residential segregation.”¹⁸⁵ And they joined counterparts in Boston, whose focus on “busing” rather than desegregation “made it possible to oppose school integration without having to explicitly support segregated schools.”¹⁸⁶ In Fort Worth, similarly, the adoption of “busing” as a rhetorical framework to discuss school desegregation shifted the conversation away from segregation and the School Board’s role in manipulating school zoning around segregated housing patterns to maintain it. Without addressing housing segregation, the Board’s desegregation plans for 17 years proved ineffective. Even in 1971, the desegregation, or “busing,” plan was limited. Announcing it, Superintendent Julius Truelson reassured school principals that, when necessary, “busing will be minimal; time and distance will be quite short – a maximum of four miles and approximately nine minutes.”¹⁸⁷ Limiting the time and distance of school buses, the plan specifically sought to preserve “the neighborhood school concept,” which, as noted in the previous chapter, the Board had used as a fluid concept to reinforce segregation.¹⁸⁸ However flawed, the 1971 plan was fundamentally about school desegregation, but the focus on “busing” distracted from the plan’s limited scope, which included only 12% of the school population and left schools largely segregated.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Mathew Lassiter, “The Suburban Origins of “Color-Blind” Conservatism: Middle-Class Consciousness in the Charlotte Busing Crisis” (*Journal of Urban History*, vol. 30, no. 4, May 2004), 549.

¹⁸⁶ Mathew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 83.

¹⁸⁷ “Letter for All Principals from Julius Truelson, Subject: Integration Plan – 1971,” Folder “Integration,” Billy W. Sills Center for Archives, Fort Worth Independent School District, Fort Worth, 2.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

Both the School Board and local newspapers normalized “busing” rhetoric and delegitimized the NAACP and Black Power activists’ efforts to address how persistent segregation coupled with minimal desegregation policies burdened black communities. When addressing school policies, the black community largely rejected the rhetorical framework that considered the desegregation policy as separate from broader issues of segregation and racial justice. Speaking to the *Star-Telegram*, NAACP attorney Clifford Davis described the new plan as “totally inadequate.” “It puts the burden of busing on the Negro students because they don’t want to send the white kids to those old beat-up Negro schools,” Davis stated. The NAACP argued that it was necessary to have a more extensive plan that included the entirety of the school system.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, throughout the summer Black Power activists pressed the School Board to address the effects of segregation by adopting specific policy changes to improve black education. Some of the activists’ demands included teaching black history, non-Judeo-Christian religions, and courses on black political and economic development; additionally, they requested teacher aids in the classroom and black representation on the School Board.¹⁹¹ Following a Board meeting on July 28 at which black activists presented such demands, School Board President Rev. John Leatherbury told the press, “I don’t think we’re going to do anything about it. I really don’t.” Describing the same meeting, the *Star-Telegram* dismissed the activists as “black militants wearing African attire and giving African names.”¹⁹² As both the Board and the city’s wider political system lacked black representation, Leatherbury’s dismissal of black opinions amounted to a rejection of

¹⁹⁰ “NAACP Attorney Says Busing Plan Inadequate,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

¹⁹¹ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 28, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 1.

¹⁹² “Crowd of Young Blacks Rails at School Board,” *Star-Telegram*, July 29, 1971.

black input on policy decisions about Constitutional rights. The failure to accept black opinions on education as legitimate ultimately reflected how Fort Worth viewed black activism as a threat to the city's conservative desegregation agenda, which prioritized white opinions at the expense of black rights.

The Supreme Court case *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg* directly challenged Fort Worth Board of Education policies that reinforced neighborhood and school segregation up to 1971. In the aftermath of *Brown*, city and school officials aimed to prevent overt controversy about racism and delayed desegregation in ways that contributed to the reinforcement of school and neighborhood segregation. Up to 1971, the Board argued in court that residential segregation “gives justification for [racial] imbalance” in schools. Residential segregation was such that in 1967, when the courts required the board to cease discriminatory school zoning practices, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals stated, “Because of marked residential separation of races in Fort Worth, little integration was accomplished by this revision in student assignment.”¹⁹³ Under the previous zoning practice, white and black students were assigned to the nearest school of their race, rather than the school closest to where they lived, or “neighborhood school.” The Board's previous zoning policies primarily affected black students who only had one high school for decades; however, white students in racially transitioning neighborhoods were also transferred to white schools further away, reinforcing shifting neighborhood patterns. The fact that zoning revisions did little to desegregate schools is a testament to the pervasiveness of residential segregation in Fort Worth. By 1971, residential

¹⁹³ *Flax v. Potts* (1972)

segregation, reinforced by city policies, remained the biggest hindrance to school desegregation.

After abandoning racially-coded school zoning in 1967, the School Board continued using segregated residential patterns to reinforce segregated schools and closed black schools to achieve minimal court compliance for school desegregation. In 1969, the Board simultaneously voted to construct a high school in the all black Morningside neighborhood in South Fort Worth and to close two segregated black high schools, Como and Kirkpatrick. The Board justified Morningside's construction not in terms of desegregation, but by arguing that the school was best for the local community. This justification misrepresented how the project would also reinforce school and housing segregation. When proposing the project in 1969, Superintendent Julius Truelson claimed that it was the Board's duty to give Morningside residents the opportunity to attend their own neighborhood school.¹⁹⁴ Truelson noted that 80% of the students who attended the all black I.M. Terrell High School lived in the Morningside area and by the next Fall the area's high school age population was expected to be 1,904.¹⁹⁵ School officials and parents also contributed rising dropout rates among black teens to the distance they had to travel to attend Terrell.

While framed as beneficial to the black Morningside residents, the school construction ignored the legal mandate of *Brown* that "separate, but equal is inherently unequal." Moreover, the Board's decision to close the all black Como and Kirkpatrick High Schools for desegregation purposes complicates their logic for Morningside's construction. Not only would students from the closed schools no longer have a

¹⁹⁴ "NAACP May Sue to Stop Building," *Star-Telegram*, July 10, 1969.

¹⁹⁵ "Board to be Asked to Shutter Como," *Star-Telegram*, June 28, 1969.

“neighborhood school,” but they would ride a bus to white or black schools in other neighborhoods, a fact that drew no protests from the white community. Rather than desiring to improve black education by implementing meaningful desegregation policies that involved all of the Fort Worth community, the Board opted to move black students around like pieces on a chess board to maintain legal compliance with the courts while reinforcing residential segregation patterns that would continue to thwart equality and justice.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the “neighborhood school” concept proved largely meaningless in a rapidly suburbanizing United States. In 1965, a Massachusetts commission led by state Commissioner of Education, Owen Kiernan, concluded that “integrated education means better education when it is planned carefully and implemented decisively.”¹⁹⁶ Regarding “neighborhood schools,” the commission argued that the concept had more to do with race and class than geography, a reality supported by the Boston School Committee’s practice of busing white students to ensure that they went to white schools. In wondering why there is so much attention paid to “neighborhood schools,” the committee stated that the “distinguishing feature of the “neighborhood” is ethnic similarity.” Further, the commission added that “The neighborhood school concept, because of the ethnic housing patterns that exist in virtually all cities, means that [a] child is only able to learn and play with others like himself.”¹⁹⁷ The School Board’s use of the “neighborhood school” concept affirmed the Kiernan commission’s report. Rather than protecting “the precious freedom of our right

¹⁹⁶ *Because it’s Right - Educationally: A Summary of the Report of the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education.* Massachusetts State Board of Education, April 1965, 1.

¹⁹⁷ *Because it’s Right - Educationally*, 76.

to send our children to the schools of our choice in their own neighborhood,” as one Fort Worth woman later wrote, the Morningside project and the Board’s history of busing white students out of increasingly black neighborhoods reveals the Board’s fluid application of the concept to adapt to demographic shifts and maintain segregation.¹⁹⁸

Pointing out the unconstitutional basis of the project, the NAACP highlighted how Morningside High School’s construction would burden black students, reinforce segregation, and reflected the Board’s unwillingness to undertake good faith efforts to improve black education, which would require meaningful desegregation. “If you approve this it will be like driving another nail or two into our coffins,” R. J. Diamond, the vice president of the local NAACP chapter, told the Board. Diamond’s statement reflects how the NAACP viewed housing and school segregation as interrelated and believed that the persistence of segregation in any form would result in unequal education for black students. Davis supported his claim that the Board was unwilling to undertake good faith desegregation by citing data collected by the Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union, which revealed that, by the late sixties, 77.8% of black students remained in all black schools. The FWCLU report also stated that “Fort Worth ISD plans to continue limiting construction to either the all-white suburbs or to those central sites at which new construction will enhance racial isolation.”¹⁹⁹ The Morningside project, along with the closing of Como and Kirkpatrick, proved to be a continuation of the Board’s bureaucratic resistance to desegregation and prioritization of white public interest.

¹⁹⁸ “Neighborhood Schools Doomed?” *Fort Worth Press*, July 25, 1971.

¹⁹⁹ Informal Report #1570, presented to the City Council, January 9, 1970, FWISD: Como; General Correspondence January 21, 1969 – June 17, 1970. Greater Fort Worth Civil Liberties Union Fort Worth, Texas, Box 14. University of Texas at Arlington.

In June 1971, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals cited *Swann* to directly challenge notions that segregation in Fort Worth was de facto and not rooted in the city's history of de jure segregation. The Appeals Court required the board to abandon Morningside's construction and to "implement a student assignment plan ... that complies with the principles established in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*."²⁰⁰ To overcome the hurdle of residential segregation, any such plan would have to involve the Board providing transportation to reassign students to create desegregated schools. Furthermore, rooting the continuation of segregation in past policies, the Appeals Court stated, "*Swann* teaches that the continued existence of one-race schools in a school system with a history of state-supported segregation is presumptively discriminatory."²⁰¹ The Morningside project would have further reinforced residential and school segregation in South Fort Worth and was consistent with the School Board's history of viewing segregated housing patterns as legal exoneration from good faith school desegregation. As the legal ground of the School Board's policies shifted after *Swann*, the Board remained motivated to maintain local control of the desegregation process by pursuing minimal court compliance and preempting outside intervention from state or federal agencies. As of June 1971, the student population was 84,944, with 22,325 black students and 56 completely segregated schools.²⁰²

The same month as the Appellate decision, the Board unanimously passed a desegregation plan that integrated faculty and transported black students to white schools but resisted passing the "busing" provision that would confront pervasive school and

²⁰⁰ *Flax v. Potts* (1971).

²⁰¹ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

²⁰² "Schools to Devise New Mixing Plan," *Star-Telegram*, June 17, 1971; *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

housing segregation. On July 6, Board members Bill Elliot, Stan Harrell, Bobby Bruner, and Jim Harris voted 4-3 vote against the provision that would create “clusters” within which students would be reassigned to different schools.²⁰³ The provisions that the Board unanimously agreed to included faculty integration to achieve a ratio of 78% white students to 22% black students in all schools; a voluntary majority to minority transfer program “whereby a student attending a school where his race is in the majority may transfer to a school where his race is in the minority;” and free transportation for students transferring from the closed Como and Kirkpatrick High Schools.²⁰⁴ The majority-minority transfer option erroneously shifted the Constitutional obligation to desegregate to the students and their parents. Not a single Board member voted against transporting all of the African American students from Como and Kirkpatrick to other neighborhoods. Nor did any white parents protest the action that would require “busing” black students away from their now nonexistent “neighborhood schools.” After voting against the measure, board member Bill Elliot warned, “You mark my word, if it (busing) is passed, and the courts rule on it, people are going to be very unhappy – both blacks and whites.” Yet, by closing two black high schools, the Board effectively created a one-way “busing” policy that prioritized white public interest and placed the burdens of desegregation solely on black students.

Early on in the summer, African Americans in Fort Worth actively spoke out about school policies that affected their communities but rejected the “busing” framework as Elliot suggested.²⁰⁵ On June 23, Albert DeLeon, a resident of the

²⁰³ “Judge Given Board’s Mixing Plans,” *Star-Telegram*, July 8, 1971.

²⁰⁴ “Desegregation Plan Remains Incomplete,” *Star-Telegram*, July 7, 1971.

²⁰⁵ “Board to Receive ‘Hot’ School Issue,” *Star-Telegram*, July 11, 1971.

predominantly black Diamond Hill-Jarvis area, requested that the School Board petition the Department of Housing and Urban Development to delay construction of an apartment complex he claimed would “critically overload five area schools.”²⁰⁶

Following DeLeon, black high school and college students voiced their disapproval of the closings of Como and Kirkpatrick High Schools and school curriculum. Although the Board claimed the students arrived too late to speak, Limbusha Tarik relayed that the group desired black studies programs in schools and wanted to discuss the costs of transporting black students from the closed high schools.²⁰⁷ At the end of the meeting, the School Board made a motion to write HUD but did not address Tarik’s concerns. Early on in the summer of 1971, black activists confounded the notion that “busing” was the principal issue affecting Fort Worth schools and opted to address School Board policies that proved burdensome to black communities and caused overcrowding and one-way desegregation remedies.

Black citizens continued to speak out against limited desegregation policies that affected black communities in early July. As the Board gathered to vote on the new desegregation plan on July 6, Buford Eddington, representing the Como Betterment League, told the board how “citizens were very dissatisfied that [Como] was being closed.” Instead of closing the school, Eddington requested the Board to change boundary lines and reduce enrollment to 1,000 students. In this way, the burden of transferring students to new schools would not fall solely on the shoulders of the black Como community, but would be shared with neighboring Ridglea and Arlington Heights.

²⁰⁶ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” June 23, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 1.

²⁰⁷ “No Decision Reached on Integration Ruling,” *Star-Telegram*, June 24, 1971.

Following Eddington, Mrs. Erath questioned the limited scope of the “busing” plan under consideration. Particularly, she was concerned with Morningside and Dunbar Elementary Schools, “two of the largest” African American schools, which “were not being considered in the plan.”²⁰⁸ As Erath observed, the “busing” plan under consideration that the Board would shortly vote down for being too drastic, did not go far enough to address segregation. As the black community spoke out, the Board remained committed to a “Fort Worth Way” approach. Rather than taking active steps toward constitutional compliance and racial justice, the Board largely ignored black input in a manner reminiscent of the paternalism of white supremacy.

While Fort Worth’s black community petitioned for policies that directly addressed the lasting effects of segregation, Fort Worth’s white community adopted the national language of “color-blind” conservatism that legitimized open resistance to school desegregation. Following the meeting’s open forum and before the “busing” vote, Board member Jim Harris addressed the Board “as a concerned American who loves his country dearly.” Aligning himself with President Richard Nixon’s Silent Majority, Harrell stated that he was concerned with “my country not winning a war that it can win,” the existence of “a welfare state,” and a “lack of law and order.” Harris’ identification with the Silent Majority reinforced the national politics at play in Fort Worth. As historian Mathew Lassiter states, the Silent Majority consisted of “millions of Middle Americans who had lost faith in the future of their country [and] now embraced an ethos of victimization in the face of urban riots, campus demonstrations, rising inflation, and a

²⁰⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 6, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 5.

general sense of breakdown in traditional moral values.”²⁰⁹ The backlash against issues like “busing” and desegregation revealed how Nixon’s “silent majority” were only silent when the mechanisms of state worked in their favor. As “busing” threatened to level the playing field, they became outspoken in their resistance.

Harris employed the “busing” framework to discuss issues of rights and equality, stating, “I am not speaking against integration in public schools... it is the principle of *forced* busing of school children that I am against.” While Fort Worth ISD already provided 81 buses for children who lived further than two miles from their schools, the term “forced” implied the advent of something new. Considering that the provision required 20 additional buses, the only substantial change was that “busing” would now transport some white students to black schools. The primary intent of “busing” was to undo the city’s history of segregation. Obscuring that basic truth, Harris acted to “guard and keep” an ideology of white innocence rooted in segregation.

In adopting this “antibusing” rhetoric, Harris ignored segregation and the black students he voted to “bus” from Como and Kirkpatrick to white schools. Specifically, he employed the phrase, “freedom of choice,” which is an extension of “freedom of association” that was popularized by segregationists after *Brown*.²¹⁰ “One of the greatest freedoms that we possess as Americans,” Harris stated to his fellow Board members, “is the power of choice.”²¹¹ Harris defined that freedom as “the selection of where we are to live, what city, what state, or what neighborhood... and yes, we should have the power of

²⁰⁹ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 302.

²¹⁰ Kevin Kruse, “The Fight for Freedom of Association: Segregationist Rights and Resistance in Atlanta,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 100.

²¹¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 6, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 5-6.

choice of the school that we desire to attend.” Harris’ use of “antibusing” rhetoric blurred the line between white preferences and the Constitutional rights of black students at the heart of the *Brown* decision. In closing, Harris stated “that education is being used as a whipping boy.”²¹² By invoking a phrase historically used to describe one who unjustly incurs punishment on behalf of another, Harris posited that desegregation policies like “busing” punished, or “whipped,” public education. Despite Harris’ attempt to frame education as unduly punished by the whip of school buses, African American concerns in late June and early July paint a different picture in which black students incurred unjust punishment as School Board policies consistently rejected the Constitutional mandate to desegregate Fort Worth’s schools. The Board’s committed bureaucratic resistance deprived black students of their right to equal education through desegregation.

Although the majority of the Board members voted against “busing,” the threat of losing local control of the desegregation process changed their calculus. Since the Appellate Court ordered Fort Worth to comply with *Swann*, the Board’s rejection of the “busing” plan failed to meet minimum court compliance. District Judge Leo Brewster rejected the plan the following day in a “strongly worded rebuke,” and gave the board an ultimatum: include busing in the plan by July 16 or he will have a plan drafted by an outside “education expert.” In a prepared statement, Brewster told the Board they did not “have a right to disobey laws they dislike.” Elliot remained particularly defiant. “I vote my convictions and I can go to bed and sleep at night,” he responded in a conversation with the press. On Monday July 12, Board member Stan Harrell changed his vote to approve the “busing” provision of the plan in order to avoid outside intervention. “I

²¹² Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 6, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 5-6.

firmly believe we must keep absolute control of our school system here in Fort Worth,” he stated.²¹³ Judge Brewster approved the new plan on July 16 and scheduled its implementation for the beginning of the school year on September 1.²¹⁴ By maintaining local control, the Board could continue bureaucratic resistance through minimal compliance with the courts. However, with white students set to be “bused” to black schools in September, many of Fort Worth’s white community went into action to limit desegregation further and maintain a largely segregated system of education.

Following Harris’ lead on adopting the national politics of “busing” and “color-blind” conservatism, Fort Worth’s white community mounted a pressure campaign to preserve the alliance between public policy and white interests. At the July 12 School Board meeting (the day Stan Harrell switched his vote to approve the “busing” provision), “antibusers” echoed Jim Harris’ rhetoric and articulated their opposition to the new plan in terms of “busing,” “neighborhood schools,” and “freedom of choice,” not segregation. Robert D. Napier, a student at the predominately white Paschal High School, appealed to the board that the Supreme Court “slammed the doors on the last whispers of freedom of choice.”²¹⁵ Similarly, a Joe Bob Russell told the board he “believed taking children out of their neighborhood schools would harm their education, regardless of their race.” Neither Russell nor Napier acknowledged that the closing of Como and Kirkpatrick necessitated an increase of “busing” for black students; nor did they acknowledge that buses were already a prominent feature of school transportation. By treating “busing” as something new and neglecting the continued segregation that

²¹³ “4-3 Vote Reverses Old Move,” *Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

²¹⁴ “‘Clusters’ Ordered into Effect,” *Star-Telegram*, July 17, 1971.

²¹⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 12, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 2.

necessitated new strategies, these early rumblings against “busing” revealed the problematic aspects of the provision were not related to education generally but how it would affect white students specifically.

“Antibusing” also neglected the limited scope of the Board’s student transfer provision. The plan created six “clusters,” which included 11,000 students (12% of total school population) from 27 elementary schools.²¹⁶ Clusters grouped schools in similar geographic areas such as east, west, north, and south. Thus, under the plan, no student would be transferred across town. The total number of students who would ride a bus to a different school in their cluster was 2,696 second graders (3% of the overall school population), of which 1,353 were black and 1,343 were white. As stated, buses were required for students living more than four miles away from school and by 1971 there were 4,500 students riding 81 buses.²¹⁷ A year after the plan’s implementation, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals recorded the existence of 56 schools (16 black and 40 white) that remained segregated during the 1971-72 school year.²¹⁸ Despite the plan’s limited scope, the previous existence of buses for school transportation, and the continuation of segregation in much of the district, members of Fort Worth’s white community created an atmosphere of defiance and false crisis to protect existing racial hierarchies.

African Americans at the meeting challenged the “busing” rhetoric by sharing personal experiences of “busing” and calling out how residential segregation necessitated a new approach to an old problem. Texas Christian University student Franklin Callaway, who was the president of the campus’ Students for the Advancement of Afro-American

²¹⁶ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

²¹⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education,” July 12, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, Supplementary Material: “Plan Two,” 2.

²¹⁸ *Flax v. Potts* (1972).

Culture, explained the black community's history of "busing" to access the city's limited education opportunities, "I was bused into another city ... because I was forced to be bused," he stated. Responding to fears of "busing," Callaway countered: what "we're worried about [is] busing white children."²¹⁹ A Mrs. Arthur Hessin referred to "busing" as "band-aid for a much different problem" and spoke out against residential segregation.²²⁰ "Fair housing practices would have precluded this present dilemma," she stated. Callaway and Hessin's statements revealed African American experiences and opinions of "busing" differed from many in the white community. Rather than discussing "busing" as an issue in and of itself or lamenting the demise of "freedom of choice" and "neighborhood schools," black citizens reminded the Board how, by 1971, desegregation had not gone far enough, and the white community remained largely apathetic to their city's history of segregation.

"Antibusing" made resisting desegregation a popular, grassroots organizing platform in Fort Worth for the first time since the formation of the Tarrant Citizens' Council in 1955. Contrasting African American concerns about lasting segregation, white Fort Worth citizens' organized Citizens for Neighborhood Schools on Sunday night, July 11, and further popularized "busing" as the framework for conversations about racial equality and Constitutional rights. Approximately 100 people attended the first meeting and elected Jim Lucas as president of the organization. Lucas, a mortician in the Riverside area explained the purpose of CNS as preventing the courts and School Board from "forcing our children to attend schools they shouldn't attend."²²¹ Stating the group's

²¹⁹ "Frustrated Feeling Shared by Speakers," *Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

²²⁰ "Frustrated Feeling Shared by Speakers," *Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

²²¹ "Busing Foes Plan Legal Discussion," *Star-Telegram*, July 14, 1971.

purpose in this way made explicit CNS' determination to prevent white students from attending black schools. Throughout the summer, CNS would employ the "color-blind" language of "choice" and "busing" not as philosophical discussions of public policy but as tools of resistance.

Grassroots resistance to "busing" was ideologically motivated to maintain a broader system of segregation and racial hierarchy. Not only did the Board's desegregation plan involve only a small percentage of white students, none of the CNS leadership had children who would be "bused" to another school. CNS organized into nine areas, demarcated by Fort Worth's nine local high schools and its most prominent leaders were Jim Lucas, Rev. Eugene Hoover (Rep. Arlington Heights), Jay Mertz (Rep. East Fort Worth), Bill Parish (Rep. Paschal High School area) and Joe Cameron.²²² On July 23, *Fort Worth Press* journalist Carmen Goldthwaite reported that "None of the area representatives and officers of Citizens for Neighborhood Schools has children that will be affected by busing."²²³ According to Goldthwaite, Joe Cameron's youngest son was a junior in high school, but Cameron stated he was "tired of federal judges taking away from the legislative and executive branches of government." Likewise, Bill Parish's children would not be "bused" in the Fall and he justified his service to CNS by echoing School Board member Jim Harris. CNS is about "the power of choice in this country," Parrish told Goldthwaite. "Education is the whipping boy now." With its purpose defined, the group turned to rallying Fort Worth citizens against "busing" in hopes of forcing elected representatives to take a more urgent stand. However, with changes to Constitutional law unlikely, CNS' grassroots "antibusing" campaign could do little more

²²² "Anti-busing groups organize nine areas," *Fort Worth Press*, July 23, 1971.

²²³ "Anti-busing, but no children to bus," *Fort Worth Press*, July 23, 1971.

than cast doubt upon public education and shift conversations fundamentally about rights to defenses of residential segregation.

The momentum of the local “antibusing” movement revealed the city’s lasting accommodation of segregationist politics, nearly two decades after *Brown*. A CNS “we won’t bus our children” rally on July 20 at Mid-Town Church of Christ drew a crowd of 1,200 people. The rally allowed CNS to garner additional support and outline its strategy to prevent buses from rolling in the Fall. Speakers encouraged people to write their local, state, and national representatives to warn them that they will not be reelected if they fail to act decisively against “busing.” Simultaneously, CNS encouraged parents of children scheduled to be “bused” to boycott public schools altogether. In the era of “law and order,” the Silent Majority in Fort Worth, as elsewhere, promoted lawlessness as a veiled defense of residential segregation.²²⁴ “Feeling that the law of desegregation by busing was not right, many people seemed to agree that mass civil disobedience was better than compliance,” the *Press* stated.²²⁵

The rally also underscored the dynamism of massive resistance and “color-blind” conservatism. “Antibusers” used the language of the Black Freedom Struggle to limit and ultimately defeat many hard-won reforms. Positing “antibusers” as heirs of black civil rights protests, Rev. Eugene Hoover of Ridglea Baptist Church told the crowd, “If the civil rights demonstrations have taught us anything, it is that if enough people disobey an unjust law, they cannot put us all in jail.”²²⁶ The adoption of the rhetoric and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement highlights how “antibusers” falsely equated white privileges

²²⁴ Mathew Lassiter, “The Suburban Origins of Color-Blind Conservatism,” 571.

²²⁵ “‘Silent Majority’ takes a stand against busing,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 21, 1971.

²²⁶ “‘Silent Majority’ takes a stand against busing,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 21, 1971.

and black rights. The Civil Rights Movement fought for social justice by using the power of democratic mass protests and nonviolent direct action to expose the “negative peace,” as Martin Luther King, Jr. called it, of the unconstitutional and immoral system of segregation. Throughout the U.S. and acutely in the South, black activists exposed the violent underbelly of white supremacy as white communities and local bureaucracy used every available tool to resist the formidable threat to racial and economic hierarchies. Tools of white resistance included unlawful police action, bombings, and lynchings that killed 40 people from Emmet Till to Martin Luther King, Jr.²²⁷ Contrasting this historic liberation movement, CNS representatives and other “antibusers” in Fort Worth openly resisted “busing” to preserve “neighborhood schools” and “freedom of [public school] choice,” neither of which were Constitutional rights or even had substantial basis in reality. Ultimately, the appropriation of civil rights rhetoric is rooted in the perception that the Black Freedom Struggle of the 1950s and 60s had achieved its goals and was now overextending its reach. Such a perception flew in the face of the surmounting evidence that the School Board had not yet met its Constitutional obligation to desegregate Fort Worth schools, 17 years after *Brown*. Toward the end of the meeting, City Councillor John O’Neill stood before the crowd and encouraged them, “let’s fight!”²²⁸

A local pastor wrote the Press to point out the hypocrisy behind the supposed connection of “antibusing” to the Civil Rights Movement. Weldon Haynes, Associate Pastor of Meadowbrook United Methodist Church, critiqued the argument that one could

²²⁷ “The 40 Who Fell in the Turbulence of the U.S. Battles for Civil Rights,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1989.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

support desegregation, yet oppose “busing.” In a letter to the *Press* on July 25, Haynes stated, “When a person has to continually remind others through speech and in writing that he is “not a racist,” but opposes any attempts at integration, one wonders... where have these integrationists been for the past 17 years [since *Brown*].” Haynes’ comments confronted the false notion that “antibusing” was not a fight against desegregation generally. Throughout July and August, many in Fort Worth’s white community continued to popularize “antibusing” rhetoric locally and solidified the shift in conversation from desegregation to “busing.” With rallies, a letter-writing campaign, and the pursuance of alternatives to public education such as private and parochial schools as a means of avoiding the Constitutional mandate of publicly funded institutions, “antibusers” helped keep the local conversation away from racial justice and toward moderation. As “antibusers” cast themselves as freedom fighters, Hayes asked the pivotal question: “where were these same people in the midst of the civil rights demonstrations?”²²⁹

The scope of the local “antibusing” movement’s popularity and legitimacy was reflected in a letter writing campaign that continued to distract from the fundamental issue of desegregation. During late July and early August, the *Star-Telegram* and *Fort Worth Press* published “antibusing” letters on almost a daily basis. By printing the original words of citizens with no analysis from the newspaper, the Letters to the Editor format helped legitimize “busing” as the “common sense way to describe school desegregation.”²³⁰ While the total number of letters sent to local newspapers is unknown,

²²⁹ Letters to the editor: “Where were ‘integrationists?’” *Fort Worth Press*, July 25, 1971.

²³⁰ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 2.

the *Press* claimed their offices were flooded with letters and published some of them under titles like, “Those Busing Letters Keep Rolling In.”²³¹

While men dominated the leadership of CNS and the School Board, women took advantage of the call to voice their opinions to the local press. Pushing back against what they perceived as federal overreach into the private sphere of their homes, women reinforced “busing” as the framework of resistance. Like Irene McCabe, the “antibusing” activist who would later rise to national prominence in 1972 for marching 600 miles from Pontiac, Michigan, to Washington D.C., many women throughout the United States opposed “busing” explicitly in terms of motherhood. Women had long played a significant role in nurturing white supremacy and historian Mathew Delmont has noted how “antibusing” mothers were “part of a long history of women ... who have rooted their political claims in their identities as mothers or housewives.”²³² Reflecting national racial and gender politics in Fort Worth, Mrs. David Benzenhoefer wrote to the *Press*, “The government didn’t suffer the pains of labor during the birth of my children... Why then should these people have any right to take over the lives of my children? They are doing me and other mothers an injustice?”²³³ Similarly, Mrs. D. Flores asked, “How can the Supreme Court tell us what’s best for our children?”²³⁴ Viewing “busing” as a violation of motherhood, Flores and Benzenhoefer articulated legitimate concerns regarding the role of the state in the private sphere of life. However, their rhetoric was consistent with the “antibusing” framework in general and sidestepped the fundamental

²³¹ “Those Busing Letters Keep Rolling in,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 2, 1971.

²³² Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 144.

²³³ Mrs. David Benzenhoefer, Letters to the editor: “Busing idea still drawing protests,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 11, 1971.

²³⁴ D. Flores, Letters to the editor: “Airman Views Busing Issue,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 24, 1971.

issue of segregation in a public institution that is funded by tax dollars and bound by Constitutional law.

Other letters attempted to distinguish “antibusing” from overt racism. Repeating claims similar to School Board member Jim Harris, on July 12, Mrs. Ronald Brown wrote, “I am definitely not against integration. I believe each child should go to school closest his home. Busing is a form of artificial integration which is an insult to all.”²³⁵ Likewise, on August 1, Mrs. O. T. Clark Jr. wrote, “I am for integration; I am for freedom for all citizens. I am resolutely against busing to achieve a racial balance, as was Congress.”²³⁶ The attempt to portray desegregation and “busing” as separate issues neglected the historical roots of segregation and white supremacy at the heart of the “busing” controversy and distracted from issues of equality and justice at the heart of desegregation.

In defending “neighborhood schools” others brazenly acknowledged and defended the class divisions inherent to segregation and explicitly sought to protect middle and upper-class education, rather than promote equalization of education for all students. Pushing back against affirmative action policies, Mr. and Mrs. J.B. Miniatas wrote that they considered two-way busing (with both white and black students being transferred) unfair because middle-class children would be subjected to allegedly inferior black schools. “We think most middle-class citizens are unwilling to lower their standard of education [and] suffer the senselessness and inconvenience of forced busing,” the couple stated. “We will, however, welcome minority children into our neighborhood

²³⁵ Letters to the editor: “School busing opponents take up torch,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 26, 1971.

²³⁶ Letters to the editor: “Compromise would encourage more school busing,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 1st 1971.

school if they wish to come. Please give us this same freedom of choice.”²³⁷ The Miniatas defense of economically segregated neighborhoods reveals class consciousness lurking beneath arguments for “neighborhood schools.” By focusing on questions like: “Are we lowering our child’s learning potentialities in order to meet a certain ethnic ratio?” “antibusers” neglected the Constitutional rights of all students to have access to desegregated public education. Further, scholars have shown that one-way “busing” remedies burden poor black and white communities and allow middle-class and wealthy whites to evade the desegregation process by living in segregated suburbs.²³⁸ Indeed, without comprehensive two-way “busing” that encompassed an entire metropolitan area, the spirit of *Brown* would be defeated.

CNS also drew on a long tradition of using boycotts and private schools to avoid the Constitutional mandate of *Brown*. In states like Virginia and Georgia, officials passed legislation to establish tax vouchers to close public schools and send white students to private schools as a method of massive resistance to desegregation.²³⁹ CNS similarly called for a boycott of public schools and advocated the creation of private or parochial schools, which had the effect of maintaining segregation and creating a climate of diminishing confidence in public education. Parents of second graders in East Fort Worth met on Tuesday, July 27 to discuss such plans and East CNS representative Jay Mertz outlined the goals of a potential boycott. “State aid (based on average daily attendance in schools) would be cut and the schools would no longer have the racial balance busing

²³⁷ Letters to the editor: “Background and Achievement,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 13, 1971.

²³⁸ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*.

²³⁹ See Kevin Kruse, “The Fight for Freedom of Association: Segregationist Rights and Resistance in Atlanta,” in *Massive Resistance*, ed. Clive Webb (Oxford University Press, 2005), 106; and Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*, 70.

was designed to achieve,” the CNS representative stated.²⁴⁰ By thwarting the goals of “busing” (i.e. desegregation), perhaps the courts would see the cluster plan as futile and unrealistic, he reasoned. People at the meeting agreed to proceed with the boycott and CNS East Fort Worth began plans to organize “private neighborhood schools” in local churches to educate children who would not attend public schools. These volunteer schools would have volunteer state certified teachers so that the students would be qualified to advance to the 3rd grade the next year if they returned to public schools after the defeat of “busing.”²⁴¹

The letter-writing campaign was a part of a broader massive resistance movement to maintain segregation and its “color-blind” language helped protect the Board’s already limited commitment to desegregation from scrutiny. In this climate, even public officials like Harris joined in resistance efforts. Mayor Pro Tem Ted C. Peters helped organize the private White Lake School to help white students avoid attending school with black students. While some Fort Worth residents had already been working toward establishing a private school in the Meadowbrook area, Peters stated, “The busing situation caused them to speed up their plans.”²⁴² Similarly, among the 100 citizens who attended a rally in the Paschal area “to organize their fight to retain neighborhood schools” was Jim Harris. The *Star-Telegram* stated that Harris “was present at the meeting as an ‘interested party’ while members of the crowd congratulated Harris for standing firmly against busing.”²⁴³ The public spirit of resistance, masquerading as a fight for “choice” and “neighborhood schools,” granted legitimacy to the city’s weak commitment to

²⁴⁰ “East FW parents to act on boycott,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 26, 1971.

²⁴¹ “Parents backing proposed boycott,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 28, 1971.

²⁴² “Anti-bus school will open,” *Fort Worth Press*, July 26, 1971.

²⁴³ “Southside Citizens Plan Busing Protest,” *Star-Telegram*, July 30, 1971.

desegregation and perpetuated the notion of Fort Worth exceptionalism, which held that the city had already done enough to correct past injustices.

Fort Worth's "antibusing" movement and popular resistance to desegregation reflected state and national politics from local communities throughout America all the way up to the White House. President Richard Nixon significantly helped legitimize "antibusing" views and used his public and political influence to undermine desegregation efforts. After HEW prepared an extensive desegregation plan in Austin involving "busing," President Nixon "ordered the Justice Department to appeal the Austin plan to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit."²⁴⁴ The Appellate court rejected the HEW plan and the Austin School Board crafted a new plan that did little to address school segregation. Responding to the situation on August 4, the President stated in a televised address, "I have consistently opposed busing of our Nation's school children to achieve racial balance, and I am opposed to the busing of children simply for the sake of busing." Yet "busing" simply was not for the "sake of busing." The president's middle course approach was to instruct HEW to "work with individual school districts to hold busing to the minimum required by law."²⁴⁵

In *Why Busing Failed*, Delmont notes how Nixon feared his response to "busing" in Texas would affect his prospects to carry the state in the 1972 election. Thus, instead of using his public influence to ask for good-faith desegregation, Nixon's "speeches and statements on school desegregation and 'busing' were crafted so that politicians and parents from Charlotte to Los Angeles would view the Nixon White House as being on

²⁴⁴ "Texas School Official Confused by conflicting U.S. Stands on Busing," *New York Times*, August 8, 1971; Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 131.

²⁴⁵ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 131.

their side.”²⁴⁶ While President Johnson committed his political influence to federal civil rights legislation, however imperfectly, Nixon reflected the grassroots resistance efforts across the nation that undermined the Judicial Branch’s commitment to desegregation articulated in *Brown* and *Swann*.

Reneging on his Constitutional duty to enforce desegregation, Nixon further legitimized “busing” as a rhetorical framework to discuss black Constitutional rights. On Thursday, August 12, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission stated that President Nixon’s statements “almost certainly will have the ... effect of undermining the desegregation effort.” Theodore Hesburg, President of the Commission, added that “it is plain that in many situations ... transportation of students is essential to eliminating segregation.” Hesburg also argued that “antibusing” rhetoric distracted from the fundamental issue of desegregation. “Many in this nation, instead of recognizing and accepting this truth, have helped turn ‘busing’ into an emotion-laden word,” he continued. “What the nation needs was [sic] a call to duty and responsibility for the immediate elimination of the dual school system...”²⁴⁷ As in the 1956 Mansfield crisis, when President Eisenhower refused to condemn massive resistance to *Brown*, the Executive Branch again sanctioned resistance to school desegregation, sending the message to communities across the country that Supreme Court decisions could be ignored or defeated.

“Busing” sparked white backlash against desegregation in other Texas communities in 1971. In Houston, Mexican-American students planned to boycott Houston ISD in the fall in response to discriminatory busing policies. In Dallas, Tom Crouch, the Dallas County Republican Party chairman described “busing” as “easily the

²⁴⁶ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 117.

²⁴⁷ “U.S. Civil Rights Panel hits Nixon,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 12, 1971.

biggest crisis of my political career.”²⁴⁸ On August 12, Dallas voted to bus 7000 black students. The only dissenting vote on the Board came from the only African American Board member, Dr. Emmet Conrad. “It’s one way busing of blacks as usual,” Conrad stated. “I think it’s unfair and that vote is the only way I can show it.”²⁴⁹ The national politics of “antibusing” overlooked how segregation was not just a law but a geography of inequality, constructed and evolving over decades.

Ignoring segregation, “antibusing” activists desired to prove that their rhetoric and actions were not racist. On July 30, despite its veiled racism and maintenance of segregation, CNS invited Clay Smothers to speak to a crowd of 300. Smothers, a journalist from Dallas and self-described “most conservative black man in America,” rose to national prominence for being a black man speaking against “busing.” Smothers reflected a small minority of black views. However, the national media zeroed in on him as representative of respectable black perspectives on desegregation. This simplification of black views on “busing” was part of a broader white movement to ignore the NAACP, Black Power, and other civil rights activists’ demands for more far reaching reforms and redistributive justice. In Fort Worth, Smothers stated that it was insulting to him “as a black man to say we have to have white children sitting in our schools to give our schools quality.” To combat this, Smothers affirmed his support for Fort Worth parents’ decision to boycott schools. “Boycotts,” Smothers stated, “have worked for some folks. They can work for you.”²⁵⁰ Smothers’ “antibusing” stance was rooted in the notion that “busing” sent a message of inferiority to black students and parents. Such a perception surfaced in

²⁴⁸ Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, 132.

²⁴⁹ “Dallas Votes to Bus 7000 Blacks,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 12, 1971.

²⁵⁰ “300 Hear West Side CCNS Reveal School Boycott Plans,” *Star-Telegram*, July 30, 1971.

other black responses to “busing” and speaks to the history of American reform movements being thwarted by white Americans dynamic restructuring of white supremacy and racist perceptions that only black students should be responsible for desegregation.²⁵¹ Yet, as *Brown* argued, desegregation was necessary not because black students needed to go to school with white students but because segregation was “inherently unequal.” The *Star-Telegram*’s coverage of Smothers as the legitimate voice of the black community makes its later dismissal of Black Power activists as nameless “militants” all the more damning to a local community employing popular and bureaucratic resistance.

While the press focused on limited black perspectives and allowed white opinions to dominate the letters to the editor sections, the “busing” debate was not shaped by whites alone. African Americans continued speaking against the closing of black schools and advocating specific changes in school policy that they believed would provide a higher quality of education in their communities and undo the effects of historic racism. Differing from the NAACP’s legal strategy, Black Power activists and supporters, some of whom worked with the United Front, pressured the School Board and local newspapers to include black culture and history in the school curriculum and allow black representation on the School Board. While the white community dismissed African Americans who demanded educational change as militants, Black Power activism is better understood as a proactive movement seeking material improvement in black communities in the face of the School Board and white community’s maintenance of segregation and resistance to reform.

²⁵¹ Carol Anderson, *White Rage*.

The NAACP and Black Power activists rejected the “busing” framework that inaccurately characterized desegregation as primarily about concepts like “freedom of choice,” and “neighborhood schools,” rather than racial justice and Constitutional rights. “The majority of blacks do not want ‘busing’ any more than whites,” one woman wrote to the *Press*.²⁵² Refocusing the issue back to providing equal education to black students, she continued, “All they want is quality education with the best teachers (which are not all white) and the best of facilities.” In addition to rejecting “busing” rhetoric as a distraction from issues of quality education, she further stated how white “antibusing” fervor sent a message to black communities that they were unwelcome and undesired by white Americans. “I have gotten the impression that we are not equal and that we are not wanted,” she concluded.²⁵³ Other letters to the editor from African Americans reiterated that “busing” was not ideal but a necessary and realistic plan to adequately address segregation.

The black community also reminded the rest of the city that “busing” had been a part of African American education for years. Mrs. W. N. Jackson stated, “I am not for busing, but until someone comes up with a better idea, busing is now the law of the land.”²⁵⁴ Jackson’s comment reflects how “busing” was not inherently desirable but was a means to the Constitutional end of desegregation and equal education. Jackson also reminded the newspaper’s readers that black students had historically been “bused.” “You are hollering and crying like this is going to hurt your child.” Because of Fort Worth’s historically limited educational opportunities for African Americans, she stated,

²⁵² Jana Allen, Letters to the editor: “Busing idea still drawing protests,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 11, 1971.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ W.N. Jackson, Letters to the Editor: “Shoe on the Other Foot,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 25, 1971.

“Black children have been bused all their lives and have survived.” Another woman, Carol Glover, detailed her experience riding a bus to I.M. Terrell in the early 1950s and how her daughter had been bused for the past six years for desegregation. Glover ended her letter by rooting the need for “busing” in residential segregation. “I know that busing can cause problems,” she stated. “However, the whites brought it all on themselves running every time one of us would move in beside them.” To many African Americans in Fort Worth, “busing” was nothing new and was necessary to equalize education in accordance with *Brown*.

The “antibusing” movement’s ahistorical assessment of “busing” and use of “color-blind” rhetoric reinforced Fort Worth and American exceptionalism. Charles Ryser, a black high school student at I.M. Terrell, told “antibusers” to “spare the black citizens the hypocrisy of that worn-out phrase, “I’m not a racist, but...” Ryser rooted “busing” in its historical context by asking the *Press*’ readers, “Where were these poor oppressed people when blacks were bused or gerrymandered into segregated schools? It’s a shame that these concerned citizens are only now raising their voices when their dear children have to be bused to some “horrid black school” when in truth more blacks will be bused than white.”²⁵⁵ Ryser’s comments cut to the core contradiction of “antibusing” rhetoric. By failing to acknowledge the continued presence of segregation and the history of “busing” in black communities, white Americans’ claims to “only oppose busing” carried little weight and can be properly understood as a desire to protect white education and resist challenges to the race and class boundaries of “neighborhood schools.” CNS President Jim Lucas responded to charges of racism by stating, “If I were a racist, I

²⁵⁵ Letters to the Editor: “Black Viewpoint,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 22, 1971.

wouldn't have colored people working for me.”²⁵⁶ Lucas' statement again recalled the racist paternalism of white supremacy and highlighted the many contradictions of “color-blind” conservatism. While “antibusers” claimed to not be personally racist, the “I am not racist, but” refrain furthered the “redneckification” of racism that only considers individual and explicit racism worthy of concern, while ignoring systemic racism and inequality. Regardless of individual prejudice, “antibusers” like Lucas actively worked to maintain a white supremacist system dependent upon segregation, legitimized public and bureaucratic resistance to desegregation, and rejected black input on school reform.

Ryser's letter also signaled the arrival of a newer generation of African Americans in Fort Worth who took up the politics of Black Power and broke with past civil rights strategies. “Time was when blacks wanted and cried out for integration, so they could better their way of living,” Ryser stated. “That was a long time ago. To my black elders, I apologize.” The Civil Rights Movement had changed by 1971. For many young black people, desegregation seemed a dream of the past and what was needed now was tangible improvements and power in black communities. Ryser challenged the white community's misunderstanding of these fundamental black goals. “To the whites, I shall explain that the young blacks don't give a damn whether they can integrate or not. We don't whimper to go to school with ‘Master Charles’ kids. There should have been equal education at our own schools. To bus proves this wasn't given.” Rejecting the gradual desegregation approach, Black Power activists demanded concrete progress and viewed the “antibusing” movement as a ruse to distract from the core issue of inferior black education caused by segregation. “Don't use busing to cover the fact that some schools

²⁵⁶ “Anti-Busing Leader Says Plan Upcoming,” *Star-Telegram*, August 4, 1971.

do not provide quality education because they're black," Ryser wrote. "I'm not racist but I'm not that zealous to see little children bused to a school because it's white."²⁵⁷

Black power activists pressured the School Board to address the legacies of segregation and go beyond desegregation policies to improve black education. As Limbusha Tarik did on June 23, at the July 28 School Board meeting, Black Power activists demanded black studies be added to the curriculum and that the School Board adopt districted elections to increase black representation. "[We] will no longer accept decision making without representation," one man stated.²⁵⁸ The group also requested official school holidays for the birthdays of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Kwome N. Chipemberi of the United Front "presented a list of curricular demands" ranging from black languages and black literature to "black political [and] economic development" and sociology. The *Star-Telegram*'s reporting of the meeting did not include the activists' names but instead described them as youths "wearing African attire and giving African names," along with a photograph of them waving their fists at the school board. Chipemberi explained that "he and the others had adopted these names to show that they were no longer the property of the white man."

The Black Power activists articulated black community frustration with school leadership by demanding the resignations of Superintendent Julius Truelson and Board member Bobby Bruner. Bruner owned several grocery stores in black neighborhoods and activist Jomo Tarik accused the official of discriminatory practices in hiring and compensation. Regarding Truelson, a woman named Akiba accused him of "com[ing] up

²⁵⁷ Letters to the Editor: "Black Viewpoint," *Fort Worth Press*, August 22, 1971.

²⁵⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Education," July 28, 1971, Fort Worth Independent School District, 1970-71, 1.

with the least way to desegregate the Fort Worth Public Schools.” The Board listened to the group in silence for an hour and a half and “did not respond to the demands,” the *Star-Telegram* reported. While Truelson later stated that they will do all they can to heed the demands, School Board President Rev. John Leatherbury spoke more candidly: “I don’t think we’re going to do anything about it, I really don’t.”²⁵⁹ Leatherbury’s statement devalued the experiences and concerns of Fort Worth’s black community who had endured under segregation for well over half a century. For many African Americans, “busing” was not a threat to “neighborhood schools” or “freedom of choice.” Instead, rooted in a history of lived experiences with segregation and desegregation, Black Power activists sought to address a myriad of issues that they thought would improve black education as well as the material conditions of black communities. Rather than a problem in and of itself, “busing” promised much of the same: black students would continue to be burdened by desegregation policies that did not go far enough to undo a segregated, unequal, and unconstitutional education system. To some, “busing” was an honest, if undesirable way to overcome residential segregation. To others, it was irrelevant if it was not coupled with tangible power in black communities.

In Fort Worth, the “busing” controversy came to a head at the August 11 School Board meeting, which witnessed the convergence of white fears of “busing” with Black Power activism. Of the approximately 350 people who attended the meeting, the *Star-Telegram* claimed roughly 175 were “white busing opponents.” At the entrance to the board room, CNS and other “antibusers” brandished picket signs reading, “We will not

²⁵⁹ “Crowd of Young Blacks Rails at School Board,” *Star-Telegram*, July 29, 1971.

bus our children,” and “stop busing.” Inside the boardroom, 175 people crammed into a room with the capacity for 150 and citizens waited to speak out.

At the meeting, white protestors of “busing” explicitly addressed how they desired to prevent their children from attending black schools in black neighborhoods, framing their “antibusing” stance as a defense of white “neighborhood schools” and de facto residential segregation. Speaking of the black Sunrise Elementary School in Southeast Fort Worth, Ravanna Warren told the board it was an unsafe environment for her children because of the existence of two bars and a pool hall. “If I had wanted my child in these surroundings I would have moved into that area,” Warren stated. Another woman, Diethield Gore, painted a darker picture of the neighborhood around Sunrise Elementary. According to Gore, after driving to the area to view the elementary school and neighborhood, they “encountered a group of blacks in a street and the group yelled profanities and ... ‘gave us the black power sign.’²⁶⁰ Gore’s “impassioned plea resulted in cheers from the crowded boardroom.”²⁶¹ Instead of making a case for school equalization and justice, Warren and Gore were consistent with the “antibusing” desire to prevent white children from attending black schools while doing nothing to address the supposed inferiority of black schools and neighborhoods.

The meeting also highlighted how the School Board increasingly viewed Black Power as a threat to its slow-paced desegregation agenda. As Black Power activists, who were mostly high school students, continued to frame their rhetoric in terms of justice and desegregation rather than “busing,” School Board President John Leatherbury established rules that barred anyone from bringing up issues not directly related to education. As they

²⁶⁰ “Meeting Picketed: Anti-Busing Group Urges Vote Switch,” *Star-Telegram*, August 12, 1971.

²⁶¹ “Truelson to meet with Black Leader,” *Press*, August 12, 1971.

had at Board meetings in June and July, the black activists requested the creation of a black studies in elementary schools, a black humanities course in high school, and courses teaching African languages such as Swahili. However, tensions escalated when leader of the group, Abduh Uhuru Kupigana of the United Front, criticized board member Bobby Bruner for his business practices. Citing the new rules, Leatherbury requested that Kupigana step down from the podium. He refused, claiming he was not given the same five minutes as other speakers. The situation intensified as the Board continued requesting that Kupigana step down and the crowd jeered at the black speaker. The board then called the police in response to what the *Star-Telegram* described as “a crowd of young blacks [who] staged a jeering, chanting sit-in inside the board room.” “Police cars had virtually ringed the School Administration Building ” when Kupigana and his group left.²⁶² Leatherbury told the *Star-Telegram* on Friday that he believed future ‘disruptors’ at board meetings should be fined or arrested.²⁶³ Fort Worth Police Chief T. S. Walls later announced plans to “have the police intelligence division “check these people out, because I just want to know who they are.”²⁶⁴ While black activists became more openly outspoken in their rejection of minimal desegregation policies that maintained segregation, the local press and police helped frame them as “militants” who needed to be silenced, rather than citizens with legitimate voices on matters of public policy. Above all else, demands for Black Power directly challenged the preservation of racial hierarchies through segregation that the white community was determined to “guard and keep.”

²⁶² “Sit-ins by Militants Disrupts Meeting: Confrontation with Officers Avoided as Blacks Disperse,” *Star-Telegram*, August 12, 1971.

²⁶³ “Arrest of Protestors Seen By Leatherbury,” *Star-Telegram*, August 13, 1971.

²⁶⁴ “Sit-ins by Militants Disrupts Meeting: Confrontation with Officers Avoided as Blacks Disperse,” *Star-Telegram*, August 12, 1971.

The convergence of Black Power and “antibusing” activism intensified white fears of white students attending black schools. “One mother,” the *Star-Telegram* reported, claimed to have been “told by some of the blacks that they did not want her children in their school.”²⁶⁵ The woman added that the African American protestors at the meeting said they were not responsible for her children’s safety if they went to a black school. Others present at the meeting acknowledged that, while the black protestors from the Board meeting were not representative of all blacks in Fort Worth, they were still “concerned about the small radical element,” which seemed to consist of anyone who spoke against existing school policy for not doing enough for black communities. The proceedings of the board meeting furthered CNS’s resolve to boycott the schools at the beginning of the year. Executive Board member Jerry Jackson stated, “If we do not send our children, they know we mean business.”²⁶⁶

Rather than contextualize the black political movement as an attempt to address long-festering wounds caused by a history of racist public policies and the city’s slow-paced desegregation agenda, the *Press* compared Black Power to “right-wing racists.” Rejecting what they considered a violation of the “Fort Worth Way,” which implicitly operated as a policy of “justice delayed is justice denied,” the newspaper editors stated:

At a time in history when school officials, the judiciary and the great majority of people want to elevate the blacks, this strident bedlam widens the cleavage. The tactics of noise, disruption and turmoil hurt the cause of all Negroes and plays neatly into the hands of the equally loud, equally boisterous, right-wing racists. This bellicose Negro minority, by its very actions, makes the right-wing rabble rousers look like true prophets at times. Of course, the thinking man knows that this vociferous group does not represent the great Negro Silent Majority, which is more interested in better education than taking over the center stage microphone. We believe the Negro Silent Majority should and will repudiate the disruptive strategy of the few.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ CCNS Worried Over Disruptions,” *Star-Telegram*, August 13, 1971.

²⁶⁷ Editorial: “Hurting FW Education,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 12, 1971.

Positioning itself, and Fort Worth, as the moderate between extremes on both sides, the *Press* remained committed to the same politics of moderation that had effectively maintained segregation for the past 17 years. However, the blind commitment to moderation the editors' called for ignored the fact that their city was not segregated by chance. Segregation was official city policy for decades and the resistance to *Brown* enshrined lasting segregation into the geographic landscape of Fort Worth. The city's refusal to confront this history, and the white community's refusal to acknowledge it, amounted to a conservative protection of racial and economic hierarchies.

Instead of a fabled "Negro Silent Majority" that would supposedly sympathize with Fort Worth's moderate racial agenda, the NAACP again turned to the courts to achieve a greater level of desegregation. As CNS fretted about the approaching school year and the thought of their children in black neighborhoods, on August 14 NAACP attorney Clifford Davis appealed the district's minimal "busing" plan, claiming the plan did "not destroy the dual system."²⁶⁸ Davis claimed that the facts of the case reveal the Board had no interest in desegregation. Under the plan, the *Star-Telegram* reported, I.M. Terrell and Dunbar High Schools and Morningside, Dunbar, and Como Middle Schools "will remain 99 to 100 percent black." Davis was also critical of how the plan placed the "burden of busing on blacks" and closed "black, but not white, schools."

While CNS backed off its calls for a boycott in the days before schools began, the group continued advocating private schools and already succeeded in creating a climate of doubt around public education that a platform reversal could not alter. Like Howard Beard of the Tarrant Citizens' Council before him, Mertz attempted to position his group

²⁶⁸ "School Board 'Vindictive:' Mixing Verdict Appealed," *Star-Telegram*, August 14, 1971.

as a moderating influence and claimed that CNS helped subdue more radical “antibusing” factions. “Hundreds of mothers in the affected areas have asked us to take physical action to literally stop the buses by standing in the front of them, to let air out of the tires, and other actions,” Mertz stated. “We are telling you all these things so that you will understand that we have been a moderating influence on some of the more radical groups in the community.” However, Mertz overlooked how his group provided an organizational channel that fueled and legitimize such resistance. In the North Side Fort Worth, the *Press* reported that people who could not afford private schools decided to move “to parts of the city not included in a cluster.” Describing one family, “friends and former neighbors said they moved to escape busing.”²⁶⁹ Additionally, in one classroom at white Rosen Elementary School in North Side, an enrollment of 23 students dwindled to 12.

Similar parental responses occurred in other parts of the city. In the affluent area around Atwood McDonald Elementary, 56 students enrolled in private schools; in Tanglewood, 44 students who were scheduled to be bused to Como also enrolled in private schools. *Press* journalist Carmen Goldthwaite reported other, individual acts of resistance to busing. “A couple in [a cluster] filed and got a legal separation,” so that the husband could live “on the North Side with their high school age children,” while she could live in “a noncluster area with their second grader.” Another Fort Worth family transferred their child’s legal guardianship to the second grader’s grandparent to avoid busing and one second grader moved to her grandmother’s house in Oklahoma.²⁷⁰ When

²⁶⁹ “Buses will roll – how many riders? Poll shows only 200 fleeing private schools,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 29, 1971.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

asked what will come of “busing,” Mertz, whose group advocated privatized white schools rather than have white and black students attend school together, responded, “the death of the public-school system.”²⁷¹

Enrollment was down on the first day of school. The *Press* reported that, while “School officials expected 2264 second graders [to ride buses] in the 27 cluster schools. As of 10 a.m. today, 1322 had come to school.”²⁷² Of the white students scheduled to be bused to Kirkpatrick and Sunrise Elementary schools, only 12 students rode the busses. While busing numbers gradually rose in September, black students rode at higher rates than white students. The *Press* reported “Of the 1364 who rode the bus of all four grades, 956 were Negro.” The majority of students from the closed Como High School were bused to Western Hills High School and Kirkpatrick students went to North Side. At the end of the second school week, the *Press* reported the district overall was short 4947 students.²⁷³

In the summer of 1971, the Fort Worth School Board and many in the white community rejected the opportunity to engage in an honest discussion about racial inequality and confront segregation in their city. Faced with a Constitutional mandate to equalize education, the Board continued to pass minimal desegregation policies and “antibusers” actively sought to protect white education and a broader worldview contingent upon protecting white Americans privileged position in the racial and economic hierarchy at the expense of black rights. Dismissing the daunting but necessary task of confronting inequality in black schools, “antibusers,” school officials, and the

²⁷¹ “Citizens Group Decides Against School Boycott,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 27, 1971.

²⁷² “Cluster School Attendance is Down,” *Fort Worth Press*, August 30, 1971.

²⁷³ “FW schools are still 4947 students short,” *Fort Worth Press*, September 10, 1971.

local press stoked a climate of fear around black activists who spoke out against persistent injustice. For 17 years after *Brown*, Fort Worth's white community consistently ignored black rights and opted for a conservative politics of resistance to *Brown* that operated under the guise of moderation. The relatively quiet segregationist politics of the "Fort Worth Way" involved city policies that restructured segregation into the city's residential landscape as well as white community resistance that served to "guard and keep" a way of life and worldview contingent upon segregation.

V. CONCLUSION

In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin stated that “there is simply no possibility of a real change in the Negro’s situation without the most radical and far-reaching changes in the American political and social structure.”²⁷⁴ The history of resistance to *Brown* is a national story of concerted efforts to reject radical change and ensure only moderate adjustments to American apartheid.²⁷⁵ While the politics of resistance involved outspoken racism that saw Southern state officials and white communities act to preserve white supremacy, reactions against *Brown* also included the ‘polite’ racism of local bureaucracy and “color-blind” conservatism. The national political resistance to *Brown* converged in Fort Worth, Texas, from 1954 to 1971. While Fort Worth has touted its commitment to “the common good” and cited desegregation as an example of the positive influence of moderate city leaders committed to quiet desegregation, the politics of the “Fort Worth Way” operated as a quiet maintenance of segregation and protection of white community interests at the expense of black Constitutional rights.²⁷⁶ In effect, resistance in Fort Worth represented a conservative defense of racial and class hierarchies that conceded small adjustments, but left the system as a whole intact. Rejecting notions of Fort Worth exceptionalism, this thesis has shown that city leaders and aspects of the white community forged dynamic strategies of resistance that allowed historic injustices to persist and evolve for decades.

²⁷⁴James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage International Press, 1993), 85.

²⁷⁵ Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard University Press: 1998).

²⁷⁶ “Have you ever heard the term ‘the Fort Worth Way’? Here’s what it really means,” *Star-Telegram* January 22, 2019.

The conservative politics of moderation that marked bureaucratic resistance and “antibusing” movements did not simply favor “peace” over violence or the familiar over the new. As Martin Luther King Jr stated in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” white moderates proved to be the “Negro’s great stumbling block” because they chose to remain committed to the “negative peace” of segregation rather than confront the tension involved in exposing injustice. Yet, as was the case in Fort Worth, the commitment to the “negative peace” of segregation required action from local bureaucracies and communities to restructure segregation in such a way that it could be defended legally and ideologically in the post-*Brown* era. Scholarship on white resistance to the Civil Rights Movement has shown that, in cities such as Charlotte, Atlanta, Boston, and, yes, Fort Worth, “color-blind” conservatism’s commitment to segregation was shaped by race and class in ways that placed white moderates on the positive side of that negative tension. Thus, the goal of civil rights activists, King explained was not to create tension, but to bring it to the surface so that “it could be seen and dealt with.”²⁷⁷ While the KKK and Citizens’ Councilors acted out of explicit protection of a racist system and worldview, the veneer of moderation in cities throughout the U.S., brought a similar but more nuanced tension to the fore. Rather than explicit and often violent white supremacy, the prospect of busing revealed the tension involved in acknowledging that all Americans, not just the explicitly racist ones, were implicated in the problem and thus part of the solution.

The Civil Rights Movement is the story of a collective struggle against the systemic injustice of the American political, judicial, and economic system. Collective

²⁷⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” *Atlantic Monthly*, April 16, 1963.

problems require collective solutions and the moderate sleight of hand was to reframe and resist the collective by appealing to the individual. The flipside of the conservative appeal to individual freedom and choice over rights and equality is that it rendered racism nothing more than a personal shortcoming. This “redneckification” of racism allowed white moderates to remain secure in the knowledge that they were not personally racist even as they relinquished their role in the nation’s collective responsibility to racial justice. White Americans are the collective benefactors of American racism. More than individual prejudice, American racism shaped collective outcomes for all Americans and created glaring political and economic disparities between whites and people of color. Rejecting the collective soul of America for conservative conceptions of individual “choice” has allowed America’s racial injustices to evolve rather than be confronted and eradicated. Mrs. Nelson, the African American teacher who spent her career witnessing the inequality of segregated schools firsthand, recognized this truth when, in 1971, she warned the Fort Worth School Board that, unless confronted head on, injustice will not disappear and there will be “trouble up the road.”²⁷⁸ Ultimately, the politics of moderation and gradualism proved to be the segregationists’ best line of defense as they effectively delayed and limited desegregation and the extension of the Constitutional protection of equal rights to black Americans.

In 2020, Fort Worth is still suffering from the enduring realities of systemic racism. At a Race and Culture Task Force Town Hall meeting on March 8, 2018, members of Fort Worth’s black community voiced longstanding grievances about their city. Many said that black residents had been abandoned by the wider Fort Worth

²⁷⁸ “Ex Schoolmarm Scours Board,” *Star-Telegram*, July 13, 1971.

community. The city, they argued, fails to address the poverty and discrimination that afflicts black communities. Gentrification, lack of access to healthy food, crime, high dropout rates among black teenage girls, and police brutality toward African Americans all define life in the city for black residents. In recent years Fort Worth police have used excessive force on black Americans on multiple occasions, from the aggressive arrest of Jacqueline Craig and two other black women after they called for police assistance, to the shooting of the unarmed Atatiana Jefferson in her home in the middle of the night.²⁷⁹ These incidents speak to the pervasiveness of systemic racism and a broader culture of neglect toward the plight of black communities. Those who spoke to the Task Force were noticeably frustrated that the city was only now discussing long-festered issues. After describing illiteracy among black children and gang violence in the Stop Six neighborhood, to which the rest of Fort Worth seemed to have been unaware or indifferent, one man stated, “[Mayor] Betsy Price don’t ride her bike in my neighborhood.” The man’s comments reflected how residential lines of demarcation continue to divide the city by race and class. Although many expressed gratitude for the Task Force’s work, they also denounced the Task Force as a token gesture from city leaders, who were unlikely to act to produce the meaningful and tangible changes needed to alleviate the conditions of the poorest parts of Fort Worth.

Across the nation, a racist national political climate has made issues of school desegregation and white supremacy unfortunately relevant in 2020. President Donald Trump has legitimized white supremacy on multiple occasions during his presidency. The

²⁷⁹ “Charges Dropped Against Women After Attorneys Release Bodycam Footage of Viral Fort Worth Arrest,” NBCDFW, January 26, 2017; “Fort Worth Officer Charged with Murder for Shooting Woman in Her Home,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2019.

President of the United States, to name just one of countless examples, told four nonwhite U.S. Congresswomen, all of whom are American citizens, to “go back to [their] countries.” As Chapter I addresses, white supremacist ideology influences the core of how white nationalists see the world, define America, and act to protect their “private lives of power.” Now they are increasingly resorting to terrorism to defend against threats to their extremist worldviews. On August 3, 2019, a white supremacist gunman murdered 20 people at a Walmart in El Paso. Shortly before the attack, the *Atlantic Monthly* reported, he published a manifesto describing how he “wanted to kill Hispanic immigrants as ‘an act of preservation’ to reclaim his country ‘from destruction.’”²⁸⁰ More than unstable individuals, such tragedies point to a potent culture of white supremacy that is rooted in a notion of American exceptionalism that is inherently threatened by the presence of people of color.

While beliefs in explicit white supremacy are held by a small minority of racist Americans (and legitimized by President Trump), the politics of moderation and mild adjustments in the face of the systemic injustices of racism and rising inequality as well as the existential threat of climate change remain popular in American political discourse. The conservative politics of “antibusing” are particularly relevant again because Joe Biden, the former Vice President, is now a candidate for the Democratic Party in the 2020 election. Biden is increasingly criticized for his role in bringing the conservative “antibusing” and “tough on crime” legislation to the Democratic Party platform. The issue is more than just one specific issue, as many would argue that Biden represents a brand of conservative moderation that other politicians have adopted as a middle way

²⁸⁰ Wajahat Ali, “The Death Rattle of White Supremacy: Americans Need to Stand Together Against the Forces of Hate,” *The Atlantic*, August 4, 2019.

between perceived radicalism on both sides. The “antibusing” politics of “I am not racist, but...” remain alive and well in the political center. “I am for universal healthcare, but...” “I am for racial justice, but...” “I am for tackling climate change, but...” Americans are now debating the effectiveness of this moderation in light of the gravity of the issues facing us.

As Chapter II discusses, “antibusing” provided a platform for the American public to resist desegregation by casting substantive changes to systemic racism as violations of individual “choice.” What was needed in 1971 were national politicians, news media, local officials, and grassroots community organizers with the courage to confront the burdens of American history honestly and engage in the collective struggle to eradicate systemic racism and promote justice and equality. Instead, politicians like President Nixon and Senator Biden emboldened the grassroots effort to adapt national desegregation policies to white political fears and helped deliver what Edward Brooke, the Republican African American Senator from Massachusetts, called “the greatest symbolic defeat for civil rights since 1964.”²⁸¹ The moderates of “antibusing” rejected the collective struggle for justice by legitimizing a politics of individualism and “choice” that operated as a defense of hierarchies rooted in the history of American segregation. In effect, moderates actively worked against the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement.

Our ability to confront our history honestly determines our ability to see our present clearly. To be sure, the present is not a repetition of any specific historical precedent, but each generation is shaped, consciously and unconsciously, by the histories it chooses to remember, and the ones it forgets. What it means to be a moderate today

²⁸¹ Nathan Robinson, “Democrats: You Really Do Not Want to Nominate Joe Biden,” *Current Affairs*, March 7, 2020.

should be informed by what it meant during the Civil Rights Movement because, ultimately, the question facing us is the same one Martin Luther King, Jr. asked in 1967: where do we go from here? Our answer to that question will be decided by whether or not we are able to reengage the Black Freedom Struggle and continue to strive for a politics of the collective that is fundamentally rooted in the expansion of justice and freedom for everyone.

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